CHAPTER 3

Historical Consciousness and Historical Thinking

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The terms *historical consciousness* and *historical thinking* are most commonly used without any reference to each other. The casual observer might be excused for assuming that they were roughly synonymous. Yet, seen through the lens of the educational project, they point to two distinct pedagogical traditions. "Historical consciousness" springs mainly from German philosophical writing, which was elaborated in the sphere of pedagogy by Jörn Rüsen, Bodo von Borries and their colleagues. Its impact, however, has spread beyond Germany, first to continental Europe and to a lesser extent, globally. "Historical thinking," on the other hand, belongs to a more pragmatic and empirical educational agenda, evolving from the British Schools History Project and, over the past quarter century through Anglo-American dialogues, in discussion with a larger Anglophone community in Australia, Canada, New Zealand among others. Of course, history education in recent decades has benefitted from contributions from other national and linguistic traditions. This chapter highlights the German and Anglo-American in the service of comparing historical consciousness and historical thinking as key concepts in history education, but then looks at synergies and overlaps, including those developed in other national contexts.

In the midst of increasing international exchange, in volumes such as this and the symposium out of which it grew, the current moment provides an opportunity to examine broad differences between the two terms, and their implications for history education. To what degree do they refer to the same processes? What, if anything, is gained in conceptual clarity by defining and

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maintaining a distinction between them? And, what theoretical and practical benefits might be realized by juxtaposing and clarifying their intersections?

Historical Consciousness

Hans-Georg Gadamer is a controversial figure, whose work is subject to widely varying interpretations. Yet he provides a useful starting point for definitions of historical consciousness: "very likely the most important revolution among those we have undergone since the beginning of the modern epoch…a burden, the like of which has never been imposed on any previous generation" (Gadamer, 1987: 89). And the burden, as he defines it, is "…the privilege of modern man to have a full awareness of historicity of everything present and the relativity of all opinions." Thus historically situated in the modern era, historical consciousness is a consequence of the pace and profundity of change flowing from the eighteenth-century European political revolutions combined with industrial and technological development. These events precipitated conscious breaks with the past and concomitant breaks with the future: the past had been radically different from the present, and the future would therefore be different from that which was currently known. In these circumstances, the task of preparing the next generation for the world they would inhabit was also radically different from a culture in which tradition is largely unchanged from one generation to the next, where the knowledge and skills of the previous generation would be sufficient to guide and train the next. Reinhart Koselleck retraces the same territory in his definition of *Neuezeit* or modernity: "What was new was that the expectations that reached out for the future became detached from all that previous experience had to offer" (Koselleck, 1985: 266–267). Koselleck (among many others) notes the centrality of "progress" and "acceleration" within the same development of modernity.

This definition of historical consciousness, as arising from the radical discontinuity between past, present and future in a modern era of accelerating change, needs to be complicated in at least two ways. First, also central to Gadamer, is the role of tradition in the understanding of historicity. That is, even in the conditions of modernity—where all that is solid melts into air, where the pace of change undermines the foundations of deeply held belief, where the mores, institutions and technologies that shaped grandparents' lives become strange relics in the eyes of the grandchildren—even here, the world that we inhabit today is a product of what came before (Grever, 2012: 81–84). More importantly, our *experiences and understandings* of this world are as conditioned and shaped by our inheritances from the past as ever: we can never think ourselves outside of our historical situation. Thus, tradition and historicity, or deep continuity and profound change, are indissolubly joined.

Second is the condition of postmodernity. The hypothesis of postmodernism is that the process of acceleration sent culture over a cliff at some point in the recent past, after which the modern triumvirate of nation, progress and history no longer provided a credible framework for understanding human life.

That point may be defined by political catastrophe or upheaval (the Holocaust, 1968, or 1989); by the cultural impact of year-over-year revolutions in digital technologies; by successful challenges to old orders of race, gender and sexuality; or by global demographic shifts associated with decolonization and economic inequality (see also Harvey, 1989). In this context, modern historical consciousness, predicated upon the distance and difference between present and past, threatens to collapse; modern regimes of national power and white, male hegemony are subject to ongoing challenge and critique; and in the reign of the present, historical crimes live on in the psyches of survivors and their descendants as "the presence of the past." Needless to say, this is a heterogeneous grouping of phenomena, and thus I leave it, for the moment, under a hypothetical category of postmodernity. We will return to it below.

