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HISTORY BROUGHT UNDER THE GENERAL CONCEPT OF ART

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‘It was necessary first to set forth ... an unrestricted concept in order to remove all arbitrary determinations and find ... the real essence. But the more unrestricted the concept is, the more the restriction shows up in its realization.’

August Boeckh, *Encyclopädie und Methodologie der philologischen Wissenschaften*, ed. Ernst Bratuscheck (Leipzig: Teubner, 1877), pp. 20-1.¹

[Boeckh checked]

Is history science or art? This question has been asked many times, but the usual judgment is that the question is one of those that arise only from the common confusion that leads to bad answers. Those who ask it, in fact, either fail to give it precise meaning or, if compelled to do so, limit themselves to understanding it merely as asking ‘if history should be represented in a lively way and should be well written in an artistic sense, besides being verified exactly.’ And the vague meaning of the question tallies with that of the answers, the most frequent being that ‘history is science and art all at once.’

A different answer, apparently much sterner, has taken shape among the most learned authorities on history, notably in Germany, where historians follow a mental habit widespread in their country in that they often feel the need to philosophize about their discipline.^a Given the growing sense that their work is important, serious and difficult, a certain natural pride has attached to the issue. Indeed, everyone recognizes the amazing progress made by historical studies over the last century, both in methods of research and criticism and in methods of interpretation and understanding. Whole histories of civilization, entirely unknown before, have been discovered, and histories already known have been understood in a new way. Experts on history have therefore discarded the old chain of roses that used to link their discipline to the *belles lettres* and have insisted on its strictly scientific character.

No one has stated this with more clarity, perhaps, than Johann Gustav Droysen, author of the *History of Prussian Politics*, in an important and impressive little book on the *Elements of History (Grundriss der Historik)*.² History for Droysen is science and definitely not art; the attitudes of science and art are opposed and irreconcilable; artistic

^aGermany possesses a very rich literature on historiography; in comparison, the literature of other countries has little to offer. Even the book by the English historian, E.A. Freeman, *The Methods of Historical Study* (London: Macmillan, 1896), is mediocre, though it has enjoyed some influence in recent years. [note that bibliographical details in the footnotes have been checked and normalized]

¹Philipp August Böckh (1785-1867), a student of F.A. Wolf, became a founder of modern philology at the University of Berlin after 1811; his most important work was on Greek inscriptions, but his views on methodology and philosophy of history were also influential.

²Johann Gustav Droysen (1808-84) wrote history with a political point, aiming his enormous *Geschichte der preussischen Politik* at the unification of Germany; his influential *Historik* first appeared in 1858 and grew through many editions, criticizing the prevailing orthodoxy, which was based on the views of Leopold von Ranke, as philosophically naïve, and dismissing the fashionable positivism of Henry Buckle (below, n. 23) as morally bankrupt.

concerns are harmful to history; the so-called artistic histories, abundant in English and French literature, are nothing more than works of rhetoric – *rethorische Kunst*.^b

Such ideas prevail nearly everywhere, and we find them explained in the extensive and excellent *Manual of Historical Method (Lehrbuch der historischen Methode)*, published some years ago by Professor Ernst Bernheim of the University of Griefswald, which in effect collects the views of the discipline prevalent among German historians.³ We can see them in their fullest form in this book by Bernheim, sparing us the need for other citations, which would be easy to find but also redundant.^c

To summarize, Bernheim claims: (1) that history is science and definitely not art because its aim is to provide not an aesthetic pleasure but rather an understanding (*Erkenntniss*); (2) that the results of historical science, since they are reported in prose, obviously fall within the domain of art because prose is a type of art, but saying this makes history no different from any other scientific report; (3) that a work of history may sometimes turn out to be a work of art as well, but this is a rare event and, in any case, purely coincidental.^d

Obvious answers, are they not, quite clear and crisp? One would give exactly the same answers to someone who asked whether chemistry and physics are science or art. The question would seem to be closed. Attempting to reopen it would be the only reason to find oneself dreading that charge of *Begriffswirrung* – conceptual confusion – which Bernheim describes as reaching its peak when someone asserts that history is art, or art and science all at once.^e

But when two words occur together frequently, there is almost always some real reason for the concurrence. When a question arises persistently, however confused or badly put it may be, one must be wary of easy answers that seem to cut the knot. At the bottom of the poorly framed question must be some difficulty which is its real, yet unconscious, motive. But if one asks and keeps asking whether history is science or art, there is one answer that settles nothing and almost begs the question: ‘that history, being a science, has the same relations with art that all other sciences have with art.’ If the question has come up for history but not for the other sciences, it would mean, on the one hand, that history seems not to be a science like the others, and, on the other hand, that its

^bJ.G. Droysen, *Grundriss der Historik* (3rd ed.; Leipzig, 1882), pp. 81ff. [NEED 1882 ED.]

^cBernheim depends especially on a work by Heinrich Ullmann, ‘Über die wissenschaftliche Geschichtsdarstellung,’ *Historische Zeitschrift*, 4 (1885), 42-54. [Ullmann checked]

^dErnst Bernheim, *Lehrbuch der historischen Methode* (Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1889), pp. 82-90 (‘Das Verhältnis der Geschichte zur Kunst’). [Bernheim checked]

^e*Ibid.*, p. ? : ‘That people often call history an art marks the peak of the conceptual confusion that dominates our subject.’

³Despite challenges from Droysen and later from Karl Lamprecht, Ranke’s views – cautious respect, not without theological commitments, for documentary evidence – became dogma for most German historians; in 1889 Bernheim restated the consensus in his *Lehrbuch*, which became the standard work.

connection with art appears stronger and different than that of other sciences. We need to stay with these two points and clear them up.

Actually, it is strange to see Droysen himself, after the incisive claims cited above about the scientific character of history, letting these words slip: ‘And it would not be without interest to seek the reason internal to history that makes it, alone of all the sciences, enjoy the equivocal fate of having to be an art as well, a fate shared not even by philosophy, despite Plato’s dialogues.’^f He does not realize that the problem begins again just at the point where he thinks he has finished with it.

To seek the internal reason for the connection between history and art that some seem to perceive, and then to determine what this connection or relation truly is, one must go back and truly establish the content of the three concepts that enter the discussion: science, art and history. Something strange, but not uncommon, happens with these three concepts: we believe that their content is governed by an accord that does not really exist, which gives rise to endless ambiguity, making some see the problem as entirely without substance and preventing others from saying precisely what the problem is.

Authorities on history, for example, usually start with too narrow a concept of art and too broad a concept of science, while popular opinion goes wrong by using all three concepts in an imprecise and contradictory way. As it happens, nonetheless, we shall find our inquiry leading us closer to this popular opinion – that history shares the nature of art – than to the view of those who locate it definitively among the sciences. And no wonder. However vaguely it may be expressed, a true feeling for the real nature of science, art and history operates in ordinary consciousness, although it got completely lost in the ineluctable course of learned polemics – as usual.

Let us begin, then, by establishing these basic concepts. And I hope that readers will not be scared off, having been well assured that we are not attacking the problem at too great a distance, but bringing it back to their own territory instead, the only place where it can be quickly and easily solved.^g

^fDroysen, *Grundriss der Historik*, p. 85.

^gI have not managed to see the work by B. Gebhardt, *Geschichtswerk und Kunstwerk* (Breslau, 1885), which Villari mentions briefly in his study, *La storia è una scienza?*, published in the *Nuova Antologia*, Feb. 1, April 16, July 16, 1891, pp. 5-6 of the offprint. Nor have I been able to make much use of this work of Villari’s (however much its title and opening words might seem to coincide with mine) because, among the many and various questions of historical method and philosophy of history that it raises, there is barely a passing mention, here and there, of our problem. It never really gets to the point. The treatment by Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, ‘De la historia considerada como obra artistica,’ in *Estudios de critica literaria* (Madrid: Perez Dubrull, 1884), pp. 73-127, deals with the artistic value of history but not the relation of history to science. [[Menéndez y Pelayo checked](#)]

I THE CONCEPT OF ART

I was speaking, then, of the apparent accord on what the concept of art is about and, generally, on aesthetic reflection about the things to which art pertains. To questions about the aesthetic world in general and the world of art in particular the answer is apparently unanimous: ‘The world of the aesthetic is the world of the Beautiful, and art is an activity aimed at producing the Beautiful.’ But difficulties arise about the meaning of the word ‘Beautiful.’

Here I certainly have no intention of getting into the endless and subtle disquisitions that form the object of aesthetic science, a science which emerged, developed and bore astonishing fruit in Germany, though in other countries it has never been much cultivated nor has it done well – least of all in Italy, where it is now completely neglected. I forbear lamenting this neglect and pass on to other problems. For our purposes, it suffices to mention the essential features of the conception of the Beautiful and Art that I find acceptable.

