

The Practice of Conceptual History: Time, History, Spacing  
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### Time and History

Today is January 24. For us, it would be an arbitrary date if it were not a Wednesday, on which this series of lectures by different speakers is regularly taking place. This date is only accidentally connected to history, because it is *today* and not on another Wednesday that I am supposed to speak about the topic "Time and History." In my youth, things were different. Back then, knowing that the birthday of Frederick the Great was on January 24 was an established part of the general education of a Prussian bourgeois family, and among the nobility it would have been the same. One was able to remember this date—January 24, 1712—thanks to a fopish school education, even if the date was not celebrated any longer. At the most, the day was publicly commemorated every fifty or hundred years. Today, huge exhibitions are organized for these occasions, as is well known. But two hundred years ago, when "der Alte Fritz" [Frederick the Great] was still alive, the day was actually celebrated. At least he was remembered in thanksgiving and rogation services in all Prussian churches. The life of the king and supreme sovereign not only had a symbolic or historical meaning in the everyday lives of his subjects, it was part of the world of political experience, of the school, the tax burden, military service, the courts, all of which were derived from and legalized by the monarch. For this reason, the date had a political-ritual and cultic meaning that became lost with the death of the king. Since then it has been a historical date, long forgotten today.

That is not surprising. So many things have happened during the two hundred years that separate us from the death of "der Alte Fritz": the French Revolution, the dissolution of the old Reich, the founding of a German Confederation, of a new, so-called Second Reich, followed by the Republic, the so-called Third Reich, the division of Germany—we must remember that the Federal Republic existed for longer than the eventful years of Weimar and Hitler's Germany taken together. If one considers the economic and social changes conditioned by the technical-industrial development that have reshaped our life-world, then the world of two hundred years ago appears to be a different world, to which we are not connected by any recollection but only by the historical research that tells of it.

Our reflections on today's date and today's occasion have already deeply engaged us in the question of time and history. We have spoken of two dates in our Christian chronology, two dates that, depending on how we ask a question, mean something completely different; and we have sketched out two centuries during which there were at least six different constitutions—if we add in the Confederation of the Rhine, the constitution of the 1848 Revolution, and the constitution of the GDR, then there were nine. We were thus speaking of relatively long-lasting, more or less stable constitutional modes, which provided the political organization of what can roughly be called "Germany." The beginning and the ending dates of these constitutions can also be named, but what lies between these dates can obviously not be conceived as the sum of certain selective dates that can be strung together. One generally speaks of a constitution as existing *within* a certain time period, for instance, from 1871 to 1918. I am thus indicating milestone dates, which are supplied by historical chronology. When faced with the question of the relationship between time and history, however, one thinks spontaneously of more than a mere series of dates, about which Plötz, for instance, amply instructs us. Is there anything like a specifically historical time that differs from natural time, on which chronology is based? Or are there several historical times, just as there are numerous distinguishable units of action in history? Do those units of action have their own temporal courses and rhythms? Or does historical time in the singular and in the plural constitute itself only through the mutual interaction of such units of action? Assuming that there are such genuinely historical times, how do they relate to chronology? These issues raise questions that will occupy us in what follows.

To talk about history and time is difficult for a reason that has to do with more than "history." Time cannot be intuited (*ist anschauungslos*). If a historian brings past events back to mind through his language, then the listener or reader will perhaps associate an intuition with them as well. But does he thereby have an intuition of past *time*? Hardly so, or only in a metaphorical use of language, for instance, in the sense in which one speaks of the time of the French Revolution without thereby making visible anything specifically temporal.

