

Jorge Basadre's "Peruvian History of Peru," or the Poetic Aporia of Historicism

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We need a Peruvian history of Peru. . . . By Peruvian history of Peru I mean a history that studies the past of this land from the point of view of the formation of Peru itself. . . . We must insist upon an authentic history 'of' Peru, that is, of Peru as an idea and entity that is born, grows, and develops. . . . The most important personage in Peruvian history is Peru.

Jorge Basadre, *Meditaciones sobre el destino histórico del Perú*

Although many gifted historians graced the stage of twentieth-century Peruvian letters, Jorge Basadre Grohmann (1903–1980) was clearly the dominant figure. Today Basadre is universally celebrated as the country's most sagacious and representative historian, and he is commonly referred to as "our historian of the Republic." Libraries, avenues, and colleges are named after him. The year 2003 was "The Year of Basadre" in Peru, with nearly every major cultural institution in Lima organizing an event in his honor.¹ The National University

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1. There is no systematic work on Basadre, but several Peruvian scholars have reflected upon aspects of his work, and the centennial celebration has prompted the publication of conference proceedings. See Pablo Macera, *Conversaciones con Basadre* (Lima: Mosca Azul, 1979); Alberto Flores Galindo, "Jorge Basadre o la voluntad de persistir," *Allpanchis* 14, no. 16 (1980): 3–8; Magdalena Chocano, "Ucronía y frustración en la conciencia histórica peruana," *Márgenes* 1, no. 2 (1987): 43–60; Fernando Iwasaki Cauti, *Nación peruana: Entequequia o utopía: Trayectoria de una fulacia* (Lima: Centro Regional de Estudios Socio Económicos, 1988); Miguel Maticorena Estrada, *Nación e Historicismo de Jorge Basadre* (Lima: Asociación de Docentes Pensionistas de la UNMSM, 2003); Scarlett O'Phelan Godoy and Mónica Ricketts, eds., *Homenaje a Jorge Basadre: El hombre, su obra y su tiempo* (Lima: Instituto Riva-Agüero, 2004); and Manuel Pantigoso, ed., *Cátedra Basadre* (Lima: Editorial Hozlo, 2004).

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of San Marcos published a handsome new edition of his first scholarly work, *La iniciación de la República* (1929–30) while the congress commissioned a new anthology of his more inspired essays under the title *Memoria y destino del Perú*.² Not to be outdone, the executive rechristened in his honor a stately room in the presidential palace, while the central bank saw to it that Basadre's penetrating eyes should meet those of every Peruvian lucky enough to hold in her hands the 100 *nuevo sol* bill. Basadre's aura extends far beyond the ordinary reach of state and cultural institutions, however. Many of the historian's key phrases and concepts, such as *Perú posible* (the possible Peru), *Perú problema* (Peru as problem), *el país profundo* (the deep country or nation), *el país legal* (the official country or state), *la promesa del Perú* (the promise of Peru), now circulate as proverbial wisdom vis-à-vis Peru's national problem and identity. Scholars, presidents, journalists, taxi drivers, pundits, pedants, and maids constantly fall back upon these memorable phrases and concepts. All are deeply historicist, and together they constitute something like a national creed.

My critical return to Basadre's historicist thought is more than a historiographical exercise. Basadre's thought and language is the closest thing to a mental map of the Peruvian historical imagination today. The current revival of his thought responds in part to a postwar need to imagine a promising national future with an affirmative past, following the 1980s and '90s, when Peruvian civil society was ripped apart by insurgency, counterinsurgency, and dictatorship, and tens of thousands were killed and hundreds of thousands displaced. Beyond Peruvian and/or Peruvianist preoccupations, however, Basadre's historicism is also of general theoretical interest—at least that is the wager of this essay.

History and Historicism

Like the words *history* and *modernity*, the term *historicism* is an ambivalent concept with a complex history of usages, translations, and meanings. The neologism *Historismus* appears to have circulated first in German philosophical discourse in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It appears that the Neoplatonist poet, philosopher, and “prophet of romanticism” known as Novalis (Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg) coined the term. It was not long, however, before Ludwig Andreas von Feuerbach attacked the notion (in the 1840s), associating it with falsity and mysticism, while at about

2. Ernesto Yepes, ed., *Jorge Basadre: Memoria y Destino del Perú* (Lima: Congreso de la República, 2003).

the same time Christlieb Julius Braniss used the term in a positive sense to designate a new, future-oriented philosophy of history. By 1852 Felix Dahn had defined "true historicism" as "the history of the world as a whole, understood as a unitary and necessary evolutionary process, in accordance with the laws of reason," an approach based in part on the philosophies of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Immanuel Kant.³ In his 1881 study of the work of Giambattista Vico, Karl Werner also used the term, referring to the Neapolitan's *New Science* as "philosophical historicism."⁴

In his classic study of the genesis of *Historismus* published in 1937, Friedrich Meinecke traced the emergence of a newly inflected tradition of thought that combined elements of "natural law, Neoplatonism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Pietism, natural science, a curiosity in the voyages of the XVII century, the first sprouts of national sentiment and the liberty of peoples, and finally and no less important, the flowering of poetry." Key notions in this eighteenth-century mode of thought included the life of the soul, pre-Romantic vitalism, and the genetic or botanical notions of natural evolution more proper to the Enlightenment. The emerging historicist tradition crystallized in "the great German movement, from Leibniz to the death of Goethe," and produced an enduring reference for history and anthropology in the work of Johann Gottfried Herder. In an appendix, Meinecke also addressed the work of Leopold von Ranke as the professional heir to this tradition. In contrast to the "French system" or the universal philosophical history of "man in general," Meinecke argued that this new tradition and sensibility posited the dynamic individuality or singularity of the historical subject. The singular subject of historicism since Herder and Goethe was the "individual human" in all of his dimensions and, at the same time, "those ideal or real formations of the collectivity which only manifest themselves in their evolution."⁵ Although Meinecke does not subject this tradition to rhetorical or formal analysis, those "ideal or real formations of the collectivity" (nations, peoples, civilizations) were nearly always configured in a phylogenetic language of gardening, which is ultimately of Biblical origin. In Leibniz's influential theory of monads, for example, singular "seeds" or "souls" potentially contained or reflected "the world as a whole," conceived, in Herder's

3. Reinhart Koselleck, *historia/Historia*, trans. Gómez Ramos (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2004), 134.

4. Karl Werner, *Giambattista Vico als philosoph und gelehrter forschter* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1881).

5. Friedrich Meinecke, *El historicismo y su génesis*, trans. José Mingarro and Tomás Muñoz (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1943), 14–15.

famous phrase, as a “great garden in which the peoples grew like plants.”⁶ This great earthly garden was, moreover, an isomorphic mirror of the cosmos.

Although Isaiah Berlin has insightfully read the eighteenth-century thought of Vico, Leibniz, Herder, and Johann Georg Hamann as “the Counter-Enlightenment,” there are strong reasons for thinking that this “countertradition” of historicist thought shared certain theoretical assumptions and practical goals with the Enlightenment.⁷ As Elías José Palti has recently argued, the debate between Kant and Herder—often read as illustrative of the difference between rational/enlightened and romantic/historicist thought—reveals that the two men shared foundational assumptions about universal history as a “progressive and cumulative process destined to reach the full realization of the potentiality of the species,” and that historical rhetoric and pedagogy could and should serve as the “guiding thread” to that realization.⁸ In many ways these notions of universal history as realization and guiding thread were not new and indeed may be seen to echo Saint Augustine’s notion of history as “the education of the human race.”⁹ In a word, Enlightenment history (for example, Voltaire or Kant) and counter-Enlightenment historicism (for example, Vico or Herder) were not necessarily at odds, in part because they shared idioms and concepts that were not new.¹⁰

In his recent study of postcolonial thought and historical difference in India, provocatively titled *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued that historicism was modern Europe’s colonizing gift to the developing world.¹¹ In that world, European historicism effectively placed colonial subjects in the “waiting room” of history. In short, the European historicist idea that unified collectivities or nations could only emerge after a long process of con-

6. *Ibid.*, 370.

7. See Joseph Mali and Robert Wokler, eds., *Isaiah Berlin’s Counter-Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2003), and Isaiah Berlin’s *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000).

8. Elías José Palti, *Aporías: Tiempo, modernidad, historia, sujeto, nación, ley* (Buenos Aires: Alianza, 2001), 140.

9. See Donald R. Kelley, *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1988), 75–98.

10. Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment histories shared a cosmopolitanism that recognized the validity of national histories but also their universal tendencies. On Enlightenment histories, see Karen O’Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997).

11. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000).

scious development was a strong, scientific argument against independence and decolonization. Like Maurice Mandelbaum before him, Chakrabarty identifies "the idea of development" as the unifying principle of historicist thought.¹² Historicism "tells us that in order to understand the nature of anything in this world we must see it as an historically developing entity, that is, first, as an individual and unique whole—as some kind of unity at least in potential—and second, as something that develops over time." Chakrabarty continues:

Historicism typically can allow for complexities and zigzags in this development; it seeks to find the general in the particular, and it does not entail any necessary assumptions of teleology. But the idea of development and the assumption that a certain amount of time elapses in the very process of development are critical to this understanding. . . . [As a result,] much history writing still remains deeply historicist. That is to say, it still takes its subject to be internally unified, and sees it as something developing over time. This is particularly true—for all their differences with classical historicism—of historical narratives underpinned by Marxist or liberal views of the world, and is what underlies descriptions/explanations in the genre "history of"—capitalism, industrialization, nationalism, and so on.¹³

As an alternative to a colonialist and historicist "history *of*," Chakrabarty proposes a Heideggerian "history *in*" where the historical subject is configured as an always already existing but not necessarily "present" being prior to any becoming, that is, where the "not yet" aspect of becoming (that state toward which the being-in-becoming resolutely moves) merely confirms or makes present to consciousness that the subject already exists as an absence. In such a history it would be inconsistent to argue that any historical subject has "not yet" become itself, or that that self could only be apprehended, as Meinecke claimed, "in its evolution."