What is the Beautiful? Up to now, as far as I know, four main answers to this question have been given. First is the answer of Sensualism, which reduces the Beautiful to a type of pleasure.⁴ Second is that of Rationalism, which identifies it with the True and the Good. Third is the answer of Formalism, which says that it consists of unconditionally pleasurable formal relations.⁵ The fourth belongs to what a recent historian of aesthetics calls Concrete Idealism,^h which took form most effectively and most famously in Hegelian aesthetics and which sees the Beautiful as the representation or sensible manifestation of the Idea.

As for the first two, they are still nursing wounds inflicted on them by the mighty Kantian critique. Never again will it enter anyone’s mind to confuse the Good with the pleasant, save perhaps some French or English pseudo-philosopher, one of those who call their chattering ‘philosophy’ in the way that the good people of Florence – ‘they who knew not what they called her’⁶ – used to call Dante’s beloved ‘Beatrice.’ⁱ

^hEduard von Hartmann, *Ausgewählte Werke*, III: *Aesthetik*, 1: *Die deutsche Aesthetik seit Kant* (Leipzig: Friedrich, 1886), p. 107. [[Hartmann checked](#)]

ⁱSpencer, who will perhaps serve as a symbol of the philosophical mediocrity of our time, has downright childish theories and views about aesthetics. To show how feeble his literary and philosophical background is, it suffices to say that he bases the explanation of aesthetic facts in great part on the concept of the game, which he says that he saw attributed to some German author, ‘whose name I do not recall.’ The author, so obscure and easily forgotten, is Friedrich Schiller, and the book, acknowledged only indirectly, is the celebrated *Letters on Aesthetic Education*, where the concept of the game (*Spiel*) first occurs in support of inquiry into art, as later aestheticians brought it up or discussed it countless times. For treatments of positivist aesthetics, see Veron’s *Ésthetique* (2nd ed.; Paris, 1883) and *Les Problèmes de*

⁴*Piacere*.

⁵*Rapporti formali incondizionamente gradevoli*.

⁶Dante, *Vita Nuova*, 2: ‘la gloriosa donna de la mia mente, la quale fu chiamata da molti Beatrice li quali non sapeano che si chiamare’; ‘the glorious lady of my mind, called Beatrice by many who knew not what they called her.’ ‘Beatrice’ means ‘she who blesses.’

Likewise, no one will any longer locate the Beautiful in the world of science or the world of ethics, however deep such thinking may be in other ways, since an invincible impulse of the mind⁷ pushes us to seek out the relations that tie together the highest idealities of the human spirit⁸ – the True, the Good and the Beautiful.^j

More than anything else, the formalist theory of aesthetics is a strange episode in the history of philosophy, and I will mention it briefly, mainly because it has remained totally unknown to us. Herbart, who wanted to detach aesthetics from approaches full of fantasy and vague intuitions and reduce it to an exact science – having already done so quite successfully with ethics, psychology, education and other disciplines on which he made a great impression – correctly asked that one begin by analyzing particular instances of beauty.⁹ By analyzing the simplest aesthetic facts about music and observing that a simple tone is never either beautiful or ugly, that the judgment of beautiful and ugly always emerges from a relation between at least two tones, that two tones coming in one order are pleasant, but unpleasant in another – by these and similar observations he was driven to the theory that the Beautiful consists solely of formal relations of pleasure,¹⁰ which means that every aesthetic pleasure arises from form, independently of content. Lacking the time to develop a complete theory of aesthetics, Herbart left only a few remarks on the problem which the reader finds scattered through his works; hence, disagreement about the master's thoughts arose among his students, some supposing that he did not mean to exclude the expression of content from the Beautiful.^k

But Robert Zimmermann, advocating the strictly formalist interpretation and following the partial efforts of others whom it is not necessary to name here, tried to construct a complete system of aesthetics on Herbart's principles. First he brought out a major

l'esthétique contemporaine (Paris: Alcan, 1891) by Guyau, books that combine the utmost inexperience with the utmost recklessness. As for Veron, even the learned Spaniard, Menéndez y Pelayo, (in his *Historia de las ideas estéticas en España*, ed. E.S. Reyes [Santander: Artes Graficas, 1960], V, 149-52 [Croce cites Menéndez in the Madrid, 1889, edition and Guyau in the Paris, 1891, edition]; [Menéndez and Guyau checked](#)) loses patience and writes pages of remarkable violence (pp. 351-6) against him.

^jA triad not without its comic side, to tell the truth, once it provided the Italian title for several works by Auguste Comte; nonetheless, I take heart in mentioning it because I cannot resign myself to the academic philosophers and their discrediting even the True, Good and Beautiful.

^kOne can get a good look at the course of this controversy between Nahlowski and Zimmermann in the *Zeitschrift für exacte Philosophie* 2 (1862), 309ff; 3 (1863), 384ff; 4 (1863), 26ff, 199ff, 300ff. [Robert Zimmermann, 'Zur Reform der Aesthetik als exacter Wissenschaft,' *Zeitschrift für exacte Philosophie*, 2 (1862), 309-58; NEED 3 (1863)

⁷*Animo.*

⁸*Spirito.*

⁹From his thinking about Leibniz and in response to Kant and the post-Kantian Romantics, Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) developed a philosophical psychology which was revived in Italy by Bertrando Spaventa and especially Antonio Labriola (below, note 21), who was close to Croce when this essay was written.

¹⁰*Rapporti formali gradevoli.*

critical history of the discipline,¹¹ followed in 1865 by the publication of his *Aesthetics as a Science of Form*,¹ in which all varieties of the Beautiful are explained as purely formal relations of pleasure. In a work of poetry, for example, what is ordinarily called ‘poetic content’ gives pleasure – according to Zimmermann’s theory – through formal relations of character, experience and action among the persons in the piece. What is called ‘expression’ gives pleasure through the formal relation of correspondence between content and form. And the so-called ‘externals’ of form (verses, stanzas and so on) do the same in other ways through formal relations of pleasure. All these various relations, of which the work of art would be the ‘sum,’ Zimmermann classifies and reduces to a few general principles – five aesthetic ideas meant to tally with the five practical ideas of Herbart’s ethics. But after Zimmermann, who remained the only preacher of formalist aesthetics, no one continued with it.^m We agree entirely with Hartmann’s verdict: ‘the contrived construct of a perfectly fruitless insight.’ⁿ

The last of the theories that I mentioned, which has given rise to a very rich aesthetic literature, remains robust. And it is this one that prevails among the well-informed, if I may speak in broad terms. This theory locates the Beautiful in expression, in the ‘sensible manifestation of the ideal,’ to adopt the Hegelian terminology.

I cannot argue this claim, which at first glance seems strange and yet is the only one that explains all the aesthetic facts. I am forced to refer to the works of specialists, of which the last to be published, and noteworthy in many ways, is Hartmann’s¹² *Philosophy of the Beautiful*.^o Nor can I describe how the process of expression works, which is actually one

¹Robert Zimmermann, *Allgemeine Aesthetik als Formwissenschaft* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1865). [\[Zimmermann checked\]](#)

^mAttempts at conciliation between formalism and idealist aesthetics are those of Koestlin and Siebeck. The first of them, as both Neudecker (*Studien zur Geschichte der deutschen Aesthetik seit Kant* [Wurzburg, 1878], p. 72) and Hartmann (*Die deutsche Aesthetik*, p. 317) conclude, is a work that clearly shows the vacuity and failure of formalist aesthetics and can be considered ‘an unconsciously brilliant and thorough self-parody of the aesthetic formalism which in principle it puts forward.’ The second, by contrast, comes so close to idealism that there is nothing left of formalism but a whiff of the schoolroom, so to speak, since Siebeck’s background is Herbartian.

ⁿHartmann, *Die deutsche Aesthetik*, p. 304: ‘Das verkünstelte Gebäude eines völlig unfruchtbaren Scharfsinns’; also quite apropos are the observations (pp. 282-3) by which Hartmann means to put honest readers on guard against the growing ambiguity of the word ‘formalism,’ as if, by opposing idealism, formalism were defending the rights of aesthetic form against abstract content, or rather the freedom of art against preconceptions of the value of content, whereas really just the reverse is true. While idealist aesthetics in Italy has produced the criticism of De Sanctis, which is the most effective affirmation of the freedom of art, this formalism would lead logically to a petty and academic art criticism.

^oHartmann, *Ausgewählte Werke*, IV: *Aesthetik*, 2: *Philosophie des Schönen*.

¹¹Robert Zimmermann, *Geschichte der Aesthetik als philosophischer Wissenschaft* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1858).

