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J. B. BURY'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

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J. B. Bury's Philosophy of History: A Reappraisal

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GENERAL TREATMENTS OF LATE NINETEENTH- AND EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY European intellectual history have usually excluded Britain, stating (or implicitly assuming) that the British did not take part in those developments which were radically altering Western European thought.[1] In no field does this cleavage between Britain and the Continent appear to be sharper than in historiography and historical theory. British historians seem not to have taken part in, and indeed to have been totally isolated from, those theoretical and practical innovations associated with the names of Henri Berr, Karl Lamprecht, Max Weber, and Benedetto Croce.[2] Certainly until the work of R. G. Collingwood in the postwar years, British scholarship made no original contribution to speculation about the nature and scope of historical knowledge. Perhaps the explanation lies, as both Herbert Butterfield and E. L. Woodward have suggested, in a congenital antipathy to abstract thought about such problems.[3] Yet, in the period before 1914 there was one British historian—J. B. Bury—who did venture into the thickets of historical methodology and epistemology.

Bury was a prolific writer, ranging through ancient, medieval, and modern history in his various books, contributions to scholarly journals, and critical editions. Today, fifty years after his death in 1927, he continues to be known as the author of *The Idea of Progress* and of narrative histories of the later Roman and Byzantine empires. But it is his inaugural address as Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, delivered in January 1903, that has won for Bury an enduring, if somewhat dubious, notoriety. That lecture, "The Science of History," described the transformation of historical studies during the nineteenth century and pointed out its momentous consequences. Briefly

I should like to express my thanks to Felix Gilbert and Georg G. Iggers for their careful reading of this essay and their helpful comments and suggestions.

[1] See, for example, H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society* (New York, 1958), 13. For a recent criticism of this point of view, see Reba N. Soffer, "The Revolution in English Social Thought, 1880–1914," *AHR*, 75 (1970): 1938–64.

[2] That British historians were not involved in these historiographical discussions and controversies has been pointed out by Felix Gilbert, "Intellectual History: Its Aims and Methods," *Daedalus*, 100 (1971): 96, n. 15.

[3] Butterfield, *Man on His Past* (Boston, 1960), 22–23; and Woodward, "Some Considerations on the Present State of Historical Studies," Raleigh Lecture on History (London, 1950), 95.

stated, Bury held that, as a result of the rise of the critical method in Germany and the new understanding of history as a developmental process, a qualitative change in the discipline had taken place: "Girded with new strength she [history] has definitely come out from among her old associates, moral philosophy and rhetoric; she has come out into a place of liberty, and has begun to enter into closer relations with the sciences which deal objectively with the facts of the universe."[4] Hence, "history is not a branch of literature." Nor is its function the didactic one of expounding moral and political lessons. Almost at the beginning of the address Bury asserted, "It has not yet become superfluous to insist that history is a science, no less and no more." The final sentence reiterated the theme that, "though she [history] may supply material for literary art or philosophical speculation, she is herself simply a science, no less and no more."[5]

Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether or not these statements have been misconstrued, the point is that they have largely determined the image of Bury held by historians. The burden of contemporary response to the lecture, and especially of G. M. Trevelyan's well-known rebuttal, was that Bury had succumbed to the "Germanic" tendency to reduce history to the bloodless facts and abstractions of the library and the laboratory.[6] This "Professor Dry-as-dust" stereotype has remained; and among those of a more philosophic turn of mind Bury's insistence that history is a science has been taken to mean that he shared the assumptions of nineteenth-century positivism or scientism.[7] Such perceptions have served to impede serious consideration of Bury's theoretical preoccupations and, hence, to preclude proper understanding of the inaugural address itself. Bury, moreover, spoke to similar questions concerning the nature, methods, and aims of historical scholarship in other lectures and essays and in scattered passages in his books. Only if we examine Bury's premise—history is a science—within this larger framework can we clarify his statement and comprehend his meaning. For Bury addressed himself to problems that have since been given more concrete delineation by those who have come to be called the analytic philosophers of history. Although inconclusive in its debates about the nature of historical explanation, the analytic school has provided the logical tools with which to dissect the thought of a historian like Bury.

[4] "The Science of History" (1903), in *Selected Essays*, ed. H. Temperley (Cambridge, 1930), 11.

[5] *Ibid.*, 4, 8–9, 11, 22.

[6] S. H. Butcher, *Harvard Lectures on the Originality of Greece* (London, 1920), 251–55; John Morley, review of Frederic Harrison's *Theophano: The Crusade of the Tenth Century* in *The Nineteenth Century*, Oct. 1904, pp. 575–76; and G. M. Trevelyan, "The Latest View of History," *Independent Review*, 1 (1903): 395–414.

[7] Sir Charles Firth, *A Commentary on Macaulay's History of England* (London, 1938), 29–30; C. V. Wedgwood, *Truth and Opinion* (London, 1960), 62, 89–90; and E. L. Woodward, *British Historians* (London, 1943), 46, are among those who have perpetuated the stereotype. For Bury as positivist, see chiefly R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford, 1946), 147–51, and also Fritz Stern, *The Varieties of History* (New York, 1956), 20. It should be noted, however, that Arthur Marwick has presented more sophisticated comments about Bury's supposed scientism in *The Nature of History* (London, 1971), esp. 77–78. In addition, a recent article by a classical scholar, although not concerned with analysis of Bury's historical theory, does call "for an assessment of his place in the history of scholarship": George Huxley, "The Historical Scholarship of John Bagnell Bury," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 17 (1976): 104.

IN DEALING WITH THAT ENTIRE CLUSTER OF PROBLEMS CENTERING ON CAUSAL explanation in history, Bury's initial endeavor was to contrast the modern concept of history as a "causal process," which "contains within itself the explanation of the development of man from his primitive state to the point which he has reached," with the older notion that history was determined from without, by the will of God. Only when history was perceived as wholly subject to the laws of cause and effect, he pointed out, could it become a science.[8] Such a position is unexceptionable, though scarcely illuminating, for it is merely to say that historians assume the possibility of natural rather than supernatural explanation. The crucial problem remains: can history, thus conceived as a "causal process," be made to yield uniformities and, possibly, causal laws, or is a sympathetic understanding of sets of unique events and processes the proper definition of the historian's task? Typically, Bury approached this problem of the relative merits of the nomological and hermeneutic conceptions of historical explanation with judiciousness and impartiality.[9] For an Auguste Comte or a Henry Thomas Buckle historical study should establish laws which will describe the causal uniformities of whole aggregates or classes of historical phenomena; for those who reject generalization and prediction, historical study should "trace in detail a singular causal sequence."[10] Efforts at generalization, Bury noted, are more fruitful in economic history and *Kulturgeschichte,* where aggregate behavior is of greater importance. Within the body of work which endeavored to subsume historical data under general laws, Bury singled out Lamprecht's *Die kulturhistorische Methode* as "the ablest product of the sociological school of historians."[11] There can be no question about his interest in, and understanding of, the goals of the nomological approach: he was not inclined to dismiss out of hand its claim to add a new dimension to historical knowledge. But Bury stated categorically that historical generalizations were not laws, that they could provide no basis for deduction or prediction, and that such generalizations therefore had only a heuristic value: neither the role of individuals nor that of coincidence could be contained within any nexus of causal uniformities. Chance and individual action limit the scope of generalization and, therefore, make deduction and prediction impossible.[12] Like the proponents of the hermeneutic method, then, Bury stressed both the unique occurrences and the human volition inherent in the historical process. Although this emphasis meant rejecting the search for deductive and predictive laws, it did not preclude the possibility of causal explanations at some level of generality. In effect, he chose to occupy a middle position, urging historians to give "serious

