

THE IDEA OF HISTORY

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but it was caviare to the general. In Monsieur Poirot's time, to judge by his sales, the general cannot have too much of it. The revolution which dethroned the principles of scissors-and-paste history, and replaced them by those of scientific history, had become common property.

§ 4. *History as Re-enactment of Past Experience*

How, or on what conditions, can the historian know the past? In considering this question, the first point to notice is that the past is never a given fact which he can apprehend empirically by perception. *Ex hypothesi*, the historian is not an eyewitness of the facts he desires to know. Nor does the historian fancy that he is; he knows quite well that his only possible knowledge of the past is mediate or inferential or indirect, never empirical. The second point is that this mediation cannot be effected by testimony. The historian does not know the past by simply believing a witness who saw the events in question and has left his evidence on record. That kind of mediation would give at most not knowledge but belief, and very ill-founded and improbable belief. And the historian, once more, knows very well that this is not the way in which he proceeds; he is aware that what he does to his so-called authorities is not to believe them but to criticize them. If then the historian has no direct or empirical knowledge of his facts, and no transmitted or testimonial knowledge of them, what kind of knowledge has he: in other words, what must the historian do in order that he may know them?

My historical review of the idea of history has resulted in the emergence of an answer to this question: namely, that the historian must re-enact the past in his own mind. What we must now do is to look more closely at this idea, and see what it means in itself and what further consequences it implies.

In a general way, the meaning of the conception is easily understood. When a man thinks historically, he has before him certain documents or relics of the past. His business is to discover what the past was which has left these relics behind it. For example, the relics are certain written words; and in that case he has to discover what the person who wrote those words meant by them. This means discovering the thought (in the widest sense of that word: we shall look into its preciser meaning

HISTORY AS RE-ENACTMENT OF PAST EXPERIENCE 283
in § 5) which he expressed by them. To discover what this thought was, the historian must think it again for himself.

Suppose, for example, he is reading the Theodosian Code, and has before him a certain edict of an emperor. Merely reading the words and being able to translate them does not amount to knowing their historical significance. In order to do that he must envisage the situation with which the emperor was trying to deal, and he must envisage it as that emperor envisaged it. Then he must see for himself, just as if the emperor's situation were his own, how such a situation might be dealt with; he must see the possible alternatives, and the reasons for choosing one rather than another; and thus he must go through the process which the emperor went through in deciding on this particular course. Thus he is re-enacting in his own mind the experience of the emperor; and only in so far as he does this has he any historical knowledge, as distinct from a merely philological knowledge, of the meaning of the edict.

Or again, suppose he is reading a passage of an ancient philosopher. Once more, he must know the language in a philological sense and be able to construe; but by doing that he has not yet understood the passage as an historian of philosophy must understand it. In order to do that, he must see what the philosophical problem was, of which his author is here stating his solution. He must think that problem out for himself, see what possible solutions of it might be offered, and see why this particular philosopher chose that solution instead of another. This means re-thinking for himself the thought of his author, and nothing short of that will make him the historian of that author's philosophy.

It cannot, I think, be denied by anybody that these descriptions, whatever their ambiguities and shortcomings, do actually call attention to the central feature of all historical thinking. As descriptions of that experience, their general accuracy is beyond question. But they still require a great deal of amplification and explanation; and perhaps the best way of beginning this is to expose them to the criticism of an imaginary objector. Such an objector might begin by saying that the whole conception is ambiguous. It implies either too little or too much. To re-enact an experience or re-think a thought, he might argue, may mean either of two things. Either it means enacting an

experience or performing an act of thought resembling the first, or it means enacting an experience or performing an act of thought literally identical with the first. But no one experience can be literally identical with another, therefore presumably the relation intended is one of resemblance only. But in that case the doctrine that we know the past by re-enacting it is only a version of the familiar and discredited copy-theory of knowledge, which vainly professes to explain how a thing (in this case an experience or act of thought) is known by saying that the knower has a copy of it in his mind. And in the second place, suppose it granted that an experience could be identically repeated, the result would only be an immediate identity between the historian and the person he was trying to understand, so far as that experience was concerned. The object (in this case the past) would be simply incorporated in the subject (in this case the present, the historian's own thought); and instead of answering the question how the past is known we should be maintaining that the past is not known, but only the present. And, it may be asked, has not Croce himself admitted this with his doctrine of the contemporaneity of history?

