



**HISTORY:**

**THE MEANING AND PURPOSE OF HISTORY**

by

**Hans-Martin Sass**  
Chairman, Department of Philosophy  
Ruhr University  
Bochum, WEST GERMANY

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The Meaning and Purpose of History

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Whether there is a meaning or purpose in 'history' or not, one thing seems to be clear: we humans cannot avoid to search for a meaning in history and act as if history had a meaning or a purpose. This thesis can be demonstrated by the history of religious and philosophical orientation by groups and individuals in all cultures. In all cultures and at all times the specific orientation history predisposed or was an integral part of worldview, understanding of society and human being, selfunderstanding, and the concept of God. By making reference to the cultural and orientational history of humankind and different cultures in her in support of my thesis, I assume, that referring to historical 'evidence' is a strong enough argument in support of my thesis, that 'orientation in history' is as much a basic need for us humans as nutrition, information, and communication.

In as far as logical and moral recognition and individual and societal satisfaction of these basic human needs are preconditional not only for the survival of individuals and societies, but also for the good life, we may say, that they are 'basic human rights'. Rights, which have a natural foundation in the biological structure

of humans, but which are recognized only and protected as a result of historical developments which led to their universal declaration at a relatively late stage of cultural and transcultural, national and international development of humankind, when adopted as the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" by the United Nations General Assembly at its 183. meeting on December 10, 1948 in Paris. The UN Declaration does not expressively mention the right to a concept of meaning in history, however, it is incorporated in other 'equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family' mentioned in that declaration.

In this paper, I will (1) describe the interrelatedness of meaning in history and individual selfunderstanding and action, (2) describe how different concepts of history predetermine human activity, (3) discuss some aspects of prophetic historiography such as that of the unification movement, and (4) evaluate the relationship between processes of unification and diversification in the course of teleologically interpreted history. In this preliminary draft, I will only briefly and in general relate my presentation to the Unification thought, and invite participants to suggest specific points worth to be further explored. My main source for studying Unification thought was the book written by Dr. Sang Hun Lee.

1. STORIES AND HISTORIES, CONCEPT FORMATION AND ROLE MODELLING

We all have our own personal history, full events and stories in which we have been involved as leaders or followers, celebrating

or suffering, angry or happy, off-stage or center-stage, donating or receiving, doing good or doing wrong, winning or loosing, calculating right or calculating wrong. The stories we tell about our past and the dreams we dream about our future do not necessary match the reality. But dreams of the future and the images we have created of our past are of much more significant nature than past 'reality' or future 'probability. Visual or semantic stories form the map in which we orient ourselves.

We like stories, because we are curious for news, information and value laden action; we tell stories to our children. But stories do not just satisfy curiosity; storytelling has consequences. Fables and parables demonstrate exemplary setting of moral and political scenarios. Fairy tales discover the mysteries of ontology, time and eternity, might, guilt and pain, desire, suffering and the Divine. Curricula vitae of individuals present official versions of personal and carrier history, while dreams and nightmares present the hidden story behind the surface. National history provides more or less sublime or differentiated forms of patriotic identification, similar to the hermeneutics of identification in church history, corporate history, and the philosophical forms of historiography, including the historiography of history. Even the history of academic philosophy is full of stories, from Plato's parables communicating the most essential of his philosophical teaching to Wittgenstein's late language games.

Stories and histories are essential in forming worldview, communicating moral, cultural, legal and political principles and

C. S. Lewis

wisdom, and in predetermining actions based on the scenario of the story and the role I am playing in it. While Plato's parable in the cave might be the most instructive and influential one in Western transcendental storytelling, and Old Testament's story of 'my father, a wandering Aramean' can be read as the blueprint of eschatological restlessness and the identifying story for of the chosen people, I will mention four different stories correlating to very different concepts of history and our role in it.

Lessing, the German philosopher of Enlightenment told the story of the miraculous ring, which provides great fortunes and success for his bearer. As the owner of the ring had three sons he had two fake rings made and gave each of his sons one ring challenging to prove by means of goods deeds and hard work to themselves and to others the possession of the original ring; variations of this story hold that the original ring either got stolen or was deliberately destroyed by the father. Each of these variations displays a very specific evaluation of the rivaling confrontations of the three monotheistic religions of those days, Judaism, Christianity, Islam.