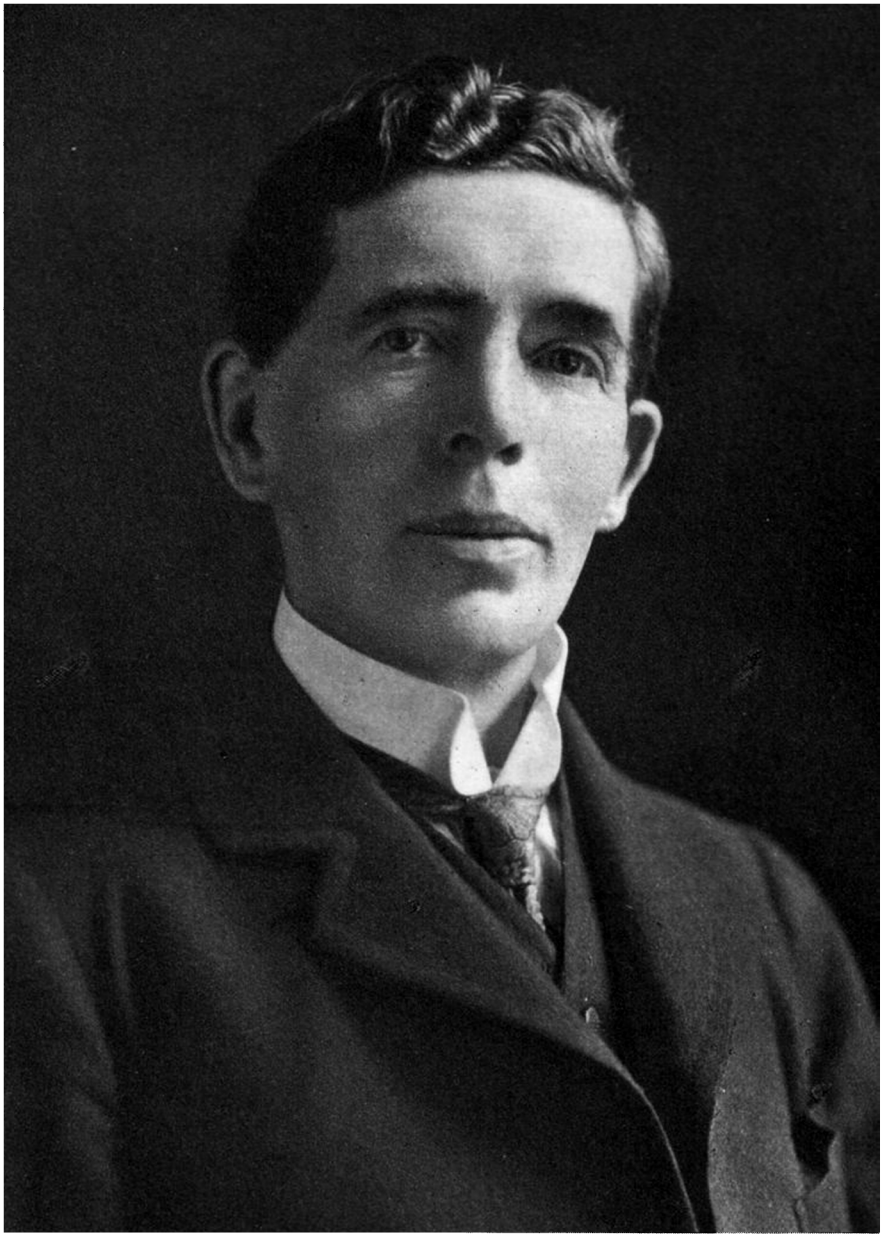
[8] "Darwinism and History" (1909), in *Selected Essays,* 26–27; also see 24.

[9] For a discussion of the development of these two conceptions of historical explanation, see Georg Iggers, *New Directions in European Historiography* (Middletown, Conn., 1975), chap. 1.

[10] "Darwinism and History," 29–30, 33; also see Bury, "The Place of Modern History in the Perspective of Knowledge" (1904), in *Selected Essays,* 44–46.

[11] "Darwinism and History," 41; also see 38.

[12] *Ibid.,* 38–42. Bury elsewhere remarked, "For the comprehension of history we have perhaps gained as little from Comte's positive laws as from Hegel's metaphysical categories"; *The Idea of Progress* (New York, 1955), 301.



J. B. Bury in early life. Photo courtesy of University Library, Cambridge, and Cambridge University Press: H. Temperley, ed., *Selected Essays of J. B. Bury* (1930).

thought" to theories like those of Lamprecht, while nevertheless recognizing that they were applicable only to certain types of historical phenomena.[13]

The aspect of historical explanation that perhaps interested Bury most was that of contingency. Aware of the importance of what he termed the "chapter of accidents" in history, he offered his own interpretation of how historical contingency should be understood. Chance as it operated in history was not "the intrusion of a lawless element"; he defined it instead as "the valuable collision of two or more independent chains of causes—'valuable' meaning that it is attended with more or less important consequences."[14] The accidental was not therefore outside the realm of cause and effect, but was rather the product of a causal sequence quite unconnected with the historical situation it influenced.[15] For purposes of further clarification Bury introduced the categories of "pure" and "mixed" contingencies. The distinction between the two can best be explained by using Bury's own illustration. If Napoleon had been killed by a meteorite, the situation would have been a "pure" contingency, since "the meteorite was completely disinterested in his death." If, on the other hand, Napoleon had been killed by an enemy for political reasons, this would have been a "mixed" contingency, "for the assassin was interested in Napoleon's death, and the causal sequence which led him to commit the act would have been connected with the causal sequence which rendered the great man's death historically important."[16]

In the "Cleopatra's Nose" essay, in which Bury dealt solely with the question of contingency, he proposed a logical structure for the study of the operations of contingency within specific historical situations. His initial premise was that all historical phenomena—those which are defined as "accidental" as well as those which are the result of human purpose—are subject to the law of causation. That is, all occurrences have antecedents. It follows that the causal sequence determining a chance event is as open to discovery and explication as an event stemming from human choice and action. For the historian, according to Bury, "a systematic study of contingencies is a necessary preliminary to any speculations which aim at historical synthesis." The importance of accidental factors will vary according to the circumstances: "in some cases they produce a situation to which the antecedent situation does not logically lead. In others they determine the form and means of the realisation of a logical tendency." By "logical tendency" Bury meant the entire complex which at any given historical moment has resulted from "the experience and knowledge of man. . . . It is to this that the historical process owes its logic, so far as it is logical." He suggested that the role of chance in historical development might diminish as a consequence of an increase in human knowledge of both the natural and social environment.[17]

[13] "Darwinism and History," 42.

[14] "Cleopatra's Nose" (1916), in *Selected Essays*, 61. The same definition can be found in "Darwinism and History," 37 n., and *The Idea of Progress*, 304.

[15] Patrick Gardiner has aptly paraphrased Bury's point: "when a historian refers to something as having happened by chance, he implies that its explanation lies . . . off the main track of his enquiry or concern"; "Causation in History," *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, 1 (New York, 1968): 283.

[16] "Cleopatra's Nose," 67–68.

[17] *Ibid.*, 67, 66, 68, 69.

Bury's analysis of contingency has been subjected to varying interpretations and alternately praised and condemned. E. H. Carr has cited with approval Bury's definition of a chance event as one with an independent causal sequence colliding with other causal sequences. According to Carr, Bury's stress on the importance of accident in history should be understood sociologically. That emphasis was related to "the growth of a mood of uncertainty and apprehension which set in with the present century and became marked after 1914. The first British historian to sound this note after a long interval appears to have been Bury."[18] Whether Bury's stance was indeed a reflection of a changing mentality or merely the result of his own reflections on history is moot. Norman Baynes and Harold Temperley, both of whom knew Bury, mention his growing conviction about the significance of contingency, but offer no explanation of how he arrived at this conviction.[19] Herbert Butterfield has remarked that "Bury, after having been too rigid in his initial scientific assumptions, came to the conclusion that the shape of Cleopatra's nose altered the course of history."[20] Butterfield implied that excessive belief in the possibility of general explanations led to subsequent despair about the likelihood of such explanations. The central question raised by these comments is whether or not Bury came to think that contingency alone was decisive in historical development. Certainly the "Cleopatra's Nose" essay does not justify this conclusion. Here he referred specifically to "the experience and knowledge of man" creating "a logical situation at a given moment of history" and to the interplay of this "logical situation" and contingencies.

For both Baynes and Temperley, Bury's changing analysis of the causes of the fall of the Roman Empire in the West provides evidence of a drastic shift in his views. In his 1889 *History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to Irene,* he had listed various general causes which led to "decline and fall"; in his 1923 *History of the Later Roman Empire from the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian,* he stated that "general considerations" could not explain the collapse of the Empire in the West.[21] Without doubt there is a difference of emphasis in the two works. Nevertheless, to say that "general considerations" cannot explain a particular historical phenomenon is not to assert that there are no general, but only contingent, causes of that phenomenon. What is at issue is the logical distinction between necessary and sufficient cause, the former defined as "a causal component without which an effect will not occur," the latter as "all the other causal components which are required to make it occur."[22] Bury's aim in the 1923 *History* was to point out that, despite the general causes (that is, necessary causes) of weakness within the Empire, its dissolution was not inevitable and therefore had to be explained by a series of contingent events (that is, by sufficient causes). The earlier work, then,

[18] Carr, *What Is History?* (New York, 1964), 130–31.

