

HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND IDENTITY FORMATION: MUTUAL DEPENDENCY

CONSCIÊNCIA HISTÓRICA E FORMAÇÃO DE IDENTIDADE: DEPENDÊNCIA MÚTUA

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Abstract: How does historical consciousness come about? Recognizing the past depends on a factorial network. In the center of this network is the acting person, himself a historically and socio-psychologically educated being. Such a network is formed from factors that interweave acting people, their personal history and their (immediate) cultural environment culturally and socially. The meaning of history, the meaning of the formed subject identity and the historical awareness acquired in stages are closely related.

Keywords: Historical consciousness, Historical education, Historical knowledge, Historical culture.

Resumo: Como surge a consciência histórica? Reconhecer o passado depende de uma rede fatorial. No centro dessa rede está a pessoa atuante, ela mesma um ser educado histórica e sócio-psicologicamente. Tal rede é formada a partir de fatores que entrelaçam cultural e socialmente as pessoas atuantes, sua história pessoal e seu ambiente cultural (imediato). O sentido da história, o sentido da identidade do sujeito formado e a consciência histórica adquirida em etapas estão intimamente relacionados.

Palavras-chave: Consciência histórica, Educação histórica, Conhecimento histórico, Cultura histórica

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Out of our conceptions of the past, we make a future.
Hobbes (1994, p. 32)
The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic,
New York: Oxford University Press

Historical consciousness is the expression used currently to designate the consciousness that every rational human agent acquires and builds in reflecting upon his concrete life and his position in the temporal process of existence. This is a fundamental metaphysical assumption: historical consciousness is thus assumed an intrinsic characteristic of human nature, regardless of the degree of its extension, depth or content. Like any metaphysical assumption, there is no effective or absolute proof of it. It “only” deals with the registration, description and analysis of reflective manifestations of empirically existing human rational agents. Concrete, flesh-and-blood people are not abstractions, as the expression historical consciousness may suppose. Every active subject is a product of history, acts in it and inscribes his action in it. Although one cannot assume absolute determinism in any type of human action, one can assume a relative determination of every concrete form of being: that of the past from which the agent emerges, that shapes and offers him, so to speak, the 'raw material' he deals with in order to constitute his historical consciousness and establish the conditions of his existence in the present and in the future. This “determined past” – or what remains of it in material and immaterial memory – can be called historical culture, in which the relationship with time is partly precise (it is eventually known what day and time it is, who is the actor and what action, cause and consequence this entails, etc.) and partially inaccurate (century, millennium, epoch, era, period, phase, etc.). Such an assumption is intrinsic to modern thinking regarding the absolute equality of all human beings and their homogeneous endowment of rationality. Furthermore, this assumption offers a common denominator for comparing the existential circumstances of rational human agents in the different cultural conditions in which they are immersed. It allows the comparison of different ways of constituting personal and group identities within the context of the respective culture. It also allows the comparison of ways of conceiving and managing time and their 'fulfillment' by human action over time.

That said, one could operate with this assumption in an organized manner. Let us see how.

It includes two constitutive elements: that of personal identity and that of understanding the social set (group, society, people, nation, and so on) to which it belongs, situated in time. The constitution of the historical consciousness is a logical moment in the operation of historical thought and is immersed in the comprehensive environment of

historical culture. Historical culture is the 'collection' of the senses constituted by human historical consciousness over time. Historical consciousness needs memory - individual and collective - as a reference of contents.

The historical consciousness includes the awareness of the historicity intrinsic to all human existence, inserted in the set of culture, institutions and actions of people. Historicity is a fundamental assumption of the existential condition of every human being. Reflecting on this condition is a procedure of historical thought, necessary for each one, which is always carried out in every circumstance throughout one's life. Historicity and temporality coincide. Historical thought takes possession of them and elaborates them reflexively in historical consciousness. The expressions of this reflection, in the form of narrative (formal or informal) are inserted in the context of the agent, in the broad framework of historical culture.

All human action requires the historical (even if not historiographical) reflection of the agent. The ability to act results from learning. This is due to the appropriation of the concrete data of the empirical history in which the agent is situated, on which the reflection focuses, producing understanding and interpretation of the historical environment in which the agent finds himself, which is both a product and a producer. Historical consciousness has in mind that the surrounding historical culture precedes and involves every concrete existence as it derives from it. Learning (knowing the concrete empirical data of the past) is a basic requirement of historical thought operations (which fill memory with reflected information). These operations lead to the constitution of historical consciousness and are responsible for the contents found in historical culture.