Chakrabarty claims that "historicism—and even the modern, European idea of history—one might say, came to non-European peoples in the nineteenth century as somebody's way of saying 'not yet' to somebody else."¹⁴ This critique of historicism as a modern discourse of colonial developmentalism in

12. Maurice Mandelbaum, *History, Man, and Reason: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Thought* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1974).

13. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 23.

14. *Ibid.*, 8.

a “history *of*” mode may be seen to apply to certain aspects (but not others) of the genetic or genealogical narrative of Peruvian history, first elaborated in the 1860s by Sebastián Lorente and later reworked by Basadre.¹⁵ However, the historicist strains of thought found in Lorente and Basadre appear to be of an earlier, Neoplatonist vintage (as Meinecke recognized for Germany), and this Peruvian historicist tradition is sometimes defined against the hyperreal model of “Europe.”¹⁶ Moreover, and despite its developmentalist tones, Basadre’s history *of* was at the same time a history *in*, for Peru exists as a being prior to, and at the same time as, her becoming. In addition to being a history *in* Peru, Basadre’s Peruvian history *of* Peru is also a Peruvian history *for* Peru, and it is this latter self-referential and poetic dimension of historicism that Chakrabarty’s critique appears to underplay. Hayden White has argued that history

is never only history *of* [but] always also history *for* . . . not only in the sense of being written with some ideological aim in view [as Mannheim argued], but . . . in the sense of being written for a specific social group or public. More: this purpose and direction of historical representation are indicated in the very language which the historian uses to characterize his data prior to any formal technique of analysis or explication that he may bring to bear upon them so as to disclose what they “really are” or what they “truly mean.”¹⁷

Drawing on Claude Lévi-Strauss, White suggested that “to historicize is to mythologize.” To mythologize or historicize is to enlist the poetic faculty of language *for* history. White argued further that the supposed distinction between historicism and history is equivalent to the separation of philosophy of history from historiography in professional history since the age of Ranke. For White this distinction is moot, for all historiography is by virtue of the poetic faculty of language always already an inventive or mythic philosophy of history:

Every “historical” representation—however particularizing, narrativist, self-consciously perspectival, and fixated on its subject matter “for its own sake”—contains most of the elements of what conventional theory calls

15. See Mark Thurner, ed., *Sebastián Lorente: Escritos fundacionales de historia peruana* (Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 2005).

16. Mark Thurner, “After Colonialism and the King: Notes on the Peruvian Birth of ‘Contemporary History,’” *Postcolonial Studies* 9, no. 4 (2006): 393–420.

17. Hayden White, “Historicism, History, and the Figurative Imagination,” in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), 104.

"historicism." The historian *shapes* his materials, if not in accordance with what [Karl] Popper calls (and criticizes as) a "framework of preconceived ideas," then in response to the imperatives of narrative discourse in general. These imperatives are *rhetorical* in nature [and are revealed] in the very *language* that the historian uses to describe his object of study, prior to any effort he may make formally to explain or interpret it.¹⁸

In short, historicism flows from the same ink as history proper. But what is "history proper"? Jacques Rancière has argued that

history is, in the final analysis, susceptible to only one type of architecture, always the same one—a series of events happens to such and such a subject. We may choose other subjects: royalty instead of kings; social classes, the Mediterranean, or the Atlantic rather than generals and captains. We are no less confronted by the leap into the void, against which no auxiliary discipline's rigors offer a guarantee: we must name subjects, we must attribute to them states, affections, events.¹⁹

What is this "leap into the void" that historians are obliged to make? Rancière explains: "there is history because there is an absence of things in words, of the denominated in names."²⁰ In short, historical discourse "requires the possibility of positively tying together the twofold absence that is at the heart of historical affect," for without subjects with proper names (a proposition that militates against the fact that names are always incommensurate with the denominated) history forfeits its ability to tell singular and affirmative stories that may be identified as real and so taken to be true. History's bold "leap" into the twofold absence or void is made, then, on the wings of the "signature . . . the mark of its identity, the proper name." Since history can never resolve or close the enabling double absence at the heart of its naming and narrative operation, its subjects are always precarious or ungrounded and for that very reason possibly true.²¹ Again, history grounds its precarious subjects by means of the proper name,

18. *Ibid.*, 101–2; italics in the original.

19. Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, trans. Hassan Melehy (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1994), 2.

20. *Ibid.*, 63.

21. The precarious and "empty" nature of the subject in historical discourse would coincide with the philosophical propositions of Hegel and Heidegger that subjects are "groundless" or "negative." See Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, trans. Karen E. Pinkus (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2006).

which it then narrates, creating the historical affect and effect of an experiential and developmental passage through time. In effect, then, we may say that history is a philosophical wager for the subjects that it itself creates by naming and develops in narrative, and in this regard history proper differs little from historicism.

As we shall see, Basadre's "Peruvian history of Peru" is historicist in the sense described by Meinecke (whose study Basadre read). In other ways, however, Basadre's historicism—building as it does not only on European philosophy but on the history of Peruvian thought—exceeds Meinecke's account of the genesis and legacy of historicism, just as it also exceeds Chakrabarty's critique. In short, Basadre's thought shares a great deal with historicism in general as it emerged in German thought in the late eighteenth century, but it also presents its own aporia or conceptual impasses, and these follow from the historian's idiomatic configuration and experience of the historical subject named Peru. The task of this essay is to probe the poetics and aporia of Basadre's historicism for small insights into the general nature and limits of history and historicism, understood as narrative modes and philosophical wagers for configuring and "leaping across" the abyss or void that lies at the heart of any and all historical subjects.

Basadre's Wager

Basadre's historicist thought was in many ways a Peruvian derivation or catachresis of two philosophical propositions or wagers. The first was the oft-cited truism of the Italian philosopher and historian Benedetto Croce (later revived by R. G. Collingwood), namely, that "the only true history is contemporary history."²² The second was the seventeenth-century French polymath Blaise Pascal's famous wager that although God's existence could not be definitively proven, it was more advantageous to wager for it than against it, since the positive wager opened up an infinite number of possibilities for a happy existence whereas the wager against God yielded only finite possibilities. In early twentieth-century Peru, however, Croce's freshly minted maxim was anything but a truism, and Pascal's wager could easily draw ridicule. Peru was still ailing from a humiliating defeat at the hands of Chile in the War of the Pacific (1879–83); notable Peruvian intellectuals of the period characterized Peru's postcolonial republican history (1821–78) as a disastrous national failure that was best for-

22. Jorge Basadre, *La iniciación de la República* (Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 2002), 47.

gotten. The future could not possibly be based on that past. Swimming against the tide, Basadre boldly proposed a positive, philosophical, and future-oriented interpretation of Peru's contemporary history. Croce's maxim (which served as the epigraph to Basadre's first history, *La iniciación de la República*) summed up the Italian philosopher's ironic defense of the affirmative truth of human actions and words in history.²³ In Croce's thought, "the historical" or indeed "history" not only is the human product of actions and words; it is *all* that there is.²⁴ Basadre's Pascalian wager (*apuesta para el sí*) for the Peruvian implications of Croce's proposition—that is, that Peru's contemporary history must be true in a reflexive sense and so it would do no good to turn away from it—became a trademark phrase that signaled a moral and critical affirmation of the contemporary promise and destiny of Peru. Moreover, and as Basadre insisted on several occasions, this wager was an all-or-nothing proposition, since "history is all that we have in common." In short, without a collective, positive wager *for* "the Peruvian history of Peru," the country might simply implode or devolve into the ahistorical (and the antihistorical) and disintegrate.

The Crocean truism and the Pascalian wager were also moral affirmations of Basadre's own life and work. Indeed, the historian's personal history was emblematic of Peru's twentieth-century political and intellectual history. The son of a relatively well-connected Creole merchant and an educated German mother, Jorge was born in 1903 to a comfortable and enlightened home situated on the central plaza of Chilean-occupied Tacna. Following Chile's victory in the War of the Pacific, "Heroic Tacna," an oasis town of merchants and smallholders in the southern coastal desert, successfully resisted "Chileanization," and the city was reincorporated to Peru in 1931. After a prolonged wait and a frustrated plebiscite, the new national border dividing the two South American republics was drawn just to Tacna's south but, to the great displeasure of Peruvians, north of the former Peruvian port of Arica. Basadre's patriotic father did not live to enjoy the long-awaited day of repatriation. Young Jorge left his occupied hometown in 1912 and with his mother moved to the Peruvian capital, where he would study in Lima's elite German School (Deutsche Schule, later renamed Colegio Humboldt).

Despite the canonization of Basadre today as guru of the Republic and

23. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), 375–425.

24. David D. Roberts, *Benedetto Croce and the Uses of Historicism* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1987). The concept of "the historical," or *Historik*, was first advanced by Wilhelm Dilthey and later modified by Johann Gustav Droysen.

master builder of Peruvian historiography, his youthful experience in occupied Tacna and his initial marginality as a provincial migrant and student in metropolitan Lima betray the ambivalent marks of internal exile. Under the duress and isolation of Chilean occupation, the young Basadre had conjured an “invisible Patria” related to him in stories and read about in books.²⁵ Basadre later associated this literary patria with the irrigated fields that surround Tacna and give way to the desert. Late in life the historian reflected on his youthful experience:

An important element of my early intellectual formation comes from my childhood in Tacna. It is the sensation of the “invisible Patria,” the concept of Peru as a symbol. Since I was a boy, Peru was for me, as it was for many, the dreamed, the awaited, the deep; the nexus of loyalty between the native soil and the home that invaders wished to sever; the vague idea of a history marked by brilliant moments and numerous defeats, and of faith in a future of liberation. . . . We learned to love Peru by divining the nebulous horizons and by following the dusty roads of books.²⁶

Basadre’s dreamy and bookish experience of Tacna resembled Ernest Renan’s late nineteenth-century sense of the national dilemma for France (and Germany) of Alsace-Lorraine. Reflecting on this dilemma and responding to racist thinkers, Renan would propose that the nation was a “quotidian plebiscite” and “spiritual principle” based on memory and forgetting. As we shall see, Renan was an important influence, and indeed Basadre’s adult life and vocation as a historian may be read as a “quotidian plebiscite” on the question raised by his childhood in Tacna: did Peru exist or was it only a bookish dream? Might the bookish dream be the basis of a national existence? Although borrowed from European historicist thought, many of Basadre’s key historical concepts appear to reflect (at least in retrospect) his experience of Tacna, now writ large across the canvas of Peru. That Tacna remained Peruvian and Arica became Chilean suggested that states could shape nationalities against the people’s desire; that, in short, the state or “país legal” could impose schemes that did not correspond to the true historical aspirations of the “país profundo.”

