

**GOING SOMEWHERE?**

**The Pervasiveness of Teleology in History  
and the 18th Century Great Experiment to Eliminate It**

BY

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A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Departments of History  
University of Manitoba and University of Winnipeg  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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## ABSTRACT

The writing of history is based on a teleological foundation. In the eighteenth-century, Voltaire and Hume used history to demolish the *Ancien Régime*. Their methodology was a plain language description of the moral and intellectual bankruptcy of the aristocracy and the Church. Post-Enlightenment historians assumed that the plain language description still functioned in a purposeful way. Unfortunately the purpose and use of historical description, and the way historians used it after the Enlightenment was based on teleological assumptions about language, politics, culture, and society which few practising historians could ever begin to defend. These gratuitous and anti-theoretical assumptions are a teleological fallacy that threatens to compromise the integrity of contemporary historical studies.

Even as Rationalism developed in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it did not replace the old irrational system based on Christian faith. In the post-Enlightenment the teleological “goal” changes from a static extrinsic objective to a process-based intrinsic ideal. Teleology now inheres within the plain language descriptive methodology as part of a building process.

Six representative, influential philosopher-historians from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are studied and analyzed: Voltaire, Hume, Kant,

Hegel, Marx, and Ranke. In their work is the redevelopment and appropriation of teleology from telic goal to methodological purpose.

Teleology in some form is an essential feature of the writing and understanding of history. Without a teleological framework there is no logical way to propose or understand a meaning in history. But it is where the telos resides that will determines the kind of history we produce and wherefrom its value is derived.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Douglas Sprague, a brilliant and apparently unrepentant opponent to the status quo, helped me find a point and purpose in the many odd thoughts I suffered about the study of history and the methodology for doing so. Dr. Aubrey Neal focussed my collected thoughts on the subject matter as presented in the initial, disjointed draft and offered valuable comment and support for this thesis. I appreciate your help and only hope that you are both pleased with the result. Dr. Lionel Steiman and Dr. David Arnason I sincerely thank for their time and care in reading and evaluating this work.

Mostly, thanks Doug.

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## Chapter I

### TELEOLOGY: PROVIDENCE, PROGRESS, PROCESS

*Why are we here? How did we get to this place? Why did some-such happen? Where is it all leading?* These are philosophical questions that have bothered thinking people since we realized that we could, in fact, think and wonder. In the writing and telling of history, the direct or implicit answers to these questions are the foundation of a theme or metanarrative that is teleological. “Teleological explanations attempt to account for things and features by appeal to their contribution to optimal states, or the normal functioning, or the attainment of goals, of wholes or systems they belong to.”<sup>1</sup>

Socrates and Aristotle were perhaps among the first in the Western world to make or address teleological explanation. Their thinking held up through to the Enlightenment when writers such as Voltaire successfully parodied their early notions. One of the reasons that teleological explanations are questioned is because there are instances when an item’s contribution to a result still does not explain its occurrence. (e.g., The spring rain’s effect on fall crops does not explain why it rains in the spring.) If we knew that there was an intelligent designer of a thing, however, then we could quite readily explain the thing by considering its contribution to the purpose it helps create *without* making the mistake of assuming that it is as it is because of the effect it causes. But only creationists

could accept teleological explanation if such explanations always presupposed an intelligent design. So there must be more to teleological explanation.

There are many instances of teleological explanation that do not presuppose intelligent design. Typically these arise in biology and economics, among other sciences, quasi-sciences, and arts. "Their justification typically involves two components: an analysis of the function of the item to be explained and an aetiological account."<sup>2</sup> With regard to history and the consideration of human action in the past, function is obviously not the pre-eminent consideration of historians—based on reading history; it appears that an analysis of causality is the approach most readily and often taken. However, teleology in history has had an unbroken reign since at least the Classical period with only one significant deviation.

I would suggest that the aetiology or origin of history is clear, or at the very least dim but readily identifiable within the traces of the past left to us. On the other hand, history's *function* is more interesting. In the pre-Enlightenment, history was used to convey a moral message or glorify a warrior. The method was panegyric recounting of half-truths and wishes followed up by rigorous demonstration of the veracity of the history. Hume and Voltaire, however, used history to demolish the *Ancien Régime*. Their methodology was simple: a plain language description of the moral and intellectual bankruptcy of the aristocracy and the Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Ted Honderich, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 868.

Plain language description was a powerful revolutionary method for communicating to the world at large in the eighteenth century. As the name suggests, it was an unglamourized and unadorned form that spoke directly to the masses using the *lingua franca* in a way the reader or recipient of any sort could understand. No more turgid prose and scholarly Latin “great man” history with its panegyric veneer. Plain language description concerned itself with those parts of the past, and of society more broadly and currently, that affected the vast masses of people that were living without pretense distinct and detached from the pomp and ceremony of the halls of power.

The plain language method derives its power from the breadth of its audience and the unadulterated (albeit quite possibly biased) information it purports to present. Such information empowers the uninformed or, more likely, misinformed and politically oppressed. No wonder Bacon could, with tremendous erudition, say that “knowledge is power.” Essentially, the king had no clothes, and all it took was understandable, unthreatening plain language to make the message real. In a twentieth-century context, this same type of “telling it like it is” has been seen both in Mark Twain’s use of the patois within the dialogue of his literary Americana, as well as in the American media’s reportage of the Vietnam war. In both instances the prevailing stilted ersatz was made real—to significant, and some might say “unfortunate”, effect. Plain language description, which precipitates a wave of common understanding and creates doubt of those in power, is, by its very nature, a stronger force for deconstruction

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<sup>2</sup> Idem.

of a tyrannical or merely oppressive political structure than for the composition and sustaining of a new one.

During the great Enlightenment *ecrasez*, the plain language description spoke for itself. For those that came afterward, the situation had changed. Post-Enlightenment historians assumed that the plain language description still functioned in a purposeful way. Unfortunately the purpose and use of historical description, and the way historians used it after the Enlightenment is based on gigantic teleological assumptions about language, politics, culture, and society which few practising historians could ever begin to try to defend.

In the receptive environment of history, teleology is a virus that spreads quickly. The environment is receptive because of the natural human tendency to seek and see ordered patterns, directions, and movements. As Wilson states:

Teleology involves uncovering great developmental patterns in history that show either progress or decline. . . . More narrowly defined, the term refers to (1) a study of the past with reference to the present, (2) a pursuit of causal agency in history based on the assumption that God was the original cause, and (3) a generational delineation of "a class of wills out of which there emerges something that probably no man ever willed" but that the Whig historian is able to make intelligible to the present.<sup>3</sup>

Teleology dates back to Aristotle's conception and explanation of causes, which, without extensive explanation, are: material, formal, efficient, and final. The last of these "because" clause options, *final cause*, is an explanation based on

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<sup>3</sup> Norman Wilson, *History in Crisis? Recent Directions in Historiography*. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1999) p. 7.

the object's intended function or purpose.<sup>4</sup> The Aristotelian use of the final cause explanation is not without its limitations, particularly in the conception that it is within an object's nature to do or act in a certain way. Strictly speaking, this does not address the issue of purpose, and it was one of the obvious shortcomings of the final causes explanation that would make this Aristotelian view an easy knockdown for philosophers and scientists such as Voltaire. Although the philosophy of the explanation is well beyond the purpose of this paper, the teleological explanation in the Aristotelian conception sufficiently shows that the teleological concern with purpose or ultimate end has been considered for a long time. The concept of teleology has, of course, changed with the passing of centuries and development in thinking, especially in scientific knowledge and thought.

Chronologically, the formal doctrine of divine Providence in the Western Christian theology would be the next significant manifestation of teleology in the Western world. As I address in somewhat greater detail below, the conception of the human march to its destined end, Providence, as designed and directed by God, is central to the Western Judeo-Christian philosophy of history. In this respect, we have little alternative but to admit and accept it as a very important contribution to the teleological framework of the Western world's philosophy of history.

The ascendancy of science and scientific rationalism, which is, on the whole, hostile to the traditional concept of teleology, marked something of a low ebb in

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew Woodfield, *Teleology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) p. 3–6 *passim*.

the influence of teleology on historical writing. The predominant reason for dismissing teleological explanations was that such explanations were obscurantist and unempirical. The scientific reasoning of the seventeenth century was primarily inductive and, as we will note particularly with Hume, for many scientists final causes were irrelevant. An aphoristic expression of this opinion made by Francis Bacon in his *De Augmentis Scientiarum* says it all: "Inquiry into final causes is sterile, and, like a virgin consecrated to God, produces nothing."<sup>5</sup>

Voltaire and the *Philosophes* did their part to reduce the significance and impact of the teleological divine Providential history. Voltaire himself, however, could not rid himself of a deity, making nature his providence. He therefore only flirted with a purposeless history. In a more pessimistic period he called history "un tableau des misères humaines."<sup>6</sup> But it was David Hume who led the charge on Providential history and rendered a philosophy of history grudgingly with a first cause and all but no teleological purpose. Doubt and skepticism were the root of sentiments such as the following, which went a long way toward destroying the existing telos.

We are placed in this world, as in a great theatre, where the true springs and causes of every event, are entirely unknown to us; nor have we either sufficient wisdom to foresee, or power to prevent those ills, with which we are continually threatened. We hang in perpetual suspense betwixt life and death, health and sickness, plenty and want; which are distributed amongst the human species by secret and unknown causes,

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<sup>5</sup> Woodfield, *Teleology*. p. 3. Original source reference to *De Augmentis Scientiarum* (1623), Book III, ch. 5. "nam causarum finalium inquisitio sterilis est, et, tanquam virgo Deo consecrata, nihil parit"

<sup>6</sup> J.H. Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1958) p. 123. Original source: letter to D'argental, 1761, xli, 255.

whose operation is oft unexpected, and always unaccountable.<sup>7</sup>

Be that as it may, the teleological framework was reintroduced, in one form or another, into Western historiography after the Age of Reason. After the Voltarian and Humian contributions to the induction-centred decimation of teleology that all but excluded the consideration of telos in history and in formal science, it was Kant who reopened the door to teleological thinking in his organic conception of human nature and history. In the wake of the Humian disavowal of telos and final cause, it was Kant, the man of pure reason, who first told the world to act "as if" God existed, then told them that there must be a purpose to nature (and therefore humanity). And, if not, we should interpret it that way regardless. As Yirmiahu Yovel notes:

Kant claims that when these conditions are fulfilled, we may accept the propositions in question with the same degree of assurance that a religious believer would have accepted them from his own, nonrational motives; but ours will be a perfectly *rational* attitude described as "rational faith."<sup>8</sup>

The Romantics of the nineteenth century, who may or many not have been festering with reaction to the omnipresence of scientific method and the enlightened rationalist model, used Kant's opening to fully reintroduce a form of teleological thinking. Be it in science or in history (with which we are more interested), the underlying theme of this return to teleological thinking was the search for *purpose*, which the rationalists had neglected and all but disavowed. It

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<sup>7</sup> David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*. Edited by A. Wayne Colver. (Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1976) p. 33.

is this search for end *purpose* rather than *cause* that changed and returned the teleological conception to the fore. But the purpose was no longer extrinsic to history; it inhered in the process of history.

In Hegel, for instance, Kant's synthetic, speculative philosophy of history was fully integrated into a providential determinist model that was overtly teleological. There is, of course, much more to Hegel's philosophy than this, but at present, suffice it to say that his theory was teleological without question. Hegel's impact on later historians and historicists was quite significant and we see others following his lead. One student who did not follow his lead but took the philosophy of history into an entirely different but equally teleological realm was Karl Marx. With Marx we are introduced to a completely Godless determinist philosophy with a definite end in mind. There can be no more teleological a view of history. And, we are all more than aware of Marx's influence on late nineteenth and early twentieth century history.

So we turn to the twentieth century. It would be presumptuous to suggest a pattern in twentieth century history because (a) it is still a little too close at hand for proper detached analysis, and (b) it would require a substantial survey of materials. But, by considering only a few works of one genre of history—world history—we might make a quick judgment for the sake of argument. Arnold Toynbee and Oswald Spengler wrote extensive world histories at the praxis of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Toynbee, in his *Study of History*, saw

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<sup>8</sup> Yirmiahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) p. 294.

evolutionary spirals leading toward an obvious (to him) end. Spengler's civilizational life-cycle had a consistent and pre-ordained (cyclically regular) end. In the 1980s, Paul Kennedy wrote a book entitled, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. The thrust of the book was to assess by military and economic factors, consistencies in how and why the world (or demi-global) hegemons rose then fell, with an intent to summarize with a prediction of what was to come. Francis Fukuyama also wrote a book, in the 1980s, which presumed to find an end to history in the fall of the socialist-communist experiment (and the victory of capitalist democracy). Such consistency and continuity of direction is unquestionably teleological. On this basis, let us assume that telos remains a strong factor in twentieth century history.

For the sake of clarity it is worth considering briefly that teleology itself is a conception; it is a perspective and manner of thinking. Teleology manifests itself in a vast number of ways in different circumstances and for different reasons. We should take a moment to assess a few of the principle ways in which we have seen teleology arise in history writing. Determinist philosophies and theories, for example, are inherently somewhat teleological because of their focus on direction. Other ways that telos has been derived include fate, providence, and progress.

Fate, or destiny, is imbued with telos to its core. There is no alternative future; the course of action is essentially immaterial because the purpose and "end" is cast. Within this conception of life and history, there is very little point in looking backward at causes as they are of precious little consequence. Fatalism is an extreme position, and whether it is a function of faith or intellect does not

concern us. Only that it is directed, purposive, and focussed on a definite "end" matters in this context of fatalism as a teleological manifestation.

Providence, whether natural or divine, is by definition teleological. It is the "end" as determined by that greater force, and in that respect is the destination to which man is voyaging through the generations. Of course, Divine Providence has been an instrumental feature of the Judeo-Christian philosophy of history for a long time.

The modern concept of progress, which is the rationalists' replacement for providence in history, is not strictly teleological. Progress does not inhere with purpose or an "end", merely a direction. However, it is in that direction of movement to ever-greater degrees of perfection in the human condition that we see telos. That is, while we do not actually know the end of the progression, we conceive it.

As a grounding for our discussion of teleology in historical philosophy, we need to understand the speculative concepts of form and destination. Arguably, the four most influential trends and varieties of history in the post-Enlightenment world are: (a) progress, (b) historicism, (c) Positivism, and (d) Determinism. Let us briefly familiarize ourselves with these several strains of history being especially mindful of their purpose and effect on history vis à vis teleology.

## *Progress*

The notion of progress permeates post-Enlightenment history. When we say progress, we simply mean mankind perceived within history *to progress* (vb.) or go forward on to ever-better circumstances, ideas, knowledge, and so forth. When juxtaposed against its cousin, telos, progress is readily identified as an old concept indeed. We will address this important connection more fully later, but for now let us agree that progress is a reasonably sensible modern resultant of the Scientific Revolution. Science, we know, builds new knowledge atop of old in a linear and progressive fashion. Every new discovery or proven hypothesis is not merely *new*, it is *better*. Science moves forward.

Although today many people are questioning the scientific values that led to the “facile equating of modernity with progress,” the seventeenth-century Scientific Rationalists and the enlightened *Philosophes* undertook to apply science to everything they could, including history.<sup>9</sup> The natural result was the interpretation of history as progress. While the concept of progress should not be confused with the historical variety known as American Progressivism to which the following quotation from Breisach refers, the sentiments of the statement below are applicable to both.

[T]he Progressive historian's very cause rested on an idea: the idea of progress, in which reason was central to the fate of the nation and mankind. Therefore these historians liked the evolutionary intellectual histories of Buckle, Lecky, and Eggleston, which hailed reason's steady emancipation from superstitions and errors. Robinson proclaimed that

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<sup>9</sup> Joyce Appleby et al, *Telling the Truth About History*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1994) p. 276.

thought properly applied assured the pinnacle of progress.<sup>10</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century, history as progress was a strong force. While in earlier times, "The belief in history as progress remained as strong as ever, . . . its driving force had been providential (God) or at least metaphysical (reason) . . . [By the end of the nineteenth century] progress was seen as resulting from human actions increasingly informed by rational planning and considered to be more effective because of it."<sup>11</sup> Countless orthodox (modernist) historians inject their work with progressive thinking, particularly if any part of their purpose is predictive. It is, in fact, the desire to use the past as a guide to the future that requires history either be directed, progressive, or both. Were history random or non-sequential, any and all predictive value in it would evaporate.

It was the notion of progress that permitted an allegedly ordered transition in historicist thinking. That is, progress-based reasoning was a viable alternative to the older Christian-conceived absolutism.<sup>12</sup> As Breisach states, "With Christian universal history in disarray, the West had acquired in the progress theory a new and viable synthesis of past, present, and future."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval & Modern* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) p. 364. The quotation was drawn from Robinson, *The New History*. p. 263.

<sup>11</sup> Breisach, *Historiography*. pp. 315-316.

<sup>12</sup> Appleby et al, *Telling the Truth*. p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> Breisach, *Historiography*. p. 210.

## ***Historicism***

Historicism is a catch-all description of the speculative systems that assume an ultimate meaning in history which can be explained in the form of an historical law, often coupled to some type of historical inevitability (theistic or naturalistic).<sup>14</sup> One need not look too deeply to see the notion of progress settle nicely into these speculative systems. Historicism (not to be confused with the Relativist views of certain historians that all ideas are rooted in history, which go by the same name) is sometimes referred to as “metahistory” and is essentially any philosophy of history. It is within this framework that one encounters some of the key thinkers about history. The previously-mentioned Kant, Hegel, and Marx—who tried to create broad systems out of history—each added to the historicist portfolio of choices. For example, Appleby et al write of Hegel: “Georg W.F. Hegel’s doctrine of historicism . . . held that truth is rooted in history itself. History revealed truth.”<sup>15</sup>

But others, perhaps not immediately considered in this context, were equally important to historicist development. Consider Ranke, who is not widely known as a speculative historian, of whom Wines says:

Ranke . . . express[ed] the difference between his own historical method and that of philosophy: ‘From the particular we can indeed thoughtfully and boldly ascend to the universal; but from the universal, there is no way to the particular.’ *This is the essential idea of historicism.*

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<sup>14</sup> Ronald Nash, ed., *Ideas of History Vol. 1: Speculative Approaches to History*. (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1969) p. 265.

<sup>15</sup> Appleby et al, *Telling the Truth*. p. 65.