"Historical consciousness," in all its complexity, poses a challenge in moving from the theoretical to an educational program. Theoretically, it appears to describe more of a historico-cultural situation than a framework that would offer guidance for developing young people's understanding. In the European context, Jörn Rüsen (2004) addressed this problem through a hierarchy of four types of historical consciousness. His scheme provides a way of understanding how young people (and cultures as a whole) use narratives of the past—and how they might progress in those uses—within the conditions of modernity, in order to make decisions in the present about the future.

What is important to note here, particularly because of its contrast with Anglo-American educational thought explored immediately below, is the use of history as an *orientation in time*. The difficulties of going beyond Rüsen's first steps, in translating this theory into a framework that is useful either for empirical studies of students' competencies or for the purposes of teaching, are widely recognized (e.g., Karlsson, 2011). Nevertheless, according to Kölbl and Konrad (2015: 23), the term "historical consciousness" currently appears in most of the 16 German state history curricula.

Historical Thinking

British thinking regarding the use of history, and therefore its shape in history education has quite different foci. Furthermore, British work has had a more visible impact on the vibrant American field of history education in the past two and a half decades. The Schools Council History Project (more recently, the Schools History Project) made the seminal contribution of "second-order concepts" in history (Shemilt, 1980). These procedural (or structural or disciplinary) concepts were described as "not what history is 'about'," but as shaping "the way we go about doing history" (Lee & Ashby, 2000: 199). Denis Shemilt, Peter Lee, Rosalyn Ashby and others included concepts such as accounts, significance, change and evidence. This conceptual breakthrough provided the basis to define students' progress in history education. Rather than simply measuring the memorization of more factual knowledge as progression in historical competency (what Peter Lee graphically labels a "sedi-

mentation" model of history learning), improvement was conceptualized in terms of increasingly powerful ways of handling and applying second-order concepts in dealing with historical topics and problems. This conceptualization gave rise to a robust research program aimed at identifying on the basis of empirical investigation, the levels of students' development and various paths to greater sophistication.

Lee and Ashby (2000: 216) summarized, "As students develop more powerful ideas about how we can make claims about the past and about the ways different kinds of claims may be substantiated or overturned, they acquire the best intellectual toolkit we have for thinking about the human world in time." In this one sentence, we can see the British emphasis on the epistemological problems of the discipline of history, and their distance from their Continental colleagues. These contrasts included not only the emphasis on historical epistemology but also the degree to which the research had an impact on school curricula (the Schools History Project had a huge impact on the British curriculum) and the relative ease with which the British conceptual framework could be empirically investigated in research.

However, for the purposes of this chapter, the most important contrast is in their respective concerns with the *uses* of the history, specifically the relationship between the disciplinary practices of historians and the lives of the rest of society around them. Jörn Rüsen's disciplinary matrix is useful in this regard (Megill, 1994). The matrix consists of a cycle, with "the historical discipline" in the upper half and "life practice" below. Historians' theories, methods and representations—form the upper semi-circle. It is connected to the lower semi-circle by feeding into the "existential orientation," and by being fed by "interests" that are part of "life practice." Rüsen was thus centrally concerned with how historical questions arise from everyday life, and, in turn, with how historical research could feed back into the larger culture. These concerns were largely outside the purview of the British history education discussion. The British would go no further than asserting that learning the operations of the discipline of history as an open and critical practice would yield educational benefits, by definition, for participation in a liberal, democratic polity (see also Lee's 2004 critique of Rusen's disciplinary matrix).

American history education research, which began to reach a critical mass in the late 1990s, followed the British precursors in many respects, but developed some themes that set it apart. The work of Sam Wineburg was central in these developments. His "On the reading of historical texts" (1991) helped to define the distinctive disciplinary character of reading in history for history education scholars. This early work was prescient in setting a "historical literacy" agenda that was perfectly attuned to the focus on improving students reading and writing that developed in national educational initiatives over the next two decades. A focus on the quartet of sourcing (a Wineburg neologism that has now become commonplace), contextualization, corroboration and close reading formed the basis of school initiatives with massive uptake. His students pushed the work further: Reisman (2012) in reading, and Monte-Sano (2011)

in writing. In much of this work, historical thinking was operationalized as historical literacy.