When one seeks to form an intuition of time as such, one is referred to spatial indications, to the hand of the clock or the leaves of a calendar that one pulls off every day. And when one tries to guide one's intuition in a historical direction, one perhaps pays attention to the wrinkles of an aged human being or the scars in which a life's past fate is present. Or one calls to mind the juxtaposition of ruins and new buildings or, today, looks at obvious changes in style that lend temporal depth to a spatial row of houses. Or one looks at the various levels—side by side, below, and above one another—of differently modernized means of transportation, ranging from the sled to the supersonic aircraft. Entire ages meet within them—namely, the last Ice Age or, rather, the Paleolithic Age as part of it and our century. Finally, above all one thinks of the succession of generations within one's own family or professional world; within them, different spaces of experience overlap and different perspectives on the future intersect, including all the conflicts that they contain as seeds. All the examples that are intended to render historical time visible to us refer us to the space in which humans live and to the nature within which they are embedded, be it the system of planets by which clocks and calendars are regulated, or the succession of biological generations as it is expressed in the social and political realm.

With this, I arrive at my first aspect, the prerequisites of natural time for human history and its historiography.

In order to be able to live and work, humans depend on time limits that are pre-given by nature. They remain dependent on such limits even when they increasingly learn to manipulate these times more and more through technology or medicine. Let me recall a well-known joke from the Soviet Union—"Sleep faster, comrade!"—to indicate a natural limit that cannot be transcended by any planning.

The times of the day and the seasons were guiding forces for the first self-organization of human societies. The habits of deer for hunting cul-

tures; location, climate, and weather conditions for farming cultures; all this embedded within the seasons, shaped everyday life and induced magical and religious attitudes, plus the modes of behavior oriented by them. This is still valid today, although decreasingly so, corresponding to the decline in the food-producing sector, which now amounts to fewer than 10 percent of the employees within our society. In other words, the natural time prerequisites of our lives can never be eliminated; rather, they have their own history. This will be outlined briefly following several instances of time measurement.

Ethnologists report how deeply earlier measurements of time remained embedded within the context of human action. In Madagascar, for instance, there still exists the temporal unit of "the time it takes to cook rice" or of the moment that is necessary "to roast a locust." Temporal measure and course of action are still completely convergent. Such expressions are even more concrete than, for instance, the "blink of an eye" (*Augenblick*) in our language, which is likewise a natural unit of time.

Even the elementary chronometers of advanced civilizations, which indicate the course of time via a decrease in matter—sand or water—were still adapted to the enactment of concrete actions: they measured the length of a sermon or determined the hour of mass, or, like Cicero's water clock, of an address to the jury in court. These elementary chronometers were supplemented by sundials, which, depending on the season or geographical location, announced different times, since these indications were based in nature itself. Even mechanical clocks were able to adjust to this condition. As late as the nineteenth century, the Japanese used clocks of a particularly artful design: the way the hand and face indicated the hours was kept variable so that, depending on the season, the hour of the day was in reverse relation to the hour of the night, that is, longer during the summer and shorter during the winter. By way of these clocks, the seasonal difference between the hours of the day and those of the night entered directly into the rhythm of work from which they received their purpose.

Yet the introduction of the mechanical clock in the thirteenth century already effected a new organization of the human division of time over the long term. Following some precursors in antiquity, it led to quantifying the day by means of twenty-four equal hours. Le Goff speaks of commercial time, the time of businesspeople, which entered into competition with the liturgical time of the church and pushed it more and more into the back-

ground. The mechanical clock, once it had been invented, descended from the church tower to town and city halls, then moved into the living rooms of the wealthy and the bourgeoisie, and finally found its way into watch pockets. Since the sixteenth century, this clock has been able to indicate minutes and, since the seventeenth century, seconds; it indicated, but also stimulated, a disciplining and rationalizing of the world of human work and its latitude for action. In the first half of the nineteenth century, numerous industrial workers in England already carried their own watches—as status symbols, but also so as to check on their supervisors' watches. With the emergence of the railroad traffic system and its standardized schedule, standard times were finally introduced—in Prussia, before the Revolution of 1848—which completely differed from the respective local time and the position of the sun. Henry Ford began his career as an industrialist by producing clocks that were able to indicate standard time and local time simultaneously on two faces: a final indication of the development of units of time made necessary by technology, which became separated from nature-bound, traditional rhythms of time. Day and night seemed to become more alike, just as tracks made it possible for railroads to run at night. This corresponded to the introduction of night work in the large companies of the last century so as to increase production.