Seattle, chief of the Duwamish Indians, in 1855 confronted US President Franklin Pierce with the story of Mother Earth: 'This earth does not belong to the humans, the humans belong to this earth..this earth is our mother.. whatever happens to the earth, happens also to the sons of the earth..if we sell you land, love it as we loved it,..keep it for your children and love it, as God loves us all. There is one thing, which we know- our God is the

same. He has sanctified this earth. Even the white man cannot escape from the Common Destiny'. The message of Seattle's story is that moral evaluation of natural history and its rotations and the interdependences of all creatures determine the right course of moral action.

John E. Etzler in 1833 in Pittsburgh in his book 'The Paradise within the Reach of All Man without Labor by Powers of Nature and Machinery' had a quite different orientational story to tell. It was the story of not going along with the powers of nature, rather fighting, manipulating, and exploiting them. It was the secularized soteriological story of Man's paradise on earth, just as Marx's dream of the classless and workless dream of the Proletariat's Paradise, argumentatively backed up by the story of world history as the history of dialectical and antithetical forms of exploitation and class struggle.

The fourth story told is the Unification story on history, more precisely the interrelatedness of natural history and personal history. While Unification ontology seems to refer to the revolving character of natural history, Unification history emphasizes the salvation character of human and personal history; this makes a very interesting combination for Western philosophy as it resembles the pseudo-Aristotelian 'Peri tou kosmou' story, that the cosmic harmony instructs the humans to construct and respect similar models of interaction and reciprocity as demonstrated by astronomical observation of the the never-changing revolving kosmos. Writes Lee: "Cosmis law is absolute and unchanging, if we

fail to obey it, we will be harmed as a result... We should, therefore, establish order and realize values in our lives, in order to realize happiness, peace and prosperity, - the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth" (p. 96).

These four different stories, each in its particular way of identifying the main players, the goal and the means of action, shape worldview, moral principles, goals for action and the relationship with God, nature, and our fellow humans differently.

## 2. REVOLVING WHEELS AND REVOLUTIONARY MARCHES

Orientation history follows basically two different models of movement: revolution as the permanent revolving of the seasons of nature, or revolution as the transforming, destroying, or reconciling process of progress or regress. In Western thought Judeo-Christian eschatology and soteriology has supported, in theological and in secular versions, the model of salvation by change or revolution over that of happiness by accepting the revolving character of nature.

Moral and anthropological orientation in natural history, such as in the case of Chief Seattle, appreciates the eternal suprahuman powers of nature over mortal human beings. In 'Peri Tou Kosmou', Aristotle describes the movements of the stars and planets as the eternal image of action which sets rules and principles for the 'polis' the human society of interrelatedness. No word of improving moral actions and social relations by changing the rules, by destroying or manipulating the old and erecting the new. Eastern



thought, such as expressed in Taoism or Hinduism or Unification Thought, has a more favorable understanding of the great moral incentives of orientation in an ideally interpreted image of natural rotation and natural interrelatedness. Only relatively late in orientational history Charles Darwin changed the image of nature from the 'return of the same' to the 'survival of the fittest', thus transforming the image of reliable eternity into one of revolutionary processes of extinction and survival, adaptation and progression; in this form evolutionary, even revolutionary forms of natural history gave orientational support to racism, work ethics based capitalism, socio-Darwinism, genocide programs, and forms of radical Islamic or Jewish prophetism. Orientation in nature, as a salvation from the stress of cultural emancipation and rational and technological progress, has occurred in Western thought already in Rousseau, 200 years ago, but only recently found strong support in the 'new age' of what has been called post-modernism.

Salvation history calls for change, including the change of the existing order, not for the integration in the established parameters nor for their reaffirmation. Change can occur in evolutionary or in revolutionary terms. Revolutions can be antithetic, such as the Manichean model of St. Augustine, only having foes or friends, those who win or those who will be eradicated and destroyed, and a permanent purification of the principles of the 'sons of light' fighting the 'sons of the dark', - or they can be dialectical, mediating, often restoring and reconciling, such as in Hegel's concept of dialectical progress of



emancipatorial history. Marx belongs into the Manichean camp, as he had no understanding of mediation, reconciliation, just of destruction and eradication; Marxism-Leninism and its total moral and economic failure can be understood as the biggest and most immoral Human Experimentation of humans on their fellow humans, driven by secularized messianism. When individuals identify themselves as the subjects of historical progress, they tend to become radical, rightly so in their understanding, as the future of history rests on their actions. If, as shown by Hegel, people understand the 'cunning of reason' or some other agent behind the scenes to be the final force of progress, individuals may be less radical, as final responsibility does not rest with them. Also, if individuals are not the direct agents of historical progress, they may retreat from defeat more easily, as higher forces might be responsible for the failure and might give the individual a new chance; this explains the relative radicalism of Marxism-Leninism and the relative liberal concept of evolutionary progress in the emancipation of freedom and liberty in Hegel's strategy of using dialectically interpreted facts of history for encouraging moral improvement and political progress in his days.