The other distinctive American contribution was a sociocultural lens, which led to the investigation of the impact of ethnicity, culture and gender on historical understanding. Barton and Levstik (e.g., 2004), Epstein (2008) and VanSledright (2002) were central in these developments. While this research examined the relationships of learning history to the social context in which it took place, it was informed by social psychology rather than by Continental philosophy. In its insistence on social amelioration, it had perhaps closer ties to American social studies than to either the British research or German history didactics.

The fast-growing body of empirically based, English-language research in history education has been the subject of decennial reviews in *Handbooks of Educational Psychology*, from Wineburg's (1996) initial contribution, through VanSledright and Limon (2006) to "Studying Historical Understanding" (Monte-Sano and Reisman, 2016). The latter emphasizes that the work under review was rigorous empirical research that focused on student learning. The authors purposefully exclude theoretical or philosophical discussion of history education. (p. 282).

The pragmatic Anglo-American history education community has largely left philosophical explorations to the pages of *History and Theory*, and thrown itself into curriculum reform, assessment development and empirical studies of students' ideas and learning. While these efforts have borne fruit in explicit definitions of historical thinking as goals in new national curriculum in Australia, revised provincial curricula across Canada, the Common Core Standards in the United States and the much-downloaded Stanford "Reading Like a Historian" lessons, they have largely sidestepped any direct confrontation with the philosophical challenges of plural historical cultures.

Historical Consciousness and Historical Thinking: How the Traditions Intersect

In a number of recent projects, we can see the intersection of the two traditions as defined to this point. In a stunning University of Laval doctoral dissertation, Catherine Duquette (2011, 2015) not only offered extended definitions contrasting "historical thinking" with "historical consciousness," ("the understanding of the present, thanks to the interpretation of the past which allows us to consider the future") but also presented the results of an empirical study exploring the relationship between students' competencies in each area. The research is particularly important because of its location, Quebec, Canada, where curricula and assessments target both.

Historical thinking, in the Quebec curriculum as in Duquette's study, is a "series of specific cognitive operations" (2015: 52) in two categories. The first (labeled somewhat confusingly, in English) "historical perspective," comprises what the British would call second-order concepts (e.g., historical sig-

nificance). The second is "historical method," including such items as framing questions, proposing hypotheses and analyzing sources. She used Rüsen's definition of historical consciousness but rejected his four types, after an attempt to work with them empirically. The key progression, in her empirically based categorization of historical consciousness, is the move from uncritical to critical approaches.

Duquette tested the relationship between historical consciousness and historical thinking by posing contemporary problems—international economic disparity, immigration and voluntary enlistment in armed services—and examining the ways in which students invoked history (or didn't) in explaining them, both before and after explicit lessons in historical thinking. Her study not only showed a correlation between students' mastery of historical thinking and level of historical consciousness but also showed development in historical consciousness after explicit lessons in historical thinking. Her assessment instruments offer considerable promise in advancing the field.

Comparable directions are being explored in Sweden, where the national history curriculum is explicitly defined as "the development of the student's historical consciousness" (Eliasson et al., 2015: 171; see also Bjerg et al., 2011). In this case, historical consciousness includes using a historical frame of reference, critically examining sources, reflecting on the uses of history and "using historical concepts" (p. 172). Here, historical thinking does not stand as something that can be contrasted with historical consciousness: rather, the former is an integral part of the latter. Look at the third competency in the Swedish array, it

> makes students understand the function of historical narratives for individual orientation in life and shows them how different actors in society use history as a means to influence people's perception of the past, their orientation in the present and, subsequently the future. (p. 172)

Like Rüsen's, this conception makes "narrative" central to historical competence and emphasizes the use of history, but it also underscores diversity within current society and potential change in the uses of the past over time.

