Historical Objectivity and Conceptual Frameworks

A Critical Study of Kant and Hegel

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Abstract of the Thesis

Kant and Hegel brought to attention the inescapability of conceptual frameworks in all areas of inquiry. The aim of this thesis is to assess the impact of this point on contemporary discussions of objectivity in history.

My strategy consists of four steps. First, I consider several types of historical knowledge for which claims of objectivity are made—reportage, explanation, description, and evaluation. I raise the possibility that the presence of conceptual frameworks defeats the claim for the objectivity of explanations in history.

Second, an examination of the views of Kant and Hegel on explanations in history highlights the questionable character of claims for their objectivity. The significant patterns in the historical process to which explanations purport to refer do not lie waiting to be discovered in that process. On the contrary, significant patterns in the historical process and explanations in history texts are understood and formulated in terms of conceptual frameworks brought to their investigations by historians.

Third, I criticize the moves of Kant and Hegel to avoid the possibility that historians merely invent significant patterns in history. They each mistakenly take a particular conceptual framework as a standard for the adequacy of all others.

Finally, I argue that while there can be many possible conceptual frameworks in terms of which explanations and significant patterns in history are understood, there are non-Kantian and non-Hegelian ways of assessing the suitability of these frameworks.

References to Works of Kant and Hegel

All references to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* are given by citing (1) the page number of the Kemp Smith translation and (2) the page numbers, in parentheses, of the original A and B editions. All references to Kant's other works are given by citing (1) the page number of a translation and (2) the volume and page numbers, in parentheses, of the *Akademie* edition. Section numbers are also provided within brackets for the *Critique of Judgement*.

All references to Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* are given by citing (1) the page number of the Sibree translation and (2) the page number, in parentheses, of his *Vorlesungen uber die Philosophie der Geschichte*, *Sämtliche Werke*, Volume II, 3rd. edition, Hermann Glockner, Stuttgart, 1949.

Introduction

For the last thirty years, much of the discussion in philosophy of history has taken for granted the distinction between analytical philosophy of history and speculative philosophy of history.[1] According to this view, concern with objectivity and the logic of explanations in history typically characterizes the analytical subregion of the field, while questions about structure and meaning in the historical process itself are said to occupy the speculative territory. Though this division of labor in philosophy of history has been fruitful, it tends to be pushed too far.[2] On the one hand, analytical philosophy of history has drifted toward a mere exercise in applied logic, whose practitioners relegate the questions which interested classical speculative philosophers like Hegel to the dustbin of the history of philosophy. On the other hand, speculative philosophy of history has become the province of ideologically committed Marxists and theologians, who care little about the methodological problems facing historians.

One way of establishing more helpful communication between analytical and speculative philosophy of history is to show how easily questions about objectivity and explanation in history lead into questions about meaning, significance, and structure in history. This will be the object of the first chapter of this book. I shall argue that there is a distinct type of significance in history related to each of the sorts of explanation most discussed in the literature, and that proponents of the different logics of explanation assume something distinctive about the structure of the historical process itself.

However, this minimal dialogue between analytical and speculative philosophy of history will not get very far without an interrogation of two of the classical speculative philosophers, Kant and Hegel.[3] It was these philosophers who first discovered that talk about

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[1] The terms "critical" and "substantive" are sometimes used in place of "analytical" and "speculative," respectively. See W. H. Walsh, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, 3rd ed. revised (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1967 [1951]); and Arthur Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

[2] Haskell Fain deserves much credit for calling attention to this tendency and for beginning a movement to mitigate it. See Fain, *Between Philosophy and History: The Resurrection of Speculative Philosophy of History within the Analytic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

[3] While there seems to be little doubt about Hegel's speculative proclivities, Kant is often regarded as a founder of critical philosophy of history. for example, Henri-Irenee Marrou, *The Meaning of History*, trans. Robert J. Olsen (Baltimore: Helicon Press, Inc, 1966 [1954]). But I shall argue that there is a critical element

the objectivity of explanations in history tends to be naive. Their achievement in philosophy of history was to have introduced the notion of a conceptual framework, which is established by the interests and questions of practitioners, and in terms of which logics of explanation are formulated and meaning-structures or significant patterns in the historical process are understood.[4]

It would therefore be appropriate to bring the notion of conceptual frameworks into the discussion of objectivity and significance in history by means of an examination of what Kant and Hegel had to say on these matters. This will be the object of Chapters 2 and 3 of this book. I shall demonstrate that both Kant and Hegel were seriously concerned with the topic of objectivity in history. I shall also show that each put forward a particular conceptual framework in terms of which explanatory logics and meaning-structures in history are understood and related, and which I shall call reason in history.

Despite their achievement, however, Kant and Hegel themselves labored under a certain naivete about conceptual frameworks in history. Along with this notion came the belief that a particular conceptual framework, established by one particular interest or question valid for all historians, has priority over all the others. Having dispelled the illusion that there are meaning-structures in historical reality waiting to be discovered by explanatory logics, Kant and Hegel succumbed to the illusion that there is one and only one conceptual framework in terms of which explanatory logics are best formulated and meaning-structures of reality are most appropriately understood. In Chapter 4 of this book, I shall argue on the contrary that there can be a plurality of suitable conceptual frameworks in history, and that reference to the interests or questions establishing them is not an adequate standard of the objectivity of one such framework rather than another.

Even as philosophy of history is purified of these two illusions, some critical questions are likely to arise. If no conceptual framework in history has priority over any other, does this mean that these frameworks are arbitrary inventions or mere functions of the whims of

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in Hegel's thought and a speculative element in Kant's, such that each anticipates the bridge now being built between analytical and speculative philosophy of history.

[4] Several contemporary philosophers have dealt with the inevitability of conceptual frameworks in all areas of inquiry, for example, Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 47 (1973-1974 F 5-20; Nelson Goodman, *Ways of World Making* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1978); and Richard Rorty, *The Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

historians? And where conceptual frameworks in history seem to conflict, is there an intelligent way to decide between them? In the conclusion of this book, I shall argue that though the interests of historians do indeed establish conceptual frameworks in history, and though there are no ready-made meaning-structures waiting to be discovered in the historical process, there are ways in which the preference for one conceptual framework in history rather than another can be rationally justified.

Chapter 1: The Problem of Objectivity in History

Concern with objectivity in history is almost as old as the discipline of history itself. With respect to philosophers, this interest dates back at least to Aristotle's comparison of the kinds of knowledge attainable in history and poetry. For Aristotle, knowledge obtained from history could be said to be less objective than that obtained from poetry, because particulars or the objects of historical knowledge are in some sense less knowable than universals or the objects of poetic knowledge.[5]

Concern with objectivity takes a different focus in the philosophy of Hobbes and Descartes, for whom the objectivity of history is contrasted with that of natural science. According to these philosophers and the tradition they establish, historians must, like physicists, be capable of mathematizing their subject matter, in so far as they claim to put forward objective or scientific knowledge.[6]

But history, unlike nature, has seemed notoriously recalcitrant to mathematization. The late-nineteenth century neo-Kantians made careers out of calling attention to this peculiar characteristic of history. The work of Dilthey in particular purports to show that since the realm of history, unlike that of nature, is ineluctably infected with meanings and values, it is incapable of the sorts of mathematical objectification which physicists impart to nature. Moreover, there is another sense, on this view, in which history cannot be value-free: the values of the historian inevitably interact with the values which the subject matter

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[5] *Poetics*, 1451^{b}5. One must admit that Aristotle says that poetic knowledge is more "philosophical" than historical knowledge. But this seems to mean something like what we mean "objective" today. Aristotle's classification of the kinds of knowledge seems to derive in part from Plato, for whom *episteme*, or knowledge of unchanging things, is more certain than *doxa*, or opinion about changing things. For Aristotle, knowledge is divided into two general classes: philosophy or metaphysics—whose subject matter is the unchanging or the most knowable things—and the natural, the practical, and the productive sciences—which admit of some uncertainty because their subject matter admits of change. Within this scheme of classification, poetry, which deals with *types* of changing things, seems more "philosophical," certain and objective than history, which deals merely with *particular* changing things. See R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970 [19465, 20-24; and John Dewey, *Art As Experience* (New York: Perigee Books, 1980 [1934], 283-7S5.

[6] On Hobbes' view of history, see J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (London: Methuen, 1972), Chap. 5; and on Descartes' view see Arthur Danto, "Narration and Knowledge," *Philosophy and Literature* 6 (1982): 19-21. Vico was perhaps the only thinker before Kant whose views ran counter to this tradition. For Vico, history, which has been made by human beings, is more capable of being known than nature, which has been made by God. Kant of course one-upped Vico, by claiming that human beings can also know nature, to the extent that they have constructed it. See Isaiah Berlin, "Vico's Concept of Knowledge," in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed e Henry Hardy (London: The Hogarth Press, 1979), 111-119.

presents, so that not only the subject but also the account of it is thoroughly value-laden or contestable.[7]

More recently, philosophers of science and language, among them W. V. O. Quine and Thomas Kuhn, have claimed that all so-called empirical judgments are infected with the theoretical presuppositions if not with the values of the investigator, and that therefore objectivity is problematic not only in history but also in natural science.[8]

Finally, Hayden White has argued that historians inevitably prefigure the field of reality with which they deal in terms of preferred linguistic protocols.[9]

It took an encounter with the work of the neo-Kantians to shake historians' naive, Rankean faith that they could simply give accounts of "what really happened," but they were not long in catching up with the philosophers' skepticism about historical objectivity. The essays of Charles Beard in the 1930's, as well as the views of the early *Annales* group of historians in France, exemplify this awakening interest.[10] The relativity of the historians' accounts to the climate of opinion in which they have been reared and trained has been a major theme of recent historiography.[11]

Against this background of concern, recent philosophers have made some headway in dealing with skepticism about objectivity in history. The work of Russell Keat has helped to dispel some of the doubt that social science can be value-free.[12] The writings of Hilary Putnam on science and of Maurice Mandelbaum on history have explored the extent to which empirical science and history can be taken to be objective despite the unavoidable presence

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[7] See Maurice Mandelbaum, *The Problem of Historical Knowledge* (New York: Harper Torch books, 1967 [1938]), Chaps. 1-5.

[8] See Quine, "Ontological Relativity," in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969); and Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970 [1962]).

[9] See White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); and "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," *History and Theory* 23 (1984): 1-33.

[10] On Beard's views, see William H. Dray, *Perspectives on History* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), Chapter 2; on the French historians, see Paul Ricoeur, *The Contribution of French Historiography to the Theory of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

[11] See, for example, Robert Allen Skotheim, *The Historian and the Climate of Opinion* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1969).

[12] See Keat, *The Politics of Social Theory: Habermas, Freud and the Critique of Positivism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), Chaps. 1 and 2.

of the theoretical presuppositions of the investigators.[13] Most recently, Richard Bernstein, drawing upon the various strands of post-empiricist philosophy of science, hermeneutics, and political philosophy, has formulated a conception of objectivity "beyond objectivism and relativism."[14]

For the purposes of this book, the problem of objectivity in history is best viewed as a problem of the objectivity of historical knowledge. However, as W. G. Runciman has argued, there are at least four different kinds of historical knowledge: reportage, explanation, description, and evaluation.[15] Since Runciman proposes a clear and interesting scheme for dealing with the problem of objectivity in social science and history, I shall dwell on it at length as a way of clarifying some important distinctions.

Like Putnam and Bernstein, Runciman begins his argument by posing the problem of objectivity in terms of a dilemma raised by alternative readings of the history of science. That is, the history of science can be read either naively and dogmatically as a straightforward, cumulative progress toward objective knowledge, or skeptically and relativistically, as a matter of gestalt switches, shifts among paradigms, and combat among rival ideologies and theoretical presuppositions. For convenience, I shall hereafter call the former reading "positivist" and the latter reading "skeptical relativist." And like Putnam and Bernstein, Runciman looks for a third way between these two readings, whose implications seem unacceptable to those who nevertheless believe that science least *aims* at objectivity.

Put most cryptically, Runciman's overall scheme rests on the distinction between value freedom and theory neutrality, and on the distinction between theory neutrality and presuppositionlessness. He argues that some types of historical knowledge (explanation and description) can be value free without being theory neutral, and that other types of historical knowledge (reportage and evaluation) can be both value free and theory neutral without being presuppositionless.

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[13] See Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and Mandelbaum, *The Anatomy of Historical Knowledge* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); and "Subjective, Objective and Conceptual Relativisms," *The Monist* 62 (1979): 403-428.

[14] Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

[15] Runciman, *A Treatise on Social Theory*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Runciman first tries to lay to rest the issue of value freedom by distinguishing between two sorts of value, the academic and the moral or political.[16] The argument is that while the connection between social scientists' findings and the academic values by which their arguments and conclusions are assessed is internal or necessary the connection between these arguments and conclusions and their political values is merely contingent. Though an investigator might be motivated to conduct research in certain areas by his political values, the reports and explanations which result from this research can be assessed entirely in terms of the academic values of accuracy and validity. To take Runciman's examples, there is no reason why observers who detest Spencer's political prescriptions against welfare schemes cannot employ his theoretical presupposition of the survival of the fittest in arriving at explanations which are valid by academic criteria. Similarly, that an observer does not share Marx's views on politics is no reason why the former cannot employ the latter's presupposition of the fundamental influence of class conflict in a scientifically useful way.

This is not to say, however, that the political values of investigators never infect their arguments or conclusions. As Runciman points out, one of the reasons that methodological disagreements in the social sciences have appeared more frequently and are more contentious than those in the natural sciences is that political values do frequently enter the debate there about adequacy of reports and explanations. But this tendency can be mitigated by a distinction between evaluation *within* social science and the evaluation *of* social science.

While Runciman argues that political or moral values ought never to enter into methodological disputes in social science, he does not want to leave the impression that social scientists ought never to make value judgments about their subject matter. Moral evaluation of an attenuated sort is an important part of social science, as long as it is not confused with methodological evaluation. Indeed, the presence of evaluation and what Runciman calls description in social science leads to methodological problems which distinguish it from natural science; but once again, the criteria or academic values by which evaluations and descriptions are assessed ought to have nothing whatever to do with the moral or political values of the social scientist. Thus, the entry of political values into methodological disputes can be seen to be illegitimate, because the connection between

[16] Ibid., 42-50.

these values and scientific methods is external or contingent and because there are academic values for the legitimate assessment of rival reports, explanations and evaluations within social science.

This point leads into Runciman's second major project: the attempt to distinguish among reportage, explanation, description, and evaluation in social science, and to formulate criteria or academic values for assessing the adequacy of each. Having dispensed with the problem of value freedom as it is ordinarily understood, Runciman now deals with the problem of theory neutrality. By making a distinction between theory neutrality and presuppositionlessness, he believes that one can positively resolve the dilemma posed by the positivists and the skeptical relativists. His claim is that objectivity is possible in social science, but only on the conditions which he lays down for discriminating among and evaluating (in the academic sense) reportage, explanation, description, and evaluation.

My main concern is with Runciman' s distinction between reportage and explanation, but some remarks will need to be made about description and evaluation as well. A summary of some of the defining characteristics of good reportage, explanation, description and evaluation will be helpful.

Reportage. Reports are answers to requests for primary understanding, or to the question "what happened?" or "what were they doing?" The kinds of things that happen, in history at least, are typically events, processes or states of affairs, and these are made up of what people do. Actions, in turn, are accurately reported if and only if the beliefs, intentions and context which constitute them are exposed. For example, an historian investigating the French Revolution must determine in principle whether what occurred was in fact a revolution. That is, a good report of the French Revolution must accurately expose the beliefs, intentions and context of the actions of the participants and those affected by it. Furthermore, a good report of the French Revolution must not preempt any theory which may subsequently be invoked in support of an explanation, description or evaluation of it. The critical test of a good report is its acceptability in principle to the agents in question. Since the very essence of an explanation, description or evaluation is to reconceptualize the actions in question in the theoretical terms of the historian, any such reconceptualized accounts may be unacceptable as reports to the agents in question. In other words, reports that the participants in the French Revolution were engaging in class conflict may in some cases not

be reports at all, but rather preemptions of a preferred explanatory theory. Good reports must be both accurate and theory neutral. But they are not presuppositionless, a characteristic which will call for further comment.

Explanation. Explanations are answers to requests for secondary understanding, or to the question "why did the reported event, process or state of affairs occur when, where and as it did?" Runciman gives a summary of some initial features which explanations must possess to qualify as valid. First, there must be possible alternatives, so that the hypothesis in question will be neither vacuous nor circular. Second, the causal field must have been narrowed down to manageable dimensions by the specification of initial conditions. Third, the contrast between what really happened and what might have happened but did not must be well defined. And fourth, the hypothesis in question must accord well with the evidence.[17] But however complete they might seem, these are only some of the necessary conditions of a valid explanation. The remaining condition is that the competing hypotheses be very improbable. This means that the explanatory hypothesis in question can be shown to be grounded in a theory which can be so interpreted or "modelled" as to rule out either competing hypotheses, competing models of the same theory, competing theories derivable from the same or different theoretical presuppositions, or competing presuppositions. Thus, in giving a valid explanation of the French Revolution, the historian must reconceptualize the actions of the participants and those affected by it in terms of some theory capable of ruling out competitors to his chosen hypothesis. For purposes of explanation, the actions which make up the French Revolution may be understood in terms of a wider context of class conflict, or of technological development, or even of the repression of libidinal drives, depending on the preferred theory. Moreover, the theoretical terms in which the explanation is couched need not be in principle available or acceptable to the agents in question.

Description. Descriptions in Runciman's technical sense are not to be confused with reports, which resemble descriptions in the conventional sense. Descriptions in the technical sense are answers to requests for tertiary understanding, or to the question "what was the experience of the reported events, process or states of affairs like for the agents involved?" A good description of the French Revolution must give an authentic depiction of what it was

[17] Ibid., 160.

like for those who participated in it or were affected by it. Though they rest on theories, authentic descriptions must be acceptable in principle to the agents in question and must depict the experience of a representative sampling of the groups of agents involved. But the remaining criteria of authenticity seem to be negative in character. That is, we know how to recognize inauthentic descriptions because we know how to detect errors of omission (incompleteness, oversimplification or ahistoricity) or commission (suppression or ethnocentricity).

Evaluation. Evaluations are answers to the question "how was the reported event, process or state of affairs a good thing or a bad thing?" However, this way of putting the question hides some ambiguities. Was the reported event a good thing or a bad thing according to the values and preferences of the agents affected by it, or according to the values and the preferences of the historian? Or according to theory neutral values or preferences which could be acceptable to all agents and historians? Runciman defends just one theory-neutral, though not presuppositionless, mode of evaluation, which can be considered to be internal to social science. This mode of evaluation rests on the presupposition of benevolence, according to which an improvement in their wellbeing as the agents in question define it is a good thing, and its impairment a bad thing, unless there are grounds in a particular evaluative theory of either the agents or the historian for overruling this presupposition. On this view, cases of evaluation which do not rest on the presupposition of benevolence but do rest on a particular moral, political or aesthetic theory are not internal to social science or to history, but may properly be parts of social theory, philosophy of history, or propaganda. In other words, historians and social scientists may abandon theory neutrality in evaluation, but strictly speaking they abandon science in doing so. Nevertheless, evaluation within history or social science is permissible on the presupposition of benevolence, and forms of misevaluation due to the theory-neutral grounds of false consciousness or bad faith may be detectable among either the agents or the observers or both. Thus, from the standpoint of science alone, a good evaluation of the French Revolution will thus consist of an account of how, in the views of a representative sampling of the participants and those affected by it and on the presupposition of benevolence, the French Revolution was a good or a bad thing. A further account, grounded in a particular moral theory of the historian, would amount not to history, but to philosophy of history or to

propaganda. Put another way, evaluations within history or social science are, like reports, theory neutral but not presuppositionless; while evaluations which stray into the areas of philosophy of history or propaganda are neither theory neutral nor value free.

