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Wherever man has lived, wherever he has left some feeble imprint of his life and his intelligence, there is history. ❀ Fustel de Coulanges

In history, as in nature, the processes of death and birth are eternally in step with one another. Old forms of thought die out while, at the same time and on the same soil, a new crop begins to bloom. ❀ Johan Huizinga

This anthology presents the work of an original mind, a historian acutely sensitive to the conditions that shaped life in the twentieth century and the modern age: John Lukacs. Born in Budapest in 1924, Lukacs came to the United States in 1946 to escape the Communist takeover of his homeland. His life has spanned much of the history of the century about which he has so movingly written. As the author of *The Duel* and *Five Days in London, May 1940*, Lukacs is one of the most popular historians of World War II; as the author of *Historical Consciousness*, a study of the nature of historical thought, Lukacs remains almost unknown. *Remembered Past* seeks to call attention to this unjustly neglected aspect of Lukacs's work. The diverse essays and reviews that compose this volume situate his corpus in the unfolding narrative of historical thinking.

Human life is intensely, unalterably historical. "*Man . . . has no nature,*" wrote the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset. "*[W]hat he has is . . . history. . . . Man . . . finds that he has no nature other than what he has himself done.*"¹ Even the body originates in the past, a unique variant of ancestral genetic components. So completely does the past infuse being that man has come to have "no proper place in what is new."² The restive discontent with custom and tradition and the impetuous embrace of novelty and fashion signal not progress but an illness that may yet prove fatal: the inability or unwillingness to accept human limits and to live within our means on



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our inheritance. “The error of the old doctrine of progress,” Ortega declared, “lay in affirming a priori that man progresses toward the better.”³ Time alone will tell. Without reconciling the ephemeral present with the enduring past, we will know neither peace nor rest. That much is certain. The accomplishments as well as the failures of history are ours to bear and to pass on. Civilization, and perhaps existence itself, depends on the effort to answer the unanswered questions of the past and to undertake anew the tasks that previous generations left incomplete. To forget the past is thus to invite moral catastrophe and spiritual ruin, for it means to lose contact with the self, with reality, and with all that is human.

Of utmost importance, according to John Lukacs, is the continuing need to rethink the significance of the past itself, to expose the past to “multiple jeopardy.”⁴ Yet Lukacs demurs to answer the epistemological question of what constitutes historical knowledge. He knows that historians cannot offer statements of definitive historical truth. On the contrary, Lukacs has concerned himself with the reduction of untruth by explaining the conditions of thought and identifying the limitations of knowledge. Modern men, as Lukacs puts it, have become “historians by nature.” Their understandings of self and world emerge and take shape in relation to the past. He concurs with the nineteenth-century German historian and philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey that men know themselves through their history, and that they understand their history at least as much from the inside out as from the outside in. Similarly, insofar as the link between life and the past is indissoluble, Lukacs agrees with Benedetto Croce that all history is contemporary history, that all history is the remembered past—the imprecise, unsystematic, and partial knowledge that some human beings have of other human beings.⁵

The intellectual revolution that brought history to the forefront of consciousness began in the seventeenth century and, Lukacs argues, coincided with the rise of science and the adoption of the scientific method. Together, history and science reflected the growing secularization of thought that followed the Protestant Reformation and the ensuing wars of religion. In time, the ideological conflict between Protestants and Catholics, which resulted in the slaughter of hundreds of thousands in the name of God, debased religion, subverted theology, and inspired a mistrust—among all but the most zealous and enthusiastic—of any system proclaiming to embody truths beyond those that observation and evidence could verify. Conscientious and thoughtful men accepted nothing on faith. For the educated classes, history and science filled a void (as, perhaps, witchcraft did for the masses), introducing alternative methods of ordering and interpreting experience.