[19] Baynes, *A Bibliography of the Works of J. B. Bury, with a Memoir* (Cambridge, 1929), 72–76, and Temperley, Introduction, *Selected Essays,* xxiv–xxv.

[20] Butterfield, *Christianity and History* (New York, 1949), 110.

[21] *A History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to Irene* (London, 1889), 1: chap. 3; *History of the Later Roman Empire from the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian* (New York, 1958), 303–13.

[22] These succinct definitions are taken from David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies* (New York, 1970), 172.

differed from the later one in the respective weight allotted to specific necessary and sufficient causes. As Temperley admits, however, this difference was an alteration imposed by "new materials and fresh interpretations."[23] It does not in itself constitute proof of a radical change in Bury's theoretical views, particularly since his other writings provide no evidence that he became convinced of the primacy of contingency in historical explanation.[24]

The two chief philosophical critiques of Bury's ideas about contingency are those of Michael Oakeshott and R. G. Collingwood. Although there are significant differences between the two, both were written from the standpoint of philosophical idealism. Hence, both attempt to refute the notion that a properly historical treatment of the past will use the category of cause and argue that causality is a concept applicable only to the natural sciences. Collingwood and Oakeshott found Bury's views of interest precisely because of what they understood to be his growing skepticism about the adequacy of causal explanation in history and his subsequent emphasis on the role of contingency.[25] Oakeshott explained that Bury attempted to construct a theory in which the dynamic of historical change could be understood as the interaction of causal sequences and accidental occurrences. Although he did subject this theory to a rigorous analysis colored by his own philosophical assumptions, Oakeshott, in general, faithfully described its substance and intent.[26]

Collingwood's interpretation, on the other hand, contains grave distortions—distortions which, unfortunately, have helped to shape the received wisdom about Bury's historiographical speculations. According to Collingwood, Bury began by accepting two aspects of the positivistic view of history: that the task of the historian was the gathering of ascertainable, isolated facts and that an event was to be treated "not as unique but as an instance of a certain type, and the explanation of it [was to be found] by discovering a cause applicable not to it alone but to every event of the same general kind."[27] Gradually, however, Bury became disenchanted with this position, experienced a "crisis in his thought" in which he attempted to shake off his positivistic past, and was ultimately unsuccessful.[28] For Collingwood, the very

[23] Temperley, Introduction, *Selected Essays,* xix.

[24] For example, comparison of Bury's *Quarterly Review* article of 1900 on "Causes of the Survival of the Roman Empire in the East" (reprinted in *Selected Essays,* 231–42) with his Introduction to *The Eastern Roman Empire* (vol. 4 of the *Cambridge Medieval History* [Cambridge, 1923], vii–xiv) reveals the same effort to balance the role of general and contingent factors.

[25] Collingwood, *The Idea of History,* 176–77, 214–15, 148–50; and Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge, 1933), 132–33.

[26] Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes,* 140–41. As William H. Dray has pointed out, however, Oakeshott's critique rests in part on a misapprehension of what Bury meant by "cause" and "general cause"; "Michael Oakeshott's Theory of History" in Preston King and B. C. Parekh, eds., *Politics and Experience: Essays Presented to Michael Oakeshott* (Cambridge, 1968), 39–40.

[27] Collingwood, *The Idea of History,* 148; see also Collingwood's review of *Selected Essays,* in *English Historical Review,* 46 (1931): 461–62.

[28] Collingwood's review of *Selected Essays,* 465. Essentially the same interpretation has been advanced in a recent doctoral dissertation: Arthur Haberman, "J. B. Bury: A Crisis of Historical and Individual Conscience" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1966). According to Haberman, however, Bury was an inconsistent positivist during the period up to and including the inaugural address of 1903.

essence of this "crisis" was Bury's assertion of the importance of contingency, since it implied rejection of the search for general laws and recognition of the significance of individuality in history. Yet Bury was unable to move further in this direction because of his "positivistic prejudice that individuality as such is unintelligible, and that in consequence the generalizations of science are the only possible form of knowledge."[29]

Collingwood's summary bears little resemblance to Bury's formulations, largely because the latter have been forced into the rigid mold of a theory of history in which "idealism" and "positivism" relentlessly confront each other. The reader of Collingwood, for example, will search Bury's writings in vain for any approach to the covering-law model of historical explanation, with its assumption that events should be understood as "instances" to be subsumed under general causal laws.[30] Collingwood has conflated Bury's belief that causality and causal sequences were legitimate and essential explanatory devices with the positivist search for laws which will describe and predict the behavior of whole classes of historical phenomena. Nor is it accurate to counterpoise an early Bury, neglectful of chance and individuality in his quest for generalizing laws, with a post-"crisis" Bury, who believed that insofar as history was determined by accident and individuality it was unintelligible. By stressing contingency Bury meant to point out the existence of differing types of causal relationships, not to proclaim the reign of the goddess Fortuna. According to Bury's theory of contingency, even chance events were not in the strict sense unintelligible, since they too could be explained in terms of cause and effect. And certainly he never considered individuality itself to be unintelligible unless mediated through, and subsumed under, broad causal explanations. In short, Collingwood read Bury through the lenses of his own idealism and arrived at an interpretation that misconstrued the latter's ideas and that obscured his real concerns.

More generally, both the idealist critique and the view that Bury came to think of contingency as determinative in historical change are misleading. Despite the allegations of Oakeshott and Collingwood, Bury's approach to the problems of historical explanation was not in the positivist tradition, unless this tradition is defined so broadly as to be emptied of content. In discussing contingency Bury sought not to make a priori judgments about the role of chance in history but to suggest that historians examine more carefully the nature and dynamics of accidental causes within specific historical contexts. He wished to call attention to contingency as one type of historical causation and to the necessity of making distinctions among varying kinds of causal factors. Morton White has best caught Bury's intent: Bury illustrated "the

[29] Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 150; also see his review of *Selected Essays*, 464.

[30] Collingwood adduces as evidence only Bury's 1900 article entitled "Causes of the Survival of the Roman Empire in the East," where, according to Collingwood, "the survival of the Eastern Empire is regarded as an event of a certain general kind, and the problem is to find causes of certain general kinds to account for it"; review of *Selected Essays*, 462. But in this essay Bury attempts nothing like an analysis of the causes of the survival of empires. His focus is fixed firmly upon the Eastern Empire, with comparisons between the Eastern and Western Empires used as a means of illustration and not of generalization. See "Causes of the Survival of the Roman Empire in the East," 231–42.

correct view that causes are not distinguished merely on the basis of a categorical criterion according to which they must be either states or events. They may be either."[31] And, because the historian deals with both "states" and "events," with the general and the individual, neither the nomological nor the hermeneutic methods of historical explanation could be rejected out of hand. Precisely because Bury's mode of thought was that of a working historian rather than that of an adherent of any speculative system, he did not pronounce upon the intrinsic validity of these methods but instead defined the prospective uses and limitations of each. Considering Bury's reputation as a positivist, it is ironic that he found those aspects of the nomological approach most closely associated with positivism unacceptable: the emphasis upon predictability and the existence of what Maurice Mandelbaum has called "directional laws." Yet Bury refused to regard the hermeneutic method as sacrosanct. He stated that it was necessary to move beyond the collection of "particular facts" to a consideration of theories which attempted to explain the relationships between individuals and the collective social environment.[32] Such theories would be based upon the study of aggregates and uniformities and would therefore result in a more generalized level of causal explanation. Bury was receptive to these potential developments insofar as their aim was not the discovery of laws but the explication of specific historical structures. From a philosophical point of view, his refusal to limit the possibilities of historical explanation to the precepts of any one speculative system or method may be condemned as a vacuous eclecticism. But, despite—or perhaps because of—its lack of theoretical rigor, this posture does correspond to the experience of the historian, confronted as he is by the variety and complexity of historical phenomena. In any event, Bury was among those historians who, before 1914, realized the need for a reconsideration of the methods and goals of historical explanation.