If there is anything like objectivity in historical knowledge, it seems to enter at the level of what Runciman has called reportage. Good reports are claimed to be both accurate and theory neutral, predicates which do not attach to good explanations, descriptions, or evaluations. Moreover, good reports had better be in some sense more objective than good explanations, descriptions or evaluations, since the former are held to help settle quarrels between observers of rival theoretical schools over the latter. There might be some doubt, however, that an observer could ever give a good report of an event, process or state of affairs, in the sense of an accurate account of the beliefs, intentions, and context of the agent or agents which constitute it. I shall not rehearse all the objections to the notion of accurate reportage which Runciman tries to answer in his *Treatise*; I shall rather focus on two points which are relevant for my argument.

First, Runciman claims that while accurate reports must be acceptable in principle to the agents in question, explanatory theories need not be so acceptable. To use his own example, the ancient Romans could have understood and accepted reports about earnings and expenditures which they made in a given year, but they could not be in a position to understand or accept the economic theory according to which these actions formed part of an inflationary spiral in their economy.[18] Or, to take another example, the participants in the French Revolution could have understood and accepted reports that they were either attacking or defending the privileges of the nobility, but they could not be in a position to understand or accept the theory of class conflict according to which these actions formed part of a struggle between the feudality, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In neither of these examples could the agents have the historian's theoretical concepts available to them. However, Runciman also claims that an accurate report of what an agent is doing in uttering certain words or making certain gestures presupposes an explanation, at another level, involving the beliefs, intentions, and context which constitute his action.[19] But if he has

[18] Ibid., 13-14.
[19] Ibid., 106.

already claimed that good explanations depend on theories, how can he claim that reports which somehow depend on explanations are theory neutral? If this objection is on point, then either the agents in question must be capable in principle of understanding explanatory theories, or they really need not be capable in principle of understanding reports of their own actions. On either of these alternatives, Runciman's distinction between reportage and explanation appears to break down.

I believe that a way to save Runciman's case for the theory neutrality of reportage is to make a distinction between explanations on which reports depend but which are not grounded in theories, and explanations which depend on reports but are grounded in theories. Given this distinction, the agents in question can be held to be capable in principle of understanding the explanations which do not invoke theories, while they need not be so held with regard to the explanations which do invoke theories. The sort of distinction I am thinking of has been current in discussions of philosophy of history for the last forty years, namely, that between teleological or intentional explanations and causal explanations. Many of the varieties of causal explanation proposed in these discussions could fill the bill for Runciman's notion of explanations which seek theoretical grounding. On the other hand, teleological or intentional explanations can be given even more dignity than they already have according to their best accounts by serving the role of the explanations which must be given to make accurate reports of events, processes or states of affairs in history.[20]

While Runciman's admission that accurate reports depend on some sort of explanations really poses no problem for their theory neutrality, a second objection might still arise. For he also concedes that no reports are presuppositionless, even though they may be both value free and neutral with respect to explanatory, descriptive, and evaluative theories. But if reports are always informed by the presuppositions of the observer, how can they be objective, accurate or acceptable in principle to the agents? This question becomes acute for observers of other cultures or other historical periods, who must contend with

[20] For one of the best accounts of teleological explanation, my estimation, see Rex Martin, *Historical Explanation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); for one of the best accounts of causal explanation, see Mandelbaum, *Anatomy*, Chaps. 3-5. William H. Dray deals briefly with the problem of placing the same event in these two different contexts of explanation in "Conflicting Interpretations in History: The Case of the English Civil War," in *Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects*, ed. Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984) 256-257.

actions whose constitutive intentions, beliefs and contexts appear radically different from any of their own and yet are committed to provide reports which can be intelligible in principle to both their audience and the agents.[21]

This problem of intelligibility is the same for anthropologists trying to understand actions in other cultures as it is for historians trying to understand actions in other periods. I shall use an argument of Rex Martin's to show how the problem for reportage arising from the radically different presuppositions of the agent and the observer can be overcome.[22] Martin cites an example from anthropology to illustrate the general problem. A member of a primitive tribe, having suffered a knife wound, begins to clean the knife, rather than his wound, as a means of curing his wound. An investigator can cite plenty of evidence that the tribesman sincerely believed that by cleaning the knife, he would cure his wound. But no matter how much we are convinced that the belief and action went together intelligibly for the tribesman, the investigator has not provided us with an account of why this relationship between belief and action should be intelligible to *us*, if we are only given evidence that they in fact cohered for the agent in question. According to Martin, the investigator must also give us further information, of a sort which would fill in the account of the connections between the belief, intention, and action in question, thereby rendering these connections intelligible to us. He cites an example of such "filling in" from the work of Kroeber:

> The savage and the peasant who cure by cleaning the knife and leaving the wound unattended, have observed certain indisputable facts. They know that cleanness aids, dirt on the whole impedes recovery. They know the knife as the cause, the wound as the effect; and they grasp, too, the correct principle that treatment of the cause is in general more likely to be effective than treatment of the symptom . . . They fall back on agencies more familiar to themselves, and use, as best they may, the process of magic intertwined with that of medicine. They carefully scrape the knife; they oil it; they keep it bright.[23]

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[21] Runciman is of course aware of this problem. Ibid., 26

[22] Martin, 86-92, 227-230.

[23] Quoted in Martin, 88; reference to Kroeber, A. L., "The Superorganic," *American Anthropologist*, 19 (1917): 163-213.

By filling in the connections between the component elements of a practical schema in cases of action not immediately intelligible to observers of another culture or period, an investigator provides understanding of these connections to his audience in their own terms. One might say that in these cases of teleological explaining, the investigator must translate from one theoretical presupposition to another. He begins with his own presupposition or that of his audience, in terms of which the connections between beliefs, intentions and action are normally understood or made intelligible, and by a process of mediation moves to the presupposition of the agent, in terms of which he would have understood these connections. In this process of filling in, what could be called the alien conceptual framework of the agent is made familiar to the observers, the connections between the components of the practical schema in question have been made intelligible on all sides, and the explanation has provided some real understanding or supported an accurate report of the action.

The point to be learned from the second objection to Runciman's account of reportage is that historians need to be alive to the difference between their own presuppositions and those of the agents whom they investigate, if they are to give good teleological explanations and thus reports of actions occurring in other periods of history. But this objection is not fatal, for in cases where the historian can translate from his own presuppositions to those of the agents and back again, he can make accurate, theory-neutral reports of the events, processes or states of affairs in question.

That reports can be objective in the strong sense of accurate or true, despite being informed by the presuppositions of the observer, is a critical point which will come up again later. The problem on which I now want to focus concerns the kinds of objectivity possible for explanations, descriptions, and evaluations, which, like reports, depend in part on the presuppositions of the investigator. Specifically, I shall be concerned with the kind of objectivity possible for explanations, in contrast with that of reports, descriptions and evaluations. There are several points worth noting:

1. The terms Runciman uses to characterize good explanations, descriptions and evaluations – "valid", "authentic," and "coherent," respectively - possess progressively weaker connotations of objectivity than does accurate as applied to good reports. However, despite this declining scale of objectivity, explanations are paired with

reports and descriptions are paired with evaluations, in order to indicate some important features that distinguish the social sciences from the natural sciences.

2. At least part of the objectivity appropriate to reports, descriptions and evaluations, but not to explanations, rests on the ability of "them," the agents in question, to vouch for their adequacy.
3. The kind of objectivity appropriate to descriptions is singled out from that of reportage, explanation and evaluation for special consideration.

According to Runciman, it is not the need for special criteria or academic values for assessing reports and explanations which distinguishes the social sciences from the natural sciences but rather the need for special criteria or academic values for assessing descriptions and evaluations. He makes the interesting point that the presence of descriptions and evaluations serves not only to pick out the social sciences from science in general, but also to explain why certain works of social science continue to be read as classics long after their counterparts in natural science have passed into oblivion. [24] The argument is that some authentic descriptions and, to a lesser extent, some coherent evaluations found in the classics of social science will never go out of date or be superseded. But any explanation given in the natural sciences and, for that matter, in the social sciences, at best is incorporated into current texts as part of the ruling paradigm or at worst is relegated to a footnote to a superseded stage in the growth of knowledge. Thus, one can read the classics of social science much as one reads the classics of literature, for good descriptions and evaluations of a range of human behavior. On this view, paradoxically, good descriptions and evaluations can be expected to hold up much longer than good explanations, even though the former seem, on the declining scale of academic values, to be less objective than the latter.

This paradox raises some suspicion about the ranking of good explanations on the scale of objectivity, and there seems to be another reason for grouping the objectivity of explanations not with that of reports, but with that of descriptions. As Runciman himself has noted, reports can be held to be theory neutral (i.e., independent of competing explanatory, descriptive, or evaluative presuppositions) only by deferring to the presuppositions of the agents in question. contrast, good explanations, like good descriptions, depend on theoretical

[24] Runciman, 50-51.

presuppositions which appear to be capable of overruling the descriptive or explanatory accounts that the agents may give of events, processes or states of affairs. In other words, the presuppositions of the agents serve as an independent constraint on those of the observer in the case of reportage, while there *seems* to be no such constraint on the observer's presuppositions in either explanation or description, except in so far as both are in turn constrained by the accuracy of good reports.

But the case for the objectivity of good explanations seems worse still. Despite what just was said above, Runciman claims that the agreement of the agents in principle to descriptions is a necessary condition of their adequacy. That is, even though the observer may invoke a theory in support of his description of an event, process or state of affairs, the way he puts his description must be acceptable in principle to the agents in question.[25] Thus, unlike his explanatory presuppositions, the observer's descriptive presuppositions are constrained by the presuppositions of the agents.

Nevertheless, Runciman believes that the objectivity of explanations can be enhanced by comparing them more closely with descriptions, whose objectivity at first seemed next in weakness on the declining scale. Although descriptions are constrained by reports and by the descriptive presuppositions of the agents, it still appears that their objectivity is of a lesser grade than that of explanations:

> The criteria by which a description is to be tested are equally distinctive. Their distinctiveness may be masked by the use of terms which are colloquially applied with the same readiness to explanation: thus, it may seem as natural to speak of a description as of an explanation as, say, valid or well-founded or persuasive or convincing. But the last two of these are perlocutionary terms, not illocutionary ones; and the first two carry the implication that descriptions can be either true or false, which strictly they cannot. The descriptions given by sociologists, anthropologists or historians, although they may consist of statements of fact, are not to be construed as statements of fact themselves: they must not misreport, misidentify or misname anything, but that is all. Once these conditions are satisfied, the criteria which apply

[25] Ibid., 237-238.

> to them are of a different kind. If they fail, it is because they can be shown to be, for example, oversimplified or ahistorical or exaggerated or ethnocentric. None of these, with the possible exception of 'exaggerated,' has a direct bearing on truth-value.[26]

Furthermore,

> two different explanations cannot both be of equal validity except as answers to requests for secondary understanding dictated by a different selection of possible causes, conditions and constraints. Different descriptions, on the other hand, can be of equal authenticity, even where both are given in answer to a request for tertiary understanding of the same aspect of the same event, process or state of affairs . . . Alternative descriptions based on [the same set of] accurate reports which any rival observer is bound to accept are not exclusive of one another as in their different ways, both alternative explanations and alternative evaluations are.[27]

It seems that the logic of descriptions in social science can, like that of the interpretations of works of art, be understood in terms of a robust relativism of the sort proposed by Joseph Margolis.[28] On this view, certain statements need not be logically incompatible, even though they possess equal truth values and are incongruent, as long as two conditions are fulfilled. First, their truth values must be weaker than "true" or "false." Second, they can be shown to depend on a different set of statements that *can* be logically incompatible or possess the truth values "true" or "false." Descriptive statements would be a subset of the first set of statements, while reports would be a subset of the second set.[29] However, the logic of explanations cannot be so understood, since any two rival explanatory statements depending on the same set of reports must be logically incompatible or not

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[26] Ibid., 39-40.

[27] Ibid., 295.

[28] Margolis, "The Nature and Strategies of Relativism," *Mind* 92 (October, 1983): 548-567.

[29] One might concede that descriptions can be true in Haskell Fain's sense of the whole truth, without granting to them the truth and nothing but the truth. Just as one could have the truth and nothing but the truth without getting the whole truth, so one could have an inauthentic description consisting of nothing but accurate reports. See Fain, Chap. 13.

equally valid. Thus, in this respect at least, explanations in history could be said to be more objective than descriptions.

Nevertheless, the claim that the valid explanations are more objective than authentic descriptions might seem a bit hasty, in light of the apparently interminable disputes that arise over which explanations in history are indeed the valid ones. It will be helpful at this point to consider some examples, in order to determine whether the lingering doubt about this issue is well founded.

Many of the disputes over the validity of explanations arise simply because the reports available to the observers of rival theoretical schools have been preempted by one or another explanatory theory, However, Runciman points out that once rival observers can be gotten to agree on the relevant reports and on a single hypothesis which accords well with the evidence, disputes over the validity of an explanation can still occur at the level of competing models for a theory in which the hypothesis is grounded, or at the level of competing theories, or at the level of competing theoretical presuppositions. To take his example of the fall of the Roman Empire, rival observers may all agree that its collapse was due to the inability of the army to defend its frontiers. However, given a supporting theory of imperial involution derived from the presupposition that power abhors a vacuum, they may dispute the model to be given this theory. It may receive a "military" interpretation, to the effect that lines of supply had become too extended to equip adequate forces; or it may receive an "economic" interpretation, to the effect that the Roman economy could not produce adequate supplies to begin with. But the observers may go on to dispute the theory of imperial involution itself, opposing to it a "bad generalship" theory, though still deriving it from the original presupposition. Or, finally, they may go on to dispute the theoretical presupposition that power abhors a vacuum, opposing to it the presupposition of economic determinism, from which a theory about the relevance of the decline of slavery in the Empire for supplying the army can be derived.[30]

One more example may be helpful. This again involves competing accounts of the fall of the Roman Empire, but in this case the rival hypotheses are each grounded in a different type of explanatory theory and presupposition. The first hypothesis, associated with

[30] Runciman, 186-193.

Gibbon's account in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and holding the field against all comers until the 1920's, states that the fall of the Empire, and thus the beginning of the Middle Ages, was due to the moral and political decadence of the Empire and the "barbarian" invasions of the fifth century. Various theories have been invoked in support of this classical hypothesis, but most of them have been derived from some characteristically political presupposition, such as “power abhors a vacuum" or "moral decay invites invasions.”

However, with the rise of interest in economic history at the turn of the twentieth century, historians began to look at the fall of the Roman Empire in a new light. In a series of books and articles, Henri Pirenne established what came to be known as "The Pirenne Thesis.”[31] Pirenne argued first that the Roman economy and civilization were able to absorb the Germanic invasions, to such an extent that Gibbon’s "fall" was only a minor political inconvenience. Second, he proposed that the Roman economy and civilization, though "Germanized" politically, were able to survive until the Islamic Empire cut off Mediterranean trade routes to the West in the seventh and eighth centuries. During this period, Western Europe became economically landlocked, giving rise to the characteristic forms of economy, social structure and cultural outlook associated with medieval feudalism. Thus, what really brought about the fall of the Roman Empire, or the beginning of the Middle Ages, was not the Roman moral decadence or the "barbarian" invasion of the fifth century, but rather the rise of Islam and the decline of international trade in the seventh and eighth centuries. The Pirenne Thesis is grounded in a theory of economic change, which in turn derives from a presupposition to the effect that things like the rise and fall of empires are to be understood in terms of the fundamental influence of economic changes.

More recently, historians have taken an interest in the history of mental attitudes. One of these historians, Georges Duby, has given an account of the rise of the early medieval european economy which threatens to overturn the Pirenne Thesis.[32] At first glance, Duby

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[31] See, for example, Pirenne, *Medieval Cities*, trans. Frank D. Halsey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952 [1925]), 3-55; reproduced in *The Pirenne Thesis: Analysis, Criticism, and Revision*, 3rd edition, Alfred D. Havighurst (Lexington, Mass.. D. C. Heath and Company, 1976 [1958]), 1-26. For a more extended account of how Gibbon' s classical hypothesis was overturned by the Pirenne Thesis, see Bryce Lyon, *The Origins of the Middle Ages: Pirenne’s Challenge to Gibbon* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1972).

[32] Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy*, trans. Howard B. Clarke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974 [1973]), esp. Chap. 3. On Duby’s interest in mental attitudes, see Ricoeur, 50-53.

seems to agree with Pirenne that the encounter between the Germanic tribes and the Romans in the fifth century produced a melding of "barbarian and Roman productive forces and sociopolitical structure. But a closer look reveals an important shift of emphasis. For not only was the socioeconomic way of life of the Germanic tribes not entirely "Romanized," as Pirenne thought, but the reason it was not, was the fundamental influence of Germanic mental attitudes on all areas of life in the Roman West from the fifth through the tenth centuries.

Bringing with him the outlook of a 20th century ethnologist rather than a 19th century economist, Duby was able to expose what had been misconceptualized by Pirenne: namely, that the Western European economy of this early period was not one of trade, but rather one of necessary generosity or of "taking, giving and consecrating." Early Western Europeans lived in a primitive economy, not because exchanges took the form of barter as opposed to commerce, but because they were governed by immaterial needs. During this period, the prestige of the powerful was a function of their liberality, both to their earthly peers and to the gods. They would conduct expeditions of plunder and pillage, mainly in order to fuel grand ceremonial occasions of conspicuous destruction of wealth. The dead and the gods were major consumers in this economy The dead were frequently buried with all their wealth, including their tools. The favor of the gods also had to be purchased with sacrifices of wealth. The development of land with agriculture and settlement was retarded by lingering taboos associated with pagan forest-worship. Even money in this area of Europe served primarily a magical and political function, rather than an economic one. Coins were minted with the likenesses of kings, the gods, and the dead and accumulated around them, largely to surround them with a halo of magnificence and authority. Finally, "Romanization," where it occurred during this period, took the form of fascination with classical taste in food, clothing, and palace splendor, and served mainly to fan the flames of conspicuous consumption. "The Duby Thesis" can be summed up in the author 's words:

> Society as a whole was shot through with an infinitely varied network for circulating wealth and services occasioned by what I have called necessary generosity (*les generosites necessaires*): gifts of dependants to their protectors, of kinfolk to brides, of friends to party-givers, of magnates to kings, of kings to aristocrats, of all the rich to

> all the poor, and lastly of all mankind to the dead and to God. True, we are here dealing with exchanges, and there were plenty of them. But it is not a question of *trade*.[33]

The fall of the Roman Empire can best be explained not in terms of the Islamic blockade on trade with the West, for there was no trade, but rather in terms of a siphoning off of goods to satisfy "immaterial needs" within the economy of the West from the fifth to the tenth centuries. Only when Christianity began to take firmer hold on mental attitudes did the conditions of trade or real economic exchanges arise in the West in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Among these were its bans on forest worship and on burial of the dead with their wealth, and its attraction of wealth to the church for accumulation and potential recirculation rather than destruction. Duby's explanation of the fall of the Roman Empire thus is grounded in a theory of the role of mental attitudes in primitive societies, which in turn is derived from a presupposition to the effect that economic changes can in part be understood in terms of the influence of mental attitudes. His reconceptualization of the reported exchanges in terms of "necessary generosity" rather than "trade" depends on this presupposition.

It seems to make sense to claim any of these competing hypotheses can be ruled out if they do not depend on the relevant, accurate reports, or that they can be ruled out if they are not grounded in a theory which depends on these and on other reports. After all, since explanatory hypotheses and theories are, by definition, testable, reports seem to have a direct bearing on their objectivity. This also means that even competing explanatory theories can be ruled out in so far as they are testable. But how can one rule out competing theoretical presuppositions if, as Runciman claims, these are untestable? Perhaps by ruling out the theories derived from them. But then the presuppositions in question *would* be testable.