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But, though they share common antecedents, history and science have diverged in their purposes. Science, Lukacs maintains, involves the exploration of nature, while history, as Giambattista Vico first observed in *Scienza nuova*, comprises man's knowledge of man. History, for Lukacs, is a form of thought. Science may be studied historically; the history of a science is science. History, by contrast, because it deals with the exceptional, the indeterminate, and the unpredictable, cannot be studied scientifically. Attempts to reconcile history and science, or, more precisely, to subordinate history to science and to subject the investigation of the past to objective and universal laws, has led historians into error and confusion. Nevertheless, well into the twentieth century, historians continued to associate their discipline with science, social science, and the prestige that both enjoyed. For example, in *What Is History?* E. H. Carr concluded that "scientists, social scientists, and historians are all engaged in different branches of the same study: the study of man and his environment, of the effects of man on his environment and of his environment on man. The object of the study is the same: to increase man's understanding of, and mastery over, his environment."⁶ The nature and purpose of history, Lukacs replies, are not so pragmatic, so utilitarian, or so grandiose. History does not work. Unlike scientists, historians cannot manipulate data to change the world or to predict the future. Their intent is, or ought to be, not to increase the "quantity of knowledge" but to deepen the "quality of understanding."⁷

Yet, in some respects, the conception of history as science and, later, as social science marked an intellectual advance. During the eighteenth century, principally in Western Europe, history flourished as literature. Only in the nineteenth century did history sever its connections with literature and emerge as an independent form of inquiry governed by its own methods and objectives, which the German philologist Leopold von Ranke articulated. Historians, Ranke insisted, must try to write history as it actually happened or as it actually was ("*Ich will nur sagen wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*"). Unlike many of his successors, Ranke never intended that historians accumulate a multitude of facts to produce an exact transcript of the past to which, as Lord Acton hoped, all could assent. Such a project was as undesirable as it was impossible. "Those historians are . . . mistaken," Ranke protested, "who consider history simply an immense aggregate of particular facts, which it behooves one to commit to memory."⁸ By themselves, facts revealed nothing. Only a systematic and critical evaluation of original documents enabled historians to organize the facts in meaningful ways, to expose the unity of disparate events, and to adduce the truth.

Ranke's innovative approach encouraged the study of the past in its own terms and not merely as a narrative expression of established authority,

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orthodox principle, or dogmatic system, whether literary, theological, or philosophical. He remained confident that whatever the shortcomings of his own work he could show “humanity, as it is, explicable or inexplicable: the life of the individual, of generations, and of nations, and at times the hand of God above them.”⁹ Far from making a science of history, Ranke’s determination to reconstruct the past “as it was” cast history adrift from its philosophical moorings and left it vulnerable to diverse and competing political interpretations. Ranke’s twentieth-century disciple, Friedrich Meinecke, ascertained the epistemological weakness that afflicted Ranke’s thinking and continues to burden historicism. The study of history, Meinecke admitted, tended to make all values impermanent, arbitrary, and relative. Since no belief is, or can be, absolute, universal, and timeless, those inclined to do so can use the past to justify and promote their cause. Current academic pretensions notwithstanding, the effort to transform history into a neutral, objective science arose in part from the desire to insulate the study of the past from the ideological disputes and upheavals of the nineteenth century. In that ideologically charged atmosphere, gifted historians could not resist the temptation to indulge in partisan activity or to put historical scholarship at the service of political ambition. In France, their number included Augustin Thierry, François Guizot, Jules Michelet, and Jean Jaurès; in Germany, Johann Gustav Droysen and Helmut von Treischke; in Great Britain, Thomas Babington Macaulay and Thomas Carlyle; in the United States, George Bancroft. Most notable, of course, were Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, then, the majority of historians had begun to associate history with the natural sciences. So pervasive was this conviction that in his inaugural lecture as Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, delivered in 1902, J. B. Bury could assert that “history has really been enthroned and ensphered among the sciences; but the particular nature of her influence, her time-honoured association with literature, and other circumstances, have acted as a sort of cloud, half concealing from men’s eyes her new position in the heavens.”¹⁰ Under the influence of positivism, the learned English amateur historian Henry Thomas Buckle aspired to discern uniform and unchanging patterns of human existence, just as scientists had purportedly fathomed the design of nature and the configuration of the universe. Historians, Buckle contended, had not only to make the past intelligible, but also to make events predictable. Only their indolence and incompetence had thus far delayed the creation of a true science of history.