¹²Eduard von Hartmann (1842-1906) was best known for his theory, meant as a Kantian response to Schopenhauer, of the unconscious dynamism that drives the world and makes it a wretched place; he allowed that the value of beauty, unlike pleasure, is a possible antidote to pessimism – along with morality, religion and a sense of purpose.

of the most successful parts of Hartmann's study, titled 'Theory of Levels of Concreteness in the Beautiful.'^p

Suffice it to say that expression of a content appears decisive in manifestations of the Beautiful, even in the simplest and, so it would seem, most material cases of beauty. Herbart was mistaken in believing that pure form is what gives pleasure in the relation or consonance¹³ of two tones. Leibniz looked much more deeply into the nature of the pleasure produced by musical consonances, defining them by the bizarre and well-known formula, 'a covert exercise of arithmetic by a mind unaware that it is counting.'¹⁴ And it can be confirmed that in the pleasurable impressions of the senses, those that derive either from agreements of tones and colors or from other senses called 'lower,' what gives them aesthetic character, albeit unconsciously, is always the (symbolic?) expression of some content.^q Pleasure seems to come just from physiological stimulation, but it is not so. Like Leopardi, one might almost say

With love inclining, even in the body's grasp,
Just toward this, but not toward that,¹⁵

not the physiological stimulus but the meaning that fills it, the idea that it carries.

So also, if we go to the opposite extreme and consider mathematical propositions or philosophical concepts – the most rarefied products of the mind, of the most abstract thinking – we see that these become objects of aesthetic discernment only insofar as they are embodied in speech and other means of expression. And this expression is adequate and effective, in every respect, to the extent that the means are beautiful. Aesthetic form is not, as some believe, something that has aesthetic value in itself, applicable to some contents but not others, like a coat of many colors or a diadem of sparkling jewels: it is the projection, as it were, of the content itself. When the topic requires it, even technical language is aesthetic, and in the event that it is required, it is actually more aesthetic than any other language.^r

Starting with that concept of the Beautiful – treating the Beautiful as the expression of a content, in other words – what may be explained are the judgments of approval or disapproval that the aesthetic sense customarily pronounces in the presence of objects of nature and art. Also explained is relativity of judgment when an object is seen from one point of view or another, as the saying goes: actually, the object is treated as the expression of one content or another. A specimen of an animal species will be ugly, for

^pIbid., pp. 72-208.

^qOn this, see Hartmann's acute discussion, *Philosophie des Schönen*, pp. 82-6 and elsewhere.

^rNothing is aesthetically indifferent, though one can consider an object while setting aside its aesthetic aspect, which happens when interests of another kind are dominant. Thus, one can leave the aesthetic

¹³*Rapporto o accordo.*

¹⁴'Musica est exercitium arithmeticae occultum nescientis se numerare animi': *Viri illustris Godefridi Guilielmi Leibnitii epistolae ad diversos*, ed. Christian Kortholt (Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1734) I, 241.

¹⁵Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837), the greatest Italian poet of his century, also expressed his Romantic pessimism in philosophical speculation and political theorizing, the latter in Croce's liberal style.

example, if viewed as an expression of what is animal in general because, in the given specimen (form), animal life (content) may not be fully reflected, but on the other hand it could be beautiful if viewed as a typical expression of a particular species of animal since in that case it is viewed as an expression or form of a different content.^s In short, an object is beautiful or ugly according to the category of its apperception.^l

But art, in fact, is one category of apperception.^u And in art, all natural and human reality – beautiful or ugly in different ways – becomes beautiful because it is apperceived as reality in general, which **one wants to see completely expressed**. When they enter the world of art, all persons, all actions, all objects lose (artistically speaking) the features that they usually have for various purposes of real life, and they are judged uniquely by the greater or lesser perfection with which art depicts them. Caliban is a monster in reality, but as a figure of art he is no longer a monster.

One sees from this how mistaken it is to believe that the proposition, ‘art represents the Beautiful,’ entails that art takes as its content those objects that seem beautiful from various natural points of view. ‘The Beautiful!’ De Sanctis¹⁶ once wrote: ‘Then show me anything as beautiful as Iago, a form which has emerged from the utmost depths of real life, so full, so concrete, so finished in all its parts, in all its gradations, one of the most beautiful creatures in the world of poetry.’^v

Clearly, the concept of the Beautiful is the same in art as in nature, but the ideal presented in art – the content **that one wishes to represent** – is simply reality in general, whereas in nature the items of the ideal are particular instances of reality: hence the distinction which, though not at all abstruse, is also not easy.

If we restrict ourselves to this concept of art and view it as a representation of reality, we obviously eliminate most of the reasons that outrage many people, making them refuse to admit that historical writing¹⁷ is a product of art. Such outrage is entirely justified when it

aspect of a book on physics or anatomy out of consideration, saying, in current parlance, that works of science are at issue, in which the beautiful plays no part.

^sIn aesthetics, ‘content’ and ‘form’ are relative terms, as Hartmann (*Philosophie des Schönen*, p. 33) makes clear; one object can be related to a second as form to content and to a third as content to form.

^lAccordingly, the familiar witticism, ‘not bad for a hunchback,’ would not seem peculiar. In his essay on ‘Vito Fornari estetico,’ *Giornale napoletano di filosofia e lettere*, 1872, Imbriani cites the passage from a German comedy in which a character sees an old woman and calls her ‘very beautiful.’ ‘Well, I’m very old,’ she replies, ‘and now I have all these wrinkles....’ ‘That’s exactly why you’re beautiful: because you are the perfect old woman, and the more wrinkles you have, the more beautiful you are.’

^uIn their neglect of natural beauty as compared with the artistic, Hegel and the Hegelians were not sufficiently aware that a kind of artistic creation occurs in the contemplation of natural beauty. The

¹⁶Francesco De Sanctis (1817-83), the foremost literary critic and historian of nineteenth century Italy, was also a major figure in liberal politics and a (critical) reader of Hegel: thus, one of Croce’s heroes.

¹⁷*Storiografia*: see below, section V, on history (*storia*) as past events or the artistic representation of such events (*storia narrativa*), both distinct from the scholarship that underlies true history but does not attain that status; Croce’s *storiografia*, more than the English ‘historiography,’ indicates the practice of history rather than the study of it as a genre or discipline; below, nn. 17, 24.

arises from one of the three theories about art and the Beautiful that we have rejected: namely, when it is thought that art's purpose is either (1) to process pleasure through the senses and imagination or (2) to represent the True and the Good or (3) to assemble a set of formal relations of pleasure. The purpose of doing history¹⁸ is incompatible with these three aims, or compatible only in unusual and accidental circumstances. But outrage seems not so justified when one accepts the definition given above: that art is the representation of reality. May history not also be a representation of reality?

But those who oppose identifying art with history say 'You are mistaken. History does not represent reality, as art does, but studies this reality scientifically, which is a much different matter. Therefore, there can be only one artistic aspect of historical writing, the same that belongs to any type of communication that must be put into good prose. History is science.'

So let us see what science is.

Beautiful in nature is not 'inanimate,' as they claimed, but is, in fact, animated by the mind of the one that contemplates it and thereby creates.

¹⁸De Sanctis, 'La Critica del Petrarca,' *Nuovi saggi critici* (Naples: Morano, 1879), p. 281; [Croce cites the Naples, 1872 edition; [De Sanctis checked](#)]

¹⁸*Storiografia*.

II HISTORY AND THE CONCEPT OF SCIENCE

On the concept of science there are certainly not the disagreements that we have described about the concept of art. Yet one should not believe that there is agreement.

Some, even many, confuse science with knowledge or with information in general.¹⁹ Any proposition expressing a truth, then, is for them a scientific proposition. When I say 'I took a walk today,' this does not entitle me to conclude that I am making a scientific statement.

Such a concept is so broad that it really misses the distinctive features of science. And anyone who wants to give precise meaning to the function of science will agree with those who distinguish it from knowledge in general, pointing out that science always seeks the general and works by concepts. Where no concepts are formed, there is no science. According to Herbart's excellent definition, philosophy itself, highest of the sciences (assuming that there is a hierarchy among the sciences), is just the development of concepts left confused and contradictory by the special sciences.

But if we start with this concept of science, which is the only precise concept, we can justly ask: 'Of what is history a science? What concepts does it develop?'

Bernheim (I continue to cite his book for the reason mentioned above) immediately provides an answer to our question. 'History,' he says, 'is the science of the development of humans in their activity as social beings.'^w

And so we would have learned what history is a science of, had brief reflection on this formula not led us straight to a discovery: that the definition of history given here is only apparent. History is not the science of development; it does not determine what development is; history sets forth or rather recounts the facts of development. The determination of the concept of development is an aim of that part of philosophy which deals with the principles of being or reality, and it would occur to no one to classify inquiry about the concept of development with books about history. At most, were one referring to what would be regarded more specifically as historical development, it would be thought of as 'philosophy of history.'

