…with a long sense of time…

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Such an introduction is a wonderful privilege, even if a sober voice in me discounts most of my alleged virtues as doubtful ones. That faculty selection committees make an occasional mistake in no way diminishes my gratitude for the exceptional privilege of standing before you as this year's Ryerson Lecturer I have long felt extremely privileged to be at this University; I am grateful for its education I am grateful for the colleagues it offers, and particularly for the students it lets me teach, and, in turn, be taught by, and the time it lets me have for writing. Life cannot be more privileged than when it gives you a great love, wonderful friends and colleagues, a salary for doing what you truly want to do, and a deeply rewarding professional life.

The confessions of such a privileged man, in my case, easily turn into the confessions of a historian, or more correctly, of someone who since the age of thirteen has tried to become a historian. Since then my imagination has been captured by the vision of mankind expressing itself in ever changing cultural configurations. The subject and its problems are so vast that one exclaims, like the Breton manner putting out to sea: "My God protect me, my ship is so little, and Thy ocean so great!" Ideally done, one would chart the course of world history from the first appearance of man to this troubled age of our own. But for that my ship is too little and my courage too small; in those seas this poor sailor will drown. My experience of working with Louis Gottschalk on Volume IV of the UNESCO History of the Cultural and Scientific Development of Mankind was enough of this sort of thing. My vision of human worlds is also limited by lacking the anthropologists' theoretical bent and by an aversion to life in the Amazon or New Guinea jungles. I do not have the patience of the archaeologist and decipherer of cuneiform inscriptions, so that the long history of the Ancient Near East is but a hazily perceived human world for me. My very limited knowledge of languages has fumed my professional life to the civilization of our Western World from the Greeks to our century when this civilization has established itself as such a dominant one. If my friends want to remember me as its enthusiastic defender, they will honor me. Of course, this subject is still too vast ever to permit me to be a scholar. For even if I work on it for fifty years, perhaps giving me a better understanding of it than others who invest less time and energy in it, I will still be a dilettante and not the kind of scholar for whom these lectures were created. As a historian I am, moreover, haunted by the imprecise and shifting quality of my discipline. Other historians will try to make history a science, or at least more scientific. Some historical knowledge is indeed solid knowledge. But for me the urge to understand the dead runs up against most formidable obstacles and the severe limitation of skills. At best I

can hope for a gradually growing esprit de finesse, allowing me intelligent guesswork about mere plausibilities. To the scientist it must look like a laughable discipline resulting at best in vague and shadowy understanding.

For what I want to say today, however, it is less important that history be a sound discipline than that it has become a deeply felt need of life. It was not written in the stars that we should be compelled to understand nature through mathematics. Just as little was it given to man that he must understand his own realities through history. Whatever else we are, we are also creatures of culture. And not all cultures have equally predisposed their individuals either toward mathematical or historical understanding. Long historical developments (which one can readily describe) have made our Western minds strikingly receptive to historical understanding. History is now one of the great modes of viewing the world. We have become more accustomed to join our need for understanding "Becoming" with our culturally ingrafted habit of probing for an understanding of "Being." Our penchant for explaining our human world genetically, that is as a development, has been strengthened since the eighteenth century when the static order of the world, expressed for centuries in the conception of the "Great Chain of Being," fell apart, when the notion of creation as a completed act gave way to a growing conviction that the earth and its creatures were evolving realities, that the sun and the planets had their history, and when some daring minds became willing to think that God also is a Becoming rather than a static Being. Besides the logic of scientific reason we now are willing to accommodate historical reason. Our mental make-up has acquired a strong historical dimension. It has for me. In this, as in many other aspects, I do not know whether I can speak for other historians. For many I am much too old-fashioned, and too slow a thinker who cannot keep up with the latest theories. It is enough for me that I feel humbly related to my colleagues by a common love for the past and our shared enthusiasm to give our lives to its explanation. The historical dimension of our minds and being, the tendency to rely on historical reason, is fundamental to me. It informs all I do in talking and in writing. I could have opted for a more scholarly account of the work I am now doing on problems of the Baroque Age, but I hope it is in the spirit of these lectures if I state for you, in everyday language, what it means for me to live with a strong historical outlook.