Lukacs dismisses this persistent representation of history as science and social science, refusing, as he writes, to force “history into the Procrustean

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bed of the scientific method.”¹¹ His views are more consonant with those of Croce, Dilthey, and Droysen, each of whom emphasized understanding (*verstehen*) at the expense of precision or accuracy of knowledge and accepted the unavoidably personal involvement of the historian with his subject. In addition, Lukacs suggests that an understanding of the past cannot be confined to “what actually happened.” The potential is as important to historians as the actual, for, as Lukacs remarks, “human inclinations, even when they do not mature into definite acts, are essentially potential signs of actualities.”¹² In this respect, Lukacs echoes the French social theorist Raymond Aron, who explained that “we speak of understanding when *knowledge shows a meaning which, immanent to the reality, has been or could have been thought by those who lived and realized it.*”¹³ Historians do not reconstruct, reproduce, or re-experience the complex reality of the past “as it actually happened,” summoning it again to life. Rather, they re-imagine its meaning and rethink its significance. The study of the past is an act of creative re-cognition in which historians contemplate the potential inherent in the actual and reexamine different and changing ways of feeling, perceiving, remembering, and thinking. About history there must forever be an element of contingency, indeterminacy, and doubt, since human communication even between contemporaries is always imperfect and since history is the continual reinterpretation of the past for the present.

History, though, constitutes more than ruminations occurring in the minds of historians. It is, in Lukacs’s preferred formulation, the “remembered past,” potentially encompassing the entirety of human experience beyond the information that documents record. Among other implications, understanding history as the remembered past “represents the beginning of an awareness of the limitations of the scientific method . . . , the recognition that Descartes’ division of the universe into ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’ no longer makes sense.”¹⁴ To Descartes, no problem was beyond solution; no invincible secrets, no indomitable mysteries confounded the rational mind. The universe was transparent. Ideas about reality were objectively intelligible and mathematically certain. Nothing was ambiguous. Subject and object were radically separate and distinct, as were spirit and body, mind and matter. Quantitative deduction emancipated the intellect from error and superstition, rendering human beings at last “the masters and possessors of nature.”¹⁵

Repudiating, or rather superceding, Descartes’ methods and categories, Lukacs maintains that historical consciousness is neither subjective nor objective but personal and participant. The unequivocal and absolute separation of subject and object, the misapprehension that historical truth exists outside the mind, leads to, and is in fact predicated upon, a kind of

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determinism: the assurance that historians of varying educations, abilities, temperaments, nationalities, cultures, and perspectives will reach identical conclusions about the past. Neither are historical judgments subjective. Lukacs is no solipsist. Personal and participant knowledge is not the equivalent of individual and private knowledge. Human beings are not isolated, solitary creatures whose ideas are wholly inaccessible. They live in relation to, and in relationships with, other human beings. Nor is knowledge of the human—fragmentary, selective, and inaccurate though it may be—ever general, abstract, and bloodless. During the Modern Age man's knowledge of man may have turned introspective, but at the same time it came to be historical.

As consciousness evolved, reality became inseparable from mind, that is, from thinking about reality—and, Lukacs adds, from thinking about thinking. The language of reality is thus not scientific, mathematical, or geometric any more than it is merely psychological. The language of reality is, instead, personal, participant, and historical. “We have been geometers not only through chance,” Lukacs believes, “but through history, and we are now near the end of a phase of history when the *esprit de la géométrie* and the mathematical concept of reality seemed the best (and, increasingly, the only) approach to truth. But now as the antinomies of idealism and realism, of objective and subjective knowledge prove to be inadequate, we may find anew the potential for an idealistic and realistic view of life.”¹⁶ To eliminate such dualisms, Lukacs has stressed the essential importance of the human. He has no wish to substitute the intellectual order of science for the intelligible disorder of history. Unlike Enlightenment thinkers who enshrined the objective laws of reason and postmodernist critics who disavowed any reality beyond the subjective constructs of mind, Lukacs has restored man to the center of the universe.