Here we have two objections, which we must consider in turn. I suppose the person who maintained the first would be implying some such view of experience as this. In every experience, at any rate so far as it is cognitive, there is an act and an object; and two different acts may have the same object. If I read Euclid and find there the statement that the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal, and if I understand what is meant and recognize that it is true, the truth which I recognize, or the proposition which I assert, is the same truth which Euclid recognized, the same proposition which he asserted. But my act of asserting it is not the same act as his; that is sufficiently proved by either of the two facts that they are done by different persons and are done at different times. My act of apprehending the equality of the angles is therefore not a revival of his act, but the performance of another act of the same kind; and what I know by performing that act is not that Euclid knew the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle to be equal, but that they are equal. In order to know the historical fact that Euclid knew them to be equal I shall have not to copy his act (that is, to perform one like it)

but to perform a quite different one, the act of thinking that Euclid knew them to be equal. And the question how I manage to achieve this act is not at all illuminated by saying that I repeat Euclid's act of knowing in my own mind; for if repeating his act means apprehending the same truth or asserting the same proposition which he apprehended or asserted, the statement is untrue, for Euclid's proposition 'the angles are equal' and mine 'Euclid knew the angles to be equal' are different; and if repeating his act means performing the same act over again, it is nonsense, for an act cannot be repeated.

On this view, the relation between my act of now thinking 'the angles are equal' and my act of thinking it five minutes ago is a relation of numerical difference and specific identity. The two acts are different acts but acts of the same kind. They thus resemble one another, and either of these acts resembles Euclid's act in the same way; hence the conclusion that the doctrine we are considering is a case of the copy-theory of knowledge.

But is this a true account of the relation between these two acts? Is it the case that when we speak of two persons performing the same act of thought or of one person as performing the same act at two different times, we mean that they are performing different acts of the same kind? It is, I think, clear that we mean nothing of the sort; and that the only reason why anyone should fancy that we do is because he has accepted a dogma that whenever we distinguish two things and yet say that they are the same (which, as everyone admits, we often do) we mean that they are different specimens of the same kind, different instances of the same universal, or different members of the same class. The dogma is not that there is no such thing as identity in difference (nobody believes that), but that there is only one kind of it, namely specific identity in numerical difference. Criticism of the dogma, therefore, turns not on proving that this kind of identity in difference does not exist, but on proving that other kinds exist, and that the case we are considering is one of them.

It is contended by our supposed objector that Euclid's act of thought and mine are not one but two: numerically two though specifically one. It is also contended that my act of now thinking 'the angles are equal' stands in the same relation to my act

of thinking 'the angles are equal' five minutes ago. The reason why this seems quite certain to the objector is, I believe, that he conceives an act of thought as something that has its place in the flow of consciousness, whose being is simply its occurrence in that flow. Once it has happened, the flow carries it into the past, and nothing can recall it. Another of the same kind may happen, but not that again.

But what precisely do these phrases mean? Suppose that a person continues for an appreciable time, say five seconds together, to think 'the angles are equal'. Is he performing one act of thought sustained over those five seconds; or is he performing five, or ten, or twenty acts of thought numerically different but specifically identical? If the latter, how many go to five seconds? The objector is bound to answer this question, for the essence of his view is that acts of thought are numerically distinct and therefore numerable. Nor can he defer answering until he has appealed to further research, for example in the psychological laboratory: if he does not already know what constitutes the plurality of acts of thought, the psychological laboratory can never tell him. But any answer he gives must be both arbitrary and self-contradictory. There is no more reason to correlate the unity of a single act of thought with the time-lapse of one second, or a quarter of a second, than with any other. The only possible answer is that the act of thought is one act sustained through five seconds; and the objector, if he likes, may admit this by saying that such identity in a sustained act of thought is 'the identity of a continuant'.

But does a continuant, here, imply continuousness? Suppose that, after thinking 'the angles are equal' for five seconds, the thinker allows his attention to wander for three more; and then, returning to the same subject, again thinks 'the angles are equal'. Have we here two acts of thought and not one, because a time elapsed between them? Clearly not; there is one single act, this time not merely sustained, but revived after an interval. For there is no difference in this case that was not already present in the other. When an act is sustained over five seconds, the activity in the fifth second is just as much separated by a lapse of time from that in the first, as when the intervening seconds are occupied by an activity of a different kind or (if that be possible) by none.