The diversity of human rational agents is expressed in the multiperspective of the historical culture proper to each one and makes it understand both the multiplicity of historical cultures, beyond what is recognized as their own, as well as the elements common to all cultures, as human. The idea of equality of human beings and their common dignity has become a historic heritage of the historical consciousness, known under the names "human dignity" and "fundamental human rights". Historical consciousness is also constituted by the consolidation of this knowledge.

Historical thinking inscribes in historical consciousness the knowledge of the meaning learned in the surrounding historical culture and operates the comprehensive interpretation that re-elaborates this meaning because of the conscious and intentional actions of the agent. Historical learning is informal (in the usual environment of practical life) and formal (in the school system). Every learning process assumes that historical consciousness (as initially present, not yet theorized, in every agent), contributes to its

constitution and consolidation, needs it to be firm and to develop. For Jörn Rüsen, historical learning contributes to the development of the subject and results from the developing subject. Historical consciousness contributes to the subject's development and strengthens his learning capacity.

The compilation of items believed to be indicators of historical consciousness is important both *ad intra* (with respect to society and the culture to which the subject belongs) and *ad extra* (with respect to other societies and cultures).

Hans-Jürgen Pandel proposed seven “dimensions” of the category of consciousness of history: (a) consciousness of time (distinction between past, present and future) and the historical “density” (saturation of events) of a given time (1964-1985); (b) sensitivity to reality (sensation of real and fictional); (c) awareness of historicity (duration and historical consciousness of concrete existence in time); (d) identity (awareness of belonging to a group and ability to take this into account); (e) political awareness (vision of dominant structures and interests in culture); (f) economic and social awareness (knowledge of social and economic inequality); (g) moral conscience (ability to reconstruct values and norms of the time, without falling into alienating relativism or giving up one's judgment).

Other dimensions can be added, such as awareness of differences between individuals and groups, awareness of the absolute community of humanity as a preeminent cultural value (dignity and rights of the human person), and so on.

Historical culture forms a social practice and derives from it: every form of historical thought is embedded in historical culture and memory, in which context historical narratives are produced and must be interpreted. This process has historical identity as its goal, since every form of historical thought and narrative includes historical educational offerings for the present and future, such as identity projects. The competences of historical thinking enable the agent to orient himself in the present and the future, through the reflexive appropriation of the past and its cultural context. The historical consciousness allows the subject to express or recognize in successive logical stages: diffuse prior narrative, reflected historical narrative, critical historiographical narrative. The science of history collects and methodically elaborates in its practices the historical consciousness. Historical thought - and its cognitive contents obtained through experience and research - in its commonality to all and in its scientific specificity, therefore operates on two interdependent but logically distinct levels: that of the historical consciousness of each and every one, and that of critical historical consciousness, achieved and consolidated in historiography.

Rüsen points out five procedures that are proper to the scientific version of historical consciousness: (1) the development and refinement of historical culture through

research methods and discursive strategies of historiography; (2) the transposition of the past from its eventual presence in memory to distant events in time: the past is objectified, as it is in the informative content of the sources and how it can be methodically grasped from and within them; (3) this objectified form of the past is the content of methodized knowledge process; (4) cognitive collections become available for guidance and professionalization of the historical production of knowledge and its transmission (teaching and learning); (5) This conformation of historical knowledge generates an ever renewed content of meaning – which departs from previous content and evolves into reflexive interpretation.

Historical consciousness is therefore a basic category of history didactics, encompassing its five basic operations of historical constitution of meaning: asking, experiencing or perceiving, interpreting, guiding, motivating. In the large and specialized social space, historical learning is a process of historical consciousness on its two levels. Every reflexive agent subject goes through informal and formal learning processes in which the historical constitution of meaning takes place. Being aware of historical consciousness as an interconnection between individuals and societies, as a link between yesterday, today and tomorrow, and as a connection between experiences and expectations is an indispensable factor of human existence, to be taken into account in all teaching and learning processes (in the choice of content as in tactics of information, appropriation and use of contents and narratives).