Also, goals in eschatological meaning of history might either be in the other world or in this world. If goals are in the other world, political radicalism in this world might be less dominant, and the incentives to change this world are very low or not existing. On the other hand, if successful moral or other deeds in this world are of great soteriological importance for the

individual's role in the world to be, or if the changes in this world are all what is needed, than soteriological historiography and its interpretation might result in incredibly radical actions in this world, as the actions of the Franckist sects in Eastern European Judaism or the acts of radical Islamic, Jewish or Christian phrophetism even today demonstrate.

### 3. PROPHETIC HISTORY AND THE CUNNING OF REASON

This leads to the question of the role of historiography based on revelation and prophetic interpretation of the rules of history. In Hegel's critique of the terror of the French revolution, he particularly analyzed the presumption of direct responsibility by the revolutionaries for the progress of history and the 'freedom' of humankind. He found Robbespierre's principle of 'virtue' unacceptable: 'Robbespierre set up the principle of Virtue as supreme, and it may be said that with this man Virtue was an earnest matter. Virtue and Terror are the order of the day; for Subjective Virtue, whose sway is based on disposition only, brings with it the most fearful tyranny. It exercises its power without legal formalities, and the punishment it inflicts is equally simple - Death'. From the outside, heresy and prophecy are indistinguishable, they look alike. From the inside, prophetic engagement whether inspired by satanic or divine powers, measures its success not by critically re-checking its roots, rather by the determination and endurance of its revolutionary activities. Outsiders, non-illuminated as they are - rightly are suspicious of

prophetic movements. The means available to outsiders to check prophetic legitimacy are very few, among them are the recognition of the protection or promotion of basic human rights such as nutrition, information, communication, and the right to question different meanings in history. Those, awakened by the new prophecy, barely have any additional means, not to speak about interest, to question the legitimacy of prophetic revolutionary calls. To falsify prophetic interpretation which extends into eternity, is impossible, as values of this world which might be disregarded by prophetic interpretation, indeed, might be obsolete in 'absolute' prophetic terms. But identifying false prophet promising the paradise on this earth is easier, actually it can be done easily. If they destroy the fabric of natural and cultural networks, such as family, neighborhood, the basic human rights, which I mentioned, and the 'equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family' as the UN Declaration calls them, then these prophets are false prophets.

Hegel had a methodological solution for orientation formation by means of philosophical or religious historiography. It was the differentiation between the forces and agents of historical process, a differentiation between those on the scene - we, acting humans, but also the Napoleons, Hitlers, Kants, Mozarts, and Einsteins - and the real force behind the scene - God, Reason, the old Deus revelatus, as far as he revelates himself in nature and in his deeds and to his prophets, but still only the revealed side of Him, his other side still the deus absconditus, the God who does

not answer our questions, those of Job, or those of the Jews in the KZ's, or those of the martyrs. In his story about history, the carpetmaker weaves the carpet of world history the same way the puppetier holds the strings and lets the puppets act on the scene, some with ratio, some with passion, some with morals, others with bloodshed , treason, and terror. According to his story, both passion and reason, in their interconnection and intertwining make the carpet of history 'the one the warp, the other the woof of the vast arras-web of Universal History'.

In a world becoming smaller and smaller, more interdependent in media communications, in the results of moral or immoral action, in cultural priorities, in commerce, and the promotion and application of science and technology, false prophets can have a much more devastating role than in former times. Given the shortage of genuine leaders and exemplary role models in the contemporary world, there is a hunger among people of all cultures and all ages, particularly on widely destructured societies, for leadership by value and example. False prophets have a great chance to lead not only small sects, but entire populations and eventually 'all members of the human family' into temptation, into the establishment of the 'empire of the evil' and subsequently into selfdestruction. Examples in our century are abundant, up to these very days. How do we recognize them and do we fight them? If they do not recognize human rights and do not respect and protect their embodiment in civil rights, then the prophets are wrong. If they sacrifice nature, the present, and the values established in the

course of cultural and moral history, they might be wrong, even though they might declare their view and interpretation of history to be the only true and absolute one.