The contention that an act cannot happen twice because the flow of consciousness carries it away is thus false. Its falsity arises from an *ignoratio elenchi*. So far as experience consists of mere consciousness, of sensations and feelings pure and simple, it is true. But an act of thought is not a mere sensation or feeling. It is knowledge, and knowledge is something more than immediate consciousness. The process of knowledge is therefore not a mere flow of consciousness. A person whose consciousness was a mere succession of states, by whatever name these states are called, could have no knowledge whatever. He could not remember his own past states, for (even granting that his states are connected together by certain psychological laws, *ex hypothesi* to him unknowable) he would not remember being burnt but would only fear the fire. Nor could he perceive the world around him; he would fear, but would not recognize that which he feared as the fire. Least of all would he, or anyone else, know that his consciousness was the mere succession of states that it is alleged to be.

If, then, mere consciousness is a succession of states, thought is an activity by which that succession is somehow arrested so as to be apprehended in its general structure: something for which the past is not dead and gone, but can be envisaged together with the present and compared with it. Thought itself is not involved in the flow of immediate consciousness; in some sense it stands outside that flow. Acts of thought certainly happen at definite times; Archimedes discovered the idea of specific gravity at a time when he was in the bath; but they are not related to time in the same way as mere feelings and sensations. It is not only the object of thought that somehow stands outside time; the act of thought does so too: in this sense at least, that one and the same act of thought may endure through a lapse of time and revive after a time when it has been in abeyance.

Take a third case, then, where the interval covers the whole lapse of time from Euclid to myself. If he thought 'the angles are equal' and I now think 'the angles are equal', granted that the time interval is no cause for denying that the two acts are one and the same, is the difference between Euclid and myself ground for denying it? There is no tenable theory of personal identity that would justify such a doctrine. Euclid and I are

not (as it were) two different typewriters which, just because they are not the same typewriter, can never perform the same act but only acts of the same kind. A mind is not a machine with various functions, but a complex of activities; and to argue that an act of Euclid's cannot be the same as an act of my own because it forms part of a different complex of activities is merely to beg the question. Granted that the same act can happen twice in different contexts within the complex of my own activities, why should it not happen twice in two different complexes?

The objector, although explicitly denying that this can happen, is covertly assuming that it can and does. He maintains that although the object of two people's acts of thought may be the same, the acts themselves are different. But, in order that this should be said, it is necessary to know 'what someone else is thinking' not only in the sense of knowing the same object that he knows, but in the further sense of knowing the act by which he knows it: for the statement rests on a claim to know not only my own act of knowing but someone else's also, and compare them. But what makes such comparison possible? Anyone who can perform the comparison must be able to reflect 'my act of knowledge is *this*'—and then he repeats it: 'from the way he talks, I can see that his act is *this*'—and then he repeats it. Unless that can be done, the comparison can never be made. But to do this involves the repetition by one mind of another's act of thought: not one like it (that would be the copy-theory of knowledge with a vengeance) but the act itself.

Thought can never be mere object. To know someone else's activity of thinking is possible only on the assumption that this same activity can be re-enacted in one's own mind. In that sense, to know 'what someone is thinking' (or 'has thought') involves thinking it for oneself. To reject this conclusion means denying that we have any right to speak of acts of thought at all, except such as take place in our own minds, and embracing the doctrine that my mind is the only one that exists. Against anyone who accepts that form of solipsism I shall not stay to argue. I am considering how history, as the knowledge of past thoughts (acts of thought), is possible; and I am only concerned to show that it is impossible except on the view that to know another's act of thought involves repeating it for oneself. If a

HISTORY AS RE-ENACTMENT OF PAST EXPERIENCE 289
person who rejects that view is driven in consequence to this kind of solipsism, my point is proved.

We now pass to the second objection. It will be said: 'Has not this argument proved too much? It has shown that an act of thought can be not only performed at an instant but sustained over a lapse of time; not only sustained, but revived; not only revived in the experience of the same mind but (on pain of solipsism) re-enacted in another's. But this does not prove the possibility of history. For that, we must be able not only to re-enact another's thought but also to know that the thought we are re-enacting is his. But so far as we re-enact it, it becomes our own; it is merely as our own that we perform it and are aware of it in the performance; it has become subjective, but for that very reason it has ceased to be objective; become present, and therefore ceased to be past. This indeed is just what Oakeshott has explicitly maintained in his doctrine that the historian only arranges *sub specie praeteritorum* what is in reality his own present experience, and what Croce in effect admits when he says that all history is contemporary history.'

The objector is here saying two different things. First, he is saying that mere re-enactment of another's thought does not make historical knowledge; we must also know that we are re-enacting it. Secondly, he is arguing that this addition, the knowledge that we are re-enacting a past thought, is in the nature of the case impossible; since the thought as re-enacted is now our own, and our knowledge of it is limited to our own present awareness of it as an element in our own experience.