Lukacs's humanism does not engender an exultant vision of mankind and a triumphant philosophy of history that reveal design, intention, and purpose. Quite the contrary: Lukacs espouses a chastened historical philosophy that recognizes the historical dimension of both existence and consciousness. No simple narrative from which to derive heroic examples or moral lessons, history is a form of thought integral to the nature and being of humanity. Historical knowledge is inseparable from personal knowledge. To “*know thyself*,” Lukacs asserts, “must also mean *know thy history*.”¹⁷ Knowing thyself, however, requires an appreciation of the limitations of knowledge or, perhaps better, of the human conditions of knowledge—an appreciation that Lukacs regards as salutary and enriching rather than malignant and impoverishing. A heightened consciousness of the self and history, and of the self in history, abrogates the expectations of heaven on



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earth that accompanied faith in scientific, technological, and material progress. Sir Francis Bacon's aphorism "knowledge is power" seems vain and arrogant to Lukacs and, for all its presumption and immodesty, naïve, superficial, and reckless as well. "Only humility and submission . . . can produce a worthy man," wrote Montaigne. Men endowed with the mature and contrite sense that their knowledge and understanding are circumscribed by the very nature of their being do not aspire to utter definitive statements, do not pretend to speak for all time, and do not incline to dream of utopia (or of the apocalypse).

Developments in modern physics sustain Lukacs's assault on the scientific worldview. Far from confirming the operation of the universe according to a set of mathematical laws, the physicists who contributed to quantum theory demolished the ideas of scientific objectivity, immutability, and certainty. They abandoned constricting definitions, illusory facts, and mechanical causality in favor of potentiality, mutability, and flux. They substituted relations for absolutes. Quantum physics led to the acceptance of relativity, indeterminacy, and degrees of truth. Lukacs clarified the epistemological implications:

Quantum physics does not allow a completely objective description of nature. To describe "as it really happened"—the famous desideratum of historical description (or, perhaps, more than description: definition) stated by the great German historian Ranke more than 150 years ago—is an unfulfillable desideratum in the world of matter too. . . . The very knowledge (or, let us say, the cognition) of physicists about subatomic events—that is, about the very basic elements of matter— . . . corresponds, and impressively, to the inevitable limitations of our historical knowledge: that is, of the knowledge of human beings about human beings.¹⁸

This change came about from the recognition that science, like history, is a product of the human mind and reflects what the German physicist Werner Heisenberg referred to as the "interplay" between man and nature. "It is thus that the recognition of the human condition of science, and of the historicity of science . . .," Lukacs confirms, "may mark the way toward the next phase in the evolution of human consciousness, in the Western world at least."¹⁹ Science historicized is science humanized. If humans did not exist, there would be no science, no mathematics, no history. We can no more escape participation in the knowledge of our environment than we can escape participation in the knowledge of our past.

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The evolution of consciousness, moreover, betrayed the absence, or at least the inaccessibility, of eternal truth. It is for Lukacs the very fallibility and impotence of human knowledge and invention that places mankind again at the center of the universe. Human knowledge is no longer subordinate to the categories of natural science, which depend on classification and homogeneity. In history, as in life, uniqueness matters and exceptions count. “Nature preceded man,” Lukacs writes, “but man preceded the science of nature; indeed, he created the science of nature. This, of course, is a historical recognition.”²⁰ Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Descartes, and Newton destroyed the geocentric and anthropocentric cosmos, reducing the earth to “hardly more (indeed, even less) than a speck of dust on the edge of an enormous dustbin of the universe, with the solar system itself being nothing more than one tiniest whirl among innumerable galaxies.”²¹ The reunion of the observer and the thing observed effected by twentieth-century physics annulled the Copernican Revolution, reinstating human thought to its former primacy. Men may have only their own imperfect and incomplete knowledge of the past, the world, and themselves—a knowledge that they cannot transcend—but they nonetheless know that they know. Their consciousness augments their existence and gives it meaning. The “unique complexity” of human beings, Lukacs affirms, “is in itself an argument for our central situation.”²²

