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WHAT IS THE OBJECTIVE OF “THEORY OF HISTORY”?**

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Abstract: The article argues that the “theory of history” has gradually changed from being an analysis of what historians actually do or what historians ought to do into a discipline or art of its own. Historical theorists communicate with each other but rarely with historians. The making of “theory of history” into a discipline of its own is recent, even if the roots are perceptible in the philosophy of Kant and his successors, especially Fichte and Hegel. The community of theorists of history rarely accepts practicing historians as discussants. In the present analysis of six articles written by six different well-known historical theorists, (Hayden White, A.R. Louch, Gabrielle Spiegel, Herman Paul, Marek Tamm, and Chris Lorenz), the author points out the unanimity among them in considering “history” to be texts on the past and nothing else. When these historical theorists exemplify historical texts, they often use surveys and overviews of history instead of historical knowledge as an outcome of original research. The article asks for a closer relation to the professional writing of history as a search for new historical knowledge. Hayden White and A. R. Louch, in other respects advancing quite different ideas, want to identify “history” with texts written about (parts of) the past. For them “history” is a narrative (Louch) or a representation (White) but not the past itself. The struggle with concepts of this kind is also typical of Herman Paul’s thinking (performing or producing history) as well as Marek Tamm’s (performative speech acts), and the latter drives this to the extreme of making truth (of historical statements) into a “truth pact” between historians and their readers.

Keywords: Historiography, Theory of History, Philosophy of History, History as Past Events, Conceptualisation, Art, Narrative, Fact, Scientific History.

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When I was young “theory of history” signified speculations that some historians had proposed on the purport of their craft and its methods. Their ambition was not to compete with “great thinkers” such as, Wilhelm Dilthey, Heinrich Rickert, or Wilhelm Windelband. These were “philosophers” and their business was different from that of the historians. Where Karl Marx was to be placed was not clear, nor much contemplated by historians. Collingwood was (only partially wrongly) counted among historians. The

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division of theories about history into “theory of history” and “philosophy of history” depending on the discipline of the writer has disappeared, but what has emerged instead?

The six authors presented here with one article each, are well-known theoreticians in the field of theory (or philosophy) of history. Hayden White, Gabrielle Spiegel, and Chris Lorenz, are dominating theoreticians of an “older” generation, A. R. Louch is nowadays often forgotten and belonging to a recent past, while Herman Paul and Marek Tamm have found their place in theory in the twenty-first century. This means that my selection has not been done quite by chance, as I mean that they have all played an important role in the theoretical debate during the last fifty years, but it does not mean that I hold them to represent the current theory of history in its entirety. It is a subjective selection, and it is subjective also in my choice of one article from each of them. If asked, they might have proposed quite other contributions as more representative of what they want to say about theory of history. I will not pretend that I know well their whole production on theory so that I can contend that I have chosen the most suitable article of each of them, but I can only assure the reader that I have had the intention not to misrepresent the ideas of the treated authors by my choice of articles to analyse.

What sort of theory is now “theory of history” or, alternatively, “philosophy of history”? In the *Journal of the Philosophy of History* Herman Paul in his commemorative article on Hayden White, and the editor of the *Journal*, Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen have both touched upon the matter, and the latter seems to underestimate the intricate terminology of the field (Paul, 2019: 3–20)¹. Their main question is however, if philosophy of history is a discipline or not, and that is not the problem I wanted to draw attention to. For the matter of clarity, I must tell the reader that I will make no distinction in this article between “theory of history” and “philosophy of history”, though I am well aware of the possibility to make sophisticated differences between the two, as the words “theory” and “philosophy” are by no means generally equivalent. The word “history” makes the matter further complicated. Are we thinking here of history as “*events* that took place in the past and *social conditions* of the past” (or something of the kind)? Or are we thinking

¹Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen states: “There is very little technical jargon which would make it difficult, or even impossible, for outsiders to read and understand papers in philosophy of history. This state of affairs would seem to make philosophy of history particularly well-disposed to have a visible and active role in cultural arenas outside the academia” (Kuukkanen, 2019: 1–2).

of “*accounts* of past events or of past social conditions in the form of descriptions, narratives, or analyses presenting past occurrences in words and concepts of their day” in any kind of media?

In the following reflections, I will primarily focus on “theory of history” as something practised and formed by philosophically minded persons when they talk about history, that is, the past conceptualised and put into words. Here arises another problem: Is there any difference between “theory of history” and “the theory (or art) of historiography”? If so, what kind of difference do we then talk about? To make things still more opaque, we have concepts like “metahistory”, signifying an aspect or perspective on past writings on past events, and “history of historiography”, signifying a description or analysis of past writings on past events.

