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THE HUMAN SCIENCES

interplay of reasons, must be a positive domain of *knowledge* and cannot be an object of *science*.

IV HISTORY

We have spoken of the human sciences; we have spoken of those broad regions delimited more or less by psychology, sociology, and the analysis of literature and mythology. We have not yet mentioned history, though it is the first and as it were the mother of all the sciences of man, and is perhaps as old as human memory. Or rather, it is for that very reason that we have until now passed it over in silence. Perhaps history has no place, in fact, among the human sciences, or beside them: it may well be that it maintains with them all a relation that is strange, undefined, ineffaceable, and more fundamental than any relation of adjacency in a common space would be.

It is true that History existed long before the constitution of the human sciences; from the beginnings of the Ancient Greek civilization, it has performed a certain number of major functions in Western culture: memory, myth, transmission of the Word and of Example, vehicle of tradition, critical awareness of the present, decipherment of humanity's destiny, anticipation of the future, or promise of a return. What characterized this History - or at least what may be used to define it in its general features, as opposed to our own - was that by ordering the time of human beings upon the world's development (in a sort of great cosmic chronology such as we find in the works of the Stoics), or inversely by extending the principle and movement of a human destiny to even the smallest particles of nature (rather in the same way as Christian Providence), it was conceived of as a vast historical stream, uniform in each of its points, drawing with it in one and the same current, in one and the same fall or ascension, or cycle, all men, and with them things and animals, every living or inert being, even the most unmoved aspects of the earth. And it was this unity that was shattered at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in the great upheaval that occurred in the Western *episteme*: it was discovered that there existed a historicity proper to nature; forms of adaptation to the environment were defined for each broad type of living being, which would make possible a subsequent definition of its evolutionary outline; moreover, it became possible to show that activities as peculiarly human as labour or language contained within themselves a historicity that could not be placed within the great narrative common to things and to men:

production has its modes of development, capital its modes of accumulation, prices their laws of fluctuation and change which cannot be fitted over natural laws or reduced to the general progress of humanity; in the same way, language is not modified as much by migrations, trade, and wars, by what happens to man or what his imagination is able to invent, as by conditions that properly belong to the phonetic and grammatical forms of which it is constituted; and if it has been possible to say that the various languages are born, live, lose their energy as they age, and finally die, this biological metaphor is not intended to dissolve their history in a time which would be that of life, but rather to underline the fact that they too have internal laws of functioning, and that their chronology unfolds in accordance with a time that refers in the first place to their own particular coherence.

We are usually inclined to believe that the nineteenth century, largely for political and social reasons, paid closer attention to human history, that the idea of an order or a continuous level of time was abandoned, as well as that of an uninterrupted progress, and that the bourgeoisie, in attempting to recount its own ascension, encountered, in the calendar of its victory, the historical density of institutions, the specific gravity of habits and beliefs, the violence of struggles, the alternation of success and failure. And we suppose that, on this basis, the historicity discovered within man was extended to the objects he had made, the language he spoke, and – even further still – to life. According to this point of view, the study of economies, the history of literatures and grammars, and even the evolution of living beings are merely effects of the diffusion, over increasingly more distant areas of knowledge, of a historicity first revealed in man. In reality, it was the opposite that happened. Things first of all received a historicity proper to them, which freed them from the continuous space that imposed the same chronology upon them as upon men. So that man found himself dispossessed of what constituted the most manifest contents of his history: nature no longer speaks to him of the creation or the end of the world, of his dependency or his approaching judgement; it no longer speaks of anything but a natural time; its wealth no longer indicates to him the antiquity or the imminent return of a Golden Age; it speaks only of conditions of production being modified in the course of history; language no longer bears the marks of a time before Babel or of the first cries that rang through the jungle; it carries the weapons of its own affiliation. The human being no longer has any history: or rather, since he speaks, works, and lives, he finds himself interwoven in his own

being with histories that are neither subordinate to him nor homogeneous with him. By the fragmentation of the space over which Classical knowledge extended in its continuity, by the folding over of each separated domain upon its own development, the man who appears at the beginning of the nineteenth century is 'dehistoricized'.