What does this retrospective look at the history of chronometry in everyday life mean? We are dealing with a long-term process of increasing acts of abstraction designed to remove humans from what was naturally pre-given to them. First, chronometry was inserted into the human context of action. Second, the sundial made it possible to, as it were, objectify natural time. Third, the mechanical clock and, later, the pendulum clock initiated a reshaping of everyday life through quantified, uniform units of time, which pervaded and causally affected social organization and economic production. One can also call this a denaturalization of the division of time and of the experience of time included in it. In the course of mechanization (*Technifizierung*), physical instruments of measurement have increasingly contributed to divesting the course of everyday life of its natural preconditions, a process that has been interpreted as both a relief and a burden.

Our retrospective look also tells us about other things. We have traced the history of chronometry in social changes in everyday life. Here the interpretation of a denaturalization takes on meaning, though with the reservation that, to this day, all forms of chronometry mentioned have remained

dependent upon our planetary system, on the revolution of the earth around the sun, on that of the moon around the earth (though less so), and on the turning of the globe around its axis. In other words, regardless of the social function of the respective form of chronometry, any form of chronometry remains embedded in scientifically verifiable and, in this sense, objective data. These data of the solar system were already calculated with great precision by astronomers of advanced civilizations in the second millennium B.C. or by the Maya; they are valid regardless of history, regardless of the historical situation in which they were first ascertained. Not without reason is chronology called an *auxiliary* science of history. It answers questions of dating by referring the numerous calendars and chronologies that have been used in the course of our history back to a common time of our planetary system, which is calculated in a physical-astronomical manner.

With the inception of overseas land acquisition, the number of calendars competing in Europe around 1600 (Julian, Gregorian, Byzantine, and also Muslim) was increased by several chronologies. Employing different sequences of numbers, they all referred to objectively equal dates of the same natural time. Scaliger, for instance, defined January 1, 4713 B.C., as day "one," from which every day and every year was to receive its natural identity, to which all calendars could be referred.

This brings me to the second part of our question, the natural prerequisites of our history, namely, *historiography*.

I cannot here address the difficulties that result from the conversion of cultic calendar dates into a natural chronology. Let me just call to mind that the year zero is lacking; accordingly, Christ was born on December 25 of the year one B.C. Or let me call to mind the difficulty that our months no longer correspond to the revolutions of the moon around the earth, or that the days comprise neither the year nor the month without remainder; the conversions of the different calendars presuppose a science of their own. Or let me call to mind the replacement of Julian years by Gregorian years, whose introduction was delayed over a period of centuries from country to country in Europe; according to our calendar, which was introduced in Russia in 1923, the October Revolution of 1917 took place thirteen days later, that is, actually in November.

By addressing all the difficulties of chronology, I want to emphasize the following: our entire chronometry, in minutes and hours, in units of years and centuries, which we create artificially, is based on the regularity

and cyclical return of naturally pre-given dates. For historical chronology, at least, time is measurable only because of its natural recurrence.

To be sure, all chronologies are products of certain cultures and are, in this respect, relative. This is also true for the Christian chronology, which has been largely universalized. Since the sixth century, it has started counting from the birth of Christ. Only since the seventeenth century has it counted the years before Christ backward: *ante Christum natum*. This became indispensable, first, because the discovered world also included Chinese calendars extending even before the date of the world's creation, which required coordination; second, because geology was slowly opening up periods of time in the face of which biblical chronology dwindled. The roughly five thousand years of biblical world time became a phase in the history of our cultural development. Finally, once the infinity of space in the universe was hypostasized, time became expandable to infinity, into the past and into the future. But apart from the context of the history of this change in scholarship during the Enlightenment, there remains the prerequisite that, for purposes of chronology, our time measurements are tied to the recurrence of natural time. Every historically relative chronology is based in a time that is pre-given by nature.