In this bewildering mess of concepts it is important to make clear that the objective of most researchers of history is to produce new knowledge about the past. “This was not known by earlier researchers” and “here I have been able to show ‘how people lived’ in the treated period, which has not been correctly presented by earlier historians”—such are statements that are made by historical researchers or can be inferred from their texts. Very often, they do not want to make epistemological theories about the past but just show something new that they find important (for an argument, a narrative, or an interpretation). As historical researchers I classify only those who write about findings in their own research and how these findings can be placed in the bulk of historical knowledge presented by other researchers. In my view, it is important to make a distinction between writings by researchers on the one hand, and history texts by history narrators, who compile what others have said about a topic without contributing with own research results on the other hand. Some such narrators have contributed with research earlier but have left research or have written a book as pastime or for the imagined benefit of others.

The following parts of this essay will try to find out at least what some people had in mind when they in the recent past used the concept of “theory of history” (or some words that may be taken to signify almost the same). The background objective of my reflections is to find out firstly, if these people had an intention to establish any connection between history-writing and historical knowledge production; or secondly, if they want to deny any such connection; or thirdly, if they do not bother which is the case. One lead to answering the question about their purpose is to analyse articles (or books), which can be said to relate their subject matter to “theory of history”, in order to analyse what they find to be the most important

theoretical aspects on “history” or “history-writing” or “writing on the past”. This will be done in order to elucidate my background objective. My sample of such texts is very limited and very much steered by my opinion of who has made interesting contributions to the subject.

HOW DOES “THEORY OF HISTORY” RELATE TO HISTORIOGRAPHY AND TO EPISTEMOLOGY OF HISTORY?

HAYDEN WHITE

It may be appropriate to begin this analysis with Hayden White, who was a dominant figure in the theoretical discussion about historiography during the last five decades up to his recent decease. I will use a polemical article on historiography as art or science (White, 2000: 391–406) that he wrote occasioned by a review by Georg Iggers of his works from his book *Metahistory* (1973) and onward to the turn of the century. Among White’s many publications, this is an outspoken defence of his views and a sharp dismissal of “traditional historiography”. As a complement, I will use also an article from 1966, “The Burden of History” (White, 1966: 111–134), which shows that White had formed many of his later views already several years before *Metahistory*, even though part of the introductory comments about “modern” theories of the relations between natural science, social science and history state standpoints that he did not repeat later.

A most striking characteristic of Whites article on history as art or science is that he is using the word “history” all through the article in the sense of writing of history. He also uses the word historiography, but this is reserved, as far as I can find, for the collective of “histories” written on a specific subject matter (a period or a theme). In a couple of instances he uses this term for historical works that are treated by “historians of historiography”, that is, historians devoting their work to the development of history-writing, in general or nationally or about a theme. The word “history” as such is therefore central in the text, and it signifies texts written by historians (or by anyone treating events or people in earlier times). However, it is important that it does not signify the past as such. White is very precise about this: “The representation of a thing is not the thing itself”. He continues: “[in *Metahistory*] I was more interested in the ways by which historians constituted a past as a subject that could serve as a possible object of scientific investigation”; and further, “... to believe that an entity

once existed is one thing, to constitute it as a possible object of a specific kind of knowledge is something else altogether” (White, 2000: 396–397).

White also makes a link here to historical research (which is rare in his texts). “In their research, historians typically try to determine not only ‘what happened’, but the ‘meaning’ of this happening, not only for past agents of historical events but also for subsequent ones. And the principal way meaning is imposed on historical events is by narrativization” (ibid.: 397). The last concept, goes beyond what the Oxford English Dictionary defines as “narrativize” (or “narrativise”), namely, “present or interpret... in the form of a narrative”. Here, I want to present what White sees as the main research function of the historian (White 2000: 397):

During the research phase of a historian’s inquiry into the past, she is interested in constructing an accurate description of her object of interest and of the changes it undergoes in time, based on the documentary record, out of the contents of which she produces a set of facts. I say “produces” a set of facts because I distinguish between an event (as an *occurrence* happening in worldly time and space) and a *fact*.

A further step, typical for historians according to White, is that they use their research findings to establish a “meaning” of events, which goes beyond what they find in their documentary evidence, as I have already quoted.

One should observe the word “description” used for the sort of textual organisation that historians make of their research findings. Such findings do not yet constitute “history” in White’s sense. “In other words, if a historical explanation or interpretation is a construction, conceptual and / or imaginative as the case may be, so too is the object on which these explicatory techniques are brought to bear. When it comes to historical phenomena, it is construction all the way down” (ibid.: 398). Historical documents give only a lead. “What can be studied by direct observation, of course, are the documents that attest to the nature of the past object”, but documents require interpretation. White continues (ibid.):

This leads me to conclude that historical knowledge is always second-order knowledge, which is to say, it is based on hypothetical constructions of possible objects of investigation which require a treatment by imaginative processes that have more in common with “literature” than they have with any science.

