

Routledge Approaches to History

DECONTESTING HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Apostolos Spanos



Decontesting Historical Consciousness

Decontesting Historical Consciousness provides a comprehensive exploration of historical consciousness, redefining it not just as an academic concept but as a fundamental human state of mind essential for navigating the modern world. By approaching historical consciousness from an ontological perspective and by viewing humans and the world as both “history-made” and “history-making”, the text illuminates how our understanding of the past directly shapes our individual well-being and collective survival.

After an overview of how historical consciousness has been defined over time, this book offers a new ontological definition of the concept. Then it proceeds to analyse the historicity of the world and the human, the historicity of time and historical narratives, and the ways in which history is used. Furthermore, the book discusses the relation of historical consciousness to historical knowledge and historical thinking. A distinctive feature of the work is the introduction of original typologies, including an 11-part model of historical thinking and a three-tiered quality level of consciousness: Innate, reflective, and scholarly. The author also bridges the gap between theory and practice by examining the application of history in politics, education, and entertainment, while utilizing Bloom’s taxonomy to categorize historical knowledge.

Designed for scholars, students, and practitioners in history, history education, philosophy, and sociology, this book is an essential resource for those seeking to enhance historical thinking and self-awareness. Its unique “two-dimensional” versus “three-dimensional” approach makes it a compelling read for anyone interested in how historical narratives and “biocultural” evolution influence contemporary democratic participation and global crises like climate change.

Apostolos Spanos is a professor of history at the University of Agder, Norway. His research and teaching are based on interdisciplinary approaches to history as a discipline and to historical evolution as a phenomenon. His interests lie in applied history, historical consciousness, the multi-dimensionality of historical time, the coinherence of present, past, and future, modelling history, the use of artificial intelligence in studying and teaching history, the use of games to study the past, and the study of innovation as a mode of historical existence and evolution.

Routledge Approaches to History

68 *Cultural Histories of Democracy*

Studies in Political Culture Since the 19th Century—Germany and Beyond

Thomas Mergel

69 *The Historiography of German Reunification*

Endeavours of Construction

Tilo Schabert

70 *Transnational Comparisons in Nineteenth-Century History*

Theory and Case Studies

Enrico Dal Lago

71 *Parahistory and the Popular Past*

Acts of Historical Production

Kalle Pihlainen

72 *Philosophy as Cultural Self-Understanding*

Peter Winch, R. G. Collingwood and the Human Sciences

Olli Lagerspetz and Jonas Ahlskog

73 *The Politics of Personal Experience*

Writing a History of Munchausen Syndromes

Chris Millard

74 *Religion, History and Identity Construction*

Identity Games

Tamer Balci

75 *Decontesting Historical Consciousness*

Apostolos Spanos

For more information about this series, please visit:
<https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Approaches-to-History/book-series/RSHISTORY>

Decontesting Historical Consciousness

Apostolos Spanos



NEW YORK AND LONDON

First published 2026
by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

and by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2026 Apostolos Spanos

The right of Apostolos Spanos to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-041-29020-9 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-041-29022-3 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-76765-7 (ebk)

DOI: [10.4324/9781003767657](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003767657)

Typeset in Sabon
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

Contents

[List of figures](#)

[Preface](#)

1 Introduction

[2T and 3T: a reflection on doing history](#)

[The cornerstones of historical knowledge](#)

[Contestation and decontestation of historical consciousness](#)

2 Historical consciousness contested

[Historical consciousness as consciousness of historicity](#)

[Historical consciousness as temporal consciousness](#)

[Rüsen's typology of historical consciousness](#)

[Historical consciousness as a meaning-making mental process](#)

[Historical consciousness and historical thinking](#)

[Historical consciousness, collective memory, and the use of history](#)

[Historical consciousness as an essentially contested concept](#)

[Merging reflections](#)

3 Defining historical consciousness

[Definition of consciousness](#)

[Definition of historical consciousness](#)

4 Being conscious of the historicity of the world

5 Being conscious of the historicity of the being

[Biological consciousness](#)

Social consciousness

Cultural consciousness

Biocultural consciousness

Historicity of the being and historical empathy

6 Being conscious of the historicity of time

Categories of time

Dimensions of historical time

Layers of historical time

Space of experience and horizon of expectation

7 Being conscious of the historicity of historical narratives

Historical narratives and their content

Types of historical narratives

Chronology, periodization, and concepts as challenges

8 Being conscious of the use of history

Rethinking history use in relation to historical consciousness

Types of history use

Merging reflections

9 Being conscious of historical knowledge

Touching on (parts of) historical knowledge

Types of historical knowledge

The process of historical knowledge—and its limits

Merging reflections

10 Being conscious of historical thinking

Types of historical thinking

From awareness to consciousness, via thinking

11 Innate, reflective, and scholarly historical consciousness

12 Conclusions

Bibliography

Index

Figures

3.1 Historical consciousness: categories, types, and subjects explored in the book.

7.1 "Schematic spiral of the levels of competency in historical learning", from *Evidence and Meaning: A Theory of Historical Studies* by Jörn Rüsen.

9.1 The process of historical knowledge.

9.2 Factors underlying the broadest pattern of history.

10.1 The process leading from historical awareness to historical consciousness.

Preface

This book is the outcome of a reflective study of scholarship on historical consciousness and related concepts, such as historical knowledge, historical thinking, and the use of history. It arose from my own need to deepen my understanding of the concept and phenomenon of historical consciousness, as well as from a desire to do my best for the students who have honoured me with their trust by enrolling in my course "Historical Consciousness and Applied History". Working with my students has continually challenged me to probe more deeply into the meaning of historical consciousness. My deepest thanks, therefore, go to all the students who, since 2022, have shared their questions and ideas with me.

I am grateful to PhD candidate Kristoffer Fjalsett and MA in history Sondre Vindbo for the many discussions on historical consciousness we have had over the years. They generously read portions of my manuscript at various stages and offered invaluable feedback. Our conversations pushed me to reflect on and clarify my own understanding of historical consciousness. Sondre served as my research assistant for this project, and his deep grasp of historical theory, combined with his keen observational acuity, strengthened the work. Kristoffer has been a consistently thoughtful interlocutor whose comments across a range of topics have challenged me to think more clearly and deeply—and get some more "dirt" in the hands of my mind.

I would like to thank Routledge for including the book in its "Approaches to History" series, and my editor, Max Novack, for his steady collaboration from the beginning of the project to the present. I am also grateful to my anonymous peer reviewer, whose feedback substantially improved the book's content and structure.

Please note that, due to my linguistic limitations, the book draws only on Anglophone and Scandinavian publications. Unless otherwise indicated, translations from Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish are my own.

I let the book fly hoping that it will contribute to a richer understanding of this important concept and phenomenon, and that it will support your reflection on your own historical consciousness and on the individuals and collective entities that shape your life and the worlds in which you live.

Kristiansand, January 2026

1 Introduction

DOI: [10.4324/9781003767657-1](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003767657-1)

Every human is a historian. Some of us study our in-time existence explicitly and consciously, while the rest deal with history implicitly and unconsciously. But there is no one who does not take into consideration the past and the future when a decision must be made in any given present. And if there is just a tiny number of people who do not think (much) about the future, there is no human being who does not think about the past. Those who do not (in fact cannot) do so have a diagnosis: Amnesia. And this incapability makes their lives difficult, and sometimes dangerous, especially since, as relevant research over the last decades has shown, “some amnesic patients struggle to project themselves into both the past and future”.¹

When we think about time (mainly about the past and its relation to the present), we do so in anthropocentric (often narcissistically anthropocentric) terms. Our questions focus on the human being and its central role in history. Some of these questions are indeed inviting to an ontological reflection on our existence and our historical role in the world. Some other questions are related, implicitly but clearly, to the very interesting subject of historical evolution, human and non-human. Any reflection on historical evolution is directly related to the phenomenon that is coined by historians, philosophers, psychologists, neuroscientists, and many others as “historical consciousness”. This book is a literature-based reflection on (1) the definition and theorization of historical consciousness, both as a phenomenon and as a concept; (2) the ontology of historical consciousness; (3) its relation to historical

reality and historical knowledge; and (4) its relation to historical thinking.

An explanation of the metaphorical use of “ontology” should be in place here. Originally, ontology is related to the study of the being and existence itself. Related to a concept like historical consciousness, the use of “ontology” and “ontological” refers to the study of the nature of the concept (one more metaphor that is slightly out of place), its fundamental elements, and how they are related to each other. But my ontological approach also has a literal meaning, since historical consciousness is related to the ontology of the world and the ontology of the human being, in particular their in-time existence and function and their existence as history-made creatures. In addition comes (again, metaphorically speaking) the ontology of historical time, that is, its different dimensions and their coinherence and interplay.