The first point is obviously right. The fact that someone performs an act of thought which another has performed before him does not make him an historian. It cannot, in such a case, be said that he is an historian without knowing it: unless he knows that he is thinking historically, he is not thinking historically. Historical thinking is an activity (and not the only one, unless the others are somehow parts of it) which is a function of self-consciousness, a form of thought possible only to a mind which knows itself to be thinking in that way.

The second point is that the *condicio sine qua non* demanded by the first can never be realized. The argument adduced to prove this point is important; but let us look first at the point proved. It is that although we can re-enact in our own minds

another's act of thought, we can never know that we are re-enacting it. But this is an explicit self-contradiction. The objector confesses to a knowledge that something happens and at the same time denies that such knowledge is possible. He might try to remove the paradox by saying 'I did not mean that it does happen; I only meant that, for all I know, it may; what I maintain is that, if it did, we could not know that it was happening'. And he might cite, as a parallel case, the impossibility of knowing that any two persons experience indistinguishably similar colour-sensations on looking at the same blade of grass. But the parallel is not exact; what he was actually saying was something very different. He was saying not that, if it happened, some other circumstance would prevent us from knowing it: he was saying that if it did happen the very fact of its happening would make us unable to know that it was happening. And this makes it an event of a very peculiar kind.

There is only one kind of thing which may happen in a mind, of which it can be said that the very fact of its happening would render it impossible for us to know that it was happening: namely being under an illusion or error. What the objector is saying, therefore, is that the first of the two indispensable conditions of historical knowledge is an illusion or error on just that point of which knowledge is required. No doubt this in itself would not make historical knowledge impossible. For a condition of something's existing may be related to that thing in either of two ways: either as something that must exist first, but ceases to exist when that thing comes into existence, or as something that must exist so long as that thing exists. If the contention were that historical knowledge can only come into existence as replacing historical error, it would at any rate be worth considering. But the re-enactment of past thought is not a pre-condition of historical knowledge, but an integral element in it; the effect of the contention, therefore, is to make such knowledge impossible.

We must turn to the argument on which this contention rests. It was urged that an act of thought by becoming subjective ceases to be objective, and thus, by becoming present, ceases to be past; I can only be aware of it as the act I am here and now performing, not as the act which someone else has performed at another time.

Here again there are various points to be distinguished. Perhaps the first is the meaning of the phrase 'be aware of it.' The term 'awareness' is often used in an equivocal manner. To be aware of a pain is loosely used for simply feeling it, without knowing that it is a toothache or a headache or even a pain at all: the phrase refers simply to the immediate experience of having or undergoing the pain. Some philosophers would call this immediate experience by the name 'acquaintance': but that is a most misleading term for it, since acquaintance is a familiar English word denoting the kind of way in which we know individual persons or places or other things as permanent objects that recur, recognizably identical with themselves, in the course of our experience: something far removed from immediate feeling. But the term 'awareness' is also used in two other ways. It is used as a name for self-consciousness, as when a person is said to be aware of losing his temper; where what is meant is not only that he immediately experiences a feeling of anger which, as a matter of fact, is increasing, but that he knows this feeling to be his feeling, and an increasing one: as distinct from the case, for example, where he experiences the feeling but attributes it, as people often do, to his neighbours. And thirdly, it is used for perception, as when a person is said to be aware of a table, especially when the perception is somewhat dim and uncertain. It is well to clear up this ambiguity by settling how to use the word; and the best English usage would suggest its restriction to the second meaning, reserving feeling for the first and perception for the third.

This requires a reconsideration of the thesis. Does it mean that I merely feel the act going on, as an element in the flow of immediate experience; or that I recognize it as my act with a determinate place in my mental life? Clearly the second, though this does not exclude the first. I am aware of my act not only as an experience but as my experience, and an experience of a determinate kind: an act, and an act of thought which has arisen in a certain way, and has a certain cognitive character, and so forth.

If that is so, it can no longer be said that the act, because it is subjective, cannot be objective. Indeed, to say that would be to contradict oneself. To say that an act of thought cannot be objective is to say that it cannot be known; but anyone who said

this would be claiming thereby to state his knowledge of such acts. He must therefore modify it, and will perhaps say that one act of thought may be an object to another act, but not to itself. But this again needs modification, for any object is properly the object not of an act but of an agent, the mind that performs that act. True, a mind is nothing except its own activities; but it is all these activities together, not any one separately. The question is, then, whether a person who performs an act of knowing can also know that he is performing or has performed that act. Admittedly he can, or no one would know that there were such acts, and so no one could have called them subjective; but to call them merely subjective, and not objective too, is to deny that admission while yet continuing to assume its truth.