In a few pages of his major work and with his usual brilliance, Schopenhauer maintained that history should be denied any scientific character. 'History lacks the basic feature of science, subordination of the things that come into consciousness, and it only knows how to present a mere coordination of the facts that it registers. This is why there is no system in history, as there is in the other sciences.... As systems of cognitions, sciences always

^wBernheim, *Lehrbuch*, p. 4: 'Begriff der Geschichtswissenschaft': 'Die Geschichte ist die Wissenschaft der Entwicklung der Menschen in ihrer Bethätigung als sociale Wesen.'

¹⁹*Confondono la scienza con la conoscenza o col sapere in genere.*

speak of types; history, by contrast, always speaks of individuals. History would be a science of individuals, then, which entails a contradiction.^x

An excellent treatment by Lazarus,²⁰ often cited on the topic, also expresses a contrast like this between science and history.^y History deals with individual and concrete facts; history obviously relates particulars to the complex but does not thereby acquire a scientific character; the ‘complex’ is different than the ‘general,’ the proper object of science. ‘What interests science is not the single fact but the law that recurs in each fact; for history the goal of research is each single fact or the complex of such facts. History does not deal with facts, events, actions or persons as such, but always with this fact, this person and so on. For science, this determination is entirely without interest because science looks for the general – what exists in all the individual objects, in other words. Summarizing briefly, on one side we have logical abstractions, on the other simple processes of psychological condensation; on one side, general concepts, on the other, condensed concrete representations, even if they are not quite individual; here the singular as abstract specimen, there the singular as concrete individuality; here the goal of research is the general law, there it is the individual process.’^z

The truth of these observations is indisputable. History has only one function: to tell the facts,²¹ and saying ‘tell the facts’ also means that the facts must be collected carefully and shown as they really happened – traced back to their causes, that is, and not just set forth as they appear superficially to the untrained eye. This has always been the ideal of good historical writing in all periods. And even now, while methods of research have made progress, while the interpretation of the data of historical tradition has made progress, the ideal of doing history has not changed because it cannot change. History narrates.^{aa22}

^xSchopenhauer, *Die Welt as Wille und Vorstellung* (3rd ed.; Leipzig, Brockhaus, 1859), 2.3.38.499-509, ‘Über Geschichte.’

^yM. Lazarus, *Über die Ideen in der Geschichte*, Rectoral Address in the Great Hall of the Bern Hochschule, November 14, 1863 (2nd ed.; Berlin: Dümmler, 1872), first published in the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, of which Lazarus was a director.

^z*Ibid.*, pp. 21ff.

^{aa}Labriola, *I problemi della filosofia della storia* (Rome, 1887), p. 45: ‘All the trends and all the scientific studies, which for some time have modernized the traditional writing of history, keep pushing it closer to a considered representation of causes operating individually and collectively in a particular period. As much as history uses science as support and presupposition, however, its function is still always narration and exposition.’

²⁰Moritz Lazarus (1824-1903), influenced by Herbart, was a proponent of comparative psychology (*Völkerpsychologie*); reacting against metaphysics as well as materialist positivism, he advocated a social and cultural perspective for psychology as a way out of the dead-end of introspection.

²¹*Narrare fatti*.

²²Antonio Labriola, cited in Croce’s note, corresponded with Engels in the 1890s, gaining information about the early Marx that helped make Marxism a serious philosophical issue in Italy; Croce had known Labriola since 1884 by way of Silvio Spaventa, his cousin and the brother of the great Hegelian, Bertrando Spaventa; an early triumph in Croce’s career as cultural impresario was arranging the publication in 1895 of Labriola’s *In Memoria del Manifesto dei Comunisti*.

A writer who deals with historical topics, not knowing how to escape the arguments made above, has said that history is not a science like the others but that it is a science, not an explanatory but a descriptive science, on a par with geography. But what does 'descriptive science' mean?^{bb} Don Abbondio's character exists *in rerum natura*. Is science then the description, quite perfect, that Manzoni gives of it?²³ As for the example of geography, if geography finds itself in the same position as history, it too is no science. But we should stick to the point and not complicate things.

Given the strong sense that history is not a science, given the comparison between it and the sciences in the strict sense, in modern times much writing has appeared on history's uselessness and uncertainty, and here I shall mention our countryman from the Abruzzi, Melchiorre Delfico.^{cc} From the same source came Buckle's great enterprise,²⁴ which caused a stir in the world of science thirty years ago; whether its failure was more comic or tragic is hard to say.^{dd} Finding his sense of science unsatisfied by tales of history, Buckle proposes to make history a science, extracting the laws that govern it from the mass of facts, as science requires.^{ee} But his very celebrated work quite soon fell into oblivion, and now it is not hard to see how very dubious his premise was, even setting aside the many possible objections to the very concept of 'historical laws'^{ff} – laws which,

^{bb}Wundt, 'Über Ziele und Wege der Völkerpsychologie,' in *Philosophische Studien* IV, pp. 4-5 of the offprint, denies the basis of this distinction in natural science, 'it is no longer accepted,' he says, 'by any natural scientist.'

^{cc}Melchiorre Delfico, *Pensieri sulla storia e sulla incertezza ed inutilità della medesima* (3rd ed.; Naples: Agnello Nobile, 1814).

^{dd}Note the resemblance between Delfico's little work and the first pages of the *History of Civilization in England*, a sign of the similar intellectual conditions of which each was a product.

^{ee}On the other hand, Buckle was never clearly aware of what he was after. He directed his criticism partly at the accumulation of useless erudition, partly at narrative history as against a science of historical laws. In practice, his work is nothing but a series of histories of Spain, Scotland, England, France and so on, related to general causes contrived by him in a rather superficial and paradoxical way.

^{ff}Cf. Georg Simmel, *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie* (Leipzig, 1892), chapter 2, 'Von den historischen Gesetzen,' especially pp. 36-8, where he discusses the impossibility of establishing laws of complex events ('Unmöglichkeit von Gesetzen über Gesamttzustände'). What Buckle's four famous laws were will be recalled: (1) the progress of the human race is the successive extension of the knowledge of the laws of facts; (2) every stage of progress is preceded by the spirit of skepticism; (3) scientific discoveries increase the effectiveness of intellectual powers and correspondingly diminish that of moral powers; (4) the chief enemy of the movement of progress is the defensive spirit. Laws like these (Droysen was right) are found by the dozen every day, and better than any other is this magnificent example: 'the measure of a people's civilization is its consumption of soap.'

²³Don Abbondio, a village priest, is a leading character in *I Promessi sposi* (1825-42), the novel by Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873) that established the Tuscan dialect as literary Italian, thus providing a linguistic basis for Italy's political unification in 1860. Manzoni became a major force in Italy's cultural, religious and political development. Don Abbondio, who naively and fearfully tolerates evil and thereby sets the novel on its course, is one of his most memorable characters. Below, n. 40.

²⁴Melchiorre Delfico (1744-1835), like Croce a southerner, lived long enough to see Italian philosophy move away from the 'sensualism' of Condillac and other thinkers of the French Enlightenment, but Delfico himself continued on this path toward materialism. His views on history, which included hostility to Roman law and civilization, were also uncompromising: he believed history to be useless and pernicious. At the other extreme, Henry Buckle (1821-62), inspired by Auguste Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830-42), believed that history could derive scientific laws by observing the basic forces of nature and that the scope of such laws extends beyond politics to all aspects of the human condition.

in any case, would have to lead to another discipline but could not do away with history in the proper sense, which does not formulate laws but tells what happened.^{gg}

Therefore, in denying history the character of science one must take care not to connect a judgment of devaluation with this denial. Schopenhauer overstates his case, as usual,^{hh} though more in tone and color than in substance, and Buckle is ruled by the same sentiment of devaluation – not to speak of Delfico, who is completely obsessed with it.ⁱⁱ History is not science (nor is poetry science), but that does not mean and cannot mean that it is not something of great value and importance or that one need not keep doing it as it has been done up to now, teaching it in the schools and giving it the place that is given it in the life of the mind.