It all starts with the great wonder of time. At least, it did for me. When I was thirteen I read two books that steered me toward history. They were very different books. A fine teacher at the Quaker school in Holland, which shaped much of me, directed me to Jacob Burckhardt's *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*, his world historical reflections which James H. Nichols, formerly of our Divinity school, translated under the title *Force and Freedom*. When I took up the book again eight years later, I kept shaking my head in disbelief: what could the thirteen-year-old have understood of that subtly complicated book? But something of its majesty stayed with me; perhaps I noticed vaguely that it is a book on the Historical dimension, *das*

Historische, and certainly I was taken by this reflective contemplation of big historical questions. The other book was Hendrik Van Loon's *History of Man*. Aside from a squiggly pen drawing of a temple on a hill, I remember nothing of his treatment of human history, nor do I care to find out now. But I know that I totally fell under the spell of the effects of the silly little story he placed at the beginning of the book. In a fabled land lies a bald granite mountain. Every hundred years a little bird comes to it to sharpen its beak by grating it against the mountain. When the bird will have worn down the whole mountain, not even one second of eternity will have passed. This is a silly story for anyone who will have learned from Saint Augustine that eternity, as the opposite of time, cannot be measured against time. But to the youngster, still thinking of eternity as an immensely long span of time. the effect of the story was overwhelming. The vast dimension of time suddenly opened up. There was no longer just the comfortable Dutch present and the short memories of a fearful world of a broken home, being shunted back and forth between a loved mother, a dreaded father, and overmeticulous German grandparents, or the inability of remembering a single friend or playmate in that crazy world which was Germany in the early thirties. Suddenly the boy felt related to a vast span of time filled with lives potentially as real as his own. I guess I have been searching ever since to uncover these lives, at least in the context of the Western world to which I belong. A reading of the first chapters in H. G. Wells's *History*, about the long climb from physical chaos to cultured life, never quite repeated the impact; much later I did again sense that wonder of time in Loren Eiseley's *The Immense Journey* on the rise of the angiosperms and how flowers changed the world. But there I ultimately missed what had meanwhile become most important to me: man as the maker of his way of life, *homo ludens*, the great player with cultural forms far transcending his biological needs'. A humanized sense of time, filled with the search for the meaning of human life, had superimposed itself on the bewildering immensity of physical time which my non-philosophical and non-mathematical mind could not grasp. It remained a great puzzle how the self at every moment that is but a present could relate itself to what is no longer and to what is not yet. This was clarified by Saint Augustine's own struggle with time in Books 10 and 11 of the *Confessions*. In the inwardness of our experience, always in a present, we are given a present time of past life by our memory, a present of present time in which we have all we have, and a present time of future time made up of our hopes and expectations. It is the humanized sense of time in which our present has what has already been thus or so, and in which our present also faces the openness of time to come. Thus, even the grand non-human subjects of rocks, of organisms, and of the stars become time-bound to what men have thought about these subjects, what they think now, and what they may think in the future. In his perpetual present man can only account to himself for whatever draws his attention in the present of past, the present of present, and the present of future time.