The act of thinking, then, is not only subjective but objective as well. It is not only a thinking, it is something that can be thought about. But, because (as I have already tried to show) it is never merely objective, it requires to be thought about in a peculiar way, a way only appropriate to itself. It cannot be set before the thinking mind as a ready-made object, discovered as something independent of that mind and studied as it is in itself, in that independence. It can never be studied 'objectively', in the sense in which 'objectively' excludes 'subjectively'. It has to be studied as it actually exists, that is to say, as an act. And because this act is subjectivity (though not mere subjectivity) or experience, it can be studied only in its own subjective being, that is, by the thinker whose activity or experience it is. This study is not mere experience or consciousness, not even mere self-consciousness: it is self-knowledge. Thus the act of thought in becoming subjective does not cease to be objective; it is the object of a self-knowledge which differs from mere consciousness in being self-consciousness or awareness, and differs from being mere self-consciousness in being self-knowledge: the critical study of one's own thought, not the mere awareness of that thought as one's own.

Here it is possible to answer a tacit question which was left open when I said that a person who performs an act of knowing can also know that he 'is performing or has performed' that act. Which is it? Clearly, the first: for the act of thought has to be studied as it actually exists, that is, as an act. But this does not exclude the second. We have already seen that if mere

experience is conceived as a flow of successive states, thought must be conceived as something that can apprehend the structure of this flow and the forms of succession which it exhibits: that is, thought is able to think the past as well as the present. Where thought studies the activity of thinking itself, therefore, it is equally able to study past acts of thinking and compare them with the present act. But there is a difference between the two cases. If I now think about a feeling which I had in the past, it may be true that thinking about it occasions, or else perhaps depends for its possibility on the independent occurrence of, an echo of that feeling in the present: that, for example, I could not think of the anger I once felt except so far as I now experience at least a faint vibration of anger in my mind. But whether this is true or not, the actual past anger of which I am thinking is past and gone; that does not reappear, the stream of immediate experience has carried it away for ever; at most there reappears something like it. The gap of time between my present thought and its past object is bridged not by the survival or revival of the object, but only by the power of thought to overleap such a gap; and the thought which does this is memory.

If, on the contrary, what I think about is a past activity of thought, for example a past philosophical inquiry of my own, the gap is bridged from both sides. To think at all about that past activity of thought, I must revive it in my own mind, for the act of thinking can be studied only as an act. But what is so revived is not a mere echo of the old activity, another of the same kind; it is that same activity taken up again and re-enacted, perhaps in order that, doing it over again under my own critical inspection, I may detect in it false steps of which critics have accused me. In thus re-thinking my past thought I am not merely remembering it. I am constructing the history of a certain phase of my life: and the difference between memory and history is that whereas in memory the past is a mere spectacle, in history it is re-enacted in present thought. So far as this thought is mere thought, the past is merely re-enacted; so far as it is thought about thought, the past is thought of as being re-enacted, and my knowledge of myself is historical knowledge.

The history of myself is thus not memory as such, but a peculiar case of memory. Certainly, a mind which could not

remember could not have historical knowledge. But memory as such is only the present thought of past experience as such, be that experience what it may; historical knowledge is that special case of memory where the object of present thought is past thought, the gap between present and past being bridged not only by the power of present thought to think of the past, but also by the power of past thought to reawaken itself in the present.

To return to our supposed objector. Why did he think that the act of thought, by becoming subjective, ceased to be objective? The answer should by now be plain. It is because he understood by subjectivity not the act of thinking, but simply consciousness as a flow of immediate states. Subjectivity for him means not the subjectivity of thought but only the subjectivity of feeling or immediate experience. Even immediate experience has an object, for in every feeling there is something felt and in every sensation there is something sensed: but in seeing a colour what we see is the colour, not our act of seeing the colour, and in feeling cold we feel the cold (whatever exactly cold may be) but not the activity of feeling it. The subjectivity of immediate experience is thus a pure or mere subjectivity; it is never objective to itself: the experiencing never experiences itself as experiencing. If, then, there were an experience from which all thought were excluded (whether such an experience really exists or not, it is beside the point to inquire), the active or subjective element in that experience could never be an object to itself, and if all experience were of the same kind it could never be an object at all. What the objector was doing, therefore, was to assume that all experience is immediate, mere consciousness, devoid of thought. If he denies this, and says that he fully recognizes the presence of thought as an element in experience, we must reply that he may have recognized it in name but that he has not recognized it in fact. He has found a place for thought only by the expedient of selecting some items in the flow of consciousness and conferring upon them the title of thought, without asking what it implied; so that what he calls thought is in fact just one kind of immediate experience, whereas thought differs precisely from sensation or feeling in that it is never an immediate experience. In the immediate experience of sight, we see a colour; only by thinking can we