For a brief but decisive period Jorge attended Peru’s premier public

25. Manuel Pantigoso, “Basadre, el Perú y el libro: Lo visible de lo invisible,” in Pantigoso, ed., *Cátedra Basadre*, 141–70.

26. Basadre, *La vida y la historia* (Lima: Industrial Gráfica, 1975), 110–11.

lyceum, the Colegio Guadalupe (1917–18), where the liberal curriculum had been designed in the 1840s by Sebastián Lorente, the Spanish-born founder of university-based historical studies in republican Peru. After delivering his first historical essay at Guadalupe's graduation ceremony (on the sore but heroic subject of the defense and fall of Arica to Chilean arms) Jorge pursued the doctorate in letters at the University of San Marcos (1919–27). He quickly found a job as an assistant in the National Library (1919–30), where he worked under the wing of Lorente's star pupil and fellow Tacneño, the historian Carlos Wiesse. Basadre soon became director of the library at San Marcos, and after studying library science in the United States on a Carnegie Foundation fellowship he ascended to the position of director of Peru's National Library. He traveled to interwar Germany and Spain in the 1930s and was subsequently awarded several fellowships to study, write, and teach in the United States and France, including Organization of American States fellowships to work in the Hispanic Collection of the Library of Congress, a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship to expand his *Historia de la República del Perú* (1939–68) to include the twentieth century, and a UNESCO editorial project on nineteenth-century world history, which took Basadre to France in the mid-1950s, where he exchanged ideas with the *Annales* historians. In the intervals between his travels and studies, Basadre twice occupied the cabinet post of minister of education.²⁷

In *La iniciación de la República* Basadre summoned Croce's maxim to his immediate task, which was to draw the attention of Peruvians to the vital significance of the history of an epoch that at the time seemed altogether less admirable and worthy of study than the "glorious Peru" of the Incas or the "regal Peru" of the Spanish viceroys. A dark postwar cloud hung over the history of the Republic, and Basadre's courageous pen would cut through it:

There is a black legend that hangs over the republican epoch, inflated by the reactionary propaganda of [Manuel] González Prada against the men and methods responsible for the disaster of 1879. According to this legend, the Republic was a cave of bandits. But we should not judge so quickly those disorders and errors that were never devoid of sincere acts of merit. We do not give homage to our Republic by seeing her as a reproduction of Lilliput mixed with the vices of Sodom.²⁸

27. Basadre's revision of *Historia de la República del Perú* produced the fifth edition of that work. Posthumous editions have since appeared.

28. Basadre, *La iniciación de la República*, 51.

The context of Basadre's revindication of the Republic was the centennial commemoration of Peru's independence (1921–24) under the "New Patria" regime of Augusto Leguía (1919–30). This multifaceted event erected scores of monuments to independence, and it deeply marked Basadre's generation. Although the postwar "generation of 1900" was the first to claim the modernist, twentieth-century mantle of "the new," Basadre's centennial generation consciously lived and wrote under that master sign.²⁹ Notably, the Peruvian "new" of both of these generations was a postwar "after" that entailed something of a crisis of reason, for many of Peru's intellectuals had lost faith and historical interest in the Republic and its founding principles. As we shall see, Basadre's historicism would restore the reason of republican Peru, albeit in a new social idiom.

The Historical Essay as Wager for the Republic

Basadre's first two major works, *La iniciación de la República* (*The Initiation of the Republic*) and *La multitud, la ciudad, y el campo en la historia del Perú* (*The Crowd, the City, and the Country in the History of Peru*), appeared toward the end of Leguía's 11-year reign, and in many ways they constitute critiques of that regime's authoritarian tendencies (a number of Basadre's friends and colleagues were harassed, imprisoned, or forced into exile during this period) and what Basadre called its shallow and decorative "pastime nationalism." *The Initiation of the Republic* is an innovative account of the key political and military events of independence, and it relies upon the explanatory device of the sociological sketch of social classes and political doctrines or ideologies conceived, for the most part, in critical yet non-Marxist terms. Working against the dominant notion that this period was marked by chaos, Basadre gave national and social meaning to the independence campaigns, political debates, and caudillo-led military regimes that marked the tumultuous postindependence period. In Basadre's new interpretation it was during this period that "the nationality was determined." Basadre periodized Peru's early republican history in broad accordance with a historicist language in which the historical subject is configured as an unfolding totality in space and time, that is, in which Peru emerges in a series of struggles that are assigned meaning as formative moments in a process of realization. The sequencing of the periods speaks for itself, that is, the characterization of periods provides the narrative structure of rise, crisis, fall, and renewal that prefigures any interpretation. National meaning is also written into the characteriza-

29. The generation of 1900 included José de la Riva-Agüero, Víctor Andrés Belaunde, and the Paris-based writers Francisco and Ventura García Calderón.

tions of the social classes, ideologies, and caudillos. Thus, the seemingly chaotic parade of caudillos or military rulers is now depicted in accordance with the criteria of "ample but questionable Peruvianism," on the one hand, and "limited but authentic Peruvianism," on the other. The first label glossed a "grand Peru" reminiscent of past glory (the Inca empire and the Viceroyalty of Peru), while the diminished Peruvian Republic with its cramped postcolonial borders is depicted as "authentic" precisely because it came to pass—here we see both the Crocean maxim and the Pascalian wager at work—that is, because it exists as a "becoming" (*devenir*) and so has a wider future than the grand Peru, which no longer exists except as the "pastime" fantasy of Hispanists and nativists.³⁰ Basadre's affirmative historicism thus turns away from dreams of grandeur and nightmares of loss and instead takes Peru as it exists as promise and possibility.

Basadre extended what he called the "psychological sense of the contemporary" inherent in Croce's maxim to its spatiotemporal dimension as political proximity. Unlike most colonials (Spaniards) and probably all precolonials (Incas) (here Basadre echoed Vico's apprehension of the ancient Greeks as primitives far removed from modern Europeans) the Creole founders of the Republic were "like us," that is, like Basadre and his readers, in short, "contemporaries." Basadre's "history of and for us" was thus both more limited and immediate than Lorente's nineteenth-century genealogical "we," which had fully embraced "our Incas" as national founders, although Basadre was also fond of the long, genetic view of Peruvian history, albeit as a species of functional prehistory.³¹ Despite his call for a social history of "Perú profundo," for the most part Basadre wrote the collective biography of a Creole national state and society struggling to fulfill the promise upon which the Republic was founded. In this regard, Basadre's "we" could be more authentic and inspiring because reflexive, that is, its subject was its own political biography understood as an urgent moral commitment to Peru's full historical realization, as a wager on Peru's promise as a democratic republic. Notably, Basadre's more immediate, contemporary Creole historical "we" is formulated in relation to "the national problem" and the "social issue" that, taken together, problematized the Creole-dominated Republic in new ways by contemplating the apparent aspirations of the lower orders. In Basadre's writings these lower orders appear as an anonymous and telluric *pueblo raíz* (a translation of the German historicist concept of *Grundvolk*) and as spontaneous

30. Basadre, *La iniciación de la República*, 146.

31. Mark Thurner, "Peruvian Genealogies of History and Nation," in *After Spanish Rule: Postcolonial Predicaments of the Americas*, ed. Mark Thurner and Andrés Guerrero (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2003), 141–75.

masses or crowds (*la multitud*), whose intermittent and often misguided actions nevertheless raised the social issue to the level of national problem. Basadre's generation posed this social issue or question—in their view unanswered by nineteenth-century republican liberals— as “our social problems,” that is, as contemporary problems of a general order that defined the present and future not only of Peru but of the world at large. For the most part these were conceived as deep problems inherited from the precolonial and colonial pasts; since they were also universal they linked Peru to the rest of the world.

In many ways *The Initiation of the Republic* is Basadre's most thorough study of an epoch, its dominant personages, and its cyclical or spiral trajectory. Notably, the prosaic style and essaylike strategy of the book, based on his doctoral thesis, would, as Gustavo Montoya has keenly observed, remain constant throughout Basadre's long career, and this style characterizes key passages in his best-known work, the monumental *History of the Republic of Peru*.³² Basadre's preferred style and strategy would always be the problem-oriented conceptual or philosophical essay and the sociological sketch of conditions and doctrines. In general, Basadre did not write compelling stories, and his prose is only rarely elegant. Indeed, at first glance it would appear that the analytical and essay-prone Basadre did not write narrative discourse on a subject with a proper name in passage through time, that is, “proper history” in the sense outlined by Rancière.³³ But this is an illusion. The success of Basadre's essaylike mode of writing may be attributed to the fact that the master subject of nearly all of his historical and philosophical writing is the subject named Peru, which is always linguistically configured in affirmative and ontological terms, and which always already prefigures his essays and histories as proper history and historicism. In spite of Basadre's early claims, his landmark *History of the Republic of Peru* is not really a “synthetic narrative history” at all but rather, as the author himself confessed, a university teaching manual. In response to its unexpected commercial success, this work evolved over six editions and the addition of a dozen more volumes to become a massive biography of the Republic, an encyclopedic pastiche of annals, sketches, essay fragments, notes, and figures compiled under the unifying, periodic framework first introduced in *The Initiation of the Republic* and which preconfigures any meaningful reading of the contents as a massive

32. Gustavo Montoya, “Jorge Basadre: El ensayo como estrategia,” in Basadre, *La iniciación de la República*, 18–20.

33. Basadre wrote only one book that came close to being a history of a subject in the round, narrative sense of the term. An insightful and well-written “life and times” book built around the Viceroy Conde de Lemos, it is perhaps Basadre's best read.

and multiple process of "Peruvianization." Although a critical reading of the *History of the Republic of Peru* reveals a great deal about Basadre's career and mode of writing history, the fundamentals of his philosophical historicism are more openly displayed in his essays.