With such a sense of time, we live in time. We live in history as we now see it, as we now make it, and as we hope it to be. We live with our history. Ultimately, I would say: we are our history. Others would not. I am a pluralist and I believe we must practice great tolerance. As such I consider it good that other minds, founded more in a sense of eternity, seek the permanence of things, are able to compare Plato and Kant as though time made no difference to thought, and that they believe in the eternal values of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. But the time-bound quality of everything human haunts me. Granted, the historian also works with certain plausible constancies; if we did not assume that our own muscle power is roughly comparable to that of the Ancient Egyptians, we could not contradict an assertion that the Great Pyramid was built by two lusty Egyptians on a sunny Sunday afternoon when they had nothing better to do. In barely 6,000 years of a human evolution of a million years, the biological machinery of man has presumably not changed very much. For the better part of these 6,000 years we are likely to have ingested and digested in the same basic manner, procreated, struggled with mothers, suffered pain, laughed, and died in the same biological way. But during the same span of time, the seemingly stable organism has used its energy for so many differing ventures, focused its roving attention on different matters, thought vastly different thoughts, spoke differently, felt very differently about very similar things, crafted its objects in very different fashion, walked to different tunes, fed its stomach in distinctly different ways, and dressed its "natural" urges in such different habits that one can hardly say what is "natural" and what is "acculturated." The more the essential biological constants disappear behind this welter of change, behind variation and variability and the telling differences and manifold richness of expression, the larger looms the fascination with the fact of human culture. Man seems to be doing very much more than simply perpetuating biological life. His dreams and hopes of the good life drive him beyond the biological base of his life. He finds surplus energy which he invests in the creation of cultural forms and techniques, in refined feelings, in ideas and imaginations. And he constantly plays around with his own creations and varies them. He embodies his needs within his creations, so that even the biological urges appear under different covers. The serious task of maintaining biological life is thus subsumed in a play for stakes far transcending that task. The player with free energies, *homo ludens*, places his needs and simple drives within his plav with cultural forms. All human actions then become shaped and colored by the moments and the specific conditions of such play. And it may seem as if "man has no nature, all he has is a history." Ortega y Gasset exaggerates in this pronouncement. But his exaggeration is useful because it points to the historian's fundamental concern: learn to perceive man in his historical dimension, learn to understand how he came to be what he is now, learn to understand him by his history.

We resort to many techniques and modes of explanation in accounting to ourselves for the puzzles within us and outside us. We employ the force of deductive logic and logical inference, the calculations of

means to ends of a "purpose rationality," or the more specialized forms of explanation of our many sciences. Aside from the question whether these are historically conditioned modes of knowing—which I think they are—we forever run into phaenomena for which only a historical explanation will do. Only the story of British actions against Acadian fanners along the St. Lawrence River can help explain why there were enclaves of French-speaking farmers scattered from Maine to Georgia, and why they speak Cajun (or Acadian.) around St. Martinsville, La. Why does the cathedral at Amalfi look so moorish, when just a bit further north in Rome hardy any church has such traits? When Voltaire's lady friend, the Marquise de Chatelet, thought she could explain everything by the new scientific mode of reasoning, he (who had done so much to popularize such reasoning in France) doubted that anything but a long story could explain why a Turkish Sultan now ruled in Constantine's Christian capital of Constantinople. For us, Constantinople has become Istanbul; St. Petersburg is not St. Petersburg any more; and even Crawford Avenue in Chicago is hard to find. If you are presently attending to this matter, your own mind teems with your own examples. Why is it that while you are thinking your thoughts, your ears are being assaulted by this frightful accent, incapable of managing the "*th*'s," the "*v*'s," and the "*w*'s"? I could only answer this by telling you the story of how a Russian, running away from the Revolution, and a Hessian-Alsatian woman had a son whom the Dutch were kind enough to harbor in a time of need, whom New Jersey Quakers helped to come to this country, to whom an admissions counselor at Columbia University said: "Young man! there is but one place for you to go! The University of Chicago!" And whom Edward Levi—I assume against his better judgment—granted tenure. And so forth, and so forth. I know it in my bones that History has its reasons whereof Reason knows not. And hundreds of complex historical reasons explain why I can formulate this conviction as I do, not the least of which is that I have read Pascal's fine phrase about the heart having its reasons whereof reason knows not. When I want to account for myself in my human world I need to tell a long, endlessly intertwined story.