know ourselves to be seeing it and also know that what we see is what we do not see it to be: an object at a distance from us, for example, which we have seen before. And even if he went so far as to recognize this, he failed to take the next step, and realize that by thinking we know ourselves to be thinking.

There is still one point in the objection that has not been cleared up. Granted that it is possible to reconstruct the history of one's own mind, by an extension of the general act of memory to the special case where what is remembered is an act of thinking, does it follow that the past which can be thus knowingly re-enacted is any past but my own? Does it not rather seem that, since history has been described as a special case of memory, each of us can be the historian only of his own thought?

In order to answer this question we must inquire further into the relation between memory and what, as distinct from memory, I will call autobiography, using that name for a strictly historical account of my own past. If anyone of us were setting out to compose such an account, he would be confronted with two kinds of task of which one must come before the other. I do not mean that one must be completed before the other begins, but only that in every part of the work one side of it must be taken in hand before the other can be carried out. The first task is that of recollecting: he must search his memory for a vision of past experiences, and use various means of stimulating it, for example by reading letters and books that he once wrote, revisiting places associated in his mind with certain events, and so forth. When this is done, he has before his mind a spectacle of the relevant parts of his own past life: he sees a young man undergoing such and such experiences, and knows that this young man was himself. But now begins the second task. He must not merely know that this young man was himself, he must try to rediscover that young man's thoughts. And here recollection is a treacherous guide. He remembers how he walked in the garden at night, wrestling with a thought; he remembers the scent of the flowers, and the breeze in his hair; but if he relies on these associations to tell him what the thought was, he is more than likely to be misled. He will probably fall into the mistake of substituting for it another which came to him later. Thus politicians, in writing their autobiographies, remember very well the impacts and

emotions of a crisis, but are apt, in describing the policy they then advocated, to contaminate it with ideas that belonged in fact to a later stage in their career. And this is natural: because thought is not wholly entangled in the flow of experience, so that we constantly reinterpret our past thoughts and assimilate them to those we are thinking now.

There is only one way in which this tendency can be checked. If I want to be sure that twenty years ago a certain thought was really in my mind, I must have evidence of it. That evidence must be a book or letter or the like that I then wrote, or a picture I painted, or a recollection (my own or another's) of something I said, or of an action that I did, clearly revealing what was in my mind. Only by having some such evidence before me, and interpreting it fairly and squarely, can I prove to myself that I did think thus. Having done so, I rediscover my past self, and re-enact these thoughts as my thoughts; judging now better than I could then, it is to be hoped, their merits and defects.

Now it is certainly true that, unless a man could do this for himself, he could not do it for anybody else. But there is nothing which the autobiographer does, in this second part of his task, that the historian could not do for another. If the autobiographer, although from the point of view of simple recollection his past thoughts are inextricably confused with his present ones, can disentangle them with the help of evidence, and decide that he must have thought in certain ways although at first he did not remember doing so, the historian, by using evidence of the same general kind, can recover the thoughts of others; coming to think them now even if he never thought them before, and knowing this activity as the re-enactment of what those men once thought. We shall never know how the flowers smelt in the garden of Epicurus, or how Nietzsche felt the wind in his hair as he walked on the mountains; we cannot relive the triumph of Archimedes or the bitterness of Marius; but the evidence of what these men thought is in our hands; and in re-creating these thoughts in our own minds by interpretation of that evidence we can know, so far as there is any knowledge, that the thoughts we create were theirs.

We put into the objector's mouth the statement that if experience could be repeated, the result would be an immediate identity between the historian and his object. This deserves

further discussion. For if a mind is nothing but its own activities, and if to know the mind of a person in the past—say Thomas Becket—is to re-enact his thought, surely in so far as I, the historian, do this, I simply become Becket, which seems absurd.