Basadre's first major essay was first delivered as an annual address at the University of San Marcos attended by Peru's leading public figures. Inspired in part by Oswald Spengler's Goethean and relativist critique of Western civilization, *Decline of the West*, *La multitud* makes a Fichtean and Hegelian reading of Peru's historical process. Basadre's essay outlines a critical vision of a Peru in crisis and decline that dramatizes, in historical terms, modern urban man's alienation from his agrarian roots. Sounding the nativist themes and dialectics of José Carlos Mariátegui and Luís Valcárcel, Basadre describes the emergence of a "cultural dualism" in Peru where the coastal city, new home of the Spanish conquerors, is historically dynamic, while the primal indigenous past "takes refuge" in the Andean countryside. Under the ancient agrarian socialism of the Incas (here Basadre follows the Frenchman Louis Baudin) there had existed a natural relationship between the country and the city.³⁴ However, Inca centers were not true cities in the European sense but rather tributary and ceremonial loci for the ethnic elites. The precolonial order could not produce true patriotism, since its diverse members were mere cogs in a theocratic social machine. In contrast, the Spaniards were individuals or historical agents endowed with a Fichtean national consciousness (see discussion below), and this social-historical fact explains their victory over the Incas. The conquest had destroyed the old tributary relationship between urban centers and the countryside in Peru. After conquest, "the past took refuge in the countryside. . . . The last Inca [rulers] disappeared . . . but the masses survived, no longer tranquil and isochronous but persecuted, frightened, [and] displaced" across the land.³⁵ In Basadre's view the European civilization brought to Peru by Spain had been forged both from the "Romanic" tradition of the city-state and the Germanic influence of the rural-based nation-state.³⁶ The Viceroyalty of Peru, ruled from the new coastal capital of the conquerors, exploited the semifeudal countryside, where certain aspects of Peru's ancient rural economic order had survived. As a result, the Peruvian Republic had inherited grave structural contradictions between city and countryside that militated against national unity. (Notably, these were the

34. Louis Baudin, *L'empire socialiste des Inka* (Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1928).

35. Jorge Basadre, *La multitud, la ciudad, y el campo en la historia del Perú* (Lima: Huascarán, 1947), 58–59.

36. *Ibid.*, 259.

very same contradictions that militated against European unity but which also promised a Hegelian synthesis of the Germanic and the Romanic; indeed in Hegel's view this was the historical work of the French Revolution.) The solution was to reunite the country with the city via a federalist decentralization, so that "the region" (that is, provincial centers) rather than Lima would become the "administrative and economic base of national unity."³⁷ In short, decentralization of the state would produce a new national synthesis.

Despite the schism between city and country, coast and sierra, the crowd (*la multitud*) had emerged here and there from its docile, "isochronous" state under the Incas to become a unifying, albeit intermittent force in Peruvian history. The crowd spontaneously expressed the "true historical sense of the people," but this sense was rarely heeded by the state and its leaders. The crowd appeared at different moments and was at turns Creole, mestizo, Indian, plebeian, urban, or rural. Indeed, the urban Creole crowd was present at independence, but the real actors and victors were the military chiefs or caudillos and their armies, not the people. Indians were oblivious to independence. Under the Republic, the old colonial order of cities dominating the countryside continued, while large rural estates or haciendas expanded at the expense of Indian peasants. However, "spontaneous" rural uprisings—from Tupac Amaru (1780) to Atusparia (1885) to the recent unrest in the southern highlands—registered an ongoing discontent with that process. Basadre's methodological argument was that the crowd could be read as a "seismograph" of the deep, telluric tremors of the Peruvian people. The new social historian was akin to the geologist, his ear to the ground. Basadre exhorted his listeners and readers to leave behind the superficial and vainglorious "pastime nationalism" of the day and to cultivate instead a bold new "problem nationalism." This call was an obvious attack on the Leguía regime's penchant for the monumental, its glorification of heroes, and its drawing-room nativism, and it no doubt made many of those present at the address uncomfortable (President Leguía was among them). There were far too many historical problems to be resolved before Peru could claim true nationhood.

**The National Problem as Possibility:
Restoring Peru's Historical Reason**

In his second major collection of essays, entitled *Perú: Problema y posibilidad* (1931), Basadre painted a "panorama of the historical formation of Peru." Basadre's "panorama" was a Herderian genetic history of the people and the land's epochal progression toward its destiny, from the primitive advent of pre-Inca

37. *Ibid.*, 261.

civilization onward and, despite or rather because of the "social issue," upward toward the inevitable future of socialism. Basadre once again followed Baudin's characterization of Inca civilization as "a singular Empire, where man was a mere cog in a state machine and where, at the same time, his health and welfare was paternally protected . . . and any possibility of ambition, avarice, and the spirit of initiative was foreclosed. . . . Such an organization is only possible within a collectivity without thirst for liberty, power, or riches, and only with a numerous body of conscientious functionaries, armed with precise statistics."³⁸ He characterized the Spanish conquest in naturalistic language as an "alluvium" that added a new layer to the "fertile soil cultivated by the Incas," and in that alluvium lay "the first seeds [*el comienzo de la siembra*] of the Peruvian nationality." The harvest follows but is not concluded during the colony, and independence sows new seeds of liberty and democracy. "Peruvian history," Basadre concluded, "loses its significance if the Inca period is not seen to be only the soil, the Conquest the sowing, and subsequent epochs the harvest and also the beginning of new sowings, which will one day germinate."³⁹ Independence was largely an urban, Creole phenomenon and therefore was only a promise and not the fulfillment of national aspirations. Basadre now proposed, after Mariátegui, that fulfillment would come in the future form of a European-inspired socialism by virtue of which Peru would definitively embrace world and regional history and so resolve its social issue and national problem. The young Basadre closed with these prophetic words: "the exhausting historical formation of Peru is bound to culminate in socialism."⁴⁰ Although Basadre's vision here was broadly social democratic or evolutionary socialist rather than revolutionary socialist, it was the only time that he let his historicism lead him down the path of the Marxian destiny. Notably, Basadre's path had crossed Mariátegui's because both men understood Marxism in national and historicist terms. After Mariátegui's premature death, however, Basadre turned away from Peruvian Marxism mainly because in his view it was no longer sufficiently nationalist and historicist (having taken a Stalinist turn). Significantly, in Basadre's view this had also been the problem with nineteenth-century thought.

In 1943 Basadre wrote that "the tragedy of our epoch lies in that the theoretical bases [of nineteenth-century thought] are now in crisis."⁴¹ Despite his

38. Basadre, *Perú: Problema y posibilidad: Ensayo de una síntesis de la evolución histórica del Perú* (Lima: Librería Rosay, 1931), 11–12.

39. Basadre, *Perú: Problema*, 4.

40. *Ibid.*, 248–49.

41. Jorge Basadre, *La promesa de la vida peruana y otros ensayos* (Lima: Mejía Baca, 1958), 27.

labors to restore the Peruvian Republic to respectability, Basadre deplored what he considered to be the antihistorical character of the nineteenth-century thought that had created and, for a time, sustained that Republic. In ways similar to Dilthey's "critique of historical reason" and Edmund Husserl's critical reflections on "the crisis of European science," Basadre characterized nineteenth-century thought in Peru as antihistorical abstractions that had created "ideal" and thus false images of the nation and of man. For Basadre, nineteenth-century South Americans were "idealists" who viewed man as "a rational being above history." For them, "history was an odious burden."⁴²

Basadre's historicist attack on nineteenth-century Peruvian thought is often indignant, directed at "pessimists and Europe-worshippers." As in the preface to *The Initiation of the Republic*, González Prada's "propaganda" is once again the primary target. "His positivist sociologism generally coincided with abstract progressivism in its submission to European fashions and, if it surpassed the old abstractions in its critical view of national reality, it also committed the sins of pessimism and fatalism."⁴³ Basadre's critique of nineteenth-century Peruvian thought was also inspired by European fashions, and in particular by contemporary German, Italian, and Spanish historicist critiques of French rationalism and positivism. Moreover, his sweeping dismissal of nineteenth-century thought was clearly exaggerated, and it wrought considerable collateral damage. Basadre had leapt from the independence-era classical republicanism or the so-called abstract progressivism of the founders (that is, what Basadre took to be "idealism" or "rationalism") to the positivist sociologism of González Prada's generation (that is, what Basadre took to be "materialism" or "naturalism"), bypassing the more practical republican historicism of the 1850s–70s, including most importantly the historicist thought of Lorente, who in many ways had anticipated Basadre's "Peruvian history of Peru."⁴⁴ In short, Basadre's historicist critique was in part made possible by a space-clearing gesture of oblivion that deposited Peru's previous historicist tradition in the dustheap of the "antihistorical."

In a critical passage, Basadre reviews the underlying world-historical causes of the crisis of reason and the consequent revision of the idea of progress. Notably, however, this crisis and revision does not translate into the crisis of the reason of Peru, since as a name, idea, entity, and being, Peru is deeper than the

42. *Ibid.*, 28.

43. *Ibid.*, 31.