In the present of my past life I find myself related to countless other lives. They are present in my present life because I am their heir. Our own existence has been made possible only because these former others have prepared it for us. We live off others. Without consulting us, they put us into a world we did not make. We must start out our lives in the human world which their lives force upon us. Had we not inherited their world, we could not function. We can walk securely where they have smoothed out the earth for us. We are fed by ground they have broken for us. We speak and read and understand because they have already created a language for us. Their lives enable us to have civilized lives, for they gave us the law, their refined thoughts and sentiments, their customs, institutions, and arts—even their libraries and museums, grand symbols of heritage. We always find ourselves at a highly specified place in the immense network of a wholly man-made world that both sustains us and demands that we cope with it. Fashioned

by the interactions of millions of intentions guiding busy minds and fingers, it is a reality so complex that it cannot easily be summed up in a simple compressed formulation. I guess we call it culture. But this reality constantly demands from us to be understood. To understand it, we must understand those who gave it to us and forced it on us. They, in rum, are to be understood through those who gave them their world. Surrounded by their effects in our present, our ever-expanding memory associates us with the countless dead receding into deeper layers of time. Many "whys" and “hows" of our question may lead back no further than grandfather's generation: but for such a simple matter (and is it indeed so simple?) as to why I let my day be governed by a division of hours into sixty minutes, I need to go back to some people along the Tigris and Euphrates, several thousand years ago, who had their own reasons for thinking in terms of sixties, and who deemed this the right way of dividing the flow of time. To live with my world as a thoughtful heir is to find myself more and more profoundly being related to the world of the dead—dead and gone, and, yet, my present benefactors and my burden.

Some find it easy to live as heirs. They take the laboriously elaborated man-made world as if it were a piece of nature, or had dropped ready-made from heaven, a reality that is simply there for their indiscriminate use. They exhibit the mentality of the spoiled child, a puerilism that is literally an act of barbarism. They have no sense for the colossal price humanity has paid for a culture; they share little of the awesome gratitude filling us when we understand that we live off others. This plague of the thoughtless heir may have beset every society; it seems particularly rampant in our world. Among such offenders are also those intoxicated grown-up children who neglect the care for the inheritance, because they feel entitled to remake the whole world according to their fantasies. They are right that this inherited world is staggeringly complicated, that their dreams are simpler and nicer, and that it is hard to be a responsible heir. To live with a heritage demands from us grateful acceptance of what has been given, but also its continued cultivation by responsible use. The talents of silver cannot be buried safely for fear of losing them. We risk them by using them, as did those whose labor gave them to us. Our life may often appear to us as the captive of the present of past time. But the present of future time, as our present anticipation and hope, endows our life also with an open-endedness which makes us free beings. And as the future dead, we will leave a modified inheritance for still others.

As present heirs, living at the very edge where the accumulation of past human deeds meets the open future to which we will give shape, the very position we hold in between past and future is an absolute given for us. We should accept it, but man does not always do so. For it is easy to sacrifice the present to the past, and easy to sacrifice the present to the future. Nostalgic atavism and impatient utopianism both create problems for us. Wanting to go home again to a less complicated world we remember or dream up turns us into the heirs who bury the talents of silver for safe-keeping, instead of using them for expanding

present life. It is probably such a temptation because we are the products of a volatile, restless civilization that often moves with great rapidity and has fostered beliefs in many backward-looking renaissances. In contrast, to declare the past an unbearable error that we should undo by replacing it with the wishful constructs of our minds denies us the benefits of being heirs. To be Utopian means, after all, to stand nowhere when we actually have no other place to stand but in our present past. In a symbolic manner our modernity has been marked by the act of Descartes, wiping out the past by creating his *tabula rasa*, the clean slate on which to draw the blueprint of an errorless rational scheme (though he argued his case in an almost Scholastic manner), or by the acts of French revolutionaries trying to bring forth from the egg of their pure thoughts a whole new world which, of course, was beset by ever so many features of an undeniable past. The problem of our atavistic and Utopian tendencies lies in our heritage. But the more we know ourselves as historical beings, the more we also know that we can only move to the future by standing at the edge of time at which historical development has placed us, without being forever its captive.