Why is it absurd? It might be said, because to be Becket is one thing, to know Becket is another: and the historian aims at the latter. This objection, however, has already been answered. It depends on a false interpretation of the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity. For Becket, in so far as he was a thinking mind, being Becket was also knowing that he was Becket; and for myself, on the same showing, to be Becket is to know that I am Becket, that is, to know that I am my own present self re-enacting Becket's thought, myself being in that sense Becket. I do not 'simply' become Becket, for a thinking mind is never 'simply' anything: it is its own activities of thought, and it is not these 'simply' (which, if it means anything, means 'immediately'), for thought is not mere immediate experience but always reflection or self-knowledge, the knowledge of oneself as living in these activities.

It may be well to enlarge on this point. An act of thought is certainly a part of the thinker's experience. It occurs at a certain time, and in a certain context of other acts of thought, emotions, sensations, and so forth. Its presence in this context I call its immediacy; for although thought is not mere immediacy it is not devoid of immediacy. The peculiarity of thought is that, in addition to occurring here and now in this context, it can sustain itself through a change of context and revive in a different one. This power to sustain and revive itself is what makes an act of thought more than a mere 'event' or 'situation', to quote words that have been applied to it, for example, by Whitehead. It is because, and so far as, the act of thought is misconceived as a mere event that the idea of re-enacting it seems paradoxical and a perverse way of describing the occurrence of another, similar, event. The immediate, as such, cannot be re-enacted. Consequently, those elements in experience whose being is just their immediacy (sensations, feelings, &c. as such) cannot be re-enacted; not only that, but thought itself can never be re-enacted in its immediacy. The first discovery of a truth, for example, differs from any subsequent contemplation of it, not in that the truth contemplated is a different truth,

nor in that the act of contemplating it is a different act; but in that the immediacy of the first occasion can never again be experienced: the shock of its novelty, the liberation from perplexing problems, the triumph of achieving a desired result, perhaps the sense of having vanquished opponents and achieved fame, and so forth.

But further: the immediacy of thought consists not only in its context of emotions (together, of course, with sensations, like the buoyancy of Archimedes' body in the bath) but in its context of other thoughts. The self-identity of the act of thinking that these two angles are equal is not only independent of such matters as that a person performing it is hungry and cold, and feels his chair hard beneath him, and is bored with his lesson: it is also independent of further thoughts, such as that the book says they are equal, or that the master believes them to be equal; or even thoughts more closely relevant to the subject in hand, as that their sum, plus the angle at the vertex, is 180 degrees.

This has sometimes been denied. It has been said that anything torn from its context is thereby mutilated and falsified; and that in consequence, to know any one thing, we must know its context, which implies knowing the whole universe. I do not propose to discuss this doctrine in its whole bearing, but only to remind the reader of its connexion with the view that reality is immediate experience, and its corollary that thought, which inevitably tears things out of their context, can never be true. On such a doctrine Euclid's act of thinking on a given occasion that these angles are equal would be what it was only in relation to the total context of his then experience, including such things as his being in a good temper and having a slave standing behind his right shoulder: without knowing all these we cannot know what he meant. If (which the doctrine in its strict form would not allow) we brush aside as irrelevant everything except the context of his geometrical thought, we do not even so escape absurdity; for in composing his proof of the theorem he may have thought 'this theorem enables me to prove that the angle in a semicircle is a right angle', and a hundred other things which it is just as impossible for us to know. Very likely he never thought of his fifth theorem without some such context; but to say that because the theorem, as an act of thought, exists

only in its context we cannot know it except in the context in which he actually thought it, is to restrict the being of thought to its own immediacy, to reduce it to a case of merely immediate experience, and so to deny it as thought. Nor does anyone who attempts to maintain such a doctrine maintain it consistently. For example, he tries to show that a rival doctrine is untrue. But the doctrine he criticizes is a doctrine taught by somebody else (or even one accepted in unregenerate days by himself). On his own showing, this doctrine is what it is only in a total context that cannot be repeated and cannot be known. The context of thought in which his adversary's doctrine has its being cannot ever be the context which it has in the critic's experience; and if an act of thought is what it is only in relation to its context, the doctrine he criticizes can never be the doctrine taught by his opponent. And this not owing to any defects in exposition or comprehension, but owing to the self-frustrating character of the attempt to understand another's thought, or indeed to think at all.