The keystones of this book are two theoretical theses that are fundamental in most studies of historical consciousness. The first is that *we are our history*, a synthesis of our biological, personal, and collective history. Each and every one of us is a historical creature, in fact, a historical product. This means that whatever you are, whatever you do, whatever you think, the ways in which you understand and identify yourself, and everything around you, all these and much more are outcomes of historical evolution. They are creations not only of your own lifetime but also of the time that created the physical environment around you and the time that created your values, your principles, and your criteria for positive or negative evaluations—in other words, the time that created your cultural worlds. This is the reason why being conscious about your history is of crucial importance and one of the reasons why historical consciousness gets more and more attention in academic discourses and educational policies related to the aims of learning history in and out of school.

The second keystone of this book is the thesis on the *coinherence of past, present, and future*, in other words, their historical existence not as three different dimensions of time but as inseparable elements of one historical continuum. We divide this continuum into

past, present, and future for practical reasons, for making it easier to orient ourselves in time and to make our lives better and easier on the basis of this orientation. Indeed, past, present, and future are basic categories of historical thinking that interplay and interinfluence each other every time you develop, maintain, change, or innovate your thoughts, decisions, values, principles, or norms. We, humans, are temporal creatures that live in a present that incorporates both the past and the future. In the excellent phrasing of Jan Tønnes Hansen, “the human is fundamentally a forward-looking, past-determined presentness that both worries about its future and carries a life history”.²

What is of utmost importance when thinking of present, past, and future as coinherent is that in the histotemporal continuum, each of them is an essential part of the other two (throughout the book, the term histotemporal signifies something related to the historical dimension of time, which will be discussed in [Chapter 6](#)). Any change in the perception of any of them automatically and unavoidably causes relevant changes to the perception of the other two. Present, past, and future, not simply coexist, but they exist mutually within each other, deeply interconnected and interdependent, without losing their individual identity.³

Another thing that is equally important to keep in mind every time you read or think about this continuum of past–present–future is that both past and future exist in a present. This means that past and future are contextual historical categories we use to orient ourselves in time (and life). With what we use to call “the passage of time”, which, in fact, means us and the world moving in time, in a specific context, something is registered as present, and on the basis of this present, we categorize everything “before” it as past and everything “ahead” as future. As we will see later in the book, the present is something flexible, as it sometimes refers to a few moments and sometimes to several decades. This is because we register something as present to say that this something is neither past nor future. So, from any given present, we have a perception of what does not exist anymore and what does not exist yet. And in

case things still exist as inseparable elements of our lives, we include them in something that is usually called “extended present”, which might incorporate both elements from the past and elements from the future. As for the content of the past and the future, it is easy to understand that the content of the future is clearly ideational. In a different way, this is also true for the past, because our registered past is not the past per se, but our own perception of the past, on the basis of (a) an individual or collective interpretation of whatever sources we have, an interpretation which is not always correct, or (b) of individual and collectives memories, which, as we will see later, are not always to be trusted.

Explicitly or implicitly, your mind employs the continuum past–present–future every time you evaluate actions (yours and by others), events, structures, or institutions, and every time you act. Indeed, it is impossible to think, evaluate, or act in the present without taking into consideration both the past and the future. This is a prerequisite for survival, and exactly because of that, it is something evolved over millions of years, so that a basic mental interplay of past–present–future is innate in the mental function of all humans (and most animals), a part of our nature. This is why we normally do not reflect on it.

2T and 3T: a reflection on doing history

Before opening the discussion of historical consciousness, I would like to say a few words on the meaning of the term “history”. The word history, used in academic and non-academic ways, might signify three interconnected but different concepts. First, it means the registered and remembered content of time. Second, it means the narratives we make about selected parts of the content of time (events, communities, groups, periods, etc.)—notice that there might be differing narratives about the same event, and that some narratives might be false or even fake. Third, the term History (notice the capital initial) might signify the academic and school

discipline that studies both the content of time and the narratives we construct about it.

Now, there are two ways of approaching history, that is, the content of time. The first, which is the traditional one, operates on the basis of a distinction between past and present. Past and present are supposed to be not only distinct but also separated. The past indeed influences the present, but the opposite is not possible. The past is distant and fixed, and “history” is something bygone that does not exist anymore. The second approach to history includes the future in the equation, and it speaks of the study of history and the construction of historical narratives as related not only to the past but also to the coinherence of past, present, and future. None of the three “dimensions” of time can exist without the other two, and each of them influences the other two. So, our perception of the past is a construction in—more correctly, of—a present that takes into consideration the future. According to this second approach, the study of history has a practical aim: It is directly related to the human need for orientation in life.

I am tempted to call these two approaches “two-dimensional” (2T) and “three-dimensional” (3T). The “2T” approach understands “history” as a synonym to the past, perceiving the past as something bygone, which exists independently of the present and in a distance from it, as something that can only be studied from a distance (the distance between past and present).⁴ In this understanding, a person, a group, an institution, an event, or anything else “becomes history” only when it is no longer related to the present. The past is supposed to be a “foreign country”, which we can learn from, draw examples from, and so on. But it is always so that “we” belong to another time than “them” in the past. Unfortunately, many historians and many teachers still approach and treat the past in this way, even if they often try to speak (unconvincingly) about history as important exactly because it is related to the present—you can recognize them by their neglect to clarify *how* the past is related to the present and by the fact that they never speak about the future as part of history.

The “3T” way of approaching history relates history to the past, present, and future, as well as to the basic human need for orientation in life. In this approach, the past is still alive in the present, directly and actively influencing our decisions and acts, at the individual and collective levels. The same applies to the future. All three historical dimensions of time coexist and interplay in historical evolution.⁵

The 3T understanding of history is more analytical than the 2T, less chronological and more sociocultural, indeed more reflective and existential, as it seeks to study and communicate the ways in which we develop our identity and the ways in which we think and act as historical creatures (i.e. as history-made and history-making individuals and groups). Historical consciousness is related to this way of approaching history.

Explicitly and implicitly, this book discusses in various places historical knowledge, in relation to its content, the methods supporting it, and its limits. To avoid misunderstandings as to how historical knowledge is built up and what it consists of, I would like to postpone for a minute the discussion of historical consciousness as a concept and dedicate a short section to the four cornerstones of historical knowledge.

The cornerstones of historical knowledge

The main aim of this section is to invite you to a reflection on the cornerstones, or pillars, of historical knowledge. Before discussing these elements and types, I need to clarify that there are other approaches and models of historical knowledge and that this is a subject that has been debated for long and has an equally long future. In my approach, the cornerstones of historical knowledge are historical data, historical concepts, historical theory, and historical method.

Historical data: Historical data are the main components of history and thus the raw material of History as a discipline. They are the

building blocks of historical information (what we might call “historical facts”) and historical narratives. There are two types of historical data: temporal and spatial. *Spatial data* represent the physical historical reality we live in, and they are related to the world’s hardware and software (i.e. natural elements, human-made material technologies, or the human-made environment, energy, and the social and cultural innovations that are essential for our survival and well-being). This type of historical data includes names of various kinds (people, objects, places, etc.), information on events, and descriptions of material and immaterial technologies. *Temporal data* represent moments, dates, and periods in past, present, and future times, and they support our orientation in the time maps of the temporal historical reality we live in. Historical data are the basic digits in the code of communication between a sender (a historian or anybody else who produces a historical narrative) and a receiver (individuals or groups who read, listen to, or watch this narrative). It is very important that the sender and receiver use the same code of communication, and this can only be done if the narrative is clear and precise in the use of all relevant terms, so that there is no space for misunderstandings.

Historical concepts: Concepts are generic communicative symbols of ideas, events, practices, actions, or phenomena that help us better understand the world around us. Concepts help us to do so by being the tools for organizing what we know and then using a common code of communication to categorize this cognitive knowledge. There are two types of historical concepts: Empirical and abstract. *Empirical historical concepts* are communicative generalizations of historical data; they are usually the results of categorization. We use them to generalize knowledge about spatial and temporal data related to the world’s hardware and software, as well as to material and immaterial technologies. Think, for example, of the concepts “revolution”, “democracy”, or “game”. *Abstract historical concepts* communicate ideational models that help us synthesize historical data (often categorized on the basis of relevant empirical concepts) to understand and communicate historical evolution. Think, for example, of the concepts “truth”,

"consciousness", or "soul". Some other abstract concepts might be related to how a historian works (e.g. "source criticism" or "historical narratives"), but they might also be related to how we systematize historical time or historical evolution (e.g. "space of experience", "medieval times", "continuity", and "change"). If historical data are the basic digits in the code of communication, historical concepts are what give meaning to this communication, making it something more than the transmission of information (in the form of "raw data"). So, it is even more important that concepts are clearly defined, to avoid misunderstandings which will unavoidably create wrong perceptions about historical data and historical evolution.⁶

Historical theory: The term "theory" in historical studies signifies a statement with a high degree of generalization, based on the cognitive study of relevant evidence and the metacognitive insight of (a) how history functions as a science, (b) how historical narratives are made, and (c) the dimensions of historical time. I would like to remind that there are three types of historical theories: *evidence-based theories* (also called "object" theories), deriving from the generalization of evidence; *metatheories on historical studies and the work of historians*, that is, theories on the use of history, historical method, source criticism, evidence analysis, historical narrative, etc., and *historical theories deriving from philosophizing time*, that is, theories related to the varying dimensions of historical time and the coinherence and interinfluence of these times.⁷

Historical method: The term method signifies two different things. First, the methods (in plural) we use to investigate and analyse historical data: These methods are related to the choice of sources, the investigation of sources, the critical use of sources, the dialogue between evidence and theory, the approach(es) of explanation we will adopt, and so on. Second, the term method (in singular) signifies the overall body of practices and techniques that dominate in a project and is strongly related to the research question and the working questions, the choice of theoretical approaches, and so on.⁸

The use of historical theory and method is related to how a historian, or even a non-historian, should approach her historical

data and concepts, in her effort to reach cognitive historical knowledge. At the same time, having an insight into how theory and method function is related to the communication of historical knowledge, that is, to how historical knowledge can be generated in clear, well-structured, well-argued, and trustworthy narratives. Finally, while seeking historical knowledge (as any other kind of knowledge), we should reflect on ourselves as (re)searchers and learners. Since historical knowledge is not something fixed, but always situated and relevant (“my” or “your” historical knowledge), we are essential parts of it.