In our own historical moment we are related to a vast backward-stretching order. Even if we were to heed the view favored by many that "history is just one damned thing after another," we observe the force of the "after another." It is important that one thing happens after another. The force of historical reality is the force of sequential reality. For present-day Americans it is important that Ronald Reagan was elected after Jimmy Carter, that the end of Watergate came when it came, that we experienced the Vietnam War when we experienced it, that John Kennedy was assassinated before this war developed more fully, that the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were dropped after D-Day in Normandy, and so on backwards. It matters immensely that the Russian Revolution came after Lenin thought his thoughts, and that he did so after Marx and Engels thought their thoughts, and that Engels continued to think about Mark's thoughts when Marx was no longer there to correct him. It is not an indifferent matter that Louis XIV was not a contemporary of Queen Elizabeth but of William III. The Peloponnesian War cannot be placed prior to the Persian War. Wittgenstein thought his thoughts after Husserl and Frege, after Hegel, after Kant, after Wolf and Leibnitz, after Descartes, after Duns Scotus who cannot be placed before Thomas Aquinas, who thought after Abelard and Anselm, after Boethius, and after Augustine, whose thought came after Plotinus, who thought after Aristotle and Plato. It matters immensely that Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, Posidonius, Cicero, and Philo preceded Jesus and Paul, Justin and Tertullian, Origen and Cyprian, and Anthony and Ambrose and Augustine. Any part of this sequential order can be enriched by placing ever more persons and events in the proper places of the sequence. This, and everything else you wish to think, is part of an immense order. Nothing in this order can be inverted. There is no plea or theory at work here saying that Duns Scotus had to think his specific thoughts after Thomas Aquinas had left him a specific problem. The point is very simply that, since Scotus thought after Thomas, this "fact" has a binding force. In the past, phenomena have to stay where past

life put them. Those who do not care much for the flow of time will feel no qualms about taking Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, Abelard, Erasmus, Locke, and Kant out of the order so that they may inspect and compare positions on fine ethical theories, as though thought dwelled in a timeless world. I can see the usefulness of such exercises of the mind. But the historical injunction haunts me that I may falsify men's thoughts when I lift them out of the context in which they were thought. As Wilhelm Dilthey noted, men think their thoughts in the face of their specific circumstances. Whether thought and artistic creations, unlike fish, can survive in free air after having been pulled out of their place in the stream of time is not an uninteresting question; whether they can do so because we reinsert them into our moment in the stream of time is another interesting question. But each one also whispers to us: "Please, heed my moment and the setting of my own moment."

When the force of this sequential order makes itself felt, the arch-sin of anachronism becomes the unpardonable error. On one level it is such a laughable error and the historian's righteousness such unbearable pedantry. What, in Heaven's name, does it matter that Shakespeare lets the cannons roar in *Julius Caesar*? In a way, it is charming that he does so. It smacks of superciliousness to object that Lucas Cranach in his crucifixion dresses the Roman soldiers around the Cross in the armor of sixteenth century Swiss *Landsknechte*. Is not there real value instead in the dose identification with the central Christian drama of which such men were still capable? But the issue changes when a professor tells a student: "No, it is not all right to write a paper about John Locke's influence on Descartes! Although it may be all right to write about Locke's influence on the history of Cartesianism because of the way in which Locke perceived Descartes' thought!" The student's anachronism is not charmingly, but blatantly, wrong. Christians, who had a good deal to do with fostering our Western historical sensitivities, knew how deadly a sin anachronism could be. As Paul suggests, the Jews forfeited their claim to being God's chosen People when they misread the historical moment, when they failed to recognize the Messiah in Jesus. He who acts after the crucifixion as though the crucifixion had not happened is blind and lost. For the Christian the anachronistic sin stands in the way of salvation. At different times during the course of the year, my students read Perikles' *Funeral Oration* and Mussolini's defense of the Fascist state. The *Oration* is a powerful glorification of the Athenian polis as the greatest state, "the Hellas of Hellas," the state which has achieved so much that it has the unquestioned right to demand the service of the whole Athenian citizen. Mussolini speaks of the Fascist state as "the soul of soul," as the only legitimate reality which can give life and direction to its citizens, and which, therefore, has the right to claim and to dominate all individuals. If we praise Perikles in the fall, why do we sneer at Mussolini in the spring? But surely, the student should see a difference made by time. Athens, as an early society, has succeeded in lifting itself out of a more primitive tribal kinship society to a higher plane of existence by trusting the power of the polis state. Mussolini, with

an atavistic theory, denies and undoes centuries of Western man's efforts to raise the dignity of the individual by respecting his rights against the Leviathan state. The anachronistic student has missed the point of the course. He cannot claim a tuition refund, although I, perhaps, should be fired for having failed him as a teacher.