It seems that one cannot have it both ways. Either testable theories are derived from theoretical presuppositions and thus both are testable, or theoretical presuppositions are not testable and thus yield no testable theories. Therefore, either one must admit that theoretical presuppositions can, like reports, be true or false, or one must grant that explanatory presuppositions, explanatory theories and explanations possess no higher grade of objectivity than their descriptive or evaluative counterparts. Indeed, Runciman seems to

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[33] Duby, 56.

be trapped in a real dilemma. He cannot opt for the former alternative, or the possibility of true presuppositions, since it would undermine his distinction between theory neutrality and presuppositionlessness. But he cannot opt for the latter alternative, or the possibility of untestable presuppositions, without shifting his emphasis from the cumulative, progressive character of explanation in social science to the relativistic implications of the apparently irresolvable conflict among explanatory presuppositions. It is revealing to note that he dwells at some length on such arcane philosophical notions as the indeterminacy of translation, while barely mentioning Kuhn's treatment of the incommensurability of theories and theoretical presuppositions.[34]

The objectivity which Runciman claims for explanations thus seems to be of a peculiar sort indeed. Not only are valid explanations open to correction or revision in a way that authentic descriptions and coherent evaluations seem not to be, but their validity seems to rest on untestable presuppositions no less than does the authenticity of descriptions and the coherence of evaluations. But perhaps the objectivity of valid explanations could be rescued from these straits by arguing, as Runciman would not, that there is a true theoretical presupposition from which objective explanatory theories can be derived. This is just the strategy which, as I shall show in the next two chapters, Kant and Hegel adopt. They admit that one cannot avoid explanatory presuppositions in history, but claim that there are true presuppositions on which valid explanations possessing objectivity worthy of the name can be grounded. However, in the final two chapters I shall argue that, attractive as this option might seem, it is no more defensible than a form of relativism—either skeptical or robust—which acknowledges that explanations in history, to the extent that they depend on theoretical presuppositions, can be no more objective than descriptions or evaluations.

As a prelude to my exposition of the views of Kant and Hegel in the next two chapters, I shall pose the problem of objectivity in history as clearly as possible and introduce some terminology which will facilitate my argument. First, the terms. I shall use "conceptual framework" to designate the theoretical presuppositions or assumptions underlying explanations in history. Marx's assumption that human interaction is to be understood in terms of the fundamental influence of forces and relations of production, Freud's assumption

[34] On incommensurability see Runciman, 10-11; and on indeterminacy of translation, see 66-67.

that it is to be understood in terms of the fundamental influence of libidinal drives mediated by cultural constraints, and Veblen's assumption that it is to be understood in terms of the fundamental influence of the disposition to consume conspicuously are all instances of conceptual frameworks which have been used by historians. Much of my attention in the next two chapters will be focused on the conceptual frameworks which Kant and Hegel take to be true and to ground objective explanations in history.

I shall use "pattern" to designate the structure of initial conditions and *explanandum*-events to which explanations in history purport to refer. An event, process or state of affairs can fit into a pattern in two ways. For purposes of reportage, the event can be understood in terms of the beliefs, intentions and context constituting the actions which make it up; and for the purpose of explanation, the event can be understood in terms of a broader context of initial conditions and laws grounded in an explanatory theory. Furthermore, patterns of either sort will be seen to be "significant" or to have "significance" in terms of the conceptual frameworks brought to them by the investigator. Since the conceptual framework of the agents can be appealed to in the case of reportage, the significance of events which are merely reported can in principle be agreed upon by observers of rival theoretical schools. But to an observer who subscribes to the conceptual framework of conspicuous consumption for the purpose of explaining these events, a pattern which is found to match his assumptions is bound to seem more significant than a pattern which matches the rival framework of class

analysis, given an agreed upon report about the *explanandum*-event.

This leads into the problem. There seem to be two sorts of significant pattern in terms of which events, processes, or states of affairs in history can be understood. At the level of reports, events are understood in terms of the beliefs, intentions, and context constitutive of actions. This sort of pattern in which an event is situated receives its significance from a conceptual framework, to which the agents in question have privileged access but which also serves as an objective constraint on the frameworks of rival observers. Thus, the significance of this type of pattern can be determined in a strongly objective way. By contrast, at the level of explanations, events are understood in terms of relations to initial conditions which are grounded in the conceptual framework of the observer alone. Thus, while disputes about the significance of patterns of the first kind can be settled by appealing to the conceptual frameworks of the agents, disputes about the significance of patterns of the second sort,

which rest on the apparently incongruent frameworks of rival observers alone, seem to be irresolvable.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I shall expose the attempts of Kant and Hegel to formulate conceptual frameworks in terms of which the "true" significance of patterns in the broad, explanatory sense can be grasped. After demonstrating the failure of this strategy in Chapter 4, I shall argue in conclusion that the objectivity of explanations in history can be understood in terms of criteria weaker than those which Kant and Hegel demanded but stronger than those of relativism, robust or otherwise.

Chapter 2: Kant's Solution to the Problem

The Problem of Significance and Conceptual Frameworks in History

In the previous chapter, I brought to light the presence of conceptual frameworks or theoretical presuppositions in some well-recognized types of explanation in history. I argued that the objective validity of both teleological and causal explanations depends in part on the theoretical presuppositions or conceptual framework which historians bring with them to their investigations. While I did not suggest that the objective validity of explanations in history could never be established, I did want to indicate that it is a function of conceptual frameworks in history. Nevertheless, I attempted to call attention to a thorny problem which conceptual frameworks in history pose for causal explanations in particular. Because the conceptual framework of the agent can be translated into that of the historian, conceptual frameworks in history pose no real problem for the establishment of the validity of teleological explanations in history. But in the case of causal explanations, there seems to be no analogous framework against which that of the historian could be checked for its adequacy. The historian may therefore claim in this case that he has found some significant patterns in history, but he can appeal only to his own conceptual framework to justify this claim. In other words, it seems that the historian may really run into a problem in determining the validity of causal explanations.

My aim in the present chapter is to present Kant's way of dealing with this problem. His solution is to show that there is one conceptual framework or interest which all historians share as rational beings, and in terms of which patterns in history can be seen to be really significant. My exposition of Kant's views on this problem will take the following three steps. First, I shall show that Kant took teleological explanations seriously. This means that he allowed for the understanding of actions in terms of the beliefs, intentions and context constituting them, or for the sort of understanding of events which reportage presupposes. Second, I shall demonstrate that he took causal explanations seriously. This means that he allowed for reconceptualizing reported events in theoretical terms, for another level of understanding of events which explanation presupposes. Third and last, I shall present Kant’s belief that there is a conceptual framework built into certain causal

explanations, which I shall term "reason in history," and which enables one to determine whether any patterns in history really are significant or, correlatively, whether any explanations in history are objectively valid. Kant' s views on these matters will thereby be seen to be one possible resolution of the problem which conceptual frameworks in history pose for causal explanations.[35]

Kant on Teleological Explanations in History

Before I examine Kant's views, a brief review of teleological explanation in history is in order. As Runciman has argued, teleological explanations are essential for what he calls primary understanding or reports of events, processes or states of affairs in history. Teleological explanations situate the actions which make up events, processes or states of affairs in significant patterns. The significance of patterns at this level is understood in terms of relationships of appropriateness, consonance or intelligibility among actions, beliefs, intentions, and situational motivation. In order to give a teleological explanation, an investigator must understand or interpret a piece of behavior in intentional terms, that is, as an intentional action. He does this by adopting the perspective of the agent, or by imaginatively reenacting this perspective by fitting the action and the appropriate beliefs, intentions and situational motivation into a practical schema.

By contrast, an investigator giving a causal explanation accounts for human actions by reconceptualizing or reinterpreting a piece of human behavior as an event, for which law-like relationships to initial conditions or other events can be found. However, it is important for my purposes in this section to point out that the contrast between these types of explanation is not a contrast between the analytical and the empirical or between the ethical and the empirical. For teleological explanations are strictly empirical in the following four respects. First, while the component elements of a practical schema are not related in a law-like way, neither are they analytically related. Second, the principles relating action, belief,

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[35] Accounts of Kant 's theory of explanations in history are few and far between. But see, for example, Manfred Riedel, "Causal and Historical Explanation," in *Essays on Explanation and Understanding* ed. J. Manninen and R. Tuomela (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1976), 3-25. However, Riedel focuses only on causal explanations and ignores teleological explanations.

intention and situational motivation are not ethical in any sense. Third, the assertions about the individual components of an agent's practical schema are empirically testable or falsifiable. Fourth and last, the assertions that actions, beliefs, intentions and situational motivation are appropriately related in a practical schema can be justified by appeal to probabilistic relevance considerations.[36]

I shall now offer some evidence for the claim that Kant took teleological explanations seriously and then consider some objections to this claim. Some apparently good evidence has been offered by Lewis White Beck and Theodore Mischel.[37] Both commentators emphasize the difference for Kant between a physical body's behaving according to laws and a human being's acting according to freely adopted principles or conceptions of laws. According to this reading of Kant, there are two general types of human behavior. The first type is something like reflex action. In cases of this type, a person's will has given way to blind impulse and become purely passive. The will of a person behaving in this manner is not even free in a negative sense but has become like the will of an animal, in Kant's terms, an *arbitrium brutum*. Human behavior of this general type, like the behavior of billiard balls, can only be explained, and thus reported, in causal terms. The second general type of human behavior is something like intentional action. In cases of this type, the agent's will is considered to be an *arbitrium liberum*. That is, the agent is taken to be negatively free to adopt principles or rules for achieving given ends, and/or positively free to adopt his own ends. Moreover, for Kant, there are three sorts of human behavior which are species of the second general type. First, there is the behavior of a person whose principle of acting conflicts with the moral law. Second, there is the behavior of a person whose principle of acting does not conflict with the moral law. Third and last, there is the behavior of a person who, out of respect, takes the moral law as a limiting condition on his principle of acting.[38]

According to this reading of Kant, both moral evaluation and teleological explanation of human behavior are made possible by the same condition: namely, the understanding of

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[36] On all these points, see Martin, Chaps. 5, 6 and 7.

[37] Beck extracts the premises from Kant, and Mischel argues from them to the conclusion that teleological explanations of action are possible in Kantian terms. See Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 94-97; and Theodore Mischel, "Kant and the Possibility of Empirical Psychology," in *Kant Studies Today*, L. W. Beck (La Salle, Ill., Open Court, 1969), 443-455.

[38] I have taken this classification of types of intentional action from Beck's *Commentary*, 203.

this behavior in intentional terms. In other words, whatever evaluation the second general type of human behavior receives from moral judges, the presence of principles of acting in each species of this type enables investigators to give teleological explanations of it. However, there are two objections to this interpretation which need to be dealt with, before it can be considered acceptable.

The first objection focuses on Kant's frequent use of causal terms to characterize human action. Some of his discussion of desires, motives, intentions and action might seem to provide a warrant for a Davidsonian interpretation of his views on explanation. Davidson argues, briefly, that one explains actions by reference to reasons, but that reasons are really causes. Furthermore, reference to causal laws seems not to be necessary for causal explanations of human action.[39]

Nevertheless, there are three reasons why a Davidsonian interpretation of Kant's views on the explanation of human action is not plausible. First, Kant seems to characterize human actions, motives and desires as much in intentional terms as in causal terms. Second, whenever Kant uses "cause" in the sense of "causal explanation," he is talking about law-like relations between physical bodies or events in space and time. According to Kant, causal explanation always involves causal laws, and causal laws apply only to objects of experience, that is, to physical bodies in space and time. Third and last, when Kant uses causal terms to describe relations between mental items, or between mental items and physical items, or between actions, desires, beliefs, motives and intentions, he is really doing either of two things. Either he is using these terms in a merely analogical sense, as he does whenever he describes relations between phenomena and noumena. Or he is uncritically adopting the vocabulary common in the psychology of his day.[40] Kant's use of causal terms in these contexts therefore should not be taken to mean that he believed that human action can be given causal explanations of the type which anticipates Davidson' s account.

The second objection concedes that Kant frequently characterized human action in intentional terms, but he did so only for purposes of moral evaluation. This is the only way, according to this view, which such a characterization of human action could be compatible

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[39] See Davidson, 685-700.
[40] See Mischel, 438-449.

with a fundamental principle of Kant's metaphysics or transcendental philosophy, namely, the distinction between phenomena and noumena. This principle asserts, briefly, that while we can think of but not know the human will to be free as a noumenon, we cannot think of human actions as phenomena except as determined by causal antecedents. More generally, in order to make any explanation, we must understand the *explanandum*-event, be it a piece of human behavior or a physical event, in causal rather than intentional terms. Therefore, though we may morally evaluate human behavior by reference to the quality of the noumenal will lying behind it, we must explain this behavior causally rather than teleologically.

Kant frequently seems to lend support to this objection, in passages such as the following:

> Whatever one may hold, from a metaphysical point of view, concerning freedom of the will, certainly its appearances, which are human actions, like every other natural event are determined by universal laws.[41]

Nevertheless, I believe that an objection resting on Kant's phenomenon/noumenon distinction does not hold up under close examination. Justice can be done to both his distinction and teleological explanations if the following two steps are taken.

First, I grant that individual human actions can be understood, like other phenomena, as physical events, and thus may be given causal explanation. But my critic must grant that we are then talking about or reconceptualizing human behavior in terms of a broader context or pattern of wider significance than that in terms of which it is reported or teleologically explained. This point will be treated in more detail in the next section.

Second, according to my critic's view, an explainer's perspective is always that of an observer, while a participant's perspective is always that of a judge, usually a moral judge.[42]

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[41] Immanuel Kant, *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*, trans. L. W. Beck, in *Kant on History*, Beck (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1963), 11 (VI 11, 2). See also Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. K. Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), 476-478 (A: 553-556, B: 581-584).

[42] Commentators as diverse as Fackenheim, Beck and Rorty have argued for the view that observers explain while participants evaluate. See Emil L. Fackenheim, "Kant's Concept of History," *Kant-Studien* 48 (1957): 383-393; Beck, *A Commentary*, 190-193; and Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 193), 382-383. However, Beck shifts his position substantially in the direction of my interpretation in *The Actor and the Spectator* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975).

This view might seem counterintuitive, but that is apparently the price one pays for causal explanations of individual human actions. However, while my critic attributes this view to Kant, it more properly belongs to the tradition of Hobbes and Hume. It was Hobbes who first tried to employ the methods of modern physics in explaining human behavior. According to his view, the only difference between the behavior of physical bodies and deliberate human actions is that the latter must be explained in a more roundabout way.[43] Hume adopted the concept of a physics of human behavior from Hobbes. From the perspective of an observer/explainer, argued Hume, the behavior of physical bodies and human beings is of a piece:

> A prisoner who has neither money nor interest discovers the impossibility of his escape as well when he considers the obstinacy of his jailer as the walls and bars with which he is surrounded, and in all attempts for his freedom chooses rather to work upon the stone and iron of the one than upon the inflexible nature of the other. The same prisoner, when conducted to the scaffold, foresees his death as certainly from the constancy and fidelity of his guards as from the operation of the ax or wheel. His mind runs along a certain train of ideas: the refusal of the soldiers to consent to his escape; the action of the executioner; the separation of the head and body; bleeding, convulsive motions, and death. Here is a connected chain of natural causes and voluntary actions, but the mind feels no difference between them in passing from one link to another. The same experienced union has the same effect on the mind, whether the united objects be motive, desires volitions, and actions, or figure and motion.[44]

From the perspective of an agent, by contrast, a distinction can be made between human actions and the movements of physical bodies, but only for purposes of moral evaluation. According to Hume, an agent has the power, provided that his moral sense is in

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[43] On this tradition, see C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 9-45; and Jurgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, trans. J. Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), Chap. 1.

[44] David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning the Human Understanding*, ed. C. W. Hendel (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1955), 99-100.

good working order, of discriminating between the praiseworthy or blameworthy behavior of human beings and the movements of physical bodies:

> Inanimate objects may bear to each other all the same relations, which we observe in moral agents; though the former can never be an object of love and hatred, nor are consequently susceptible of merit or iniquity. A young tree, which over—tops and destroys its parent, stands in the same relations with Nero, when he murdered Agrippina; and if morality consisted merely in relations, would, no doubt, be equally criminal.[45]

My critic's Hobbesian/Humean reading of Kant thus goes as follows: when Kant spoke of phenomena, he was adopting the perspective of an observer for purposes of causal explanation only; and when Kant spoke of noumena, he was adopting the perspective of an agent for purposes of moral evaluation. Consistently enough, one commentator who holds my critic's view takes the neo-Kantian distinction between the methods of the natural and the social sciences to rest on the distinction between phenomena and noumena.[46] Nevertheless, if Kant admitted that individual human actions or a certain range of phenomena can be understood in intentional terms, then there seems to be no reason, other than uncritical allegiance to the Hobbesian/Humean perspective, to deny that an explainer can adopt an agent's perspective simply to explain rather than to evaluate. On the basis of the evidence that I have offered that Kant in fact made this admission, the distinction between phenomena and noumena poses no real threat to the claim that Kant took teleological explanations seriously. In fact, the distinctions between causal and teleological explanations and between the natural and the social sciences cut across the distinction between phenomena and noumena, or rest on the distinction between ranges of phenomena under different descriptions.

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[45] Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. C. W. Hendel (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1957), 111.

[46] See Rorty, 382-383. He then argues from the incoherence of the phenomenon/noumenon distinction to the unity of method of the natural and the social sciences.

Nevertheless, when I say that Kant allowed for a range of phenomena—human behavior—to be understood in intentional terms or explained teleologically, I do not wish to imply that he did not allow for the same range of phenomena to be reconceptualized for the purpose of causal explanation. I wish only to emphasize the difference between the two sorts of understanding or explanation in Kant's philosophy, perhaps as a new twist on the double aspect theory.[47] According to this theory, Kant treated human behavior under two aspects. The first, the phenomenal, is the aspect under which human behavior is viewed for purposes of explanation. The second, the noumenal, is the aspect under which it is viewed for purposes of moral evaluation. But if my argument is correct, there is a second double aspect under which human behavior can be viewed. For purposes of reportage, human behavior can be treated as intentional or purposive phenomena. But for purposes of explanation (in the causal sense), human behavior can be reconceptualized as phenomena in a context of causal laws. The way in which Kant thought that this latter sort of reconceptualization occurs will be the focus of the next section.

Kant on Causal Explanations in History

If my argument that Kant took teleological explanations seriously is correct, then his philosophy allows for the assessment of the accuracy of what Runciman has called reports of events, processes or states of affairs in history. For these in turn are made up of actions, which are understood in terms of the intentions, beliefs and context constituting them. However, to place events, processes or states of affairs in significant patterns of a broader sort, or to give what Runciman would call valid explanations of them, two further conditions are necessary. First, the events, processes or states of affairs in question must be placed in a pattern or context of law-like relationships to initial conditions. Second, this pattern must be shown to be really significant, or grounded in a theory and theoretical presuppositions capable of ruling out alternative patterns in which the events, processes or states of affairs could be placed. I shall argue, in this section and the next, that Kant believed that there is

[47] On this theory, see, for example, Beck, *A Commentary*, 192-194.

another sort of explanation in history possessing features which satisfy both of these conditions.