Similar directions are being developed in Germany by Andreas Körber and his colleagues (2011, 2015). Having existed for decades in the realm of the theoretical, German history educators have been making a concerted effort to operationalize historical consciousness in a way that it can be demonstrated in the form of students' competencies. Körber (2011: 147) defines the aim of school history as enabling students "to take part in the historical and memorial culture of their (pluralist) societies." This translates, specifically, into "all those often neglected competencies needed for actually *using* the historical information … for personal or collective orientation in the present and the future" (Körber, 2011: 148). The Historical Thinking Competencies in History ("HiTCH") Project uses four dimensions of historical competence. The first three are derived directly from Rüsen's disciplinary matrix, involv-

ing the generation of historical questions from life situations, working with historical method to answer them, and development of representations which are then useful for life orientation—a cycle integrating historical and life practices. A fourth dimension, "Sachkompetenz," is a greatly expanded version of the Swedes' fourth aspect of historical consciousness, comprising the broadest range of first and second order historical thinking concepts.

While this model grew out of the theoretical work in historical consciousness, the need to develop constructs useful for curriculum and assessment led to the formulation of competencies and, perhaps paradoxically, to calling the Project and its products, exercises in "historical thinking." In any case, like the Swedes, the Germans are actively building bridges between historical thinking and historical consciousness.

Nowhere has the diverse nature of contemporary societies in relation to historical consciousness been taken more seriously than in the work of Dutch history education researchers. As in other jurisdictions, there was no easy line of development toward the current initiatives. In the 1980s, history educators articulated and promoted methods of historical analysis and critical investigation. In the new millennium, however, the promotion of overviews of national history resurfaced using history to promote social cohesion (Van Boxtel & Grever, 2011). In 2001, an influential commission provided the history curriculum with a system of ten eras intended to provide a common frame of reference for history education in the Netherlands, covering mainly Dutch and European history (Van Boxtel & Grever, 2011: 99–101). Nevertheless, historical thinking survived as an important component of the curriculum.

Recently "heritage education" has been used in the Netherlands to describe the use of museums, historical sites and heritage objects for educational purposes, largely, but not exclusively, through the school subject of history. While this was promoted by the Dutch government starting in the 1990s, a group of educational researchers at the Centre for Historical Culture at Erasmus University took an interest in the phenomenon, building a theoretical and empirical research basis for a practice that was already under way in the schools (Grever et al., 2012). The title of their research program, "Heritage education, plurality of narratives and shared historical knowledge," targets the role of historical knowledge in settings with diverse cultural memories.

The upper-level Dutch history curriculum has recently been revised, along with the corresponding examinations, to include "the changing significance of the past for different groups of people in the past and in current societies," and "the recognition of various present motives, values, and expectations when people make moral judgments about the past" (Van Boxtel et al., 2015: 41). The school curriculum and examinations accordingly prescribe an analysis of the functions of myth and history for various contemporary groups. Like the German and Swedish examples, the Dutch are thus clearly aligned with the concerns of Rüsen's disciplinary matrix, examining the relationships, back and forth, between disciplinary historical practices and the larger historical culture(s) with which they potentially interact.

The Dutch researchers recognize the term "heritage" as being more associated with "building up historical identities…" and less with "questioning and investigating." They seek to address that imbalance without erasing historical identities: "How can heritage education contribute to some kind of *commonality* between all learners while at the same time acknowledge *multiperspectivity*?" (Van Boxtel et al., 2011: 10). This has been achieved through a "dynamic heritage approach" which rejected, "essentialist meaning" and "static identity" (p. 12). They sought out classrooms with diverse student populations, in order to set up discussions that would "create an awareness of living in a pluralist yet common world" (p. 12).

Historical Thinking and Historical Consciousness in Canada's Historical Thinking Project

A final place to look for the meeting point between historical thinking and historical consciousness arises from the Historical Thinking Project, of which the author of this chapter was director (www.historicalthinking.ca). The conceptual framework of this Canadian Project comprises six second-order concepts, linking it clearly to the British model (Seixas & Morton, 2013). But there are also clear connections between Project's framework and the approach to history education organized around historical consciousness. Here I will explore four of these.