[emphasis mine]<sup>16</sup>

Ultimately, like it or not, every attempt at writing history is an exercise in the application of a metahistorical belief system—even Ranke's history. And, although philosophies are by their nature general belief systems created from broad abstractions, there is no rule that says universal metahistories can not be developed from particular data. Note especially that scientific law, for example, based on empirical research, is just such a method for the creation of universal law. (See Positivism below.)

Historicism and the many speculative views of history which it represents are also key to our consideration of rationalism and teleology in history in a slightly different way. As Mandelbaum clearly states in his essay, *Speculative Philosophy of History: A Critique*: "every abstraction from the historical process as a whole, every focussing of attention upon some one aspect of that process, follows from an original value-charged choice."<sup>17</sup> We need to be concerned by historicist systems influenced by values, which are not necessarily informed by reason but rather by faith, as they are present throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

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<sup>16</sup> Leopold von Ranke, *The Secret of World History*. Edited by Roger Wines. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1981) p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> Nash, *Ideas of History* Vol. 1. p. 277 The quotation is drawn from *The Problem of Historical Knowledge*, Liveright Publishing Corp., 1938.

## ***Positivism***

Appleby et al capture the essence of Positivism in their description of August Comte and his philosophy.

Comte coined the term ‘positivism’ in the 1830s to capture his view of the scientific status of historical laws. Inspired by heroic science, Comte maintained that progress in all knowledge as in science depends on developing general laws out of direct observations of phenomena.<sup>18</sup>

Again, perhaps the crucial—and somewhat obvious—consistency to note is that Positivism was inspired by Scientific Rationalism. It is, however, speculative and a form of historicism. In it, Comte presented a strong telos: from theological to metaphysical to positive.<sup>19</sup> As if progress, the historical concept, did not have a large enough impact on the study and practice of history, according to Breisach, “As the positivists saw it, historiography as practiced in the late 1800s was definitely *out of step with progress*. [emphasis mine]”<sup>20</sup> The Positivists used their position *beyond* metaphysics to exclude all but hard facts from their history, and thus avoided traditional philosophical difficulties inherent in history: “we learn not to speculate about God, ultimate reality, first causes, final purposes, because questions about such things are unanswerable.”<sup>21</sup> As we will see, this approach is, to the vast majority of people, unsupportable.

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<sup>18</sup> Appleby et al, *Telling the Truth*. p. 67.

<sup>19</sup> Comte felt human history passed through three stages: the theological (childhood), metaphysical (youth), and was passing into the positive stage (adulthood) in which events would be explained by scientific law.

<sup>20</sup> Breisach, *Historiography*. p. 274.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Conkin and Roland Stromberg, *Heritage and Challenge: The History and Theory of History*. (Wheeling: Forum Press, 1989) p. 71.

### **Determinism**

One thing historically determines another; that is the simple explanation of Determinism. For example: all human development is determined by economics. (One's or a class's economic circumstance is the factor that controls everything.) Determinism in the post-Enlightenment plays its most significant role in the late nineteenth-century speculative histories of, among others, Hegel, Marx, and Spengler. The concept is fairly closely tied to the teleological view of history, with one additional element. By its very nature, true, full-bore Determinism eliminates—or at least inhibits—free will. It thereby removes human agency.<sup>22</sup> Only by fancy and liberal defining of *degrees* of Determinism can human agency exist within a Determinist schema.

Because it invalidates the notion of free will and human agency, we find that Determinism deviates from both Scientific Rationalist and the *Philosophes'* thinking. Free will and freedom of the free man to think, create, and direct was the foundation of their philosophy. Furthermore, Determinist history must by its very nature be teleological to an extreme. Besides which, we can intuit that, "no law which abstracts out of the historical process merely one set of determining factors can ever do justice to that process as a whole."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 159.

<sup>23</sup> Nash, *Ideas of History* Vol. 1. p. 276.

Such is the nature of historiography and the philosophy of history today as it developed out of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century crucible. The crucial matter, however, is the legacy of teleological fallacy into which we have all become mired.

The post-Enlightenment historicists thought that the plain language methodology devised and skillfully used to great destructive effect by Voltaire and Hume was the way to address and resolve the problems and issues that had arisen in practice. They had no further need of philosophy and theory because history and the plain language of their historical debate was a parallel process of philosophical, moral, and political understanding. This gratuitous and anti-theoretical assumption is a teleological fallacy that threatens to compromise the integrity of late modern historical studies.

## Chapter II

### REASON AND ROMANCE: PROLEGOMENA TO THE FALL

Sometime in the 1680s, a scientist named Isaac Newton was hit on the head by an apple, or so legend would have it, and the course of human thinking has never been the same. With his encompassing theories, he culminated what Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler had started. He introduced the world to a form of Scientific Rationalism that went well beyond what Aristotle and Plato had ever imagined in their philosophy. Newton was followed quickly by a number of others who continued and expanded on his work. As it relates to history, what these men unleashed was a firestorm that would decimate Western Christian history and how thinking people perceived their world. The turn to modernity was set in motion by these seventeenth-century men of reason. The certainty, comfort, and pervasiveness of the overriding Christian hold on the story and explanation of our past and the meaning of our today was shaken by doubt.

It would appear that developments in historical writing since the Enlightenment, just as so much of that produced before the Enlightenment, have systematically facilitated the human need for telos. There is substantial evidence to suggest that much of what are generally considered proper and superior samples of post-Enlightenment history were in fact written with a passionate *a priori* intent, design, or conclusion. History does, after all, lend itself to finding evidence to support a conclusion rather than concluding from available evidence.

And that, above all else, is a cardinal flaw of any type of reasoning. Aristotle, who said, "We must follow where the argument leads," would be less than impressed.

Historians in the wake of the Enlightenment would create and choose from a variety of methods and philosophies through which to express their findings and thoughts on history. These *varieties* of history can be classified into a few major categories. In the post-Enlightenment, the two generally accepted most powerful currents of thought were the rationalist Skepticism of the eighteenth century and the succeeding Romanticism of the nineteenth century, which ultimately led to the hodge-podge of twentieth century (modern) history. Without doubt or denial, these and other patterns of thought, or what are sometimes called metanarratives, have had lingering, broad implications on the nature of philosophy and history. Their underlying assumption sets create divergent if not diametrically opposed frames of reference and perceptions of the past. For our purpose, however, it is the impact of these two key metanarratives upon *telos* in history that is interesting. The need for an underlying motive or purpose has, with notable (but questionable) exception in the seventeenth century, informed history writing.

As the line of thought and development of argument to be presented is sweeping and being made within a context open to broad interpretation, establishing criteria for and constraints upon meaning is essential. It is imperative that we define and understand Rationalism, both Scientific and Enlightened, and Romanticism. These are, after all, the basis of the dialectic (of a sort) being

proposed herein as the modifier and substantiator of teleology's position in the practise of history.

Scientific Rationalism began to develop in the early seventeenth century and before with the thinking and experimentation of men such as Bacon, Descartes, Kepler, and Galileo. Influentially foremost among these men was, arguably, René Descartes (1596-1650), a French mathematician and logician who developed a philosophy based upon the principle of doubt. His seminal work constituted a proof of existence by virtue of doubt inasmuch as *only that which can be clearly and distinctly thought can be true*.<sup>24</sup> Descartes's philosophy sought to prove the truth by the rigour of logical argument rather than empirical study. Thus he could extend a line from *doubting* through to the knowledge of his own existence in the famous phrase, *Cogito ergo sum*. Descartes managed to prove the existence of God as well, in his *Discourse on Method* and in the *Meditations*, although the argument is weak at best and there is reason to believe that its inclusion was gratuitous.<sup>25</sup> We will later see how this was significant. Regarding history, Conkin notes that, "the Cartesians openly disparaged history . . . it does not attain certain truth; it is an inexact and confused study; it cannot be reduced to mathematics."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*. Trans. By F.E. Sutcliffe. (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968) pp.33-41 *passim*.

<sup>25</sup> One must bear in mind that only four years earlier Galileo was condemned by the Inquisition for his heretical scientific theories. Descartes had valid cause to make the proof.

<sup>26</sup> Conkin et al, *Heritage and Challenge*. p. 40.

Descartes's dazzling mathematically-based logic preceded the next key influential thinker—for our purpose—in the creation of Scientific Rationalism: Isaac Newton. In the words of Carl Becker:

Common men associated the new philosophy with the name of Newton because it appeared that Newton, more than any other man, had banished mystery from the world by discovering a "universal law of nature," thus demonstrating, what others had only asserted, that the universe was rational and intelligible through and through, and capable, therefore, of being subdued to the uses of men.<sup>27</sup>

Newton's work went on some 30 years after Descartes died, and is related to Descartes's legacy because Newton's masterpiece, *The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1687), known by its Latin short form *Principia*, was in large part intended as a refutation of Descartes. Notably, Newton too found room for God in his natural philosophy. Again, the inclusion of God and faith was important both to the great experiment in non-telos and to the pervasiveness of teleological history, as we will see later. Science, whether pure or compromised to account for unscientific faith contains its own telos. That is, natural law and certainly Newton's laws, all point to an outcome.

Scientific Rationalism, then, should be the cold and hard, inductive scientific logic that demands either mathematical precision or empirical evidence (for which there are "rules" of development). Generally it is so, except at a praxis of religious faith and science. However, as we have seen, in the climate of the

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<sup>27</sup> Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932) p. 60.

seventeenth century even cold hard science fell to the inclusion of faith at its core. But, more about this later.

A crucial aspect of Scientific Rationalism as it relates to our purpose, a concept to which we shall return, is its utter dependence upon method. To science, method is of paramount importance: the replication of cause and effect in experiment is dependent upon proper and rigorous application of developed (and developing) methodology. In the early stages of experimentation, method provides the means to examine and seek the result, the cause, the idea. Later, when the experiment has been validated, the method has a tendency to ossify within the orthodoxy, thereby effectively precluding the means it affords from achieving further or broader development. Method, the servant, becomes Method, the master.

When we consider Reason and Rationalism in the context of history, we really must turn to the Enlightenment philosophers. "The 'enlightened' ones, under the influence of Newton and Locke, tended to react against the abstract rationalism of the Cartesians in the direction of an empirical, experimental approach to reality more suited to historical work."<sup>28</sup> Appleby et al have noted that

Diderot described the follower of the Enlightenment as an eclectic, a skeptic and investigator who 'trampling underfoot prejudice, tradition, venerability, universal assent, authority—in a word, everything that overawes the crowd—dares to think for himself, to ascend to the clearest general principles, to examine them, to discuss them, to admit nothing

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<sup>28</sup> Conkin et al, *Heritage and Challenge*. p. 47.

save on the testimony of his own reason and experience.<sup>29</sup>

The fundamental breach between the Scientific Rationalists and the enlightened ones or *Philosophes* was the actual target of their investigations and invective. The *Philosophes* were abjectly disenfranchised from the great social powers of the period: the Church and the aristocracy. Becker describes the nature of the Enlightenment and the paradoxical aspect of the *Philosophes'* philosophy:

... for to be truly enlightened was to see the light in all its fullness, [which] revealed two very simple and obvious facts. One of these contained the sum of those negations which we understand so well—the fact that the supposed revelation of God's purposes through Holy Writ and Holy Church was a fraud, or at best an illusion born of ignorance, perpetrated, or at least maintained, by the priests in order to accentuate the fears of mankind, and so hold it in subjection. The other fact contained the sum of those affirmations which we understand less easily—that God had revealed his purpose to men in a far more simple and natural, a far less mysterious and recondite way, through his works. To be enlightened was to understand this double truth, that it was not in Holy Writ, but in the great book of nature, open for all mankind to read, that the laws of God had been recorded.<sup>30</sup>

They were truly imbued with the faith of Reason, the certainty that inquiry will always disclose a fundamental and simple order in the world.<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, Romanticism was, as Conkin writes, "that new [nineteenth-century] spirit which exalted, among other things, folklore, national tradition, and medieval subjects, and reacted against the abstract universalism of

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<sup>29</sup> Appleby et al, *Telling the Truth About History*. p. 39. Original source: Denis Diderot, *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, Nouvelle impression en facsimilé de la première édition de 1751 – 1780 (Stuttgart, 1966). (Originally found in *Encyclopédie* 1751 vol. 5, p. 270.)

<sup>30</sup> Becker, *Heavenly City*. pp. 50-51.

neoclassical taste by stressing the concrete and the particular."<sup>32</sup> Coming at the end of the eighteenth century as it did, Romanticism is too easily dismissed as a millennially-inspired reaction to the rampant Skeptical Rationalism of the day. But to a great extent it was just that, and because of it has become in many ways the Rationalists' whipping-boy. Yet, despite what we know about this nationalist, emotional, gothic mode of thought, how truly different from Scientific Rationalist history it really was—within the context of our inquiry here—is subject to some debate.

How and why the Romantics appeared when they did is attributed to a number of causes, not the least of which is millennial anxiety. However, Appleby et al suggest that Romanticism grew out of the Enlightenment even as the Enlightenment was developing. Perhaps even Enlightened Rationalism contained the seed of its own demise.<sup>33</sup>

Already in the midst of its [Rationalism's] triumph, some scholars, artists, and poets began to chafe at the bit of a reason that seemed arrogant and impervious to the darker, more exciting, emotional, and creative sides of life. The Romantics, as they were soon known, valued emotion over reason, an almost religious response to the wonders of nature over scientific detachment, and the mysteries of history over the brash efforts to escape from it.<sup>34</sup>

It is important that we not make the error of presuming that Romanticism was a polar opposite to Rationalism. In many ways, it was not. Consider that while

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<sup>31</sup> Conkin et al, *Heritage and Challenge*. pp. 49-50.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 65.

<sup>33</sup> From another Romantic: "The fate which rules the world wills that everything should pass away. The happiest state of an individual or nation has its limits. Everything carries within itself the hidden germ of destruction." (d'Alembert "Mémoires et Reflexions" *Oeuvres* 2 p. 132).

their objectives and the motives may have been different, the Romantics inherited the legacy of “Reason” and thus their method was substantially the same as the Rationalists who preceded them. The process of development in thinking about history was not about to be reversed at the end of the eighteenth century.

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<sup>34</sup> Appleby et al, *Telling the Truth*. p. 64.

## Chapter III

### TELEOLOGY AND RELIGION: THE ALPHA AND OMEGA

The morass of religious discussion *vis à vis* philosophy of history is a place that is very easy to slide into, but not so easy to climb out of unscathed. Were it possible to conduct this discussion and analysis of teleology in post-Enlightenment history without introducing religion, we would all be better off and I would be most happy to do it. But, unfortunately, we have already identified that the context of this analysis is the Judeo-Christian Providential history of the pre-Enlightenment. Specifically we are dealing with how post-Enlightenment historians have endeavoured to introduce temporal replacements for the Providential Christian history which had been for centuries the commonly accepted version of historical development. On this side of the temporal replacement of Providence, the thematic elements of that earlier historical form creep in again and again. So it is well worth briefly reviewing Providential history.

Be warned that the exposition in this section is necessarily incomplete. It is not meant to be an extensive analysis or evaluation of Providential history nor an attempt to make a comparison to the eighteenth and nineteenth century philosophies of history. Rather, it is to provide a broad description of the playing field over which these writers waged their battles for philosophical supremacy.

Simply put, the Christian Providential history can be understood as follows. There is one God. That God is omniscient and omnipotent, and created the

world and man in it. God's work was revealed in the scriptures; His will in His Son and in revelations. Man's destiny is determined by Divine Providence. Thus, our history is the tale of mankind's march from creation and original sin through to the final judgment and the end of days. Every event, action, and development can be described and interpreted in relation to this philosophy: whatever happened (or did not happen) did (or did not) happen because such was God's will. In the Middle Ages, this was the singlemost common explanation for historical events. As time passed, event-to-event causality and free will were given greater consideration, however, and people in general but historians specifically tended to only fill in the unresolved gaps in their understanding by reversion to the "God's will" answer. Yet, God remained the crux of the Western system of belief and history.

God, in most religions but definitely in Judeo-Christianity, represents and answers definitively any question about first cause. Creation is the so-called first cause, and it is, whether using Voltaire's analogy of the watchmaker or Kant's assumption of God as the first cause, an argument-ending answer to the troubling question of how we got here. God provides a certain, if uneasy, direction. The Bible, both the Old and moreso the New Testament, provides a definite purpose, direction, and ultimate end to the world. That telos speaks to the following two important philosophical questions: "Why are we here?" and "Where are we going?" These two questions are further addressed by a third manifestation of God, which is that God, being omnipotent, controls the outcome of the world. What befalls individuals, groups, or all of humanity is the ultimate result of God's direction. Thus God, through religion, provides a Determinist belief system in

which all is determined at God's pleasure.<sup>35</sup> God punishes the evil and rewards the righteous; there are rules by which God has instructed humanity to live; the righteous follow the ways of God and the evil are controlled by the devil. Those underpinnings and rules to live by result in a moral system of guidance for those with faith.

Providential history is by its very nature teleological because it is written with at least a conceptual understanding of the "end" of history. The end of days or judgment day is the end, and everything is lead-up to it. Interpreting history is not only unchallenging within this context, but is probably quite dull. Having said that, I am sure there is enormous challenge in resolving conflicts of concept and data such as, "Why would a good, kind God make an earthquake that devastates a region populated with thousands?" Nevertheless, the issue is that the philosophy of history in the West was almost exclusively Christian Providential prior to the Enlightenment; Providential history is by its nature teleological. Therefore, the nature of the philosophy of history prior to the Enlightenment—and more importantly, prior to the eighteenth century—was predominantly teleological.

Although our descent into the religious morass quickens, we should be aware that the practical importance of teleology and Christian Providential history is that it provided a means for one group to control or capture the intellectual direction of the masses during that period. That is, an uneducated, unsophisticated people living in turbulent times needed the popular conception

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<sup>35</sup> We are, of course, presuming that the free will that God bestowed on humanity, which I believe to be a fairly recent addition to Christian theology, must necessarily be limited. The argument regarding

(i.e., not just in formal written histories) of a Providential design. They required a purpose and “rationalization” for the many incomprehensible phenomena that occurred around them. While mystery and superstition was the alternative explanation, the Roman Catholic Church (for our purpose, *the Christian Church*) could not permit that regression in thinking to take hold.