Yet human capacities invariably reveal human weaknesses. The resplendence of the imagination, the vigor of the mind remain insufficient to illuminate the mysteries of existence. No human being can have full, accurate, and perfect understanding, or even knowledge, of the self, the world, the universe, the past, another person. Such liabilities are the challenge and the genius of humanity. “Thought constitutes the greatness of man,” reflected Pascal. “[I]f the universe were to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which killed him, because he knows that he dies and the advantage which the universe has over him; the universe knows nothing of this.”²³ Men stand at the center of his universe, which does not and cannot exist apart from mind. “We did not *create* the universe,” Lukacs writes. “But the universe is our *invention*; and, as are all human and mental inventions, time-bound, relative, and potentially fallible.”²⁴ It is, hence, the quality of thought and the acuity of understanding, rather than the quantity of knowledge and the degree of certainty, that are important. Artless knowledge, even when factually accurate, may prove sterile, impersonal, abstract, and unreal. Evocative understanding, which the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga described as “historical sensation,” inevitably connects men with the reality that arises from their experience and awakens in their consciousness.²⁵

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If Lukacs repudiates the illusion of scientific objectivity, he is equally skeptical of idealist determinism. For idealists such as R. G. Collingwood, history was the history of thought. "All history," Collingwood professed, "is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's . . . mind."²⁶ But historians themselves, in Collingwood's analysis, are the products (and the hostages) of their own times, moral convictions, political commitments, and individual biographies. They see the past and the present differently according to their different backgrounds, capacities, cultures, and so forth. They cannot do otherwise. The historian must "write with all honesty in the perspective his own irreducible values set for him," alleged H. Stuart Hughes. "A conservative cannot help writing as a conservative, and a radical as a radical. . . ."²⁷ Historical idealists were mistaken, Lukacs posits, because they failed to liberate themselves from the scientific worldview they elsewhere repudiated. They shared with the advocates of scientific objectivity antiquated concepts of mechanical causality and human nature derived from Cartesian geometry and Newtonian physics, and so "went wrong because, like the objectivists, they were thinking in terms of direct causes, of men as products."²⁸

Idealists, Lukacs charges, unwittingly disavowed free will and human agency, thereby permitting men to avoid responsibility not only for their deeds but also for their thoughts and words. Although he emphasizes the primacy of mind over matter and registers the intrusion of mind into the structure of events, Lukacs discerns at the same time that "what matters is not what ideas do to men but what men do to their ideas."²⁹ No idea exists outside the mind and separate from the words in which, the circumstances under which, and the purposes for which, the thinker expresses it.

The task for historians, as for all men, is the pursuit of truth, which is itself a historical preoccupation. Elusive but not ephemeral, truth changes through time. "That something is not true for all time," wrote Ortega y Gasset, "does not mean that it may not have its moment of truth."³⁰ Lukacs's idea of truth corresponds to the Judeo-Christian view of the human condition, according to which man, although made in the image of God, is nevertheless a finite creature predisposed to error and sin. Evil is at the heart of the human will and personality; it originates in and with man himself. "We are not Gods," Lukacs proclaims, "but historical beings, and the fallible descendants of Adam."³¹ Insufficient unto themselves, men cannot comprehend the full meaning of their existence. Immersed in nature and in history, they are at the same time acutely conscious of their struggle to transcend the constraints imposed upon them. In so doing, they are tempted to raise themselves above their proper station. Usurping the role of God, men distort their relation to the divine and the eternal. "*Sicut eritis dei,*"

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Satan promised: You shall be as God. Soon, though almost invariably too late to save themselves from folly, men discover the barrenness of such pretensions. The rational ordering and interpretation of historical experience fail to elucidate the whole. “And here,” Lukacs confesses, “our knowledge, our understanding, our very imagination stops . . . , because in the entire universe the meaning of God may be the only meaning that exists independent of our consciousness.”³² Truth endures—else why pursue it?—but, Lukacs concludes, “pure truth” belongs to God alone, the changeless source of man’s variable being.