BURY'S "RESTLESS AND FERTILE MIND," TO QUOTE ARNALDO MOMIGLIANO'S TELLing phrase, led him to ponder another thorny question that besets the philosophically inclined historian: what is the nature of historical cognition? Is it inevitably subjective and, if so, in what sense can history be considered a science? Bury's earliest reflections on these questions can be found in a short article, "Anima Naturaliter Pagana," published in 1891. In this essay he argued that it is impossible to recover the pagan past, whatever one's resources of knowledge and empathy. The modes of thought and feeling in the historian's environment cannot be discarded, and these present an insuperable obstacle to the apprehension of alien cultures.[33] This slight but charming essay reveals Bury in a very different mood from that of the sober

[31] White, *Foundations of Historical Knowledge* (New York, 1965), 138. By "states" White means standing conditions, general considerations, or what the historian frequently refers to as underlying causes.

[32] "Darwinism and History," 42.

[33] "Anima Naturaliter Pagana: A Quest of the Imagination," *Fortnightly Review*, new ser., 41 (1891): 102–12.

scholar, patiently accumulating data which he believes will result in a valid reconstruction of the past. Imaginative understanding, rather than causal explanation, is the keynote here. But it would be a mistake to lend too much emphasis to the Crocean implications of Bury's awareness that the historian brings his own present to the study of the past. For Bury hoped that this limitation might be surmounted in the future, that "a new method of historical psychology" would make it possible to trace "the gradual growth through the ages of various emotions and their delicate modifications." This is suggestive of Karl Lamprecht rather than of Benedetto Croce: the historian's imprisonment in his own mental and emotional milieu is not necessarily a permanent obstacle in the pursuit of historical knowledge, but one which might be surmounted by the progress of scholarship.[34]

To turn to the inaugural lecture is to observe Bury in his chosen role of spokesman and advocate of "the science of history." With a note of triumph, of elation, he described how a new and higher standard of historical truth had emerged in the nineteenth century as a result of the critical method. He went so far as to assert that, when Ranke's dictum—"Ich will nur sagen wie es eigentlich gewesen ist" [*sic*]—has been thoroughly impressed upon historians, "there will no longer be divers schools of history."[35] The inaugural address, then, would seem to furnish clear-cut evidence that Bury entertained no doubts about the possibility of reaching complete understanding of the past. Yet this is not the case. A somewhat different view emerged in the course of his discussion of the idea of development, which he considered to have been of equal importance with the critical method in raising history to the status of a science. Here Bury forcefully argued that "the patient drudgery," "the microscopic research," which historians undertake is justifiable because it helps "to build, firm and solid, some of the countless stairs by which men of distant ages may mount to a height unattainable by us and have a vision of history which we cannot win, standing on our lower slope." In one sense, Bury here merely claimed that scholarship is cumulative. But he was also prepared to accept the logical consequence of his emphasis upon the evolving—and therefore relative—nature of historical truth and to recognize a less than absolute value in the historical works produced by each epoch:

> It may be said that like the serpents of the Egyptian enchanters they are perpetually swallowed up by those of the more potent magicians of the next generation; but—apart from the fact that they contribute themselves to the power of the enchantment which overcomes them—it is also true that though they may lose their relative value, they abide as milestones of human progress; they belong to the documents which mirror the form and feature of their age, and may be part of the most valuable material at the disposal of posterity.[36]

[34] *Ibid.*, 112. It is unlikely, though possible, that as early as 1891 Bury would allude to Lamprecht's views. The latter's *Deutsche Geschichte* began to appear in 1891, and his first methodological essay appeared in 1896. The two historians probably met in 1904, when both gave addresses at the St. Louis Congress of Arts and Sciences. Bury's first explicit reference to Lamprecht's work occurs in "Darwinism and History" (1909).

[35] "The Science of History," 10; also see 5–6.

[36] *Ibid.*, 17–18.

As an example he cited Heinrich von Treitschke's German history, which was not "the ultimate history of Germany in the nineteenth century," but rather "a characteristic document of its epoch."[37] Again, one should not exaggerate the presentist connotations of this passage; by applying the concept of development to historiography itself Bury meant to stress the growth of historical knowledge, not its subjective nature. He was not denying the possibility of knowing "wie es eigentlich gewesen," but merely deferring that moment of illumination into the future. But the dark side of the moon remains: until it has been illuminated, the historian is condemned to produce works which are, in an absolute sense, valuable only as documents of his own age.

In writings and lectures that followed upon the inaugural address, Bury returned to the problem of historical cognition. While he reiterated that all historical writing reflects the historian's present, he now made an explicit distinction between fact and interpretation: "Dates, names, documents, can be considered purely objective facts," but "the reconstruction, which involves the discovery of causes and motives, which it is the historian's business to attempt, depends on subjective elements." And these "subjective elements" reflect not only the historian's personal experience but changes in collective mentality which provide new formulas for historical interpretation.[38] Bury spelled out these ideas most clearly in *The Ancient Greek Historians,* in the course of his explanation of how "historical science" has come to realize that all ideas and events must be understood in terms of their historical contexts and "merely represent a particular stage of human development." In the same way the interpretations of the historian are "conditioned by the mentality of his own age," and therefore he cannot hope to make final judgments. Bury declared sharply and unequivocally that it was a still prevalent "illusion" to think that "a historical judgment may be the last word." The "permanent interest" of historical judgments, he concluded, was that they mirrored the attitudes of their own eras.[39] What is absent in these pages is that bracing belief—present in the inaugural address—that sometime in the future historical truth will emerge from the cumulative labors of historians. And yet, despite his acknowledgment of the fragile and changing nature of historical knowledge, Bury continued to insist upon the scientific status of history. Indeed, in *The Ancient Greek Historians* these concepts are linked. History had become a science precisely because of its recognition of the genetic or developmental principle; and, when this idea is applied to historiography, its logical corollary is the relativity of all historical interpretation.

In what sense, then, did Bury consider history to be a science? Most obviously, as he himself noted, his usage of the word "science" was meant to correspond to *Wissenschaft.*[40] Historical scholarship was that branch of *Wissenschaft* which accumulated and presented facts about the past in an orderly

[37] *Ibid.*, 18.

[38] Bury, Introduction to Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (6th ed., London, 1912), 1: xiv. Also see "The Place of Modern History in the Perspective of Knowledge," 51.

[39] *The Ancient Greek Historians* (New York, 1958), 250, 252–53.

[40] *The Life of St. Patrick* (London, 1905), viii n.

and comprehensible fashion. The reconstruction of facts became possible with the establishment of the critical method; order and comprehensibility became possible once the genetic (or developmental) approach to historical phenomena was accepted. This transformation of history into *Wissenschaft* did not, however, imply facile analogies with the natural sciences. Bury warned against such analogies and explicity rejected the view that history was merely a "higher zoology."[41] But, although the distinctive nature of its subject imposed upon historical research methods and problems different from those of the natural sciences, the historian need not limit himself to a narrow and mindless empiricism. The effort to achieve meaningful and coherent syntheses, as well as respect for fact, was the common obligation of all *wissenschaftliche* activity. The "science of history" came into existence when it shouldered these responsibilities. Thus, "fact-gathering" was not an end in itself: "I cannot imagine the slightest theoretical importance in a collection of facts or sequences of facts, unless they mean something in terms of reason, unless we can hope to determine their vital connection in the whole system of reality."[42]

The tone as well as the content of this statement is revealing. Unlike many of his contemporaries who struggled with the problem of historical cognition, Bury seems not to have been afflicted with what Marc Bloch has described as "a disillusioned humility."[43] Bloch was referring to those whom Henri Berr caustically dubbed "*historiens historisants,*" and specifically to Charles Seignobos. Bury's distinction between fact and interpretation is analogous to Seignobos' discrimination between analytic and synthetic history: both attempted to preserve some vestige of epistemological realism while recognizing the relativistic nature of historical knowledge.[44] Whether or not this position is indeed philosophically naive, as the Croce-Collingwood tradition would insist, is not at issue; for Seignobos, acceptance of what would now be called "perspectivism" resulted in a sense of unease or futility, which is perhaps best exemplified in his well-known remark, "Facts which we do not see, described in language which does not permit us to represent them in our minds with exactness, form the data of history."[45] Possibly the key to Bury's very different attitude lies in the fact that he was, in a manner of speaking, a "convert" to historical scholarship. Because he came to history from classical philology, Bury was intensely conscious of the advances that had been made possible in the former by the application of the critical methods of the latter. Whatever the methodological limitations, he was not prone to denigrate or minimize the

[41] "The Place of Modern History in the Perspective of Knowledge," 46–47. Also see "Darwinism and History," 28 n., 36; and "The Science of History," 5–11.

[42] "The Place of Modern History," 47.

[43] Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (New York, 1953), 15.