Christian Providential history afforded the Church and its priests, through the demands of true faith, the ability to control the converted population over which they had dominion. As keepers of the “knowledge”, “rules”, and “imperatives” by which the world had apparently always worked, and the secrets of where the world was going, the priests could readily direct the actions of the vast majority of the uninformed masses. Particularly in the pre-Enlightenment, the Church, because it was the earthly representation of God, had moral power over the people. Because its members, the priests, were among the few literate and educated people in the population, the Church had the power of knowledge over the people. The presence of these levers was not lost on the Church, and through faith it held tight reign over its world. Becker sums up this line of thought:

It is well known that the medieval world pattern, deriving from Greek logic and the Christian story, was fashioned by the church which for centuries imposed its authority upon the isolated and anarchic society of western Europe. . . . In this climate of opinion it was an *unquestioned fact* that the world and man in it had been created in six days by God the Father, an omniscient and benevolent intelligence, for an ultimate if inscrutable purpose. . . .[emphasis mine]<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> omnipotence and the absence/presence of control vis à vis human agency applies here.  
Becker, *The Heavenly City*. pp. 5-6.

In this respect the Roman Catholic priests were little better than the magi and sorcerers of the Aztec, Maya, Zoroastrians, and so on.

This religious line of thought we are pursuing is crucial to understanding a subtext of the revolution that occurred in philosophy and history during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The glib description of the socio-religious effect of the age, that the *Philosophes* (or Rationalists, or scientists—take your pick) “killed God,” has been heard in one form or another by most philosophy and history undergraduates, and has meaning and context in front of a Christian Providential backdrop. It is an interesting turn of phrase that has been employed by philosophers, historians, and even theologians for the past 150 years or more. More than that, however, it speaks to the matter of teleology and its transference in the eighteenth century.

## Chapter IV

### THE 18th-CENTURY PHILOSOPHER-HISTORIANS

The foundation of eighteenth century historicism was the Judeo-Christian story. Popkin notes, "For seventeenth-century Jews and millenarian Christians, history was still all Providential. Each event was still part of a divine scheme, each meaningful sign of God's relationship with man and a possible clue concerning the coming of the Messiah."<sup>37</sup> The hold of this type of thinking was extensive even beyond the uncovering of natural law and scientific rationalism in the seventeenth century. Moreover, the Church did everything it could to ensure that it preserved the status quo. As Timothy Mitchell writes:

Convinced that both Scripture and Tradition constituted twin foundations of Revelation, from which flowed the truths of Christ, the Church proclaimed its infallible authority; arguing that without it, the fallible minds of men could never discern with consistency and accuracy the divine message. . . ." <sup>38</sup>

To a significant degree, the writings and actions of the eighteenth century *Philosophes*, skeptics, and rationalists of other sorts were directed at the Church's hold on society. Of the three representatives selected for deeper examination below, Voltaire and David Hume were self-professed opponents of the Church, its doctrines, and its moral/social hegemony. The effects of their anti-Church efforts

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<sup>37</sup> David Hume, *David Hume: Philosophical Historian*, Edited by David Norton and Richard Popkin. (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965) p. xvii.

<sup>38</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *David Hume's Anti-Theistic Views: A Critical Appraisal*. (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986) p. 30.

upon history writing were significant in an indirect way as well. As Brumfitt notes, "One of the main features distinguishing modern historical writing from that of the seventeenth century is that history has become an end in itself rather than a medium of moral instruction."<sup>39</sup>

There are those who still aphoristically refer to these writers—especially Voltaire and Hume—as the ones who "killed God." I would argue that it is not much of a stretch to suggest that it was these and other eighteenth-century philosophers who, rather than ensuring God was dead, did the most to ensure that He was not. Their method for doing so was almost blatant theft of the features of religious faith—including God—directly and indirectly, and the co-opting of their own Reason. As Becker says, they found "reason is amenable to treatment [and] tempered reason with sentiment, reasons of the heart that reason knows not of."<sup>40</sup>

These philosophers and historians ultimately, perhaps unwittingly, undertook to recreate faith within reason. The pattern is understood by most if not all historiographers. While they boiled on the surface at the superstitions of the Church and its faith, below they were calmly incorporating, to greater or lesser degrees, the essence of God and religion into their own Rationalism. A representative sampling of other authors' understanding may cast a brighter light on this subject than any of my own explaining. We start with Breisach:

Some historians were about to assume no less of a task than to give

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<sup>39</sup> Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian*. p. 95.

<sup>40</sup> Becker, *The Heavenly City*. p. 69.

meaning to the multitude of mundane events whose significance hitherto had been provided by Divine Providence. The patterns of progress or cycles of life they suggested became key features of the eighteenth century.<sup>41</sup>

Wilson:

In the eighteenth century, Enlightenment historians returned to Renaissance notions of progress but now within the framework of scientific regularities. The new teleology was based on a profound belief in progress.<sup>42</sup>

Becker:

In spite of their rationalism and their humane sympathies, in spite of their aversion to hocus-pocus and enthusiasm and dim perspectives, in spite of their brave youthful blasphemies and talk of hanging the last king in the entrails of the last priest—in spite of all of it, there is more of Christian philosophy in the writings of the *Philosophes* than has yet been dreamt of in our histories.<sup>43</sup>

And, Appleby et al:

The absolute character of their truth mimicked the older Christian truth upon which Westerners since late Roman times had come to rely. They transferred a habit of mind associated with religiosity—the conviction that transcendent and absolute truth could be known—to the new mechanical understanding of the natural world. Eventually they grafted this conviction onto all other inquiries. The study of history became the search for the laws of human development.<sup>44</sup>

One further impact the Rationalist Skeptics and *Philosophes* had on the writing of history was the development and shift to more, varied forms of speculative history. That is, philosophies of history that were somewhat more

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<sup>41</sup> Breisach, *Historiography*. p. 199.

<sup>42</sup> Wilson, *History in Crisis?* p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> Becker, *The Heavenly City*. p. 31.

idealistic and grand than they were practical. For instance, they "ranged from Bossuet, written at the end of the preceding century in the light of the Sun King, showing the guiding hand of Providence in all human affairs, to that of Condorcet, written at the end of the eighteenth century in the shadow of the guillotine, representing human resourcefulness as the motor of inexorable progress."<sup>45</sup>

We will now consider three representatives of the rationalist/skeptic eighteenth century. Voltaire, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant, in different parts of Europe and affected by different local social pressures and circumstances, collectively and probably to some extent unknowingly, contributed most significantly to the great experiment in teleological reductionism.

### ***Voltaire (1694 - 1778)***

Voltaire, perhaps the most influential—certainly the most prolific—writer of the period is generally accepted as a bellwether of transitional eighteenth-century philosophy and historicism. His writings and position on history are essential to understanding the changes that occurred and would occur during the period. He is a particularly good representative of the period both because of his prodigious volume of writings and because of his knack for assuming the ideas of others and making them particularly his own. As J.H. Brumfitt, acknowledged as a foremost Voltarian, says, "there is nothing profoundly original in Voltaire's views. He draws to himself all the different currents of historical thought, and forms of

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<sup>44</sup> Appleby et al, *Telling the Truth*. p. 15.

them his own synthesis."<sup>46</sup> While other philosophers' and historicists' contributions are equally valid and provide a rounder view of the circumstance, within the corpus of Voltaire one is able to survey the early eighteenth century *vis à vis* history. On the other hand, if it is a coherent philosophy of history that one seeks in Voltaire, then one will be sadly left unfulfilled. Voltaire, for everything else, was "too agile, too intuitive, and too *superficial* [emphasis mine] to develop a consistent theory."<sup>47</sup>

The *Philosophes* writings and philosophies in general were a reaction to the humanist histories of the past. Their intent was to distinguish and forever separate legend from fact. An accomplishment, which, were it to be realized, would render history rational in the same scientific sense that Newton had applied to physics and science.<sup>48</sup> In his *Customs of Nations*, Voltaire summarizes the *Philosophes'*, but certainly his own, view of humanity: "the bulk of the human race has always been, and will long remain, senseless and stupid; and perhaps the most senseless of all have been those people who have tried to find some sense behind these absurd fables and to introduce reason into folly."<sup>49</sup> Voltaire himself was, in Becker's words, "a crusader pledged to recover the holy places of true faith, the religion of humanity."<sup>50</sup> In general, Voltaire was, as we have seen,

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<sup>45</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kant on History*. Edited by Lewis White Beck. (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1963) p. xiii.

<sup>46</sup> Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian*. p. 45.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p. 127.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Voltaire, *Voltaire: The Age of Louis XIV and other selected writings*. Trans. and abr. by J.H. Brumfitt. (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1963) p. 254-5.

<sup>50</sup> Becker, *The Heavenly City*. p. 37.

opposed to stupidity, ignorance, and credulity. The perpetrators and perpetuators of this malfeasance were "the very small number of people who knew how to write and could deceive others . . . [and] get us to believe the most enormous absurdities."<sup>51</sup> In the seventeenth century and earlier, who were these perpetrators? Predominantly the churchmen, of course.

Voltaire took direct aim at the absurdities and fanaticism which he perceived in the Roman Catholic church. Even in his earliest historical writings Voltaire can not help but thrust his rapier at the churchmen. In *Histoire de Charles XII* he says, "A tax which he [Charles] attempted to impose on the clergy was the final straw which made him the object of the nation's hatred. The priests, who too often join their own cause to that of God, publicly called him an atheist because he was asking for their money."<sup>52</sup> On this issue of the target for his attack, Gooch provides:

Voltaire was a rationalist; and the crushing weight of [church] authority could only be overthrown by a whole-hearted champion of the might and majesty of reason. By allowing his razor-edged intelligence to play freely over vast ranges hitherto unchallenged by critical thought, he did much to destroy the blind credulity against which erudition alone was powerless.<sup>53</sup>

Despite leading the charge to enlighten the masses and pull them from the shackles of the Church and its superstition, Voltaire could not decide how faithful

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<sup>51</sup> Voltaire, *Voltaire: The Age of Louis XIV and other selected writings*. p. 316.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p. 113.

<sup>53</sup> George Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century*. (London: Longmans, Green & Company (reprinted by Beacon Press, 1959), 1913) p. 7.

he was to his God.<sup>54</sup> It is Brumfitt's opinion that Voltaire could not conclude whether man was free and gaining mastery over the world, or if he was carrying out God's plan by some inbred knowledge.<sup>55</sup> Brumfitt and Rosemary Lauer, among others, have noted that this inconsistency developed as Voltaire matured. Early in his years, Voltaire appeared to be more confident in the concept of human Free Will; later, we will see, his position became more solidly determinist. Yet, throughout his life, Voltaire—the deist—chooses to include "God" in his philosophy of history although he does not use such a direct reference. Instead, he chooses to refer to "that one" or make some other such oblique pronoun-based identification.<sup>56</sup> There is no doubt that Voltaire can not resolve some issues of first cause, and so while he does not specifically refute the idea of providence and continues to believe in some greater intelligence, he will not bring himself to admit to a God in the Christian sense. At best, Voltaire will acknowledge that reasonably, it is evident that the enormity of the world machine can only be explained by a supreme "creator".<sup>57</sup> In effect, he attempts to create a pattern of historical causality which is rational and absent of the "finger of God."

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<sup>54</sup> "'Tomber sur l'infâme' was the raison d'être of *La Philosophie de l'histoire*. Voltaire never defines 'l'infâme' (the vile) but used it to mean all those manifestations of intolerance, fanaticism and absurdity he saw in the history of religion, especially that of the Roman Catholic church." Voltaire, *The Complete Works of Voltaire No. 59 (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.: La Philosophie de l'histoire)*. Edited by J.H. Brumfitt. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969) p. 58.

<sup>55</sup> Voltaire, *The Complete Works of Voltaire No. 59 (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.: La Philosophie de l'histoire)*. Edited by J.H. Brumfitt. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969) p. 78.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. pp. 91, 114, 115, 222 passim.

<sup>57</sup> Rosemary Lauer, *The Mind of Voltaire: A Study in his "Constructive Deism"*. (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1961) p. 142. Also Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian*, p. 32.

But he can not divorce himself of a supreme being—God or what have you. So, instead he commits to a form of natural first cause in which God provides the first cause to the natural world and imbues its various component parts with attributes the use of which will afford them with their purpose and design. For example, in *Customs of Nations* and *Philosophie de l'histoire*, Voltaire says

Dieu nous a donné un principe de raison universelle, comme il a donné des plumes aux oiseau, et la fourrure aux ours; et ce principe est si constant qu'il subsiste malgré toutes les passions qui le combattent, malgré les tyrans qui veulent le noyer dans le sang, malgré les imposteurs qui veulent l'anéantir dans la superstition.<sup>58</sup>

After that, we are on our own. By virtue of the Free Will with which man is filled, it is now incumbent upon him to take some part in his own development.

Voltaire's early works indicate that he held over certain tendencies in thought and analysis from the humanist historians that preceded him. Most obvious in one of his earliest large works, *Histoire de Charles XII*, Voltaire tends toward biography and a romanesque style.<sup>59</sup> Particularly curious in this is that Voltaire's qualm with historians of the past was their "credulity and lack of critical sense, their national and religious prejudices, their insignificant and useless details, their preoccupation with battles and genealogies".<sup>60</sup> Yet, in *Charles XII*, he falls into this same kind of biographical, great-man history.

What makes Voltaire's historical position interesting to the critical reader and valuable to the development of historical thought is that at the same time as

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<sup>58</sup> Voltaire, *La Philosophie de l'histoire*. p. 114.

<sup>59</sup> Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian*. p. 15.

he was developing out of the humanist tradition of history, he was attempting to apply the principles of seventeenth-century science (à la Newton) to history. Cause and effect, tenets of scientific rationalism, underlie his analysis every bit as much as the attempt to attribute unchanging natural laws to human nature. In Voltaire's world, "The laws of human conduct are as immutable as the laws of gravity."<sup>61</sup> This arises from his contention that God is the one cause in the world of nature through the mediation of universal laws such as the Newtonian laws of nature, and that therefore that divine causality (natural laws) apply to everything in nature including human activity.<sup>62</sup>

Despite what may otherwise be said of Voltaire's deism and underlying belief in a supreme creator, he was a skeptic. Influenced by "le Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire", that overwhelming doubt about the validity and reliability of all information about the past and the ability to learn from it which is the hallmark of the post-Enlightenment skeptic, Voltaire brings with him the phrase "les faits donnés pour vrais", which we can see suggests a lack of confidence—at least—in the veracity of the facts. Moreover, we find him unwilling to accept or believe in any type of historical certainty (which is unusual given his position that the natural historic laws are essentially immutable). There is a passage from the article *Vérité* which illustrates his view.

Les vérités historiques ne sont que des probabilités.

Si vous avez combattu à la bataille de Philippe, c'est pour vous une

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. p. 26.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p. 103.

<sup>62</sup> Lauer, *The Mind of Voltaire*. p. 126.

vérité que vous connaissez par intuition, par sentiment. Mais pour nous qui habitons tout auprès du désert de Syrie, ce n'est qu'une chose très-probable, que nous connaissons par ouï-dire. Combien faut-il de ouï-dire pour former une persuasion égale à celle d'un homme qui, ayant vu la chose, peut se vanter d'avoir une espèce de certitude?

Celui qui a entendu dire la chose à douze mille témoins oculaires n'a que douze mille probabilités, égales à une forte probabilité, laquelle n'est pas égale à la certitude.<sup>63</sup>

As Voltaire aged and his thinking about history developed, he became more rigidly determinist. His belief in Free Will (limited as it may have been) was subsumed by this determinism. One insight into where this determinism derives is found in a somewhat extreme point he makes in the article "Philosophy" of the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*. He says that, "Le hasard est un mot vide de sens; rien ne peut exister sans cause. [Note the scientific first cause.] Le monde est arrangé suivant des lois mathématiques: donc il est arrangé par une intelligence."<sup>64</sup> Our reading of Voltaire is affected because the majority of his historical works appear after he has taken on this determinist view.<sup>65</sup> Rosemary Lauer calls Voltaire's method "constructive deism" and describes it as

from the viewpoint of its relevance for human life, a purely materialistic humanism, except for the recognition that man gives to the existence of a powerful and admirable geometer. From the viewpoint of the empirical scientist, Voltaire's constructive deism is a necessary, mathematically ordered, absolute determinism.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian*. p. 99. Original source: Voltaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. XX, ed. L. Moland. (Paris, 1777-85), p. 560.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p. 121. Original source: Voltaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. XX, p. 210.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p. 121.

<sup>66</sup> Lauer, *The Mind of Voltaire*. p. 144.

Voltaire's determinism manifests itself in interesting ways, but most particularly as a form of fatalism. For example, he writes, "Dans la foule des révolutions que nous avons vue d'un bout de l'univers à l'autre, il paraît un enchaînement fatal des causes qui entraînent les hommes comme les vents poussent les sables et les flots."<sup>67</sup> Also, with reference to the Stuarts, Voltaire makes this causal fatalist statement:

Si quelque chose justifie ceux qui croient une fatalité à laquelle rien ne peut se soustraire, c'est cette suite continue de malheurs qui a persécuté la maison de Stuart pendant plus de trois cents années.<sup>68</sup>

It should be understood that this is not a particularly radical change from earlier works by Voltaire. His references to the forces of fate or destiny in his more determinist, later works parallel the random forces and results of chance in his earlier works. For example, Voltaire ascribes it to the king's enemies in *Charles XII*: "The besiegers pressed on with their works with determination and enthusiasm and were aided by a very *curious chance*." [emphasis mine]<sup>69</sup> The occurrence of chance and then later destiny is the result of Voltaire's unresolved internal argument whether man (especially the "great" man) was the master of or the slave to uncontrollable and unpredictable forces.<sup>70</sup> He writes in the *Dialogue entre un Brachmane et un Jésuite* of a chain of events commencing with the Brahman stepping out with his right foot rather than his left and ending with the

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<sup>67</sup> Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian*. p. 122. Original source: Voltaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 169.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p. 108. Original source: Voltaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 306-7.

<sup>69</sup> Voltaire, *Voltaire: The Age of Louis XIV and other selected writings*. p. 94.

<sup>70</sup> Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian*. p. 107.

assassination of Henri IV.<sup>71</sup> And again, in *The Age of Louis XIV*, he attributes the fall of Marlborough and the Whigs to the accidental spilling of a few drops of water.<sup>72</sup> The point of this prefiguration of chaos theory is that all events are determined and may result from the most insignificant of causes.

Notwithstanding his pessimism toward humanity in general, but corresponding to his late-coming determinism and overriding deism, Voltaire saw progress in history. "Progress" appears in a number of places, but crucially in *The Age of Louis XIV*, when he speaks of France's development. Two examples should suffice.