The first comes from the concept of historical significance. The problem of historical significance arises from the question, "what is worth knowing about the past?" and the related question, "how does it become worth knowing?" Like the other concepts in the framework, "historical significance" provides a label for a problem that is unresolvable in any ultimate way, but which entails competent negotiation between equally untenable extremes. The first thing that will strike the competent historian is that what is historically significant is so only in relation to the questions and problems raised by various groups in the present, in contemporary life, which is, itself, changing over time. To ignore this is to sink into antiquarianism. In contending with the problem of historical significance, we are thus thrust into Gadamer's "full awareness of historicity of everything present and the relativity of all opinions" (1987: 89), noted above.

The second concept, primary source evidence, is equally embedded in the relationships between our present and a foreign past. We choose historical sources in order to answer historical questions that arise from contemporary concerns: why are some nations poorer than others, what is the origin of global warming, how have race relations changed and remained the same, and how was homosexuality viewed in the nineteenth century? These are not questions that would have occurred to the historical peoples who will be investigated in order to arrive at satisfactory answers for today. Moreover, we have to interpret the traces that they left behind in relation to the historical contexts in which they lived, throwing ourselves imaginatively into their worlds in order to con-

struct valid interpretations. A web of relationships between past and present is thus invoked by choosing and analyzing primary sources, bridging, at the same time, the historical discipline and everyday life, as articulated in Rüsen's disciplinary matrix.

Narrative competence is a central term in Rüsen's model of historical consciousness, as in many of the other European models. The conundrum of causation, central to narration, arises from the question of human freedom and agency. Change over time is shaped by a complex interplay of humans acting within and against the larger social organizations in which they find themselves. Humans make history, as Marx famously wrote, but they make it under circumstances not of their choosing. Explaining "causes" thus must include both the structures and conditions which were inherited from the past, and the freedom and choices which were at least apparently available in any particular historical moment. The more thoroughly and convincingly the historian (or student) explains how and why an event took place, the greater the danger that human agency will disappear into an inexorable march of impersonal, mutually determining forces. The historian's narrative achievement is to set human decision-making in context in a way that communicates choice and intention, while accounting for historical context and conditions. Moreover, one of the pedagogical benefits of historical narratives that successfully negotiate the problem of agency is that, by analogy, they position us as historical agents with responsibilities toward the future.

The "ethical dimension" of history, as articulated in the Historical Thinking Project, is one that lies outside the British models of historical thinking but is central to German historical consciousness. In the Canadian model, it includes coming to terms with the past crimes and injustices whose legacies—either benefits or deficits—we live with today, and the memorial obligations that we in the present owe to victims, heroes, or other forebears who made sacrifices from which we benefit. The connection between ourselves in the present and the historical actors in the past reaches its apogee in this aspect of historical consciousness. Moreover, this aspect of historical consciousness may be something quite new. After the Second World War, reparations, which prior to the Holocaust had been a matter of state-to-state transfers, began to involve individuals, both as perpetrators and as victims of historical crimes (Torpey, 2006). A new mode of thinking about responsibilities for the past migrated to other cases of genocide, colonialism, slavery and apartheid, potentially bringing the past into more immediate presence. And these responsibilities achieve particular urgency in newly multicultural neighborhoods, schools and classrooms.

The notion of memorial obligation as a debt to earlier generations is an old one. However, the involvement of historians is quite new, and arrives through the explosive growth of memory studies, exemplified—and stimulated—by the work of Pierre Nora (1996), forcing the examination of the relationship of memory and history. In schools, the assumption that history curriculum can serve both educational and memorial functions is under increasing threat. In Nora's words, "We no longer celebrate the nation, but we study the nation's

celebrations" (p. 7). In multicultural, multinational classrooms, it may be difficult to sustain the traditional pledges of allegiance or songs to royalty without irony and critique.

Contemporary Challenges

As they come into increasing dialogue with each other and with history education elsewhere in the world, both the German and the Anglo-American approaches to history education face a series of theoretical challenges that should transform the field.