[44] There is no evidence that Bury was familiar with Seignobos' ideas. Bury's library did not contain any of Seignobos' methodological or theoretical writings, though it did have a copy of the Bernheim *Lehrbuch der historischen Methode;* see *Catalogue of the Library of the Late J. B. Bury,* Blackwell's Catalogue # 228 (Oxford, 1927/28).

[45] Charles Langlois and Charles Seignobos, *Introduction to the Study of History,* tr. G. G. Berry (London, 1898), 221. Seignobos wrote this section of the book.

successful reconstruction of historical fact. More important, he considered the genetic or developmental idea as one which had revolutionized—and liberated—the study of history. Indeed, his insistence upon this point is reminiscent of nothing so much as Friedrich Meinecke's affirmation that "the rise of historicism was one of the greatest intellectual revolutions that has ever taken place in Western thought." For Bury wholeheartedly accepted the historicist point of view, with its implicit relativism and consequent overthrow of "the illusion of finality."[46] Because he identified the transformation of history into *Wissenschaft* with the genetic or historicist approach, he was able to regard perspectivism not as the negation, but as the mirror image, of the scientific status of history. Then again, Bury's temperament, free from a thirst for absolutes, permitted him to acknowledge the relative nature of historical knowledge without dismay.

Bury's views on historical cognition strike the same note as his ideas on historical explanation: neither are distinguished by theoretical rigor but rather by an eclecticism that reflects the concerns and experience of a practicing historian. Hence he rejected some of the claims of both epistemological realism and idealism in favor of a middle position which holds that facts, although existing independently of the historian's mind, are chosen and interpreted according to the perspective of the historian. It can be argued that Bury's adherence to this position demonstrated a rather sophisticated awareness that the pristine forms of realism and idealism offer inadequate means of resolving the problem of historical cognition. Harriet Gilliam has recently spoken of the "tension" or "dialogue" between realism and idealism which "takes the form of a series of efforts, often quite deliberate, to accommodate and reconcile the views of one school to those of the other."[47] If this is indeed the case, then Bury's own effort at reconciliation becomes significant for the evaluation of his place in the development of twentieth-century historiographical theory.

Whatever the merit of Bury's reflections about historical explanation and historical cognition, they are internally consistent, unlike his views about whether or not history should be written without personal animus or partiality. Should the historian, in his writing of history, openly display his *parti pris*? Not only was Bury obscure and at times inconsistent on this question, but he also tended to conflate the question of impartiality with that of history as literature. This is evident, for example, in the introduction to his edition of Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Here Bury pointed out that, if Gibbon were writing his history in the nineteenth century, his attitude would be one of "detachment," since he would have imbibed the "historical

[46] Warren Wagar, in *Good Tidings* (Bloomington, Ind., 1972), 188, recognizes Bury's "implicit avowal of the premises of historicism" in the epilogue to *The Idea of Progress*. Obviously I am not using the term "historicism" in Karl Popper's sense, but defining it as a concept which stresses individuality, development, and relativism. These have recently been suggested by Pietro Rossi as the "three typical elements of historicism" in "The Ideological Valences of Twentieth-Century Historicism," *History and Theory,* Beiheft 14, *Essays on Historicism,* 14 (1975): 16.

[47] Gilliam, "The Dialectics of Realism and Idealism in Modern Historiographic Theory," *History and Theory,* 15 (1976): 231.

point of view."[48] Yet Bury himself is curiously reticent about affirming "detachment" as a virtue in historical writing, and this reticence is linked to the issue of literary merit. He noted more than once that Gibbon's prejudices lend interest and color to the narrative; and Bury commented, "it has sometimes been remarked that those histories are most readable which are written to prove a thesis."[49] After giving examples of historians who wrote with a "party spirit" (Theodore Mommsen, George Grote, Johann Droysen) as against those who maintained an attitude of impartiality (Leopold von Ranke, Mandell Creighton), he did not take a stand in favor of either position. At the end of his introduction, he ventured the somewhat sibylline remark that "it might be reasonably maintained that zeal for men or causes is an historian's marring, and that 'reserve sympathy' . . . is the first lesson he has to learn," but concluded by observing that Gibbon's "zeal," or "zealous distrust of zeal," was "an essential and most suggestive characteristic of the *Decline and Fall.*"[50] Bury thus implies that Gibbon's very prejudices were "essential" to the writing of his masterpiece and that this very subjectivity is "suggestive" of the role of *parti pris* in the creation of great historical works.

At first glance, it appears difficult to reconcile this somewhat indecisive stance with the authoritative manner in which, in the inaugural address, Bury swept aside the notion of any integral connection between history and literature. In "The Science of History" Bury celebrated the newly won freedom of history from literature as well as from moral philosophy. Nevertheless, the significance of Bury's pronouncement that "history is not a branch of literature" should not be exaggerated, since he went on to concede that "the facts of history . . . can supply material for literary art." His cardinal point was that "to clothe the story of a human society in a literary dress is no more the part of a historian as a historian, than it is the part of an astronomer as an astronomer to present in an artistic shape the story of the stars."[51] Plainly, he wished to assert as sharply as possible the distinction between historical research itself ("the science of history") and the presentation of the results of that research in literary form. Bury's delineation of such a distinction does not resolve the issue: should a historian, in the name of vivid and provocative narrative, cast aside detachment and openly write as a partisan? Despite appearances, then, and the invocation of the Rankean "wie es eigentlich gewesen," the inaugural lecture does not serve to explicate Bury's views on this subject.

Much of the criticism of the address ignored Bury's distinction between historical research and the casting of that research into aesthetically pleasing narrative. The phrase "history is a science, no less and no more" was taken to

[48] Introduction to Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* 1: xxix; also see the Introduction to Gibbon's *Autobiography* (London, 1907), where Bury stated that Gibbon did not have what nineteenth-century historians were to acquire, namely, " 'historical sense'—to judge an age by its own ideas and ideals" (xiv).

[49] Introduction to *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* 1: xli; also see xxxix-xl, lxvii-lxviii.

[50] *Ibid.,* lxviii.

[51] "The Science of History," 9.

mean that the new regius professor wished to exclude the literary element from historical writing.[52] Bury responded to this accusation in the "Preface" to his *Life of St. Patrick* (1905). He explained that he "never meant to suggest a proposition so indefensible as that the presentation of the results of historical research is not an art, requiring tact and skill in selection and arrangement which belong to the literary faculty"; and he also made explicit a position which he had endeavored to set forth in the inaugural lecture by stating that the text of the *Life of St. Patrick* was "an effort in the art of historiography," while the appendices to the book "represent the work which belongs to the science of history."[53] This was an effective rebuttal, especially to Trevelyan's remark that Bury wanted history to be presented "without any literary dress,"[54] but one has a sense that despite the minor furor occasioned by the inaugural address the significant questions were neither asked nor answered. For example, there is the obvious question of whether or not historical research can be separated so tidily from "the art of historiography." Because his critics focused upon his supposed denigration of history as literature, this question was neglected, together with that of the relationship between "the art of historiography" and historical bias. Bury's attempt to sever research from literary presentation was analogous to his epistemological distinction between fact and interpretation. But here Bury lacked the willingness to think through the implications of his position with the rigor he displayed in dealing with the epistemological problem. Having exonerated himself from the charge of regarding historical writing as synonomous with "the science of history," he explored the matter no further.

In 1926, however, less than a year before his death, he wrote a curious letter to the London *Morning Post* on the subject of impartiality in the writing of history. The tone of this letter is utterly different from that of most of Bury's work. He discarded his usual cautiousness and discretion, and he forthrightly pronounced, "I do not think that freedom from bias is possible, and I do not think it is desirable. Whoever writes completely free from bias will produce a colourless and dull work." He argued that "the most effective histories"—for example those of Tacitus, Gibbon, Mommsen, and Thomas Babington Macaulay—have exhibited a *parti pris,* because the writer must be personally involved in order to produce "instructive" history. Only if the historian is interested in his subject, and therefore has an opinion about it, can his work interest others.[55] To explain this letter Baynes commented that Bury must have undergone a "change of outlook" from the position he had set forth in the *Life of St. Patrick*.[56] Certainly the priority which Bury accorded to interesting and "instructive" historical writing in this letter is not encountered

[52] S. H. Butcher, *Harvard Lectures on the Originality of Greece*, 251–55; Morley, review of Frederic Harrison's *Theophano*, 575–76; and G. M. Trevelyan, "The Latest View of History," *Independent Review*, 1 (1903): 395–403, 412–14.