This fortunate age, which was to witness a revolution in human spirit, did not to begin with seem *destined* to such greatness. Take first the case of philosophy. In Louis XIII's time, there was nothing to indicate that it was on the point of emerging from the chaos in which it was plunged.<sup>73</sup> [Emphasis mine]

And

The fourth age is that which we proposed to call the age of Louis XIV, and it is perhaps one of the four which *approaches most nearly to perfection*. Enriched by the discoveries of the other three, it has, in certain fields, achieved more than all of them put together. It is true that . . . human reason made remarkable *progress*.<sup>74</sup> [Emphasis mine]

Whether that progress was the result of God's plan or man's effort is somewhat irrelevant. Be that as it may, we know that Voltaire consistently pointed to

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p. 122.

<sup>72</sup> Voltaire, *Voltaire: The Age of Louis XIV and other selected writings*. p. xxiv-v.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p. 164.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p. 123-4.

economic prosperity, prefiguring Marx perhaps, as the key to all progress.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, as Brumfitt notes, "Voltaire's constant denunciation of abuses, his condemnation of the past in the name of reason and tolerance, all imply the reality of progress . . . [and] that the human spirit has liberated itself of the shackles of the past. . . . For this reason, Voltaire's role in the creation of the *mystique* of progress is no small one."<sup>76</sup>

Thus we find Voltaire to be a Rationalist who tries to impose the fundamental thinking of the Scientific Rationalists upon history. He is a skeptic of a sort who does not abide by the myth and legend of past history writing, particularly any of it that propagates the accepted Christian history. He is a determinist with a sense of fatalism that pervades human endeavor. Yet, he is a deist who can not unload the burden of having an anthropomorphic god as the prime mover of a loosely providential history. The progressive aspect of his beliefs alone, but certainly all the rest piled on top points to his holding a teleological view of history. After all,

if human nature, too, is controlled by an intelligence, then history must have a plan and a purpose, and we are led back to a teleological view of history which differs from that of Bossuet only through the substitution of the deist Supreme Being for the Christian Jehovah.<sup>77</sup>

Teleological views dominate Voltaire's approach to the question of final end. This is illustrated in "Des singularités de la nature", when he affirms that mountains have their "utilité" and that "'toutes les pièces de la machine de ce

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p. xxvii.

<sup>76</sup> Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian*. p. 127.

monde semblent faites l'une pour l'autre.'" Moreover, "God . . . must have created the world once and for all."<sup>78</sup>

Voltaire used history as a *tool* for *ecrasez*. For him there were no historical laws, only the historical process. And, speaking in plain language description, the process shows the aristocracy as imbeciles and the *Ancien Régime* in general as brain dead.

At the outset of this discussion of Voltaire and his impact on history writing, we noted that he was a bellwether for the early eighteenth-century mentality. We shall leave the last word on Voltaire's relevance to Brumfitt, who says that stimulating change in others' perceptions of history

is perhaps Voltaire's greatest achievement. Yet he has an important part to play in another transformation which may well be considered even more significant. In the nineteenth century history comes to be regarded as the equal of the natural sciences: the historian claims to show, in Ranke's words, 'wie es eigentlich gewesen', and does not merely point a moral or adorn a tale. Modern historiography is not just concerned with the doings of past human experience, the history of societies and civilizations in all their different aspects.

This transformation is not the work of any individual, but Voltaire's part in it is an important one.<sup>79</sup>

### ***David Hume (1711-1776)***

If we judge or gauge the impact of the historian-philosophers selected for specific examination within this paper against the measure of detachment from

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p. 122.

<sup>78</sup> Voltaire, *La Philosophie de l'histoire*. p. 40.

<sup>79</sup> Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian*. p. 165-6.

the Christian providential history or on the marker of inherent telos, David Hume would prove the high-water point. His philosophy of history, which is not so much of a cogent, stated philosophy as it is an inferential belief system drawn from his philosophical and historical writings, is far and away the most distinct from providential history and the least teleological. As we will see, Hume's skepticism and Scientific Rationalism is the underlying reason for his separation from the others.

It is important to begin by establishing that Hume held no traditional firm religious beliefs save a possible religious adherence to the principles of scientific naturalism. Thus he did not feel any duality between nature and religion, and could therefore submit theology to logical tests.<sup>80</sup> Which is precisely what he did. In fact, as Timothy Mitchell notes, Hume "spent a lifetime literally trying to obliterate any rational proof for the existence of God and the tenets of the Christian faith."<sup>81</sup> In this respect we see Hume sharing a purpose with Voltaire. The following lengthy passage from *The Natural History of Religion* provides a sense of how Hume felt about religion and the acceptance of religious tenets without critical appraisal.

What a noble privilege is it of human reason to attain the knowledge of the supreme being; and, from the visible works of nature, be enabled to infer so sublime a principle as its supreme Creator? But turn the reverse of the medal. Survey most nations and most ages. Examine their religious principles, which have, in fact, prevailed in the world. You will scarcely be persuaded, that they are other than sick men's dreams: Or perhaps will regard them more as the playsome whimsies of monkeys in

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<sup>80</sup> Robert Hurlbutt, *Hume, Newton, and the Design Argument*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965) p. 144.

<sup>81</sup> Mitchell, *David Hume's Anti-Theistic Views: A Critical Appraisal*. p. ix.

human shape, than the serious, positive, dogmatical asservations of a being, who dignifies himself with the name of rational.

Hear the verbal protestations of all men: Nothing they are so certain of as their religious tenets. Examine their lives: You will scarcely think that they repose the smallest confidence in them.

The greatest and truest zeal gives us no security against hypocrisy: The most open impiety is attended with a secret dread of compunction.

No theological absurdities so glaring as have not, sometimes, been embraced by men of the greatest and most cultivated understanding. No religious precepts so rigorous as have not been adopted by the most voluptuous and most abandoned men.<sup>82</sup>

Although Hume was not a deist and had no belief in a supreme being, anthropomorphic or otherwise, that he was unable to prove by an *a priori* rationalization, he does allow that there must be a supreme intelligence that designed the universe (see below). To that end, he allows that those who have religious belief will have a stronger faith in nature once they reflect on their beliefs and nature. He says:

For men, being taught, by superstitious prejudices, to lay the stress on a wrong place; when that fails them, and they discover, by a little reflection, that the course of nature is regular and uniform, their whole faith totters and falls to ruin. But being taught, by more reflection, that this very regularity and uniformity is the strongest proof of design and of a supreme intelligence, they return to that belief, with they had deserted; and they are now able to establish it on a firmer and more durable foundation.<sup>83</sup>

From this passage, we can understand that Hume maintained a great faith in Newton's laws of nature and the knowability of all things through a scientific exploration. Obviously, that which could not be proven by experimentation, even in the realm of metaphysics and history (both of which are decidedly not

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<sup>82</sup> Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*. pp. 94-5.

scientific), was not to be believed. In order to understand the underpinning of Hume's natural philosophy regarding human nature and history, we need to appreciate his position on a fundamental matter of natural science: causality and causal relations. In the mechanistic world of science, everything has a cause. As it relates to Hume's philosophy of history, we can know something in the past by an *a posteriori* proof based on an effect's cause, repeating the process until we arrive at a proof, a first cause, or an unconditioned effect. In the following passage, Hume provides a summary of his basic doctrine.<sup>84</sup>

Here is a billiard-ball lying on the table, and another ball moving towards it with rapidity. They strike; and the ball, which was formerly at rest, now acquires motion. . . . There was no interval betwixt the shock and the motion. *Contiguity* in time and place is therefore a requisite circumstance to the operation of all causes. 'Tis evident likewise, that the motion, which was the cause, is prior to the motion, which was the effect. *Priority* in time, is therefore another requisite circumstance in every cause. But this is not all. Let us try any other balls of the same kind in a like situation, and we shall always find, that the impulse of the one produces motion in the other. Here, therefore is a *third* circumstance, *viz.* that of a *constant conjunction* betwixt the cause and the effect. Every object like the cause, produces always some objects like the effect.<sup>85</sup>

The final sentence of the passage above is crucial to understanding Hume's philosophy of history. He applies that scientific principle of the natural world to history and then demands that people act like every other aspect of nature covered by Newton's natural laws. The underlying belief is that history, like the natural world, must be rational. And, if it is rational, then all must be reasoned.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid. pp. 50-1.

<sup>84</sup> I apologize for imposing another lengthy quotation, but David Hume was nothing if not longwinded.

<sup>85</sup> Tom Beauchamp and Alexander Rosenberg, *Hume and the Problem of Causation*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981) p. 4. Original source: David Hume, *An Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. J.M. Keynes and P. Sraffa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938) p. 11f, 22f.

But, there is no way experientially or by reason to establish a first cause. Therefore, no god.

More directly, we hear from Hume again: "It is universally acknowledged that there is a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages, and that human nature remains still the same, in its principles and operations. The same motives always produce the same actions: The same events follow from the same causes."<sup>86</sup> Because nature is so well ordered and mathematically precise, Hume needs to find a way to establish a first cause. As he states in *The Natural History of Religion*, "A purpose, an intention, a design is evident in everything; and when our comprehension is so far enlarged as to contemplate the first rise of this visible system, we must adopt, with the strongest conviction, the idea of some intelligent cause or author."<sup>87</sup> He turns back to Newton, but does not accept the Godhead which Newton created to locate a first cause (i.e., the creation of motion) and a final purpose.<sup>88</sup> Instead, basing the argument on the scientific mechanist conception of the world, which is to say the world is analogous to a machine, we arrive at the argument from design. The argument from design, as Hume notes in the preceding passage, essentially argues that since the world exhibits order and design, it must have a designer that may or may not be God. In Hume's case it wasn't, at least not in the Christian theological sense.

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<sup>86</sup> Leon Pompa, *Human Nature and Historical Knowledge: Hume, Hegel and Vico*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p. 42. Original source: David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893 reprinted 1955) pp. 83-4.

<sup>87</sup> Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*. p. 92.

<sup>88</sup> Hurlbutt, *Hume, Newton, and the Design Argument*. p. 80.

The design argument is Hume's masterstroke *vis à vis* history because it is an *a posteriori* argument which moves from premises which describe nature as effects to God (or whatever) as cause. And, as these effects (e.g., the laws of nature) are observed, they are thereby scientifically valid. Moreover, the argument from design is essentially an analogy using the principle of like-cause-like-effect, which is essential to scientific method. Therefore, the argument from design is scientific in character.<sup>89</sup> We must bear in mind, however, that the argument from design in the eighteenth century is not a mere version of the Aristotelian teleological argument. That is, it did not "assert or imply that nature is directed toward some end or purpose having value; rather it depended upon an alleged analogy between certain apparently purposive things and arrangements to be found in nature and things produced by human technique."<sup>90</sup>

Ironically, in a way, Hume, who detested religion and God as a function of religion managed to put a god back into history. The design argument is, after all, in some senses precious little more than another argument for the existence of God, of which there are many. They go by a variety of names including ontological, cosmological, authoritative, moral, argument from faith, scripture, revelation, and so forth. But, as Hurlbutt says,

when the theological chips are down, and when all other means of subduing the skeptic have failed, the devotee will always, as does Cleanthes in Hume's *Dialogues*, remonstrate impatiently ". . . but look

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid. p. 81.

<sup>90</sup> J.D. McFarland, *Kant's Concept of Teleology*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970) pp. 47-8.

round the world . . .," and deal out the design argument. This argument, in some form or another, is and always has been the most universally accepted and commonly used argument for the existence, power, intelligence, and goodness of god.<sup>91</sup>

Make no doubt about it, Hume was a skeptic. So perhaps it was his own twist on this old workhorse argument that was necessary to satisfy his skeptical and critical mind. Hume began his writings at an early age, and at that time his skepticism was extreme, to the point of pyrrhonism. In the Introduction to *The History of England*, Rodney Kilcup notes that Hume was a skeptic "insofar as he was skeptical of any explanation that involved a violation of the regular course of nature and of any hypothesis that pretended to explain the nature of things by experience. He was sure that the ultimate cause or causes of things were forever hidden from our view."<sup>92</sup> Hume's skepticism arose out of Newton's scientific work which was considered to be within the skeptical tradition or even a form of skepticism. Norton notes that,

According to this kind of skepticism, complete certainty regarding the essential nature of reality seemed beyond the grasp of human faculties. It did seem, however, that an adequate level of certainty could be obtained with regard to appearances, or the phenomena of daily existence.<sup>93</sup>

Ultimately, however, Hume retreated from strident skepticism into a somewhat kinder and gentler "mitigated" skepticism. This form of skepticism is said to result "when the 'undistinguished doubts' of [excessive skepticism] are

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<sup>91</sup> Hurlbutt, *Hume, Newton, and The Design Argument*. pp. xii-iii.

<sup>92</sup> David Hume, *The History of England*. Abr. By Rodney Kilcup (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975) p. xxiii.

<sup>93</sup> Hume, *David Hume: Philosophical Historian*. p. xxxvii.

corrected by 'common sense and reflection'.<sup>94</sup> It is this skepticism, and the arguments and proofs which result from it, that are Hume's hallmark contribution to the philosophy of history. While he could argue for an intelligent designer by way of the argument from design, he could also establish neither progress nor purpose in history. The former would imply more than mechanical design, which was all that Hume would allow himself in a designer. The latter simply could not be developed without a final cause; and that Hume simply could not reason.

In brief, David Hume did more than any other philosopher or historian to rid history and historicism of God and religion. It was in no small part due to his skepticism that history was secularized. That he could only grudgingly accede to a first cause and refused to acknowledge any form of final cause was the line of reasoning that ultimately would detach teleology from history for a time. But, he was also a second key proponent of plain language description who contributed to the fall of the Church and the *Ancien Régime*. Consider one final word from Hume, who says,

the study of history confirms the reasonings of true philosophy; which, shewing us the original qualities of human nature, teaches us to regard the controversies in politics as incapable of decision in most cases.<sup>95</sup>

In other words, strip away the veneer of shallow act and word, and a record of how people really acted will be revealed. What's more, those actions will conform to the philosopher's reasonings.

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<sup>94</sup> Stanley Tweyman, *Scepticism and Belief in Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986) pp. 6-7.

<sup>95</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. (Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1888) p. 562.

### *Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)*

Immanuel Kant is best known for his critiques of pure and practical reasoning. One usually thinks of imperatives, such as the "categorical imperative" when the name of Kant is invoked. But although he did not produce any works of practical history—the closest he came was a series of speculative essays—Kant's thinking was instrumental in the development of historical thinking. In his theories and critiques we find a resolution to the problems unleashed by the Scientific Rationalists and their bastard offspring, the *Philosophes*. Kant helps sort us out and bring us, as historians and concerned thinking humans back to a way of understanding history that we can live with.

With Kant we must start with his imperatives, particularly the categorical imperative. H.J. Patton explains fairly clearly how Kant proposes and argues that

where the objective principle of practical reason is not conditioned by any end, the action is enjoined for its own sake, as good in itself without any reference to any further end. The imperative is then *categorical*: that is to say that it is not conditioned by the hypothesis that some particular end is desired.<sup>96</sup>

At this point Kant is taking a position not dissimilar to that of Hume: there is no end contemplated, only what is reasoned for its own sake. Both of these men came from the Scientific Rationalist tradition, so some similarities are to be expected. As a feat of logic and metaphysics, the categorical imperative is powerful. But when we consider history, it leaves us wanting. It lacks primarily because history is necessarily experiential.

The basis of Scientific Rationalist thinking, to which Kant subscribed, is natural law and causality, which we have addressed earlier in our discussion of Hume. Despland noted, "Newtonian science, Kant saw, was metaphysically important because it led to a redefinition of the meaning of nature. The whole of nature may now be seen on the model of a machine, as a connection of simple and one-sided causal relations."<sup>97</sup> For Kant as well, causality was of extreme importance to his method. But, unlike Hume, of whom Kant said, "he awoke me from my metaphysical slumber," Kant's method for arriving at a first cause was not to make the *a posteriori* argument from design as did Hume. Rather, it was Kant's contention that there was a better *a priori* manner for achieving the same effect by reason alone. To that end, as H.J. Paton shows,

Even in the understanding of physical nature we may have to use another concept besides that of causal law—the concept, namely, of purpose or end. This concept seems to be necessary for the study of organisms. To say this is not to say either that organisms and their organs are the product of conscious purpose or that they themselves have a conscious purpose: it is rather to say that we must consider them *as if* they had a purpose and see whether in this way we can understand them better. For the understanding of human nature the concept of purpose or end is still more necessary; for it is an essential characteristic of human nature to set purposes before itself.<sup>98</sup>

In two simple words Kant turns the nature of thinking about history around again: *as if*. In his judgment of teleology and development of a new model, he uses the "idea" both at the front and the back of the temporal, causal string. At

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<sup>96</sup> H.J. Paton, *The Categorical Imperative: A Study in Kant's Moral Philosophy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948) p. 115.

<sup>97</sup> Michel Despland, *Kant on History and Religion*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973) p. 25.

<sup>98</sup> Paton, *The Categorical Imperative: A Study in Kant's Moral Philosophy*. p. 149.

the “front”, Kant is prepared to make the assumption of an ultimate, unconditioned first cause, as McFarland describes Kant’s text,

reason starts with an empirical fact which is to be explained and searches for a condition or premise from which it can be deduced; but in order to explain this condition it must find a further condition, and so on to an unconditioned, or ultimate premise. Although we can never reach an ultimate condition, Kant nonetheless believes that the idea of such a condition can have a useful, indeed essential, role in the systematization of empirical knowledge.”<sup>99</sup>

And at the “back”, Kant would

Approach nature as *if* it were ultimately teleological, thus becoming aware of possibilities which can never be given proof but which may suggest avenues of investigation which would have remained unknown to us on a strictly mechanical approach.<sup>100</sup>

It is easy, but important not to underestimate the importance of this approach and what Kant did for the study of history by undertaking it. We must remember that Kant followed and was operating within the context of the mathematician and physicist, Descartes and Newton, who could “know” God but worked only within the realm of nature. Moreover, we have already seen how anathema was the notion of God and the consideration of God within a natural system to the likes of Voltaire and Hume. (Although we should recall that neither was particularly opposed to a supreme being, only to the Christian conception.) For Kant to consider assuming a purpose to anything, let alone to history, was catastrophic. Consider the published positions of Descartes and Galileo. First Descartes: “. . . the species of cause termed final, finds no useful employment in physical [or natural] things; for it does not appear to me that I can without

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<sup>99</sup> McFarland, *Kant’s Concept of Teleology*. p. 25.

temerity seek to investigate the inscrutable ends of God."<sup>101</sup> And, Galileo: ". . . it is brash for our feebleness to attempt to judge the reason for God's actions . . ."<sup>102</sup>

As if. It was this simple proposition and method that opened up reason to consider new ways of thinking about things in the world, and how they may be connected in terms of the end purpose and objective as opposed to considering first cause. Kant himself says, "Such a principle opens out to our reason, as applied to the field of experience, altogether new views as to how the things of the world may be connected according to teleological laws, and so enables it to arrive at their greatest systematic unity."<sup>103</sup>

Kant's philosophy of history was ultimately a teleologically based philosophy. As noted above, it was not a mere rehashing of Aristotle, but a teleology that saw a purpose in nature, including man. In *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*, Kant states his conception of the value and purpose of history:

However obscure their causes, history, which is concerned with narrating these appearances, permits us to hope that if we attend to the play of freedom of the human will in the large, we may be able to discern a regular movement in it, and that what seems complex and chaotic in the single individual may be seen from the standpoint of the human race as a whole to be a steady and progressive though slow evolution of its original endowment.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid. p. 35-6.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. p. 44. Original source: Rene Descartes, *Meditations*, IV, in *Philosophical Works of Descartes*. Trans. by Haldane and Ross. (Cambridge, 1931) Vol. 1, p. 173.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. p. 44. Original source: Galileo Galilee, *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*. Trans. by Stillman Drake. (Berkeley, 1953) p. 368.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p. 32-3. Original source: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. by Norman Kemp-Smith. (London, 1933) p. 714-5.