Contestation and decontestation of historical consciousness

Historical consciousness has been studied by various disciplines (e.g. history, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychology, or neuroscience) and from varying starting points.⁹ In historical studies, the discussion of historical consciousness has been related mainly to history didactics and secondarily to the philosophy of history. This book is an ontological and conceptual contribution to the discourse of historical consciousness. This means that I am not discussing historical consciousness in relation to history didactics, and I am not considering it as an element or a goal of history teaching, in other words, as a skill that can be learned or as a pedagogical device. Excellent colleagues have been doing great work in this direction for at least the last two decades, and relevant publications abound.¹⁰ In addition, I should make clear that I am not presenting the history of historical consciousness as a concept.

The aim of the book is threefold. The first is to present an overview of the differing ways in which historical consciousness has been understood as a concept since its introduction in the 1960s. The second is to analyse historical consciousness ontologically, hoping that such an analysis will help anyone to improve their

historical consciousness, and will support historians and history educationists in better understanding and applying the concept in their work. My third goal is included in the second: As part of the ontology of historical consciousness, I will discuss historical consciousness in relation to two other central historical concepts, namely, historical knowledge and historical thinking.

So, a definitional reflection on historical consciousness lies at the core of this book. It should be noticed from the beginning that there is a plethora of definitions around, but the concept is not properly defined. Its conceptual polysemy constitutes a challenge in the theorization and teaching of historical consciousness, as it is often difficult to know what a historian means when she uses the term. Let me illustrate by an example, which I find characteristic. In an essay published in 2017, history educationist Robert Thorp discusses (in his own terminology, “deconstructs”) how one of the most influential scholars of historical consciousness, Klas-Göran Karlsson, defines and discusses the concept. Thorp shows that Karlsson operated with at least “five views of historical consciousness ... that could serve as a basis for stipulating a definition of the concept” and equally many ways of approaching its application, function, and operationalization.^{[11](#)}

I am claiming that historical consciousness is not simply a concept with varying definitions, but one of these concepts that in conceptual studies are coined as “essentially contested”. As we will see in [Chapter 2](#), essentially contested concepts are concepts for which varying definitions exist, but with none of them being accepted as the proper one. With this in mind, this book aims to contribute to an ontological decontestation of historical consciousness.

The first step towards such a decontestation is understanding the reasons for the contestation itself, that is, the polysemy of the concept at question. There are two main reasons for the polysemy of historical consciousness. The first is that it has been studied by scholars with varying backgrounds and interests, who defined it according to different epistemological criteria and on the basis of their own needs or aims.^{[12](#)} The second reason is related to the

concept itself. Historical consciousness is a compound concept consisting of two elements, "historical" and "consciousness", each of which has a wide conceptual nature. To quote Kenneth Nordgren, "compounding two such all-embracing terms as history and consciousness provides almost endless opportunities to associate perspectives and manifestations".¹³ Unfortunately, it also provides many opportunities for varying definitions.

I will discuss challenges related to the definition of historical consciousness in [Chapter 2](#), where I am studying various ways in which historical consciousness has been defined, all of them valuable and composed by excellent historians and history educationists, philosophers, anthropologists, and sociologists. Historical consciousness has in general been approached as a consciousness of historicity (the human as history-made and history-making) and/or a histotemporal consciousness, related to the interplay between the interpretation of the past, the perception of the present, and the anticipation of the future. To make the definition of the concept more suitable for teaching history in the classroom, history educationists have related it to several other abstract historical and historiographical concepts, such as historical thinking, historical narration, history use, or collective memory. To make the definitional study of historical consciousness more structured and reader-friendly, in [Chapter 2](#), I am discussing the definitions under the following rubrics:

- Definitions approaching historical consciousness as a consciousness of historicity
- Definitions approaching historical consciousness as a temporal consciousness
- Rüsen's typology of historical consciousness
- Definitions approaching historical consciousness as a meaning-making mental process
- Definitions approaching historical consciousness in relation to historical thinking
- Definitions approaching historical consciousness in relation to collective memory and the use of history

[Chapter 3](#) aims at opening the decontestation of historical consciousness by answering the "what-is question" in an ontological way. Approaching historical consciousness as a type of human consciousness, I am first discussing the term consciousness in neuroscientific and psychological terms, to proceed then to the ontological content of it, which ends with the presentation of my

operational definition of historical consciousness. [Chapter 3](#) is, in fact, the introduction to [Chapters 4–10](#), in which I am presenting concrete areas and subjects, of which anyone (not just historians) should be historically conscious. The book is founded on the definitional thesis that historical consciousness is a state of mind, and as a state of mind, it unfolds in two cognitive, three metacognitive, and two epistemological areas, which are presented in [Chapters 4–10](#).

Cognitive historical consciousness is related to the so-called “historicity of the world” and “historicity of the being”. [Chapters 4](#) and [5](#) are dedicated to this type of historical consciousness.

[Chapter 4](#) focuses on being historically conscious of the world as history-made, and sometimes as history-making. It is based on a perception of the world as a system that has hardware and software dimensions. The world’s hardware encompasses all natural elements, including human beings, as well as human-made material technologies, in other words, the human-constructed environment. The world’s software has two components: Natural and human-made. The natural software is energy, while the human-made software consists of what I term *immaterial technologies*, that is, the social and cultural innovations (symbols, techniques, laws, rules, norms, values, principles, etc.) that are essential to our survival and flourishing.

[Chapter 5](#) discusses being historically conscious in terms of the so-called “historicity of the being”, that is, the human as history-made and history-making. It focuses on four dimensions of human historicity, related to (a) our quantitative and qualitative biological evolution, how this evolution influences history and how it is influenced by historical evolution; (b) our social evolution as homo sapiens and how this evolution influences historical evolution; (c) our cultural evolution and how this evolution influences historical evolution; and (d) our biocultural evolution, that is, how genetic evolution and cultural evolution interact in various and complex ways.

Metacognitive historical consciousness is related to the “historicity of time”, the “historicity of historical narratives”, and the use of

history. It is discussed in [Chapters 6, 7, and 8](#).

[Chapter 6](#) focuses on the historicity of time. As a first step, I am discussing four categories of time, namely, physical time (the time we measure in clocks and calendars), biological time (time as experienced and measured by your body), cultural time (varying ways in which different cultures measure, structure, and organize time), and historical time (the time as understood in relation to how we perceive historical evolution). Second, I am getting closer to historical time, to present different dimensions of it. Third, I am presenting theories approaching time in terms of various temporal layers that coexist in any given present. And finally, I am presenting a theory claiming that our decisions and actions in the present are the result of an internal dialogue between our perception of the past and our anticipation of the future.

[Chapter 7](#) is dedicated to being conscious of the historicity of historical narratives, in other words, to being conscious of narratives as history-made and history-making cultural products. Its first section discusses the content of historical narratives and their function. Then, I am presenting various types of historical narratives. Finally, I am discussing chronology and periodization as challenges related to composing and studying historical narratives, to close the chapter with a discussion of how you could be conscious of the importance and the meaning of empirical and abstract concepts as elements of historical narratives.

[Chapter 8](#) approaches historical consciousness in terms of history use. It opens with a discussion of how to rethink the use of history in terms of historical consciousness. Then, it presents various types of history use, related to the application of history in various areas of life, such as in politics, education, commerce, or entertainment.

Epistemological historical consciousness is related to how we gather and develop historical knowledge and how we think of ourselves, the others, and the world in historical terms. This type of historical consciousness is discussed in [Chapters 9 and 10](#).