[53] *The Life of St. Patrick*, viii, viii n.

[54] Trevelyan, "The Latest View of History," 395.

[55] "A Letter on the Writing of History" (1926), in *Selected Essays*, 70–71.

[56] Baynes, *A Bibliography of the Works of J. B. Bury, with a Memoir*, 105.

elsewhere in his work. Logically, however, there is no inconsistency, since in the *Life of St. Patrick* he had sharply separated historical research from "the art of historiography," with the implication that the former constituted the realm of objective fact and the latter that of personal and subjective historical narration. The 1926 letter assumes this distinction, and in it Bury finally stated explicitly that impartiality is not desirable in the art of historical writing.

What is puzzling, if not jarring, in Bury's conclusion here is his negation, in effect, of his own lifework. For above all detachment and lack of bias characterize most of Bury's historical writings. Only in the *History of Freedom of Thought* (1913), a popular work meant for the edification of the British public, did he write from a partisan point of view.[57] Perhaps August Heisenberg, a fellow Byzantinist, has given the best description of Bury's work: "His verdicts on people and things are objective, sober, and severe, fairly and acutely weighted, but reserved. As a historian, he chose, like Ranke, only to narrate the way things were. Therefore he limited himself strictly to that which the sources handed down to us. . . ."[58] Nor was Bury's unwillingness to indulge in rhetoric and the expression of personal judgments confined to his historical writing: as a lecturer at Cambridge and within the British historical profession he was regarded as the prototype of an objective and impartial scholar. According to Temperley, Bury felt it to be "a duty . . . to avoid giving his personal impressions of a historical problem."[59] His Cambridge lectures on "The Use of Authorities" corroborate Temperley's testimony. They are careful, detailed, and judicious, but they provide few hints as to Bury's own views.[60] There is, then, a radical disjuncture between the entire thrust of his work and the sentiments expressed in the 1926 letter. Nor can this letter be dismissed as merely a passing and insignificant vagary on Bury's part, since it is not inconsistent with a point of view for which he had previously shown some sympathy. What remains inexplicable is that he toyed with, and ultimately accepted, a set of opinions about impartiality and "the art of historiography" which were utterly at variance with his practice as a historian.

Perhaps the key to the enigma lies in Bury's effort to accommodate himself to the British historiographical tradition, which emphasized history as literature, history written with grace, style, and sympathetic imagination. Bury's fundamental allegiance belonged to the ideal of historical scholarship which had emerged in nineteenth-century Germany, and yet he felt the fascination of a Gibbon or of a Macaulay. Indeed, the example of Gibbon initially led him to assume that history written with superb literary style was inseparable from history animated by a *parti pris*. In the inaugural address, and especially in his response to Trevelyan's accusation that he wished history to be presented

[57] Bury's *History of the Papacy in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1930), which is also intemperate, though less so than the *History of Freedom of Thought*, consists of posthumously published lectures.

[58] Heisenberg, "John Bagnell Bury," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 27 (1927): 240.

[59] Introduction, *Selected Essays*, xxvii–xxviii.

[60] "The Use of Authorities" (unpub. lecture notes). I should like to thank G. R. Potter and Robert Schwoebel for allowing me to see these notes.

"without any literary dress," Bury attempted to steer a course between what he regarded as the demands of "the science of history" and those of traditional British historiography. For a Frederic William Maitland, with his literary genius and lack of self-consciousness about "the science of history," this presented no problem. Maitland's writings could have provided Bury with convincing evidence that lively and imaginative historical writing was compatible with impartiality. As it was, however, Bury was unable to resolve the conflicting claims of what might be termed the "British" and the "German" historiographical traditions.[61] Inconsistencies and confusion resulted, mirroring the tension in Bury's own mind between these two differing modes of historical thought and practice. There remains the impression that, in dealing with the question of impartiality and of historical writing as a literary or artistic endeavor, Bury was not, so to speak, his own man. He could not break out of the terms of discourse set by an existing tradition and hence was not free to speculate *de novo,* as he did in considering the problems of historical explanation and of historical cognition.

THE KEYSTONE OF BURY'S CONCEPT OF "THE SCIENCE OF HISTORY" WAS THE IDEA of development, as he made quite clear in the inaugural lecture. Yet none of the subsequent discussion and criticism addressed itself to this topic. Even John Morley, a most perceptive and well-disposed critic, insisted that the more careful use of sources did not mean that a new "science of history" had been created.[62] This is to miss Bury's point completely, since he had explicitly stated that it was the genetic approach, in conjunction with the critical method, that had changed the nature of history. Trevelyan, too, equated the scientific aspect of history with "the collection, collation, and valuation of historical evidence." He prasied Bury's statement that history should be envisaged *sub specie perennitatis,* but related it to "the poetical sense of time and eternity."[63] In effect Trevelyan substituted his own essentially moral and aesthetic historical vision for Bury's emphasis upon the profound intellectual consequences of the genetic idea. The significance of viewing history as a process of genesis and development was, for Bury, that historical phenomena could thereby be perceived as coherent causal sequences amenable to scholarly investigation.[64] Insofar as the response to the inaugural address is any indication, the world of British historical scholarship either ignored or misunderstood Bury's position. As a result, his conception of "the science of history" was misconstrued and oversimplified. While this is the crucial point

[61] This is not, of course, to say that German historical writing was devoid of either literary ability or bias: the difference is one of emphasis and self-image. Also, I am not referring to the Prussian school but rather to the Rankean tradition, which served as Bury's model of German historiography. A charming example of the way in which Maitland dealt with the question of the scholarly versus the literary elements in historical writing appears in his review of J. H. Round's *Commune of London*; see Maitland, *Selected Historical Essays*, chosen and introduced by Helen M. Cam (Boston, 1962), 259–60.

[62] Morley, review of Frederic Harrison's *Theophano*, 576.

[63] Trevelyan, "The Latest View of History," 399, 412 n.

[64] "The Science of History," 6–11; also "Darwinism and History," 23–27.

for the purposes of this essay, there are other implications. For example, it is difficult not to detect in this incomprehension a measure of Bury's distance from his contemporaries among British historians. At the very least, it raises the question of whether his insistence that it was the genetic approach to the past that had created a new "science of history" was in fact unique within the British historical profession.[65]

The idea of development provides the link between Bury's views on the nature of modern historical scholarship and his reflections about the purpose and direction of the historical process itself. Or, to express the matter somewhat differently, the idea of development is central to both the analytical and speculative components of his philosophy of history. In the former, understanding of the significance of change and development has crucial historiographical ramifications; in the latter, change and development are related to the concept of progress. Although occasionally Bury was guilty of an elision in which "development" and "progress" became synonymous, these lapses were few, and there can be no doubt about his awareness—and acceptance—of the distinction. Indeed, he neatly pointed out both the difference between and the relationship of the two ideas in 1909:

> "Progress" involves a judgment of value, which is not involved in the conception of history as a genetic process. It is also an idea distinct from that of evolution. Nevertheless it is closely related to the ideas which revolutionized history at the beginning of the last century; it swam into men's ken simultaneously; and it helped effectively to establish the notion of history as a continuous process and to emphasize the significance of time.[66]

To speak of progress, then, was to speak of a speculative theory about the meaning of the historical process, rather than to describe the process itself. As such, the idea of progress rested upon assumptions about human nature and the course of history which were not amenable to verification. What is more, the very notion of progress must be regarded as the product of a particular time and place: therefore it can have only relative value. To think otherwise would be to succumb to what Bury termed "the illusion of finality"—that is, the illusion that any doctrine represents final and absolute truth. In sum, the doctrine of progress "cannot be proved either true or false. Belief in it is an act of faith."[67]

As a historian Bury emphasized that the idea of progress, irrespective of its validity, had increasingly become part of the European mentality since the seventeenth century. Yet his interest in progress did not stem solely from his awareness of its importance in modern Western history. He indicated his own sympathies by dedicating *The Idea of Progress* to its protagonists: to the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, the Marquis de Condorcet, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spen-

[65] The question of Bury's place within the world of British historical scholarship is one of the topics I am investigating as part of a larger study of the development of the British historical profession before 1914.

[66] "Darwinism and History," 27; also see page 25, where Bury states that the concept of progress implies a "teleological hypothesis" not involved in the genetic idea itself.