44. Thurner, "Una historia peruana para el pueblo peruano: De la genealogía fundacional de Sebastián Lorente," in Thurner, *Sebastián Lorente*, 15–76.

crisis of ideas or the innovations of positive science. Basadre now argued that the promise of Peru had become "an essential element of the national persona" and as such could not be denied. Paradoxically, perhaps, Basadre's historicism now came to the rescue of Peru's ahistorical or abstract reason, for it was reason that made the republican promise of equality and prosperity, and that promise had now taken on a life of its own. What was important was not so much the founding reason but instead the historical fact that, as a consequence of that reason, Peru existed as a mode of becoming. In the same gesture, Basadre's "problem nationalism" or historicist notion of the social issue came to the rescue of the nation's future, since that future was now conceived as a unifying commitment to the fulfillment of the promise of prosperity and equality among Peruvians. Given the fundamental importance of this passage for understanding Basadre's historicist thought, I quote it at some length:

Over the last eighty years, the rationalist and idealist bases of [nineteenth-century thought] have been contradicted. The prodigious development of the biological, sociological, anthropological, and historical sciences, as well as infant psychology, has dispelled the idea of "rational man" erected as archetype in the early nineteenth century. The idea of the individual as an atomic unity, as a sovereign person, has also been dispelled, because man's life is inseparable from his social environment, and because if he has discharged his human inheritance and does not belong to a community, he is like an errant animal. The idea of progress also suffers an essential revision. Progress understood as human dominion over external nature exists, without any doubt, and is increasing. . . . But what once appeared absurd has now been realized: the new and prodigious instruments of science and industry have been placed at the service of war. The future is no longer "the sun that never sets" [*el sol sin occidente*]. In spite of his amenities and machines, man is not any happier or better off. At times the excesses of rationalism in the form of an excess of culture or refinement have led man into decadence, rendering him sterile, skeptical, antisocial. Nevertheless, something remains of abstract progressivism, such as it was understood in our America. We should not forget that it coincided with the process of Independence, which encouraged the growth of the concepts of sovereignty and national liberty. . . . This concept of sovereignty and liberty is deeper than the pendulum motion of ideologies, and deeper than the changes produced by the contributions of the sciences. These remain as permanent and essential elements of the national persona, which it is necessary to defend and affirm. But the

legacy is not limited to these aspects. It is not just an affirmation, but also a promise. Why did we achieve our independence? To develop to the maximum the potential of this soil, and to give the best possible life to Peruvian man.⁴⁵

The historicist rescue and defense of national reason as collective destiny thus found sustenance in the social critique of liberal notions of progress that followed from the devastation of the Great War. In Europe the critique of nineteenth-century ideas associated with the Enlightenment, German Idealism and classical historicism, but also with positivism and the natural sciences, was especially acute in the interwar period, when Basadre visited Germany and Spain. Husserl and his student Martin Heidegger as well as the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset were among the more brilliant critics, and Basadre read them all. The crisis was brought on in part by the casualties of the war, among which was the boundless liberal faith in the Hegelian pageant of the progress of Western civilization. Spengler's *Decline of the West* was an emblematic if shrill example of the new historicist critique. As a result, many Latin American intellectuals who previously worshipped European civilization (Germany in particular, in Basadre's case) now turned away. Now, Basadre quipped, "we wish that we were even further away from Europe than we are."⁴⁶

Back to the Promise of the "Not Yet"

The turn away from Europe meant a turning inward toward "Perú profundo" and its promise. Like so many others of his generation, Basadre recommitted himself to the project of true nationalism, to the embrace of *lo nuestro*, to the "Peruvian history of Peru," and to the social pedagogy of a real and vital national history that would serve as an inner wellspring of strength against "unhealthy international forces." The essay "La promesa de la vida peruana" ("The Promise of Peruvian Life," 1943) reappeared as the lead piece in *Meditaciones sobre el destino histórico del Perú* (*Meditations on the Historical Destiny of Peru*, 1947) and was subsequently published in 1958, along with two additional essays, as a best-selling book of the same title. In this key essay Basadre transformed the "abstract progressivism" or reason of Peru's contemporary democratic promise into a collective ontology, an affirmative call. No longer merely an abstract idea, Peru's promise became in Basadre's hands a binding force that gathered up the already

45. Basadre, *La promesa*, 29.

46. *Ibid.*, 32.

lived in the existence of the present. In short, Basadre gave Peru a new historical reason that could not be denied without denying Peru itself.

The stated purpose of *Meditations* was "to seek the historical reason of Peru, the sum of the epochs, her fourth dimension." An inspired Basadre writes for a "young readership from all age groups . . . serious people, desiring to think with dignity." He addresses his young Peruvian readership in a universal key, drawing upon and appealing to the history of peoples. "Those peoples that are deserving of their name always guard spiritual and moral reserves, an unsuspected aptitude of fertility, a beautiful potential for a nobility of conscience, of dreams, and of enterprises." Basadre continues, characteristically, that "in spite of everything, in Peru it is necessary to write not only the history of servility, of disloyalty, of frustration, and of collective disillusion." It was also necessary to write an affirmative history of "Peru in her most fertile aspects, in her will to go forward [*voluntad de camino*], in her mission, and in her hope." In short, Basadre's *Meditations* "are an act of faith and, at the same time, of destiny."⁴⁷

In "The Promise" Basadre explained in clear and persuasive prose the motivation behind his first history, *The Initiation of the Republic*, and he posed historicism's foundational but repeating question, this time in relation not to Peru but to the republic that Peru had become. "Why was the Republic founded? To fulfill the promise that it symbolized!"⁴⁸ Like the "collective impulse" (a translation of Dilthey's concept of *Trieb*, or unifying historical force) that named Peru in "the abyss" of Spanish conquest, the promise of 1821 is itself a historical force or reason, for "without being aware of it, the promise gathered certain elements from the past, transforming them." These elements included "the Incas, who sought the aggregation of the tribes under the Empire" and the resonance of the name "Peru . . . as a fascinating announcement of riches and well-being." Finally, "upon the foundation of Independence emerged the yearning for concert and community: 'For Union, Firm and Happy' says the motto on the coin. . . . An additional element resided in the republican promise . . . the fervor for equality . . . that finds its maximum expression in the national anthem: 'We are free.'⁴⁹ Basadre's promise was now an authentic call that had gathered the functional elements of Peru's past; not to hear that call was tantamount to denying both the possibilities of the past and the truth that all history was contemporary history. Once again, Pascal's wager and Croce's maxim were manifest.

47. Basadre, *Meditaciones sobre el destino histórico del Perú* (Lima: Huascarán, 1947), ii–iii.

48. Basadre, *La promesa*, 20.

49. *Ibid.*, 17.

Basadre's concept of the promise of the Peruvian Republic may be traced to Santiago Távara's *Historia de los partidos* (1862), where the author argued that the "promise" of democratic life in Peru was the great gift of the founding generation of independence. That gift, given in a "historical void," could only be realized by means of a violent forgetting or negation of the colonial past. This was the necessary, destructive task of the generation of independence, and Távara likened it to the flight of the Jewish people from Egypt.⁵⁰ In Peru after the War of the Pacific, Basadre would reclaim that promise not as forgetting but as a memory with a future. Basadre would have Peruvian eyes turn away from "the lost paradise of the ahistorical past" (this is how Basadre summed up the memory of Peru's colonial past cultivated by those nostalgic Hispanists who "dwell in the age of Adam and Eve"); but Basadre would also have Peruvians turn away from "the historical past," that is, away from the utopian fantasy then held by many socialists and nativists of "returning to the age of the Incas." Peruvians should turn "toward the future, toward the dream of a paradise not lost but yet to be found." For "the dream of a future paradise for all arose together with the contemporary age. . . . Independence was made with an immense promise of a prosperous, strong, and happy life. And the tremendous thing is that here, after 120 years, that promise has not been fully realized."⁵¹ For Basadre, then, the unrealized promise is not a colonial sign of underdevelopment vis-à-vis Europe but instead a "tremendous thing," a stirring call to the collective labor of making a more democratic future. This would be the task of his monumental *History of the Republic of Peru*: to chart the many reasons why Peru's promise had lived on because it had not yet been fulfilled, and thereby contribute to its authentic realization. In short, the twentieth century presented to Peru a second chance to get things right; this was a true gift of history, and it inspired Basadre and his generation.

Basadre's 1941 essay on the *país profundo* or "deep country," appended to the second edition of *La multitud* (1947), historicized "the problem of the very existence of Peru as a state (*país legal*) and as a nationality or nation (*país profundo*)." In "Afterword on the Deep Country" ("Colofón sobre el país profundo") Basadre argued that "the drama of Peruvian life emerges from the fact that the State would not seem to fit very well within the Nation."⁵² This diagnosis leads to the conclusion that Peru would have two histories, one corresponding to the state, the other to the nation or nationality. This too had been a central theme of Ger-

50. Santiago Távara, *Historia de los partidos* (Lima: El Comercio, 1862).

51. Basadre, *La promesa*, 13–14.

52. Basadre, *La multitud*, 267–68.

man historicist thought.⁵³ Unfortunately, wrote Basadre, until now Peruvian history had been written only as the history of the state. Although he does not offer a fully worked-out example of an alternative, Basadre looks forward to the day when Peruvian history would be written not in relation to the state but "in relation to Peruvian nature."⁵⁴ By "history of Peruvian nature" Basadre does not mean natural history, however. Instead, he has in mind the "functional history" of the nationality as a "cultural aspiration."