The temporal perspective of human action is an essential feature of historical thinking. Thinking historically characterizes everyone, in everyday life as well as in history.

Why does a factor-based network help to explain the understanding of two basic characteristics of human existence - its historical awareness and its identity in the flow of time? In the consolidation of both characteristics, two factors are decisive: historical thinking in general, as a universal way of knowing oneself and defining oneself, and the technically produced professional historiography that functions as reference and basis of a steady support of self-thinking and self-narrating.

Historical knowledge includes the empirical knowledge of facts and events regarding human action, as well as the reflexive perspective of such knowledge over time. The historical specificity of knowledge consists in this perspective of time. Knowledge is understood here as a process of cognitive appropriation of experience, the conscious accumulation of which over time is called 'historical knowledge'. The time-conscious reflection transforms the accumulated experience into historical knowledge. This reflection is carried out in a coherent network of factors.

The factors

Historical knowledge is thus obtained in a network of relationships that is produced by individual human activities in time and space within societies. French historian Paul Veyne calls this network “intrigue” and Brazilian philosopher Ivan Domingues “trama” as the intrigue of a novel. The term network is preferred here, which empirical “intrigue” is the interweaving of the factors that determine the historical consciousness of every actor.

The formation of historical consciousness and the development of the corresponding historical knowledge follow a continuous moto through a double process. On the one hand, every human being is the result of the history that has occurred empirically through human activity in the past. On the other hand, history is produced in the concrete present of people, in the expectation of a future that is intended, possible and feasible through specific action. Like any human rational cognition, historical cognition also depends on a “bundle of factors”, at the crossroads of which the subjectively conscious and individually active person stands.

There are therefore at least three factor-based reference instances that, when linked together, generate historical knowledge. The very first instance is the actor himself or herself. The second is the time during which the action is carried out. The third are the spaces in which the action takes place: the physical space and the social space.

These entities share certain variables: social (for example, kinship, solidarity of the community, a group or class), political (among other things, awareness of the individual or collective role in the institutions, citizenship, representation), economic (labor organization, production relationships, sources of income and the like) and cultural (such as faiths, beliefs, assumptions, opinions, interests). These variables are determined by the concrete historicity of the actions in time and space. Since these factors apply to both the “common person” and the “expert” (historian), it is necessary to characterize the historical subject as an actor.

The historical agent

With regard to the reflected time of subjective experience, in which the immediate experience of time (the concrete story) is turned into thought history, it is necessary to look at the actor from two perspectives. On the one hand, the individual is the result of a certain factor-based network of predetermined historical circumstances, in the context of which the subject asserts itself in the world, educates himself, organizes himself, outlines horizons and sets goals, i.e.: acts. In this regard, the individual is a “product of history” insofar as he is

determined by the actions in time and space accumulated in the empirical heritage of history. Each actor thus builds up as an individual in that he has to come to terms with the historical heritage that he has encountered empirically in order to assert himself autonomously in relation to this heritage and acting.

On the other hand, any person acts as a historically conscious acting subject in time and space in such a way that the historically reflected factuality of the world is humanized in historical consciousness. The acting person rationally appropriates the world and transforms it into a human world through his historically conscious action.

The actions brought about in this way thus become historically lived experiences. The historicizing reflection operated by the subject inserts such experiences into the cumulative whole of history, the overall heritage of which is articulated in tradition, memory and narrative. In the first type of action, one can speak of a (dynamic) historical process: in it, one experiences and internalizes it in the consciousness. In the second type, one speaks of the (static) product of history: the acting subject is located in the historical dimension in which it is, and in which it is active.

How is this legacy constituted, how does the actor become aware of it? The historical process of becoming aware of the cultural environment in which the individual emerges can be compared to a system of concentric circles, at the center of which is the particular subjectivity of the individual. This center is located in a person who is educated under common physical and mental characteristics, thinks and acts rationally. The first concentric circle corresponds to the first phase of contact between the subject and the historical heritage of culture. This group usually includes family relationships, language, learning rules of conduct, adopting basic values that are prevalent in social space. The factors bundled in this first circle are usually analyzed by the science of child developmental psychology. They are not directly reflected on by historical science, but it is advantageous for them to perceive the findings of such a discipline. At present, historical research – especially in oral history points to established intellectual traditions, cultural constants and social habits, in the educational processes of the actors – from the first moments of their socialization. This is a phase of information, informal education, the individual and social constitution of the (self) conscious actor.