<sup>104</sup> Kant, *Kant on History*. p. 11.

That is all well and good, of course, but if Kant is assuming an end purpose in nature or for history, it would be well to know what he feels that purpose to be. And, in the same essay, he tells us that nature's ultimate purpose for human history is a "universal cosmopolitan condition" which will "come into being as the womb wherein all the original capacities of the human race can develop."<sup>105</sup> What we might understand the universal cosmopolitan condition to be, in another essay, *Conjectural Beginning of Human History*, Kant indicates as "nothing less than progress toward perfection," which we could interpret as perpetual peace (based on the title and thesis of even another essay on the philosophy of history).<sup>106</sup>

Fundamental to Kant's method and system, of course, is the complete denial of chance. There is a reason for everything, and each "effect" is caused by something. In his conception as in Hume's, nothing happens accidentally, which is why he can make the assertion within the first proposition of his *Idea* that, "All natural capacities of a creature are destined to evolve completely to their natural end."<sup>107</sup>

Kant, like Hume and others following Newton, who had replaced the teleological world view with a mechanistic one which "undertook to know nature through material causes exclusively and not through final causes," perceived the

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid. p. 23.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p. 60.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. p. 60.

system of nature and the world in general to be mechanistic.<sup>108</sup> That is, it was purposeful in the same sense as a machine had purpose. Each of the parts of a clock has a specific purpose, and in fulfilling its purpose each part is integral to the machine's operation. To some extent, then, each part of the machine can be considered to have a causal relation upon the clock as a whole. This view of the world system informed Kant's earlier thinking about history. But, in application to human nature and history, the mechanist approach came up lacking.

It lacks because a mechanistic purpose is immediate and not based on a purpose with value. Moreover the mechanical heurism could not address purpose in the greater sense. Because Kant was prone to teleological thinking anyway, developing and implementing a model that could incorporate not only first cause (e.g., the intelligent designer) but also end purpose became Kant's goal. In effect, he came to believe that not everything could be explained by the thinking and rationalizing of physicists.

Kant arrived at another heuristic conception of human nature and history: the organic model. The underlying sense of this concept is that like a natural organism, there was a purpose to everything in nature. Not a value-laden "end", but an intrinsic purpose which was designed. It was the historian's job to establish that purpose in history, even though it was neither visible nor provable, and use it to develop analyses of the past.

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<sup>108</sup> Despland, *Kant on History and Religion*. p. 24.

Immanuel Kant was not an historian, nor much of an historicist for that matter, but his philosophical position on history's role and purpose is telling. He does not so much include God in his Rationalist philosophies as he acquires the attributes of God and faith (as we understand the terminology here) and employs them within his work. The attribute that he takes hold of most seriously is teleology. In his most important essay on the subject, *Idea of a Universal History*, Kant writes, "The history of the human race, viewed as a whole, may be regarded as the realization of a hidden plan of nature."<sup>109</sup> He suggests that despite his being unable to prove that history has a telos of some sort, the historian must *presuppose* a purpose. The argument is that with no plan to history, there is no justification for believing in providence; and without trust in providence, there is no basis for a moral life. Thus, he suggests, "It is imperative then that the historian uncover the plan implicit in history."<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Nash, *Ideas of History* Vol 1. pp. 48-9. (No reference for original source)

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. p. 49.

## Chapter V

### THE 19th-CENTURY PHILOSOPHER-HISTORIANS

There are two ways to consider the nineteenth-century writers: as a Romantic reaction to the skeptic/rationalist movement that had virtually overtaken philosophy and history through the eighteenth century; or, as the progenitors of a natural evolution in thought, following up Kant's last position on historical teleology. Both perspectives are accurate and justifiable within the context and by the criteria of historical method and observation.

The nineteenth century ushered in Romanticism, as we noted earlier. And the Romantic method is verifiable and definable: it exalted folklore, national tradition, and medieval subjects, stressing the concrete and particular. The predominant methodology and historical positioning of Romanticism is, to some degree, the antithesis of Godless Rationalism. Yet, as we see in seminal representatives of the period, the breadth of variety among individual approaches is much greater.

There is also significant value to the description of the nineteenth-century writers as an evolution from Kantian thought. While in some ways, concepts and faith much older than Enlightened Rationalism informed their methods, these historians and philosophers proceeded along a track given value by Kant in the eighteenth century. Most significantly, the methods they employed—especially as they regard teleology—were part of the Kantian legacy.

It seems that in the nineteenth century, historicist thought went in one of two directions: fully incorporating and rationalizing the spiritual, or denying the spiritual altogether. In a different dichotomy (or dialectic, which was a favoured method of inquiry by at least two of the key figures in the century), historicist thought was either esoterically speculative or pragmatically real. The former is represented by George Hegel, the latter by Karl Marx; master and student, both of whom are examined further below.

Though different, they both incorporate a teleological world view into their histories and philosophies of history. In every respect, including his way of dealing with the reason/faith issue, the famed German historian, Leopold von Ranke, fits into this group as well. Although he is better known for his empirical approach and verify-the-sources-then-tell-it-like-it-was methodology, Ranke was a Romantic of the first order who contributed greatly to the renewal of (Providential) teleology in history. Regardless of individual inflexion, the history and philosophy of the period continued to more completely integrate the attributes of faith into the writing of Rational history.

### ***Georg Hegel (1770-1831)***

Hegel started with Kant's *Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason Alone*, and then moved on to an ideal formulation of a philosophy of history that has made an impact on later historians, including the likes of Marx.<sup>111</sup> His thesis is

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<sup>111</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Discovering the Mind: Goethe, Kant, and Hegel*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1980) p. 205.

tortuous and difficult to comprehend in places, and demands a close analysis of the line of argumentation. That is not to say that it is without merit; rather, it has proven to be a line of thinking that has had the same effect as Kant tried to achieve in his words “as if” inasmuch as Hegel’s theory has spurred more extensive thinking about history in ways that would not have been conceived before him.

Hartman summarizes for us the thrust of Hegel’s philosophy in the Introduction to Hegel’s *Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History*:

*History, for Hegel, is the development of Spirit in Time, just as Nature is the development of the Idea in Space.* If we understand this sentence we understand Hegel’s philosophy of history. Hegel’s whole system is built on the great triad: Idea—Nature—Spirit. The Idea-in-itself is that which develops, the dynamic reality of and behind—or before—the world. Its antithesis, Idea-outside-of-itself, namely Space, is Nature. Nature develops, after the stages of the mineral and vegetable kingdom, into man, in whose consciousness the Idea becomes conscious of itself. This self-consciousness is History. History and the Idea, thus, are interrelated. The Idea is the nature of God’s will, and since this Idea becomes truly itself only in and through History, History is, as a modern writer has well characterized it, “the autobiography of God.”<sup>112</sup>

Perhaps the singlemost standout feature of Hegel’s philosophy of history, upon first glance, is the incredible emphasis placed on God directly within the text. This is not the couched “supreme being” type of “designer” or “orderer” that we find in the eighteenth-century writers. No, it is a full-bore God of the Christian doctrine that Hegel draws forth as the prime mover and determinant (determiner?) of his world. Notwithstanding the deeper meaning and implication

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<sup>112</sup> Georg Hegel, *Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History*. Trans. by Robert Hartman. (New York: Liberal Arts Press, Inc., 1953) p. xxi. Internal reference is to Sydney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx*. (New York: Humanities Press, 1950) p. 36.

of Hegel's design and argument, his is an old fashioned Providential philosophy of history. Consider Hegel's statement that, "This good, this [universal divine] Reason, in its most concrete representation, is God. God governs the world. The actual workings of His government, the carrying out of His plan is the history of the world."<sup>113</sup> Therefore, "Reason is the comprehension of the Divine work."<sup>114</sup>

Georg Hegel most completely and blatantly put God at the centre of his historicist philosophy. In his work, *Philosophy of History*, Hegel introduces his position on the purpose of history and God's relative position in a long and tightly-argued discourse. One of the fundamental premises of his argument is the equation of Reason with God, as in the following passage:

This *Good*, this *Reason*, in its most concrete form, is God. God governs the world; the actual workings of his government—the carrying out of his plan—is the History of the World. . . . Reason is the comprehension of the Divine work.<sup>115</sup>

In two other passages, we see how Hegel is able to further integrate God and "His Work" into the unfolding of history. Additionally, he establishes a telos for his history that includes both God and Reason. This tricky bit of argumentation all hangs together for Hegel because of the presumptions he makes at the outset. Hegel manages more fully than anyone else to make Rationalism a spiritual endeavor, as the following passages indicate.

That the History of the World, with all the changing scenes which its

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid. p. 47.

<sup>114</sup> Georg Hegel, *Philosophy of History*. Trans. by J. Sibree. (New York: P.F. Collier and Son, 1901) p. 84.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. p. 84.

annals present, is this process of development and the realization of Spirit—this is the true Theodicea, the justification of God in History. Only this insight can reconcile Spirit with the History of the World—viz. that what has happened and is happening every day, is *not only not "without God" but is essentially His Work.* [emphasis mine]<sup>116</sup>

The inquiry into the *essential destiny* of Reason—as far as it is considered in reference to the World—is identical with the question, *what is the ultimate design of the world?* And the expression implies that that design is destined to be realized. [author's emphasis]<sup>117</sup>

In order to have man achieve or be an active agent in achieving this divine destiny of the Idea, through Reason, it is obviously imperative that History, and therefore mankind, be progressive. Hegel addresses this matter and would appear to conclude that History is, distinct from nature, progressive. He states:

Historical change, seen abstractly, has long been understood generally as involving a progress toward the better, the more perfect. Change in nature [emphasis mine], no matter how infinitely varied it is, shows only a cycle of constant repetition. In nature nothing new happens under the sun, and in this respect the multiform play of her products leads to boredom. One and the same permanent character continuously reappears, and all change reverts to it. Only the changes in the realm of Spirit create the novel. This characteristic of Spirit suggests to man a feature entirely different from that of nature—the desire toward *perfectibility*.<sup>118</sup>

Where he differs from plain old-fashioned divine Providential history, taking his cue from Kant, is in the nature of the process of arriving at destiny. In Hegel's view, the destiny which God (through nature) has set forth for man is the self-actualization of freedom which is given by God and realized by man. Humanity is not bestowed with a fixed identity, but determines its own identity and world in

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid. p. 569.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. p. 60.

the form of history, making history the process by which mankind "becomes aware of itself as self determining and therefore historical."<sup>119</sup> Thus, man is, to some extent, the determiner of his destiny; or so it goes. Hegel states, "*Progress depends on man's ability to grasp the universal interests of reason and on his will and vigor in making it a reality.*"<sup>120</sup> Because Hegel gave the idea a universal setting rather than an individual setting, as did Kant, his influence has been considerably greater.<sup>121</sup>

Additionally, Hegel coined a phrase, "the cunning of reason", which to some readers implies that somehow reason is exterior to man and above the give and take of man's self-actualization. The implicit meaning of the descriptive phrase is more to the effect of Reason in a collective global sense will be ultimately driven toward the purpose of self-actualization and freedom—even without explicit individual effort in that vein, and it would not appear to be Hegel's intent to make such an inference. As Leon Pompa suggests, it should not be thought

to imply that some *deus ex machina* were, in a wholly inexplicable manner, manipulating puppets for his own ends. Hegel himself indicates that this is not so by pointing out . . . that the agents by which reason achieves its ends are the very agents of whom it exists. *Reason is something which exists in and through human activity, . . . not*

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<sup>118</sup> Hegel, *Reason in History*. p. 68.

<sup>119</sup> Stephen Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth and History: An Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy*. (London: Routledge, 1991) p. 26.

<sup>120</sup> Burleigh Wilkins, *Hegel's Philosophy of History*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974) p. 136-7. Original source: Georg Hegel, *Reason and Revolution, Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (Boston, 1954) p. 231. [Wilkins' Italic]

<sup>121</sup> Hegel, *Reason in History*. p. xvii-viii.

*something which exists over and above it.*<sup>122</sup> [Emphasis mine].

That is not to say that Hegel believes man is in control of his historical activity.<sup>123</sup> Hegel sees the manifestations of divine providence in the form of Reason. But because man is the agent of the development toward the final end, obviously, then, in Hegel's eyes mankind must be ever-developing and changing. Such a conception is quite at odds with the science of man theories of Hume and those who followed him, particularly their claims of the constancy of human nature and of human consciousness.<sup>124</sup>

Without a doubt, Hegel's approach is decidedly teleological. More than that, however, his bent was purely methodological. In his view, the mechanical approach to history is sublated (i.e., subordinately related) within the teleological conception of history which is therefore a more *appropriate way* to study history. For Hegel, obviously, the more important matter was getting the model and method correct. I would suggest that for Hegel, as well, his mentalité was not in the Newtonian space, which would have made him prefer the mechanistic view. Considering the means-ends of teleological history, Hegel states:

In contemplating world history we must thus consider its ultimate purpose. This ultimate purpose is what is willed in the world itself. We know of God that He is the most perfect; He can will only Himself and what is like Him. God and the nature of His will are one and the same; . . .<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Pompa, *Human Nature and Historical Knowledge*. p. 99.

<sup>123</sup> Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth and History*. pp. 38-9.

<sup>124</sup> Pompa, *Human Nature and Historical Knowledge*. p. 69.

<sup>125</sup> Hegel, *Reason in History*. p. 21.

### ***Karl Marx (1818-1883)***

Of the historian philosophers being considered as representative of these two centuries, Karl Marx is distinguished by being the only one who completely and unsympathetically denies any form of the divine, be it natural deism or an actual God. He removed the divine and created, in the words of Breisach, ". . . a new type of prophetic history for a Kingdom of God without God."<sup>126</sup> His is the first structure-defined history; in Marx's world all causality is derived from structure rather than ideal. Marx's brand of economic determinism, or historical materialism, embodies both speculative and practical historical methods, Scientific Rationalism, and a progressive determinist (to a fault) teleology. The theory offered the most ambitious and influential nineteenth-century historical "science of society."

Marx was influenced greatly by Augustin Thierry's view of history as a relentless struggle on a predestined course to a known end.<sup>127</sup> He was also a student of Hegelian thought, although ultimately changing it from a providential plan to one of scientific materialism resulting from empirical investigation.<sup>128</sup> Appleby et al sum up the breadth of Marxism with respect to the other historical themes we have considered.

The idea of progress, historicism, and a scientific history seemed to come together in Marxism. Here was a vision of history informed by heroic science that offered a concrete social and economic model of the meaning of progress (the triumph of one mode of production over

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<sup>126</sup> Breisach, *Historiography*. p. 293.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. p. 240.

<sup>128</sup> Conkin et al, *Heritage and Challenge*. pp. 73-74.

another), that sought the laws of change within the process of history itself (and thus was historicist), and that claimed a scientific status for the inexorable workings of social laws (and thus was determinist). Marxism also seemed to make revolutions inevitable and endorsed their benefits.”<sup>129</sup>

Love him or hate him (as a result of the political movement which bears his name), Marx's impact on historico-economo-political thinking is deep. His theories are extraordinarily dense and comprehensive. They were not, however, particularly well-organized nor written with an inherent objective of clarity in purpose. As M.M. Bober suggests:

To undertake a comprehensive criticism of Marx's theory of history . . . The critic would have to be familiar with the genesis and nature of such institutions as the state, law, family, religion, morality; he would have to feel at home in anthropology, biology, economics, history, sociology, psychology, philosophy, literature, and art; and he would have to be clear alike about the nature of the forces that determine the progress of civilization and the ends toward which human destinies are moving.<sup>130</sup>

As I have enough trouble with history, and given that our concern here is with a mere portion of an interrelated whole within only historicist thought, the exploration of Marxism here is necessarily a shallow analysis.

Be that as it may, I would not begin to suggest that the breadth of Marx's thinking was matched by a particularly strong theoretical basis. In fact, I would tend to concur with Halbermas that the Marxist

Epistemology presumes to take nothing for granted except its pure project of radically doubting. In truth it bases itself on a critical consciousness that is the result of an entire process of self-formation.

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<sup>129</sup> Appleby et al, *Telling the Truth*. p. 71.

<sup>130</sup> M.M. Bober, *Karl Marx's Interpretation of History*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950) pp. 298-9.

Thus it is the beneficiary of a stage of reflection that it does not admit and therefore also can not legitimate.<sup>131</sup>

Only the strange and mischievous would dare to disagree with the common understanding that in Marx's conception of history the motivating and determining factor is the productive forces. The commonly accepted, and we should note, inaccurate version of Marx's theory is that economic variables completely determine history, and that all "other social factors and relations do not interact with them and are puppets of economic relations."<sup>132</sup> There are critiques of the economic all-determining version of Marxist theory as described above, which derive from various analyses. One analysis, by Melvin Rader, suggests that while Marx tends to overstate and exaggerate the importance of economics, he is not a pure economic determinist. Rader's argument stems from a retranslation and reinterpretation of integral words in key passages of Marx's work which change the cast of Marxian thought.<sup>133</sup> A lengthy sample from Marx is provided here for reference.

My investigation led to the result that legal relations as well as forms of state are to be grasped neither from themselves nor from the so-called general development of the human mind, but rather are rooted in the material conditions of life. . . . In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and

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<sup>131</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (2nd Ed.). Trans. by Jeremy Shapiro. (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1978) p. 13.

<sup>132</sup> William Shaw, *Marx's Theory of History*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978) p. 66.