In the text analysed, White thus argues that historians both want to express things that go beyond what they find in documents and have to use imagination to make those constructions that constitute historical knowledge, as direct observation of the past is not possible. Therefore history

is quite kin to any other sort of literature, an art but not necessarily fiction but as many other sorts of literature using true statements to depict images of what the author thinks is reality.

In “The Burden of History” White uses the main part of the text to show that several well-known authors of imaginative literature have been very critical of “history”. They have talked about “the burden of history”, as they have found so-called “history” narrowly occupied with past events and states of affairs and not giving any lead for life in the present or the future². The article ends with reflections on the possibility to “allow the historian to participate positively in the liberation of the present from the burden of history” (White, 1966: 124). This can take place, White says, only if historians “recognize that what constitutes the facts themselves is the problem that the historian, like the artist, has tried to solve in the choice of the metaphor by which he orders his world, past, present, and future” (ibid.: 131). Posing a problem means formulating a question. The concepts used in the question are (often) metaphorical, and the metaphor may bring about new insights (as the use of “individualism” did to Burckhardt) (ibid.: 128).

Turning back to White’s article on history as art or science, I want to underline that he makes a distinction between two modes of narration. One is a mode of speaking about the world that is different from the mode characterized as description, and from narrativisation, as a way of representing the world and its processes as if they possessed the structure and meaning of a story (White, 2000: 399). After discussing the relation between “factualisation” and “fictionalisation”, White states that many modern novels could claim to show the real conditions of life in society as much as historical works. Thus, there is no incompatibility between art and truth. A central sentence in this connection is: “Historiography is a discourse that typically aims towards the construction of a truthful narrativization of events, not a static description of a state of affairs” (ibid.: 404).

The point with White’s somewhat intricate reasoning about history as art and the role of narrativisation is that historians ought not to forget to present their findings in a way that connects the past with the understanding

²White comprising sections 2 and 3, which treat the dissatisfaction and the brushing aside of history among fiction authors and social scientists respectively (White, 1966: 114–124).

of the present and future. The basis for this opinion is the statement that all historical knowledge is a construction, as the past cannot be observed.

GABRIELLE SPIEGEL

In a very interesting article, Gabrielle Spiegel (Spiegel, 2014) has given an overview of the development of the philosophical foundations for historiography since the “adoption” in the late nineteen-sixties and the nineteen-seventies by historians of the “linguistic turn”, that is, the conception that all past events are transmitted to us only dressed in the words and concepts of earlier times or reconstructed in any later conceptual forms.

Superficially, Spiegel’s description of the development of historiography can be characterised in the following way: first came a victory of cultural history after the acceptance of the linguistic turn. This cultural history was succeeded by a revival of structural and social history around the turn of the century and both these trends have been challenged later by a revival of a phenomenological and traditional writing of history with achievements of individuals as the basis of history. However, as Spiegel lets the reader understand, Hayden White has later advanced another form of reshaping history, and he has won adherents among historians. This direction of historiography stresses the ethical basis, which Spiegel exemplifies by the role of memory for the grasping of human suffering and perpetrators’ guilt in recent history.

On a deeper level, Spiegel in this article is discussing different theories of history and their implications for historiography. What she calls “traditional” writing of history is brushed aside as obsessed by methods and empirical data, and she directs interest to what happened after the “linguistic turn”. Her focus on the linguistic turn makes her see social and economic history, which has been successful later, as a branch of structuralism. She presents a couple of social anthropologists (Geertz, Sahlins) and some critical views of their work, and lets the reader infer that this criticism applies also to social history in general (ibid.: 154).

A later turn toward individualism goes via “practice theory” or “practice itself assumes the form of a sociology of meaning, or *sémantique des situations*”, as Spiegel quotes the French historian Bernard Lepetit (ibid.: 157), which she stresses as part of a “revitalisation” of the concept “social”. This leads Spiegel to connect to historians occupied with “historical agency”, that is actor-centred perspectives, and she concludes that two different epistemologies are used. One “reverts to ... an objective basis for historical

investigation” while the other “entails at least a partial reliance on a semi-otic understanding of the constructed nature of our apprehension of that very social reality”. Spiegel finds here “the deployment of two very different epistemologies at play in an empirically grounded social history and/or a linguistically mediated cultural history” (Spiegel, 2014: 159).

Thus, in a main part of her article Spiegel tries to show that the “linguistic turn” lives on as a main alternative in the theory of history. She quotes, with at least partial assent, Joan Scott’s words that (ibid.: 161)

a renewed emphasis on empiricism and quantitative analysis, the rehabilitation of the autonomous willing subject as the agent of history and other new trends constitute a “trivialization and denunciation of the ‘linguistic turn’ — an attempt to deny it a serious place in the recent life of the discipline”.