[67] *The Idea of Progress*, 1–7, 351–52. Also see the Introduction to Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1: xxix; "The Place of Modern History," 51–52; and *The Ancient Greek Historians*, 256.

cer, "and other optimists mentioned in this volume." The concept of progress was, for him, both an object of historical investigation and, as Baynes has commented, his "working faith."[68] The phrase is telling, expressing as it does the tentative and undogmatic nature of Bury's personal belief in the possibility of human progress. Although he admitted that intellectual advance must be clearly separated from the much more dubious question of ethical advance and that regression remained as likely a possibility as advance, Bury did believe that the progress of the West could be measured by the growth of rationality and of liberty.[69] For the future, the continued commitment to reason as the *modus operandi* in determining means and ends might gradually make, in Bury's words, "men's earthly home . . . a place fit for reasonable beings to live in."[70] This formulation, which speaks of the possibility of progress rather than of immanent and quasi-scientific "laws" of progress, bears little resemblance to the great speculative systems of the nineteenth century. Indeed, only by using the term loosely can one properly refer to belief in progress as Bury's speculative philosophy of history.

In any case, his "working faith" in progress is inseparable from his view of the purposes of historical research. For, despite his insistence upon the autonomy of history, he was convinced that the discipline served ends in addition to those of the advancement of learning. History, like all branches of knowledge, must be studied as if it had no ulterior aim; this precept, for Bury, was inherent in the assumption that history was a science.[71] Yet that very understanding of history as a genetic process which was the source of its new scholarly status, when joined to faith in (or hope for) progress, meant that historical research took on new significance. In the course of comparing the Greek and modern conceptions of history, Bury expressed this idea explicitly: "For us, because we have a deeper insight into the causal connexion of past and future, because we have grasped the idea of development and dreamed the dream of progress, the reconstruction of history has become a necessity."[72] By revealing to the present its own past, historical research played an effective role in clarifying choices for future action. Thus the historian works for posterity, knitting together past and present into a unity which he hopes will serve the future.[73] This mental outlook is what lies behind the oft-quoted passage of the inaugural address in which Bury spoke of history becoming "a more and more powerful force for stripping the bandages of error from the eyes of men, for shaping public opinion and advancing the cause of intellectual and political liberty. . . ."[74]

[68] Baynes, *A Bibliography of the Works of J. B. Bury, with a Memoir*, 88.

[69] *The Ancient Greek Historians*, 256–57; *The Idea of Progress*, 1–7, 348–49. Bury's criteria of progress are similar to those of E. H. Carr (*What Is History?* chap. 6) and Morris Ginsberg (*The Idea of Progress: A Revaluation* [London, 1953], chap. 7), except that both mid-twentieth-century scholars insist upon equality as well as liberty as a touchstone of progress.

[70] *The Idea of Progress*, 349.

[71] "The Science of History," 11–22, and *The Ancient Greek Historians*, 244–45.

[72] *The Ancient Greek Historians*, 257–58.

[73] *Ibid.*, 253–58; "The Science of History," 16–19; "The Place of Modern History," 56; and *The Idea of Progress*, 347. The same emphasis upon posterity can be found in Carr, *What Is History?* 158.

[74] "The Science of History," 22.

This exalted view of the vocation of historical scholarship was shared by many historians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To conceive of their discipline as an instrument of enlightenment and progress not only conformed with a liberal intellectual and political stance but justified the prodigious expansion of historical research as well. Bury, who did not believe that progress was providential or immanent within the historical process, is a prototype of those historians who looked to the continued development and growing sophistication of "the science of history" as a means of human betterment. His interest in new modes of historical thought and research reflects both this attitude and his perception of himself as a professional historian keeping abreast of new developments within his discipline. He criticized the Rankean preoccupation with *Staatengeschichte* and called for the study of all aspects of the life of past societies.[75] And, like Lord Acton, his great predecessor as regius professor at Cambridge, he was convinced of the singular importance of modern history. He argued, again in contrast to the Rankean view, that recent history was a valid object of historical investigation.[76] In his desire to move beyond the traditional politically centered historiography and in his plea for the study of modern history, one senses an urgency, an insistence that the historian grapple with large questions and examine new approaches, so that "we may hope to charm from human history the secret of its rational movement, detect its logic, and win a glimpse of a fragment of the pattern on a carpet, of which probably much the greater part is still unwoven."[77] By extending the frontiers of historical knowledge, the historian was contributing not only to the advancement of learning but to the rational effort to understand the past as a means of shaping a better future.

Unfortunately, Bury's interest in broadening and deepening the content of historical scholarship remained by and large programmatic. His major works in Byzantine history are almost exclusively concerned with political and administrative history. He apparently felt that, at least in this field, much remained to be done in explicating what today would be called *histoire événementielle,* and that only later should economic and cultural history be undertaken. Another explanation of Bury's emphasis upon the political and administrative aspects of Byzantine history is that the continuity with Greek and Roman history drew him to Byzantine scholarship. This continuity was evident in politics and administration; hence these became the chief concerns of Bury's work.[78]

In *The Ancient Greek Historians* and *The Idea of Progress,* however, Bury did succeed in breaking out of the mold of large-scale, political narrative. The former work is noteworthy—aside from its substantive value as sound in-

[75] *Ibid.*, 19–20, and "The Place of Modern History," 43–44.

[76] "The Place of Modern History," 51–59. Although Ranke did deal with contemporary history (e.g., in the later editions of the *History of the Popes*), he did not regard it as an independent field of historical study.

[77] "The Science of History," 59.

[78] R. H. Murray, Introduction to Bury, *History of the Papacy in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1930), l–li; Baynes, *A Bibliography of the Works of J. B. Bury, with a Memoir,* 6, 17; and Baynes, "Note," *Journal of Roman Studies,* 12 (1922): 207.

tellectual history—because of Bury's willingness to move beyond delineation of the specific historiographical theory and practice of his protagonists to more general considerations about the nature of historical writing. His other scholarly foray into intellectual history, *The Idea of Progress,* reflects Bury's assumption that ideas can be a powerful engine of social change. And yet the book itself was largely devoted to showing how the idea of progress originated and developed within the high culture of Western Europe over several centuries. Bury paid little attention to the social or political context of the idea or to how belief in that idea succeeded in becoming part of the collective European mentality. In the last chapters of the book Bury did attempt to shift his focus and explain how the idea of progress became popularized.[79] Without forcing these few passages to bear too great a burden, it can be suggested that they reveal glimpses of a broader approach to the study of social and cultural phenomena. Possibly the very exigencies of his subject had led Bury beyond his usual techniques of historical analysis. In the main, however, *The Idea of Progress* is intellectual history of the kind associated with A. O. Lovejoy, with its emphasis upon "tracing the morphology of a given concept over time."[80] Neither this work, then, nor *The Ancient Greek Historians* provides evidence that Bury was able to translate his programmatic statements into innovative historiographical practice.

IT IS OBVIOUSLY INAPPROPRIATE TO PUT LABELS ON BURY'S HISTORICAL thought. To call him a "positivist" is to drain that term of substance; he neither shared the premises of the positivist world view nor wrote history in the manner of a Buckle or a Hippolyte Taine. Nor is Collingwood's description of Bury as a "perplexed and inconsistent positivist" apposite. Bury was "perplexed and inconsistent" only when discussing history as literature and historical impartiality. Nor was it the influence of positivism which led to that confusion and inconsistency; it was rather Bury's attempt to retain some fealty to the British tradition of historical writing which fostered perplexity. Perception of Bury as a kind of paridigmatic figure of historiographical "scientism," sometimes conflated with his alleged positivism, has also been widespread. To accuse Bury of "scientism" could mean to charge that he misapprehended the proper relationship between history and literature, or suggest that he accepted the assumptions of the scientific school of history in the Rankean mode, or imply that he concurred with the positivist belief that laws can be derived from historical data. But Bury's views cannot be comfortably subsumed under any of these rubrics. These persistent stereotypes have had the unfortunate effect of relegating the ideas of a major historian to the museum of historiographical antiquities.

[79] Chaps. 18 and 19.

[80] Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory,* 8 (1969): 48. See Skinner's remarks on this approach, in which *The Idea of Progress* is cited, 10–12.