This finding is a tacit yet fundamental prerequisite for our research. Because history itself remains embedded in time periods that are pre-given by nature, historiography is likewise unable to dispense with them. To make meaningful statements, we need to tie each of our relative chronologies back to a chronology that is as "absolute" as possible and independent of history. For prehistory before writing or for early history, obviously paleontological findings become meaningful only when they can be geologically classified, which today is made easier by the carbon 14 test. But exact, objectifiable dating is also required for the kind of history that is based on written sources and human monuments. Only in this way can a before and after be ascertained, without which no event can be thought and interpreted. Any succession that provides a history with meaning is linear, but it can only be dated on the basis of the cyclical return of natural time. Let me give you an example.

It is certainly of world-historical importance that at the Diet of Speyer in 1529 the Protestant Estates came together in a protestation that gave them their name and that set the course, within imperial law, for modern Protestantism. The protestation was directed against a Diet proposal that

Charles V had issued. The emperor himself was in Madrid at the time. It would be wrong to suppose that Charles, through his proposal to postpone the Reformation until a general council, drove the Protestant Estates to their protest, that is, drove them to refer to their free moral decision. The emperor wanted to be accommodating, because he was still at war with France and wished to damp down conflicts within the empire. The Diet proposal that was actually presented came from his brother Ferdinand, however, the emperor's viceroy in Germany. He presented the harsh regulations, issued as imperial regulations, that evoked the protest. The reason for these wrongly attributed harsh proposals can now be determined in a chronologically definite form—something that was only discovered in the twentieth century. Because of the war with France, the emperor's accommodating propositions had to be sent by sea, across the Mediterranean and then to Vienna. They arrived too late to be presented on time to the Diet of Speyer. Therefore Ferdinand acted on his own authority, and he did so with consequences that had a world-historical effect. He passed his own, uncompromising proposals off as the emperor's.

Only an exact chronology of "earlier than" and "later than" informs us—*ex post facto*—about true occurrences and allows us to give an interpretation that is adequate to real events.

Admittedly, no historian will reduce his interpretation of Protestantism to the events of the Diet of Speyer in 1529, at which the Protestant minority assembled for the first time according to imperial law. But already the question of how the protest came about *in actu* and concretely, the question about what role Charles V played in it and what role his brother Ferdinand played, can only be answered if the exact chronology, in this case that of the path that the documents took, is reconstructed and safeguarded. The evaluation of statesmen's actions depends on such procedures.

A historian will, of course, stop at such evaluations, which involve the motives of agents and the ways in which these motives influenced the network of actions, so as finally to issue in a chain of events. He will, for example, ask about the general conditions that made it possible for such actions as the one at the Diet of Speyer to happen at all. He might surmise that general conditions during the time of the Reformation would have given rise to a protest of the Protestant Estates, if not in 1529, then perhaps one or two years later. The conflict that had erupted about the church constitution of the German empire had longer-term causes than those that led, in a single

act at a Diet, to the protest that made the schism irreparable. Even an interpretation of the Reformation in terms of social or religious history will already give less weight to this, or perhaps not even mention it at all.

But our mental operations, which are familiar to every historian, make clear the following: they lead further and further away from the history of events that take place along a chronological order. This procedure is necessary, but it cannot be infinitely continued.

Each individual event is embedded in a chronological series of dates that is to be naturally presupposed, and its uniqueness remains unparalleled. No matter how I research and represent the history of the Reformation—in economic terms, in those of the sociology of religion, of constitutional history, of the history of ideas, or of politics alone—no general statement can get past the fact of an unalterable before and after of events that are actually past. What happened once cannot be undone, it can only be forgotten. Individual dates are pre-given; they have to be presupposed and are often no longer known. In their unalterable succession, they form a chronological grid, and any interpretation that goes beyond this must be capable of being brought into accord with it.