The “trivialisation” of the linguistic turn leads further to some “present” trends among young historians in the USA, whose standpoints have been characterised as returning to Ranke and his “documentary evidence, descriptive particularism, and ‘explanation by narration’ in the service of a reconstructive history of ‘what actually happened’” (ibid.). From this historiographical criticism, Spiegel somewhat unconnectedly states (ibid.: 162–163):

One extremely powerful movement, not centrally in play in these discussions of cultural and social history but significant nonetheless for the ways in which it is changing the conceptual, methodological and ethical imperatives that guide the writing of history, is the growing, indeed now massive, attempt to incorporate memory into the field of history.

For Spiegel this is an important transition, as the remaining half of the article deals with the role of memory and its connection with the moral reactions and reflections of historians. The writing of history should recognise memory as an important part of its material and should use it for taking a standpoint to the sufferings that form the background to almost all collective remembrances. This forms the background for the ethical imperative, which Spiegel elaborates in the form of memory history in the second half of her article.

A. R. LOUCH

A. R. Louch’s article on historical narratives (Louch, 1969) was published in 1969, when the current debate about theory of history was another than in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. One will immediately feel

the difference, when he states his problem. Narration in history had been a main topic in historiography for more than a decade, since some historians had argued that the influence of the social sciences had become too great on historians and that they ought to go back to earlier ideals of presenting good narratives. In that situation, with good reasons one could pose the problem of what characterises a well-conducted historical narrative.

“Narrative, ideally, stands proxy for experience” (Louch, 1969: 56) is one of the central sentences in the first part of Louch’s article. The idea behind it is that the past itself is unattainable for us and the historian must, therefore, try to approach it with inventiveness and artistic means. Louch continues (*ibid.*):

We do not, of course, attain this ideal, and no criterion can be formulated that will tell us when the story is complete enough. We might even want to say that in this sense historical knowledge is always relative to a certain place in the history of historiography. We judge an account to be better than its predecessors, not that it is the best or that it is complete.

The historian writing a narrative about something in the past must consider two main conditions for such narratives, according to Louch. The first is that the historian’s business is to fill in gaps in the current knowledge of the topic. The second is that the perspective has important effects on what is important and what is not. “Episodes that enjoy prominence in the account of a decade may disappear from the account of an epoch”, he writes (*ibid.*: 58).

Most important is Louch’s idea, that narration is a way to evade the epistemological difficulties that arise with the word “cause”. Narration is a way to describe a chain of events from a certain perspective, in order to make attention focus on the perspective. As such it reveals connections between events (*ibid.*: 58–59). “The force of such explanations does not depend upon covering laws or theories, but rests instead on a covert assimilation of these accounts to what is directly perceived” (*ibid.*: 59).

In order to strengthen the claim to validity for the narrative process, Louch launches the idea of narration as proxy experience, making the narrative (rather than the narrator) a stand-in for an eyewitness of the events taking place. “We need to amend this to say, stories are pictures of facts, for it is not the elements that are verified separately in proxy-experience or narrative accounts, but the story as a whole” (*ibid.*: 62).

COMPARATIVE CONCLUSIONS

The three articles presented here have one striking thing in common. They are theoretical in the sense that they are difficult to understand properly without considerable earlier knowledge in the field of “theory of history”.

Thus they are not written for the historian in general. Further, they are similar in dealing in the first hand with history in the sense of writing of history, not in the sense of past events, occurrences and states of affairs. Relating to the past, the three authors are not completely alike, as Hayden White makes a clear difference between history and the past, but he is also making clear that he is writing primarily about history-writing. Both White and Spiegel make understand that they know what historical research is and demands, but none of them shows any interest in the production of new knowledge about the past.

In one central question, there is also a similarity between them, even though they express the idea in different manner. Louch dismisses the idea of causality for historical writing and he wants to replace it with a narrative. White does not speak of narratives as any form of replacement for causality, but his argument for narrativisation as a way to present a development with structure and meaning comes close to Louch’s argument. Spiegel does not say anything about narration in history that could be interpreted as giving it a central function, but her interpretation of the consequences of the linguistic turn seems to lead her in the same direction as White.

All three authors of these articles write on theory of history entirely (Louch) or almost entirely for specialists in theory and philosophy.

FOR WHOM IS THE THEORY ON HISTORIAN’S WORK AIMED?

HERMAN PAUL

More than is usual in historical texts (including metahistorical ones like those on theory of history) Herman Paul says explicitly that his article “Performing History” is intended for philosophers of history (2 places) and historians of historiography (1 place) (Paul, 2011: 2–4). His article centres on the concept of “historical knowledge”. However, he is not advancing a new “theory of historical knowledge” of his own. He chooses instead to discuss the differences between different approaches to historical knowledge, from William Dray’s ambiguous formulation, that philosophy of history ought to focus on “what counts as historical knowledge” with its possible normative or descriptive interpretations. Paul exemplifies with different philosophical

(!) interpretations of this dilemma between normative or descriptive, which he finds typical of twentieth-century philosophy of history (Paul, 2011: 2).