Kant's *Critique of Judgment* can be seen in part as an effort to justify the appropriateness of causal explanations in some empirical sciences, among them, biology, ecology and history. [48] But it could be argued that Kant is really defending the appropriateness of what G. H. von Wright has called *quasi-teleological* explanations in these disciplines.[49] Explanations of this sort, as they are currently understood, give an account of what appears to be purposive or goal-directed behavior in strictly causal terms. One commonly says that the heart pumps faster in order to give the bodily tissues more oxygen, or that a missile's guidance system takes readings of its trajectory in order to keep it on its course, or that a certain bird population feeds on an insect population in order to maintain a balanced ecosystem. But this is really a naive way of talking, for in each of these cases, the apparently goal-directed behavior is entirely explicable in terms of complex feedback mechanisms or interactions between causal systems.

However, I prefer for two reasons to use the term "causal" rather than "quasi-teleological" to characterize Kant's concept. First, as I hope to show shortly, only in reference to ecology does one find Kant talking about explanations which resemble our present-day accounts of quasi-teleological explanation in every respect. For when Kant turns to apparently similar explanations in biology and history, he invokes a feature which marks them off as unique, but which is bound to seem outdated by our contemporary standards: a concept of real purposiveness. Second, I find the use of the term "quasi-teleological" misleading even in a more contemporary context. For if quasi-teleological explanations reduce entirely to causal explanations, why bother with the extra terminology?

According to Kant, one can legitimately call a phenomenon purposive if one cannot fully comprehend it without the idea of purpose or final cause. There are several different kinds of real purposiveness. First, human actions are purposive in virtue of intentions. Kant calls this feature practical or technical purposiveness. Second, artifacts and organisms are

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[48] I use the term "ecology" at some risk of anachronism, but I can think of no other term which better captures the sense of the kind of investigation which Kant treats in the *Critique of Judgment*.

[49] G. H. Von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971, 84-86, 153-154. For a representative account of the current view of quasi-teleological explanations, see Ernest Nagel, "Teleology Revisited," *The Journal of Philosophy* 74 (May, 1977): 261-279.

purposive in virtue of their form or structure. They are called internally purposive. Third and last, the existence of human activities, organisms, artifacts and even inorganic matter are all purposive as means for realizing the purposes of something else. They all possess what is called external purposiveness.[50] To make matters even more complicated, Kant brings these different species of purposiveness under the more general concept of the real purposiveness of nature. This concept in turn is distinguished from that of the formal purposiveness of nature; but I shall postpone my discussion of this more general distinction until the next section.

The different species of real purposiveness can be illustrated by taking a commonplace example. The actions which a craftsman must perform to construct a table are purposive or intelligible in terms of a design he has in mind. This design dictates the way he can put the parts together to form a whole artifact. In more Kantian terms, the craftsman, by performing certain actions, brings about the reality of the object of his representation or idea. The craftsman, as an agent, has both the power of acting according to the conception of rules or laws and "the capacity to be the cause of the objects of one's representations by means of these representations."[51] Intentional actions are intelligible in terms of the idea of purpose or final cause. A final cause is free or ideal, in so far as the idea of an object or effect somehow determines its real and effective cause or bringing about.

The table *qua* artifact is also a purposive phenomenon. The table is intelligible in terms of its design, form or idea, the way in which a whole determines its parts. But while the table is purposive in virtue of its form, it is not capable of producing that form or of effectively bringing about a relation of whole to parts by means of relating these parts to each other and to the whole in a certain way. Only its designer and builder, a human agent, can do that. Put another way, the purposiveness of the craftsman's actions is that of a designer, while the purposiveness of the table is that of something designed.

According to Kant, the purposiveness of an organism—or example, a tree—combines the other two species of purposiveness illustrated above. Like the table, the tree is intelligible

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[50] Internal purposiveness seems to resemble the Aristotelian formal cause, while practical and external purposiveness seem more closely to resemble the Aristotelian final cause.

[51] Kant, *The Metaphysical Elements of Justice*, trans. John Ladd (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), 10 (VI, 211).

in terms of a design or a certain relation of whole to parts. "Its parts are possible only through reference to the whole;" and "every part . . . is thought of as existing only *for the sake* of the others and the whole."[52] The tree also has the power, like the craftsman, of producing this whole by putting the parts together in a certain way. "Every part" of the tree "exists *by means of* the other parts, and "they are reciprocally cause and effect of each other's form."[53] However, the power of an organism to produce a purposive whole is different from that of a human agent. An organism has the power to grow, to regenerate injured or worn-out parts, and to generate a whole new organism, while a human agent *qua* agent has only the power to produce artifacts.

But there is also a fourth species of real purposiveness, termed "external" or "relative." To return to my examples, in so far as one considers each as an individual artifact or organism, the table and the tree are internally purposive in virtue of their forms alone. If one asks why a part of the tree or table exists, one can be referred to the role the part has in the design of the whole tree or table. But if one asks why the table or the tree as a whole exists, to what can one be referred for an answer? Ordinarily, one says that tables exist for the sake of writing or dining, while trees exist to provide habitation for birds or shade for lovers or raw materials for craftsmen. One is referred in these cases to something else for the sake of which the table or the tree exists, that is, the writing of a letter, the manufacturing of tables, or the generation of more birds. The table or the tree is called externally purposive, by reference to other artifacts, organisms or human activity whose purposes it serves.

Since the distinction between internal and external purposiveness is critical for Kant's position on causal explanations in history, I shall dwell on some of its features for a moment. The intuitive idea is that internal purposiveness characterizes the relations between the parts and the whole of an individual artifact or organism, while external purposiveness characterizes certain relations which artifacts, organisms and human activity bear to each other and, presumably, to the whole of nature as an ecosystem. But does this mean that artifacts, organisms and human activity are related to nature as parts to a whole?

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[52] Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Bernard (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1972), 219-220 (v, [651, 373).

[53] Ibid.

It seems not, for nature as a whole is not a giant, internally purposive organism, but rather an ecosystem composed of what appear to be externally purposive entities. The radical character of this distinction becomes apparent when one compares the features of causal explanations given in biology and ecology.

Kant says that while biologists are assigned the task of formulating causal explanations of the structure and behavior of organisms, or of explaining their structure and behavior in purely causal or mechanical terms, they cannot fully comprehend even the production of a blade of grass without also invoking the idea of purpose or final cause.[54] The judgments of purpose which biologists are compelled to make about an organism in no way interfere with the job of giving an explanation. On the contrary, without such judgments, according to Kant, a causal explanation in biology would not be possible. Given that an organism can grow, regenerate some of its parts, and reproduce, one must assume a certain relation of whole to parts in it, called internal purposiveness, in order to explain its behavior.

Put another way, Kant claims that the structure and behavior of an organism prompts one to make a categorical judgment of the purposiveness of its parts, in order that the way these parts produce their relations to each other and to the whole may be causally explained.

By contrast, Kant says that ecologists can do the job of giving explanations of phenomena in their domain without invoking the idea of purpose or final cause. Judgments of the external purposiveness of artifacts, organisms and human activity within an ecosystem may seem to be helpful but really are not essential to ecologists. Kant terms judgments of external purposiveness "hypothetical." This means that the existence rather than the form of an artifact, organism or human activity is judged to be purposive, and only relative to something else for which it serves a purpose. In other words, something can be judged to be externally purposive only on the condition that it be of advantage or utility to another thing about which one can make categorical judgments of purpose. Kant devotes some of the more eloquent passages in the *Critique of Judgment* to illustrations of the relative uselessness of hypothetical judgments of purpose and the Panglossian phoniness of the concept of external purposiveness in comprehending ecosystems.[55] His argument is that

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[54] Kant pays tribute to the blade of grass at several points in the *Critique of Judgement*. for example, ibid., 248 (v, [75], 40öS, 258 (V, [77], 409).

[55] For example, ibid., 215, [63], 368-369), 225-226 (v, [67], 378-379), 276-278 (v, [82], 426-428).

if one tries to comprehend an ecosystem or nature as a whole in terms of the concept of external purposiveness as well as in terms of causal mechanisms, one is trying to do the impossible. That is, one is forced, by the hypothetical character of judgments of external purposiveness, to try to ascend from one externally purposive thing or condition to another, until one reaches what could only be termed "an ultimate purpose of nature," which would give order to the whole of nature as a system of externally purposive artifacts, organisms and human activities. An attempted ascent from one externally purposive item to another might go something like this: inorganic matter is useful for plants, and plants are useful for animals, and animals are useful for human beings. With human beings, one might think one has reached an ultimate purpose of nature, which would justify all of one's hypothetical judgments of purpose and permit the idea of purpose or final cause to contribute to ecological comprehension.

However, Kant claims that there are several reasons why one cannot ascend by means of hypothetical judgments of purpose to human beings as an ultimate purpose of nature. First, the existence of human beings is as externally purposive as the existence of any other organism. For example, their bodies serve as excellent habitats for tics and lice. Therefore, they cannot be regarded as an ultimate purpose of nature. Second, it will be urged that one take not human *organisms* as an ultimate purpose of nature, but human beings as *human*, that is, distinctively human activities. However, human activities not only employ artifacts and organisms as means but also serve as means themselves. For example, some human activities help to maintain a balance among other animal species. Third, even if human activities are taken as an ultimate purpose of nature, it is difficult to see how one could so take them, when one considers the typical behavior of "savages" of both the primitive and the civilized varieties. Fourth and last, one may not even be able to *begin* one's ascent from one externally purposive thing to another, much less complete it. For

> land and sea not only contain in themselves memorials of ancient mighty desolations which have confounded them and all creatures that are in them, but their whole structure, the strata of the one and the boundaries of the other, have quite the

appearance of being the product of wild and violent nature working in a state of chaos.[56]

If the relation of organisms to their inorganic habitats seems to be blindly fortuitous rather than externally purposive, then it seems that there is no reason to think that one can begin to ascend a chain of externally purposive relationships, in order to comprehend an ecosystem as a whole. Indeed, Kant claims that a "quite undesigned mechanism" can and most probably must suffice for explanatory comprehension in ecology. Unlike the concept of internal purposiveness in biology, the concept of external purposiveness is not necessary and probably not even helpful for constructing causal explanations in ecology.

Present-day critics might object that Kant's distinction between internal and external purposiveness is not helpful at all, since he allows a legitimate role for the former concept in biology. I shall not argue this point but rather shall focus on a different issue. Although Kant quite reasonably rules out the concept of external purposiveness in ecology, this is not the last that we hear of this concept. For it comes into its own and plays a genuine role, for Kant, in causal explanations in history.[57] But why, one might ask, does the concept of external purposiveness play a necessary role in causal explanations in history, when it cannot do so in causal explanations in ecology? Because, Kant answers, there is a way of determining an ultimate purpose of nature after all, but this determination allows and requires one to make hypothetical judgments of purpose only in the field of history.

Kant argues that from the standpoint of an ecologist who must regard nature alone, one is not able to locate an ultimate purpose of nature. But one can locate such a purpose, if a standpoint is adopted from which one is able to see what Kant terms ''a final purpose of creation.” Unlike an ultimate purpose of nature, a final purpose of creation belongs to something which lies outside of nature itself, in what could be termed a “supersensible” or "metaphysical" realm. The being which has such a purpose, and which is thus independent

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[56] Ibid., 277 (V, [82], 427).

[57] J. D. McFarland’s study of the distinction between internal and external purposiveness is interesting in two respects. First, he claims that recent advances in biology enable one to dispense entirely with the idea of purpose in explanations. Second, he gives no attention whatever to Kant’s treatment of the concept of external purposiveness in explanations in history. See McFarland, *Kant's Concept of Teleology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), Chap. 6.

of nature, is the human being as a morally free being. A morally free being is not, like a natural being, externally purposive for some other natural being. On the contrary, a morally free being has a purpose in reference to which every natural being, and therefore nature as a whole, can be externally purposive. The search for the conditions of the external purposiveness of natural beings can get underway and be completed because of the existence of a being possessing this final, unconditioned purpose. This means that the concept of external purposiveness cannot be usefully employed in comprehending the relationships between natural beings, unless they are reconceptualized as historical beings.

It might be observed at this point that my exposition of Kant's views has moved from the relatively uncontroversial concept of practical purposiveness in history to the relatively controversial concepts of internal purposiveness in biology, the ultimate purpose of nature, the final purpose of creation, and external purposiveness in history.[58] Nevertheless, I would hold that any exposition of Kant's views on causal explanations in history demands at least a clarification of the concepts of the final purpose of creation, the ultimate purpose of nature, and external purposiveness in history.

The final purpose of creation, the purpose of a morally free being, is the establishment of what Kant terms an “ethical commonwealth" or a "kingdom of ends.” [59] Such a commonwealth or kingdom would be an association of all morally free beings, all of whom are disposed to act from the principle, "always treat your fellow morally free beings as ends, that is, as morally free beings, and never as means only.” A final purpose can give value or impart external purposiveness not only to all human activity,[60] but also to the existence of

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[58] Some critics, such as Davidson and Nagel, might charge that Kant begins his excursion into metaphysics not with his talk of final and ultimate purposes, but with his discussions of the practical purposiveness of human actions and the internal purposiveness of organisms. On human actions, see my discussions in Chapter 1 and in the second section of this chapter. On organisms, see Clark Zumbach, *The Lawlessness of Living Things: Kant's Conception of Organismic Activity* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, forthcoming).

[59] Kant introduces the concept of a kingdom or realm of ends in the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Beck (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1969), 58-64 (IV, 433-437); and he amplifies it in his discussion of the concept of an ethical commonwealth or invisible church in the *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. T. Green and H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960), 85-90 (VI, 93-98).

[60] Already in the *Foundations*, 11-12 (IV, 393), Kant gives a clear indication of the way a final purpose imparts external purposiveness to everything else, in particular, to human qualities and activities:

> Intelligence, wit, judgment, and the other talents of the mind, however they may be named, or courage, resoluteness, and perseverance as qualities of temperament, are doubtless in respects good and

human beings as organisms, of artifacts, of other animals, of plants, and even of inorganic matter.

The final purpose of creation and the ultimate purpose of nature are related in the following way. An ultimate purpose of nature must meet two conditions. First, it must be involved in the preparation of a morally free being "for what he must do himself" in order to achieve the final purpose of creation. Second, an ultimate purpose of nature must be natural, or "be furthered as a purpose by means of his [man's] connection with nature."[61] Kant considers only two possible candidates for an ultimate purpose of nature: human happiness and human culture.

Kant argues that happiness cannot be taken as an ultimate purpose of nature, because it could never be realized in a way that prepares human beings to achieve the final purpose of creation. There may be little doubt that we think of happiness as a purpose to be achieved by means of our connection with nature. But because our desires and the capacity of nature to satisfy them seem to be continually out of phase, it is very doubtful that happiness can even be realized as a purpose at all. For either nature seems notoriously stingy in what it grants for the satisfaction of our desires, or it is our own nature never to rest content with what nature may grant us. But even if happiness could be realized as a purpose, it does not seem that this purpose could be involved in preparing us to do anything like found an ethical commonwealth. For we will rest content with the happiness which nature has given us, rather than bother with or be better prepared for the establishment of a kingdom of ends.

Our preparation for the achievement of the final purpose of creation is therefore likely to be painful rather than pleasant, since culture is Kant's only remaining candidate for the ultimate purpose of nature. Culture, as an ultimate purpose of nature, is the production in man of "the aptitude of setting purposes in general before himself and of using nature, conformably to the maxims of his free purposes in general, as a means."[62] The aspect of culture which produces the aptitude of using nature as a means is termed "culture of skill"

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desirable. But they can become extremely bad and harmful if the will, which is to make use of these gifts of nature and which in its special constitution is called character, is not good. It is the same with the gifts of fortune. Power, riches, honor, even health, general well-being, and . . . happiness, make for pride and even arrogance if there is not a good will to correct their influence on the mind and on its principles of action so as to make it universally conformable to its end.

61 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 279 (V, [83], 429).

62 Ibid., 281 (v, [83], 431).

(*Kultur der Geschicklichkeit*), while the part of culture which produces the aptitude of freely adopting ends or purposes is termed "culture of discipline" (*Kultur der Zucht*). Put more plainly, the culture of skill involves the capacities necessary for remolding external nature to suit our purposes: agricultural skills, manufacturing skills, and the skills necessary for operating legal and political institutions. The culture of discipline, on the other hand, has to do with the capacities necessary for remolding our own nature: rearing and cultivating our character.[63]

The culture of discipline seems to have a higher rank than the culture of skill. The latter, by giving us the aptitude of using the rest of nature as a means to our purposes, indeed allows us to regard the rest of nature as a system of externally purposive beings. But the culture of skill provides us with this aptitude regardless of whether we freely adopt our purposes or simply take them as given by our desires. The culture of discipline, by contrast, gives us the capacity to master our desires, to adopt our ends or purposes freely, and thus to take on the task, as morally free beings, of achieving the final purpose of creation.

I can now sum up some of the links which connect inorganic matter, artifacts and human activities in an externally purposive way to the ultimate purpose of nature and the final purpose of creation. I shall start from the top down. The final purpose of creation, the achievement of an ethical commonwealth, is an end which only we as morally free beings can adopt. The culture of discipline, as one part of the ultimate purpose of nature, enables us to become morally free beings, to adopt our ends freely. The culture of skill, as the other part of the ultimate purpose of nature, enables us to use everything in nature as a means to our purposes. The existence of human activities, artifacts, organisms and inorganic matter is genuinely characterized as externally purposive, if and only if we have been placed by culture in the position of adopting the final purpose of creation as our end.

A consideration of the way in which man's culture is "furthered as a purpose by means of his connection with nature" will help to make explicit the role played by the concept of external purposiveness in causal explanations in history. Kant makes one further distinction which requires some discussion: the distinction between two senses of nature. Nature in the

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[63] For a more thorough discussion of the two concepts culture in Kant t s philosophy of history, see Yirmiahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 181-185.

first sense is the object of any empirical science, a system of phenomena connected by laws. Nature in the second sense is, to speak metaphorically, a wise artist with her own purposes and designs, a regulative ideal which guides the historian in his investigation of historical phenomena.[64]

Kant thinks that causal explanations can be given in an area of inquiry only if its subject matter is knowable as nature or a system of phenomena connected by laws. The region of nature investigated by physicists is knowable in terms of universal laws and statistical laws, while the region of nature investigated by social scientists is at best knowable in terms of statistical laws only. But one has trouble viewing the subject matter of history as a region of nature, because intentional human behavior does not seem to be knowable even in terms of statistical laws.

Nevertheless, Kant claims that one can treat intentional human behavior as a region of nature, as a system of phenomena connected by statistical laws. In the *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*, he argues that if one looks only at the intentional behavior of individual persons, it cannot be understood in terms of anything like a statistical law. But when one begins to consider this sort of behavior across groups of persons, statistical laws can be applied to the subject matter of history with some success:

> Since the free will of man has obvious influence upon marriages, births, and deaths, they seem to be subject to no rule by which the number of them could be reckoned in advance. Yet the annual tables of them in the major countries prove that they occur according to laws as stable as those of the unstable weather, which we likewise cannot determine in advance, but which, in the large, maintain the growth of plants, the flow of rivers, and 0th natural events in an unbroken, uniform, course.[65]

Because historians can conceive his subject matter in terms of statistical laws, they have a way of placing events, processes or states of affairs in history in patterns in the broad

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[64] For an extensive treatment of Kant's distinction between the two senses of nature, see Friedrich Kaulbach, "Der Zusammenhang zwischen Naturphilosophie und Geschichtsphilosophie bei Kant," *Kant-Studien* 56 (1966): 430-451.