To stay with our example of how Protestantism is explained and comprehended historically—as a movement of religious internalization, as bourgeois emancipation, as the revolution of the rulers, as a superstructure of early capitalism, as the severance of the German people from Roman rule, as a German uprising, just to name a few familiar interpretations from the last one hundred years—no interpretation is able to bypass the irrevocable act of a solemn protestation at Speyer in 1529.

I just stated that, chronologically, generalizations cannot be extended to infinity. Let us continue to pursue this thought for a moment. Even longer-term statements about the Reformation as a unit of events remain tied to milestone dates, before and after which it does not make any sense to speak of the Reformation as a historical period at all. Among these are, on the one hand, backdating the beginning to the late Middle Ages with its popular religious movements, or preconditions pertaining to the history of ideas, which one can find in the entire history of the Christian Church; and on the other, continuations of the Reformation as a factor with effects right into the modern age. Any such procedures—which are completely legitimate in historical terms—remain, finally, tied to a unique succession of events.

We can take our historiographical thought experiment one step further and bring into play seemingly extratemporal factors. Thus one might start out from human nature and interpret the Reformation in psychological or even psychoanalytical terms: as a case of the detachment from external authority that allegedly led to the establishment of an internal authority (namely, conscience), which then could be engaged in different ways. In purely theoretical terms, it is also possible to use an anthropological model of enduring applicability that is intended to rise above any historically unique situation. We would then be on a level of proof of supertemporal achronic permanence, as it were, this being the condition for any possible history. Such explanatory patterns have occurred again and again, in different attire. Thus it is possible to quote a proverb for any history—many dogs are the death of the hare, or pride goes before a fall—in order to reduce a lost war to general human and, as it were, antehistorical regularities.

I do not want to underestimate or downplay the influence of such pieces of wisdom, which can also be translated into the statements of an anthropologically based academic discipline. But on closer view, even these explanations always contain the inescapable indicator of a before and an after, without which a piece of epigrammatic wisdom or a psychological or sociological model of explanation become meaningless. Neither the reorientation of a need for authority nor the pride that goes before a fall can do without temporal indications. When they are applied to history, even seemingly general patterns of explanation inevitably refer to chronological succession, without which every history would be not only meaningless but impossible.

Chronology borrowed from natural time is thus indispensable for a historical reality that is to be redeemed empirically, whether approximation to the absolute exactness of data establishes meaning, or whether the cogency of the relative before and after, which is unalterable in itself, is the prerequisite for a meaningful reconstruction of historical events.

We thus arrive at a result that appears to be banal but is really fundamental: natural time, with its recurrence and its time limits, is a permanent premise both of history and of its interpretation as an academic discipline.

Everything we have dealt with so far can be defined as the objectifiable core of the calculation and determination of time. Now that it has been discovered and recognized, there can be no more dispute about the chronological order of the file that did not reach the Diet of Speyer on time. No matter which interpretation of the Reformation one subscribes to, the

above-mentioned milestone date within the chronology remains within rational control and generally acceptable. But do we sufficiently understand what can, as a result, be called historical time or historical times? Certainly not. I thus arrive at the second part of my lecture.

The singular form of a single historical time, which is supposed to distinguish itself from measurable natural time, is already open to doubt. Historical time, if the term is to have a meaning, is tied to social and political units of action, to particular acting and suffering human beings, and to their institutions and organizations. They all have certain inherent modes of performance, each of which has its own temporal rhythm. Let us, to remain in the world of the everyday, think of the different festival calendars that structure social life, of changes in work times and their duration, which have determined and continue to determine the succession of life on a daily basis.

We might speak, not of one historical time, but of many that overlie one another. Even here, measures of time that derive from the mathematical-physical understanding of nature are needed: the dates or length of a life or of an institution, the nodal points or turning points of political or military series of events, the speed of means of transportation and its increase, the acceleration—or retardation—of a production line, the velocity of weapons systems. All these, to give just a few examples, can be historically evaluated only when calculated or dated with reference to the natural measurement of time.