The second circle corresponds to the formalization of teaching and educational factors in the school system with its social, cultural and institutional peculiarities, which are intentionally programmed, planned and controlled. Plans, programs or guidelines institutionalized expressions of the past historical experiences of each individual, as they have entered and are established in the organizational structures of his society.

These circles are permeable in the historical reflection on the experience of each individual: the allegory of the concentric circles used here is merely an analytical aid. The second circle has a broad temporal amplitude that extends into adulthood and is the subject of the study of sociology and anthropology. In this context, the training gained in the first circle is the main reference for the individual, who guides his interactive experience in the second circle. Here, too, psychological research is particularly important as an aid. However, for the purposes of this reflection, it must be noted that the subject is always confronted with the fact that it has to come to terms with the social heritage and with the experience of others inside and outside the respective circle (including one's own “family”).

A third circle covers the social space of individual assertion in the broader universe of social relationships, beyond the original family circle and the circle of formal schooling. In this circle, you can find (among others) the common values that are adopted and upheld individually, as well as the diverse experiences internalized in the course of the professional career. Further possible circles can be analytically distinguished and described. The three circles highlighted here bring together the most important factors that make up the central sources of that historical legacy, which each individual has to come to terms with. It is in the context of this legacy that the individual consolidates, renews, changes, maintains his particular identity through historical culture and tries to master the social circumstances at the core of which he is. In this sense, it can be said that no rational man is born in a world without history. His identity as a subject must (and should) develop from socio-cultural heritage to an autonomous constitution. This subjective identity thus proceeds through a process of consciously appropriating its (also) historical components to 'tame' them through critical reason.

Building the identity of a historical actor

One can say that the subject forms its identity through four different strategies. These strategies are not mutually exclusive, they are rather intertwined. They are: identity through assimilation or appropriation, identity through contrast, identity through rejection and identity through difference.

Identity through assimilation or appropriation, sometimes called acculturation (through the tradition of historical and cultural legacies), corresponds to the subject (or community) subjugation process, among others. One could say that the larger (older, predetermined) community assimilates the initially “foreign”, newly arrived 'unity' and that each individual subject internalizes the culture (values, history, language) of this group. This

is the most common way of historically consolidating the individual identity, as far as it can be learnt from evolutionary psychology and cultural history.

A similar process takes place in relation to historical culture. It is always in a given historical culture that each individual subject projects his temporal roots in the past. Such a “retro projection” helps the individual to build a kind of identity that tries to preserve those “original” elements with which everyone intends to secure their space, time and living environment, in which each one may be identified and recognized as an individual or a specific group. Of course, this process can include traumatic and painful elements. However, assimilation is likely to cause less difficulty than is the case in other forms of identity construction that are characterized by confrontation, conflict, and extremely moral or physical annihilation.

In a process of differentiation, identity through contrast becomes different through systematic reinforcement of those elements that are uncommon for the subjects and their respective surrounding cultures. As in the mirror effect, the traces of a particular culture are highlighted which specifically contrast each other (or the dominant culture within a multicultural society). The preservation and maintenance of folk traditions by immigrant communities – even without deliberate opposition to, or even resistance to, predominant cultures are a good example of this type of identity marking. The appropriation of the individual’s own, original culture can happen either through identification or by contrast (modification, rejection). Festivals like the Chinese New Year in the USA or the Afro-Brazilian cult Yemanjá, celebrated by numerically comparatively smaller communities, but which do not necessarily conflict with the cultural majority of society, give examples of what is meant by identity through contrast.