From the Christian perspective, the tension between time and eternity threatens life with meaninglessness. History may reach its end before reaching its fulfillment. Men cannot solve the most fundamental problem of human existence in history, and all attempts to do so have brought disaster in their wake. Yet, as Marc Bloch pointed out, “Christianity is a religion of historians. . . . The destiny of humankind, placed between the Fall and the Judgment, appears to its eyes as a long adventure, of which each life, each individual pilgrimage, is in its turn a reflection. It is in time and, therefore, in history that the great drama of Sin and Redemption, the central axis of all Christian thought, is unfolded.”³³ According to Christian theology, God partially and episodically reveals Himself in history through Christ. For this reason, Lukacs states that the Incarnation, “the coming of Christ to this earth may have been? no, . . . it *was*, the *central* event of the universe; . . . the greatest, the most consequential event in the entire universe has occurred here, on this earth.”³⁴ Unlike its Eastern counterpart, Western Christianity, while hardly neglecting the divinity of Christ, has accentuated his humanity. Lukacs observes, for example, that among Eastern Orthodox Christians, Easter, which celebrates the divinity of Christ, is a far more elaborate and solemn holiday than Christmas. Of greater moment to Western Christians, Protestant and Catholic alike, is the day on which Christ entered the world and history as a human being.

Redemption from history is necessary. Lukacs, however, regrets the emergence and popularity of an excessive, indiscriminate, and unconditional spiritualism that extends from a belief in mystical religions to a belief in extraterrestrial phenomena. The bankruptcy of “post-capitalist and post-bourgeois materialism” has created a moral and intellectual vacuum characteristic of the end of an age. The appeal of spiritualism in the West proceeds from the desire to fill this void, to overcome the antagonistic finite perspectives that negate comprehension of the eternal. Mystics abrogate consciousness by elevating it above the flux of temporal events and merging it with the infinite. This urgent but pitiful quest for an undifferentiated, timeless reality, of which the historical world is merely a corrupt

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emanation, is, in Lukacs's judgment, an especially ominous variety of spiritual determinism, "whose shadows have begun to creep over our world."³⁵ Lukacs, by contrast, reaffirms the Judeo-Christian doctrine of free will. It is imperative that men exercise the freedom to think and act as autonomous beings. Only thus can they answer some of the questions that they have about themselves. "Our ideas," Lukacs avows, "are the results of our choices. Yes, our choices are influenced (and sometimes even produced) by our times and by the world around us; but the consequences of our ideas . . . are seldom direct or simple or unequivocal."³⁶ Lukacs abhors determinism in all its forms, whether scientific or idealist, material or spiritual, for he equates it with the intellectual dishonesty, indolence, and stagnation that combine to breed the perilous and ultimately destructive willingness to believe without thinking and to live with untruth.

Realism and idealism are not antithetical. Representations of the past cannot be purely abstract, fantastic, or metaphoric; and they must adjoin imagination and reality or else they are lifeless. The idealist must also be a realist who sets out in pursuit of truth, or at least in the dim hope of eliminating untruth. The study of the past must retain its intimacy with life, with the mystery of being and the miracle of existence. Historians, though, lack the capacity to tell the whole truth, and no amount of research, however scrupulously pursued, will enable them ever to do so. The study of history requires much more than the careful sifting of evidence and the meticulous arrangement of facts, which then more or less speak for themselves. Nor is it sufficient merely to equate causes with effects. History demands of the historian skillful acts of interpretation that, as Lukacs states, do not and cannot validate "perfect truth but the pursuit of truth through a reduction of ignorance."³⁷