Basadre rejected "naturalist" notions of the nation and of history. The nationality was not race or language or geography; it was not just the people and the land. Although Basadre's concept of Peru's *pueblo raíz* or "original people" was surely telluric and for the most part consistent with German romantic historicism's notion of the *Grundvolk*, "the history of Peruvian nature" lay at the dynamic or "functional" intersection of the multitude and its leaders. Peru's historical multitude, in the form of the crowd, "manifests itself via a series of frequently confused urgencies and aspirations, in mutilated possibilities and necessities, in latent enterprises and hopes." As a result, the nation requires leaders if it would "make its mark in the world." The historical role of these leaders is to articulate ideals or visions that are in harmony with but also exceed the aspirations of the multitude. Historically, Basadre now lamented, Peru had lacked such leaders.⁵⁵

The functional relationship between the people and its leaders extended to the past and the present, and so served as an ideal model for national history. "True nationality," Basadre argued, emerges spontaneously in the functional historical confluence of past and future, which is nothing but the merging of the primal "original people" with the more historical multitudes (Spanish, Creole, mestizo) under the guidance of wise leaders who sensed the people's and the crowd's true historical interests. Uniting the people and leaders in a new "natural history" of the nationality would be the basis for a holistic history of Peru's historical reason. This history would unite the past with the imaginable future but exceed both.

Only that which has a future may possess a fecund past. For the
Patria—totality in space and continuity in time, community of destiny

53. Basadre attributed the phrase "país profundo" to the Frenchman Charles Peguy (1873–1914), but the notion was common among German historicists and was reflected in such concepts as *Kulturstaat* and *Machtstaat*, or *Kulturnation* and *Staatsnation* (found both in Fichte and Meinecke).

54. Basadre, *La multitud*, 269–70.

55. Basadre, *Perú: Problema*, 35–36.

and cohabitation in the present—yesterday is useful only to the extent that it resonates here and now, and only if those resonances are prolonged into a future far beyond the place to which our own perishable lives will reach. History is not just the relation of events. History is also the search for what remains after the passage of events.⁵⁶

Basadre's primary inspiration here was the Spanish philosopher Manuel García Morente. García Morente had combined Renan's famous notion of the nation as a spiritual commitment to collective memory (or, as Palti argues, a commitment to the active forgetting of conflict) with Ortega y Gasset's idea that the nation was a possibility that consisted in the collective "adherence" to a shared vision of the future.⁵⁷ García Morente found that Ortega y Gasset and Renan agreed on a fundamental point, namely, that the nation is a quotidian plebiscite on the question of the relationship between a past and a future. García Morente now brought the insights of these two European philosophers of nation together to offer a third view. He proposed that the nationality was the sum of the past and the future, but that it also exceeded this historical sum. He concluded that the essence of a nationality was "style." As "a style of collective life" the nationality could not be defined or observed because it was not an idea or a thing but a "mode." It could only be imagined or configured as an archetype or ideal figure modeled after "the national man." In the case of Spain this archetypal figure was "the Christian gentleman" (*el caballero cristiano*) that "all Spaniards desire to be but none in fact are."⁵⁸ Basadre quotes García Morente as follows:

"Neither race nor blood, territory nor language is sufficient to elucidate the being of a nation. The nation is both a futural enterprise and an adherence to a past of glories and regrets. That to which we adhere is neither past historical reality nor present historical reality nor a concrete project of the future, however, but instead what these three moments share, that which links us to a unity that lies above the plurality of instants in time."⁵⁹

56. Basadre, *La multitud*, 279–80.

57. Manuel García Morente, *Idea de la hispanidad* (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe, 1938). See Elías José Palti, *La nación como problema: Los historiadores y 'la cuestión nacional'* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003); on Ortega y Gasset's idea of possibility, see Luís Arista Montoya, "La razón histórica: Ortega y Gasset y Jorge Basadre," in Pantigoso, *Cátedra Basadre*, 37–68.

58. García Morente, *Idea de la hispanidad*, 67.

59. Basadre, *La multitud*, 279–80.

García Morente's political subtext was that the nation would come to reject any project that was incongruent with its style. Since Spain's style was guided by the heroic but also humorous figure of the *caballero cristiano* (an ideal somewhere between the mythical El Cid, the fictional Don Quixote, and the legendary Conquistador), international communism was obviously not for Spain. García Morente's theory of the nation was not at odds with Franco's national project, but Basadre—whose politics were always, in Peruvian terms at least, left-of-center social democratic—appears not to have associated that theory with a conservative political ideology, in part because Basadre shared García Morente's historicist concept of a "national man." If socialism were to take root in Peru (or Spain) it would have to do so in a manner consistent with the nation's historical reason and style.

Although Basadre does not enlist the word "style," he did adopt García Morente's general theoretical point that nationality exists beyond the natural and the ideal, and that it is everywhere "functional" in that it "unifies and exceeds history." Basadre's genetic concept of national formation along with his reading of the Spanish historicist tradition led him to conclude that nations like Spain were of ancient or medieval origin. Such nations could harbor diverse, cohabitating populations as long as these groups identified with a unifying style forged in a shared history and in a land with particular natural characteristics. In this regard, Spain's heterogeneous history offered some hope to Peru. Since, as we shall see, Basadre located the true birth of the Peruvian nation at or shortly after conquest (the "abyss" and the "baptism") his ontogenetical language and theory of nationhood tended to the conclusion that the Peruvian nationality was, despite the ancient origins of the "pueblo raíz," relatively young. As a result Peru had not yet reached the zenith or full expression of its style.⁶⁰ But the sources of that style undoubtedly existed in the study of the past and in adherence to the promise of Peru. In short, if Peruvian man were to reach his destiny and in the process acquire a unifying national style, he would need a push from history.

Futural History as National Memory, or the Specter of the Divided Subject

History as a future-oriented national pedagogy was hardly a new idea in Peru. It could be said that Pedro de Peralta Barnuevo's eighteenth-century "science of princes" had anticipated that notion and that for Lorente, futural history for

60. Ibid., 270–71.

the people was the true cause of the contemporary age. Since José de la Riva-Agüero and his Generation of 1900, however, the notion of history as national pedagogy in Peru would be increasingly modeled on the national historicisms of German and Italian universities and their attempts to revindicate the name of the nation.⁶¹ In the essay “El sentido de la historia peruana,” which opens the collection entitled *Perú: Problema y posibilidad*, Basadre proposed a program of national history education that followed the ideas of Johann Gottlieb Fichte as announced in his *Addresses to the German Nation* (1807–8). Basadre’s pedagogical reflections on history as a means toward raising national consciousness were more than academic, since as Peru’s minister of education he promoted Fichte’s “New Education,” albeit with mixed success. Basadre wrote that

the New Education asks what historical knowledge and teaching are good for. In the old days it was thought that History was [Cicero’s] *Historia magister vitae*, the forger of good conduct, the source of patriotism. But that was an all-too-naïve intellectualist conceit, since it follows that historians would thereby be the monopolists of heroism, civility, and virtue. It is presently believed that History is the instrument of a jealous and aggressive nationalism . . . and that “the truth changes on this or that side of the Rhine.” But this bellicose error is passing as the world internationalizes.

Why then learn and divulge history? “The specialist responds in the name of the search for truth. . . . But what of the citizen in general?” The “New Education takes these citizens into account when it says that History serves to yank children and adults outside of themselves [*sacar de sí mismo*], that is, to place them in a conscious relation to the world in which they live, so that they may consider themselves to be actors and authors in a great drama that began before they were born and that opens up perspectives that transcend in importance any personal interest.”⁶² This “placing in conscious relation” is “the true end of history.”

This new pedagogical task for national history was, of course, based on the Fichtean and Hegelian proposition that the people were not historical agents until they gained consciousness of themselves in the world. The people must now be “yanked” into historical consciousness if the nation’s potential was to be

61. José de la Riva-Agüero, *La historia en el Perú* (Lima: Instituto Riva-Agüero, 1965), 509–10.

62. Basadre, *Perú: Problema*, 1–3.

realized in a more accelerated fashion. As Palti notes in his study of European historical thought on the nation, this was precisely the point that had troubled Otto Bauer and the one that in interwar Europe raised the specter of a divided and incomplete subject within the nation. The fear of this specter but also the possibilities it raised appear to have played a role in the rapid rise of the violent mass myth-making projects of German and Italian fascism and of Soviet communism.⁶³ Having turned away from Europe, in Basadre's Peru the nation-making task of history might be achieved gradually and peacefully by "raising historical consciousness" through education rather than mass propaganda; moreover, that task provided a fecund historical reason for those "knowing subjects" or "leaders" who would guide the process. In short, by raising historical consciousness, national history in the New Education mode would turn the preexisting, ahistorical heterogeneity of preconscious nationals into a collective "intentional desire" (the historical) to which all Peruvians could adhere.

"Historical consciousness," argued Basadre, "is the search for the authentic, collective 'I,' that is, what 'is' and what 'should be' in the midst of what is present and vanishing."⁶⁴ Echoing Riva-Agüero, Basadre insisted that "for the duration of the nineteenth century Peruvian man lacked historical consciousness" precisely because he lacked a sense of collective identity. Indeed, for Basadre this is why the historical study of the "distinct realities" of the national community was itself true nationalism, for that study was the only true basis for an authentic historical consciousness. Basadre now argued that

men have lived not in a universal community but rather conditioned by geography, economy, sociology, etc., and within the framework of states and nations. True nationalism is the study of these distinct realities. This has palpable significance before the spurious and blind implantation of typically exotic conceptions. It is also significant from the perspective of History, because in Peru History is the only thing that we possess in common; all that does not emanate from the historical is, in Peru, radically heterogeneous.⁶⁵

History's new pedagogical task of subject formation was thus grounded in the historicist notion that the historical was by definition a unifying force that both created and was created by historically conscious agents, albeit within the

63. Palti, *La nación como problema*.

64. Basadre, *Meditaciones*, 63–64.

65. Basadre, *Perú: Problema*, 2–3.

framework of states and nations. In short, the historical is unifying and national and protects against “the implantation of those typically exotic conceptions” that produced defeatism. Basadre exclaimed, finally, that if history was not a unifying national force then it should be abandoned altogether and not taught at all in the schools of Peru.

Foundational for Basadre’s Fichtean pedagogy of subject formation via historical consciousness-raising was the concept of memory. Without memory the individual self had no continuity; similarly, without collective memory peoples and nations went astray. This is because, following García Morente, “a country is a combination of tradition and destiny. By tradition we mean continuity. And continuity necessarily implies memory.”⁶⁶ The total loss of memory necessarily produced insanity, and insanity was the loss of one’s name.