Alongside history – or better, alongside the doing of history²⁵ – a science is taking shape and has acquired the name, ‘philosophy of history.’ Having first emerged as inquiry into the laws and meaning of history (Vico, Herder),^{jj} it confined its speculations about idealist philosophy almost exclusively to the latter of these two problems, and it gets confused with the philosophical presentation of universal history.^{kk} The classic work in the genre, and the mother of many others like it, is Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*. Fallen into disrepute and considered ‘quite dead,’ it has come to be restored in recent years as a treatment that covers a series of problems suggested by the critical examination of history and historical writing, such as those related to the cognitive development of the historical fact, to the real elements of history and to the meaning and value of the course of history.^{ll} And, while expressing my reservations about the possibility of giving life to a specific and coherent science that involves problems of a disparate nature, I have no doubt that the term philosophy – or rather, science, if I may – of history would be assigned only to inquiries of that kind.^{mm}

To conclude, then, the material of history can certainly give rise to scientific inquiries that form the philosophy of history in the sense described above. But in itself history is not science.

But if history is not science – and if at the same time it is not the childish and absurd activity that others have judged it to be – what is it?

^{gg}To me this seems the main point to criticize in Buckle. Droysen’s quite harsh criticism of him (in the *Grundriss*, appendix on the ‘Erhebung der Geschichte zum Rang einer Wissenschaft,’ pp. 49ff) is famous, giving special attention to the denial of human freedom which would result from Buckle’s historical theories and which in Germany caused a rebellion, moral as well as scientific, against the Englishman’s work, going so far (says Lorenz, *Die Geschichtswissenschaft in Hauptrichtungen und Aufgaben* [Berlin, 1886], I, 184) that a distinguished historian at the time expressed the view that anyone who accepted Buckle’s opinions must be ‘a completely immoral and depraved person.’

^{hh}Schopenhauer (*Die Welt*, p. 507) ends up conceding that if history is not science, it surely is the conscience of humanity and plays the same part as reason (*Vernunft*) in the life of the individual.

²⁵*Accanto alla storia, ossia alla storiografia*; above, n. 15.

ⁱⁱThe condemnation of history comes up again in recent works, as in the book by L. Gumplovicz, Professor in the University of Gratz, *La Lutte des races: Recherches sociologiques* (Paris: Guillaumin, 1893), especially 4.27.165-7 and appendix C, pp. 363-78.

^{jj}I omit older precedents. On the history of the philosophy of history, a rich literature exists, notably the works of Rocholl, Mayr, Fester and the Englishman Flint, *The Philosophy of History in Europe: Vol. I, France and Germany* (1874), and in the second edition the remarkably inflated section dealing with France and French regions, *Historical Philosophy in France and French Belgium and Switzerland* (Edinburgh, 1893). I have also seen the valuable work of Ettore Pais, *Della storiografia e della filosofia della storia presso i Greci* (Livorno: Giusti, 1899), a very extensive treatment of the topic and one of the few works in Italian literature on this level.

^{kk}Hegel identifies the two terms. For him the philosophy of history is 'world-history itself': *Philosophie der Geschichte* (Berlin, 1848), Introduction, sect. c, pp. 11ff.

^{ll}Besides Bernheim, *Lehrbuch*, see the perceptive work of Georg Simmel, cited above, and that of Labriola, also cited, *I Problemi della filosofia della storia*.

^{mmm}Here it is appropriate to cite the words found in the introduction to one of the noteworthy recent attempts at historical science, Hermann Paul, *Principien der Sprachgeschichte* (2nd ed.; Halle: Niemeyer, 1886); Paul says that he wants to avoid the expression, 'philosophy of language,' because 'our unphilosophical age detects in it a mild case of metaphysical speculation.... But in truth what we have in mind is no less philosophy than physics or psychology.'

III HISTORY AND THE CONCEPT OF ART

Faced with any object – a person, an object, an event – the human mind can carry out only two cognitive operations. It can ask ‘what is it?’ Or it can picture²⁶ the object concretely. The mind can aim to understand the object or simply to contemplate it. In short, it can submit the object either to a scientific process²⁷ or else to what is usually called an artistic process.

A psychological event (a feeling, a desire, an action of some kind), an instance of kindness or cruelty, of love or ambition or something similar can induce an artist to portray it with the tools of his art and induce a scientist to classify it in a category of psychological science. Macbeth and Richard III, represented as they appeared to the poet’s imagination, are two artistic creations; studied in their internal workings, they add a page to ‘criminology,’ the name recently conferred on the study of crime.²⁸ A flower

on the painter’s canvas is an artistic vision; the botanist describes its features and assigns it a place in his system. What gets done, then, is either science or art. Whenever the particular is subsumed under the general, the result is science; whenever the particular is represented as such, it is art.^m

We have seen that doing history does not produce concepts, however, but reproduces the particular in its concreteness, which is why we have denied it the characteristics of science. Therefore, it is an easy step – the syllogism is completely valid – to conclude that, if history is not science, it must be art.

Bernheim says that history is the science of development, but he should have said that it is the representation of development, the representation of human affairs inasmuch as they develop in time. And as such it is a labor of art. The psychological processes that Lazarus describes as belonging to history are actually just those expected of any artistic representation.²⁹ They add up to the two principles of condensation (*Verdichtung*) and substitution³⁰ (*Vertretung*): by means of the first, many long sequences of representations are made few and short, something like what happens when an orchestral piece is

^mAmong the many fine passages that Giambattista Vico wrote to mark this distinction, the following (*Scienza nuova* 3, ‘Pruove filosofiche’ 11) will serve: ‘Metaphysics abstracts the mind from the senses; the poetic faculty must immerse the mind completely in the senses. Metaphysics rises up on universals; the poetic faculty must go down inside the particulars’; see also 1, ‘Degli elementi,’ 53 etc.

²⁶*Raffigurarsi.*

²⁷*Un’elaborazione scientifica.*

²⁸Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909) began the social-scientific study of crime in 1876; when the word ‘criminology’ entered English in the 1890s, Italian sources were credited.

²⁹*Riproduzione.*

³⁰*Cambio.*

arranged for piano; and by means of the second, many representations, or whole groups of them, are included in just one that takes the place of all the others. One may note, moreover, that there is no reason why historical representation must be accomplished solely by the means employed in the art of language: it may be that architecture, music or the decorative arts cannot portray historical truth with complete clarity,^{oo} but this is not so for painting and sculpture. Records of the life of the Stuart court under Charles II left us by contemporaries – Hamilton’s *Mémoires*, for example³¹ – are they not perhaps equaled by Lely’s paintings, seen in the museums of Bethnal-Green and Hampton Court,³² which have preserved for us as lively a record of those ladies and cavaliers and their way of life? And the Roman history paintings of Louis David,³³ have they not as much ‘historiographical’ value as Rollin’s Roman history?^{pp}

Bringing history under the general concept of art, once this concept has been correctly established, seems almost obvious. And evidence could be collected in great abundance to show how ordinary observation has spontaneously arrived at this conclusion.^{qq} Objections or possible objections to this evidence are all without basis or based on misunderstandings.

Schopenhauer, in the pages already cited, since he wishes to diminish history, after having excluded it from the domain of science, also excludes it from that of art. ‘The material of art is the idea, that of science is the concept, so that both art and science have to do with what always is – and is in the same way – not with what is now but then is not, what is now in one way, then in another; both have to do with what Plato claims to be the object of true knowledge. The material of history, by contrast, is the singular in its

^{oo}But when we reproduce ancient themes in an architectural or decorative work, are we not perhaps trying to make certain feelings, certain impressions of the past, live again? What are Gothic-revival churches if not ways of arousing the Christian religious feeling that Romantic historical interpretation rediscovered in the Middle Ages? What are reproductions of baroque or rococo motifs if not explicit symbols recalling to our imagination the gay visions used by history to portray the social life of the eighteenth century before the catastrophe of revolution?

^{pp}Paolo Giovio, *Lettere* (Venice, 1560), p. 10: ‘Historians write about great deeds for the learned, and painters put them on walls for the multitude,’ which is what our ancestors used to say and what they used to do.

^{qq}In the work by Villari (*La Storia è una scienza?*) already cited, where problems are dealt with mostly in an ordinary way, I find the following observations: ‘If in fact I read an accurate and lively description of an *auto-da-fe* in Spain or of one of those cruel massacres that took place in the prisons of Paris during the Reign of Terror, I admire the historian’s power and have no need to hear a moral or political disquisition from him. But then we ask again: What is the point of all this? What is the purpose of working so hard to call from the grave persons and peoples who no longer exist?’ (At this point I would say with De Sanctis

³¹Anthony Hamilton (1646-1720) wrote the *Mémoires du comte de Grammont*, centering on the life of his brother-in-law, named in the title, a nobleman exiled by Louis XIV to the court of Charles II.

³²Sir Peter Lely (1618-80) was working for Charles I by 1647 and later became Charles II’s court painter. Pictures in the museum that opened in 1872 in Bethnal Green (Tower Hamlets) in East London are now in the National Portrait Gallery; London’s Hampton Court Palace is a public museum.