<sup>133</sup> Melvin Rader, *Marx's Interpretation of History*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969) p. 15. "The most crucial sentence in the Preface has been implausibly translated. . . . The plausible translation is as follows: 'The mode of production of material life *conditions* (*bedingt*) the social, political and intellectual life *conditions* (*überhaupt*).' [My italics.] Although a number of translators have used the word 'determines' instead of 'conditions,' Marx would probably have used a stronger verb than 'bedingt,' such as 'bestimmt,' had he intended this meaning. . . ." Internal reference is to Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, two volume edition (New York: International Publishers, no date), Vol. I, p. 503.

independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which the correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life conditions the general character of the social, political and spiritual process of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness.<sup>134</sup>

This passage notes one of the fundamental heuristic devices employed by Marx to explain his predominant economic determinism: the base-superstructure model. The quintessence of this materialistic model is that a foundation, or base, of this building is the mode of production, and resting on that base is the superstructure comprising the political state and culture. In the fundamentalist read of the model, the building can not affect the foundation, therefore the base (mode of production) determines the nature of the superstructure (society and history, broadly speaking) in a one-way mono-causal relationship.<sup>135</sup> The dialectical interpretation accepts the distinct structural strata but posits that there is a 'dialectical' relationship between them, although the economic base always prevails in the end. Marx uses his model in his description of the context for the civil war in France:

The gigantic broom of the French Revolution of the eighteenth century swept away all these relics of bygone times, thus clearing simultaneously the soil of its last hindrances to the superstructure of the modern state edifice raised under the First Empire, itself the offspring of the coalition

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid. p. 11. Original source: Karl Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1904), pp. 11-12. Translation modified.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid. p. 4. Original source: Martin Seliger, *The Marxist Conception of Ideology*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970) pp. 43,205, 221.

wars of old semi-feudal Europe against modern France.<sup>136</sup>

Marx defends his historic economic structuralism quite eloquently, if somewhat laboriously, as he answers to the observation that in our time (the nineteenth century) economic interests prevail, but that was not always so such as in the middle ages and in the classical and Roman periods when Catholicism and politics reigned supreme respectively. Marx states: "This much, however, is clear, that the middle ages could not live on Catholicism, nor the ancient world on politics. On the contrary it is the mode in which they gained a livelihood *that explains why* here politics, and there Catholicism, played the chief part."<sup>137</sup> What we see in this passage, albeit something of a non sequitur, is a pragmatism largely absent from previous philosophies of history.

Marx's pragmatism is essential to his theory of history. While only alluded to in the preceding paragraph, his pragmatism is the root of why he is described as having turned Hegel "right side up." Marx was a student of Hegel who took from his teacher the dialectical approach to history in which different parts or aspects of history (thesis and antithesis) created progress or new developments (synthesis) through their antagonistic conflict. Marx, however, moved beyond his mentor to create a different type of history: one based on real world, everyday, structural features. As Melvin Rader explains:

Until the advent of Marxism most historical interpretation was idealist,

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<sup>136</sup> Karl Marx and V.I. Lenin, *The Civil War in France: The Paris Commune*. (New York: International Publishers Co. Inc., 1940) p. 54.

<sup>137</sup> Shaw, *Marx's Theory of History*. p. 67-8. Original source: Karl Marx, *Capital*. 1:82n (Werke 23:96n) my emphasis.

depicting events as the outcome of religious, moral or philosophical ideas. The idealist interpretation reached its apogee in Hegel. In turning Hegel's theory "right side up," Marx's model of base and superstructure marks a great change. Almost all modern treatments of economic history go back to Marx's interpretation, and even the history of culture has been enormously influenced by it.<sup>138</sup>

Marx's theory is highly teleological in every sense of the word. We have seen above, the "antagonistic character he attributes to progress in general."<sup>139</sup> And, in *The Story of the Life of Lord Palmerston*, he notes that Palmerston represents, "new evidence of the necessity of taking off the mask from this wily enemy to progress of human freedom."<sup>140</sup> We also have established that to him, economics was the prime mover of social development.<sup>141</sup> But it is Marx's estimation and prediction for the communist end of history, or of society, that he is best known. In this projection is Marx's teleological side. As Rader says, for Marx, "The movement of history is to strike off these [existential] fetters and to make the transition from human bondage to human freedom."<sup>142</sup> To some extent, critics who suggest that Marx created a providential history without God are right. His is a pseudo-divine plan with all indicators pointing to a destiny that is completely without question. To that extent his telos actually is buried within the theory and method. That is to say, his destiny is determined by a theory he has created from history for history.

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<sup>138</sup> Rader, *Marx's Interpretation of History*. p. 55.

<sup>139</sup> Shaw, *Marx's Theory of History*. p. 165.

<sup>140</sup> Karl Marx, *Secret Diplomatic History and The Story of the Life of Lord Palmerston*. (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1969) p.180.

<sup>141</sup> Shaw, *Marx's Theory of History*. p. 81.

<sup>142</sup> Rader, *Marx's Interpretation of History*. p. 100.

At the same time, Marx does not attempt to predict every action or contingent event. In fact, the many day-to-day events upon which history turns do not even appear to be of significant concern to him. His structurally determined history is "measured in decades, not days."<sup>143</sup> He recognizes the potential for and likelihood of accidents but would seem to consider them as only the accelerator or brake on a train bound for a particular destination (which Marx, the knowing observer, can see). Within his work of history, *The Civil War in France: The Paris Commune*, Marx takes on a brief philosophical stance to elaborate on his thinking about chance and its relation to his teleological view.

World history would indeed be very easy to make, if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favourable chances. It would, on the other hand, be of a very mystical nature, if "accidents" played no part. These accidents themselves fall naturally into the general course of development and are compensated again by other accidents. But acceleration and delay are very dependent upon such "accidents," which include the "accident" of the character of those who at first stand at the head of the movement.<sup>144</sup>

Up to the present the dialectic has evolved four distinct productive régimes, and Marx divides past history into four epoch. "In broad outlines we can designate the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal, and the modern bourgeois modes of production" as progressive epochs in the economic foundation of society. All these are "prehistoric" eras, mere preludes to the future epoch, the socialistic.<sup>145</sup> In *The Paris Commune*, Marx places the Parisian working class into the pragmatic, progressive, teleological context of his theory:

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<sup>143</sup> Shaw, *Marx's Theory of History*. p. 72.

<sup>144</sup> Marx and Lenin, *The Civil War in France: The Paris Commune*. p. 87.

They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present *society is irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies*, they will have to pass through long struggles and through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have *no ideals to realize*, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant. . . . [emphasis mine]<sup>146</sup>

Marx confirms, outside his philosophical writings and in his history writings, the economic overbearance and class struggle he sees determining and driving the progress of the world:

A strict confinement of slavery within its old terrain, therefore was bound according to economic law to lead to its gradual effacement, in the political sphere to annihilate the hegemony that the slave states exercised through the Senate, and finally to expose the slaveholding oligarchy within its own states to threatening perils from the side of the "poor whites."<sup>147</sup>

### ***Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886)***

There is a validly generated perception of Ranke as the thoroughly empirical scientist of history showing only what actually happened ("wie es eigentlich gewesen"). He was, in fact, a character of great importance to the historical profession, chiding and pushing his peers and students to go critically back to the primary sources in their analyses and to put forth only renderings of history not opinion. Then there is the reality: Ranke was a hopeless Romantic unable to

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<sup>145</sup> Bober, *Karl Marx's Interpretation of History*. p. 46.

<sup>146</sup> Marx and Lenin, *The Civil War in France: The Paris Commune*. p. 61-2.

<sup>147</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Civil War in the United States*. (New York: International Publishers Co. Inc., 1937) p. 69.

subdue his Christian faith to his “scientific” approach to history. Like Newton two centuries earlier, his faith informed his Rationalism.

Above and beyond the excessive importance placed on Ranke, the empiricist, by the history profession of the twentieth century, there are two significant features of Ranke’s work that bear scrutiny. These features of his historical positioning, and likely his personal belief system, inform Ranke’s work and make of it a teleological, neo-Christian Providential history replete with allusions and direct references to progress and destiny. These two features are (1) the influence—the point of control—of the divine God, and (2) a reinfusion of strength in idealistic historicism.

In the following three passages, Ranke expands on his belief that “History is religion [and] there is no human activity of intellectual importance which does not originate in some relation to God and divine things.”<sup>148</sup> He is either certain of God’s presence in history, unable to address the forces that guide and determine history, or both. Regardless, the passages speak volumes about the true nature of Ranke’s philosophy of history and how it fits in the longer-term flow of historicist ideas.

. . . humanity contains within itself an endless variety of developments which come to view from time to time, according to laws which are *unknown to us, more mysterious, and greater than we can conceive.* [emphasis mine]<sup>149</sup>

Since everything springs from God, . . . as we uncover reality, remove its

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<sup>148</sup> Gooch, *History and Historians*. p. 88.

<sup>149</sup> Ranke, *The Secret of World History*. p. 161. Original source: Walther Peter Fuchs, Vol. II of *Aus Werke und Nachlass, Über die Epochen der neueren Geschichte* (Munich, 1971)

shell, and bring forth its essence, it happens also that our own existence, inner life, source, and breath reveal the passage of God, or at least His being.<sup>150</sup>

In all of history God dwells, lives, is to be found. Every deed testifies to Him; every instant preaches His name.<sup>151</sup>

While we must acknowledge that Ranke did not appear to believe in a complete providential destiny in which men were mere puppets of God's will, his history is predominantly determined by the divine. To his way of thinking, men were required to actively participate in the making of their destinies—with which they were programmed from birth (or, presumably, as a species), the efforts merely affected the color of the walls down the great hallway to our collective destination. Destiny, to him, albeit real, was not blind.<sup>152</sup> As Kreiger says, "Thus Ranke associated divine purpose with world history and used both to cradle 'the core nature, and life of the individual' (*Individuum*), which was the immediate object of his historical studies."<sup>153</sup>

Having said all this, we note that in places Ranke explicitly denies progress, an incongruity that bears further examination because in countless instances through his work, Ranke refers to the "progress" of this and that. Ranke resolves the differences between these incongruous positions by compartmentalizing the places and spaces where he will allow for progress and where he will deny it. Kreiger sums it up best:

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid. p. 5. Original source: Ranke's dictation of May 1869, SW 53/54: 60–63)

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. p. 241. (SW 53/54:88)

<sup>152</sup> Leopold von Ranke, *A History of England Principally in the Seventeenth Century* (Vol. I). (Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1875) p. 4.

Ranke left no doubt that his denial of progress was in the service of his principle of individuality. He admitted progress "in the realm of material interests and he admitted "an extensive progress" in quantitative diffusion "in the moral realm," but he rejected progress in the "moral respect" that mattered to him most—the morality that comprehended "the productions of genius in art, poetry, science, and state—because "moral force always depends on individuality and individual development.<sup>154</sup>

Ranke himself noted in papers that went unpublished until after his death that the idea that "mankind is involved in an uninterrupted progress, a steady development of its own perfection" is "largely not so."<sup>155</sup>

Ranke's historical writings, judging by the contents of two of his more extensive works, *A History of England* and *History of the Reformation in Germany*, were exceedingly bent toward the Christian conception of the world. His opinion was that Christianity was the fulfillment and peak of the development of religion and morality. Quite explicitly, to him, "no further progress" could take place beyond Christianity as it was the perfect result of "a sudden divine manifestation."<sup>156</sup>

Roger Wines puts the sum of Ranke's faith, historicism, and not undue fanaticism for original sources in proper perspective.

In a way which we do not clearly understand, God providentially guided

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<sup>153</sup> Leonard Kreiger, Ranke: *The Meaning of History*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977) p. 25.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. p. 229. Original source: Leopold von Ranke, *Aus Werk und Nachlass*, Edited by Walther Fuchs and Theodor Schieder, 3 vols. (Munich, 1964-73) pp. 2:54-6, 68-9, 77.

<sup>155</sup> Ranke, *The Secret of World History*. p. 102. Original source: Ranke's papers posthumously published by Alfred Dove in *Weltgeschichte*, IX, Part II, pp. vii-xi.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. p. 163. Original source: Ranke, *Aus Werk und Nachlass, Über die Epochen der neueren Geschichte*, Edited by Walther Fuchs and Theodor Schieder, 3 vols. (Munich, 1964-73) Vol 2, no page reference.

His creation; divine ideas fused themselves into historical institutions and personalities which then intervened to change the course of history. Historical development required, he asserted, not only 'the breath of God, but also the effort of man.' This was indeed in the tradition of the Christian philosophy of history, but Ranke differed from other philosophers of this school by maintaining that only a scrupulous and rigorous study of the sources could establish a history sufficiently accurate to trace the designs of Providence.<sup>157</sup>

We can isolate and identify the essence of Ranke's derivation of purpose and destiny within the words "scrupulous and rigorous study" from the preceding passage. Ranke, we see, was internally driven to rigors of study and telling it like it was. It was his method—and his contribution to the professionalization of the study of history—and how he created history and determined its end. Notwithstanding the matter of it being part of his faith, we need to ask whether Ranke possibly did not have time to concern himself with pedestrian issues like critical questioning of the meaning of history because he was overwhelmed by the demands of finding out about the past and telling it like it really was.

The Progressive historian Charles Beard, was no stranger to relating faith and reason in the context of history. His book, *Written History as Act of Faith*, presents a quick insight on his position. The Progressives found, like most other post-Enlightenment historians, the concept of progress to be quite seductive (hence the appropriate name). It afforded the opportunity to engage a "natural" telos in their histories—which is, as we know, a holdover from the religious notion of divine direction—with or without God's presence. While the Progressives could take their history with or without faith, Reinhold Niebuhr, representing the

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

Christian-historian stream of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was a little more explicit about the position and value of God and faith in the writing of history: "There is unity in history but it can only be discerned by faith, not by reason. Only faith in the sovereignty of God can supply meaning for the historical process."<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Nash, *Ideas of History* Vol. 1. p. 224.

## Chapter VI

### THE “FAILED” GREAT EXPERIMENT IN TELEOLOGICAL DENIAL

Western historiography in the Gothic and Renaissance periods prior to the Enlightenment was essentially Christian historicism. While facts and data were found among the traces of the past, the underlying metahistory was that of the principles and tenets of the Judeo-Christian religions, primarily Christianity. Within this form of historicism, the divine—God—provided the answer to all the unanswerable questions. Regardless of whether God gave man free will or not, the answer to all those questions was ultimately: because that's how God made it.<sup>159</sup> Greater or lesser degrees of divine determinism and the divine telos served history well during that period when the Church theologians set the philosophical and societal standards. It was these attributes of faith: telos or purpose, determination or restricted human agency, and final judgement or the goal to be reached, which in no small part marked pre-Enlightenment Christian historicism.

As we have noted elsewhere, Christian Providential history is essentially a teleological narrative. God is the first cause; the end goal (final cause) is determined by God; all acts and events of and by human beings are mere development—acceleration or deceleration, if you will—of the divine destiny. Although the divine telos was employed by the churchmen to control the

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<sup>159</sup> As stated earlier, I think that free will is a fairly recent addition to Christian theology, but since this is not a theological paper and I am uncertain, we are not taking a firm stand.

Christian masses (and convert the heathen hordes), I have and would continue to contend that regardless of form, basic teleological metanarrative is not merely a convenience but a necessity. Regardless of the “end” or purpose being proposed, the teleological narrative is always used as the churchmen used it in the pre-Enlightenment: to simplify and direct, or to comfort and inspire. A destination of some sort or another for the great human journey provides all of those necessary mental reliefs. That is not to say that the teleological narrative now is the same, determined similarly, or being used in the same way as in the pre-Enlightenment. In fact, I would propose that there is a significant difference. Be that as it may, the underlying human psychic motivation is the same.

I have tried my best to avoid analysis of and comment about the religious aspects of this subject matter. But I would suggest that a key reason for the endurance of any religion is the telos it provides to inspire its believers. Whether the destiny is to have the messiah arrive among the chosen people, to march to final judgment, or otherwise, it is not causality that inspires, it is the ultimate goal. History, as a quasi-religious tale under the Christian Providential metanarrative is nothing more than the story of how far we as a people have come along the road to the destination.

Notwithstanding the priests’ misuse of the Providential telos for more earthly purposes such as political control, the teleological explanation of history had proven satisfactory in the West for hundreds—maybe thousands—of years. It was, in one form or another, proven to be a staple of human comprehension of itself, its past, and its future. And, it worked. History was written in a particular manner, everyone understood, roles were clear and defined, and there was no doubt. This

point is, of course, crucial. The simple, single teleological philosophy of history eliminated any doubt about what one could possibly be doubtful of: purpose and destiny. But, the human mind is inquiring, and it was, to some extent, inevitable that this peaceful existence would be disturbed.

I would suggest that in the post-Enlightenment—after Hume and Voltaire—the “goal” changes from a static extrinsic objective to a process-based intrinsic ideal. More specifically, where the Church’s goal in history was a static, ideal, providential design, the post-Humian historical goal is a politically-motivated ideal *process* driven by reasons of state. The teleology now inheres within the plain language descriptive methodology initially employed by Hume and Voltaire to destroy the *Ancien Régime* as part of a process to build rather than tear down. Therein is the crucial development and result of the great experiment, and we should now synthesize and develop this argument more fully.

In the mid-seventeenth century the Western world was treated to the development of a line of thought known as Rationalism—primarily the result of the Scientific Revolution. The safe and easy monotheistic faith of the seventeenth-century Western world was first rocked by philosophy, then mathematics, and finally science. Led, at least in spirit, by René Descartes, these so-called neo-classicists or Rationalists took dead aim at the faith which God represented. They doubted and insisted on proving everything by the force of mind. They, rational men, were free men: free to think, free to control, free to determine. Among its fundamental principles, as the search began for universal laws of nature, were free will, the supremacy of human reason, and insupportability of superstition (i.e., religious faith). Reason was, to the mind of

many a scientist-philosopher, an obviously more perfect system for explaining the mysteries of life and nature. No longer would they be bound by the superstitions of the church. "At the heart of modernity is the trust or faith in scientific reason, understood as the source not only of vast powers but of authoritative guidance as to how to use those powers," suggests Thomas Pangle.<sup>160</sup>

Later, it was Locke, Bacon, and others, including and especially Isaac Newton, who furthered the cause of science with sweeping natural laws. With Newton, "a mechanistic world view replaced a teleological one and science undertook to know nature through material causes exclusively and not through final causes."<sup>161</sup> Or at least this is how it would have appeared at first blush. Consider instead that these scientists and Rationalists did not, in fact, give up any teleological assumptions at all. What they did was deny the extrinsic telic goals such as would be attributed to the providential history, and pushed the teleological assumptions into their scientific method.