And the imaginative values then assumed by the past, the whole lyrical halo that surrounded the consciousness of history at that period, the lively curiosity shown for documents or for traces left behind by time – all this is a surface expression of the simple fact that man found himself emptied of history, but that he was already beginning to recover in the depths of his own being, and among all the things that were still capable of reflecting his image (the others have fallen silent and folded back upon themselves), a historicity linked essentially to man himself. But this historicity is immediately ambiguous. Since man posits himself in the field of positive knowledge only in so far as he speaks, works, and lives, can his history ever be anything but the inextricable nexus of different times, which are foreign to him and heterogeneous in respect of one another? Will the history of man ever be more than a sort of modulation common to changes in the conditions of life (climate, soil fertility, methods of agriculture, exploitation of wealth), to transformations in the economy (and consequently in society and its institutions), and to the succession of forms and usages in language? But, in that case, man is not himself historical: since time comes to him from somewhere other than himself, he constitutes himself as a subject of history only by the superimposition of the history of living beings, the history of things, and the history of words. He is subjected to the pure events those histories contain. But this relation of simple passivity is immediately reversed; for what speaks in language, what works and consumes in economics, what lives in human life, is man himself; and, this being so, he too has a right to a development quite as positive as that of beings and things, one no less autonomous – and perhaps even more fundamental: is it not a historicity proper to man, one inscribed in the very depths of his being, that enables him to adapt himself like any living being, and to evolve like any living being (though with the help of tools, techniques, and organizations belonging to no other living being), that enables him to invent forms of production, to stabilize, prolong, or abridge the validity of economic laws by means of the consciousness he attains of them and by means of the institutions he constructs upon or around them, and that enables him to exercise upon language, with every word he speaks, a sort of constant interior pressure which

makes it shift imperceptibly upon itself at any given moment in time. Thus, behind the history of the positivities, there appears another, more radical, history, that of man himself – a history that now concerns man's very being, since he now realizes that he not only 'has history' all around him, but is himself, in his own historicity, that by means of which a history of human life, a history of economics, and a history of languages are given their form. In which case, at a very deep level, there exists a historicity of man which is itself its own history but also the radical dispersion that provides a foundation for all other histories. It was just this primary erosion that the nineteenth century sought in its concern to historicize everything, to write a general history of everything, to go back ceaselessly through time, and to place the most stable of things in the liberating stream of time. Here again, we should no doubt revise the way in which we traditionally write the history of History; we are accustomed to saying that the nineteenth century brought an end to the pure chronicle of events, the simple memory of a past peopled only by individuals and accidents, and that it began the search for the general laws of development. In fact, no history was ever more 'explanatory', more preoccupied with general laws and constants, than were the histories of the Classical age – when the world and man were inextricably linked in a single history. What first comes to light in the nineteenth century is a simple form of human historicity – the fact that man as such is exposed to the event. Hence the concern either to find laws for this pure form (which gives us philosophies such as that of Spengler) or to define it on the basis of the fact that man lives, works, speaks, and thinks: and this gives us interpretations of history from the standpoint of man envisaged as a living species, or from the standpoint of economic laws, or from that of cultural totalities.

In any case, this arrangement of history within the epistemological space is of great importance for its relation with the human sciences. Since historical man is living, working, and speaking man, any content of History is the province of psychology, sociology, or the sciences of language. But, inversely, since the human being has become historical, through and through, none of the contents analysed by the human sciences can remain stable in itself or escape the movement of History. And this for two reasons: because psychology, sociology, and philosophy, even when applied to objects – that is, men – which are contemporaneous with them, are never directed at anything other than synchronological patternings within a historicity that constitutes and traverses them; and

because the forms successively taken by the human sciences, the choice of objects they make, and the methods they apply to them, are all provided by History, ceaselessly borne along by it, and modified at its pleasure. The more History attempts to transcend its own rootedness in historicity, and the greater the efforts it makes to attain, beyond the historical relativity of its origin and its choices, the sphere of universality, the more clearly it bears the marks of its historical birth, and the more evidently there appears through it the history of which it is itself a part (and this, again, is to be found in Spengler and all the philosophers of history); inversely, the more it accepts its relativity, and the more deeply it sinks into the movement it shares with what it is recounting, then the more it tends to the slenderness of the narrative, and all the positive content it obtained for itself through the human sciences is dissipated.

History constitutes, therefore, for the human sciences, a favourable environment which is both privileged and dangerous. To each of the sciences of man it offers a background, which establishes it and provides it with a fixed ground and, as it were, a homeland; it determines the cultural area – the chronological and geographical boundaries – in which that branch of knowledge can be recognized as having validity; but it also surrounds the sciences of man with a frontier that limits them and destroys, from the outset, their claim to validity within the element of universality. It reveals in this way that though man – even before knowing it – has always been subjected to the determinations that can be expressed by psychology, sociology, and the analysis of language, he is not therefore the intemporal object of a knowledge which, at least at the level of its rights, must itself be thought of as ageless. Even when they avoid all reference to history, the human sciences (and history may be included among them) never do anything but relate one cultural episode to another (that to which they apply themselves as their object, and that in which their existence, their mode of being, their methods, and their concepts have their roots); and though they apply themselves to their own synchronology, they relate the cultural episode from which they emerged to itself. Man, therefore, never appears in his positivity and that positivity is not immediately limited by the limitlessness of History.

Here we see being reconstituted a movement analogous to that which animated from within the entire domain of the human sciences: as analysed above, this movement perpetually referred certain positivities determining man's being to the finitude that caused those same positivities to appear; so that the sciences were themselves taken up in that great