³³Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) became famous for stirring depictions of Roman and Greek heroes before moving on to revolutionary and Napoleonic subjects, long after Charles Rollin (1661-1741) had written his stiff and superficially learned but influential histories of Rome and the ancient world.

particularity and contingency,³⁴ that which at one time is and then is no longer and forever, the wispy threads of a human world moving like clouds driven before the wind, often entirely transformed by the smallest events.³⁵ But this objection arises from one of the doctrines of art that we rejected at the start since Schopenhauer, in the matter of aesthetics, falls into rationalism or abstract idealism.³⁶ That art represents the idea of things is not true – or rather it is true in a sense that can also be claimed for history.³⁷

Droysen, on the other hand, counts this among the chief differences or contrasts between art and history: that art represents objects which are complete in every part, while the content of history is often fragmentary, uncertain, incomplete. But that would be a defect of history, not its nature; the historian aims to represent his object as fully as an artist, and if he does not always succeed in this, it is the result of circumstances³⁸ (lack of documents, of information and so on) and not because the effort is impossible in itself. It would be odd to make the absence of history part of the definition of history.

As for Droysen's other observation, that the artist presents only the final product of his labors while the historian must put the work that got him there on display,³⁹ we will have more to say later, noting for now that history is one thing and historical reasoning or argument³⁶ another.

More common is the objection that history deals not just with events and persons but also with ideas, opinions and the like, and that for this reason the history of mathematics is also history – or Lecky's book³⁷ on the *Origin of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*.⁴⁰ Might there be some limit on the content of art? Can the exposition of a series of thoughts not be a content of art? The psychological novel and the philosophical lyric exist, do they not? Think for a moment about a book treating the history of philosophical sciences in Italy as a psychological novel, for example, and the analogy will help remove prejudices that may still persist against the artistic nature of any sort of history. Truly, what psychological novel is more interesting than the history of philosophy?⁴¹

that anyone who asks this question is like those who want to know 'What good is poetry? What do we learn from it?') Villari concludes with a question: 'How can history, whose means are so different than those of poetry, ever produce effects on us that are so much alike?' Simmel, op. cit., pp. 82-3, n. 84, using a better method, continually makes use of comparisons with art; see also Dilthey, *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften* (Leipzig, 1883), I, 49-50, 114.

³⁴Schopenhauer, op. cit., p. 553; in this way of dealing with art, it is easy to recognize the ancient Aristotelian notion that 'poetry is something more philosophical than history' (*Poetics* 10), to which Schopenhauer himself explicitly refers.

³⁵In fact, Hartmann, *Die deutsche Aesthetik*, pp. 44-61, puts him in the section of his history of aesthetics that deals with 'abstract idealism.'

³⁶If this claim means, for example, that the artist, facing the raw material of his observations, completes a process of idealization, the historian also complete this process.

³⁴*Il singolo nella sua singolarità e accidentalità.*

³⁵*Per contingenze.*

³⁶*Altro è la storia, ed altro la dissertazione o ragionamento storico.*

³⁷Among the few who tried to emulate Buckle was William Lecky (1838-1903), first in his evolutionary intellectual histories of rationalism and morality, then in a more specialized but very extensive study of the eighteenth century, especially valuable for its treatment of Ireland.

^{uu}Droysen, *Historik*, p. 85.

^{vv}Lecky, *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe* (1865), often reprinted.

^{ww}The distinguished historian of Spanish literature, Ferdinand Wolf, *Studien zur Geschichte der spanisch und portugiesisch Litteratur* (Berlin, 1859), p. 557, captures the artistic nature of the history of literature in a beautiful comparison: 'He (the historian) must – if this comparison is permissible – subordinate the lyrical excitement that guides his own taste to narrative empathy in what appears and in its adjustment so that he can offer an a dramatic and artistic portrayal.' For these analogies between forms of history and forms of art, the distinctions made by Gervinus should be noted.

IV ART IN THE STRICT SENSE AND HISTORY

But if history is art, one may ask what place it has among other works of art. What relations of similarity and difference hold between Dante's *Comedy* and Machiavelli's *History of Florence*, between Goethe's *Faust* and Mommsen's *Roman History*? Let us answer this entirely legitimate question.

Without addressing the many attempts at classifying the arts – Hegel's historical-ideal version is famous, treating the arts as symbolic, classical and Romantic – let us simply express the view that the only solid criterion for classifying the various arts³⁸ is one that either derives from the various means that each art uses or defines a special field of representations for each one.^{xx}

According to that mode of classification, doing history³⁹ should be included in the class of arts of language (both prose and poetry, since examples of verse histories abound and are not at all impermissible historically or aesthetically). But neither should one forget – speaking with the rigor required here – that the telling of history can also be expressed by means of the figurative arts, as we have mentioned above, and in that sense history would sometimes come into painting (portraits, history painting) and into sculpture (monumental sculpture and its relatives).

By this route, then, one does not reach a distinction between history and other products of art, and – in the purely aesthetic sense, or rather as a mode of representation – it is also clear that history does not constitute a genre but is a product that forms part of various genres, a content that can be expressed by various means.

Hartmann strongly insists on a dichotomy of the arts (a Hegelian legacy, in the end) – the not-free (*unfrei*) and the free (*frei*). Included among the first are all that have as their aim not just the appearance of reality (*Schein*) but reality itself, exactly as it would be for historical narrative, rhetorical discourse and, in short, all prose that sets up a real end for itself – and architecture too, which Hartmann considers not a free art because it pursues a utilitarian and extra-aesthetic end.⁴⁰

But either I misunderstand or this dichotomy is scientifically groundless and, in a word, superficial. What the arts that have a real end take into account, as arts, is exactly the appearance of this end, and only this, and for the purely aesthetic spectator this appearance is enough. A temple is a work of art in that it effectively represents a particular religious sentiment in the lines of its architecture; fixed on this relation, the aesthetic viewer can admire a Greek temple as much as a Gothic cathedral, an Arab

^{xx}On this point especially, Lessing's *Laocoon* is a very stimulating work.

³⁸G.E. Lessing (1729-81), cited in Croce's note, argued in his *Laocoon* (1766) that painting and poetry can be distinguished by their different objects, which are bodies for painting and actions for poetry; see Croce, *Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic*, trans. Douglas Ainslie (New York: Noonday Press, 1956), pp. 449-54.

³⁹*Storiografia*.

⁴⁰Hartmann, *Philosophie des Schönen*, pp. 586-714.

Mosque as much as a baroque church without being pagan and Christian or Moslem and Jesuit at the same time. There may be no real sharing of any of these sentiments and beliefs. The religious person, on the other hand, when what he is doing is religious, apperceives a temple simply as a means of expressing his real spiritual need or as an instrument for his worship. But how can an objective classification be based on this varying psychological information?⁴¹ Even a love poem can be as useful for purely aesthetic contemplation as for the expression – from the lover’s perspective – of real feelings that fill the heart.

Getting to such a determination requires another criterion entirely, not the purely aesthetic criterion of the mode of representation, but the different criterion, extraneous to aesthetics, of content – in other words, the material or the topic or whatever one wants to call what history sets out to develop differently than other products of art.

And here we must deal in passing with another serious problem, which is the problem of the content of art. In science, content is everything: the ambition of science is to bring each and every manifestation of reality into the category where it belongs. Everything must be brought under concepts: this is the domain of science.^{yy} But does the domain of art have the same extension? Can art represent everything?

As a general principle, speaking abstractly, where there is a work of art, something is always represented completely. In life lived concretely, however, while pure science wends its way toward the universal, art sets its task and defines it according to the various circumstances among which it develops. It is important for us to know the laws of reality, though it is not important – it is actually against our interests – to know all the facts, whatever they may be, of reality. Now what is the principle of this definition and determination? This amounts to asking what the content of art is.

On this point, theories innumerable in variety have been proposed by aestheticians or simply by connoisseurs of art. But most of them quickly collapse because they are tied to those aesthetic doctrines that we have already mentioned and discarded as false. Thus, sensualist aesthetics must necessarily put the content of art in objects that give pleasure;^{zz} and rationalist aesthetics locates it in the moral ideal or in the representation of a type. We have seen that Schopenhauer, just as a result of this doctrine, treats the idea as the

^{yy}I am speaking of purely scientific issues, and obviously I do not mean to deny that the development of science also takes direction from practical life, that one problem or another will generally be of more or less interest at one time or another and, as a result, may be more or less pursued. Thus, theological problems were of interest in the Middle Ages because they were connected with social and political life. But hydrostatics, often seen as developing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from the need to control the flow of rivers in northern Italy, might not have emerged in ‘thirsty’ Apulia.