[65] Kant, *Idea*, 11 (VIII, 2); on Kant's understanding of statistical laws, see Kaulbach, "Welchen Nützen gibt Kant der Geschichtsphilosophie?," *Kant-Studien* 66 (1975): 81.

sense. One might expect, as a result, that the historian, in much the same way as an ecologist, could give causal explanations without any reference to the idea of purpose or final cause. But Kant argues that the historian, like a biologist, must invoke the idea of purpose or final cause to give explanations of this kind. Nature in the second sense—the supra-human agent, designer or wise artist—must be invoked as a regulative idea to guide knowing in history.[66] Kant states the function of nature as a regulative idea for the understanding of historical phenomena in the eighth "Thesis" of the *Idea*:

> The history of mankind can be seen, in the large, as the realization of Nature t s secret plan to bring forth a perfectly constituted state as the only condition in which the capacities of mankind can be fully developed, and also bring forth that external relation among states which is perfectly adequate to that end.[67]

History can be seen as an arena in which nature, the agent, through certain means or instruments, strives to bring forth individual liberal democracies and a world federation of states, as conditions which enable the ultimate purpose of nature, the system of historical phenomena, to be realized.

I can now re-summarize Kant's concept of causal explanations in history from the ground up. Human history at its most basic level is a scene of conflict between individual persons, groups of persons and nations. At the root of this conflict is a principle which Kant terms "unsocial sociability." This mainspring or motor of conflict in history is analyzed into two components: first, an individual pursues its own aims; and second, an individual requires the presence of other individuals, either as means or for recognition, in order to realize its aims.[68] But if history is a scene of conflict at its most basic level, then it seems that it would not be a region of phenomena in which even unsignificant patterns could be discovered. It would seem, as Kant rhetorically puts it, to be rather an "idiotic course of things human," where "beside the wisdom that appears here and there among individuals,

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[66] According to KauIbach, nature in this sense also guides doing and hoping in history. See ibid., 83-84.

[67] Kant, *Idea*, 21 (VIII, 27).

[68] The principle of unsocial sociability is discussed in a number of Kant's writings. for example, *Idea*, 15-16 (VIII, 20-22); and *Religion*, 22-23 (VI, 26-28).

everything in the large is woven together from folly, childish vanity, even from childish malice and destructiveness."[69]

Nevertheless, Kant thinks that historical phenomena only offer the appearance of chance at what could be called the local level, or the level of intentional actions of persons or groups (in so far as the latter can be said to have collective aims). He also believes that low-grade statistical laws can be applied to actions when one takes these at what could be called the global level, or across a large number of agents.[70] If this belief is true, then one is able to comprehend the founding of a guild system or a state at least as the result of a blind mechanism rather than mere chance. But while this sort of comprehension would apparently be satisfactory for causal explanations in ecology, Kant claims that blind mechanism is not a satisfactory principle for causal explanations in history. In order to comprehend something like the founding of a guild system or a state, an historian must utilize not only statistical laws but also the concept of external purposiveness. For good causal explanations in history point not to just any patterns in the historical process, but to significant patterns. And patterns can be seen to be really significant only in terms of the concept of external purposiveness.

Kant on Reason in History

If the exposition of the preceding two sections of this chapter is correct, then I have laid the groundwork for the claim that Kant's philosophy of history holds a possible solution to a problem posed in Chapter 1. This is the problem of establishing the validity of causal explanations in history, once it is recognized that competing conceptual frameworks of historians inevitably enter into the formulation of these explanations. Put another way, this problem has to do with determining which patterns picked out by causal explanations in history really are significant. Such a determination presupposes both reported events, processes or states of affairs and a reconceptualization of those events in terms of law-like relations to initial conditions. Since Kant 's philosophy of history allows for both teleological

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[69] Kant, *Idea*, 12 (VIII, 2).

[70] On the distinction between the local and the global level of events in history, see Henry Pachter, "Defining an Event: Prolegomenon to Any Future Philosophy of History," *Social Research* 41 (1974): 439-466.

explanations and one of the components of causal explanations in history, I believe I have shown that his philosophy can account for significant patterns in the narrow sense and for patterns in the broad sense. It remains to show how Kant's philosophy of history purports to take care of the significance of patterns in the broad sense. However, I must note that part of this job has already been done in the foregoing discussion of Kant's views on causal explanation. For Kant, the remaining component of such explanations, the concept of external purposiveness in history, is already part of the conceptual framework, which I shall call “reason in history,” that purports to enable historians both to determine the significance of patterns objectively and to assess the validity of causal explanations in history. Therefore, in this section, I shall merely make explicit and place in a broader context the sort of conceptual framework which is built into Kant's conception of causal explanations in history.

It will be helpful, first, to deal with a skeptical challenge. To many readers of Kant, it may not be immediately clear why reason must or even can play any role in the acquisition of empirical or scientific knowledge. It will be granted that "reason" of the sort discussed in the *Critique of Pure Reason* has a critical use, and that "reason" of the type examined in the *Critique of Practical Reason* has a practical or moral use. But only "reason" in the former sense seems to have anything to do with empirical investigation, and then only to determine the nature, limits and foundations of empirical knowledge, rather than to contribute anything to its content.

According to the "Transcendental Analytic” of the first *Critique*, empirical knowledge has two and only two sources: sensibility and understanding. The matter or content of empirical knowledge is always given through sensibility, while the form of this knowledge is always provided by the understanding. For Kant, empirical knowledge consists of a given manifold of appearances brought under the unity of a concept, in such a way that the object of this knowledge can be determined by laws. When investigators such as a physicists or historians construct an explanation of an event, they seem simply to subsume the data of sensibility (movements of physical bodies, human actions) under universal laws provided by the understanding (causal or functional laws). Moreover, as the "Transcendental Dialectic” reveals, any attempt to bring the matter or content of empirical knowledge under the unity of an idea of reason, such as God, freedom or immortality, is bound to lead empirical scientists into delusion. Therefore, according to this commonly accepted view, the task of

reason with respect to empirical investigations seems to be merely critical and negative, namely, to confine these investigations to what can be given to sensibility and thought through the understanding.

I believe that this interpretation of Kant's theory of empirical knowledge is not incorrect, but it is extremely short-sighted. It ignores what Kant says about the empirical use of reason in the "Transcendental Dialectic" and in the *Critique of Judgment*.[71] A brief consideration of his conceptions of the regulative use of the ideas of reason, the reflective judgment, and the formal purposiveness of nature will illustrate what the skeptics have missed and will make more explicit the conceptual framework that I have called reason in history.

Kant focuses on the regulative use of the ideas of reason in the "Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic" of the first *Critique*.[72] "Reason," we are told, in its empirical use "has . . . for its sole object, the understanding and its effective employment."[73] Reason does not, like the understanding, bring a manifold of appearances directly under its concepts. To try to do so would be delusory, for the concepts of reason are ideas, for which no corresponding objects can be given to sensibility. Reason's object is not the object of empirical knowledge, or the object of the understanding. Reason's object is empirical knowledge itself, or a manifold of the activities of the understanding brought under the unity of ideas:

> What is given to it [reason] does not consist in objects that have to be brought to the unity of the empirical concept, but in those modes of knowledge supplied by the understanding that require to be brought to the unity of the concept of reason—that is, to the unity of connection in conformity with a principle. The unity of reason is the unity of a system; and this systematic unity does not serve as a principle

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[71] The work of Emil Lask, Richard Kroner and Lucien Goldmann presents a more balanced view of Kant 's conception of reason. See Lask, "Vorwort" to *Fichtes Idealismus und die Geschichte* and "Hegel in seinem Verhaltnis zur Weltanschaung der Aufklärung," both in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, Eugen Herrigel (Tübingen: J. C. B.Mohr, 1923), 6-27, 333-345; Kroner, *Von Kant bis Hegel* (Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr, 1961 [1924]), 119-139, 152-159, 286-302; and Goldmann, *Immanuel Kant*, trans. R. Black (London: NLB, 1971 [1947]), 101-231.

[72] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 532-570 (A: 643-704, B: 671-732).

[73] Ibid., 533 (A: 644, B: 672).

> that extends the application of reason to objects, but subjectively as a maxim that extends its application to all possible empirical knowledge of objects. It is not a constitutive principle that enables us to determine anything in respect of its direct object, but only a merely regulative principle and maxim, to further and strengthen *in infinitum* the empirical employment of reason—never in any way proceeding counter to the laws of its empirical employment, and yet at the same time opening out new paths which a not within the cognisance of the understanding.[74]

One of the new paths opened out to the understanding by the empirical use of reason is the determination of significance in history. A brief look at Kant's conception of reflective judgment will show why he believes that the human understanding needs this guidance of the ideas of reason in empirical investigation.

According to Kant, the function of the understanding, or of judgment in general, is to subsume the particular under the universal. The universal in question is typically a law of nature, whose source is the understanding itself. The particular in question is normally a more or less loose empirical regularity derived from observation or sensibility. The judgment which subsumes a particular under a given universal is termed "determinant," while the judgment which looks for a universal for a given particular is termed "reflective."

One problem to be solved by the empirical use of reason can now be posed as follows. If the human understanding could subsume every possible particular empirical regularity under its laws, then it could completely determine its object. But this type of knowledge, were it attained, would put empirical scientists out of business. For Kant, however, this is not a real possibility, since only a divine or intuitive understanding could achieve this sort of knowledge. The human understanding is finite and discursive, and thus it can never completely determine its objects by universal laws. For human investigators, empirical knowledge is an unending process of determining an object. More plainly, empirical knowledge is open-ended, provisional, or always subject to modification.[75] But in order to

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[74] Ibid., 556 (A: 680, B: 708).

[75] For a discussion of the open-endedness of empirical knowledge, see Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. I (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1977), Chap. 8.

extend this process as far as possible, or even to get it underway, investigators must at least adopt the complete determination of their objects as a regulative ideal.

Put another way, the problem in question is that "the particular, as such, contains something contingent in respect of the universal, while yet reason requires conformity to law in the combination of particular laws of nature."[76] To bring a manifold of particular laws under the unity of universal laws of nature is the task of reflective judgment. This sort of judgment moves from parts (a manifold of particular laws) to a whole (unity under universal laws), but can do so only under the guidance of a

> *representation* of a whole which may contain the ground of the possibility of its form and the connection of the parts belonging to it. Now such a whole would be an effect [product] the *representation* of which is regarded as the *cause* of its possibility, but the product of a cause whose determining ground is merely the representation its effect is called a purpose.[77]

Kant terms this kind of representation "formal purposiveness of nature." According to Kant, the concept of formal purposiveness of nature guides the reflective judgment toward its objective of complete unity of particular empirical regularities under universal laws of nature in any empirical investigation—in physics as well as in biology and in history. I have dwelled on this concept here only to show the most general way in which Kant thinks that a conceptual framework or "reason" plays a role in attempts to construct valid explanations in any field of inquiry.

But the role of conceptual frameworks or of reason in biology and history is more obvious for Kant. He believes that biologists and historians must bring with them the concept of real purposiveness as well, in order to give valid explanations of the peculiar subject matters of these fields. More specifically still, Kant claims that the notions of an ethical commonwealth, a cosmopolitan federation of states, and the individual state as a civil order are all ideas of reason or constituent elements of a conceptual framework, which enables

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[76] Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 252 (V, [76], 404).
[77] Ibid., 256 (V, [77], 407-408).

historians to determine the objective significance of any event and thereby the validity of any causal explanation in history.

Chapter 3: Hegel's Solution to the Problem

Hegel and the Problem of Significance and Conceptual Frameworks in History

In the preceding chapter, I argued that Kant's solution to the problem of significance and conceptual frameworks in history depends on his belief that all historians can and ought to share one conceptual framework. He took this framework to be a cluster of regulative ideas which are valid for any historians in so far as they are rational investigators. Kant thus believed, as I have argued, that there is a way of determining which patterns in history really are significant in a sense that is valid for or binding on the community of rational investigators, even if the presence of conceptual frameworks in history bars them from ever determining which of these patterns are significant "in themselves."

In this chapter, I shall attempt to show that Hegel believed that Kant's solution does not go far enough, even though it seems to be on the right track. Kant's solution seems to be on the right track, according to Hegel, in two respects. First, Kant does justice to the impossibility of ever achieving a correspondence between explanations in history and significant patterns in the historical process "in itself." Second, Kant tries to formulate a conception of reason in history, or one conceptual framework against which all others can be measured for their adequacy in determining which patterns in history would be significant for a community of rational investigators. My first move in this chapter will be to show how much Hegel aligned himself with Kant in viewing the nature of the problem and its possible solution. But my second step will be to expose Hegel's dissatisfaction with Kant's solution, and, specifically, with the latter's conception of reason in history. This will lead naturally to a third and final step, namely, an examination of Hegel's own conception of reason in history as a conceptual framework for determining the real significance of patterns in history. I hope to show, among other things, that for Hegel, an adequate conception of reason in history dissolves Kant's distinction between significance "in itself" and significance for the community of rational investigators, without a return to the naive view of a simple correspondence between explanations and significant patterns in history.

Hegel on the Different Types of History

In this section, I shall examine Hegel's discussion of different types of history, in order to reveal his way of posing the problem of determining significance in history. Since Hegel's use of certain technical terms may at first appear confusing, it will be wise to begin with a brief discussion of his vocabulary. Most readers familiar with Hegel will note that he not only adopts a Kantian distinction between "understanding" and "reason" but also invokes his own distinction between "reason" and "spirit." Moreover, as if to obscure matters, Hegel often uses "reason" and "spirit" interchangeably, especially in his lectures on the philosophy of history. Furthermore, Hegel sometimes qualifies "spirit" and, less frequently, "reason" as "subjective" or "objective."[78] Finally, he seems to accept the Kantian distinction between the empirical and the practical uses of reason in history.

In Hegel's treatment of the different types of history, such expressions as "spirit of an historian," "spirit of a people," and "history of the spirit of humanity as a whole" appear. "Spirit" in its "objective" form seems to denote something that a particular person shares with both a particular people and humanity as a whole. Spirit in this sense always has a particular embodiment or shape. The different sorts of embodiment which spirit can take seem to run a gamut from mere matter in motion through organic life to human society and culture. According to Hegel, spirit also has a history, but only in the last type of embodiment, human society and culture.

This brief clarification of Hegel's terminology should suffice for my account of how the problem of significance and conceptual frameworks in history arises for him. At the beginning of his lectures on the philosophy of history, Hegel draws a general distinction between *original history* and *reflective history* and then marks off four subspecies of the latter type.[79]

The original historian, according to this view, is concerned only with presenting the spirit of the actions of his own people or of a people of his own time. The works of

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[78] For an extended commentary on the distinction between "subjective" and "objective" reason Hegel 's philosophy of history, see George Dennis O'Brien, *Hegel on Reason and History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), Chaps. 3 and 4.

[79] Hegel, G. W. F., *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956).

Thucydides, Caesar, and Frederick the Great apparently are outstanding examples of original history. The spirit of each of these historians and that of the age, person or people he writes about are virtually identical. This seems to mean, for the purposes of my argument in this chapter, two things: first, that the understanding and explanation of actions given in these histories are close to or identical with what the agents in question might have given; and second, that these actions have a significance which the agents in question might have given them.

In each of the kinds of reflective history, by contrast, the spirit of the historian may differ more or less from that of the people or age he writes about. This characteristic of reflective history arises first in *universal history*. Here the historian tries to present the spirit of his subject in the lively, immediate and naive manner of an original historian. But his subject is not merely his own people or a period within his own lifetime, whose spirit he could adequately mirror in the original fashion. On the contrary, his subject is the whole lifetime of a people or even of humanity. Since the spirit of a people may undergo many changes during its lifetime, and since the history of humanity consists of many peoples possessing different spiritual shapes, the history written about them cannot be naive or original but must become reflective. The task of the reflective historian is to reflect the spirit of another people or age in a lively and immediate way, without losing the sense of the difference between it and the spirit of his own age or people.

Hegel finds fault with the attempts of two types of reflective history to discharge this assignment. *Pragmatic history*, he claims, could be done well, as the work of Montesquieu (*Esprit des Lois*) illustrates, but usually it is not done well. Pragmatic historians tend to moralize about other peoples and other periods, or to hold the standards of their own age to be valid for all other periods of history. By looking in other ages only for lessons for their own time, pragmatic historians for the most part miss the peculiar quality of the spirit of these historical periods. *Critical historians*, though apparently aware of the lapses of pragmatic history, carry the vice of reflective history one step further. Their work consists essentially in the examination of other historical treatises for their reliability. This seems harmless enough; but, Hegel argues, in so far as critical historians go on to make judgments about other periods and peoples in history itself, they tend to indulge in wild and fanciful speculation. Instead of

critical analyses of other portraits of the past, therefore, critical historians often present us with the partialities of their own time even more "effectively" than pragmatic historians.

The problem which arises for Hegel can now be reformulated as follows. Original history provides a reliable portrait of the significance of a person's or a people's actions, but only as they occur within a very narrow slice of time. To take an example used in Chapter 1, an original historian concerns himself with portraying the significance of the strikers' actions as they themselves might have understood it. He is neither concerned with nor in a position to determine what other significance their actions may have had in terms of a more comprehensive context, such as the development of capitalism in the early nineteenth century. Universal historians try to draw the same sort of portrait for much longer stretches of time but tend to ignore the changes which a people's spirit undergoes. They might describe the strikers' actions as the endpoint of a long process of development in the modern economic world but mistakenly assume that this is the significance of the actions as the strikers or their contemporaries could have grasped it. Pragmatic and critical historians should be more aware of these changes, but they lack the appropriate point view for comprehending both the uniqueness of each shape of a people's spirit and its position as a stage in an ongoing process of development. They might be aware that the significance of the actions for the strikers is not the same as the significance of the action for historians living centuries later. But they seem to have no warrant for the significance which they in fact attribute to the actions. What reflective historians of the non-philosophical sort seem to be missing is a key to the significance of the actions of other peoples in other historical periods.

The final type of reflective history, the *fragmentary*, provides Hegel with a clue as to what is needed for this sort of comprehension. Fragmentary history deals with the history of art, law and religion. By adopting a general point of view, the fragmentary or intellectual historian can grasp the art, law, and religion of a people as expressions of a unitary spirit. Moreover, while this sort of history requires a grasp of discontinuity, of the uniqueness of the entire culture of a people in any particular period, it equally demands insight into continuity , or the development of this culture from one unique shape to another across time. If it is done properly, fragmentary history seems to give us what the other types of reflective history

normally omit, namely, "the inward guiding soul of the occurrences and actions that occupy a nation' s annals."[80]

To summarize once more, according to Hegel, reflective historians cannot give objective explanations without a grasp of the uniqueness of the spirit of a people and its place in the historical development of humanity as a whole. But this sort of comprehension is rational, and when it is brought to reflective history one gets what Hegel terms *philosophical history*. As it is for Kant, a conception of reason in history seems needed to assess the validity of conceptual frameworks employed by ordinary historians. Before I move on to his criticism of Kant, however, a few remarks on Hegel's notion of the relation between philosophy and empirical inquiry will be helpful.

For Hegel, original history and reflective history are empirical inquiries, to which a philosopher brings "the simple conception of reason"[81] order to construct philosophical history. As several commentators have argued, Hegel's treatment of the relation between empirical history and philosophical history is intended to deliver the reader of some prejudices: namely, that historians are passive ciphers of brute facts, while philosophers of history arbitrarily force these facts into *a priori* schemes.[82] Hegel claims, first, that an historian cannot operate on any facts without a minimal conceptual framework; second, that the conceptual framework of the historian can do violence to the facts if it is not critically examined; and third, that a good philosophical historian both performs this critical examination for historians and does justice to the facts. Therefore, the function of the philosophical historian's reason is not to violate the facts of history, but to determine the true value and position of historians' understanding of these facts, or of the conceptual frameworks within which something can count as a fact at all.[83] Ironically enough, Hegel, whose philosophy of history is frequently accused of apriorism, takes it as his mission to expose and correct the tendency of historians to force the facts into fanciful schemes.

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[80] Ibid., 8 (33).

[81] Ibid., 9 (34).

