
A table of contents for *Epworth Review* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_epworth-review-01.php

History and Faith

(1) History and the Gospel in our Culture

D.W. BEBBINGTON

THE conception of history in any culture is crucial to its self-understanding. The image of the past gives a perspective on the present and so helps determine the future. Writers about the past can forge the identity of a nation. They are equally effective as subversives. 'Historians are dangerous', observed Nikita Kruschev in 1956, 'and capable of turning everything topsy-turvy. They have to be watched'.[1] For good or ill, history is powerful. The broad perspectives in which the past is viewed are particularly potent since they so often form part of a society's unexamined assumptions. They can create an atmosphere either receptive or inimical to the gospel. It is therefore imperative for the welfare of the Christian faith to appreciate the balance between schools of historical thought at any time and place. Five main perspectives on the past have exercised an influence on western civilisation. In many and various ways they continue to shape our presuppositions about life. But it is also important to recognise that a sixth school is emerging in the late twentieth century. To identify and examine the new way of looking at the past is a central Christian task today.

The most formative conception of history in the west has been the Christian one. The Apostles' Creed has much to say about events. The primary reason why Christianity is a historical religion is that it believes that God decisively intervened in human affairs through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But other aspects of Christian teaching about history have also enriched the western mind. If God was at work in Christ, he is also portrayed in the Bible as intervening at other points in time. The exodus from Egypt is when he supremely displays his power in the Old Testament; and in the New the growth of the Church is attended with what the Puritans were to call 'particular providences', occasions when God himself takes a distinctive part in human affairs. Providence, in the normal Christian understanding, is not restricted to particular happenings. God has also been seen as guiding the whole course of affairs. Since God created the world, he continues to care for it. 'The Lord reigns', declares the Psalmist. And there has been the Christian hope. History will come to an end, according to the New Testament, with Christ's return. The divine purpose will be brought to a triumphant conclusion in the last things. Christians have therefore held a linear view of history as a process moving towards a climax predetermined by God. That panorama long moulded the western imagination.

Yet it was never without a rival. Ancient civilisations in general tended to conceive history on the pattern of the seasons in the natural world, in cycles. Nations and whole civilisations, it was held, rose to an apogee before falling to their dissolution. Elements of the cyclical view blended with the

Christian conception of history, particularly at the Renaissance. In the later Enlightenment there arose a fresh view of the historical process, a secularisation of the Christian understanding, in the idea of progress. Empirical research on the model of natural science, it was held, would generate positive knowledge and enable humanity to progress towards the goal of happiness. The historicism of the Romantic era emerged in a German reaction against the positivism of the Enlightenment around the turn of the nineteenth century. It contended that each society produces its own distinctive values in the course of its history. Knowledge of the past was thought to be the result of intuition rather than scientific inquiry. Both schools continue to have their disciples. So does the other body of thought, Marxism, although its advocates divide into those who commend a positivist version indebted to the Enlightenment and a historicist version deriving from the German conception of history. In China Marxism has even been married to the cyclical view to explain the sequence of dynasties in the national past.[2] Philosophies of history from the past turn out on examination to fall into one or more of the categories Christian, cyclical, positivist, historicist and Marxist.

In the present day speculative philosophies of history are supposed to be out of fashion, but debates between them are reflected in discussions of the philosophy of historiography. Controversy in this field revolves around the divergence between those applying the positivist approach to questions of method and those indebted to the historicist tradition. The former appears in its strongest form in an essay published by the American philosopher Carl Hempel in 1942;[3] the classic statement of the latter is *The Idea of History* by R. G. Collingwood, published posthumously in 1946. Hempel's so-called 'covering law model' of historical technique attracted widespread support among those wishing to see history as fully scientific in method. Collingwood's theory of the re-enactment of past events in the historian's mind received sympathetic attention from, among others, Christian apologists of an earlier generation such as Alan Richardson and Norman Sykes.[4] One of the more noteworthy recent contributions to the discussion has been a work by Rex Martin of the University of Kansas that tries to establish a coherent middle ground between the covering law model and re-enactment.[5] For the most part, however, the issue between the two sides has been fought and refought by philosophers concerned with history in a technical jargon often dismissed as sterile by historians unconcerned with philosophy. It is safe to say that the impact on the western historical consciousness has approximated to zero.