Most insistent among these is the question of universalism. Historical consciousness, as defined by the Germans, and historical thinking, as defined by the British, are both clearly rooted in Western, European Enlightenment thought. For Rüsen, the highest "genetic" type of historical consciousness surpasses the "traditional" type in many of the same ways that contemporary, multicultural cosmopolitanism supersedes monocultural peasant or tribal life. And the British and American conceptions of the practices of history derive from the discipline as it developed in Europe: the criticism of sources, the key roles of periodization and progress, and the understanding of human agency. Are these accomplishments so rooted in Western intellectual developments that using them as universal goals and standards for history education becomes yet another colonial imposition? The concepts of "multicultural ways of knowing" (Levisohn & Phillips, 2011) and the possibly oxymoronic "aboriginal historical consciousness" (Carlson, 2010) provide direct challenges to "disciplinary practices" of history that transcend cultural divides. Dipesh Chakrabarty (1992, 2000) and other subaltern studies scholars raised these questions for historians more than two decades ago.

To state that challenge most succinctly, different cultures have different kinds of temporal orientation; different ways of dealing with the relationship among past, present and future; and different standards and methods for assessing knowledge claims. Recognition of the relativity of all values and the historicity of all traditions might appear to be an appropriate stance for contemporary cosmopolitan societies. Within the context of public educational systems, however, it will fail to satisfy the demands of fundamentalist religious movements, aboriginal activists and other antimodern tendencies. Thus, the demand to recognize "aboriginal historical consciousness" in Canada is not just about including stories of indigenous peoples in the curriculum. Rather, it is a call to entertain plural standards of truth, and to accord multiple understandings of the relationships among past, present and future (Seixas, 2012). The consequences for what Körber (2008: 63) framed as "history teaching in pluralist societies with controversial memorial cultures" is yet to be confronted.

A second set of challenges, closely related to the first, springs from the notion that we have entered a new regime of historicity (Hartog, 2003), where the relations among past, present and future are arrayed in a fundamentally different way than they were during the nineteenth-century and earlier twentieth-

century development of the discipline of history (Bevernage & Lorenz, 2013; Hartog, 2003; Runia, 2006; Bevernage and Lorenz). If this is the case, and if it can be shown, empirically (which none of these scholars has attempted) that people today actually inhabit this new regime (in other words, that it is not just a logical possibility), then the conception of what it means to become competent in historical thinking (or reading or writing) would demand revision as well. Some of that work has begun in conferences such as Erasmus University's *Tangible Pasts? Questioning Heritage Education* (Grever et al., 2013) and *Longing for the Present: The History of History Education and the Temptations of Modernity* (Grever et al., 2012; Wils, 2012).

These challenges are tied together through post-Holocaust, post-Hiroshima sensibilities, unprecedented intercultural contact driven by both migration and technology, the collapse of the notion of progress fueled by human agency, the decline of the promise of the nation in the face of globalization and the apparent imminence of ecological catastrophe on a global scale.

Conclusion: Is Historical Consciousness a Thing of the Past?

In 1969, J.H. Plumb celebrated "the death of the past" (Plumb, 1969). He was confident that academic history, with its avowed political disinterest, methodological rigor and ideological neutrality had successfully displaced parochial, provincial and faith-driven collective memory. He spoke too soon.

Of course, the entry of political interests and advocacy into school history has been a staple of education systems since the nineteenth century, changing more recently, perhaps, in the degree to which supporters of nation-building ideologies have been forced to make room for competing advocates (Taylor & Guyver, 2012). The calls for, and willingness of, historians to enter into contemporary political questions of recognition, reconciliation and restitution are a more recent phenomenon (Torpey, 2006). Both trends contribute to the porousness between contemporary interests and our narrations of the past, constituting a clear threat to the distanciation that was once a staple of the practice of modern, academic history.

The terms, "historical thinking" and "historical consciousness" have roots that can be traced to the world of ideas that Plumb extolled. Anglophone history educators have used academic history as a governing framework for articulating the practices that students should learn. Continental history didacticians following Rüsen have posited a tolerant "genetic" historical consciousness that recognizes, accepts and learns from profound change over time as the ultimate goal of history education. But times *have* changed. Diverse classrooms with students from cultures that vigorously assert the presence of the past demand a rethinking of the purposes and practices of school history. Philosophers and theorists on one side, and researchers and practitioners on the other, will have to work together if we are to contribute to meaningful temporal orientations for the next generation in profoundly unsettled times.

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