Philosophy of history since these times seems to agree that “historical knowledge must be conceived of as a *product*, made and ready for inspection, rather than as a *production process*, continuously underway and in development” (ibid.: 3). This goes both for Carl G. Hempel and the covering law adherents and for the narrativists like Arthur C. Danto, Louis O. Mink, and Hayden White. Paul states also that this narrativism became the dominant successor paradigm to Hempel’s covering-law approach. The narrativists shared with their predecessors a “fascination” for the outcome of the historian’s research. However, they were not interested in how historians worked with their archival material and how they brought this material together into narratives, “but the outcome of that process” was what they wanted to investigate. Even White, who was interested in analysing “metahistorical” conventions, did not investigate the intellectual operations involved in doing archival research (ibid.).

Thus, Herman Paul states the importance of making the production of historical knowledge the object of philosophical or theoretical investigations. He declares that historians bending over archival volumes and interpreting their content “are engaged in performative activities”, and he wants to analyse these activities as performance.

In other words, whereas philosophy of history from Hempel to White has focused on the materialisation of the historian’s performances (be it explanations offered in historical accounts or narratives produced in discursive fields), I would invite philosophers of history, and historians of historiography, to pay attention the performances themselves (ibid.: 4).

With these words, Paul makes clear that his first aim is to lead philosophy of history on new path. He certainly recognises some predecessors with this aim, but these have mostly been working in adjacent disciplines, such as, political science and history of science. A crucial element for this analysis should be “epistemic virtues” as diligence, accuracy, and truthfulness.

The main part of Paul’s article is devoted to showing how historical methodologists, e. g. Langlois and Seignobos, and Marc Bloch, present and look upon “epistemic virtues” and, in a next step, Paul scrutinises what philosophers in general say about such virtues. Socialisation into a discipline is important, even though sociologists no longer embrace Robert Merton’s theory of this process, and Paul stresses that socialisation includes epistemic

virtues in combination with routines, which researchers of the discipline have developed.

The study of virtues and routines of past historians it is possible to develop a field of history of historiography, which is not a variety of philosophy of history, according to Paul. He especially develops how the examination of epistemic virtues and their shift between generations is focused on understanding the development of the discipline without recommending one or the other (Paul, 2011: 13). Paul also underlines that this need not lead to a closed disciplinary history, as virtues may spread to other disciplines than the one where they were first used. He concludes the article with a discussion, whether his recommendation of studying epistemic virtues entails a standpoint in favour of a prescriptive history of historiography. On the contrary, he emphasises that his aim is rather descriptive than prescriptive. This leads him to present a series of problems regarding epistemic virtues, which finally makes him state that if philosophy of history engaged in them, it might “eventually become a philosophy, not merely of explanations and narrative discourse, but of historical performances, that is, of historical scholarship in action” (ibid.: 19).

In this article, Herman Paul argues for a new philosophy of history based on his desire that the historians’ practices should be a central object of analysis. Only then one can understand how new knowledge in history is created. It would seem that he thereby had pointed to detailed studies of historians’ day-to-day work both manually and intellectually, in order to reach their creative process. However, this is hardly the case. Instead, Paul focuses on epistemic virtues and performances, which can be generalised. They can be examined in the history of historiography as differences between generations and, as the end of the article underlines, they may be the object of philosophical analysis. However, he does not go into the question of how historical researchers make their conclusions, and he does not, even, make a distinction between historical researchers and those who compile historical works based on what others have presented earlier.

MAREK TAMM

In the article on truth, objectivity and evidence in historical writings Marek Tamm (Tamm, 2014) has approached what historians do and how this ought to be understood. As I found in the preceding section Herman Paul makes the same in his article without really go into the historians’ practice. The title of Tamm’s article may sound as if he was intending a more theoretical approach, but this cannot really be said to be the case.

Tamm starts out with discussing the concept truth and some philosophers who have rejected it or at least expressed doubts on the possibilities to use it. Tamm leaves that question with stating this standpoint and says (Tamm, 2014: 267):

The calls for rejecting truth have fallen on a particularly barren ground amongst historians who still, quite unanimously and shamelessly, regard the pursuit of truth as a cornerstone of their professional work and don't feel the slightest inclination towards giving up debates over truth... .

So far, Tamm is only introducing his main theme, a pragmatist theory of history. First, he emphasises that he wants to analyse written history in the light of the theory of speech acts, and refers to the grand trio of Charles S. Peirce, William James and John Dewey. Pragmatists used terms of experience to analyse problems and concepts, and they evaded to separate theory and practice, Tamm says (ibid.: 269). The pragmatist approach has similarities to present-day philosophy of science where a “performative turn” has led to “the shift from conceiving of science as *knowledge* to conceiving of science as *practice*”, Tamm says with a quote from John Zammito (ibid.).