Identity through rejection represents a strong escalation of conflict processes. Not only an individual, but also social groups, immigrants or transplanted communities tend to claim their identity by using that social or cultural fight identity in which they may be immersed. As in other forms of identity formation, historical consciousness projects its roots deep into the past to justify the conflicting rejection of the 'straitjacket' of the leading culture. Such a leading culture, in the perception or assessment of many, would be a culture imposed *de facto* or *de iure*. The first moments of black peoples' historical and political awareness in the United States in the 1960s or in Brazil (as in other countries) in the years 1970 to 1990 illustrate this combative version of identity formation. Similar processes – but without the specific (old fashioned) component of other skin colors - can be seen in terrorist movements after the social-political revolts of May 1968, especially in Germany and Italy. The decolonization processes, especially in the second half of the 20th century – with more or

less armed violence - were characterized by a painful search for identity through rejection. This often happened with good reason, as the post-colonial studies show. The nationalisms of the early 20th century (think, for example, of the “ethnic minorities” in the Austro-Hungarian Empire) as well as those re-emerged nationalisms at the end of the 20th century (Ireland, Corsica, the Basque Country, Catalunya, Serbia, Kurdistan, Armenia, Palestine, Israel, Afghanistan, Iraq, etc.) defended, with varying degrees of radicalism, identity through rejection as a form of self-assertion, in open conflict with the respective historical, predominant, leading culture – and not necessarily limited to the geopolitical boundaries of a state.

Identity by difference is a common component of other forms of identity construction. In the course of historical consciousness, the assertion of individuals and groups occurs in the chronological order and in the simultaneity of historical thought and culture, in the course of which people assert themselves by forming the difference. The concrete, historical formation of differences necessarily takes place in the consideration of the other and can take place as identity formation via the forms of assimilation, contrast or even rejection. However, the way in which differences are deliberately balanced is crucial in the decision-making process. Historiography often – if not predominantly – deals with the differentiated identities and with the influence of such identities in the decision-making process of the subjects involved. Therefore, there are important fields in which the differences are of outstanding importance, such as in the contexts of race, language, politics, religion or economy. About such contexts, the narrative of the agents – reconstructed and analyzed by historical research – provide a multitude of details, whose relative importance for the individual or collective self-assertion depends on the scale of values and their concrete historical realization in time and space.

The network of the individual and group identity of an actor thus consists of at least four weft threads: (a) the story of origins (the legacy into which one is born), (b) the identity built up, (c) the action specifically carried out in time and space, (d) the narrative expression of the interpretive reflection of culture, which is thereby historicized. This composition is effective for every subject, including those who become historians during their training and professionalization.

4. The factor network and the historicization of thinking and acting

The subject, framed by the perspective of their own historicity and their culture, is certainly able to transcend such historicity without denial or to accept it without becoming its hostage. In particular, the historian who moves at the methodological level has the analytical means to articulate his own historicity and that of the studied subjects, as well as his reflection on such histories and their mutual dependency, without amalgamating them indefinitely.

Thus, the historian develops a sense of the action in time and space (history) because of an interaction between the conscious intentionality of the actor and the past and present circumstances of his activity, which are carried out with the prospect of expected future effects. Such effects can continue, change, or reject the precedent actions.

4.1 Historical knowledge

The term “historical knowledge” used here (as the epitome of reflected experience) has at least two possible meanings. The first states that every knowledge is necessarily obtained at a certain time, in a given space and under certain circumstances. A second meaning refers to the type of knowledge acquired through the methodological procedures in history as science. In both cases, the acquisition of knowledge would have to meet a number of theoretical requirements, which should meet a constant expectation of accuracy and certainty, which has a rational function in the long Western tradition, that is, leading to the truth. The basis of this certainty lies in the assumption that the actor’s rational cognitive ability is capable of truth and that his claim to objectivity comes from an adequate ability to observe, which enables him to empirically acquire reality through experience. At this point it should be noted that the question of the knowledge in general (as in common sense) is subject to analytical criteria that can theoretically only be verified for intersubjectively verifiable knowledge. Such criteria certainly apply scientifically also to history.

Concerning the narrative form of historical discourse, it must be pointed out that one often encounters a blurred overlay of historical narrative in everyday life and historiographic narrative in historiography. Although both narrative forms are used in the concrete life world – and influence one another – one has to bear in mind that the control criteria that are applied to the historiographical form are not the same as the informal character of the general narrative (for example, if one speaks of his life story without producing a “technical” [auto]biography).