The grand sequential order of history is something much more fundamental than the systematic orders that the minds of some thinkers impose on history: the theologically determined providential order of Augustine or Bishop Bossuet, the logical order of spirit and mind seen by Hegel, the patterns of class-struggle and dialectical materialism of Marx, the cultural morphology of Spengler, or the many views of manifest destiny and the ideas of progress. These grand schemes of historical order always have an element standing beyond the sequential order of history. They impose something on the sequential order, although they are also related to this order in very profound ways. They constitute very specific modes of reading that vast and intricate sequential order. Their driving impulse is our irresistible desire to find an overall meaning in the past. They necessarily differ from one another because we possess no single definitive explanation of life. Most of such schemes of interpreting history are monocausal schemes, illustrating our temptation for opening up the meaning of human life with one simple key, by reference to one single cause. They are not useless, for they tell us how men at different times have seen and interpreted the human past. They are thus, in themselves, interesting historical facts. They can, at times, be fruitful by suggesting interrelations among historical phenomena which could not be seen without such specific prisms of historical perception. But often they result from ideologies, concerns projected into a desired future, and then they reduce knowledge of the past to propaganda for that future. They can be a stimulation for the historian. But they also are an irritant to him when they violate the sequential order filling him with awe and feeding his sense of responsibility for that fundamental order. That order rarely appears to him as a schematic order or a straight-line logical continuum. So much that was important has been lost. WhenIthink about how much I have learned from Thucydides, I can still tremble at the thought of being without his wisdom and insights if anything had happened to the two manuscripts in which he survived. So much depends on chance recoveries, on the discontinuities and zigzags of human activities and the logically unexpected byways of cultural twists and turns. And yet, the most conscientious historian will find it unavoidable that he also brings his own bias to that sacrosanct order.

The present of present time from which the historian undertakes his retrospective viewing involves him in a very specific perspective. He sees his world as the heritage of a vast interrelated past yielding to historical reason. The effort to understand the heritage is an effort to understand the present. Present needs determine the perspectives on the relevant segments of past human experience. The present interests help to sort out and to highlight the past elements. Thus, we may need to understand the working of our specific

democratic society, or why and how science came to dominate much of our lives, or how we came to think of ourselves as ineffable individualities. In this we cannot help viewing and understanding and interpreting the past from a perspective given to us by our placement in the present of present time. And every following generation will have to reinterpret our interpretations from its own presentist perspective.

But in opposition to this "presentism," the working historian will also experience that the dead force him away from his present concerns. In a way they ask him to exchange his perspective for their own. For while he asks the dead to illumine his present world, he will also find that they thought thoughts, had feelings, and acted in ways that have little or no relevance to his own world. Like him, they must have tried to live whole lives that, as a whole, were quite different from his own. Thus he discovers another human form, one that has ceased to be, the other human whom only the past has, even if we possess his partial expressions in the signals left to us. Our present has no Caesar, no Augustine, no Saint Francis. The only way in which we can get a glimpse of such other ways of being human is by trying to uncover them in their past moments; and if we do not try to perceive them there, we will not know of that part of human existence. We want to be understood for what we are, so we must extend to them the courteous act of trying to understand them on their own terms, by the light of their moments, their values, their hopes, and aspirations. We must cease to use them for our purposes. Then we will seek behind the text or artifact for the full human lives of which these are but remaining expressions, imposing as little of our own world as we can manage to do. The task is nearly impossible, but even with such imperfections, the reward can be wondrous. For it is the encounter with humanity in its astoundingly rich manifoldness. There opens up for us the vision of the many ways in which man can be man. "Erst alle Menschen machen die Menschheit aus," said Goethe, and only the knowledge of all the forms of being human can inform us of our own humanity.