This pragmatist approach to the theory of history leads Tamm further to regard the writing of history as founded on a “truth pact” between historians and their readers. In earlier philosophic discussions about truth in history writing was about philosophical definitions of truth, while Tamm finds that the pragmatic interpretation of history as a series of speech acts, or “an assertive illocutionary act”, appears more relevant (ibid.: 272). He also uses Philippe Lejeune's term for the relation between the readers and autobiographies as a pact with contractual effect for the relation between historians and their readers. The truth claim by the historians is communicated through verbal or other signals (ibid.: 275). Among the signals the use of footnotes has a prominent place. Besides communicating information, the footnote signals the author's truth intent (ibid.: 276).

Readers become ready to accept truth signals such as, disciplinary objectivity, which Tamm defines as pragmatic by nature in accordance with Peirce's and Dewey's conceptions of objectivity. “Objectivity is not a feature characteristic of the statements, but describes the activity of inquirers”, Tamm says (ibid.: 281). The role of the discipline of history and the community of professional historians leads Tamm to observe, after Aviezer Tucker, that the consensus among historians does not concern the answers to historical problems but the questions raised and how it is possible to

answer to them. It will seem that Tamm finds disagreement between professional historians as conspicuous, but he does not explain in what way this differs from disagreements between professionals of other disciplines such as, sociology or physics. It would seem to me that disciplinary consensus generally concerns methods and queries, not new results. It will take time and many tests and empirical investigations before a result is incorporated in the body of “accepted knowledge about *A*”, which other researchers take as a starting point for setting their problems.

Leaving disciplines and consensus Tamm devotes the final section of his article to evidence and fallibleness in the writing of history. He states immediately that the main prerequisite for the truth claim is its foundation on evidence. “Thus the central problem of the philosophy of history is not the relation between history writing and reality, but between history writing and evidence” (Tamm, 2014: 285). Further, he says (*ibid.*: 286):

Thus, historical knowledge is nothing but a critical analysis of all existing evidence [for a specified problem?] and the conclusions drawn from it concerning historical reality. These conclusions are never final (although sometimes beyond reasonable doubt), but merely probable and subject to later revisions.

After this entry into the laboratory of the historian, he poses the question what evidence is and states that nothing is evidence in itself, but only in relation to a problem. He also quotes Collingwood’s proposal that “Evidence is evidence only when someone contemplates it historically”. These standpoints are presented as if they were new insights and the essence of Tamm’s article, which may be somewhat surprising to anyone who has followed methodological discussions in the discipline of history, where similar standpoints are abundant.

To conclude, Tamm’s article starts out with a very theoretical introduction, which leads directly into the heart of “theory of history”. His stance is taken as a pragmatist, and he advocates a pragmatic theory of history in the form of “practice” or “performance” and “doing” for the historian. So far, he directs his discussion to other theoreticians of history. In the second half of the article, Tamm strikes another tone and approaches the actual practice of the historian. His viewpoints on disciplinary consensus and on the role of evidence would be met by recognition by many practising historians, even if not everything he says would meet immediate acceptance.

One observation must be made. As historical theorists usually do, Tamm starts his article with the conventional use of “history” or “history writing” for any texts about the past. This is natural for the part, which is dealing with

theoretical matters. When he goes over to matters that relate immediately to the practice of historians, especially when he discusses evidence and its role in the writing of history, he continues to talk of history writing in the same manner. Thereby he neglects the difference between texts founded on the author's research and texts, which narrate something that they have found in other historians' texts.

CHRIS LORENZ

The article by Chris Lorenz (Lorenz, 2008), which I have chosen to analyse here from the point of view of the intended readership and intended influence, starts out with taking up William McNeill's concept "mythistory" launched in an article in 1985.

Lorenz says that he will use this article as a starting point for an analysis of two claims made by "scientific" historians in the academic discipline of history. One claim is epistemological. It is (ibid.: 36)

related to the status of history writing as a *Wissenschaft*, that is, a methodical truth-seeking discipline: academic history above all else, claimed to do away with all myths about the past and to replace them with The Truth — or at least some truths.

Academic history "had become" (past tense) characterised by its claim to "scientificity", "although this claim could be based on a wide variety of methodological positions, ranging from Comtean positivism to Rankean historicism" (ibid.). The other claim was that history fulfilled a function to provide some guidance in life by giving an orientation, mostly in the form of identification with the state. Lorenz states that this claim was dominant among professional historians over much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

After this introduction, Lorenz says that his article intends to show that there was an unresolved opposition between the epistemological and the practical claims of scientific history. But first he makes an analysis of McNeill's effort to build a bridge between the two claims, which is a bit outside my aims with the present article though in itself interesting, especially in regard to the question if methods could create consensus between "scientific" historians (ibid.: 39). Lorenz further says that McNeill's distinction between source criticism and the "art" of using facts for creating meaningful patterns in narratives goes back to Ranke, and he further states that when McNeill pleads for an ecumenical understanding among historians as a moral duty, he makes a transition from the cognitive to the

normative level, which is a “typical methodological move for a historian” (Lorenz, 2008: 40).