A diffusion factor in the demand for truth and certainty as a criterion for the admissibility of a historical narrative in today's society is the systematic distribution of the

school system (as outlined above in relation to the “second concentric circle”). In school education (which in its time included community catechesis) one works with the acquisition of knowledge security according to the scientific model. The doxa is thus subject to the requirements of the episteme, and the rhetorical argument in the narrative must adapt to the form of the logical-discursive demonstration. Sometimes the expectations regarding the historical narrative mix, insofar as the acting people want to convince themselves (as a subject) and their peers (community – whether general or professional) at the same time. So sometimes the usual mechanisms of observation (internalized experience) and argumentative treatment (reflexive knowledge) are used (especially in everyday language) without having explained which methodological procedures correspond to the required intersubjective control of cognitive narrative quality .

The constant effort to overcome the uncertainty factors related to the results of experience-based knowledge suggests that the basic nature of knowledge in general, including science, involves dependency on a factor network of circumstances, conditions, and hypotheses. This leads to the recognition of a double methodological imperative. On the one hand, a careful reconstruction of the necessary and sufficient number of those factors is necessary to determine whether the subject of the completed narrative (the “fact”, the “event”, the “trend”, the “process”, the “politics”, the “regime” etc.) is or was the case in a given time, in a given space, in a given society, in a given culture. On the other hand, it is also necessary that the historian explore the factor network of his own circumstances, from the perspective of which he is doing his historiographical work. Such methodological imperatives do not allow for a random or arbitrary character. The intersubjective control of cognitive quality – that is, the plausible and credible admissibility of the historiographical narrative both in the process of building it up (e.g. document research) and in its presentation (narrated argument) – is part of the methodological “contract” of historiographical quality in the treatment of past times and in its presentation in the present.

4.2 Concept of history

Human beings are the measure of all things: this Protagoras’ sentence, adopted by Husserl, is probably a motto for the human and social sciences. Knowledge is certainly related to the subject who acquires it or builds it up. However, this fact does not imply a blank check for the knowing subject at the methodological level of science. History is not invented, although the historical narrative must understand (cover and explain) a few gaps in experience by discursive means as historical connections. Several theories of object construction and the participation of the psychological and historical structure of the subject

in the acquisition and development of knowledge have become common, without this meaning that historical knowledge can be equated with arbitrary decisions or individual preferences or prejudices. The historical explanation of the world, whether sectoral or global, corresponds to a modeled and depicted world, but not to an invented one. Historiography produces a kind of “World 3” in Freges and Popper’s sense, in which the degree of agreement with what is observed (experienced) and the discursive consistency withstand intersubjective control and make practical goals of action credible. The theory of successive representations of history, which correspond to the respective stage of the development of the acquired knowledge – with which the claim to an absolute, demonstrably verified validity is apparently given up – gains in effectiveness, insofar as the behavior of the acting subjects is a permanent (i.e.: plausible) reconstruction of the projected image of the real world, as Max Planck noted in 1929.

Durkheim rightly pointed out that “true and correct human thinking is not originally there; it is an ideal limit that we are getting closer and closer to, but probably never reach.” Durkheim referred to the faculty of knowledge (gaining information) as well as to knowledge as a collection of information. In both cases, Durkheim recognizes the double function of the historical consciousness of an acting person: (a) for one, it requires that the actor's psychosocial insertion be kept in mind; (b) on the other hand it becomes indispensable through historical consciousness always to remain aware of the cultural heritage, some of which has been gradually gained, as an autonomously desired freedom of action depends. Such a relational dependence of historical consciousness and the acting subject has been generally recognized since the middle of the 19th century – albeit with possible relativistic exaggerations.

Such exaggerations – as seen in Nietzsche, Benjamin or the so-called postmodernists – often correspond to a fuzzy understanding of history, sometimes also because of the language imprecision in the use of the word “history”. Therefore, it makes sense to clarify the term “history” in its usual triple meaning. The first meaning includes “what the case was or what was done by someone” (according to the traditional Latin expression *res gestae*). Such occurrences or events obviously happen through humanly rational, effective (individual or collective) actions, which are carried out under certain, methodologically understandable conditions, circumstances, intentions, goals, etc. This is inevitably part of the human “past”, even if its presence in the mind and its current awareness are not necessarily clear. This is what one calls history in general, how it is presented, historically internalized and effectively adopted and told.