There has nevertheless been a shift in the last thirty years or so away from one of the attitudes associated with positivism. The ideal of objective, value-free history has gone into decline. The chief agent of the shift is less the dissent of historicists than the assault in theory and practice by Marxists. The notion that intellectual inquiry of any kind can be totally disinterested has been challenged by those who argue that the orthodox Anglo-Saxon empiricist tradition is in reality attached to the values of liberal democratic capitalism. The work of Christopher Hill, Eric

Hobsbawm, E. P. Thompson and others has shown that perceptive history can be written by the ideologically committed. In Germany Jürgen Habermas and in France Louis Althusser have inspired more full-blooded rejections of positivism by joining Marxism (in the case of Habermas) to the legacy of German historicism and (in the case of Althusser) to French structuralism. Although Marxism has gone on to the defensive in the 1980s, it helped to convince many far beyond its ranks that objectivity was no more than a noble dream.[6] Commitment is more tolerated, as the flowing tide of women's history makes plain. Feminism, however, has so far generated no notable contributions to the theory of history. And commitment has been discerned by non-Marxists among historians who would have protested their non-alignment. A golden age of British history from the 1940s to the early 1970s has been diagnosed as an ideological expression of Butskellite national unity. Its problem was an arcane professionalism, an unwillingness to ask fundamental questions that might rock the boat of consensus. The consequence was a turning away from the subject by the general reader.[7] The history of the professionals has become more committed, but by no means more formative of public opinion.

It is therefore to the sixth school of thought that we must turn if we are to appreciate the way in which the past is growingly approached in our culture. Its origins are to be found in the literary and philosophical avant-garde of the early twentieth century, the so-called Modernists. The phenomenon of cultural Modernism needs to be distinguished from the theological Modernism, which, though contemporary, was far less innovative. The inspiration of the avant-garde was drawn from distaste for Romantic decadence, from a sense of crisis in and around the First World War and supremely from the thought of Nietzsche and Freud. Nietzsche taught not only that God is dead. He expounded the conviction that if there is no God, there is no metaphysics, no order in the universe, no correspondence between words and things. Freud and his fellow-explorers of the subconscious popularised the view that reason and emotion cannot be separated. Thought and feeling are mingled in forms of human self-expression. With the dismissal of order and reason, the legacy of the Enlightenment as well as the more immediate inheritance from Romaticism was rejected. In art the Post-Impressionists, in music the atonalists, in fiction the stream of consciousness writers all reflected the new cultural mood. Modernism drastically affected most areas of human creativity.[8]

Nor has it been superseded. In the last thirty years, and especially in the 1980s, there has been much heralding of Post-Modernism as a new era of western civilisation. But, at least among the social analysts who make greatest play with the term, Post-Modernism is normally contrasted not with the Modernism of the early twenticth century but with the 'modernity' that, since the Enlightenment, has been the goal of rational, technocratic endeavour. Jean-François Lyotard, one of the more influential commentators on the phenomenon, repudiates suggesting any discontinuity between 'the Postmodern condition' and the High Modernist cultural moment.[9] What has happened is that attitudes once confined to small

coteries of artists and *littérateurs* have extended to a larger public, often diffused through the radical theorists and the counter-culture of the 1960s.[11] The attitudes may be expected to spread more widely. It is not surprising that ideas of a Modernist lineage are beginning to impinge on the historical world.

One channel through which such currents of opinion have reached historians is the work of Michel Foucault (1926-84), a French thinker who is normally classed among the Post-Structuralists. That is to imply a just contrast with the Structuralist school associated with the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss which analysed language and behaviour according to the inter-relationship of terms. For the Post-Structuralists, who also included the literary critic Roland Barthes and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, there was no such relationship discernible in the flux of the world. Foucault published two substantial historical books in the 1960s, *Madness and Unreason* (1961), a study of attitudes to insanity that cast doubt on their sanity, and *The Order of Things* (1966), an analysis of ways of perceiving commerce, language and animals since the Renaissance that argued for parallel discontinuities in the three areas in about 1650 and about 1800. Foucault was increasingly influenced by Nietzsche over the years, so that a central theme of his writing in the 1970s was the isolation of the will to power as the force underlying the will to knowledge. Already in *The Order of Things* Nietzsche is applauded for seeing that the notion 'man', which according to Foucault is a recent construct, is nearing its end. 'Rather than the death of God', he writes, ' — or, rather, in the wake of that death and in a profound correlation with it — what Nietzsche's thought heralds is the death of his murderer . . .'[11] A pronounced anti-humanism that will call for further comment is apparent here. It is entirely typical of Modernist thought as a whole.