One of Martin Luther King's unfinished plans was to write a novel entitled 'The Global village'. In this novel he might have presented the different and diverse characters of that global village to be, the weaknesses and strength of different people, of their views, their histories and their interactions. He also might have analyzed the behavior of the alchemists, fuehrers, prophets, and leaders, the many false ones and those few with genuine authority.

#### 4. THE LOGOS SPERMATICOS AND THE MARKETS OF UNIFICATION AND DIVERSIFICATION: THE QUEST FOR VALUE LITERACY

This leads to my last remark: will the 'give and take actions' (Lee, 316) in history lead into a uniform global culture or will it lead into a global culture rich in its diversities, but based on a few commonly shared basic values. What, if people disagree about the true character of revelation and of absolute values, will they nevertheless be able to formulate and to implement objective values or mid level moral principles such as the protection of privacy and the right to free speech and to disagree? It was Jesus, who in the story of the Samaritan, taught, that we do not need the final insight into the absolute values, which should govern us, but do not do for various reasons, some of them based in our genetic heritage (in biological terms) or original sin (in theological

terms), as long we embody those mid level principles which are given to us either by means of direct revelation or by means of 'natural revelation', as St. Paul called it, or by acceptable and intelligible teaching of religious or humanist groups. Not only the mid level moral principle of 'good neighborhood' is supported by various worldviews and views on the history by theist and nontheist religions of all kind, by secular humanism, by socialist, even anarchist thought. This was the old Neoplatonic theory of the logos spermatikos, the one single 'logos' who now appears divided and multifractional in diverse forms and scenarios, some more familiar, some quite strange. It was understood that at the 'end of it all 'the apokatastasis pantoon' or the 'providence of restoration' (Lee,279) would bring it all back unified. Hegel hold this view in weaving the carpet of the image of emancipatorial development with its warps and woofs of passion and reason.

Then the unification of diverse principles, in the process of world history, might be brought about as so many things in this world, by forces of the markets of competing values and valuables, rich in their diversities of revelation, worldviews, and motivation for action. The prophetic unification thought and its orientation in mediating 'laws of give and take' in history, in business, politics, culture, and in personal affairs (Lee,316) definitely is part of this rich diversity.

There are some who rest their actions on the 'correct understanding of God'(Lee, 356), others are less safe and ensured about their readings or misreadings of God. In Martin Luther King's

vision of the global village they would have to work together. In Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan they could agree on essential mid level principles, which might be backed up by different, even opposing sets of absolute values. The story of the three different miraculous rings told by Lessing lays emphasis on the competitive character of different factions of what might be the logos spermatikos, the winner will be declared not by the rightness of his or her theory but by the righteousness of his or her deeds. If we charge worldviews and thoughts, including the theories and meanings in history therein, by their outcome for peace, love and the effect on natures and cultures, and not by their revelational or otherwise epistemological superiority over others, then we might be able to uniformly agree on one standard to measure moral and cultural performance in the age of truly global transformation of consciousness.

Jakob Burckhardt, who compared philosophical and prophetic historiography to a 'centaur, a contradictio in adjecto', at the end of his *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* [Reflections on World History] makes the remark, that more often than not humanity was protected and restored not by the driving forces of the fashion fads of value based revolutionary guards, empowering themselves for the 'progress' of history, but by the revolving capacities of history and its center, the 'suffering, striving, and acting human, the way he is, the way he was, and the way he will be'. The good deeds of humans would then be accredited with preventing the worst, the good outcomes of historical developments and the course of



world history would not be accredited to humans or their suffering, strives or actions, rather to the 'invisible hand' of market dialectics, as Adam Smith called it, or in philosophically more pretentious terms of the 'cunning of reason', as Hegel liked to phrase it.

There is no watertight method to interpret the rules or the course of history. But we might be able to avoid misleading conclusions and to protect ourselves and our fellow sisters and brothers against false prophets and those who claim they know the 'truth'; we can do so by improving our history literacy, i. e. by studying the richness of different cultural heritages, by starting cross-cultural dialogues, and by improving overall our value literacy and value management competence.

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