[Chapter 9](#) reflects on historical knowledge and its limits. As a first step, I am presenting a few thoughts on historical knowledge, historical truth, and objectivity. Then, I am presenting briefly four

types, in fact areas, of historical knowledge: Factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive knowledge. Then, I am communicating some fundamental thoughts on the process of historical knowledge and its limits. In this last section of the chapter, I am focusing on the process of seeking, interpreting, and analysing historical evidence, and I am discussing the possibility of manipulating this evidence, intentionally or not. I am also touching upon phenomena such as anachronism, imagined history, and historical perspective-taking. Finally, I am briefly presenting the difference between proximate and ultimate causes in historical evolution.

[Chapter 10](#) discusses historical consciousness in relation to another fundamental historical concept and phenomenon, namely, historical thinking. The chapter starts by referring to the difference between physical reality and temporal reality and focusing on the human need for constant orientation in both. Then, it presents my typology of historical thinking, which includes 11 types, divided into three categories, on the basis of the content, the operation, and the epistemological dimension of historical thinking. Namely, I am presenting episodic, semantic, counterfactual, imaginative, synthetic, analytical, critical, temporal, scenario, procedural, and self-reflective thinking. Finally, the chapter discusses the process leading from historical awareness to historical consciousness via historical thinking.

[Chapter 11](#) is not about types of historical consciousness and areas in relation to which it can be studied and improved. This chapter is about the quality levels of historical consciousness. I am proposing that there are three levels: An innate historical consciousness, which is basic and fundamental and related to our practical life, a reflective historical consciousness, which is more advanced, and a scholarly historical consciousness, which is the result of relevant education and training.

There is something crucial I would like to underline: Historical consciousness being a generic and abstract phenomenon of vast dimensions, any presentation of concrete areas related to it could never be complete and definitive. Thus, [Chapters 3–11](#) should not

be perceived as all-covering but as an invitation to a deeper engagement with historical consciousness as a phenomenon of fundamental significance for our existence and identity.

* * *

Historical consciousness has become, during the recent decades, a crucial element of history teaching and a central goal in history learning. My aim is to help anyone seeking historical consciousness (especially history teachers and students) by contributing to its ontological study and theorization. I need to underline once more that the reflections and definitional and theoretical proposals presented in this book are not exclusive. Others, historians and non-historians, might come up with alternative approaches and reflections. I believe that this would be welcome by anyone who believes in the social, political, and cultural importance of having historically conscious citizens and society members. The quality of democracy, for example, depends on the existence of a critical mass of historically conscious citizens, as citizens who are not historically conscious can be easily manipulated, not only in relation to how fake or distorted pasts supposedly influence the present but also because of the use of ahistorical dystopic futures as tools leading to present decisions and actions that serve the desires of power-havers. So, any further theoretical discussion and implementation of historical consciousness is welcome. But it should be emphasized that any alternative reflection on historical consciousness should be theoretically and conceptually clear and sound.

My overall hope is that the following chapters will support you to better understand historical evolution and historical consciousness and will motivate you to further study the most fundamental dimensions of individual and collective life: Our history-made existence and identity, our relation and interaction with time, and our history-making agency.

Notes

1. [Buonomano \(2017\)](#): 198 (Kindle). ↵
2. [Tønnes Hansen \(2001\)](#): 160), cited from [Jensen \(2012\)](#): 21). The Danish language has this beautiful word, "nutidighed", which means the state of being in the present moment. I translate it here as presentness. ↵
3. For the Christians among the readers, it might help to note that the term "coherence" is used in theology to speak about the relationship between the three divine persons of the Holy Trinity. ↵
4. This has been observed by several historians; see, for example, [Jensen \(2009\)](#): 43); [Karlsson \(2014\)](#): 57. ↵
5. Let it be noted that the "three-dimensional" approach could also be understood as "uni-timentional", given that past, present, and future are perceived as one inseparable continuum. I prefer to call it three-dimensional, because it makes the comparison to the two-dimensional easier to grasp. ↵
6. On the use of concepts in history and the humanities, see [Koselleck & White \(2002\)](#); [Bal \(2002\)](#); [Bal \(2009\)](#); [Mair \(2008\)](#). ↵
7. On theory use in historical studies, see [Akker \(2021\)](#); [Kleinberg, Wallach Scott & Wilder \(2022\)](#); [Ohara \(2022\)](#); [Paul \(2015\)](#); [Claus & Marriott \(2012\)](#); [Fulbrook \(2002\)](#); [Green & Troup \(1999\)](#). ↵
8. On method in history see, among others, [Luarsabishvili \(2022\)](#); [Ahlskog \(2021\)](#); [Manning \(2020\)](#); [Tosh \(2013\)](#); [Claus & Marriott \(2012\)](#). ↵
9. [Nordgren \(2019\)](#), for example, discusses the tension between the perception of historical consciousness as an ability to historicize the world and its perception as an anthropological universal related to the human ability to create meaning out of experiences of time. ↵
10. The interested reader will benefit significantly by studying the work of (in alphabetic order) Robbert-Jan Adriaansen, Anna Clark, Alexandre Dessingué, Catherine Duquette, Daniel S. Friedrich, Carlos Gölbl, Maria Grever, Bernard Eric Jensen, Klas-Göran Karlsson, Carlos Kölbl, Andreas Körber, Stéphane Lévesque, Erik Lund, Kenneth Nordgren, Jörn Rüsen, Peter Seixas, Jürgen Straub, Robert Thorp, Arie Wilschut, David Winted, and Paul Zanazarian (I am afraid this list is unfair to more historians and history educationists, whose work is of equal quality and importance). ↵
11. [Thorp \(2017\)](#). ↵
12. [Grever & Adriaansen \(2019\)](#): 815) illustrated the problem in these words: "Although the concept of historical consciousness is subject of an incredible amount of studies, its meaning and empirical application remain vague and rather enigmatic. One of the reasons is that the concept is grounded in various philosophical, anthropological, historiographic and educational disciplines with different normative (political or didactic) agendas". ↵
13. [Nordgren \(2019\)](#): 782). ↵

2 Historical consciousness contested

DOI: [10.4324/9781003767657-2](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003767657-2)

We are history-made and conscious creatures. Even our consciousness is (at least partly) history-made. Thus, historical consciousness is the most important sort of consciousness we might have. During the recent decades, the importance of historical consciousness in life has become increasingly recognized. More and more national educational programmes and reforms include historical consciousness to the core aims of history teaching, underlining its fundamental importance in the development and maintenance of social coherence, cultural matureness, and political stability in the form of well-functioning democracy. Furthermore, other disciplines, such as political science, sociology, religion, ethnology, or literature studies, include historical consciousness to the theoretical approaches that support their analysis of various topics.¹

The phenomenon of historical consciousness gets more and more attention, while historical consciousness as a concept has become the main subject of numerous publications. But the study of historical consciousness, both as a phenomenon and as a concept, faces several epistemic and theoretical challenges, that might be divided into two parts, each related to one of the two concepts historical consciousness consists of: Some of these challenges are related to the meaning and function of history, while others are related to the meaning and function of consciousness.

Since the 1970s, and because of a reformation of history education in Germany, in order to deal with the country's difficult past,² historical consciousness entered the scene of history

education and has become a central concept in historical studies and history teaching.³ During this time, it has been discussed in various scientific environments. The relevant discourses and definitions are so broad that it is not possible to discuss them in full length and depth. In the following pages, I am presenting a short (and by no means exclusive) overview of efforts to define historical consciousness in history, history didactics, philosophy, anthropology, and sociology. My aim is to sketch the development of historical consciousness as a theoretical concept in History. This is an almost impossible task, as Klas-Göran Karlsson has noted, “has several layers of meaning”.⁴

Historical consciousness might be understood as a specific sort of consciousness related to the historical dimension of the human being and the world(s) we live in—the term “human being” meaning each one of us individually and each of the communities we belong to. Thus, any discussion of historical consciousness should start with approaching the two basic questions: What is history? And what is consciousness? Consciousness is a rather contested concept. History is slightly easier to deal with, but this does not mean that its meaning is clear to the untrained (and sometimes even to the trained) mind. Therefore, I find it necessary to dedicate the next chapter to an ontological discussion of historical consciousness, in an effort to create a basis of common conceptual understanding that is necessary for the study of historical consciousness and its practice in everyday life. My main working questions in [Chapter 3](#) will be: What is the meaning of “consciousness” in the framework of studying history to understand who we are? And what is the meaning of “historical” in relation to human consciousness? But before getting there, in this chapter, I would like to present an overview of how historical consciousness has been approached and defined so far.

I would like to underline that I discuss only definitions that I value, definitions that have helped me better understand (sometimes by negation) the meaning of historical consciousness. In order to save (your) time and (the book’s) space, I am not presenting definitions that are mere reproductions of older ones. In addition, please notice

that I am not discussing definitions that I evaluate as wrong. My aim with this book is not to review or correct approaches to historical consciousness that I find mistaken, but simply to present approaches and a definition that I believe could help you better understand historical consciousness and reflect on yourself as a historically conscious human—and perhaps as a conscious teacher of history.