[82] For example, O'Brien, Chap. 2; Burleigh Taylor Wilkins, *Hegel's Philosophy of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), Chap. l ; and Hayden White, "Historicism, History, and the Figurative Imagination," *History and Theory*, Beiheft 14, (1975): 63. White argues that philosophy of history and historicism merely bring to the surface a theory or conceptual framework which normally is latent or embedded as "the figurative element" in ordinary historical texts.

[83] Hegel, 65 (102).

Hegel's Criticism of Kant's Conception of Reason in History

If the argument of the preceding section is correct, then Hegel agreed with Kant that historians stand in need of a conception of reason in history in order to assess the adequacy of their conceptual frameworks for determining significance in history. The purpose of the present section is to show why Hegel thought that Kant's conception of reason in history still does not serve as a suitable standard. In what follows, I shall consider three major faults which Hegel found with Kant's views on reason in history and I shall begin to indicate the remedies to be examined in more detail in the next section.

The first complaint that Hegel had with Kant's views on history is found at the level of explanation rather than at the level of reason. To recall the analysis of the previous chapter, Kant believed that the significance of actions in history can only be determined when those actions are placed in patterns or law-like connections with other events. In other words, in order to determine which patterns in history are significant, an historian must first have the patterns. For Hegel, by contrast, talk of patterns or law-like connections between events in history is totally out of place, a type of category mistake. This means that in Hegel's philosophy of history one does not find anything like causal or quasi-teleological explanations in von Wright's sense. Rather than using different concepts of purposiveness to mark off causal explanations in history from those in biology, as Kant does, Hegel denies that causal explanations have any place in history to begin with. As I shall discuss in further detail in the next section, history for Hegel is essentially history of spirit, and causal explanations pertain only to the operations of nature. Nevertheless, it is important to note here that this does not mean that actions in history do not have a significance which goes beyond their significance for the agents, but only that this broader significance is to be understood in a different way than Kant thought.

Hegel's second bone of contention concerns Kant's conception of reason more directly. Kant's conception of the empirical use of reason in history can be epitomized by the following phrase: "the subsumption of the particular under the universal." This motto also applies to his conception of the practical use of reason in history. On the one hand, an

historian, guided by ideas of reason, is set the infinite task of explaining or determining an object or historical event by universal laws. On the other hand, an agent, guided by similar ideas, is set the infinite task of subordinating the particular ends of nature to moral ends. In the case of the historian, explanations are never completely adequate to their object, while in the case of the agent, performance is never completely adequate to what is morally prescribed. Kant's conception of reason not only enjoins the investigator and the agent to take their endeavors in a certain direction but also reminds both that they are engaged in essentially unfinished business. Though reason in Kant's sense permits them a glimpse of what their destinations ought to be, the jobs of the historian and the agent are never done.

Hegel's principal objection to Kant's conception of these functions of reason in history is that there seems to be no sense in which the jobs of the historian and the agent could even get under way, let alone be completed. This predicament is an instance, Hegel argues, of the *bad infinite*, or a condition arising from a wrong-headed way of taking the distinction between the universal, the particular and the individual. In order to overcome the infinite task of subsuming the particular under the universal, Hegel claims that one must grasp the *genuine infinite*, or comprehend both the universal and the particular within a third category, the individual or concrete universal.[84] Since it is supremely important not to misunderstand what Hegel means by "individual," I shall briefly dwell on this notion and set the stage for a more detailed discussion in the next section.

The *individual* in Hegel's technical sense should not be confused with the *particular*. When, for example, he says that historical agents are individuals, he does not always mean that these are particular persons. "In the history of the world, the *individuals* we have to do with are peoples; totalities that are states."[85] This is not to say, of course, that particular persons never act in history. But for Hegel, in so far as persons act historically, they do so not as particulars, but only as parts of wholes, of nations or peoples. Even the so-called "world-historical individual" or hero, who distinguishes himself in some sense from his nation or people, can act historically only in reference to this whole. Furthermore, particular persons

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[84] On Hegel's distinction between "the bad infinite" and "the genuine infinite," see Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 114-115; and Michael Rosen, *Hegel's Dialectic and Its Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 77-83, 101-105.

[85] Hegel, 14 (40).

act historically within a nation as a concrete totality and not, as for Kant, within a collection of persons as a statistical aggregate. This claim seems to be part of the more general attack on Kant's treatment of history as a region of nature, but it is also closely related to Hegel's conception of the ethical life of a nation or a people. In this sort of life, Hegel finds not a conflict but rather a harmony between duty and inclination, customs and personal ideals, and intentions and consequences. A concrete totality or individual in this sense consists of particular persons who do what they ought as a matter of habit or desire. History takes place just when heroes upset this harmony between "ought" and "is, but they do so only by establishing another "ought" which their own or another nation is perfectly capable of realizing. To bring reason to the study of history is, for historians, in part to grasp the careers of individuals, that is, of nations and heroes, as the subject matter of history. According to this view, just as whatever *ought* to be done by the individual or historical agent *is* done, so whatever ought to be known by the historian who comprehends the career of individuals is known.

A final word is necessary on Hegel's second objection. At the root of this objection, which seems to attack Kant's conception of reason in its most general form, is the possibility that this conception leaves empirical investigators with an unhelpful distinction between significance for a community of rational investigators and significance "in itself." That is, just when Kant has led one to believe that he has found a way of determining the real significance of any event in history, it seems that there may be a residue of significance "in itself" which

cannot be captured any explanations. For the significance discoverable by the human understanding is one thing; but the significance discoverable by the divine understanding is, on Kant's view, another.[86] According to Hegel, what Kant gives with one hand to the conception of reason in history he takes away with the other: the capacity to determine the real significance of any event in history. Any distinction between human understanding and divine understanding, or between significance for a community of rational investigators and significance "in itself" is intolerable to Hegel. He takes it to be one of his major tasks to abolish this distinction, and since he believes that there is no significance "in itself," his own

[86] For Kant's discussion of the importance of the distinction between the human understanding and the divine understanding, see Kant, the *Critique of Judgement*, 249-258 (V, [76, 77]), 401-410.

conception of reason in history will not be open to the charge that it returns investigators to any naïve positions.

Hegel's third and last charge against Kant has to do with the character of purposiveness in history. For Kant, the occurrence of any event, either in nature or in history, can be regarded as directed toward the achievement of one purpose: the preparation of human beings for establishing an ethical commonwealth. This sort of preparation, under the headings of the culture of skill and the culture of discipline, can be completed only when a cosmopolitan federation of political states has been founded. But there is a sense in which this plan can never be fully carried out in history. For the establishment of an ethical commonwealth demands, for Kant at least, both the assistance of divine grace and an endless effort to reform the human disposition to evil.[87] The apparent futility of this conception of purposiveness in history leads Hegel to a more general point, namely, that Kant's conception is too "external." According to Kant, the final purpose of creation allows one to regard the phenomena of nature and history as a whole as externally purposive. Something is externally purposive when it can serve as a means of realizing the purposes of something else. For example, the existence of any natural organism or social institution, or the occurrence of any natural or historical event, can serve as a means of realizing the final purpose of creation. But for Kant, only the ethical commonwealth can be regarded "always as an end and never as a means only," or as something which ought not to serve the purposes of anything else. Even the ultimate purpose of nature—the development of talent and character in humanity—is as externally purposive or as useful a means as the occurrence of any other natural or historical phenomenon.

The external quality of Kant's conception of purposiveness in history bothers Hegel because of its affinity not only with the "bad infinite" or general failure of historical comprehension, but also with the more specific vice of pragmatic history, namely, the tendency to moralize about other peoples and other historical periods. He attempts to remedy these defects by formulating new conceptions of ultimate purpose and purposiveness in history. Instead of distinguishing an ultimate purpose of nature which can

[87] For a discussion of Kant's concept of divine grace, see Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), Chap. 6.

be realized in history from a final purpose of creation which apparently cannot be, Hegel discerns a single ultimate purpose of history. This goal—spirit's consciousness of its own freedom—begins to be realized with the first historically active people, the Chinese, for whom "*one* is free." The last historically active people, the northern Europeans, for whom "*all* are free," completes the realization of the ultimate purpose of history, at least in principle.[88] For Hegel, the ethical commonwealth is not an abstract idea, a mere "ought" which seems to lie forever outside of historical humanity's grasp. On the contrary, the human spirit becomes conscious of its freedom only when an ethical commonwealth comes to be realized in its concrete life. Furthermore, Hegel believes that when history is understood in terms of this conception of ultimate purpose, the external quality of anything's purposiveness will recede, as the observer moves from nature to history and from economic and social institutions to the spheres of artistic and religious activity.[89] Ironically, Hegel, who is often accused of bringing ethical life under the judgment of history, and Kant, who is universally taken to invoke respect for human activity as an end in itself, seem to be miscast in their roles. Apparently, it is for Hegel and not for Kant that many areas of human activity are not simply tools for the realization of history's ultimate purpose.

Hegel on Reason in History

Thus far in this chapter, I have tried to show that Hegel 's quarrel with Kant is not over the need for reason in history, but over which conception of reason in history is most adequate. An adequate conception of reason in history for both philosophers should do two things. First, it should do justice to the inevitability of conceptual frameworks in history, or to the impossibility of historians ever establishing a relation of simple correspondence between explanation and significant patterns in cases involving other periods of history. Second, it should help the historian to assess his explanations, and perhaps to establish an indirect relation of correspondence between them and significant patterns in history, by

[88] Hegel. 18-19 (45-46). I have deliberately avoided the use of the term "Germans" to refer to Hegel 's last world-historical people. Napoleon, after all, was for Hegel the last hero to show the way to the concrete application of the modern principle that all men are free. Furthermore, I use the expression "at least in principle" to avoid the misunderstanding that any modern state, including Hegel's Prussia, fully realized the ultimate purpose of history.

[89] Ibid., 33-34 (63-65), 37 (68-69).

providing a standard against which his conceptual frameworks can be measured. It is now time to examine Hegel 's conception of reason in history in more detail, to see how it purports to satisfy these conditions and to enable the historian to determine the true significance of any event in history.

In the preceding section, I mentioned that Hegel invokes the charge of the bad infinite against Kant's conception of reason in history. When reason is thought of as the director of an unending process - the subsumption of the particular under the universal - carried out by something else - the understanding or the will - then reason has become enmeshed in the bad infinite. Hegel makes this charge not only against Kant but against all of modern philosophy as well. For Hegel, the term "understanding" in a very broad sense indicates a fundamental trend in modern philosophy, from Descartes to Schelling, and characterizes both the empiricist and the rationalist wings of this tradition. Understanding represents the effort to adhere rigorously to principles of traditional formal logic in all areas of inquiry. The adherence to the principles of identity and noncontradiction is most critical. Understanding holds apart in fixed, abstract opposition the following pairs of concepts: universal/particular, infinite/finite, concept/intuition, freedom/nature, teleology/mechanism, intuitive understanding/discursive understanding, holy will/sensibly affected will, and theoretical reason/practical reason. By contrast, "reason" in a very broad sense refers to a development implicit in the thought of Kant, Fichte and Schelling, which Hegel claims to complete and make explicit. Reason represents the effort to bring back together what the understanding has held apart, by discerning the unity of its oppositions in a dialectical process. As Fackenheim has pointed out, the trend represented by reason in this broad sense purports to enable reason and understanding in a narrower sense not to function at cross purposes, as in the bad infinite, but to work together as a unit:

> Hegel asserts an Understanding which confronts, analyzes, and keeps separate facts, not merely *beside* a Reason which speculatively unites them but rather—of incomparably greater consequence—*within* a reason empty without it.[90]

[90] Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 19.

In his lectures on the philosophy of history, Hegel makes the well-known claims that "reason is the sovereign of the world"[91] and that "to him who looks upon the world rationally the world in its turn presents a rational aspect."[92] He argues that there is at least one sense in which it should not seem surprising that reason rules the world. It is virtually self-evident to modern men that nature as a whole is a system which operates according to universal laws. However, was not always so obvious. Hegel cites Anaxagoras as the first to look upon the world rationally, in such a way that the world presented to him a rational aspect as a system of nature governed by laws. Is history, like nature, a domain of phenomena which can be looked upon rationally in this sense, as a system governed by laws? Can one expect to find patterns in history as well as in nature? Most modern philosophers apparently thought so, and Kant, as I have tried to show, is a paradigm case of this line of thought. Hegel, of course, did not think so. There seem to be two reason s why he believed that Anaxagorean *Nous* is not the sort of reason appropriate for history.

First, shortly after Anaxagoras formulated his principle of reason, Socrates complained that it is only abstract, or it has yet to be applied in a concrete way in deducing all of the particular phenomena of nature from it. And in the modern period, as Kant has illustrated, there still seem to be problems with the view of nature as a system of occurrences governed by laws, even within the domain of so-called natural phenomena. Given any mass of particular events, there seems to be no way to apply universal laws to them concretely in order to arrive at objective explanations. Kant holds that the process of applying the universal to the particular, or of subsuming the latter under the former, is at best an infinite task of empirical investigation. Though certain ideas of reason and teleological concepts may indicate general directions for empirical investigation, one must also realize, Hegel points out, that investigators working with such principles can never reach their destination or give completely objective explanations.

Second, even if the Anaxagorean principle could be concretely applied to nature and objective explanations of natural phenomena thereby obtained, there is still a sense in which this way of looking rationally at nature would be totally inappropriate, in Hegel's opinion, as

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[91] Hegel, 9 (34).
[92] Ibid., 11 (37).

a model for looking rationally at history.[93] The attempt to bring particular historical occurrences under universal laws would miss precisely what is essential about the historical process for Hegel: namely, both the uniqueness of the shape of the spirit of humanity in any particular period and the development of spirit from one unique shape to another. To bring nature under a system of laws might seem an adequate way of explaining its phenomena, which can be regarded as repeatable instances of general types. But to treat the phenomena of history in a similar fashion would be worse than all the errors of pragmatic and critical historians. Whatever the merits of the Anaxagorean principle for a rational grasp of nature, Hegel calls for an entirely different principle for the rational grasp of history.

The principle he proposes for grasping the rational aspect of historical phenomena is providence or a divine plan. As in the case of the common belief that nature is ruled by laws, so in the case of history and providence: it is not surprising that many people believe that historical events are somehow related in a plan of God's. Even Kant, as I have shown, argues that one cannot fully comprehend historical events without invoking a plan and purpose of nature, taken metaphorically as a wise artist. Once again, however, Hegel calls attention to the difference between mere belief in an abstract principle and its concrete application to an entire domain of particular phenomena. A believer need only spot occasional signs of God's otherwise inscrutable design in isolated, spectacular events. But for an historian, this special form of insight is no more helpful than a Kantian regulative idea. According to Hegel, to bring reason to historical investigation is to reveal the divine plan in its entirety and detail. The determination of significance in history and objective explanations presuppose the concrete application of the principle of providence to particular historical phenomena.

To a casual observer, or even to a believer who sees occasional signs of God's plan, history, like nature, might seem like a mere going on, one damn thing after another. This is not entirely the aspect of nature presented to a rational observer, of course for whom events occur with some regularity. The image of the Phoenix, of new life arising from death, decay and ashes, for Hegel pertains to nature not as a process of mere change, but as a process of

[93] I am not sure whether Hegel would settle for the infinite Kantian task of subsuming the particular under the universal in natural science or would carry his conception of the individual as well into the domain of nature.

regular change.[94] However, while regular change is more than a mere going on, it seems to fall short of being a real process of development leading to a definite result or outcome. According to Hegel, the process of regular change in nature is symbolized by a ripe apple falling to the ground, only to yield nourishment and seed for the growth and generation of more apples. Like Kant, Hegel believes that if one confines attention to nature alone, one sees more than mere change, but the regular change one does see moves in no definite direction.

By contrast, history moves in a definite direction for both Hegel and Kant. In history there is a process of development which is not, as in nature, merely "formal " and "indeterminate."[95] But Hegel parts company with Kant on what really develops in history. For Kant, history consists of social phenomena whose regular changes maintain a similarity to those of natural phenomena, though the former sort of regularity leads the observer in a definite direction. For Hegel, on the contrary, the observer can capture what is distinctive about historical development only by abandoning any analogy to natural regularities.

While the Phoenix is the image of regular change or indeterminate development in nature, Zeus and Clio for Hegel are the images of determinate development in history.[96] Zeus is the political god, and history is primarily the realm of politics. Only when a political state is founded can Phoenix-like regular change in human affairs be brought to a stable, determinate result. This does not mean that nothing happens or occurs to peoples still immersed in what Hegel calls a natural condition. But only when a people become politically active can it for the first time become and be regarded as historical.[97] Nevertheless, one might object that history could still be treated as a process of regular change. States might rise and fall somewhat like apple trees. Hegel's reply is that Zeus is forgotten by his children and states do indeed decay, but the latter do not decay like ripe apples. For among the circle which forgets Zeus is Clio, the Muse of history, and among the ruins on which peoples feed are the written histories of their predecessors and contemporaries. Written history, or the reality of political states reflected in thought, is more like poison than nourishment to its consumers.

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[94] Hegel, 72-73 (112-113).
[95] Ibid., 55-56 (91-92).
[96] Ibid., 75-76 (115-116).
[97] Hayden White invokes Hegel's criterion of the reference of the subject-matter to political activity or institutions for determining when pieces of writing are histories rather than annals or chronicles. See White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (Autumn, 1980): 15-17.

It is the power of thought in this sense which annihilates each determinate political state or shape of spirit in the historical process, in such a way that this process can run through a series of different, determinant embodiments instead of endlessly repeating the same form.[98]

For Hegel, therefore, there is no history without determinate development, and no determinate development without written histories and political states or politically active peoples.[99] The principle of historical change is not repeatable instances of natural types, but rather" idiosyncrasy of spirit."[100] Each politically active people achieves a definite spiritual shape before it goes under, whose character is reflected in its economic life, social institutions, art, religion, written history and philosophy. Unlike development in art and science, in which the old is to a certain extent incorporated into the new, the human spirit develops historically by distinguishing one of its determinate shapes from another.[101] Written history seems to be passed on to each new people on the historical stage, not so that it may model its own style after that of its predecessors, but precisely to remind its differences from them.

While states or spirits of peoples are for Hegel *what* develop historically, the actions of heroes or world-historical individuals are the significant *means by which* this development occurs. This is not to say that other persons never act in history; unless a people as a whole follow his lead, the actions of an Alexander or a Napoleon would have no significance. Nevertheless, the world-historical individual may be picked out by his clear-sighted awareness that a time is ripe for his people to move in a new direction in their historical development, and by his single-minded resolve to lead them accordingly. While historians perform the negative function of administering poison-draughts which hasten the decay of the overripe spirit of a particular historical people, heroes perform the positive function of discerning the shape of the future and assisting in its birth. To extend this biological metaphor which should not be taken too strictly, the new shapes of a people's spirit come

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[98] Hegel, 60-62 (97-100), 77-78 (1 17-118).

[99] On Hegel's conception of the internal connection between history as written and history as a real process, see O'Brien, 11—16.

[100] Hegel, 46 (79), 50-52 (87-88), 63-64 (101).

[101] Admittedly, there is a tension, if not an inconsistency, between Hegel's claim that old art is assimilated into new and his claim that art and other forms of "absolute spirit" are essentially tied to the unique character of a particular political shape of spirit in history. See ibid., 69-70 (108-109).

forth from the old like kernels from their shells which, along with the leaders who make the deliveries, are then discarded into the historical scrap heap.