Lorenz then gives a historical survey of the concept of myth and this leads over to the nation with the question: Is the nation a myth? Important here is that Lorenz points out that the nation has become the object of a cult as religion is based on cult. “Both cults also worship special persons, who are regarded as ‘mediators’ between the world of the sacred and the world of the profane”—saints and martyrs and national heroes (ibid.: 45). To sacrifice one’s life for the sacred cause is regarded as utterly laudable in both religion and nationalism. Lorenz concludes that “the case for ‘mythistory’ in national history is very convincing” and that the diagnosis only gets worse when one realises that much twentieth-century national history was no better than its nineteenth-century counterpart (ibid.: 46). He finishes this reasoning with the admonition [to historians?]: “‘Don’t look back’ still seems the safest strategy for everybody with an unsettling past—including ‘scientific’ historians” (ibid.).

In the last section Lorenz wants to explain the roots of the “crisis of ‘scientific’ history”, as he says. This crisis is not just a temporary phenomenon, but stems from the “fathers” of “scientific” history, Leopold von Ranke and Wilhelm von Humboldt. Ranke’s dictum “*wie es eigentlich gewesen*” has been misinterpreted as an “advocacy of hardboiled ‘empiricism’, implying a restriction of scientific history to ‘the facts’”. With “*eigentlich*” Ranke meant not “factuality” but concentration on the essential. This essential was for Ranke his idealistic theory of history. Specific ideas, for instance, state, religion, and language, worked as forces in history. “Only by connecting established facts to their immanent ideas [...] ‘scientific’ history was born” (ibid.: 48).

Both Ranke and Humboldt (who advanced a similar theory of history) were aware that facts and factuality were not enough for good history, and that theory was needed. For them theory was equal to the theory of ideas. Later historians who realised that there were other theories “lacked the theoretical tools and the theoretical justification to compare and evaluate them rationally”. The theory of history was placed outside of rational discourse on epistemology. Therefore, “mythistory” is inherent in the “scientific” history itself (ibid.: 49).

Concluding the section on Chris Lorenz and his article, the following comments seem most urgent. First must be mentioned that Lorenz uses “history” in the same way as other philosophers of history, that is, it is a concept that embraces all sorts of texts the aim to describe or narrate

about the past. It is true that he mentions historical research and researchers on a couple of occasions, but this is not to specify a research activity and distinguish it from other forms of writing history. It is rather to include historical texts founded on research in the “history” family.

Second he makes a distinction between scientific history (often with a quotation sign around scientific) and other forms of history. These other forms seem to be more modern, not exactly narrative in Hayden White’s sense but rather without Ranke’s *Historismus* based on an idealistic theory of history and without the cult of facts that he means has characterised the misinterpretation of Ranke that dominated among historians far into the twentieth century. One may ask whether there were not in reality several other theories of history, that gave other bases for meaningful conclusions from facts, but Lorenz here gives no room for alternatives beside an old-fashioned identification of God’s will manifested in the state on the one hand, and factualism on the other. He seems to have a tunnel vision of only national(istic) historiography to be observed before his own time of writing, although he exhorts historians to create alternative theories in the future to embrace the pro-tempore true facts that they have found in meaningful interpretations.

Third, Lorenz is writing here (and in other articles as well) for an intended audience of philosophers or theoreticians of history. His argument has no direct bearing on the problems of historical research.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Among the six theoreticians presented in this article only Louch does not demonstrate a dissociation from “traditional historiography”. What he wants to show is, however, that narration is a very important instrument for historians. These do not just want to describe historical findings as facts, but they want to create connections between events, and this is done through narration. Louch takes this to an extreme, when he states that narratives get the role of “proxy experience”, when they connect events in a form that creates an explanation.

When Louch wrote this in 1969 the theory of history was already taking a much more radical turn, but the basic reason was the same as for Louch. Hayden White was also stressing the limitation of what was observable for the historian in the article he wrote occasioned by Iggers’ criticism. The problem he stressed was also, like Louch’s, how history writing might overcome the fact that the past as such was not observable for historians.

His solution was more radical. “This leads me to conclude that historical knowledge is always second-order knowledge”, and he continues, “which is to say, it is based on hypothetical constructions of possible objects of investigation which require a treatment by imaginative processes that have more in common with ‘literature’ than they have with any science”. All sorts of “history”, that is all historical writings aiming at giving a picture of the past, are a sort of literature among other sorts, based on imagination to construe the links between the statements that can be formed on the basis of documents.

The theory of history is then for White as well as for Louch a theory about written history or historical texts in general. It does not matter that narrative was a solution of the problem for Louch, while it was just an instrument for a deeper lying epistemological solution through constructivism and imagination in White’s thinking. Both of them tried to say something about the relation between research and history writing, but none of them analysed the research work of the historian but just talked of documents.