To make the effort of studying the definitional adventures of historical consciousness easier, I am not following a chronological presentation of definitions. Instead, I am structuring the material thematically, focusing on elements that are central in understanding and defining historical consciousness. These elements are the following:

1. Historical consciousness as consciousness of historicity, that is, as an understanding of how we are history-made and history-making
2. Historical consciousness as temporal consciousness, that is, as consciousness of how past, present, and future are related in our minds, in our efforts to orient ourselves in time
3. Jörn Rüsen's typology of historical consciousness as narrative competence
4. Historical consciousness as a meaning-making mental process
5. Historical consciousness related to historical thinking
6. Historical consciousness related to collective memory and the use of history

Please note that some of the definitions put some of these elements together in different combinations. I will try to make you aware of that while discussing the relevant elements of these definitions, hoping that the final result will not be confusing or boringly repetitive.

Historical consciousness as consciousness of historicity

I am starting the discussion of definitional approaches to historical consciousness by focusing on the scholars who understood it as a consciousness (a) of humans (individuals and groups) and the world as history-made, (b) of every human interaction and institution as formed by historical processes, and (c) of humans as history-making, that is, as having an agency that influences historical evolution. The definitions discussed in the following pages do not include all these elements; they mainly focus on the historicity of the human being as formed by its past (which is almost always presented as "history" per se).

The philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer was the first to systematically discuss historical consciousness as consciousness of historicity in the academic essay "The problem of historical consciousness", which appeared in French in 1963 and in English translation in 1975.⁵ The core of the essay is philosophical, and historical consciousness is approached from an epistemological and methodological (mainly hermeneutical) perspective, not historically. Despite that, the essay is an important contribution to the field of historical consciousness, so much so that there are historians who coin the understanding of historical consciousness as an awareness of historicity as "Gadamerian".

Gadamer defined historical consciousness (which he also calls historical self-consciousness) as "the privilege of modern man to have a full awareness of the historicity of everything present and the relativity of all opinions".⁶ What is important in this definition is Gadamer's thesis that the historicity of the being is related to the relativity of human opinions. This thesis underlines the domination of (historical) context over human thinking. Gadamer writes that "understanding always implies a pre-understanding which is in turn prefigured by the determinate tradition in which the interpreter lives and which shapes his prejudices".⁷ This means that the context in which we function influences all our experiences and also the ways in which we perceive the past. This is why "our present-day consciousness of history is fundamentally different from the manner in which the past appeared to any foregoing people or epoch".⁸

In his approach to historical consciousness, Gadamer was influenced by the philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey, especially his Philosophy of Life (*Lebensphilosophie*).⁹ As Gadamer noted in his *Truth and Method*, Dilthey “was always attempting to legitimate the knowledge of what was historically conditioned as an achievement of objective science, despite the fact that the knower is himself conditioned”. Gadamer also witnesses that for Dilthey, a historically conscious person sees everything as historical: “Historical consciousness discerns historical spirit in all things”. So, it is not only the past that is historically conditioned but also our knowledge about the past. Under Dilthey’s influence, Gadamer states that the historical observer is tied to time and place, adding that “this is precisely the claim of historical consciousness, namely, to have a truly historical viewpoint on everything”.¹⁰

What is worth noticing is that Gadamer does not ascribe any historical consciousness, not even an elementary one, to the premodern human. He claims that historical consciousness emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,¹¹ and thus, it is only the modern human that has the privilege, and sometimes burden, of historical consciousness.¹² To sum up the discussion of Gadamer’s understanding and definition of historical consciousness, I would like to quote his aphorism, published already in his *Truth and Method*: “Historical consciousness is a mode of self-knowledge”.¹³

This “self-knowledge” is reflective and based on an analytical approach to the historical narratives that have been handed down to the historically conscious, or consciousness-seeking, human. Gadamer states this in an anthropomorphic way, by presenting historical consciousness as having its own agency. This is what he writes:

Modern consciousness—precisely as “historical consciousness”—takes a reflexive position concerning all that is handed down by tradition. Historical consciousness no longer listens sanctimoniously to the voice that reaches out

from the past but, in reflecting on it, replaces it within the context where it took root in order to see the significance and relative value proper to it. This reflexive posture towards tradition is called *interpretation*.¹⁴

Gadamer stated that "interpretation is applied not only to texts and verbal tradition, but to everything bequeathed to us by history", be it historical incidents, expressions, behaviour, or anything else.¹⁵ As we will see in a minute, the interpretation of the past was central in the way another prominent student of historical consciousness, Karl-Ernst Jeismann, understood the relationship between historical consciousness and the past. This interpretation is for Jeismann something that can be fruitful only if it is performed on the basis of an awareness of the past as something that must be understood in its own terms, and not in the terms of the present. Gadamer speaks of "a developed historical consciousness, one that is aware of historical distance",¹⁶ and by doing so, he makes an implicit distinction between developed and undeveloped historical consciousness.

The historian who is accredited with the opening of a thorough study of historical consciousness as a phenomenon is Karl-Ernst Jeismann.¹⁷ In an essay published in 1979, he identified three elements that are central in understanding historical consciousness. First, he defined historical consciousness as the constant awareness that humankind and all social structures and all ways of social life have a historicity, that is, they exist in time, they have a past and a future, and they are not fixed in time and absolute, but changing. (What is very interesting is that this definition, attributed by everyone to Jeismann, is in fact a definition that Jeismann presents as a quote from Theodor Schieder.¹⁸) Second, he stated that historical consciousness is (in addition to studying the past) related to the interplay between interpreting the past, understanding the present, and anticipating the future. And third, he claimed that historical consciousness is related to the recognition that the past

exists within our current representations and ideas, which means that it is constructed on the basis of present perceptions and needs. In Jais-mann's words:

By historical consciousness we mean the permanent presence of the awareness that mankind and all social institutions and forms of coexistence created by us exist in time, i.e. they have an origin and a future and represent nothing unchangeably or unconditionally. Besides the mere knowledge of or interest in history a historical consciousness also incorporates the relationship between interpretation of the past, understanding of the present and perspective on the future. Since history cannot be perceived as an image of past realities, but can only be made aware through selection and interpretive reconstruction, historical consciousness is the awareness that the past is present in representations and conceptions.^{[19](#)}

There are a few things that should be noted in relation to Jeismann's definition:

1. The first point of his definition is the fundament of what later was coined as "historicity of the being"—something I am returning to in [Chapter 5](#). It is logical to believe that the first point of Jeismann's definition is influenced by Gadamer's definition.
2. In his second point, Jeismann related historical knowledge directly to knowledge about the past or the interest in what he calls "history", which is understood as equal to the past.
3. At the same point, Jeismann connects historical consciousness to the interpretation of the past, understanding of the present, and perspective on the future. This has been the most popular element of definitions of historical consciousness since its introduction—in fact, as you will see in the following pages, it is the sole element of many later definitions. Notice the difference in how the three temporal categories are approached: the present is understood, the future is seen in perspective (a perspective that varies between different individuals/groups, different periods, and different contexts), and the past is not known but interpreted (which again means that there might be varying interpretations of the "same" past).
4. With his second point, Jeismann introduces the importance of the future in the temporal existence of the human being. It is probably not by chance that, as Bernard Eric Jensen has noted, this essay appeared the same year as Reinhard Koselleck's *Futures Past* (*Vergangene Zukunft*), where the latter presented his theory of "space of experience" (what we know about the past) and "horizon of expectation" (our anticipations of the future), stating that every decision we make in any given present is the result of an internal dialogue between the two.²⁰ This means that Jeismann's point can be understood in a general context of historical studies in Germany, when/where

historians and history theorists started paying more attention to the future as a constitutive element of the present.

5. The third element of Jeismann's definition underlines the importance of the past in our way of thinking in the present, more concretely in the way we perceive and represent the world around us. At the same time, it sets the individual at the heart of the process leading to historical consciousness, relating our historical consciousness to our "representations and conceptions", and, as he additionally writes, to our emotional experiences.

Most contemporary scholars define historical consciousness in relation to the second element of Jeismann's definition, the one approaching it as a consciousness of the interplay between interpretation of the past, understanding of the present, and perspective on the future. To be precise, many scholars defining historical consciousness as a consciousness of temporality do indeed mention historicity, mainly in terms of the human as history-made and history-making. But most of them do not proceed further to the discussion of the content of historicity, both as a concept and as a phenomenon—instead, they focus on historical thinking and history use as mediums that can make historical consciousness more approachable to students. Thankfully, the understanding of historical consciousness as a consciousness of historicity has not disappeared. The following paragraphs are dedicated to scholars who adopt it in discussing the phenomenon of historical consciousness.

In 2014, anthropologist Janet Lee Roitman, relating historical consciousness to the contemporary discourse on the phenomenon of crisis, defined historical consciousness as "the philosophical and experiential awareness of one's own historical formation and of the historical quality of that knowledge itself".²¹ Her approach, which reminds us of the first and the third element of Jeismann's definition, focuses on both the human being, our historical knowledge, and our historical awareness as history-made, in other words, as results of historical processes. This element of the awareness on the human being as a history-made creature is one of the commonly repeated

perceptions of what historical consciousness is. Roitman also claims that being historically conscious is itself historically important.