Nature and science, by the late seventeenth century, were gaining strength at the expense of religious faith. As Appleby et al describe, "Still dazzled by the ability of Newton to explain the solar system, many Western thinkers came to believe that the movements of human beings, like those of celestial bodies, could be comprehended through scientific laws."<sup>162</sup> The empiricism of proper science was favoured as the way to achieve an understanding of who we are, why we are

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<sup>160</sup> Appleby et al, *Telling the Truth*. p. 16. Original source: Thomas Pangle, *The Ennobling of Democracy: The Challenge of the Postmodern Age*. (Baltimore, 1992) p. 3.

<sup>161</sup> Despland, *Kant on History and Religion*. p. 24.

<sup>162</sup> Appleby et al, *Telling the Truth*. p. 91.

here, and where we are going. Thus, as the eighteenth century approached, scientific empiricism and Cartesian argumentation seemed to characterize proper thinking. These free-willed, thinking men of science, history, and philosophy were supremely confident in the invincibility of their method.

We will recall from a previous section that the scientific method is inherently telic: it progresses to a goal. At the outset of a scientifically designed experiment the end goal—knowledge—drives the experiment. But to establish laws and generalities from the particular, the scientist must rigorously replicate the experiment. To build upon a foundation of knowledge, the method must be employed with new inputs. Thus, after the experiment is first conducted and successfully replicated, science worships the method; and the method is teleological. In the writing of history, the parallel is with the initial Scientific Rationalists developing the tools and “laboratory” for an experiment. The Enlightened Rationalists conducted the initial “plain language description” experiment, the objective of which was knowledge: delivering the knowledge of the system’s corruption. Those that followed the *Philosophes* were then left to worship the method, but without the objective of their predecessors. So, they persist in their activities because of the scientific presumption that if one gets the method right, one will get the right answer (i.e., the desired goal).

Yet even as Rationalism developed, it was not replacing the old *irrational* system based on Christian faith. Rather, it began to reinterpret and implement the features of the old system within the Rationalist model. The progenitors of Scientific Rationalism, at least for our purpose—Descartes and Newton—were, even as they impressed upon a waiting world the value and superiority of their

reason and science, co-opting to their faith. This is not a judgement, but, as we will see, a statement of apparent fact. Whether in doing so either or both men were right or wrong is immaterial, and not within the ken of this paper in any event. However, these acts represent to us that the original Scientific Rationalists had difficulty reconciling their faith with their reason in addition to letting go of teleology.

René Descartes, almost as an afterthought to his *Discourse on Method*, found a way to "prove" the existence of God by virtue of his own doubt and imperfection.<sup>163</sup> In the *Meditations on the First Philosophy in Which the Existence of God and the Real Distinction Between the Soul and the Body of Man Demonstrated* (the "Meditations"), Descartes goes to much greater lengths to support his earlier proof that God exists.<sup>164</sup> He is not suggesting some completely abstract divinity here, but rather he speaks of God the Creator. Of course, it is by reason and not by mere religious faith that Descartes arrives at this proof and conclusion that God exists. As such, he manages to retain God and divinity but only within a rationale of his own making. Regardless of his motive and the immediate effect upon other thinkers of both his proof and his further meditation, what Descartes effects in this sleight-of-mind is to reintegrate the spiritual (and hence teleological) within the rational. As Breisach sees it, Descartes,

saw the world in God's hands. Within that world, however, human phenomena represented a network of forces and bodies whose

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<sup>163</sup> Descartes, *Discourse on Method* pp. 54-55 *passim*.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 113-131 *passim*.

functioning did not involve God at every step. God planned, created, and governed the world and its events in a general way, but he gave much home rule to human beings.<sup>165</sup>

Newton, it seems, went to great pains to reject "certain philosophical positions not simply because the science they supported was wrong, but also, and perhaps primarily, because he believed that those positions would lead to atheism."<sup>166</sup> The image of Newton the Rationalist suffered in the 1930s when unpublished manuscripts surfaced, providing new evidence for a broader picture of Newton. The new evidence showed him to be in these instances quite unscientific, pondering alchemy and such. But, perhaps the key issue is that for Newton, it was his religiosity that provided him with his scientific conceptions.<sup>167</sup> Again, science and Reason are if not subordinated to, certainly operating parallel to and being influenced by the divine and spirituality, which would include the inherent telos. Thus, from the outset, ever more characteristics of the divine appear in Rationalist philosophy and history.

More than these two signal examples, science and Reason were necessarily to come up short in providing acceptable answers to the most important philosophical questions of first cause, purpose, and direction. These are, except by the acrobatic logical proofs of philosophers such as Descartes, unprovable by science and Reason. Certainly the answers that science could provide did not address the questions as hoped. Thus, just as Descartes rationally proved the

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<sup>165</sup> Breisach, *Historiography*. p. 191.

<sup>166</sup> Appleby et al, *Telling the Truth*. p.175.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. pp. 175-179 *passim*.

existence of God to let Him into his Rational framework without attaching his own Reason to magic and superstition, so did other historicists and philosophers. In fact, Becker suggests that it was easy enough for the Rationalist to put God into history and science when all else failed: "The very foundation of the new philosophy was that the existence of God, if there was one, and his goodness, if goodness he could claim, *must be inferred from the observable behavior of the world* [emphasis mine]."<sup>168</sup>

Scientific Rationalism and the discovery of natural laws created a new focus for inquiry by intelligent minds. To begin, these people started to look for why things happened and how they happened within the context of the natural world rather than merely because that was how God wanted it. The requirement for such a study was to invert the thought process and seek causes for events or phenomena, which were the effects. Each successive discovery of a cause created the need to seek the cause for it, now an effect itself. In the euphoric mood of late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century Scientific Rationalism, intelligent men had found their new grail. By diligent application of the scientific method, ever seeking prior causes to explain the day, intelligent men believed they could explain everything. By focussing backward, and seeing everything as a natural, mechanical, causal function, the religious destination or end was changed to a rational process and temporal ends.

But, a human needs to have faith in *something*, apparently even a Rationalist. Being alone with nothing but one's wits is a harsh environment in

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<sup>168</sup> Becker, *The Heavenly City*. p. 65.

which to live. And, whether any one of those philosophers and historians cared to admit it, their own backgrounds as believers and faithful informed their thinking. Moreover, as Becker asserts, most "minds were too accustomed to a stable society with fixed ranks, too habituated to an orderly code of manners and a highly conventionalized art, to be at all happy in a disordered universe."<sup>169</sup> If science could not explain the crucial questions then the Scientific Rationalist had one of two choices: (a) retreat to the superstitious faith of religion, which as we see many did, or (b) take faith that the scientific method, applied assiduously, will ultimately achieve the right answer—if there is one, which is eventually what happened.

Let us reconsider briefly what this might have implied in the seventeenth century. The people, or as many as cared, were dominated by the influence of the Church. To these people the Bible provided the cause, reason, and goal of human life. They were informed and took comfort in the complete telos provided by the Bible and the doctrines of the Church. That is, while there may not have been material prosperity or luxury, there was certain spiritual meaning and direction to life (not that it was all that comforting either, but that's another matter). However, the Rationalists disturbed that faith by their questions and doubts, at least among the literate and "interested" members of European society.

With a serious movement afoot to demystify the workings of the world by application of natural law and scientific method, we arrive at the eighteenth

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid. pp. 49-50.

century. The Scientific Rationalists to this point had put in motion the necessary tools and thinking, but were not prepared fully to act on them. The earliest of the lot, Descartes, Newton, et al, were not yet far enough removed from their faith to completely abandon the tenets of their religion to the much more secular explanations of the world as was afforded by their science. It would take a different type of philosopher-historian to secularize history.

The success of Scientific Rationalism and its method had an important indirect impact on the approach to thinking about things in the eighteenth century. It naturally led to a renewed and revitalized, stronger skepticism. I say natural because the nature of scientific method and enquiry would easily engender healthy skepticism of the unobservable, mysterious, and superstitious. Armed with scientific method and critical philosophy, these new doubters questioned everything around them; nothing was spared, least of all religious beliefs. It was not long before the teleological foundation of Western Christian Providential history was under full frontal attack from the eighteenth century philosophers.

Thus, as it related to history and the philosophy of history, the explosion of Scientific Rationalism in the form of eighteenth-century Enlightened Rationalism had some significant effects. Not the least of these effects was the determined effort by the most influential philosophers and historians to secularize history, releasing it from the religious metanarrative and influence/control by the Church. Remember that the same men who were writing history and about the philosophy of history were also moral philosophers and scientists as well. They

simply carried their thoughts over to the discipline of thinking about and recording the human past.

Enter the *Philosophes*. In the early eighteenth century a group of philosophers, led by Voltaire and collectively known as the *Philosophes*, took the historical and philosophical stage. Their writings had a simple message: the long-standing overriding superstitions and control of the Church were wrong; the aristocracy was corrupt; the *Ancien Régime* was a hollow decayed sham. Using their razor-sharp powers of reason and elegant prose, they rigorously questioned everything about belief, theology, agency, and history. Ultimately, under the pressure of the great *écrasez*, the *Ancien Régime* and Church proved too insubstantial and weak to stand against the simple scrutiny and plain language revelation of its rotted state. Consider Voltaire. His life's work seems to have been a mission to defeat the influence of the Church and its corruptions. Voltaire was himself a deist, and if he did nothing more, he managed to write history without the finger of God in it. He also proved the worth and value in the plain language description of history—at least for tearing down a decomposing society. Voltaire's work and influence; and, it would only be fair and accurate to say *influence upon him* as well, by the prevailing winds of thought; were, in many respects, the beginning of the steep slope away from a teleological (Christian Providential) philosophy of history.

Voltaire's efforts marked only the beginning of the great experiment to make history without extrinsic telos; he only shifted the focus from the divine to the natural. As a deist, and aggressively anti-Church, Voltaire could not suffer the divine presence in history either as a first or last cause. So he replaced it with

Nature, leaving a “supreme nature” as the providential telos. It may appear to be an insignificant change since what he had accomplished was merely to change the names of the central players in an essentially providential plan. In fact, it was a tremendously significant step—one that the Scientific Rationalists in the seventeenth century could not make—that moved history to a more secular plane. It would, however, take another thinker to finish the job.

David Hume and his work on the philosophy of human nature and of history provided, in retrospect, the fulfillment of the great experiment to rid the human story of telos, at least the external “goal” of history. His early extreme, then later “mitigated” skepticism—coupled to an unabashed anti-theistic non-deistic belief system, was exactly what was needed to take the last step away from Christian teleological goals to a secular, historical political process. While he was grudgingly willing to accept an intelligent designer of the world as its first cause, his skepticism and the inability to reason out an “end” precluded him from accepting any form of destiny or telos in the human experience as a last cause. Ergo, the extrinsic telic goal was no longer a viable or operative part of history. Hume’s position is attributable to—or certainly explainable by—his Newtonian, “scientific” mechanical view of the world and its contents. The mechanistic world view to which Hume subscribed gave little or no consideration to purpose in the long term sense of destiny or “end”, but rather in the much shorter and narrower sense of immediate purpose and *method*. A machine serves a purpose and its purpose is fulfilled by the mechanics or methodology, but it does not have an external objective or purpose.

It may be overreach to persist in suggesting that Hume was consciously determined to theorize about and write a non-teleological history. More likely it was the certain, natural result of his beliefs and actions upon those beliefs. We know he was a skeptic and an anti-theist. Much of Hume's objective was, like Voltaire, to utterly and completely eradicate the Church's influence and superstition, and to remove any and all gods from the natural world and human experience. He also had no particular interest in coddling or hiding the stupidity of the people in control—the aristocracy—from the reader of history. Like Voltaire, he too told the story the way it was: with predictable effect. But, he truly believed that his brand of rationalist-skeptical thinking and explanation would serve the world better than the existing alternative. It was under Humian influence that telic goals disappeared from history.

Having opened Pandora's box by calling into serious question the validity and value of God and religious faith, in favour of nature and the natural law, the philosophers and historians ran out of room to maneuver. There were, after all, some questions that simply had no answer—certainly not in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—regardless of how elegant the logic. First cause, purpose, destiny, and the ultimate design or goal are some of the “what is” questions that remained elusively beyond reason despite the treatment afforded them by the likes of Voltaire and Hume. Having pushed the telic goal from the plate of history, the individual and collective psychic hunger to find pattern, reason, and meaning was now unsated. The Rationalists' philosophies left others, and perhaps even themselves, wanting. What was a Rationalist—certain in the abilities of his free will and Reason—to do? As Appleby et al admit, they had to

look to history to discover the laws of human development as those laws worked themselves out in sequential stages. This search for enduring principles of social action, of course, carried with it the assumption that beneath the flow of the daily actions of men and women there was an undertow of forces pulling those actions into orderly processes of change.<sup>170</sup>

Another person would have to find a resolution to the problem within the bounds of Reason. That person would be Immanuel Kant.

In age, Immanuel Kant was Hume's senior, but as a philosopher he was a contemporary owing to Hume being a prodigy and Kant's own writing at an advanced age. Kant's reasoning was every bit as demanding as Hume's, and he simply would not accept that which could not be reasoned from his own mind. Where he especially differed from Hume was that he was not nearly as skeptical—mitigated or otherwise.<sup>171</sup> Hume only reluctantly acknowledged an intelligent designer as the logical necessity of the argument from design and as the only reasonable answer to the troubling problem of first cause. Kant assumed an intelligent creator such as God because it was a fiction that permitted him to consider other matters of equal or greater importance. It is this "rational" decision to assume *within theory* something practically unprovable that set Kant apart and moved the world of thought to a new level. As J.D. McFarland describes:

He [Kant] realizes that all thinking is not the thinking of the physicist and that to make sense of some aspects of our experience we must use concepts different from the mechanical, even if these cannot be objectively justified. Such concepts do not enable us directly to extend

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<sup>170</sup> Appleby et al, *Telling the Truth*. p. 241.

<sup>171</sup> Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*. p. 290.

our theoretical knowledge of nature, but he believes that they do enable us to make some products of nature intelligible to ourselves which would remain entirely unintelligible in terms of mechanical concepts alone.<sup>172</sup>

With Kant we see the high idealistic justification for history as an ideal process whose goals remain forever obscure. This was not Aristotle's teleology of a value-based final cause, rather it was a natural purposiveness wherein, as Kant describes in *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*, "All natural capacities of a creature are destined to evolve completely to their natural end."<sup>173</sup> Unable or unwilling to identify a "natural end", Kant sublimated the notion within the process of development and the fullness of time; telos was buried in the process. Finding the mechanist model of understanding too limiting, Kant moved on to an organic heurism which better provided for a teleological comprehension of the natural world. Beck described Kant's theoretical, idealistic justification and thought process for us:

Ideas may be either theoretical or practical. The teleological organization of nature is a theoretical Idea; it regulates our inquiry and leads us to discover causes, even though an explanation in terms of purpose serves only until the mechanical causes are discovered—whereupon the teleological explanation of this thing is replaced by the mechanical, and the teleological Idea remains only to guide us in making the next step.<sup>174</sup>

In effect, Kant applied an hypothesis and began by focussing on the back end of the causal time chain in a theoretical way to reach the practical, mechanical "truth". So, without actually reverting to the divine Providential model, Kant

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<sup>172</sup> McFarland, *Kant's Concept of Teleology*. p. 135.

<sup>173</sup> Kant, *Kant on History*. p. 12.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. p. xx.

chose to work "as if" the first cause were God and there was a final cause or purpose. In between was the process of going from A to B, in which Kant stuck teleology.

Thus was a form of teleology reintroduced by a Rationalist to give meaning and purpose to life and the world. It was snuck in to allow for the development of a practical answer to a theoretical question. And, as in any pressure-laden and combustible situation, the result (Kant's *use* of teleology) that was seen was not the same as the ingredient (Aristotle's and/or Providential teleology) that went in. As described above, teleology was conceptually different in many ways. Most importantly, Kant's telos was theoretical and secular, to be used only as a catalytic device in the process of working and writing history; it was not practical and religious (i.e., a defined goal or objective).

As the eighteenth century closed, teleology, Rationalism, and the philosophy of history had evolved—altered forever from their original (or at least their pre-Enlightenment) conceptions. On the surface, while some scientific historicists had managed to again work the divine into their interpretations of nature and Reason, for the most part the theists had become deists and God was an unspoken theoretical element of their philosophy. "Unspoken" because despite its conceptual necessity and prevalence, the mere utterance of the word God in this context was suspect as an indication of a backward mentality. No longer was a divine plan or destiny given accord. In its stead came the concept of progress in nature—*evolution* in scientific terms. The shift was from a divine God to a divine Nature. In Becker's words: "Obviously the disciples of the Newtonian philosophy had not ceased to worship. They had only given another form and a

new name to the object of worship: having denatured God, they deified nature.<sup>175</sup> But “natural ends” would forever be unknown (and possibly unknowable), so the telos was baked into the process and the method.

As we move into and through the nineteenth century, we find development on the Kantian initiative. This century is generally typified by the Romantic reaction to the speculative history and the Humian (even the mildly better Kantian) absence of *practical* telos in history. And, there is no doubt that the nineteenth century witnessed a hard turn back to purposes, determinism, and a reconciliation with religious faith. But, at least at the outset of the century, the speculative, ideal nature of historical thought was not reduced; it was intensified. If Kant opened the door to a rekindling of teleology in history by focussing on the process, it was Georg Hegel who fanned the flame into a fire.

Hegel’s philosophy of history was every bit as speculative as Kant’s and Hume’s; like Kant, he wrote no significant works of history, only philosophies. As Hegel’s work on the philosophy of history commenced with Kantian ideas, it is natural that he would develop upon the Kantian baseline. In some ways, Hegel could be considered as the codifier of some of Kant’s reasoning. That is, in the sense that Hegel expanded upon and breathed life into some of Kant’s ideas, he was responsible for the extension of Kantian concepts into accepted wisdom about the philosophy of history.

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<sup>175</sup> Becker, *The Heavenly City*. p. 63.

A crucial example of this codification is the way in which Hegel undertook to solidify the organic teleological model for history. His argument that mechanism (the scientific approach based on inductive cause and effect relationships) is “sublated” (i.e., preserved but gone beyond) in teleology and that teleology provides a more appropriate point of view than does mechanism for the study of history,” may have been the crippling blow to the mechanistic view of history; conversely, it may have been the final support required for teleology to again stand firmly in the philosophy of history.<sup>176</sup> Regardless, Hegel’s work continued the idealization of the telos by specifically stating it, but not specifying the telic goal. Thus, he actually continues and solidifies the notion of the process telos.