A second medium for the transmission of Modernist attitudes to the historical community has been the book *Metahistory* (1973) by Hayden White, an American academic who is himself an authority on Foucault. *Metahistory* is an exercise in the philosophy of historiography, but its silence on the issues that have occupied positivists and historicists perplexed its early readers. White argued that 'the historian performs an essentially *poetic* act, in which he *pre*figures the historical field and constitutes it as a domain upon which to bring to bear the specific theories he will use to explain "what was really happening" in it'.[12] Because the preliminary conceptualisation of the past is so fundamental, there is no substantial difference between the historian and the philosopher of history. Both organise their visions according to one of four tropes or rhetorical forms. The writing that emerges is the result of social conventions transcending the individual. Prefiguring a historical field is analogous to Anton von Webern's technique of 'preforming' music from principles of composition determined in advance. The parallel illustrates the rooting of White's approach in the soil of Modernism. His book has been located in the Nietzschean tradition.[13] One of his conclusions is also typical of those swayed by Nietzsche. 'When it is a matter of choosing among these

alternative visions of history', he writes, 'the only grounds for preferring one over another are *moral* or *aesthetic* ones.'[14] There is no agreed interpersonal standard by which conflicting accounts can be assessed. Modernism capitulates to the arbitrary.

In disciplines adjacent to history the invasion by the new school of thought has been deeper. Literary criticism has been transformed by the Post-Structuralist techniques inspired by Jacques Derrida. Born in 1930, Derrida has made frequent forays to the United States, where his theories have been embraced by the literary critics of Yale. Derrida, however, is a philosopher. He burst on the scene in 1967 with three works, amongst which *Of Grammatology* is the fullest exposition of his views. In the flow of history, he contends, the present does not properly exist. A moment can be held to be present only if the succeeding moment is known already. The present is therefore necessarily deferred. Derrida describes the principles whereby meaning is deferred and so differs as 'différance'. No particular meaning is to be preferred to another, because a written text is autonomous of the intentional activity of the author. 'There is nothing outside the text.'[15] Deconstruction is the activity of discovering, from contradictions within the text, a meaning that may be contrary to the apparent thrust of a piece of writing. Derrida is the sworn foe of the supposition that there is any inherent ontological quality in the world that guarantees a single meaning. He condemns it as the doctrine of 'being as presence'.[16] Once more Derrida acknowledges a debt, together with Freud, to Nietzsche. There is no reason, in principle, why his approach to texts should not be applied by historians to historical documents — or, indeed, to human behaviour considered as the equivalent of a text. Deconstruction in history is to be expected in the next decade.

Another philosopher whose principles may affect historical scholarship is Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951). The later Wittgenstein is normally seen as an 'ordinary language' philosopher, holding that meaning should be worked out from everyday usage. That, however, is an inadequate understanding. Although the extent of his familiarity with Nietzsche is unestablished, Wittgenstein regarded himself as a disciple of Freud and did at least, like Nietzsche, feel he was writing for a future race that would think in a different way.[17] His later writings mingle arguments, images, satire, mimicry and instruction in a typical post-Nietzschean manner. His central problematic, the implications of the breakdown of the belief that language possesses a single meaning because of a bond with external reality, is precisely that of Nietzsche. His tentative solution, to stress that meaning depends on the various social contexts of the use of language ('forms of life'), is different, but he displays an identical impatience with metaphysics and desire to get on with life in the body. Already Wittgenstein has generated a minor interpretative industry. As his thought is more accurately located,[18] it is likely to inspire further philosophical exploration that moulds historical work.