But an interpretation of the interrelations that result already leads beyond natural, physically or astronomically processed determinations of time. Political constraints on decisions made under the pressure of deadlines, the repercussions upon the economy or military actions of the time spans required by means of travel and communication, the permanence or mobility of social modes of behavior in the field of temporally limited political or economic requirements—all this, plus other things, in their mutual interaction or dependence finally forces us to adopt social and political determinations of time that, although they are naturally caused, must be defined as specifically historical.

In contrast to the objective determinations of time outlined so far, one could call them “subjective,” if this is not associated with an epistemological devaluation.

The uncovering or discovery of such subjective historical times is it-

self a product of modernity. In Germany, Herder was the first to define this, in his metacritique of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Instead of seeing time only as a formal, a priori condition of all phenomena, a condition of inner intuition, Herder pointed toward the plurality of concrete carriers of action. “Properly speaking, any changeable object contains the measure of its time within itself; it exists even if there were no other one; no two things in the world share the same measure of time. . . . At one time, there exist (one can say it truly and boldly) countless many times in the universe.”

Has anything been gained from such a historical-anthropological premise for the recognition of history in its relation to time or, rather, its times? Historical research that becomes involved in factual questions does not explicitly have to pose the question of historical time. In addition, the sources “from” a certain time rarely provide any direct information “about” this time.

We must therefore clarify our question theoretically in order to make it operational for research. I will attempt to do this in conclusion, again with examples, which will—as before—engage first history, then historiography.

Historical times can be identified if we direct our view to where time itself occurs or is subjectively enacted in humans as historical beings: in the relationship between past and future, which always constitutes an elusive present. The compulsion to coordinate past and future so as to be able to live at all is inherent in any human being. Put more concretely, on the one hand, every human being and every human community has a space of experience out of which one acts, in which past things are present or can be remembered, and, on the other, one always acts with reference to specific horizons of expectation. I propose investigating this relationship between past and future or, more precisely, the relationship of specific experiences and expectations, so as to get a grasp on historical time. That historical time occurs within the difference between these two temporal dimensions can already be shown by the fact that the difference between experience and expectation itself changes—that is, it is specifically historical. Let me explain.

Until the early modern period, it was a general principle derived from experience that the future could bring nothing fundamentally new. Until the expected end of the world, sinful human beings (as seen from a Christian perspective) would not change; until then, the nature of man (as seen from a humanist perspective) would remain the same. For that reason it was

possible to issue prognoses, because the factors of human action or the naturally possible forms of government (as seen from an Aristotelian viewpoint) remained fundamentally the same. Whatever was to be expected could be sufficiently justified by previous experience. The Solomonic wisdom of *nil novum sub sole* was equally valid in the world of peasants and of politics, even though individual cases might bring surprises. Using such an inference from experience to expectation, Frederick the Great, for instance, whose date of birth was our point of departure, made an astonishingly clear prognosis of the French Revolution. He arrived at his prediction by confronting his collected historical-political experience with the discreet expectations of a French philosopher, Holbach. The prognosis is found in a review of Holbach's *Système de la Nature*: "For the fantastic ideas of our philosophers to be fulfilled, the forms of government of all the states in Europe would first need to be transformed"—which undoubtedly interpreted Holbach's secret expectation correctly. Yet Frederick went further in his conclusions, for he mobilized the expectations of a political history that was two thousand years old. "It would be necessary for the dethroned generations of rulers to be completely exterminated, or the seed of civil wars will arise, in which party leaders put themselves at the head of factions in order to disrupt the state." Then, it would no longer be possible to stop revolts and revolutions, and the misery to come would be a thousand times greater than that caused by all foreign wars being waged at the time.

Roughly speaking, the events of the French Revolution verified Frederick's prognosis. He undoubtedly saw the misery to come and the drawbacks of the Revolution more clearly than those who placed their hopes in a coming radical change of the constitution. This is authentically a prognosis that draws conclusions from previous experience for the future. Seen from a structural perspective, the difference between past and future history is zero, even if individual concrete events as such cannot be foreseen.