Memory . . . is not only the conservation of the past in the present: it is also (and this is the important thing) the collaboration of the already lived in the actuality of existence. . . . If we take away an individual’s memory he falls into insanity, into the unconscious, into the daily learning of the most essential things, into the endless beginning. Insane asylums and graveyards are full of human bodies that do not know their name, who do not know what they were, or what they have done. An analogous thing occurs with peoples. Collective memory fortifies and accentuates in them their own personality. What bonds of union would Peru, a land of geographical contrasts and diverse populations, have if not for the bonds of a common tradition and destiny?

The bond of tradition with destiny resided in the historicist concept of the participation of the “already lived in the actuality of existence” (here Basadre borrows Dilthey’s concept of *Erlebnis*, translated as *vivencia*).⁶⁷ This living cultural patrimony and memory is profound and futural, for it carries the seed for the “realization of Peru.”⁶⁸ Adherence to the promise of Peru as *Erlebnis* required not only the New Education, however; it needed a scholarly factory so that Peru’s true beginnings as a collective subject and self would not be lost among “the endless beginnings.”

66. Basadre, *Meditaciones*, 48.

67. See Wilhelm Dilthey, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung: Lessing, Goethe, Novalis, Hölderlin* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1910).

68. Basadre, *Meditaciones*, 49–50.

The "Airborne Factory" of Historical Consciousness and Intentional Desire

In "Theory of Peru" (1937) Basadre posed that quintessential national-historicist question: "When was Peru born?" The possible answers, he noted, were several, but only one was "true to the national consciousness." "The geologist," Basadre wrote, "will provide information about the determined moments in the life of the earth that correspond to the distinct strata of Peruvian soils." On the other hand, "the historian of Western civilization will say that Peru enters upon the stage when Francisco Pizarro lands at Tumbes." Still, "the student of political rights will respond by pointing to that scene in the Plaza of Lima and to that instant in which San Martín pronounced these words: 'From this moment . . . we are free.'" But these beginnings were incomplete. Basadre had his own beginning:

If we try to establish the birth of Peruvian national consciousness, the answer can only be given after an inquiry. . . . Peru, as a name and as a social fact in which the Hispanic and the indigenous coexist, does not appear modestly or imperceptibly. . . . It is a new society born of blood and tears in an abyss of history, with a loud crash that moves the world. . . . The name "Peru" is the fruit of a collective impulse. . . . "Peru" arose from an anonymous baptism, displacing the official name of "New Castile."⁶⁹

As a historical consequence of this postconquest "collective impulse" and "anonymous baptism," he continued, "Peru should have an intentional desire [*querer intencional*] that is the consequence of an irrevocable fact: Peru exists as a totality in space and as a totality in time."

Totality in space, that is, the harmonious coexistence of mountain and altiplano, condor and albatross, quinoa and cotton, corn beer and brandy, sweet cream and hot sauce, the Inca stones in Cuzco and courtly life in Lima, the revolutions of heroic Tacna under Chilean occupation, forgotten after reincorporation, and Tumbes trapped by the greed and jealousy [of Ecuador]. Totality in time, that is, a long historical event where the Incaic is present only to the extent that it survives within Peruvianness [*peruanidad*], and only to the extent to which, and amount in which, it serves Peruvianness; and where the Hispanic is present only if it has adapted to, or rooted itself in, Peruvianness.⁷⁰

69. Basadre, "Teoría del Perú," in *Meditaciones*, 104–5.

70. Basadre, *Meditaciones*, 94–95.

In short, the totalizing history of Peruvianness would stimulate historical consciousness, and in turn that consciousness would pique Peru's intentional desire. This was the true task of Basadre's monumental masterwork, *History of the Republic of Peru*.

History of the Republic of Peru grew in spurts, like those interminable buildings in Lima that always seem able to accommodate yet another floor. The ground floor of this interminable edifice was *The Initiation of the Republic*, while subsequent additions (that is, editions) were built of historical material drawn from Basadre's essays and new investigations. Although Basadre characterized the first edition as a teaching manual and a "synthetic narrative history" with no pretension to be definitive, the *History of the Republic of Peru* was never a rounded narrative history, nor did it fully achieve a persuasive synthesis as an interpretation, even after six editions and the addition of a dozen or more tomes. By the fifth or sixth edition it defined the field by its sheer bulk and erudition, but the extended work does not achieve definition, in part because of the cumulative, patchwork, and notebook-like nature of the contents, and in part because it later became clear to Basadre that "definition" was not in the cards. More than a synthesis, the *History of the Republic* became an "airborne factory" (*fábrica aerea*) and warehouse of knowledge that provided an ever-rising scholarly ceiling for Basadre's affirmative struggle to raise the historical consciousness of Peruvians.

As the author confessed in the preface to the fifth edition, *History of the Republic of Peru* was in fact an interminable "essay in functional or 'relational' history." Basadre's concept of "functional history" drew upon the holistic thought of García Morente; in a word, it contemplated the "natural history" of the nationality as a transcendent and unifying cultural aspiration forged in the presence of a past of "glories and regrets" and in the intentional desire for and adherence to a collective future. Now parting with Dilthey but following as ever the thought of Croce, Basadre explained that historical consciousness required that "we objectify the past as something dead" and thus critically available in the form of "the patrimony of the present."⁷¹ This was "relational history." Echoing points he had made in the preface to *The Initiation of the Republic* and elsewhere, Basadre now confessed that the ponderous ten-volume essay sought to effect "national maturation" by fomenting a "*toma de conciencia histórica*" vis-à-vis a republican past that was "as turbulent and lurid as it is Peruvian." Quoting Boris Pasternak, he writes "History is the 'sum of all the possibilities that have been realized,' it grants us the comforting sensation that we 'belong' to something, it

71. Jorge Basadre, "Nota preliminar a la quinta edición," in *Historia de la República del Perú, 1822–1933*, 6th ed. (Lima: Editorial Universitaria, 1968), xxi–xxii.

tells us from whence we have come, who we are. It frequently offers an answer to the question of how things came to be the way they are, for what reasons the world is as we encounter it before our eyes."⁷² *History of the Republic of Peru*, the author noted, sought to achieve this effect in the reader by means of "understanding, objectivity, coordination, and ensemble."⁷³

A second preface (a reworked version of a previously published essay) reviews trends in twentieth-century European historical thought.⁷⁴ Once again, however, Basadre returns to his Crocean and Pascalian foundations. Paraphrasing the Italian philosopher, he writes that history as a science is never complete, because "not all problems can be solved, since when they are, they only reveal new ones. The historian opens a road, he does not close it."⁷⁵ History is a sublime and liberating art and human science; its method is constructivist, and it remains vital as a critical mode of apprehending the world and our place in its Faustian unfolding.

In our epoch . . . egregious and vulgar voices . . . accuse History of lacking both solidity as a science and utility for life. Paul Valéry, one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century, has said, in an oft-repeated phrase, that History is the most dangerous product ever elaborated by the chemistry of the intellect, since it makes people dream, it intoxicates them, it suggests false memories to them, and it torments them in their repose, leading them to the delirium of grandeur and so making nations unbearable and vain. Nevertheless, and despite these and other criticisms, History is still there, living as it has always lived as long as it was authentic: a science in its attachment to the possible truth, and an art in the aura of beauty that accompanies every evocation and affirmation of life. History is an airborne factory, impalpable, subtle, made of ideas and

72. Basadre, "Nota preliminar," xlii.

73. Ibid., xx–xxi. The most significant of Croce's works for Basadre were Spanish translations of *Teoria e storia della storiografia* and *Storia come pensiero e come azione*.

74. Basadre, "A propósito de los puntos de vista de este libro: Reflexiones sobre la Historiografía," in *Historia de la República del Perú*, xxxv–xlvi. Basadre's reflections on historiography follow the preface, in which the author argues that the present, sixth edition sports a Braudelian design. Basadre's late attempt to give his masterwork a Braudelian design consisted in appending old material on the "geographic, economic, social, and cultural 'bases' of the Republic" and adding two new chapters on "the Church and the State" and "the idea of the Patria." Although Basadre shared Braudel's modernist vision of "total history," he never undertook the structural history of capitalism or material life.

75. Basadre, "A propósito," xlv.

sentiments, although, in a certain sense, it is comparable to architecture since to endure it must ground itself in technical principles when selecting materials, but be inspired by aesthetic principles in the construction itself. However rich our epoch is in apparatuses, instruments, and appetites, in the end humanity is composed of more dead than living. Our epoch, so antitraditional, is inserted in an essentially historicist culture. The sacred books of Christianity are, in their own way, history books. Classical historiography was a creation of the Greco-Roman tradition. Our arts, our literature, our lives are themselves full of the echoes of the past. But there is something more: in the twentieth century History is a vital preoccupation, like science was in the nineteenth century, philosophy in the eighteenth century, and theology in earlier centuries. Today writers, philosophers, sociologists, and politicians come up against History. This characteristic has its roots in Hegel, in Marxism, and in Positivism, but it reaches greater plenitude in Dilthey, and is evidenced by the debate on being and time proposed by Heidegger, by Max Scheler's sociology of science, and in Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge.⁷⁶

Basadre's assertion that "authentic history" is the vital preoccupation of the twentieth century seems to run counter to conventional European wisdom, which holds that the long nineteenth century (in Germany at least) was "the century of history," the ultimate scenario and expression of historicist thought. This is a notable reading, since the debates and trends that Basadre cites here may be seen to represent precisely "the crisis of historicism" in Europe, or at any rate serious challenges there to what today is often called "classical historicism."⁷⁷ That Basadre connected these critical thinkers to an ancient Western historicist tradition suggests that he may not have accepted the extent to which some of those thinkers (Heidegger in particular) had begun to undermine those foundations.⁷⁸ In Peru, and perhaps in Latin America more generally, the "general crisis" in interwar Europe seems to have prompted an inward turn toward

76. *Ibid.*, xxxv–xxxvi.