A final philosopher whose position represents the advance of a Modernist worldview is the American Richard Rorty, the author of *Philosophy*

and the Mirror of Nature (1980). There is, he holds, no mirror of nature in the mind. Philosophers since Descartes, in their epistemological preoccupations, have mistakenly supposed that there is. No truths are therefore available as a basis for further investigation. 'Foundationalism' is dismissed. Rorty claims to be a pragmatist in the tradition of John Dewey, accepting philosophical positions only insofar as they produce practical benefits, but in reality his position is more Derridean than Derrida. He rebukes the French philosopher for attributing an absolute quality to the principle of *différance* and so smuggling in foundationalism by the back door. The bypassing of epistemology in Rorty is characteristic of Modernism; so is the implication that no interpretation of reality can be accorded preference over any other. From premises like Rorty's the Dutch philosopher of historiography F. R. Ankersmit has concluded that if we have only one historical interpretation, we have no interpretation. An account of the past can be appreciated only in the presence of others.[19] With the steady spread of Modernist assumptions in the educated public, such attitudes to history are likely to become more general over time. Each perspective on the past will be supposed to be as authentic as any other.

What should be the Christian response to such trends? Just as scripture (especially the book of Ecclesiastes) and the Fathers (especially Augustine) entered a critical engagement with the alternative historical worldview of the ancient world, the cyclical view, so should we attempt to evaluate the opinions of our day. The legacy of the Enlightenment, though less all-pervasive in the historical field than a reader of Lesslie Newbigin's *On the Other Side of 1984* might expect, nevertheless remains powerful at a popular level. It is commonly supposed that atomistic facts can be firmly ascertained, so that knowledge of the past is in principle unproblematic. That leads (for example) to false expectations of the demonstrability of the resurrection. So the premise that isolated facts are there to be discovered needs to be challenged.[20] Likewise the Romantic tradition must not be allowed to hold sway with its supposition that all values are created by history. That can lead to an anti-supernatural prejudice about Christian origins that leaves no space for the irruption into history of revelation and incarnation from above. Neither the positivism stemming from the Enlightenment nor the historicism arising from Romanticism offers firm ground in itself for Christian apologetic. Both are abstractions from the Christian understanding of history. It is therefore to be expected that each will reveal deficiencies that need to be pointed out.

The most pressing task, however, is a critical appraisal of the Modernist attitude to history. There is much that is attractive. The theologian Paul Tillich, who was deeply swayed by the Expressionism that formed an early wave of German Modernism, discerned in its style a recovery of the true religious attitude to culture.[21] Tillich, we may think, was too ready to identify the Christian faith with the ultimate concerns of the twentieth century, and yet his analysis does alert us to the existence of areas of affinity between Modernism and the Christian tradition. In particular the Modernist critique of the two preceding cultural eras can be drawn on by a

Christian critique. Surely the shared assumption of the positivist and the historicist, with their concentration on epistemological questions, that the historian is concerned only with the explanation of events is as mistaken as F. R. Ankersmit has claimed. The historian interprets the overall vista of the past through spectacles determined by his worldview, and that interpretation does a great deal to shape his writing.[22] Modernism has much to teach the Christian analyst of culture.

Yet the Christian will wish to challenge the fresh attitude to history that is emerging in our day. The faith of the Church entails rebutting Modernist views on the role of God, humanity and the historian. Advocates of a Modernist perspective would wish to deny any divine pattern in the historical process, for that would be to attribute order to what is merely chaos. It would be a form of what Derrida condemns as the 'metaphysics of presence'. Providence is ruled out of court. The Christian, however, wishes to confess the sovereignty of God in controlling history and the activity of God in particular interventions. If the objection is raised that we cannot hope to understand the providential pattern until the process is complete, the answer is that, on the Christian view, the end of history has already appeared in the middle of the process in Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, bringing judgment and mercy, is the archetypal event that illuminates the whole of history. Judgment on sin, as Herbert Butterfield suggested,[23] together with mercy for sinners, is evident in the past, if only through a glass darkly. Full understanding no doubt has to be postponed until we know as we are known. Yet the Christian historian can hardly rule out divine intervention *a priori*. Like the narrative in part of Samuel-Kings, he can hint at the possibility of God's involvement in the historical process.[24] He will be pointing to what Blaise Pascal called 'the presence of a hidden God'.[25] If for the Modernist God is dead, it is all the more important for the Christian to portray his vitality.