^{zz}Here is a brief statement of this aesthetics: ‘These laws (of art) direct it to please, to charm, to enchant, and in order to produce these happy effects, it is obliged to respect what people respect, to exalt fine sentiments and condemn the base, as everyone does.’ I take this locution from a text on ‘La Moralité dans l’art’ in C. Martha, *La Délicatesse dans l’art* (Paris: Hachette, 1884), p. 201.

⁴¹*Apprendimento*.

object of art, and Schiller had already called it the universal. And then no content of art exists for formalist aesthetics since on this view the object of art is always a formal relation of pleasure.^{aaa}

Connoisseurs and critics who go on proclaiming one content to be aesthetic, another one not aesthetic, are unwittingly harnessed to these various theories. Thus arise problems with no beginning or end, continuing for a while and then ceasing not because they have been resolved in any way but simply because it is annoying to air them without effect. One of these plagued us for two or three years in Italy on the publication of Carducci's *Odi barbare* (always lively and fresh) and Stecchetti's *Postuma* (past dead and dessicated) – the so-called problem of idealism and realism.⁴²

The question 'What should be the content of art?' can be posed only by the aesthetics of concrete idealism, the aesthetics represented mainly by Hegel. The admirable criticism of De Sanctis, wholly inspired by idealist principles, is the best proof of that doctrine's fertile truth. He once wrote that 'the science (of art) was born on the day when content was not set aside and declared irrelevant⁴³ ... but assigned its place, treated as an antecedent or a given of the problem of art. Every science has its assumptions and antecedents. The assumption of aesthetics is abstract content (among others). And science begins when content lives and stirs in the artist's brain, becoming form, which therefore is content itself inasmuch as it is art.'^{bbb}

Now, once content has been assigned its place as antecedent of the aesthetic process, and once it has also been confirmed that 'it is not irrelevant,' one must determine what it is to which it is not irrelevant since it certainly is irrelevant to the aesthetic process.

Koestlin, a German aesthetician who took an eclectic approach to composing a treatise on aesthetics, has a concept of aesthetic content that seems to me nearest the truth. According to Koestlin, aesthetic content is what is of interest:⁴⁴ what interests humans as human, both from the theoretical and from the practical side, thought along with feeling and will, what we know and do not know, what gives us joy and makes us sad – in short, the whole world of human interest. And when interest in aesthetic content is more general, its value is greater: hence, those contents that affect humans as human come first; next, those that affect them as belonging to a particular race, nation or religion; then,

^{aaa}This is the position of *Formaesthetik* (aesthetics of form) as against all other aesthetic doctrines included under the term *Gehaltsaesthetik* (aesthetics of content).

^{bbb}De Sanctis, 'L. Settembrini e i suoi critici,' in *Nuovi saggi critici* (Naples, 1879), pp. 239-40, in the note. The sense in which De Sanctis uses the word 'form' is noteworthy, differing from ordinary usage (form as

⁴²*Verismo*: The poet and scholar Giosuè Carducci (1835-1907), who first published his *Odi Barbare* in 1877, won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1906. Orlando Guerrini (1845-1916), whose *Postuma* also appeared in 1877 under the name of Lorenzo Stecchetti, was a follower of Carducci. These champions of realism or naturalism (*verismo*) in art opposed Manzoni's influence, described as idealist. A major point of contention was Manzoni's success in prescribing a single literary language for Italy, which supporters of *verismo* feared would obliterate regional (especially southern) dialects, the 'real' languages of the people. Above, n. 22.

⁴³*Indifferente*.

⁴⁴*L'interessante*.

those that interest them as belonging a specific class, and so on down to what interests only the individual.^{ccc}

Except for some unclear thinking and defective terminology, this concept is welcome.^{ddd} Without doubt, the content of art is reality in general in that it presents interests with different aspects – intellectual, moral, religious, political and so on, including the aesthetic.^{ccc} If a content of art has no interest of any kind, the work that develops it can be aesthetically perfect, but it will be one that public opinion condemns summarily as cold and boring. Voltaire’s remark applies quite well to the content of art: ‘Every genre is good, unless it’s boring.’^{fff}

It is also obvious that such interest cannot be constant like that of pure science, which relates to the mind as understanding and seeks total domination of reality. Instead, depending on complex human development, it varies in part with time, place and other circumstances. We, as modern people, what different interests we bring to our thinking about works like Homer’s poems or Dante’s *Comedy*, compared to what their contemporaries brought to them! And how much less, or how different, from ours will be the interest that our descendants bring to their thinking about works like *La Dame aux camélias* or *Rabagas*!⁴⁵ It is understood, then, that in great artistic creations there should almost always be something that has interest for all times and in all circumstances because it is intrinsically human, **which is not to say** that the perfection of the representation also has its lasting appeal. In a certain sense, then, that sculpted line of Carducci’s is true: ‘Zeus dies and the poet’s song remains.’^{ggg}

a covering) or from Herbart; cf. Hartmann’s observations in *Die deutsche Aesthetik*, pp. 311-12, and in *Philosophie des Schönen*, pp. 29-33.

^{ccc}K. Koestlin, *Aesthetik* (Tübingen, 1869), 1.2.2, pp. 53-62.

^{ddd}I have seen the criticism offered by G. Neudecker, *Studien zur Geschichte der deutschen Aesthetik seit Kant*, loc. cit., pp. 62 ff: ‘Basically,’ says Neudecker, ‘if something is interesting theoretically or practically, it is therefore aesthetically interesting, so that the aesthetic domain would not have a specific content belonging to it characteristically.’ Regarding aesthetic content as life is too vague because life is the content of all human activity. ‘Yet this common content is something other than the content of thinking directed toward cognition, other than life imagined or truth scientifically conceived, and it is something other than the content of the aesthetic perceiving and producing (so to speak) directed toward aesthetic cognition, other than life perceived, cultivated and shaped or beauty conceived aesthetically.’ In sum, this criticism amounts to saying that the content of art is life (reality) represented in its concreteness, while that of science is life (reality) understood or developed logically, a determination of thought already given above in these pages.

^{eee}This is because art is often inspired by spectacles of natural beauty, and the work of art is then a beautiful object reproduced in a beautiful way. But the whole aesthetic process stands on this second use of the adjective ‘beautiful.’ As an aesthetic fact, art gains nothing from that content which is beautiful for reasons extraneous to it. For a different view, see Zumbini’s essay on Settembrini’s *Storia letteraria (Saggi critici)* [Naples, 1876], pp. 300-20).

^{fff}Preface to the *Enfant prodigue*.

^{ggg}His sonnet ‘A Dante.’

⁴⁵*La Dame aux camélias*, first an autobiographical novel (1848) and then a play (1852) by the younger Alexandre Dumas (1824-95), inspired Verdi’s *La Traviata* as well as much subsequent criticism; *Rabagas* (1872), a play by Victorien Sardou (1831-1908), has been less successful with posterity.

The content of art is classified according to the variety of interests that it presents. This is what distinguishes comedy from tragedy, figure painting from landscape and so on; all these are not different forms, certainly, but different contents of art, roughly distinguished and designated.

And in this way the product of history is also distinguished from other products of art, which is the point to be made by this apparent digression.

History, as compared with other products of art, deals with what is of historical interest, not with what is possible, but with what has really happened.^{hhh} And it relates to the complex of artistic production as the part to the whole, as the representation of what has really happened to that of the possible.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the current sense of the word, however, we call art only that activity which is meant to represent the possible. And there is no problem in accepting this use of the word as long as one also realizes that history, the representation of what has really happened, is, in the end, also essentially an artistic process and has an interest like that of art.

With that we come to distinguish history from art in the strict sense.ⁱⁱⁱ

Interest in history is so great and widespread, however, that it gives rise to an enormous amount of work and employs a large number of people. The material scope⁴⁶ of historical production equals and perhaps surpasses that of the artistic. This is the source of the disposition to regard artistic activity and historical activity as two activities of like importance, where one cannot be subordinated to the other. But one question has to do with scope, the other with nature.

On the other hand, what is interesting historically is not always of wide human interest, and this produces another apparent conflict – between the content of art and that of history, a conflict that does not exist when one gets to the bottom of it.

^{hhh}On historical interest, see Labriola, *I Problemi della filosofia della storia*, pp. 8-9 and, from an educational perspective, *Dell'insegnamento della storia* (Rome: Loescher, 1876); also the views of Simmel, *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie*, pp. 79ff.

ⁱⁱⁱOn differences between the historian's procedure and the poet's, see also Lazarus, *op. cit.*, pp. 9ff. The poet and the historian, he says, both take the elements of their creations from what is given empirically, but while the poet is guided only by the principle of aesthetic connection, the historian is also subject to the principle of real causality.