Two years later, in 2016, history educationist Robert Thorp defined historical consciousness primarily in terms of historicity awareness: Historical consciousness is “an awareness of historicity that can be applied to understand how history is characterized by contextual contingency”.²² Referring to Jeis-mann, Thorp reads correctly that

Jeismann views an awareness of historicity as the definition of historical consciousness. This awareness is constituted by knowledge of and interest in the past, and the relationship between interpretation of the past, understanding of the present and perspectives on the future.²³

The latter is the reason why Thorp also defined historical consciousness as “an understanding of how matters past, present, and future relate to each other in a way that enables the individual to create a specific kind of meaning in relation to history”. Notice that Thorp does not write about past, present, and future in general, but about past, present, and future *matters*. He does not explain what he includes in “matters”, but my understanding is that it means past, present, and future people, events, situations, structures, or anything else that is considered in any given case. Indeed, Thorp claims that there is no ontological relation between past, present, and future, and therefore, there is an ontological challenge to any definition that is based on such a relation.²⁴

Before proceeding to the next definition, let me note that Thorp is one of the few scholars who speak about two types, or levels, of historical consciousness, using as a criterion whether the individual is aware on how historical narratives are influenced by the interplay of historical times. What he calls “non-reflexive” historical consciousness is a consciousness that does not display such an awareness, while the reflexive one does so.²⁵

Let me now close the section with a historicity-based definition that was published in 2020 by history theorist Maria Grever in her

essay “Why historical consciousness?”. For Grever,

historical consciousness implies an awareness of the fundamental historical character of human behavior, knowledge, institutions, events, and developments in the world, including one’s own position. In this sense, historical consciousness is a temporary outcome of a changing *state of mind* concerning orientation in time of human beings who are involved in transforming, sometimes overlapping mnemonic communities.^{[26](#)}

Here, Grever approaches historical consciousness as a state of mind that is temporary and changing. The definition focuses on the historicity of the human being and of our perception of the world and relates historical consciousness to the human being’s orientation in time and to mnemonic communities, that is, communities whose identity is based on shared historical memories.

As mentioned before, this historicity approach to historical consciousness lost power over time, and most scholars discussing the concept focused, almost exclusively, on an understanding of historical consciousness related to the ways in which we process past, present, and future in our minds. It is to this type of definitions I am dedicating the following section.

Historical consciousness as temporal consciousness

As presented earlier, the second point in Jaismann’s definition of historical consciousness is dedicated to how past, present, and future are interconnected and interplay in our minds, when we try to make sense of ourselves, others, our life, and the world, and when we try to orient ourselves in time and space. This element has since enjoyed a life on its own, as it has become the sole element for a good number (if not most) definitions of historical consciousness.

It should be noted that Jaismann did not speak of a relationship between past, present, and future *per se*. He was careful enough to locate the relationship within the area of the mental processes, on the basis of which humans make sense of everything that has a temporal dimension. One of the elements of historical consciousness, he writes, is the connection between *interpretation* of the past, *understanding* of the present, and *perspective* on the future. Indeed, this is exactly what we do to orient ourselves in life and the world: We interpret the remnants of the past, and we construct historical narratives about it (which others will interpret in their turn), we perceive the present to the best of our ability, and we anticipate the future.

Let it be noted that this is not a new, not even a modern, thought. It goes back to at least the Roman philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BC) and the philosopher and theologian Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD).

Discussing wisdom, Cicero states that it has three parts that coexist, the first related to the past, the second to the present, and the third to the future:

Wisdom is the knowledge of what is good, what is bad and what is neither good nor bad. Its parts are memory, intelligence, and foresight. Memory is the faculty by which the mind recalls what has happened. Intelligence is the faculty by which it ascertains what is. Foresight is the faculty by which it is seen that something is going to occur before it occurs.^{[27](#)}

Augustine takes up the question of time in the eleventh book of his *Confessions*. Time has three dimensions, he states, which can be found in the soul and nowhere else, and which exist, all three, in the present: the past as memory, the present as observation, and the future as expectation:

Perhaps it would be appropriate to say, “There are three times: the present respecting things past, the present respecting things present, and the present respecting things

future". These three things do somehow exist in the soul, and I do not perceive them anywhere else: for the present of things past is memory; the present of things present is paying attention; and the present of things future is expectation.^{[28](#)}

Many historians and non-historians defined historical consciousness this way, or at least they related the concept to this approach. This is, for example, how Bernard Eric Jensen, one of the most prominent history theorists in Scandinavia, relates historical consciousness to this mental interplay:

Historical consciousness is based on the understanding that the past is present in the present as memory and interpretation of the past, and that the future is present as a set of expectations. The concept thus directs attention towards the human existential condition, that in a lived present, both a remembered past and an expected future are always included. It consequently refers to the entire interplay that exists between people's interpretation of the past, understanding of the present, and expectation of the future.^{[29](#)}

Regarding the function of historical consciousness, Jensen argues that "people use it to orient themselves in time and space" and that this is achieved through a series of complex and interwoven processes. He mentions four of them, namely: (a) historical consciousness as identity; (b) historical consciousness as an encounter with "the other", in the sense of anyone and anything different; (c) historical consciousness as a sociocultural learning process about how life can and must be lived; and (d) historical consciousness as "value and principle clarification", meaning as a background that can justify people's choices in relation to their interests, values, and principles. He links historical consciousness to our narrative competence, which he calls "scenario competence", that is, the ability to establish, enact, and evaluate socio-cultural scenarios.^{[30](#)}

Jensen claims that historical consciousness is not something innate, but something that is developed in parallel with our cultural and narrative selves, through a complex set of learning and interaction processes. At the same time, having a historical consciousness is not something we choose; it is an integral part of the human condition. But it is also something we can also lose, in “rare and extreme cases”, as, for example, when our memory is damaged.³¹

Jensen evaluated the definition of historical consciousness as the interplay between the *interpretation* of the past, the *understanding* of the present, and the *perspective* on the future as the classical definition of historical consciousness in Central and Northern Europe.³² Given that Jensen himself could be evaluated as the “father” of historical consciousness in Scandinavia (he is Danish and wrote most of his relevant works in Danish), most of the relevant publications in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway are directly influenced by his approach and the definition he adopted.

One of them is Norwegian Jan Bjarne Bøe, who perceives historical consciousness as historicity, but he links this historicity to the interplay between the interpretation of the past, the understanding of the present, and the perception of the future. Historical consciousness, he writes,

is, in its simplest sense, the awareness that humans are historical beings, and that their interpretation of the past, understanding of the present, and perception of the future have decisive significance for who they are and what they do”³³

Regarding the function of historical consciousness, Bøe argues that it operates at both the individual and group levels. Discussing its functions, he refers to Jensen’s four functions and emphasizes that the most central among them is “to maintain and develop identity and imagined communities”. Concerning narrative competence, Bøe writes that “it is primarily the ability to tie coherent connections

between the past and the present in such a way that the past provides individuals and groups with an orientation to aid in their own life practice". Indirectly, he also suggests that historical consciousness is historically shaped, as it is influenced by the relevant cultural field that shapes human imaginations and meaning-making. "Historical consciousness is a cultural expression", he writes.³⁴

A Swedish historian, who seems to be influenced by Jensen and who, in turn, influenced the study of historical consciousness in Sweden considerably, is Klas-Göran Karlsson. Referring to Jeismann, Karlsson uses the same definition as Jensen, evaluating it as "classic": Historical consciousness is "the relationship of interpretation of the past, understanding of the present and perspectives on the future". He relates this definition to Koselleck's theory on "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation", and he states that "historical consciousness is a mental compass that helps us orient ourselves in time and create meaning in life".³⁵

In 2014, S. Bracke, C. Flaving, M. Köster, and M. Zulsdorf-Kersting, paraphrasing the second element of Jeismann's definition, defined historical consciousness as "a complex interaction of interpretations of the past, perceptions of the present and expectations towards the future".³⁶ The authors refer to Jeismann's definition and Rüsen's approach to historical consciousness as a meaning-making process aiming at orientation in life.

A definition similar to that of Bracke, Flaving, Köster, and Zulsdorf-Kersting was published two years later by Swedish social science educationist Kenneth Nordgren: "Historical consciousness is the process by which we as individuals, emotively and cognitively, understand the relations between past, present, and future".³⁷

I would like to underline two differences between these definitions. The first is that Nordgren emphasizes the double dimension of historical consciousness: it is not only cognitive but also emotive. The second is a difference that is small textually, but considerable conceptually, and thus theoretically: By speaking about relations between past, present, and future, Nordgren sets the focus

on historical development itself, on relations between past, present, and future as something that exists independently of the observer. Bracke, Flaving, Köster, and Zulsdorf-Kersting, on the other side, set the focus inside the historically conscious (or consciousness-seeking) person, as they underline the significance of the individual's interpretations, perceptions, and expectations. In other words, they claim that the only relations that exist between past, present, and future are those we construct in our minds.