The estimate of humanity is equally contested territory. Since contrasting anthropologies underlie the divergence between positivist and historicist approaches to historiography, it is not surprising that there is a distinctive Modernist attitude to human beings. They are to be deconstructed. 'It is', writes Foucault, 'a source of profound relief to think that man is only . . . a new wrinkle in our knowledge, and that he will disappear as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form.'[26] Humanism, according to many contemporary theorists, must be discarded. Christianity, by contrast, upholds a definite, if paradoxical, doctrine of humanity. Human beings possess greatness since they are made in the image of their Creator and are destined for glory. Yet they are sinful since the image of God has been defaced by the fall and they all do wrong. Again, human beings are, at least in some sense, free, and so must take responsibility for their actions. Yet they are, in some other sense, determined in their behaviour by the circumstances in which God has placed them. The complexity of the Christian understanding, it can fairly be claimed, does justice to the complexity of life while avoiding the dismissal of the human condition as absurd. The Christian view can illuminate the course of events: the

historian of the blood-feud in early modern Scotland finds the doctrine of sin a helpful way of understanding the viciousness of his subject.[27] History can serve theology by illustrating its teaching about humanity. In the process it will necessarily indicate the Christian estimate of the flawed greatness of humanity against the anti-humanism of the Modernist.

The role of the historian, according to the Modernists, has no connection with truth. The primary use of history, declares Foucault, is for parody.[28] There is no way of privileging one source text over another; and there is no reason, apart from personal taste, for preferring one account of the past to another.[29] The possibility of the critical review of one historian's work by others is excluded. The result is a position of absolute relativism. The temptation for the Christian to retreat into an absolute absolutism should be resisted. That normally amounts to an assertion of the possibility of objectivity based on empiricist canons derived from the Enlightenment rather than from the Christian faith. It is far better to relativise relativism. Why, on its own account of the universal arbitrariness of propositions, should the proposition that all propostitions are arbitrary be accepted? Even if a Christian wishes to grant the basic Nietzschean premise that there is normally no necessary bond between language and things, he holds that there is an exception in the unity of the Word of God and Jesus of Nazareth. Truth is accessible through him — indeed, as John's gospel assures us, is him. Hence it is essential to the Christian faith that the events predicated of the Son of God in the Apostles' Creed did take place. The Christian will wish to prefer the creed's account of events to any other; and he will wish to privilege his source text, the scriptures, over any other. At least in the case of the events surrounding Jesus Christ, the Christian historian is committed to holding that truth is sufficiently discoverable. History has to do with truth.

Historiography has not travelled far down the road of Modernist technique. It has yet to experiment with some of the more elementary motifs in literature that bear the hallmark of Modernism. There is, for example, the method adopted by J. B. Priestley for his play *Time and the Conways* (1937) of portraying consequences before causes. But it may confidently be expected that such symptoms will appear with increasing frequency. The theory of Modernism, not least in relation to history, will equally be elaborated in coming years. In the recent past there has been little Christian impact on the theory of history, but it is essential that there is now fuller engagement with the major currents of thought of the twentieth century. That should not mean dismissal of contemporary trends. Modernism will be found to yield valuable perceptions about the weaknesses of other worldviews that are still on offer. What it must mean is closer study of Nietzsche by Christian scholars.[30] By tracing the stream of innovation in twentieth-century culture to its chief source, we can achieve a much clearer analysis of its content. Christian convictions about God, humanity and history can then be articulated with greater confidence that they will be understood. There are few intellectual tasks that will do more for the progress of the gospel in our culture.