Contrary to this, Herman Paul states that earlier theoreticians, both followers to Hempel and those like Danto and White, have analysed history only as a product, but not the process of producing it by historians. He points to the need for a closer theoretical analysis of the research work of historians, and he recommends this analysis to start out from epistemic virtues, such as, “diligence, accuracy, and truthfulness”. This is something where he is alone among this collection of theorists. To pay close attention to the “performance” part of the historians work and not only to the outcome is Paul’s specific hallmark. However, he does not say that there is a specific difference between research products and other works of history. It will seem that he is equally interested in the production process of both.

It seems natural to connect Tamm’s article to Paul’s, as he also mentions the practice and performance of historians as important objects for historical theory. He wants to connect this approach with theoretical pragmatism in the sense of Dewey, James and Peirce, something that seems alien to Paul. The consequences of Tamm’s approach are somewhat difficult to follow in his text, but the theoretical basis seems to have obscured the news in the approach. This is obvious when he uses the term history for all sorts of historical works in the same way as other theorists had done earlier.

In spite of her specific approach via the linguistic turn to historical theory, Gabrielle Spiegel does not make her stance in the theory of history quite original. Her history of the linguistic turn and of the deviations from it is interesting in itself, but it does not really give a new dimension to the theory

of history. Her persistence with the linguistic turn (shared by Joan Scott), is to an extent shared by Hayden White, but he moved his attention to ethical theory in his later works. The linguistic turn as something characteristic of history writing is confusing. When one sees natural scientists looking at their computers in order to observe the reactions of their experiments staged in another room, one must ask if there is any knowledge based on “direct observation”, that is, a knowledge which is not transformed into words and concepts. One might have expected her to penetrate the theoretical presuppositions of the research work of historians.

Finally, Chris Lorenz uses “history” in the same way as other philosophers of history for all sorts of historical texts. That makes the unanimity among the six great, even if Paul and Tamm deviate in principle with their insistence on the need to analyse the “performance” aspect of the historian’s work, but even they seem to count all sorts of historical texts as such history. Lorenz opposes “scientific” history to narrative history, and he identifies the former with Rankean ideals in idealism as well as in methods. This idealism gave the state an elevated position and state and nation were identified. That sort of nationalistic history is what Lorenz opposes, and he seems not to have really observed other types of historical writing during the last two centuries. Lorenz’ “scientific” history alludes to the same historical works as Spiegel characterised as narrow empirical fact collections. She is then one of those theoreticians who have not grasped Ranke’s theoretical influence in idealistic terms, according to Lorenz. On the other hand one must say that Lorenz makes the “traditional” history-writers more uniform than they were.

In sum, most of the historical theorists who are presented here do not in their articles bother much about historical research and how it should be understood. Only Paul and Tamm mention the problem, but their articles are more programmatic than analytic in concerning historical research. All of them seem bound by a conservative theoretical notion of what history is and how it is written.

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РОЛЬФ ТОШТЕНДАЛЬ

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В ЧЕМ ЦЕЛЬ ПРОЕКТА «ТЕОРИЯ ИСТОРИИ»?

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Аннотация: В статье говорится о том, что «теория истории» из анализа того, что историки действительно делают или что историки должны делать, выросла в самостоятельную дисциплину или даже искусство. Теоретики истории общаются друг с другом, но редко общаются с историками. Такое обособление «теории истории» — явление недавнее, несмотря на то его истоки можно найти в философии Канта и его последователей, особенно у Фихте и Гегеля. Однако теоретики истории не видят в историках полноценных участников дискуссии. Автор статьи анализирует шесть статей, написанных известными теоретиками истории (Хейденом Уайтом, А. Р. Лоучем, Габриэлем Шпигелем, Германом Паулем, Марекком Таммом и Крис Лоренц), в которых «история» понимается как работа с текстами о прошлом и не более того. Когда же теоретики истории доходят до примеров с историческими текстами, чаще всего они обращаются к обзорам или кратким содержаниям вместо того, чтобы использовать отдельную исследовательскую работу как результат исторического знания. В статье ставится задача пересмотреть роль профессионального исторического исследования в поиске нового исторического знания. Хайден Уайт и А. Р. Лоуч, хотя и предлагают совершенно разные концепции, сходятся в идее отождествления «истории» с текстами, написанными о прошлом (или его частях). Для них «история» — это нарратив (Лоуч) или репрезентация (Уайт), но не само прошлое. Такой подход оспаривает Герман Пауль и Марек Тамм. Для последнего истина (исторических утверждений) становится «пактом истины» между историками и читателями.

Ключевые слова: историография, теория истории, философия истории, история как события прошлого, концептуализация, искусство, нарратив, факты, научная история.

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