This deep-seated urge to know the Other, which has gradually grown in our civilization, involves us in frightful difficulties. Attempting to live in the presence of the dead is so difficult. The knowledge we can have of them is so problematic. It seems to depend upon an empathetic imagination, an act in which empathy for another life leads to imaginative identification at least to the degree to which we can overcome—which we never can—the obstacle of our own presence. The wandering Odysseus is granted a visit in the realm of shadows for talking once again to the dead comrades with whom he fought before Troy. The shadows remain dumb until an animal is slaughtered; when they drink its blood, they can, for awhile commune with Odysseus. It is fitting imagery for the historian who enters this realm of the dead, drawn there by whatever words and signals they left for us to find; and only by infusing some of his own blood into the shadows, will the historian, by means of his empathetic imagination, understand them a little better, by seeing their world, by feeling their feeling, by rethinking their thoughts. Herodotus tells us that Xerxes, after having moved his immense army and fleet across the Hellespont near Abydos, went up on a hill,

surveying the power at his command. "He praised himself fortunate, and presently fell a-weeping." How can we understand this unless we make the effort of seeing Xerxes' world, reexperiencing his vision of the scene, sensing his pride in his power, and feeling something of his despair in remembering the warnings that many a great venture can come to naught, leaving many slain behind? It is a piteously inadequate way of knowing. Hence it is so nice that historians can also share with Machiavelli the rare moments he described so beautifully in his letter to Francesco Vettori, when, in active conversations with the dead, one may feel closer to those who have gone than to those with whom you live. Many modem historians think that massive data, when properly categorized and counted, will solve our problems of knowing, while others again see the task in understanding economic patterns, political institutions, and so forth. But for me the past only comes alive when in my mind's eyeIcan perceive something of the men and women who lived with and experienced and fashioned their own ways of fighting, loving, hating, solving their economic needs, fashioning objects, and thinking and acting in the face of their circumstances. It seems a legitimate mode of knowing, even if you can make only very modest claims to knowledge. Only occasionally is one granted a view of the past with the sharp contours permitted by sunlight. As the Dutch historian Johan Hui-zinga (on whom, long ago, I wrote my dissertation) remarked: the historian's way is a privileged way of seeing, but it is a seeing "by the moonlight of memory." For me it is the wonderful experience whereby the consciousness of the long sense of time is not time filled only by hours, years, and decades, but a long sense of time filled with some visions, at least, of the long and intricately interwoven rows of men and women who once were as real as you and I.

The empathetic and sympathetic understanding of the past gives us the burden of relative and relativized knowledge. The attempt to understand the Other in his context and on his terms asks that we temporarily suspend judgment. Understanding a fifth-century Athenian obliges us to make the effort, at least, of not judging him by the standards of the Chicagoan of 1984. His values are his values, our values are our own. By embedding the value in time we rob it of its halo of being an eternal value. And many among us are very troubled when deprived of our assumed eternal values. It is a fascinating aspect of 2500 years of Platonic and Christian effects on our culture that so many in it believe that values cannot be values unless proven to be eternal. The historian, however, observes that values emerge in cultural configurations as expressions of the concerns and aspirations of its men and women. They vary as cultural constellations do. That certain cultural sets of values agree with other cultural sets, that some sets of values seem to last through cultural transmission—well, there are historical ways of accounting for this. Whoever believes that values were given to man by a transcendent deity must still account for the way in which adherence to such values and their meaning are modified by the passing ages. The historian for whom the passing of the ages is the grandiose and gradual unfolding of all the manifold experiments in being human, in which every

experiment has its own meaning and value, can only state that values are within time and are affected by the passage of time. They are not a given brought in from beyond time. If they were, they would dictate our lives to us. If they can be seen to be relative to time, we gain the magnificent gift of freedom to have our own values and if that comforts us, be able to treat them as if they were eternal.