Notes

1 Quoted by Marc Ferro, *The Use and Abuse of History: or how the past is taught* (1981), London, 1984, p.114.
2 *Ibid.*, p.192. The last two paragraphs summarise much of D. W. Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, Leicester, 1979.
3 Carl G. Hempel, 'The Function of General Laws in History', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 39, 1942.
4 Alan Richardson, *Christian Apologetics*, London, 1947, p.96n. Norman Sykes, 'Some Current Conceptions of Historiography and their Significance for Christian Apologetic', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 50, 1949.
5 Rex Martin, *Historical Explanation*, Ithaca, N.Y., 1977.
6 Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: the objectivity question and the American historical profession*, Cambridge, 1988.
7 David Cannadine, 'British History: past, present — and future?', *Past & Present*, 116, 1987.
8 Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, *Modernism, 1890-1930*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1969.
9 Frederic Jameson, 'Foreword', in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: a report on knowledge* (1979), trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi, Manchester, 1984, p.xvi.
10 Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, London, 1970.
11 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: an archaeology of the human sciences* (1966), London, 1970, p.385.
12 Hayden White, *Metahistory: the historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe*, Baltimore, Md, 1973, p.x.
13 Hans Kellner, 'A Bedrock of Order: Hayden White's linguistic humanism', *Metahistory: six critiques*, History and Theory Studies in the Philosophy of History, Beiheft 19, Middletown, Conn., 1980, pp.7, 16.
14 White, *Metahistory*, p.433.
15 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1967), Baltimore, Md, 1977, p.158.
16 *Ibid.*, p.43.
17 Brian McGuinness, 'Freud and Wittgenstein', in Brian McGuinness, ed., *Wittgenstein and his Times*, Oxford, 1982, p.41.
18 Especially by Henry Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida*, Oxford, 1985, and Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, Oxford, 1986.
19 F. R. Ankersmit, 'The Dilemma of Contemporary Anglo-Saxon Philosophy of History', in F. R. Ankersmit, ed., *Knowing and Telling History: the Anglo-Saxon debate*, History and Theory Studies in the Philosophy of History, Beiheft 25, Middletown, Conn., 1986, pp.23-6.
20 Such a critique of Anglo-Saxon empiricist assumptions about history has been attempted in a study of George Orwell: David Bebbington, 'History and the Human Condition on the Other Side of "1984" ', *Christianity and History Newsletter*, July 1988.
21 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2, Welwyn, Herts, 1957, p.133. Cf. Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, New York, 1959, pp.73ff.
22 Ankersmit, 'Dilemma', p.11.
23 Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History*, London, 1949, pp.49f.
24 Richard Cooke, 'Did God push the Emperor Theodosius off his Horse on 28 July 450? The problem of providence', *Christianity and History Newsletter*, January 1989.
25 H. F. Stewart, ed., *Pascal's Pensées with an English Translation, Brief Notes and Introduction*, London, 1950, p.9.
26 Foucault, *Order of Things*, p.xxiii.
27 Keith Brown, *Blood Feud in Scotland, 1573-1625*, Edinburgh, 1986.
28 Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' (1971), in Paul Rabinov, ed., *The Foucault Reader*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1986, p.93.

29 T. C. Patterson, 'Post-Structuralism, Post-Modernism: implications for historians', *Social History*, 14, 1989, p.83.
30 Although there already is a sensitive Christian appreciation in F. A. Lea, *The Tragic Philosopher: a study of Friedrich Nietzsche*, London, 1957.

Data Sheet on Crime and Prison Population Trends in England and Wales

WILLIAM J. DAVIES

Measurement of Crime

THE composition of the present prison population needs to be seen against the extent of recorded crime in this country for which two main measures are available. The first is that of offences recorded by the Police. The other is the British Crime Survey which asks victims to report their experiences of crime. Both have their limitations. In the first case, only if the public reports a crime to the Police and the Police record it is the event counted. Changes in reporting procedures and media coverage of certain crimes will have a bearing on the levels of reported crime. In the second case, the crime survey is limited by its coverage of offences, by its sample (around 10,500 interviews), and by restrictions on the members of the household interviewed (Age 16 and over).

Although serious crimes of violence attract media attention, these crimes are comparatively rare. The majority of crimes recorded by the Police are property crimes, and only a minority of crimes result in an offender being convicted in a court.

3.7 million crimes were recorded by the Police and notified to the Home Office in 1989. The number of crimes recorded has risen from around 1 per hundred population in the 1950s to 5 per hundred population in the 1970s and 7.4 per hundred population in 1989. Property crimes accounted for most of the increase since the 1950s. One half of theft offences and one-quarter of all recorded crimes are theft of and from cars. 6% of recorded crimes are violent or sexual offences and about two-thirds are minor woundings. The British Crime Survey suggests that overall there has been a slight increase in the reporting of offences to the Police in recent years.

Measurement of Offending

It is not known whether the increase in recorded crime results from more crimes being committed by the same people or from more people committing crimes. The majority of offending is committed by a small percentage of males, the peak age being the mid-teens (15-18 for boys, and 15 for girls). One third of all males, and 7% females, will have a conviction