In the same time period, the difference between experience and expectation has also been drawn out in a completely different way. For this, Kant can be called as our witness. For him, a prognosis that in principle expects the same as what has always been possible so far is no real prognosis at all. Kant assumes that the future will be different from the past because it is supposed to be different. For him, the moral requirement of establishing a republican constitution receives a political thrust that is supposed to change the history to come as well. He is concerned to surpass all previous

experience and open up a new future—for instance, to establish a league of nations, which had thus far been unprecedented in history.

His is authentically a prediction ruled by willpower, in which past and future are coordinated in a completely new way. If Frederick is right, so is Kant, in his way. For Kant addresses a specifically historical time, one that it is possible to experience only in our *Neuzeit*, in contrast to earlier ages. For in our modern age (*Moderne*), as it is shaped by science, technology, and industry, the future in fact implies different and new things, which cannot be entirely derived from previous experience. Precisely the impossibility of foreseeing technical inventions has become a principle derived from experience, and permanently keeps open the difference between past and future.

I do not need to explain further the far-reaching way in which the structure of society and its modes of organization have changed since technological progress set in. The enormous acceleration in communication and rates of production is the most conspicuous criterion for a changed time, which is also constantly changing our everyday world and its habits. As Goethe noted shrewdly: "It is bad enough that now one can no longer learn anything for one's whole life. Our ancestors stuck to the lessons they received in their youth; we, however, have to relearn things every five years if we do not want to fall out of fashion completely."

Here Goethe articulates shortened temporal rhythms and time limits that cannot be derived any more from natural time and the succession of biological generations. And—to speak in more abstract terms—he also illustrates the differential experience of past and future. The shortening of the time spans necessary for gaining new experiences that the technical-industrial world forces upon us can be described as a historical acceleration. It provides evidence of a history in which time continually seems to overtake itself, as it were, and it is thus conceived of as *Neuzeit* in an emphatic sense.

In Frederick, Kant, and Goethe we have called three witnesses; each of them has been right and has continued to be right in his own way. Frederick uses an anthropological—historically based time structure as it has been known since Thucydides. It refers to sequences that, as it were, appear on their own out of a certain pre-given situation—a revolution, for instance. History, too, has its recurring possibilities. For that reason, his prognosis came true. Kant assumes that there is a moral demand for a difference between past and future, so as to open up a horizon of planning,

from which the present situation can be changed. This has an effect on history. These reasons underlie his demand for a league of nations, which was realized in the long term. Goethe, finally, observes the shortening of the spans of experience as they are forced upon modern man by the emerging industrial world. There is a limit to inferences for the future that can be drawn from convention. In this respect, the future is as unknown as it is open—not only in individual cases, but in principle.

We have thus made three differential determinations, all of which, located at three different temporal levels, represent accurate aspects of historical reality. Our supposition that it is only meaningful to speak of historical times in the plural has thus been confirmed. In addition, our differential determination of past and future has shown that this difference has its own history and is thus suited to thematizing historical time.

Thus we have all of a sudden arrived at the final question: How can the times of history themselves be historically recognized and described? The question of which temporal level needs to be thematized in each case is a question of historical perspective. Using our example, I can cut out the historical sphere that Frederick, Kant, or Goethe has illuminated, and I can attempt to combine them. But any perspective that I choose has itself a temporal content, because the temporal difference between my position *today* and the past histories (*Geschichten*) investigated enters into my recognition. To have recognized this finding is also an achievement of our *Neuzeit*. As Goethe once said: "One will, in the same city, hear an important event narrated differently in the morning and in the evening." With his usual casualness, Goethe has recorded an apt observation, which reveals more than the long-known fact that people talk about the same thing in different and contradictory ways. It is a historical time that he is referring to, and the pressure to perspectivalism he reveals was first conceptualized in the epistemology of the Enlightenment, at a time when the plurality of historical times was made conscious for the first time.

It may therefore be that at other times one will speak differently about historical times than we have done this afternoon.

*Translated by Kerstin Behnke*