The second meaning of history refers to the “investigation of what happened” (*historia rerum gestarum*) – this activity is carried out methodologically, has to endure the qualitative control achieved by professional colleagues and has to check information sources very carefully, and establish if they are reliably explained under severe criticism. This is history as a science, in which history (in general) is usually present as a starting point, but a qualitative step in methodological explanatory capability goes far beyond it.

The third meaning of the concept of history refers to the so-called “end product”. This result of the methodologically reflective consciousness of history, as laid down in historiography, includes two things: the methodological rules of research and the criticism of their content, as well as the stages along which the researcher realizes his actions. The history books mentioned in everyday life as well as in their (?) scientific form deal with the “general history” in which people act. They bring this general history into closer control of the methodical examination of sources, traceability of the goal, actions and results of the researched actors, excellence of their own research practices, controllability of the applicable quality standard by the professional experts, persuasiveness of the explanatory discourse of the historical narrative and the like. Because of such a process, “technical history” is recorded in the historiography.

“History” therefore describes both what has happened in the past and the current process of reconstruction, which tries to describe, analyze, understand, explain and tell what happened – to the best of our knowledge and belief – as it has actually been.

Historically, it is important to know how and how far the concentric circles of the living world of people are reflected in their consciousness, and how historical research reflects this development as well as possible. Indeed, the theory of history does not directly examine the human past, but tries to understand and explain how past actions have formed, built and oriented people of yesterday and today (including historians) psychosocially – and how this is done as historically inscribed in the consciousness of each individual and in the (technical) historical narrative. This can be called a “soft realism”, in which the subjects' psychosocial factors, such as the theoretical and methodological demands of historiography, are linked in a practical and productive manner.

Accepting the assumption that the substantive equality of every human being (logically) precedes any concrete human being, one must also admit the evidence that no rational human agent is born in a world without history. The original condition of the human being is to exist in a world historically filled with the actions of the past (and their empirical effects), which have led (and still lead) to clearly identifiable individuals, societies and cultures, with distinctive elements. The ideal man, as supposed by Rousseau, for example,

is a metaphysical abstraction that serves as an ideal type, an ontological horizon of expectation or an ethical utopia. In this sense, the Social Contract (1762) advocates the precedence of the collective over the individual, through voluntary adherence: renouncing the natural rights of individuals in favor of the State, whose protection will reconcile equality and freedom; the all-powerful people [abstract entity with imprecise contours], through the legislator, the general welfare against interest groups; democratic purity is maintained in and through legislative assemblies; religion is maintained, but henceforth immanent, as a state or civil religion.

Rousseau distinguished two types of inequality: natural (or physical) and moral. Natural inequality stems from differences in age, health, or other physical characteristics; it cannot be questioned. Rousseau aims to establish a human convention that overcomes moral inequality. Rousseau will therefore explore where this convention comes from. To achieve this, Rousseau uses a thought experiment, “the state of nature”, which therefore does not constitute a historical truth. Rousseau paints a very severe portrait of modernity. His historical pessimism (history means decadence) is combined with anthropological optimism (man is naturally good). Inequality comes from property, but the growth of inequality is due to the development of the human mind.

The search for a possible comparison between concrete cultures of any contemporary world therefore needs to resort to two complementary forms of research: (a) to identify whether there are common elements of the cultures to be compared, and what they are, which thus constitute a kind of minimum common denominator; (b) to identify if there are, unusual elements between the compared cultures, and what they are, and to define a typology of the items that would allow to establish similarities and dissimilarities between them, if they get closer or they move away.

The vehicle that carries the passive cultural legacy and contemporary exchanges is the language. Communication works for the individual, who expresses himself by narrating himself, for society, within which individuals are constituted and defined, for culture, in whose scope the thinking and acting people inscribe and accumulate their actions in time. Intracultural communication thus plays a strategic role in the constitution of historical awareness *ad intra* for the individual, and in the sharing of each culture .

Even if all these cognitive, linguistic and narrative processes are only known in part or even if we are not fully aware of them, it is known that they existed, exist and will exist. It is also known that contemporary historical culture is concretely immersed in what is conventionally called “modernity”, a project of mental, social, political, economic and

cultural organization that has triumphed, primarily in western space, since the mid-17th century.

The historical consciousness must identify and situate itself in such movement of modern culture legacy that forms and performs each “contemporary” way of being, regardless of being expressly formulated by each individual.

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