ⁱⁱⁱCapuana, a contemporary Italian critic, while discussing the biography of Gavarni written by Goncourt, writes that 'it reads as hungrily as a novel: perhaps it is the first sample of what will be the novel in the future, a simple biographical study based on the most intimate documents'; *Studi di letteratura contemporanea*, 2nd series (Catania: Gianotta, 1882), p. 114. Realistic tendencies in the art of our time lead directly to the production of works of art which are at the same time works of history or, in general, of observation of real facts and factual events. The real event, in the period of art that we are living through, is gaining ground on the ideally possible. In other works, the real event and the ideal possibility are mixed in a way that is hard to describe – either historical novels or novelistic histories, where one term or the other can act as the noun.

⁴⁶*L'estensione materiale.*

V THE CONCEPT OF HISTORY AND OF HISTORICAL STUDIES

The result of what has been said is that history may be defined as that type of artistic production which has the real event as the object of its representation.

From this definition it follows that historical accuracy is an absolute and indispensable duty of the author of history. As the artist cannot lapse into the false, so the historian cannot lapse into the imaginary.

To achieve honesty and avoid the false, the artist usually completes a series of preparatory works, consisting mainly of what is called 'the spirit of observation,' and he does this work in a way that is often unconscious.^{kkk} In other artists the preparatory works are clearly and consciously special studies of psychology, society, anatomy, physiology and so on.

Likewise, before moving on to representation, before telling his story, the historian needs to prepare the material that will be presented, and his preparatory works are called research, criticism, interpretation and historical understanding: they succeed to one degree or another, sometimes achieving their full effect and sometimes not. They make up an enormous amount of writing, and works of narrative history seem to be a small minority in comparison to them.^{lll}

But are these preparatory works history? Just to frame the question answers it: surely not. Although current usage calls them works of history, an investigation to discover which German or Latin elements contributed to the birth of the Italian commune or to establish the part that Mary Stuart played in Darnley's murder, examining the historical authority of Tacitus or proving the inauthenticity of Matteo Spinelli's *Diurnali*⁴⁷ – these

^{kkk}On the psychology of the artist, see, in addition to Hartmann, *Philosophie des Schönen*, pp. 558-87, the recent work by G. Hirth, *Physiologie de l'art* (Paris: Alcan, 1892).

^{lll}However alike their methods may be, the difference of objects (the ideally possible for one, what really happened for the other) causes a special difficulty for the historian, different from the artist's problems. The artist himself establishes the conditions of the reality that he depicts: a character motivated by purely selfish influences, for example. Given this starting-point, through all that follows he can make no change in the reality; he must respect psychological causality, and so on. By contrast, the historian does not establish the conditions of what he represents but must seek them out, and here lies his special difficulty. Given person A and fact B, he must depict them in their motivations, which are not given. From the hundred possible explanations for a given fact, the artist chooses what pleases him (or explains the fact according to the impressions that he gets from it) – what is true subjectively. The historian must choose only what is true – what is true objectively. Here is the source of what is called (with small accuracy) the freedom of the artist as compared to the historian.

⁴⁷Cornelius Tacitus wrote the most important histories of imperial Rome. Communes were forms of civic government in medieval Italy. Matteo Spinelli was a chronicler of the Kingdom of Naples in the thirteenth century. Henry Stuart Darnley, Mary Stuart's husband and the father of James I, was murdered in 1567 in a plot that involved her next husband, the Earl of Bothwell.

are not history, strictly speaking, just as the artist's collection of notes and observations, as rich as they may be in precious ingredients, is not a work of art.^{mmmm}

The first condition for having true history (as well as a work of art) is the possibility of constructing a narrative. But constructing a complete narrative is something that seldom happens, and for this reason the definition of history that we have given represents an ideal that the historian can very rarely attain. In most cases, only preparatory studies and fragmentary accounts can be offered, and these are troubled by disagreements, doubts and reservations. The historian watches with 'a knitted brow,'

as men at dusk beneath
a new moon would watch one another,⁴⁸

certainly not in the full light of the noonday sun, like the artist. And one can point to many pages of history which have been completed, but there are few works of complete history and perhaps none of large scope.^{mmmm}

This is the result of human imperfection and of limitations imposed on our actions by chance. But this cannot prevent our loudly proclaiming what the ideal of history must be, even though achieving it in full is plainly hopeless. For we would have no need to distinguish ideal from real if the ideal were to coincide with reality. Not coinciding with reality deprives the ideal of none of its value, nor is anyone exempt from making every effort to achieve the ideal or, at least, to strive and long for it. 'God must write the real story,' says *Don Carlos* at a certain point, and Faust told the pedant Wagner that 'the book of the past is sealed with seven seals.'⁴⁹ Now and then we can break a seal and read a passage of that book which is never fully communicated to us.

^{mmmm}We often use the term 'history' for works that are no more than learned and reasoned confessions of our ignorance of definite, specific historical facts – 'minutes of shortage,' as Imbriani used to say.

^{mmmm}Bernheim (op. cit., p. 85) agrees with the fact of this observation, but he explains it quite differently. A shrewd and learned friend of mine (a professor of philosophy, as it happens) also used to admit to me that he had yet to find 'a single work of history' that satisfied him completely, having come to the conclusion that 'it is much easier to do philosophy of history than to do history.'

⁴⁸Dante, *Inferno*, 15.17-21: 'e ciascuna / ci riguardava come suol da sera / guardare uno altro sotto nuova luna; / e sì ver' noi aguzzavan le ciglia / come 'l vecchio sartor fa ne la cruna.' Seeing Dante and Vergil, members of a group of souls look at them 'as one man watches another at dusk beneath a new moon, knitting their brows at us like an old tailor threading a needle.'

⁴⁹Schiller, *Don Carlos*, 3.10: 'Dass Menschen nur – nicht Wesen höherer Art – die Weltgeschichte schreiben!'; Goethe, *Faust*, Part I, 2.1: 'Mein Freund, die Zeiten der Vergangenheit / Sind uns ein Buch mit sieben Siegeln.'

The ideal of art is likewise not easily attained, but the conditions required for it depend less on external causes, which is why art (in the strict sense) leads to complete creations more often than history.^{ooo}

When some historians – and it is these that Droysen correctly regards as pseudohistorians, defining their works as *retorische Kunst* – face the artistic need for complete creation, they fill the voids that remain in their knowledge of reality with imaginings which are not meant as conjectures and not presented as such. Renan often does this:⁵⁰ from his books and those of other historians, the French especially – eloquent writers, to be sure, and very lively – one can take classic examples of the intrusion of art (in the strict sense: representation of the possible) into history (art of the real event).

From what we have said, it is clear how misplaced are the fears of what Buckle called ‘the corporation of historians’ that affirming the artistic character of history takes something away from its accuracy and rigor.

As usual, I make Bernheim the spokesman for these fears: ‘It is only traditional prejudice that makes one say that history is art, or rather science and art at the same time, a prejudice that must be opposed with all our might because it damages the rigorously scientific practice of history.’^{ppp}

Surely not. Asking whether history is science or art has, in this regard, no practical importance: historians must always complete all those labors of preparation that Bernheim so minutely analyzes and illustrates so learnedly in his valuable treatise. Debating the basis of morality – Hegel once said this, if I am not mistaken – gives no dispensation from keeping the Lord’s ten commandments.⁵¹ Likewise, defining the nature of a work of history does not mean changing the procedures established by proper historical understanding.

But in the end, can one deny that all the labor of preparation goes to produce narratives of events?

And when it is proved that narrative is not science but art, how is any harm done, may we ask, to the seriousness of history?

^{ooo}On the other hand, artistic creations have their disadvantages when compared to products of history, and here some observations of Labriola (*Dell’insegnamento della storia*, pp. 43-4) on the educational effect of history are on target: ‘Situations,’ he says, ‘which as history develops are prepared by the encounter of character with the larger or external course of events, are no less effective than poetry in shaping the active and felt participation of the spectator. In fact, history has an advantage over poetry – its ability to excite the emotions with clear, precise and specific facts, while it is quite difficult for art not to lapse into abstract types, given the rare occasions when a writer reaches that level of perfection which, in Shakespeare’s plays, for example, makes us admire the naturalness of a perfect psychological causality.’

^{ppp}Bernheim, op. cit., p. 88: ‘... weil es den streng wissenschaftlichen Betrieb der Geschichte schädigt.’

⁵⁰Ernest Renan (1823-92) wrote influential historical works on Christianity, Jesus and Israel.

⁵¹Hegel ???

This brings us to the end of our task, which was to prove that there might indeed be an internal reason for so often connecting the words 'history' and 'art' and to show what the connection really is. This task is accomplished by bringing history under the general concept of art.

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