I shall now briefly summarize the way in which Hegel thinks that his conception of reason permits historians to determine the significance of any event in history. As the following passage indicates, Hegel seems to accept the distinction between the local and the global levels of an historical event:

> Those manifestations of vitality on the part of individuals and peoples in which they seek and satisfy their own purposes, are, at the same time, the means and instruments of a higher and broader purpose of which they know nothing.[102]

At the local level of an event, particular agents, whether persons or peoples, seem to be doing one thing, often with intent or conscious aim. At the global level, by contrast, something very different occurs, going beyond or even contrary to particular agents' intentions and calling for a different sort of explanation. Hegel therefore seems to align himself with Kant on the levels of an historical event; nevertheless, in spite of this area of agreement, he parts company with his predecessor on two important issues. First, there are certain historical agents - the heroes and the historians - who possess significance. Second, the type of explanation called for at the global level of an event is not quasi-teleological or causal.

"The history of the world," says Hegel, "is not the theatre of happiness. Periods of happiness are blank pages on it."[103] On the contrary, history is "the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states, and the virtues of individuals have been victimized."[104] Periods of happiness are periods of stability, of undisturbed ethical life, when particular persons for the most part act harmoniously within a whole system or shape of spirit. But periods of stability are of finite duration. Ethical wholes or individual shapes of the spiritual life of a people do not last forever; each is brought to the slaughter-bench of history during periods of change. It is only then that significant historical events occur,

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[102] Ibid., 25 (54).
[103] Ibid., 26 (56).
[104] Ibid., 21 (49).

because only then do the first significant historical agents appear on the scene: a people's heroes and historians. According to Hegel, the work of a people's historians accelerates the decay of a way of life which has become overripe, while its heroes lead the people through a particular period of change to a new form of life. The pen of the historian no less than the sword of the hero can be said to be an instrument of the historical slaughter-bench.

It is not entirely clear from Hegel's text, but the sort of historian who assists in a people's decay seems to be an original historian, or one who is concerned with presenting the contemporary significance or spirit of this people's actions. A reflective historian, by contrast, seems concerned with more than one shape of a people's spirit; he is sometimes concerned with a people' s entire history. Unlike the original historian, who does his work at the immediate and local level of the historical slaughter-bench, the reflective historian is in a position to grasp alternating periods of change and stability in a people' s history. But he can do so only if he employs reason in satisfying four conditions. First, he must grasp the concrete shapes of a people 's spirit, including the character of its economy, art, religion, etc., during the periods of stability both before and after the event in question. This condition rules out the search for patterns or law-like connections in his investigation. Second, he must be alive to the role of original historians' work in facilitating the changes leading to the event in question. Third, he must be aware of the role of heroes' insight and action in leading a people to bring about the event in question. Fourth and last, he must be able to comprehend the event in question as purposive, by reference to the ultimate purpose of history in Hegel's sense. Once he has satisfied all of these conditions in giving his explanation of an event, the reflective historian can be confident that he has given an objective explanation. His explanation is objective, on Hegel's view, because it corresponds - in the only sense of "correspond" that Hegel thinks possible, given the presence of conceptual frameworks in history - to the real significance of the event.

Chapter 4: Kant and Hegel Criticized

Some Problems with Reason in History

Thus far in this book, I presented a problem in philosophy of history and exposed Kant's and Hegel's solutions to it. The problem: given that explanations in history are formulated and significant patterns in history are understood in terms of the interests and conceptual frameworks of historians, how can the objectivity of explanations in history ever be established? The solution: the presence of conceptual frameworks in history is not denied, but these frameworks can be measured for their adequacy against one universally valid framework, called "reason in history." While the specific character of this framework seems not to be the same for Kant as it is for Hegel, both philosophers invoke it with a common aim: to enable historians to establish the real significance of patterns in history and thus to give objective explanations, in cases where their conceptual frameworks unavoidably enter into their investigations.

I believe that Kant and Hegel were on the right track in not denying the presence of conceptual frameworks in history and in wanting to find a way of determining which frameworks generate objective explanations. However, I think that the way they went about this was unfruitful, perhaps even detrimental to the task of historians. In this chapter, I shall assess the claims of Kant and Hegel for their conceptions of reason in history and show that these were not justified. My assessment will then conclude with some indications of ways in which conceptual frameworks in history can be better evaluated.

Kant

As I argued in Chapter 2, Kant believed that his conception reason in history provides a way of determining which patterns in history are really significant. My strategy consisted of three steps. First, I tried to show that Kant took teleological explanations of actions seriously, thus providing for a way of reporting or situating events, processes or states of affairs in patterns in a narrow sense. Second, I attempted to demonstrate that he took causal

explanations seriously, thus providing for a way of explaining or situating events in patterns of a broader sort. Third, I argued that the objectivity of causal explanations for Kant depends on the capacity of a certain conceptual framework to isolate the real significance of patterns in the broad sense.

In rebutting an objection to the first step of this plan, I was careful to note that Kant was not committed to any noumenal or evaluative considerations in his account of teleological explanations. That is, for Kant, teleological explanations are no less empirical than causal explanations; that agents' intentions are invoked in the former sort of explanation does not imply that the explainers must shift their sights away from the phenomenal realm or make judgments about their moral worth. In other words, Kant believed that the objectivity of teleological explanations in history could be determined in a strictly empirical way, without appeal to moral standards.[105]

If my analysis of Kant's views on teleological explanation is correct, I do not think that anyone would find fault with the way he handled what we have called reportage, or the first step in determining significance in history. However, some problems begin with Kant's approach to causal explanations in history. Most obviously, the non-empirical, in the sense of the noumenal and the evaluative, seems to enter into his account of causal explanations.[106] One cannot, Kant argues, make an adequate causal explanation or determine the real significance of any event in history without determining the relation of this event to the final purpose of creation, the achievement of an ethical commonwealth. But the ethical commonwealth is not called "the invisible church" for nothing. Since it is something noumenal, one can never tell empirically whether or not it has been or will be realized, relative to any historical event. All one can apparently do with this concept is to use it as a standard for morally evaluating a given event; but this seems to be something different from determining the real significance of the event, Unless one is prepared to concede the legitimate place of moral evaluation in causal explanations in history, it seems that Kant's

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[105] See Chapter 2, Section 2.

[106] One must be careful to distinguish some non-empirical conditions of knowledge from others. Some, like the notion an ethical commonwealth, are both non-empirical and evaluative, in that they are not empirical in origin and they apply to noumena; while others, like the principle of causality, are non-empirical but not evaluative, in that they also are of non-empirical origin but they apply only to phenomena.

critic mentioned in Chapter 2 must have been on to something.[107] Otherwise, Kant's solution seems untenable, not because an explainer must step into an evaluator's shoes in teleological explanations, but because he must do so in causal explanations. Kant therefore seems to have given us not a standard for assessing the adequacy of conceptual frameworks or determining the real significance of historical events, but at most a basis for making moral judgments in history. Small wonder that Hegel suspected Kant of rationalizing the vice of pragmatic historians.

It might be objected that this assessment of Kant's position is unfair, in that it ignores the central role of practical reason or the moral view of the world in Kant's philosophy, including his philosophy of science. In particular, it could be alleged that my criticism ignores Kant's claim that the concept of the highest good or final purpose of creation serves as a regulative ideal not only for historical action but also for historical investigation. According to this view, Kant would willingly accept the charge that real significance in history is nothing other than significance as evaluated by a moral judge, and that in the end, the explainer in history must wear the shoes of such a judge. If this is the price of commitment to "the primacy of practical reason," then Kant would gladly pay it[108]. History, it could be urged, is for Kant no less than for the neo-Kantians an area of inquiry which ultimately cannot be value free, though it possesses some features which give a minimal empirical respectability.

I have no quarrel with this objection, for I think that it characterizes Kant' s position on the place of values or reason in empirical inquiry very accurately. More precisely, I agree that the real point of this characterization is to reveal the extent to which, on Kant's view, the moral values of the investigator determine the significance of historical events. But this way of posing Kant's solution to the problem of significance and conceptual frameworks in history provokes further doubts.

Suppose that moral or political values enter into the determination of significance in at least one empirical discipline, that of history. Maybe they should, for history is the realm in which freedom, according to Kant, appears or takes on phenomenal form. Perhaps this

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[107] See Chapter 2, note 12.

[108] However, he seems to see no need to pay this price for good teleological explanations.

would be an answer to the following question: what gives Kant the right to proclaim "the primacy of practical reason" in this specific area of empirical inquiry? And why should "the practical interest of reason," which Kant's value-scheme embodies, have priority over any other interests of historians in their subject matter? Furthermore, what gives Kant the right to assert the universal validity of one scheme of moral values, namely, his own conception of reason in history? The only attempt at justification that I can find for Kant's claim, aside from some bald assertions that reason simply has a hierarchy of interests, is that nature has established this hierarchy for human beings. That is, nature has decreed that human beings have been provided with reason so that they may use it, either empirically or practically, to realize the highest good.[109] But this seems to beg the question: "the natural" is cited as the reason why one scheme of values or one interest has priority over any other. In the absence of a better argument, there seems to be no reason why one ought to accept Kant's claim that certain moral interests or values establish better conceptual frameworks for historians than others.

To summarize, I have argued that Kant 's conception of reason in history has at least two doubtful features. First, it involves an appeal to a noumenal or morally evaluative standard for determining significance in history, and therefore casts suspicion on the claim that the significance so determined is real or valid for any investigator. Second, even if one is tempted to think that moral or political values can do this job, as long as *they* can be shown to be universally valid, there is still no reason to believe that Kant has shown this for his scheme of values.

Nevertheless, I do not want to suggest that Kant's conception of reason can never be used as a conceptual framework in history, or that moral considerations can play no role whatever in determining significance in history. In the appropriate circumstances, this type of framework would probably be very useful to historians. But it would be useful only as one conceptual framework among others, rather than as a standard for assessing all frameworks. For example, Gibbon's explanation of the fall of the Roman Empire, which held the field as the most valid hypothesis for many years, seems to have derived in part from the

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[109] For Kant's appeal to nature as the ground of reason's destiny, for example, *Foundations*, 13-15 (IV, 394-395); and Idea, 12-13 (V 111, 2-4).

presupposition that certain events can be understood in terms of moral decline. But this explanation eventually was supplanted by a more valid one resting on a different theoretical presupposition.

What makes Kant's conception of reason in history better than other conceptual frameworks in history could not be, as he thought, any "intrinsic" or non-empirical property in virtue of which it serves as a standard for all frameworks, but, as I shall argue at the conclusion of this book, an extrinsic property which makes it more appropriate than others in some specific circumstances. In other words, an historian's explanatory presuppositions may be generated in part by his moral or political values, but the success or failure of these presuppositions in producing objective explanations in history ultimately must be assessed by what Runciman has called academic values.

Hegel

In Chapter 3, I argued that Hegel was alert to some shortcomings in Kant's conception of reason in history. In particular, he was distressed at Kant's introduction of noumenal considerations into explanations in history, for this seems to lead to three things: first, the employment of standards completely external to the subject matter; second, a tendency to moralize about other periods in history; third, a radical split between significance for the community of rational investigators and significance "in itself" or as it would be for a divine understanding.

The third point seems to be the critical one for understanding what motivated Hegel to formulate his conception of reason in history. For Kant, the discovery of the presence of conceptual frameworks in history implies that investigators can determine what the significance of an event is only relative to the frameworks which they employ. The best that they can hope for is a determination of significance relative to one framework that all investigators must share; they seem barred by the very presence of conceptual frameworks from ever determining what the significance of an event may be "in itself." But a determination of this sort of significance—the significance of an event as it would be known by a divine understanding—is nevertheless held out to human investigators as an ideal

regulating their inquiry. What this means, according to Hegel, is that Kant has not solved the problem of significance and conceptual frameworks in history but has exacerbated it. He has merely radicalized the discovery that the presence of conceptual frameworks in history has shown investigators to be cut off from the real significance of events, or from an adequate determination of the validity of explanations in history.

In Hegel's estimation, the wrong turn taken by Kant can be redeemed by finding a way of overcoming the split between significance for the community of rational investigators and significance "in itself." Kant was not entirely wrong in arguing that the presence of conceptual frameworks cuts investigators off from significance "in itself." But according to Hegel, this could as well mean that there is no significance "in itself." Or better, that there could be a different conception of reason in history—Hegel's own—which takes significance for the community of rational investigators to *be* significance "in itself."

Hegel's conception of reason in history and in particular his notion of spirit purport to overcome this split between significance for the community of rational investigators and significance "in itself," to enable investigators to determine the real significance of any event in history, and thereby to establish the validity and objectivity of explanations in history by means of a conceptual framework rather than despite it. Whether Hegel gives one reason to believe that his notion of spirit can do this job is now the question.

According to Hegel, true philosophers of history have a sort of "hotline" plugged into the workings of spirit in history, which enables them to tell just how the significance of events occurring in any particular historical period is to be understood. Original historians and reflective historians are also familiar with spirit in history, but in the case of the former, in a naive way, and in the case of the latter, in a misguided way. The task of philosophers of history is to bring their own particular grasp of spirit to that with which original and reflective historians are already familiar. In this process, reflective history will be purified of inappropriate concepts, so that the real significance of historical events can be apprehended in the immediate, though not the naïve, manner of original history.

In Chapter 3, I mentioned that spirit for Hegel always takes a particular embodiment. On this view, even what one thinks of as nature is really an embodiment of spirit. But since events in nature take the form of monotonous recurrence, spirit cannot be said to have a real

history in this type of embodiment. On the contrary, the history of spirit, or history *per se*, can begin only when spirit takes what could be called conventional embodiments. Economic and social institutions, forms of discourse, art and religious practices, rules and norms are all conventional embodiments of spirit which qualify to have a history.

There are two features of the conventional character of spirit's embodiment which both allow spirit to have a history and permit the reason of an historian to grasp significance. First, spirit assumes a unique or nonrepeatable shape in conventions, thereby providing something stable or determinate for the historian to grasp. Instead of a process of regular change which leads to no definite result, historians are presented with a series of self-contained periods or wholes by reference to which events become intelligible. However, historians would not be able to grasp the true significance of events, were they not able to understand these unique shapes or periods in terms of another feature: the progressive development of spirit toward a final result: knowledge of its own freedom. While the first feature is the uniqueness of any conventional embodiment of spirit, the second feature is the development of spirit through these conventional shapes toward a form "natural" to it, namely, philosophical thought. Since the latter feature might seem obscure, it would be worth dwelling on for a moment.

When Hegel claims that spirit develops in history towards a final result or consciousness of its own freedom, and that philosophical thought is the "natural" form which spirit takes at this point, he does not simply mean that spirit has achieved this goal and realized this form in his own thought, though admittedly this is part of what he means. For philosophical thought also has a history, even if it is alleged to culminate in Hegel's own thought. This means that spirit in some sense becomes conscious of its freedom, and takes a form 'natural" to it, not only at the end of the entire process of development, but also at certain points within it. Indeed, on this view spirit takes the form of philosophical thought in each particular period of history, just when the conventional forms in which it has been embodied have become ripe enough to be shed for the form ‟natural" to it. In other words, each particular period or shape of spirit in history can be seen to be a definite result or stage in an ongoing process of development, only when insight is achieved into the "natural" form in which the spirit of each particular age is expressed, namely, philosophical thought. Put yet another way, philosophical thought is the key to the "truth" of any particular conventional

embodiment of spirit in history and of its historical development as a whole. Therefore, understanding the history of philosophy is the key to understanding the history of spirit, and understanding the history of spirit is the key to determining the real significance of any historical event.[110]

Hegel's conception of reason in history seems to be able to do its job, as long as one knows that there is a spirit which is embodied in the way characterized above, or as long as one has the kind of access to its workings in history which Hegel claims that the history of philosophy provides. However, I do not think that either of these conditions are satisfied.

First, there seems to be no good reason for claiming that clusters of conventions in history are embodiments of spirit or anything else. Hume made a similar point about the concept of necessary connection in his discussion of causation.[111] From a repeated succession of perceptions of similar events, argued Hume, we tend to conclude that there is a relationship between the events themselves, namely, a necessary connection. But we have no right to conclude this. We are not even justified in concluding that our perceptions of similar sorts of events will succeed each other in the future, with a degree of probability proportionate to the frequency of their regular succession in the past. It is at most a fact of human nature that we do conclude these things.

We have no right, concluded Hume, to assume anything about a relation of necessary connection between events, on the basis of our perceptions of them. In a similar manner, one could argue that Hegel had no right to assume, on the basis of observing the clusters of conventions of different historical periods, that these are embodiments of anything else, in particular, of spirit.[112]

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[110] In other words, without the history of philosophy, according to Hegel, there could be no philosophy of history.

[111] See Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning the Human Understanding* Chap. VII.

[112] At least one commentator, Iring Fetscher, argues that even for Hegel, there is no “spirit" underlying a particular cluster of conventions:

> Hegel führt also die “verschiedenen Seiten des Lebens eines Volkes” Religion, Philosophie, Politik, Kunst, usw. auf eine Wurzel—den "Geist der Zeit” (oder den "herrschenden Volksgeistft” dieser Zeit) zurück. Dieser Zeitgeist ist aber—wie der Volksgeist—nur eine Hilfskonstruktion, zum Zwecke der Erklårung der Einheit der gennanten Phänomene geschaffene Fiktion.

Fetscher, ˝Vier Thesen zur Geschichtsauffassung bei Hegel und Marx,” *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 11, (1974): 488. I am prepared to concede that the notion of spirit may be at most a useful fiction, but I can find no evidence

A supporter of Hegel's position might reply that a Humean critic ignores just what makes possible the insight into the workings of spirit within conventions: insight into the history of philosophy as the history of the natural form in which spirit expresses and reveals itself. one stuck with merely conventional embodiments of spirit, this argument goes, then one admittedly would not be justified in claiming anything about spirit. But one has clear, transparent access to the workings of spirit in the history of philosophy, for there spirit discloses itself in non-conventional, “natural" form.[113]

However, I can find no good reason to accept this claim about the history of philosophy. Recent developments in philosophy have shown that traditional philosophers, from Plato to Hegel, were deluded in believing that philosophy provides a pure, transparent, convention-free mode of expressing anything.[114] What one finds in the history of philosophy is not the history of pure thought, but the history of thought expressed in and determined by various conventions and natural languages, none of which has been found to serve as an exclusive "natural" medium for the life of spirit. Therefore, not only does one have no good reason to believe that the workings of spirit underlie the clusters of conventions in history, but one has no good reason to believe that the history of philosophy will ever give one access to these workings.

I do not want to suggest that Hegel’s discovery that different historical periods are singled out by the uniqueness of clusters of conventions is not a valuable contribution to historical understanding. On the contrary, this insight anticipates the present-day awareness of how difficult it is to determine the significance of historical events, given that the conceptual frameworks of historians often have no correlates in the periods in which the events occurred. Nor do I want to argue that an understanding of the history of philosophy has nothing whatever to do with the understanding of historical events. As in the case of Kant, all I want to claim is that Hegel's conception of reason in history may be better than other conceptual frameworks in some circumstances but worse than other frameworks in

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that Hegel so regarded it. On the contrary, a grasp of the real movement of spirit in history seems, on Hegel's view, to be just what exposes the fanciful character of the conceptual schemes of reflective historians

[113] For an account of Hegel’s view that philosophical thought is pure or independent of conventions, see Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), Part V; and Erich Heller, *The Artist’s Journey into the Interior and Other Essays* (New York, Vintage Books, 1959).

[114] I am thinking here of the work of Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Merleau-Ponty.

other circumstances, for the purpose of generating valid explanations of events, processes or states of affairs in history.

How They Could Have Gone Wrong

Although I have examined the reasons why Kant's and Hegel's conceptions of reason in history do not achieve what they purport to, the question of how these philosophers could have been so misled or deluded remains to be answered. It would be illuminating to consider not just why their ways of assessing conceptual frameworks in history failed, but why they were motivated to adopt these specific strategies in the first place. To see why their moves seemed attractive to them might help us to understand why they might still seem attractive to us.