In 2015, history educationist Catherine Duquette claimed that "historical consciousness is best defined as the understanding an individual has of temporality". This means that "historical consciousness is the interpretation of the past that allows the understanding of the present and the consideration of the future" (notice that, as in previous similar definitions, the past is related to interpretation and the present to understanding, but in Duquette's definition, the future is related not to expectation, but to consideration). She added that "historical consciousness can be observed through the narratives used by an individual to make sense of the complex ties between past events and today's ever-changing world". She divided historical consciousness into two levels, the first being coined as non-reflective and the second as reflective. "To be reflective", she writes, "historical consciousness must base its understanding of the past on the interpretations emanating from the process of historical thinking".³⁸ Non-reflective is the historical consciousness of an individual who is capable of studying historical evidence, making sense of it, and seeing the relationship between past, present, and future content of time. At the reflective level, the historical-consciousness-seeking individual is aware of her own subjectivity in considering historical facts and narratives, thinking about history, and understanding the past.

Similar to Duquette's is the definition of political and social scientist Andrew Glencross, also published in 2015. Glencross defines the phenomenon of historical consciousness as "awareness and understanding of the temporality of historical experience, the acknowledged consciousness of living in history". In the abstract of

the same paper, Glencross includes in his definition the element of the relation between past, present, and future: "Historical consciousness is defined as the understanding of the temporality of historical experience or how past, present and future are thought to be connected". He also speaks of three genres of historical consciousness, namely, history as teacher, history as narrative, and history as representation. What is the meaning of these genres? The first, *history as teacher*, is the old and well-established understanding of the practical importance of history as an arsenal of moral exemplars and cases of pedagogical value for the present and the future (let us recall that Cicero understood history as the teacher of life—*historia magistra vitae*³⁹). *History as narrative* focuses on a way of doing history by retelling the past, ideally in detail and avoiding any moral or political judgment. *History as representation* deals with the past "by seeking to uncover the signs, symbols, and even language that enable us to make sense of the past in *its own terms*, as well as how these same elements have been *used to represent a particular version of the past*".⁴⁰

In 2019, two history theorists, Maria Grever and Robbert-Jan Adriaansen, published an article on historical consciousness, in which they included a definition that is rather general. In their own words: "[The] whole process of becoming aware of any past in the present is dynamic and constantly changing, both on collective and individual levels, and is usually referred to as 'historical consciousness'".⁴¹ Notice that in this definition, historical consciousness is understood as a mental process, in fact, a process that is dynamic and constantly changing. It should be noted that the future is not explicitly included in this definition, which focuses on the awareness of the past as present in the present.

All these definitions are similar, while, between these authors, there are some differences related to how historical consciousness functions in life. They all prioritize, and some absolutize, the second element of Jeismann's definition, as the core of what historical consciousness is. Some of the authors behind these definitions relate historical narrative to the narratives we make about the past. To

better understand this relation, let us turn to a theory that has been very influential since its first appearance in 1989, and especially during the last two decades, namely, Jörn Rüsen's narrative-based typology of historical consciousness.

Rüsen's typology of historical consciousness

The perception of historical consciousness by several scholars considered so far has been influenced by Jörn Rüsen's typology of historical consciousness.⁴² Rüsen has identified historical consciousness in slightly different ways. All of his implicit definitions conceptualize historical consciousness as a mental activity that connects the present to the past and the future in order to make sense and as an activity that is directly, closely, and intensively related to what he calls "narrative competence". In 2004/2005, he approached it this way:

Historical consciousness evokes the past as a mirror of experience within which life in the present is reflected, and its temporal features revealed. Stated succinctly, history is the mirror of past actuality into which the present peers in order to learn something about its future. Historical consciousness should be conceptualized as an operation of human intellection rendering present actuality intelligible while fashioning its future perspectives. Historical consciousness deals with the past qua experience; it reveals to us the web of temporal change within which our lives are caught up, and (at least indirectly) the future perspectives toward which the change is flowing.⁴³

In an essay Rüsen published in [2011](#), historical consciousness is defined in a much simpler way, as "a mental activity of interpreting the past for the sake of understanding the present and expecting the

future”.⁴⁴ Here, he follows the second element of Jeismann’s definition of historical consciousness as temporal consciousness.

In all his relevant works, Rüsen relates historical consciousness to human agency and moral consciousness. He claims that the practical function of historical consciousness is temporal orientation, and he relates this function to historical memory. Historical consciousness, he writes, “bestows upon actuality a temporal direction, an orientation which can guide action intentionally by the agency of historical memory”. He also states that such orientation can be detected in two spheres of life: First, in practical life, which means that historical consciousness is related to life’s temporality, in other words, how things are shaped by human activity; and second, in human subjectivity, which means that it supports us in being aware of our temporal self, understanding our temporal dimension, and developing a historical identity. Furthermore, Rüsen directly relates historical consciousness to human morality, claiming that “historical consciousness can be conceptualized as a synthesis of moral and temporal consciousness”.⁴⁵

For Rüsen, historical consciousness is manifested in narration. Central in his discussion of historical consciousness is what he calls narrative consciousness, which he defines as “the ability of human consciousness to carry out procedures which make sense of the past, affecting a temporal orientation in present practical life by means of the recollection of past actuality”. In other words, we orient ourselves in time by narrating and understanding the narratives of others. Thus, this making-sense-of-the-past narrative competence includes, according to Rüsen, three “subcompetences”, namely, the competence of experience (the capacity of learning about the past), the competence of interpretation (the capacity of bridging differences between past, present and future), and the competence of orientation (the capacity of utilizing the temporal whole in order to get oriented in life).⁴⁶ We experience life, we transform our interpretation of this experience into narratives, and we use these narratives to orient ourselves in life.

Rüsen proposes a typology of historical consciousness, based on his typology of historical narratives. His typology consists of four types. He presents them in relation to a specific narrative, which is worthy of taking into consideration. The narrative goes in general terms, like this: Imagine that you are Scottish, a member of the Maclean clan, living in the castle of Col in the Scottish Highlands. On a wall in the castle, there is a stone with an inscription, dictating that "if any man of the clan of Maclonich shall appear before this castle, though he come at midnight, with a man's head in his hand, he shall find here safety and protection against all". The reason why is deeply rooted in time. Long ago, a Maclean chieftain was granted by the Scottish king lands belonging to another clan. In a following battle to take possession of these lands, Maclean was killed, and his pregnant wife was captured. The victorious chief transferred the pregnant Lady Maclean to the care of the Maclonich family with a specific condition: If the child was a boy, it was to be killed; if a girl, she should live. Lady Maclonich was also pregnant, and the two women gave birth at more or less the same time, Lady Maclean to a boy and Lady Maclonich to a girl. To save the infant Maclean, the Maclonich couple switched the babies, raising the Maclean boy as their own and presenting their own daughter as the one born to Lady Maclean. Reaching adulthood, the Maclean boy regained his identity and his lands and castle. Out of gratitude to the Maclonich family, he decreed that the castle of Col would forever be a place of refuge for any members of the Maclonich clan who would find themselves in danger. To discuss historical and moral consciousness, Rüsen poses a hypothetical situation: a member of the Maclonich clan seeks refuge in your castle due to a crime he committed, and you, as a Maclean and the resident of the castle, are supposed to decide on whether you will provide it or not. What are you doing? And why?

Rüsen's thesis is that you might reply in four different ways: (1) You might hide Maclonich because you believe that your clan has a binding obligation to his, because of the old story. (2) You might hide Maclonich because you believe that the old story illustrates a general principle of life, dictating that favours must be reciprocated. (3) You might refuse to hide Maclonich because you do not feel obliged to do so, as you evaluate the old story as a legend devoid of evidence or binding validity. (4) You might help Maclonich, because you feel obliged to do so by the old story, but not by hiding him; instead, you might support him by hiring a lawyer or in some other similar way.⁴⁷ Your decision is related to Rüsen's four types of historical consciousness, which are the following:

1. *Traditional*: This is, according to Rüsen, a common type of historical consciousness. As its name reveals, it focuses on the origins of the present, on what is still influential in the present in the form of traditions. An individual who is historically conscious in this way focuses on keeping traditions alive and central in the process of orientation in practical life.
2. *Exemplary*: This is also a common type, related to general rules of human conduct. An individual who is historically conscious in an exemplary way does not base her consciousness on specific traditions from the past that are still alive but on more general exempla, or cultural universals, that is, norms, principles, and values that have the power of timeless rules of human conduct.
3. *Critical*: This is a historical consciousness based on challenging established traditions and exempla. It is based on counter-narratives, aiming at deconstructing problematic present and historical value systems by revealing their immoral origins or consequences. An individual historically conscious in a critical way constructs her identity by negation, that is to say, by challenging the established interpretations of the past that form her identity (or the identity of the communities she belongs to).
4. *Genetic*: At this level, historical consciousness is based on the awareness of the dynamic evolution of history, which has a

meaning only because of change over time, a change that creates new forms of life and human conduct. Exactly because of the central role of change, which is always in dialogue with permanence, this type of historical consciousness includes a stronger consideration of the future. An individual who is historically conscious in a genetic way understands herself as being permanently in transition and as living in a world in transition. She also understands her identity as being in "ceaseless changing".