Objectivity is not a criterion of truth. Historical consciousness, which to Lukacs is at once more difficult and more important to attain than scientific knowledge, implicates, engages, and occupies the whole personality. Human beings are not isolated individuals tangled in a web of subjectivity, but unique persons able to communicate their personal visions of truth, their "personal way of seeing and saying," in which others might share. "The recognition of the objectivist illusion," Lukacs maintains, "does not reduce, it rather enhances, the general validity of personal knowledge. . . . If . . . by historical 'relativity' we mean not only the historicity of every form of human cognition but also of every form of human expression, it should be obvious that this idea of relativity is neither a feeble nor a senseless one; for this 'relativity' of *truths* means not the absence but the potential richness, not the nullity but the multiplicity of *truth*."³⁸ That the knowledge, understanding, and significance of history are personal and partici-

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patory does not release historians from their obligation to truth. The more consciously they recognize their personal involvement with their subject, the more wisely they may govern their prejudices, aspirations, and sensibilities. For writing history, at last, is a moral act, and the greatness of the work is inseparable from the character of the mind that conceived it. Who a man is may, after all, be more important than what he knows.

Independence is the hallmark of Lukacs's mind and character, from whence arise both the originality of his thought and the obscurity of his reputation. *Le style c'est l'homme*, wrote the Comte de Buffon. Unlike many professional academics who now think it obligatory as well as advantageous to incarnate ideas that are fashionable, Lukacs has never tailored his scholarship to fit established (and thus temporarily respectable) intellectual or political categories. He is, instead, a skeptic, a reactionary, defying the "heavy accumulation of accepted ideas and of institutionalized ways of thinking" that occur at the end of an age.³⁹ He derides such constructs as:

Human Rights Amendments and "Star Wars"; Sex Education and the Intelligence Community (whatever *that* is); World Government and Making the World Safe for Democracy; Abstract Art and the Gross National Product; Nuclear Power and Genetic Engineering; Quarks and Black Holes; Ecumenicism and The Science of Economics; Cybernetics and National Security; Computer Intelligence and Opinion Research; Psychohistory and Quantification, and so on, and so on.⁴⁰

Unconventional though he may be, Lukacs is no cantankerous eccentric airing his private aversions. He is a historian, his standards and judgments about the present drawn from the potentially inexhaustible wisdom of the past.

There is a depth and gravity to Lukacs's finest writing that is rare in any time and nearly unmatched in ours. Humane and compassionate, evocative and profound, witty and sad, his meditations on history and human nature reflect the conditions of life and the fate of man during the short twentieth century and the long decline of the Modern Age. Toward the end of his elegiac *A Thread of Years*, Lukacs admits "it's all over . . . for most of the world that I . . . cherish." Even with "the sad decline of civilization," however, ". . . a few remnant memories of beautiful things and of decency and goodness" survive.⁴¹ Life is still sweet and still worth living. Lukacs refuses to succumb to self-pity or despair, which on more than one occasion he has dismissed not only as sinful but also as useless.

Lukacs does not merely lament the passing of a civilization but aims, if possible, to revitalize it or to find its equivalent, though he is far from san-

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guine about the prospects. His anxious expectations notwithstanding, Lukacs is no disciple of Oswald Spengler, no prophet of doom contemplating the inevitable “sinking” (*Untergang*) of the West. A vestige of civilization and its traditions may yet survive, Lukacs writes, “at least in some small part due to [Winston] Churchill in 1940. At worst, he helped to give us . . . fifty years. Fifty years before the rise of new kinds of barbarism . . . , before the clouds of a new Dark Age may darken the lives of our children and grandchildren.”⁴² Lukacs has aligned himself with Churchill, the writer, the historian, and the man of letters, the conservative guardian of tradition, the reactionary agent of a civilization founded not on birth but on breeding. To live in an age of dissolution and crisis entails special responsibilities; chief among them may simply be the unwavering refusal to capitulate, the stubborn will to press on. With somber fortitude, Lukacs continues to remind us of a world, very different from our own, that rested on the cultivation of manners and morals, on a luxuriant interior life, on the ideal of the gentleman, and on a sense of place and permanence. By calling to mind that lost and discarded world, Lukacs, like Churchill, may have afforded us a little time to rethink the world that we have made, time to face ourselves, time to slow the descent into the monstrous and inhuman Dark Age that now approaches, and time, perhaps, to rekindle the lamps of civilization in the West that, one by one, have begun to flicker and go out.