What Hegel did above and beyond this confirmation of teleology as the primary view of history, however, was to create his extensive philosophy under a “basic thesis about the course of world history: that world history is the process of the spirit’s self-development towards a final end. The end to be reached is . . . the fullest development of the idea of freedom.”<sup>177</sup> This “ideal” thesis would, at this point, appear to be basically consistent with Kant; but in Hegel’s world, the spirit is the actualization of the divine Idea. In this light then, and, in fact, Hegel takes a much larger step toward integrating Providential and secular history. I would contend that the regeneration of strength in the Providential history and the faith in the Judeo-Christian God as a prime mover, even subtextually, in history is the

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<sup>176</sup> Wilkins, *Hegel’s Philosophy of History*. p. 13-4.

<sup>177</sup> Pompa, *Human Nature and Historical Knowledge*. p. 86.

direct result (or, consequence, depending on one's point of view) of Hegel's speculative history. In other words, he not only solidified teleology's position, but also made the case for God's role in that telos.

Although Hegel's influence was significant in each of these respects, and the force of his argument would be felt in many ways, Hegel did not set a groundwork for a single continuation of his line of thought. That is, the impact of Hegel's work and the way he reasoned, is felt throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth in ways he may not have imagined. For example, Hegel's style of argumentation was dialectic, in which he proposed thesis, addressed the antithesis, and arrived at a synthesis. His purpose was to argue God back into history again. One of his students, Karl Marx, used the Hegelian method to do just the opposite.

In Marx, we find a teleological narrative of a different sort, and are required to shift the gears of our thinking away from the speculative to the materialistic. Using Hegel's dialectic thinking and turning Hegel "right side up", Marx establishes a determinist history. The difference is that whereas Hegel's view was that the primary force in society was its general "spirit", from which all development arose, Marx saw the material forces of production (economics) as the primary force driving ideology, belief, and social formations.<sup>178</sup> It is within this practical, materialistic theory that Marx contributes to the great experiment.

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<sup>178</sup> Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth and History*. p. 15.

Without repeating the earlier explanation of Marx and Marxism, we will first recall that, to Marx, "History is the activity of man seeking to achieve his ends; but the ends are . . . inspired and shaped by economic realities."<sup>179</sup> Then, we will note that this extremely deterministic conception of history: the techno-economic deterministic model, is based not on pure speculation, as were the Kantian and Hegelian works, but upon Marx's own study and application of traces of the past. Moreover, his heurism is utterly Godless, which together with the extreme determinism is why some critics have referred to the Marxist model of history as being providential without providence.

It is too easy to dismiss Marx's work as being "out in left field" because it inverts its inspiration, and doesn't appear to follow the developing pattern of historical philosophy. What's more, such a dismissal would miss two crucial points: (a) Marx's work effected a secondary finalizing argument for the need and place for teleology in history, and (b) it attempted to bring the practise and use of the philosophy of history back to a "grounded" level. That is, in Hegel (divine) teleology was given *speculative* support and strength; in Marx, it was given *practical* purpose and value. Moreover, because Marx based and supported his philosophy of history with an actual study and incorporation of the past (at least those parts he wanted and by the perception which he felt they deserved), he once again grounded historicism from the rarified speculative airs in which it had been flying. In this respect did Karl Marx winch up the great experiment into a telic process with an old-fashioned moral goal.

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<sup>179</sup> Bober, *Karl Marx's Interpretation of History*. p. 67. Original source: Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*.

The thing about Marx is that he was really something of an enlightened (Enlightenment-) iconoclast. We see that Marx learned well from Voltaire and Hume, and seems to have wanted to apply their means to his goals. Recall that Voltaire and Hume demolished the telic goal along with the Church's hold and the *Ancien Régime* by their plain language description of history "as it was." Their purpose was only to describe the historical processes and let the chips fall where they may. In Marx we see an attempt to square the historical process (i.e., history as it is/was) with history as it should be in his theoretical conception. Marx's history and philosophy of history is, in effect, a manufacturing of a new goal of historical study. He tries to change the historical process to suit and create "what history ought to be." Marx uses plain language history to build his heuristic world. Metaphorically speaking, Marx used the *Philosophes'* dynamite to try raising his building rather than to raze the existing one.

Ranke, on the other hand, was also a Hegelian, but he followed more closely to Hegel's Providential conception inasmuch as his histories, particularly those of later years, were unabashedly Providential. He felt "the breath of God" everywhere. Ranke's twist on the Hegelian model was to focus on the individual rather than on the speculative "humanity". In this way, his histories were more closely grounded with the past—similarly to Marx's—than the legacy philosophies of history upon which he built. He was, in my opinion the archetypal, dictionary-definition, Romantic: gothic, focussed on the individual, and concerned with the state as a defining feature in history.

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p. 125 and Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. p. 9.

The divine telos—destiny, fate, Providence, etc.—bubbles on the surface of Ranke's work. We do not have to question his meaning. So, we can, without undue argument simply state that he proposed and advocated a divine Christian Providential telos in history. Once again, in the context of the great experiment, we see teleology being ingrained into historical method by an eminent historian. Ranke was not a lead scientist out to break new ground and find new knowledge. But he believed in the rightness of the method. Despite and parallel to his providential subtext, Ranke was a methodist who believed that the meaning was inherent in and would fall out of the process. But, Ranke's influence is less in what he did than that he did it at all.

The word “eminence” crystallizes Ranke's importance to the great experiment and the solid seating of teleology in the methods of history. That he chose Providential history as a telic goal is nice but inconsequential; that he disbelieved in progress except as created and defined by the individual is secondary. That he “told history as it was”, however, created for him a widely-respected reputation as a leader in the true, scientific profession of history. His integrity to the purpose of telling history as it was only by reference to the sources stood him in high stead. That he was, within the profession of history, a respected, admired, and influential practitioner was of utmost import to his contribution to bringing closure to the great experiment. Simply, others believed (perhaps misguidedly, but we will not get into that) in what Ranke was doing and *how he was doing it*, and they chose to follow him even if they disagreed with his interpretations. The interpretation of the past was, to Ranke, a function of the proper technique. Thus did he entrench teleology inside historicism.

Finally, to close the period and our discussion of the great experiment by way of epilogue-like “after the fact” quasi-proof, I would recall to you the very late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century world histories which we very briefly mentioned in an earlier section (Toynbee and Spengler). Their underlying narrative was that of progress, determinism, and cyclical, all of which are shamelessly teleological. That this undercurrent, coming on the heels of the Romantic period, is a remnant of the great experiment is, I think, without question. That pseudo-world histories written in the dying light of the twentieth century (Kennedy and Fukuyama) would also be highly pattern driven and teleological again speaks to the endurance of the teleological conception of history. Modern history tries to employ the methods of science in the search for causality, and I think we can justifiably speculate that it is to a large degree produced with what appears to be a subnarrative of process and function: a telos. And, so history comes to a strict dictionary definition of teleology as provided in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: “view that developments are due to the purpose or design that is served by them.”

I find it interesting to consider that while the Rationalists could have simply attached to the divine telos (which was done in small degrees anyway) and left it at that, the scientific, reasoning mind instead developed upon the notion of “process.” Process is the true underlying driving force of modernity, especially as it relates to history. In truth, it is a convenient and pleasing telos that Rationalism could accept—again, because it was sanctioned or proven by Rationalist means. To begin, it is rational and natural. Moreover, process implies a degree of human

agency and development. In truth, the process teleology works at both the individual and societal levels; within the immediacy of a generation and in the long view of millennia. The process teleology underlies all other modern varieties and themes of history. One could assess process as little more than manifest destiny underwritten by science.

Process was the result of a general human need, in the wake of the so-called “killing of God” and destruction of both faith-based and other historical telic goals—as communicated to widening circles of people—in favour of meaning and certainty, or at least stability. Perhaps it was only the most likely, or first alternative that caught hold. Regardless, it was able to root in the fertile, secular and scientific, historical schema. With process underlying the metanarrative, history would again have an invincible teleology not dissimilar to the providential narrative that had been displaced and for a time abandoned. I would suggest that it was the redevelopment of teleology through the various speculative frameworks: once as natural providence, then—after disappearing for a time—as a theoretical conception, then in a form of natural progress, once again in the form of divine Providence, onward splitting in one form into economic determinism, and ultimately as a broadly-understood development of method and process, that contributed to its rebirth and strength. I am not sure what would have resulted if the divine telos had been successfully co-opted in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Another holdover of the pre-Enlightenment Christian historical form to be reintroduced in the Rationalist schema is Determinism. For instance, Voltaire’s later writings are decidedly determinist to the point of being fatalist, and Marx’s

writings are nothing if not determinist. Apparently, free will and total human agency is a very difficult responsibility with which to be burdened. Some degree of agency, to exercise free will, is desirable; too much is scary. Thus, cause and effect, first cause, and the notion of Nature's purpose (telos) being to provide humans with the opportunity to achieve total, perfect freedom of will and thought are put to work within the method to provide Determinist causes that are earthly and man-made. Determinism, as we know, is a factor in historical writing that ranges from the relatively benign to the excessively all-controlling.

Finally, a contribution to the world of professional history ushered in by this great experiment is the skepticism which informs our ongoing critical assessment of the past. The clarifying force of doubt unleashed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries remains with us in a somewhat tempered form. From Voltaire's maxim of "*vide, quaere, dubita*" (see, inquire, doubt) through to Ranke's "*wie es eigentlich gewesen*" historians today spend much more effort questioning the past for validity than happened prior to the Age of Reason. Were the experiment to have resulted in nothing more than this, it would have been a very positive experience. Perhaps the only shortcoming in the questioning of historical validity is the concentration placed on the validity and value of the sources rather than on the meaning and idea they imply. Voltaire and Hume had probably never intended that their skepticism would be put to quibbling over shades of grey. It was the grey that they tried to eliminate; their world was perfectly black and white.

I have referred to this two-century process in the development of Rationalist-Romantic thinking *vis à vis* the concept of teleology in history as a great experiment. It is not my intent to suggest that the experiment was planned or understood at the time, nor that it was a concerted effort by two generations of historians and philosophers. Rather, in classifying the events and developments as an experiment, I mean only that in my opinion the process can ultimately be seen as following a pattern (Would I now be suggesting my own teleological read of the events? Maybe so.) that resembles science at work. I find this particular analogy operative due to the nature and the results of the historical work produced by the six representative writers evaluated in this paper.

Given the results of their respective efforts and works as described previously in this section, and on the plane of actual historical writing vs. speculative historical writing, the following pattern emerges:

1. Prior to the Age of Reason, speculative history production was at a minimum because the accepted historicist position was the Christian Providential telos. Practical histories were written. Teleology in history was in the form of extrinsic telic goals.
2. The Scientific Rationalists upset the status quo by attempting to impose their natural law and scientific method on everything including history.
3. Voltaire wrote primarily practical histories from which we can glean or infer his speculative position. He used method and plain language description of the process of history to decimate the social status quo.

4. Hume wrote some practical histories but was much more prolific and specific in his speculative historicist works. He inculcated the scientific method into the description of historical processes and destroyed the telic goals of history.
5. Kant wrote no practical history, only speculated on the nature of the philosophy of history. He employed "as if" to refocus telos on the methodology of determining history and its processes.
6. Hegel also wrote effectively no practical history, concentrating on his speculative model, which expanded on Kant's process telos.
7. Marx produced practical histories, and his speculative works and theories were grounded in the realities of the past. He attempted, however, to employ the historical processes as they were to the creation of history as it should be.
8. We only find speculative historicist writings from Ranke within the text of his many practical histories. Ranke typified the late scientist going back over the same ground concentrating on the precision of the method.
9. Telic goals appear and are withheld depending on the historian; what remains constant is professional devotion to the sacred value in the historical process and methodology of the craft.

It is not my intent to judge, but in summarizing the value of the twists and turns in reasoning *vis à vis* history over the almost three centuries contemplated

in this analysis, I think there are two valid views of the outcome, as seen from the back end of the process. First, the great experiment in teleological denial in history was an abject failure from the perspective of the Scientific Rational purist's hypothesis and theory being denied in practice. Teleology, a conception that is, as we have seen in Hume's and Kant's work, incompatible with pure reason, did not stay down. I suspect and have proposed that the reason for this is the inherent human need to maintain a future-directed faith. As such, non-teleological history as a long-standing historicist form, could not hold.

On the other hand—and in my estimation the better perspective—this great experiment may have been successful in ways that nobody could have considered prior or during its process. If one considers the several long-lasting beneficial effects on methodology, secularization, and force of mind put toward history as described and listed earlier, there is no alternative but to concede that the experiment was valuable to the development of and interest in the practise of history.

More specifically considering the issue of how teleology has been essentially entrenched into the process of writing of modern history, I believe that the clarifying and distilling force of this experiment has benefited historicism in general. Perhaps less beneficial is that the faith and focus rests in and on the process and method rather than on the result to be found. Making the goal the means rather than the end fundamentally alters the thinking about the subject, in this case the past and its effect on the present. What an assessment of this experiment can lead us to consider is that maybe the possibility exists that the only practical value in attempting to do history without a teleological

undercurrent is its effect in provoking a change in thinking with the understanding that telos will remain integral to the philosophy of history.

To that end, let us very briefly consider the twentieth century complement to the skepticism of the eighteenth century: Post-modernism. Given the skeptical, doubting, nihilist undercurrent of Post-modernism, which is in a very real sense similar in relative situation and consequence to the Rationalist attack on the seventeen/eighteenth-century status quo, could we not evaluate post-modernism in the same light as the great experiment of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? Post-modernism questions the underlying values of the modern method and the modern telos in history. It provokes thought now (with some people) about the secular teleology where the *Philosophes* provoked thought about validity of the Divine Providential telos and the skeptic provoked thought about the value in any type of telos. Both demand a readdress and evaluation of the methods, the process, and the status quo of how we think about history.

I would step out on a limb to suggest and predict that Post-modernism will probably not last on its own at least in part because of its inherent nihilism. The human creature, I think we have abundantly established, requires future-looking purpose and meaning; something absent from Post-modernism. Having said that, however, I would be remiss not to note that the historicist process is leading to gender, social, native, intellectual, and specialist histories that are just as revolutionary as those of Voltaire and Hume. Post-modern historicism in particular is questioning the historicist process. My basis for coming to this boldly

unsubstantiated assessment is, of course, history itself as we have examined it in the course of this brief essay.

## Chapter VII

### CONCLUSION

A great experiment in the denial of teleology in history was conducted during the period from the mid-seventeenth century through to the end of the nineteenth century. Given that its cause was a development in human understanding and a desire to apply that new understanding (scientific method and natural law) to history, the experiment was in some senses a purifying or distilling activity. An untenable status quo, specifically in the irrational and uncritical overholding of Christian Providential teleology as the metanarrative of history, was attacked by intelligent, reasoning people. That they chose to attack because their reasoning precluded them from accepting the superstitions perpetuated by the Church in its control of the prevailing historicist position was merely the triggering issue. The underlying matter was resolving a Classico-Medieval thought pattern (i.e., the psychic need for purpose and direction in the human experience) with a new, modern approach (scientific method). The eventual result was a purification of both thought patterns. The result was just as Frank Ramsey would have predicted.<sup>180</sup> The old approach was confirmed; the new methods were established.

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<sup>180</sup> "Ramsey's maxim": "It is a heuristic maxim that the truth lies not in one of the two disputed views but in some third possibility which has not yet been thought of, which we can only discover by rejecting something assumed as obvious by both the disputants." Beck, *Essays on Kant and Hume*. p. 11. Original source: Frank Ramsey, *The Foundations of Mathematics*. (London, 1931) pp. 115-6.

What we learn from this great experiment is that teleology in some form is an essential feature of the writing and understanding of history. That is not to say that the past can not be comprehended in the mechanistic, cause-and-effect sense of scientific method. But there is a difference between comprehending the past or appreciating the recorded goings on from days gone by, and understanding its meaning to the development of people and to the present. Without a teleological framework of some sort, however, there is no logical way to propose or understand a meaning in history. The value of finding meaning as opposed to comprehending the causal patterns that have led to a point in time is in the human spirit. If this great experiment contributed nothing else to the study of history, it proved that humans look forward and seek to understand the past based on direction and purpose. On the whole it would appear that we have trouble coping with the past except on the basis of its import on the present and the future. And, if we can not bring ourselves to understand an acceptable future purpose, then we seek solace elsewhere such as in the methods and process of history itself.

To that extent, people will pick and choose their purpose and objective from a variety of options: some form of practical determinist telos such as Marx's, a Providential design such as Ranke's; progress, method and process; or any from the host of others that may come and go. It makes little difference; people need purpose and direction wherever it comes from—even from within. Within this context it seems that we can make a reasonably strong conclusion that in the long run teleology will remain in history writing in some form. I would suggest that we can be reasonably certain that it will be in the method, since this home appears

to be invincible against both theoretical and practical attack. Regardless, on the whole there will always be a subtext of purpose and objective driving the interpretation of fact and data from the past.

Curiously, teleology, be it divine or natural, presupposes a direction and therefore both a start and an end. But because the observer/writer is necessarily positioned in the middle of the time continuum, it is impossible to determine and conclude an end or a goal for history—or a direction for that matter—with any degree of certainty.<sup>181</sup> Thus the allure of telos in the method, which is independent of temporal position. We must operate and think within the supposition of that purpose, direction, or goal. Our interpretations of the past, our story, will only then be sensible and psychically satisfying to the people in general regardless of whether there is agreement in the analysis and conclusions. Therein lies the art.

As Huizinga says, "historical thinking is always teleological. Though the past supplies our material and compels our attention, though the mind realizes that not one minute of the future can be predicted, none the less it is the eternal future that moves our mind."<sup>182</sup> We have little choice but to accept that teleology will exist in historical thinking because we will forever be interpreting the past from the present. The only question is how much and what kind of

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<sup>181</sup> Nash, *Ideas of History* Vol. 1. p. 222. Original source: Maurice Mandelbaum, *The Problem of Historical Knowledge*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) p. 319.

<sup>182</sup> Fritz Stern, *The Varieties of History: from Voltaire to the present*. (London: Meridian Books, 1956) p. 293. (Huizinga, "Historical Conceptualization")

teleology should be tolerated.<sup>183</sup> But it is where the telos resides that will determine the kind of history we produce and wherefrom its value is derived.

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<sup>183</sup> Wilson, *History in Crisis?* p. 9.

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