In the development of historical writing in Britain, Bury's primary importance lies in his endeavor, like that of his predecessor Lord Acton, to impress upon the British academic and intellectual community the changed nature and status of the discipline of history.[81] The inaugural address proclaimed that henceforth historians must be considered (and consider themselves) professional scholars, responsible only to the canons of their craft. This implied not only adherence to the critical method, but awareness as well of the far-reaching implications of the genetic or developmental outlook, which constituted the essence of the nineteenth-century historical movement. By promoting the ideal of the professional, or "scientific," historian Bury helped to bring British historians into the mainstream of European historiography. Through his encouragement of research at Cambridge and his own historical writing, he provided a model of the professional scholar.[82] He assailed what he termed the "insularity" of historical study at Cambridge with its emphasis upon English, at the expense of continental, history. Although unsuccessful in his efforts to include both more foreign history and some training in historical method in the Historical Tripos, his austere devotion to his calling and his cosmopolitan historical outlook did not pass unheeded.[83]

Side by side with Bury the acolyte and proselytizer of the great tradition of continental historical scholarship, however, was Bury the "restless mind" that perceived unresolved problems within this tradition and sought to confront them. This makes him unique within the British historical profession in the years before 1914. For, although historians of the stature of F. W. Maitland, C. H. Firth, and A. F. Pollard were also professional scholars who encouraged rigorous research, they lacked Bury's self-consciousness about the historical craft itself. This self-consciousness led him to raise questions similar to those that agitated his continental and American counterparts: To what extent did the methods of the historian in fact provide "objective" knowledge? What was the nature of historical cognition? Did the uniqueness and individuality of historical phenomena mean that causal explanations were impossible? What of the relationship between history and the social sciences? How could the subject matter of history be broadened and deepened? Bury's efforts to speak to these questions afford additional evidence of the pervasiveness of what Georg Iggers has recently defined as the "crisis" of the scientific school of history.[84] But if historians in Europe and the United States felt the need to

[81] Butterfield has noted that Acton was the "most self-conscious representative" of the nineteenth-century historical movement in England; *Man on His Past,* xv.

[82] Bury helped to found both the Cambridge Historical Society and the *Cambridge Historical Journal.* See Temperley, Introduction, *Selected Essays,* xxxi.

[83] For Bury and the teaching of history at Cambridge, see Jean O. McLachlan, "The Origin and Early Development of the Cambridge Historical Tripos," *Cambridge Historical Journal,* 9 (1947): 96, 101–102. For Bury's influence at Cambridge, see Baynes, *A Bibliography of the Works of J. B. Bury, with a Memoir,* 50; Temperley, Introduction, *Selected Essays,* xxx–xxxi; G. P. Gooch, "The Cambridge Chair of Modern History," in *Studies in Modern History* (London, 1931), 319, and "Some Great English Historians," in *Historical Surveys and Portraits* (New York, 1966), 157–58; Murray, Introduction to Bury, *History of the Papacy in the Nineteenth Century,* xvi, lix; F. M. Powicke, *Modern Historians and the Study of History* (London, 1955), 131–32; and H. Temperley, *Research and Modern History* (London, 1930), 5.

[84] Iggers, *New Directions in European Historiography,* 18.

re-examine the nature and methods of their discipline, each undertook the task from within a specific national and social context. Perhaps the continuing strength in British intellectual life of the amateur tradition, which partially accounts for the late and incomplete professionalization of history in England,[85] chiefly shaped Bury's response. For Bury was in the awkward situation of at once endeavoring to foster the development of professional, "scientific" history and questioning some of the premises and formulations of the scientific school. To defend history as a *wissenschaftliche* activity and yet to point out the weaknesses and limitations of the Rankean historiographical tradition required an ingenuity bordering upon sleight of hand, given British attitudes and conventions. Bury's failure to move beyond occasional statements on methodological and epistemological matters may be at least partially attributed to fear that he might undermine the growing, but still incomplete, edifice of professional historical scholarship in England. Moreover, the lack of interest in questions of historiographical thought and practice among British historians must have engendered a sense of isolation.[86] With the exception of the inaugural address, none of Bury's speculative and theoretical essays were addressed to his colleagues within the British historical profession, and in his Cambridge lectures he made no attempt to communicate his awareness of, and interest in, theoretical problems. This remained the case even in the postwar years, when, to quote Carr, "the age of innocence" among British historians came to an end.[87] During this period there was a new interest in historical theory: Croce's books were translated and discussed and the work of Collingwood began to appear. Yet Bury, who continued to publish until his death in 1927, evinced no interest and made no contribution. Probably personal considerations played their part: Bury's health was failing, he was away from Britain much of the time, and he wished to complete his lifework in Byzantine history. In any event, although Bury was a significant figure in the professionalization of historical study in Britain, he had little specific influence in ending "the age of innocence" among his colleagues.

In the larger context of European historiographical thought, Bury's importance resides in his inclusion—and his alone within the ranks of British historians—among the protagonists of the "crisis" in early twentieth-century historiography.[88] Because this phenomenon has only recently engaged scholarly attention, interest has naturally focused upon the major figures, upon those whose efforts led to significant innovation or at least achieved wide notoriety. Hence, the program of Henri Berr and the *Revue de synthèse historique,*

[85] Felix Gilbert, "European and American Historiography," in J. Higham, L. Krieger, and F. Gilbert, *History* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1965), 336.

[86] Suggestive of the naiveté with which British historians regarded historiographical questions in the years before 1914 is the analogy which one reviewer made in the pages of the *English Historical Review* between the work of Durkheim and the writings of the English social historian J. R. Green: "H. W. C. D." (probably H. W. C. Davis, later Regius Professor of History at Oxford), review of Henri Berr's *La Synthèse en Histoire*, in *English Historical Review*, 27 (1912): 181–82.

[87] Carr, *What Is History?* 21.

[88] Felix Gilbert has recently mentioned Bury in this connection; see Gilbert, ed., *The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze* (New York, 1975), 7.

the creation of the "New History" in the United States, and the *Methodenstreit* that grew out of Karl Lamprecht's advocacy of *Kulturgeschichte* have claimed attention and received investigation.[89] Yet reappraisal of the views of the less influential colleagues of these innovators is also essential if the full dimensions of the reorientation in modern historical thought are to be understood. From this point of view, Bury provides a case study of how far one historian was able to move in the direction of a reformulation of the tenets of traditional nineteenth-century historiographical theory.

Owing allegiance to no systematic philosophy and isolated from colleagues who shared his theoretical interests, J. B. Bury's conclusions were based solely on reading and reflection and on his experience as a working historian. His views regarding historical explanation and historical cognition were relatively sophisticated. They anticipated the concerns of modern analytical philosophy and the solutions accepted by many practicing historians. His opinions about the literary or artistic aspect of historical writing, however, cannot be said to have contributed to serious discussion about the extent to which history as a human study is by definition closer to art than to science; they merely echoed the adage that history should be written with flair and style, even at the cost of impartiality.[90] Although the bulk of his own historical work dealt with the distant past and with political history, he nevertheless called for the study of the recent past and of social, economic, and cultural history.

To locate Bury's thought within the framework of the "crisis" of early twentieth-century historiography is not to claim that he was a Berr or a Lamprecht; it is to suggest that what Meinecke termed the "silver age" of historical writing may have bred a more pervasive disquiet among historians than has hitherto been recognized. The example of Bury indicates that this disquiet is to be found within the ranks of those customarily described as traditional historians. Did other traditional historians share his sensitivity to unresolved problems and alternative approaches? One thinks for example of Seignobos, archetype of the much-maligned "*historiens historisants,*" whose theoretical writings also show a groping toward new formulations. In short, perhaps many of the "fathers" (the traditionalists) were more complex than the "sons" (the innovators who displaced them) realized or could admit. But this is mere speculation, induced by appraisal of one historian who would have had little difficulty in accommodating himself to many twentieth-century innovations in historical scholarship.

[89] See especially John Higham, "The New History," in J. Higham, L. Krieger, and F. Gilbert, *History*, 104–16; William R. Keylor, *Academy and Community: The Foundation of the French Historical Profession* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), chap. 8; Annie M. Popper, "Karl Gotthard Lamprecht," in Bernadotte E. Schmitt, ed., *Some Historians of Modern Europe* (Chicago, 1942), 217–39; Martin Siegal, "Henri Berr's *Revue de Synthèse Historique*," *History and Theory*, 9 (1970): 322–34; Robert Allen Skotheim, *American Intellectual Histories and Historians* (Princeton, 1966), chap. 2; and Karl J. Weintraub, *Visions of Culture* (Chicago, 1966), chap. 4.

[90] On this subject see Isaiah Berlin, "History and Theory: The Concept of Scientific History," *History and Theory*, 1 (1960): 24, in which the author reaches beyond the question of style to discussion of "a profounder sense in which the historian's activity is an artistic one."