IV

The view of history here advocated breaks away from the over-simplified, monistic conceptions of either progress or cycle. It accepts some elements of both systems as partial insights, stripping them of their claim to absolute truth. It considers them as working hypotheses by incorporating them into a new, more comprehensive frame of reference. Retaining the idea of basic change and evolution, the new integration here sought rejects any belief that makes of human history a story of progress and perfectability [10]. On the other hand, it denies with equal determination that all history repeats itself perpetually, returning without fail to its starting point.

It has become increasingly evident that history constitutes a most complicated interplay of progress and regression, of rest and movement, of achievement and loss, of development and decadence, of the recurrence of the old and the emergence of the novel. Today more than ever, history must be understood in pluralistic terms. Our horizon has been so widened as a result of geographical and historical discoveries, our understanding has become so refined and differentiated due to the century-long process of secularization and rationalization that a monistic key no longer unlocks all doors. While Hegel was still in a position to speak of "der Gang Gottes durch die Weltgeschichte", the forward march of the one God through world history, and Max Weber emphasized the "eternal forever undecided struggle of the innumerable Gods", it seems as though today we can visualize the contours of a new synthesis. Admitting the existence of a sustaining and possibly irreversible trend which may, however, carry in itself the seed of its own negation, we still see the conflict of the many other tendencies and forces which, erratic and short-lived though they are, have a profound bearing on history. It is the task of the true historian to trace their struggle against the background of the pervading process, evaluating the various contenders in their strength and weakness and foretelling as correctly as possible the courses of their actions.

Thus the unwieldy and dynamic body of history no longer fits into the strait jacket of a closed monistic system. And yet history possesses a specific unity and a delimited shape. Earth and man, "blood and soil" are its basic substances. Consequently, the need for some sort of a structure arises that would do justice to the aspects of both unity and diversity, space and time, life and death. This structure must necessarily remain fragmentary, and the system remain open. Allowance must be made for the constituent factor of historical time, the march of which is unique and irreversible. The inherent antinomies must be clarified and, as far as possible, temporarily re-integrated. The system itself,

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10) R. M. MacIver: Society: A Textbook of Sociology, 1937, esp. pp. 510 ff.