At the end one may ask whether so much minding of history, so much historical contemplation, so much conversing with the dead, is a good and an affordable good. In our pluralistic culture we tolerate many diverse lives and things In one sense the devotion to historical contemplation has the same right to exist as any cow eating its grass and any thrush singing its song. We even tolerate Henry Ford who, in his infinite wisdom, declared history to be bunk. But everything we deem worthwhile is for us a matter of subtle balances; so also is the balance between the proper claims of the dead and the legitimate claims of the living. We justly feel uneasy with mere antiquarianism and a stifling ancestor worship. We cannot turn more and more of our world into a museum. We cannot let the graveyards dominate our landscape. *Hic Rhodus, hic salta*—here we stand, here we live. The rights of the living are predominant. But what these are is not always easy to know. One winter day, quite a while ago, on my way to the University to teach my class on Bonaventura's Life of Saint Francis, I encountered two blacks near the crossing of Woodlawn and 59th Street. One was in a makeshift wheelchair; he had no legs and only one arm with which he sought to guide the wheel. The other, in unbelievable rags, pushing the chair, had a badly misshapen head with only one eye, and had only one or two fingers on the stumps of his hands. They were partially yelling and partially singing. A Brueghel should have painted the scene. I only offered my help for getting them across the intersection, but they made unmistakably clear that they despised the help of an idiot honky. The scene preoccupied me for a long time, and, as you see, it still does, especially also because my thoughts were with that great saint, Francis of Assisi. The needs and claims of these very living were not met by anything I offered. Francis would have offered them his coat, his shoes, and would have kissed them much as he kissed the lepers. And many among us whom he can still inspire by his ideal will turn their lives to the task of doing something about all the misery and suffering in this world. Why did this scene not turn me spontaneously from the luxury of my historical contemplation to more immediate social work? I am not altogether hard-hearted, even if selfish, and nominally even I am a Quaker. But I am no Francis; I cannot live spontaneously, like he, imitating the life of Christ. I cannot spontaneously kiss the sick, without any concern for the social consequences, because I cannot, like he, trust simply that God in Heaven will not let me, by my good deed, carry germs to others. I live in a world where I think I am personally responsible for the predictable consequences of my actions. I am an academic and believe that academia is a necessity for our society, not only because a university has medical and social service schools, and theologians to comfort the suffering, or business and law schools training those needed to keep our society running. I also believe

in the needs of Sanskritists, classicists, and art historians, and all these supposedly useless arts. And if I had money, I would give it to support those, although the memory of my encounter with those cripples would sorely pull on my heartstrings.

The guiding conviction, of course, is that historical contemplation is not a luxury. A long sense of time is a need for the living. We need its intangible benefits for being civilized creatures. As Burckhardt warned, the barbarian lacks historical consciousness. Without respect for the long time of patient labor invested in cultivation and irrigation, he storms into the field to gratify his present need for plunder, little caring whether he destroys the delicate irrigation system. When we, like he, permit the channels to the past to get silted up, the desert will surely take over in the mind. I doubt that the study of history provides us with simple lessons. Its promise is less in easy lessons than in the hope of understanding and wisdom about human affairs. It can curb our egocentrism, and perhaps it endows us with an essential sense of proportion. The sense of wonder involved in feeling somehow related to the human race stretched out backwards in time is the greatest gift of living with a long sense of time. All those lives in their glory and their misery tell us of our humanity. Our humanity demands constant cultivation. As my humanist friends know for I have often quoted it to them, Seneca—by no standard a very great thinker—once said a very great thing in only two words: *colamus humanitatem*. Let us cultivate all that makes man truly worthy of being man. If I am right that our humanity is in its essence historical, then we cultivate our humanity when we cultivate our historical sense and consciousness. In this lies my task. In this also lies a task of this university to whom I am so grateful for having given me the chance to study, to contemplate, and to teach.

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