Others, who have taken warning by these consequences, have embraced the opposite doctrine that all acts of thought are atomically distinct from one another. This makes it both easy and legitimate to detach them from their context; for there is no context; there is only a juxtaposition of things standing to one another in merely external relations. On this view, the unity of a body of knowledge is only that kind of unity which belongs to a collection: and this is true both of a science, or system of things known, and of a mind, or system of acts of knowing. Once more I am not concerned with the whole bearing of such a doctrine, but only to point out that by substituting logical analysis for attention to experience (the constant appeal to which was the strength of the rival doctrine) it overlooks the immediacy of thought, and converts the act of thinking, from a subjective experience, into an objective spectacle. The fact that Euclid performed a certain operation of thought becomes just a fact, like the fact that this paper rests on this table; mind is merely a collective name for such facts.

History is no more possible on this view than on the other. That Euclid performed a certain operation of thought may be called a fact, but it is an unknowable fact. We cannot know it, we can only at most believe it on testimony. And this appears

a satisfactory account of historical thought only to persons who embrace the fundamental error of mistaking for history that form of pseudo-history which Croce has called 'philological history': persons who think that history is nothing more than scholarship or learning, and would assign to the historian the self-contradictory task of discovering (for example) 'what Plato thought' without inquiring 'whether it is true'.

To disentangle ourselves from these two complementary errors, we must attack the false dilemma from which they both spring. That dilemma rests on the disjunction that thought is either pure immediacy, in which case it is inextricably involved in the flow of consciousness, or pure mediation, in which case it is utterly detached from that flow. Actually it is both immediacy and mediation. Every act of thought, as it actually happens, happens in a context out of which it arises and in which it lives, like any other experience, as an organic part of the thinker's life. Its relations with its context are not those of an item in a collection, but those of a special function in the total activity of an organism. So far, not only is the doctrine of the so-called idealists correct, but even that of the pragmatists who have developed that side of it to an extreme. But an act of thought, in addition to actually happening, is capable of sustaining itself and being revived or repeated without loss of its identity. So far, those who have opposed the 'idealists' are in the right, when they maintain that what we think is not altered by alterations of the context in which we think it. But it cannot repeat itself *in vacuo*, as the disembodied ghost of a past experience. However often it happens, it must always happen in some context, and the new context must be just as appropriate to it as the old. Thus, the mere fact that someone has expressed his thoughts in writing, and that we possess his works, does not enable us to understand his thoughts. In order that we may be able to do so, we must come to the reading of them prepared with an experience sufficiently like his own to make those thoughts organic to it.

This double character of thought provides the solution of a logical puzzle that has a close connexion with the theory of history. If I now re-think a thought of Plato's, is my act of thought identical with Plato's or different from it? Unless it is identical, my alleged knowledge of Plato's philosophy is sheer

error. But unless it is different, my knowledge of Plato's philosophy implies oblivion of my own. What is required, if I am to know Plato's philosophy, is both to re-think it in my own mind and also to think other things in the light of which I can judge it. Some philosophers have attempted to solve this puzzle by a vague appeal to the 'principle of identity in difference', arguing that there is a development of thought from Plato to myself and that anything which develops remains identical with itself although it becomes different. Others have replied with justice that the question is how exactly the two things are the same, and how exactly they differ. The answer is that, in their immediacy, as actual experiences organically united with the body of experience out of which they arise, Plato's thought and mine are different. But in their mediation they are the same. This perhaps calls for further explanation. When I read Plato's argument in the *Theaetetus* against the view that knowledge is merely sensation, I do not know what philosophical doctrines he was attacking; I could not expound these doctrines and say in detail who maintained them and by what arguments. In its immediacy, as an actual experience of his own, Plato's argument must undoubtedly have grown up out of a discussion of some sort, though I do not know what it was, and been closely connected with such a discussion. Yet if I not only read his argument but understand it, follow it in my own mind by re-arguing it with and for myself, the process of argument which I go through is not a process resembling Plato's, it actually is Plato's, so far as I understand him rightly. The argument simply as itself, starting from these premisses and leading through this process to this conclusion; the argument as it can be developed either in Plato's mind or mine or anyone else's, is what I call the thought in its mediation. In Plato's mind, this existed in a certain context of discussion and theory; in my mind, because I do not know that context, it exists in a different one, namely that of the discussions arising out of modern sensationalism. Because it is a thought and not a mere feeling or sensation, it can exist in both these contexts without losing its identity, although without some appropriate context it could never exist. Part of the context in which it exists in my mind might, if it was a fallacious argument, be other activities of thought consisting in knowing how to refute it; but even if I refuted it, it would still

be the same argument and the act of following its logical structure would be the same act.