77. Charles R. Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995).

78. Basadre's appreciation contradicts Popper's claim that "modern historicists" are ignorant of "the antiquity of their doctrine." In general, Popper's rationalist rejection of historicism as "superstition" could only be applied to Basadre with great injustice. His historicism did not cling to "immutable historical laws" nor was it "afraid of change." Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).

a more vital preoccupation with history as means to create a "true" or "deep" nationality.

In Basadre's case this inward turn went to the epistemological core of history. "The greatness and servility of History," Basadre wrote, consisted in the fact that "historians created their own object of study," and the veracity of this invented object of historical study could be said to exist only insofar as it pertained to the historicity of the historian as a "knowing subject." In short, Peruvian history was the invented object and "servant" of Basadre's own historicity, which in turn was also Peruvian. For Basadre, this realization meant that "the knowing subject should seek above all to convince himself, in a centrifugal commitment, of the truth inherent in his own apprehension of the past, to distance his Self as much as possible from all the purely imaginary forms of representation, and to transmit that message with fidelity to his readers or listeners."⁷⁹ Basadre's "centrifugal commitment" evokes a sense of the knowing subject or self and of history as two forces, each of which flees from its axis or center. History always flees from that knowing subject that creates it as an object of study, and so knowledge is always insufficient, the labor of the historian interminable. The knowing self or historian also flees from "the purely imaginary forms of representation," however, so as to "transmit a message of fidelity" to readers. The historian, then, is also a servant of readers or, rather, of a certain "fidelity to readers," and history is the elusive servant of the historian or, rather, of "his apprehension of the past." The truth of history, then, is clearly both "great" and "servile."

Historicism's Poetic Aporia: The Knowing Subject and the Divided Subject

Basadre built an airborne factory against the real threats posed by neighboring states and the imaginary ones posed by "foreign doctrines" from Europe, but his historicist thought and historiographical production was also an anxious bulwark against the divisive threat of radical heterogeneity within Peru, against the nightmare of endless beginnings born of forgetting. In his intentional desire to write and realize an all-encompassing Peruvian history of Peru, that is, a history of Peru that was "homologous with its own formation," Basadre's historicism located all that was "heterogeneous in Peru" in the constitutive outside, in the ahistorical. This was so because "in Peru history is the only thing that we

79. Basadre, "A propósito," xxxvii–xxxviii.

possess in common; all that does not emanate from the historical is, in Peru, radically heterogeneous.”⁸⁰ At the same time, Basadre’s wager and poetic project *for* Peru was meaningless without that heterogeneous “outside,” without the “not yet” that the divided subject of Peru presented not as the antechamber of underdevelopment but as a “tremendous thing.” In this sense, his statement that the historical is all we have in common is surely aporetic, for it is the ahistorical and the heterogeneous that, in this line of historicist thought, provides the historical and knowing subject with its raw poetic material, and so it too is “held in common.” To be truly homologous with this subject, then, Basadre’s Peruvian history of Peru would have to admit the radically heterogeneous or ahistorical as its founding (un)reason.

It may now be seen that the enabling impasse or poetic aporia in Basadre’s historicism lies in the figure of an ambivalent subject that is at once ahistorical (and so heterogeneous, forgetful, nameless, and inert) and historical (and thus unified, knowing, named, and dynamic). Both the ahistorical and the historical are subsumed, however, under the name of a master historical subject: the idea, entity, and being named “Peru.” In short, since Peru is a “totality in space and time” and thus draws all into its field, it is necessarily a radically heterogeneous subject that is never fully historicized, since the historical is merely its mode of becoming, as an adherence to a memory with a future. The historical dimension of Peru is the unified future that cannot become without its prior being, but the ahistorical dimension of being also exists as a present thing, and it everywhere threatens to become the future and thus destroy the historical. What unites this precarious historical subject is “the name of Peru,” understood as that which transcends or “remains after the passage of events.” This is so because Peru exceeds history: Peru is the holistic unity of all points past, present, and future. The name of Peru had abruptly emerged in “an abyss of history” and was propelled into the historical by an impulse and anonymous baptism, and it was later renewed at independence as “the promise” of a happy and prosperous life for “Peruvian man.” In Basadre’s thought, then, history or historicism becomes the internal battleground of the historical against all that is not historical, and this contest is both transcended and made possible by an appeal to the proper name or signature. Historicism’s internal battleground is a life-or-death affair or, rather, a life-and-death affair, an aporia beyond which history becomes unthinkable and unnecessary, for if either opponent suddenly retreats from the field, the game is up. In other words, without a means (that is, the ahistorical)

80. Basadre, *Perú: Problema*, 2–3.

to apprehend the truth of his own historicity, the historian or knowing subject cannot configure an object of study and so cannot "serve" anything "great" that would explain or reveal his own historicity to himself.

Drawing on the insights of Partha Chatterjee and Ranajit Guha on Indian historiography, Chakrabarty suggested that, in the colonial world, history configured its subjects in developmental or evolutionary narratives that typically traced a gradual trajectory toward unification and modernity, often periodized on the model of European history. Indian history (or the history of any other postcolonial national subject) might begin with an ancient, glorious past, but it moved through dark ages and a renaissance steadily toward a future national plenitude, albeit via what Chatterjee called a "miserable present" marked by "lack" and "lag."⁸¹ The referent of all such histories, Chakrabarty argues, was and is Europe. This is so because both the hyperreal entity and concept of Europe have become coterminous in the modern historical imagination with reason, modernity, and (since Marx) capital, understood as universal historical categories that can explain everything, everywhere, at all times. As a consequence, historicism is a colonial discourse that denies the radical heterogeneity and nowness of the historical subject. Although Basadre's historicism often sounds developmentalist themes and language that may indeed be traced to European thinkers, his notion and employment of the historical is not evolutionary in a naturalist sense but is instead an affirmative wager for a future that is itself the consequence or destiny of affirmative past wagers (the impulse, the promise). Moreover, these wagers propel Peru toward a future whose "historical reason" must be distinct from that of modern Europe, since that reason is the product of Peru's own historical mode of becoming what "Peru" itself has proposed it become. This futural becoming, configured as the historical and the social, was born in the "abyss of history" of conquest, but it is clear that this abyss—understood as the radical heterogeneity of "all that is not historical in Peru"—continued to exist in Basadre's Peru and indeed was the reason for his historicist project, the "truth" of his apprehension of the past.⁸² What is notable here is that the historical subject named "Peru" does not depart—as Chakrabarty and Chatterjee's readings of historicism might suggest and as indeed is the case in certain European narratives—from an immemorial past (for example, a utopian Inca empire or a primitive communism) and it does

81. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993), 75–115.

82. Here I am indebted to Chakrabarty's concept of "the subaltern past." See *Provincializing Europe*, 97–113.

not move “naturally” toward the future fulfillment of a modernity derived from evolutionary, European models of progress (although, to be sure, Neo-Aristotelian and Neoplatonist notions of continuity, gradation, and plenitude do lurk in the background).⁸³ Rather, “Peru” as a “name and social fact” is a necessarily divided and self-perpetuating subject born in that “abyss of history” which is also the historian’s abyss.

Basadre’s “Peruvian history of Peru” is above all a poetic history *for* Peru, since his writing strives to create, against the abyss of the heterogeneous and the ahistorical, the conditions for its own future reception and realization among those who would adhere to Peru’s collective becoming. Given the great popularity in Peru of Basadre’s historicist concepts, there is little doubt that “our historian of the Republic” has been a good servant of history. Indeed, for Basadre the authentic adherence to the historical by reading citizens was history, and the practice of writing history was “true nationalism.” As a space-time totality and holistic cultural aspiration, Peru itself is an all-encompassing theory of “authentic becoming.” In short, Basadre’s historicism is not just about creating a historically grounded sense of belonging and fomenting a commitment to a project of national development. It is, more profoundly, about that ultimate goal of all philosophical labors from Heraclitus to Heidegger: the authentic form of existence.

Basadre’s historicist pursuit of the authentic form of existence is both troubled and enabled by Peru’s radical heterogeneity, understood as “all that is not historical” or, more wishfully, “not yet historical.” Since the ahistorical and the not yet historical are inscribed in the idea (or entity, being, or becoming) that is “the totality of Peru,” Peru is a divided subject whose becoming may only be understood and narrated as a struggle with itself on a path toward national fulfillment. Still, any arrival at that fulfillment would bring Peru to its extinction as a mode of becoming, and it would also obviate the need for historicism and history. In this sense Basadre’s wager is a Faustian wager “for Peruvian life” understood as an endless and tremendous struggle against “endless beginnings,” or, as Palti asserts in his reading of Badiou’s theory of the subject, a “second-order wager” or “a wager for the wager.”⁸⁴ This is why Basadre’s opus reaches no definition: it is an “airborne factory” of memory against the endless beginnings of forgetting. But the endless memory or interminable building has no

83. On the history of these notions, see Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1936).

84. Elías José Palti, “Poststructuralist Marxism and the ‘Experience of Disaster.’ On Alain Badiou’s Theory of the (Non-)Subject,” *The European Legacy* 8, no. 4 (2003): 459–80.

historical reason without the endless forgetting that threatens it and spurs it on. And so Basadre's "Peruvian history of Peru" moves not toward an evolutionary destination but instead toward that destiny which is none other than the aporia or "centrifugal commitment" of the knowing subject's life. The vehicle of this movement toward a centrifugal destiny is the finite historian's wager for the infinite future of the memory named Peru, a wager moreover that confirms "the truth of the historian's apprehension of the past," where that truth is nothing if not a wager on "the most important personage in Peruvian history": Peru. It is in this sense that Basadre's Peruvian history of Peru is "homologous with its own formation," for "Peru" is nothing but a series of affirmative wagers on and centrifugal commitments to that name which was born in an abyss of history.