Regrettably, few historians have more than a passing acquaintance with John Lukacs’s historical philosophy. The fate of Lukacs’s books, particularly his masterful *Historical Consciousness*, arises in part from the intellectual stagnation that Tocqueville recognized as characteristic of a fading democratic age. Lukacs’s most unorthodox and original works do not conform to prevailing suppositions and categories, and, as a result, are either misunderstood or ignored.

The inflation of scholarship and the bureaucratization of thought have contributed to the inattention from which such volumes as *Historical Consciousness* suffer. Even the most assiduous historians cannot hope to read all the books and essays published on a subject in which they proclaim expertise. Those works that do not receive adequate publicity, that do not add an élan to footnotes and bibliographies, often remain unknown, and so unread. The reasons for such lapses are even more complex and disheartening. As Lukacs points out, during this so-called Age of Information no one reads much anymore because few share the inclination to read. “We have now entire slews of professional experts who read little while they write much, for the sake of firming up their professional status,” he observes. “In this respect, too, we may see the devolution of democracy into bureaucracy. . . .”⁴³ Malice is not the source of this appalling ignorance. It emerges

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instead from the inability, and perhaps the growing unwillingness, to contemplate ideas that do not correspond with established, institutionalized, and accepted norms and systems. Little professional advantage or reputation accrues to scholars who dare criticize approved methods, impugn cherished theories, and question authorized conclusions. Those who adopt unpopular values and assumptions become immediately suspect, their work regarded as illegitimate, disreputable, and worst of all, insignificant.

The present collection aims to offer some redress, not only in the interest of doing justice to an incomparable writer, but also in the hope of sustaining his lifelong quest for truth, or, more humbly, reaffirming his determination, as much moral as intellectual, to reduce untruth. Lukacs's *œuvre* of more than twenty books and hundreds of articles encompasses the history of the Modern, or as he prefers, the Bourgeois Age, focusing chiefly on the political, ideological, intellectual, and military struggles of the twentieth century, the men and women who stood at the center of those conflicts, and the attendant decline of a civilization and a way of life. Integral to that project has been Lukacs's effort to "think about thinking," specifically to clarify and interpret the emergence of historical consciousness during the five hundred years that constitute "modern" history. No endeavor is more important to understanding ourselves and our world—especially as the institutions, ideas, values, and experiences that made up the life of that era recede and disappear.

Gathering many of Lukacs's assorted writings on history, *Remembered Past* serves at once as an introduction to and a compendium of this essential aspect of Lukacs's thought. The reviews, essays, commentaries, and excerpts that appear in the following pages address the nature of historical consciousness; challenge the suppositions and practices of the history profession; evaluate the contributions of historians and other writers who have used, and often abused, history; evoke the spirit of certain places in relation to their past; reconsider important events and figures of the twentieth century; and conclude, appropriately, with a discussion of teaching and writing. A bibliography of Lukacs's writings appears here for the first time and rounds out a volume that we hope will be of particular value to general and academic audiences seeking a more thorough encounter with this seminal thinker. In this book, readers will not only discover the joy of encountering a vigorous mind, but may also learn, as Lukacs has long affirmed, that reality lies within historical consciousness, which is nothing less than the consciousness of ourselves.

✧ *Mark G. Malvasi and Jeffrey O. Nelson*
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