Perhaps the most obvious factor leading Kant and Hegel to make their respective moves is something which few if any philosophers can avoid: the influence of certain prejudices of the tradition. In Kant's case, the prejudice seems to be the impulse to constrain conceptual frameworks or what could be called the interests of inquiry by practical or moral interests which are alleged to be valid for all rational inquirers. He seems to assume uncritically, if not to radicalize, Plato's subsumption of the true and the beautiful under the good.[115]

In Hegel's case, there seems to occur a somewhat different uncritical reading of the tradition. He holds that there is a mode of pure or rational thought, somewhat like Plato's

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[115] For a general analysis of this prejudice and Kant's relation to it, see Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Meridian Books, 1969), Chaps. 3 and 6. However, commentators such as Manfred Riedel think that the influence of this prejudice on Kant has useful consequences for historians:

> Geschichte ohne Philosophie—so konnen wir nun ganz im Sinne von Kant fortfahren—macht blind. Damit sind wir bei Begrundungsproblem der Geschichtsphilosophie. Ihr Ausgangspunkt ist nicht die Überlieferte Geschichtstheologie, sondern der Zustand der Zeitgen6ssischen Geschichtsschreibung, die sich mit der Anhäufung und der Ausbreitung des historischen Stoffes begnGgt und unreflectiert den Interessen der herrschenden Mächte (von Staat und Kirche) diente, Geschichte—argumentiert Kant—solte nicht um ihrer selbst willen, nicht zur Befriedigung gelehrter Neugier und Eitelkeit betrieben werden. Eine bloss quantitative Mehrung historischer Bildung ohne Grenzen und Zwecke bläht auf und fährt zum Historismus. Kant, der nicht den Terminus, wohl aber die Sache kennt, spricht von "cyclopischer Gelehrsamkeit," der ein Auge fehlt, "das Auge der Philosophie."

Riedel, "Geschichte als Aufklärung," *Neue Rundschau* 2 (1973): 296.

"dialectic," through which the ultimate nature of reality, spirit, reveals itself. For Hegel, rational insight or dialectical thought provides a constraint on the fanciful schemes of reflective historians and enables one to determine the legitimate use of conceptual frameworks in history.

A bit less obvious, but hinted at by at least one commentator, is the tendency to slide unawares from talk about meaning *in* history into talk about the meaning *o*f history.[116] This distinction has been analyzed in some detail by W. H. Walsh.[117] According to Walsh, patterns in the sense of law-like relationships between events and initial conditions and patterns in the sense of relationships of appropriateness between actions, beliefs, and intentions are types of meaning *in* history. Moreover, meaning in history seems to be the sort of thing to which an explanation could be correlated, and with which ordinary historians are familiar. By contrast, the meaning *of* history, or the way in which historical events go together as a whole, does not seem to be the kind of thing to which any explanation could correspond. In other words, the meaning of history seems not to be something which could have cognitive import for an ordinary historian, though it may have what could be called ethical or emotive import. That is, this concept would not be useful for explaining or understanding in history, but it may be helpful in evaluating.[118]

Kant and Hegel can both be accused of conflating meaning in history with the meaning of history, or of bringing what ought to be evaluative considerations into explanatory situations. Instead of keeping these notions separate, they seem to claim that a correct understanding of meaning in history requires or entails a correct understanding of the meaning of history. But Arthur Danto is more concerned with the consequences than with the causes of this mistake:

> The reason an event is mentioned in a narrative is typically distinct from the reason the event happened: different, in brief, from its *historical* explanation. This is so obvious it would hardly bear mention were it not for the practice of some great

[116] See Danto, "Narration," 29-30.
[117] W. H. Walsh, "Meaning in History," in *Theories of History*, Patrick Gardiner (New York: The Free Press, 1959), 296-307.
[118] Ibid., 304-306.

> philosophers of history to use the one sort of reason in place of the other, projecting onto the fabric of history the structures which instead belong to its narrative representation, and taking as the deep reason for the occurrence of an event the reason for which it would be included in a final narrative in which its description has a place. For the structure of history, as Hegel perceives it, is virtually the structure of a narrative text, as though what holds history together is what holds an *historical text* together: as though the criteria which justify inclusion of the description of an event in a text is what makes the occurrence of that finally comprehensible.[119]

The problem is not that Kant and Hegel hold that explanations or structures of historical text ought to mirror patterns or structures of historical reality. In my opinion, most ordinary historians, as well as the great philosophers of history, would accept this claim. On the contrary, the problem is to understand how certain pieces of historical text could correspond to certain structures of historical reality, that is, how explanations in history could be objective. At the root of this problem is the fact that no one seems to know how to classify significance, or that which makes patterns in history significant. Significance seems to be neither something like a pattern in the narrow sense, which could have been understood by the agent in question, nor something like a pattern in the broad sense, to which a causal explanation could correspond.

This difficulty, I want to suggest, may have motivated Kant and Hegel to adopt the following strategy. Perhaps significance can be taken to be a type of meaning *in* history, or something to which an explanation could correspond, if it could somehow be related to the meaning *of* history. That is, maybe the real significance of any local cluster of events can be determined by placing it within an even larger context of significance—the significance of history as a whole. For Kant and Hegel, this can be accomplished by placing a particular conceptual framework within a more general one, reason in history, since the significance of any event, either in a local context or in a global one, is established by the conceptual framework of the historian.

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[119] Danto, "Narration," 29.

Nevertheless, even if this were the problem that moved Kant and Hegel and the strategy which they adopted to solve it, the solution does not go through. For the meaning of history is not, like meaning in history, something that could be shown to be "objective" for all possible inquirers. It cannot be determined empirically, and the conception of the meaning of history to which reason purports to give non-empirical access seems contestable (there are at least two different contestable conceptions already: Kant's and Hegel's) . But this should not seem surprising, since the ethical or emotive rather than the cognitive import of something typically is contestable. A grasp of the meaning of history thus gives one no incontestable way of determining meaning or significance in history.

Conclusion

This book has been concerned with answering the following question: since the conceptual frameworks or theoretical presuppositions of historians enter into the determination of the significance of patterns in history, how is an objective determination of this significance possible? Put another way, how are objective explanations in history possible?

Two options for answering this question seem to be ruled out from the start. The first, which I have called positivist, holds that explanations in history are objective in just the way in which statements are true or false. That is, on this view, explanations in history are objective in so far as they purport to correspond to significant patterns which are discoverable independently of the conceptual framework or theoretical presuppositions of the observer. The positivist answer does not seem plausible, because it ignores the ineluctable presence of conceptual frameworks or theoretical presuppositions in history. Therefore, the claim that observers can have independent access to the real significance of patterns in history is undermined. The second, which I have called skeptical relativist, holds that the presence of a conceptual framework or theoretical presuppositions cuts the observer off from any objective significance which patterns in history may be thought to have. That is precisely because there is no way of determining the significance of patterns in history independently of conceptual frameworks or theoretical presuppositions, no objective explanations in history are possible. The skeptical relativist answer seems implausible, because it takes the positivist conception of the truth of statements for the criterion of the objectivity of explanations. Therefore, its claim that the presence of conceptual frameworks cuts observers off from the "true" significance of patterns in history is not justified.

The answers of Kant and Hegel seem to retain both the positivist criterion of objectivity and the skeptical relativist insight into the impossibility of independent access to the significance of patterns in history. They seem able to reconcile these apparently incompatible requirements by claiming that there is a true conceptual framework or set of theoretical presuppositions, in terms of which the real significance of patterns in history can

be understood and objective explanations can be formulated. But neither Kant nor Hegel can justify the claim that there is one true conceptual framework.

However, there are objections to my assessment of each of these options. First, have I really taken relativism seriously? Is anyone really a skeptical relativist in the crude sense which I have mentioned? After all, it has been persuasively argued that skeptical relativism either is self-refuting or is just not interesting.[120] And, as I have shown in Chapter 1, the view that there can be reports which are objective in the strong sense of theory neutral or "true" is well-supported and even thought to be so by some relativists.[121]

The first objection leads to another possible option, to which I alluded in the Chapter 1: to retain the positivist criterion of truth or falsity for the objectivity of reports, but to claim that the objectivity of explanations in history is of a lesser grade or is nonexistent. This is the position which Margolis has called "robust relativism." But there is some doubt whether robust relativism provides an appropriate answer to my question. Robust relativism may be appropriate as an account of the objectivity possible for interpretations of works of art, and even appropriate as an account of the objectivity of what Runciman has called "descriptions" (or answers to requests for tertiary understanding) in history and social science. That interpretations and descriptive statements need not be true or false—or objective in a strong sense—as long as they depend on reports which can be true or false. That interpretations and descriptions are not objective in the strong sense of "true" or "false" is precisely the reason why the good ones become "classics" or unlikely to be superseded. By contrast, there seem to be no classics of explanation, either in history or in natural science. The history of explanatory understanding in history and in natural science is a story of progress, whether it is evolutionary and cumulative or revolutionary and discontinuous. The explanations of a Newton or a Gibbon are not classical; they appear to have been superseded or supplanted by the explanations of an Einstein or a Pirenne.

So, the question now becomes: what does the apparent progress in explanatory understanding in history warrant one in believing about the objectivity of explanations in history? This leads to a second objection. It could be argued that I have treated positivism no

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[120] See Mandelbaum, "Subjective, Objective, and Conceptual Relativisms," and Margolis, "The Nature and Strategies of Relativism."

[121] See Chapter 1, 17-21.

more fairly than relativism. It will be pointed out that I have admitted one of the central positivist tenets: that reports can be true or false independently of theories. Indeed, they can, though as a sophisticated positivist, I would also argue that theory neutrality should not be confused with presuppositionlessness. On the contrary, as I have tried to show in Chapter 1, the dependence of a report on the presuppositions of the agent guarantees its independence of the theories of rival observers. The positivist could also point out that I agree that there is progress in explanatory understanding in history. But I would not agree with the positivist conception of the reasons why there is such progress. Or if I do agree, then the positivist in question has become so sophisticated as to be no longer recognizable as such.

In order to see why I disagree with the positivist account of progress in explanatory understanding, and to see what this means for a defensible conception of the objectivity of explanations, I shall return for a moment to Runciman's account. For Runciman, the progress of explanatory understanding in history indicates that the objectivity of valid explanations in history is very close in strength to that of true statements or accurate reports. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, he invokes a principle of incompatibility for explanations: no two explanations which depend on the same set of reports and are answers to requests for secondary understanding dictated by the same selection of possible causes, conditions and constraints can be equally valid.[122] One of them must be invalid or highly improbable. Valid or highly probable explanations are grounded in theories which, unlike descriptive theories, are capable of "ruling out" competing hypotheses, theories or theoretical presuppositions. Progress in explanatory understanding in history indicates a movement from false to true theories.

There is much to be said for Runciman's treatment of the objectivity of explanations in history. Unlike skeptical relativism and robust relativism, it does justice to the undeniable fact of progress in explanatory understanding in history. And unlike Kant and Hegel, Runciman does not claim what seems to be unprovable: that there is one true conceptual framework or set of true theoretical presuppositions from which one could derive objective explanations in history. Put another way, he is right to say that one needs something more

[122] See Chapter 1, 25-26.

than robust relativism to account for progress in explanatory understanding in history, but something less than a Kantian or Hegelian "reason in history."

Nevertheless, I believe that Runciman's account of the objectivity of explanations in history goes too far. I do not think that he has the right to assume that progress in explanatory understanding in history implies that there are rules or criteria for deciding between explanatory hypotheses and theories. He seems to assume this, and if he does so, I see no reason to distinguish his account from that of positivism. Both accounts are wrong. But this does not mean that there is no progress in explanatory understanding in history, or that the reason for this progress is a matter of entirely arbitrary choice among theories. Theory-choice is a matter of judgment and of giving good reasons, but it is not a matter of following some deductive or inductive decision procedure. Bernstein has pointed out that the positivist assumption of a rule-governed decision procedure for theory-choice is an illusion derived from the perception of theoretical progress:

> We have seen the error of thinking that there is or can be some calculus or algorithmic decision procedure for evaluating scientific hypotheses and theories It is an illusion to think that before the fact we always know (in principle) what will count as a decisive refutation of a proposed theory or that the epistemologist can discover fixed, permanent rules that are used to resolve differences Yet alternative paradigms, theories, and research programs can be warranted by communal rational argumentation. Communal decisions and choices are not arbitrary or merely subjective.[123]

However, a third objection could arise at this point. Perhaps one has no right to conclude from the fact of theoretical progress that true theories have replaced false ones. But this does not mean that the fact of theoretical progress may not indicate the approach of explanatory understanding toward one true theory, if only as a regulative ideal, or that theoretical progress could not occur by later theories incorporating earlier theories as special cases. Kant and Hegel may have had something like this in mind, and Putnam seems

[123] Bernstein, p. 172.

to propose a similar answer as a strategy for overcoming the dilemma of positivism and relativism. But I do not think that an account of this sort would involve a simple return to those of Kant and Hegel; nor do I think that the notion of the truth or objectivity of theories as an idealization of “rational acceptability" would be incompatible with the conception of theoretical progress as rational agreement about good reasons. It will be helpful to examine Putnam's argument for a moment, in order to answer this third objection.

Putnam has argued that an “internalist,” or one who recognizes the inescapability of conceptual frameworks, need not subscribe to relativism, or to the view that the true theories are whatever the established community of investigators happens to agree upon. This would be a consensus or "mob" conception of the truth or objectivity of theories. That a theory is rationally acceptable to a current scientific community does not mean that it is true. If this were the case, then, to use Putnam's example, to say that the theory that the earth is flat was true for investigators thousands of years ago is to say that the earth has changed its shape since then. For the internalist, the truth of a theory is not its rational acceptability under any current conditions, but only its rational acceptability under ideal conditions.[124]

However, if what is true ultimately *is* what is rationally acceptable, then there is no truth independent of what is arrived at by a process of rational debate, persuasion, or giving good reasons. Putnam also very carefully distinguishes between *internalism* and what he calls *externalism* or “metaphysical realism.” The latter view holds that the truth of theories, as of reports, can and ought to be established independently of any conceptual frameworks. In other words, an externalist holds the traditional correspondence theory of truth, according to which whatever is true is so from a God’s-eye perspective, or independently of any humanly held conceptual framework.

There seems to be no dispute that much of the Western philosophical tradition, beginning with Plato, is externalist in this sense. By contrast, Kant and Hegel are perhaps the first internalists, or the first philosophers to break with the tradition of externalism or metaphysical realism. According to Putnam, Kant and Hegel were the first philosophers to see that the truth of theories depends on two conditions: first, the goodness of fit within a conceptual framework, or what is rationally acceptable to the current scientific

[124] Putnam, p. 55.

establishment; and second, the ultimate goodness of fit within an ideal framework, or what would be rationally acceptable to any investigator under ideal epistemic conditions.

However, Kant and Hegel took the latter condition of the internalist conception the truth of theories dogmatically. That is, they thought that while one cannot have truth “in itself" or "one true theory" in just the way that the externalists claim, one might still hope to achieve something resembling this sort of truth by adopting "the one adequate conceptual framework.”

Though Putnam's notion of justifiability under ideal epistemic conditions might evoke associations with the views of Kant and Hegel, there seems to be one critical difference. The one adequate conceptual framework to which Kant and Hegel subscribe is really not "ideal.”

In Kant's case, this might not seem obvious, because for him the one adequate conceptual framework could also be taken to be an ideal regulating scientific inquiry. But, as I have tried to show in the preceding chapters, Kant holds that this one framework is actually possessed by God or a divine understanding. In other words, "the one true theory,” even for Kant, is true literally "from a God's-eye point of view,” even though the truth in itself remains inaccessible to human inquirers. Hegel merely did what he claimed that Kant should have done: grant these inquirers access to the God’s-eye point of view which accompanies the one true conceptual framework. The quest for rational acceptability comes to an end not with the free agreement among any possible conversants, but rather under the constraint or coercion of the one true framework.

The claims of Kant and Hegel seem to be that the one true conceptual framework is a real one which someone, either divine or human, employs. Putnam's "ideal epistemic conditions,” on the other hand, seem to entail no such God’s-eye point of view or notion of "truth in itself," yet are intended to remind one of the provisional quality of goodness of fit within a current framework or rational acceptability of a theory for the current scientific establishment.

I do not take an objection resting on Putnam's account to be decisive against the view that the objectivity of explanatory theories rests on considerations of judgment and the persuasiveness of good reasons. On the contrary, Putnam's notion of the persuasiveness of good reasons under ideal epistemic conditions entails the claims that the truth of a given explanatory theory rests on the goodness of the reasons given for it and that the history of

explanatory understanding progresses toward "truer" theories as it approaches the ideal conditions under which good reasons for them can be given.

Nevertheless, it might be thought that an objection resting on Putnam' s view of truth as rational acceptability undercuts the difference between the objectivity of explanations and that of reports. On this view, it will be admitted that the valid or true explanatory theories are merely the rationally acceptable ones; but then the same characterization must apply to the accurate or true reports. Thus, explanatory theories will be no less objective than reports, not because both can be true independently of the presuppositions of the observer, but because the objectivity of both depends on rational agreement among investigators.

But this objection ignores a feature of the objectivity of reports which is both possible and necessary. On the one hand, as I argued in Chapter 1, it is possible for the truth of reports to be independent of the presuppositions of the observer, because one condition of their truth is their dependence on the presuppositions of the agent. On the other hand, it is necessary for the truth of reports to be independent of the presuppositions of the observer, so that he or she will have something to talk about with observers of rival explanatory schools when the time comes for rational debate about the validity of explanations. The objectivity of reports has the same relevance for disputes about interpretations of works of art and for disputes about descriptions (in the sense of tertiary understanding) in history. There must be some way of indicating what the interpretation, description or explanation is *of*. But this can be done, to the satisfaction of any rival observer, only by means of the constraint of reports which can be true or false independently of the presuppositions of the rival observers.

To take the example discussed in Chapter 1, neither the Gibbon thesis nor the Pirenne thesis nor the Duby thesis can be the one true theory of the fall of the Roman Empire. A better theory may come along. But there is progress from the Gibbon thesis to the Pirenne thesis, and from the Pirenne thesis to the Duby thesis. Good reasons can be given for why the later theories account for this event better than the earlier ones; but there are no rules for compelling judgment about the truth of any of them. However, rational persuasion or giving good reasons for any of these theories depends on the objectivity of at least some reports which the rival theorists can be compelled to accept.

Paradoxically, therefore, one can be an internalist about the objectivity of explanations in history only by being an externalist, of a sophisticated sort, about reportage in history. But this seems to me to be a reasonable price to pay for the objectivity of historical knowledge.

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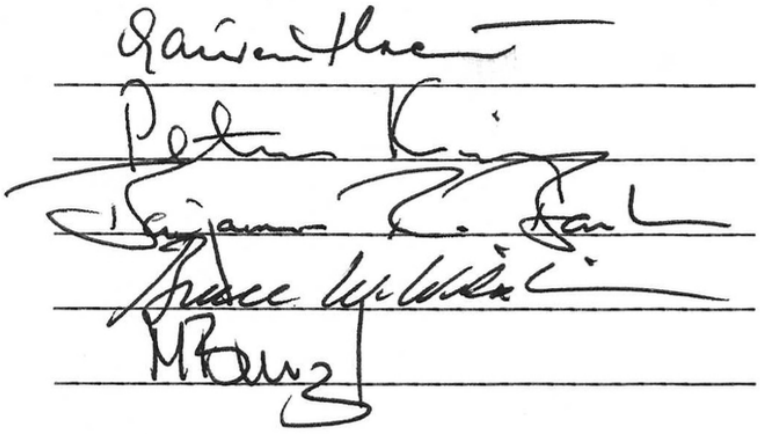

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