Evaluating the four types of historical narratives and historical consciousness, Rüsen makes clear that their sequence is qualitative, each of the types being a precondition for the next. The traditional historical consciousness, as a primary type, is the first step in the ladder of historical consciousness, while the genetic is the highest and most complex. He also makes clear that these four types might coexist when an individual deals with her past.⁴⁸

Reflecting on the typology, I am not sure whether it has had a positive influence on the study and theorization of historical consciousness. I believe that its influence is mainly due to its operationalization of historical consciousness, in relation to actuality, agency, and moral consciousness, something that is always of interest for history educationists (who mainly refer to it) and probably other students of historical consciousness. But theoretically clear and sound, I am afraid it is not.

First of all, the typology seems to me more as 2T than 3T, indeed relating the past to the present but not including the future. Rüsen speaks about the future, but he does not show how the future is actively connected to the present situation he uses as a case (how MacLean will treat the Maclonich person at her/his door).

A second point that is problematic is that Rüsen writes that "historical consciousness can be conceptualized as a synthesis of moral and temporal consciousness".⁴⁹ What I find problematic here is the lack of a clarification of the difference between historical and temporal consciousness. What is temporal consciousness? And how is it different from historical consciousness? To avoid

misunderstandings, I should make clear that I also believe that they are indeed different. But I also believe that these are questions that should be answered clearly, in order to relate these two sorts of consciousness to actuality, practical life, human agency, and moral consciousness. Furthermore, historical consciousness, which indeed incorporates temporal consciousness, comprises many more elements than moral and temporal consciousness.

A third point that I find even more important is the following: In any present case, when you are about to make a decision with present or future consequences, as, for example, the one that you are about to make as a Maclean resident of the castle of Col, your interpretation of the past is not informing your moral consciousness but is in fact informed, and formed, by it—which is quite the opposite of what Rüsen proposes. It is your moral consciousness *in the present* that will dictate if you are going to help the person on your door or not. It is *not* your interpretation of the past that will form your consciousness, but the other way around: you use your already formed moral consciousness to interpret the past story and make a decision. And this present moral decision is related (sometimes explicitly and almost always implicitly) to the future. A real study of your historical consciousness should focus on (a) how you and your moral consciousness and your ways of interpreting the past are shaped by history, (b) how the situation and context in which you are operating is shaped by history, and (c) how your decisions and acts are related to your interpretation of the past and your future expectations. In other words, it should focus on how you are history-made and history-making, and how the situation and context are history-made (and perhaps history-making too). So, as a typology of historical consciousness, Rüsen's typology is not sound. Instead, Rüsen offers an excellent way (and typology) of studying the contextualization of historical narratives in present cases that ask for a decision to be made, in addition to a study of how historical knowledge and narratives are related to identity-based human agency.

All the above taken into consideration, I wonder whether what Rüsen discusses is not historical but moral consciousness, in fact,

what could be called “historically informed moral consciousness”. And given that he focuses on practical life and human agency, I could also claim that Rüsen’s typology is related to what I am tempted to call “historically (or temporally) informed moral agency”. My overall conclusion would be that the typology, which is worthy in many ways, might cause more problems than the ones it solves in relation to the study of historical consciousness.

Historical consciousness as a meaning-making mental process

So far, historical consciousness has been related to historicity, temporality, and narration. This section is dedicated to another approach to the concept, in which historical consciousness is perceived as a mental activity or process on the basis of which individuals make sense of themselves and the worlds we live in, in order to orient ourselves in life.

Such an approach is adopted by history educationist Stéphane Lévesque, who defined historical consciousness in a way that underlines its mental dimension and the significance of the individual’s agency in the process. He defined historical consciousness as “the mental reconstruction and appropriation of historical information and experiences that are brought into the mental household of an individual”.⁵⁰ A notable element of this definition is that it underlines the importance of the appropriation of history. Indeed, I would claim that being historically conscious is not simply about historical knowledge; it is about being able to reflect on historical knowledge and use it in understanding the world around us and making decisions based on our orientation in time.

Another scholar who approached historical consciousness this way is history educationist Nathalie Popa. She defined historical consciousness as a meaning-making process that is based on understanding the links between past, present, and future, and aims

at supporting us in positioning ourselves in time.⁵¹ She gives a thorough definition of the concept, which she understands as a mental disposition—again, notice the plurality with which the concept is approached by different scholars. Popa defines historical consciousness as

a disposition to engage with history so as to make meaning of past human experience for oneself, or in other words, to make the historical past one's own. This disposition is manifested in three interrelated abilities—sensitivity toward the past, understanding of the past, representation of oneself in relation to history—and each ability is associated with a particular meaning-making process—respectively, experiencing historical temporality, interpreting historical material, and orientating in practical life through history.⁵²

In a book presenting a methodology of how history can be implemented in practical life, historian and history educationist Paul Zanzanian relates historical consciousness to our use of historical knowledge in making sense of the world, our time-related role in it, and our tempohistorical agency, and our effort to survive in an environment that is constantly changing. In his words,

in people's everyday lives, historical consciousness ... corresponds to the meaningful interpretations we develop that help us establish an understanding of time's passage and of its effects on our sense of being and, by extension, our ability to navigate practical life challenges or situations when feeling impelled to do so.⁵³

Let me close this section by referring to Andreas Körber, a historian who understands historical consciousness as a concept possessing the "dualism of being status and process". Körber argues by claiming that historical consciousness can be explored both as a process (the process of making sense by studying empirical data on

the past) and as a status (in fact, a set of capabilities, dispositions, and skills necessary to study the historical data and make sense out of it). In this latter meaning, historical consciousness is understood as a competence, “the competence to think historically”.⁵⁴ Such an approach to historical consciousness, as both a process and a status, demonstrates in a powerful way the difficulties in studying this important concept and underlines the need for a more thorough conceptual study of it. Körber’s approach does indeed reflect various understandings of historical consciousness, and it is thus convenient, but, at the same time, it is impossible for one and the same concept to signify a process and a status—this is a case of what in conceptual studies is called “concept stretching”. So, despite the fact that Körber is right (historical consciousness could indeed be approached and has been approached, in this double way), this is something that should be avoided. My proposal is that we aim at conceptual clarity related to both the meaning of historical consciousness as a status and the meaning of the process leading to it; and this is what I am trying to do in the rest of the book.

Historical consciousness and historical thinking

Let me now turn into something very interesting, namely, the relationship between historical consciousness and historical thinking. This is a relationship that has been discussed, explicitly and implicitly, for decades now, especially since the revitalization of the interest on historical consciousness in the first half of the 2000s. But let us start with some of the first relevant discussions, four decades before that.

Already in 1960, in the first edition of his book *Historical Consciousness or the Remembered Past*, John Lukacs connected historical consciousness to historical thinking—in fact, as he confesses in his “Postscript” to a newer edition of the book, the original title of the book was *Historical Thinking*, and it was changed to *Historical Consciousness* because of the publication of another

book with the title *Historical Thinking*. Thinking is central in Lukacs' historical work; he even approaches history as "a form of thought". He also relates history to memory, defining history as "the remembered past".⁵⁵

Lukacs understood historical consciousness as a "movement" that evolved during the last 300 or 400 years.⁵⁶ It is related to the human reflection on our historical condition and has evolved "intimately with another contemporary change in the European mind: With the development of something that we might call personal understanding, or self-awareness, or self-consciousness".⁵⁷ Lukacs states that historical consciousness (as well as history) "is in itself a historical phenomenon, and not only a psychological one (like memory)".⁵⁸ When it comes to the evolution of historical consciousness since its appearance somewhat more than three centuries ago, Lukacs identifies three phases. In the eighteenth century, history was approached as literature, as the narrated past. In the nineteenth century, history was approached as science, as the recorded past. And in the twentieth century, there was "a dual development: on the surface, history as a social science; the ascertained past. But, in a deeper and wider sense: history as a form of thought; the remembered past".⁵⁹ This is an understanding of history that is close to the theorization, by Rüsen and others, of history as narrative and of historical consciousness as narrative competence.

In the beginning of the 2000s, the discussion of historical consciousness and its importance in history teaching and as a sociopolitical phenomenon was revitalized. This revitalization was manifested in conferences and publications, in which history theorists and history educationists representing different perceptions of historical consciousness had the chance of interacting with each other. This interaction influenced both the theoretical discussion of historical consciousness and its practical implementation in education. The event that is supposed to have initiated this interaction was the symposium "Canadian Historical Consciousness

in International Context: Theoretical Perspectives”, held at the University of Columbia in 27–29 August 2001. The symposium resulted in the anthology *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, in which various approaches to historical consciousness were discussed.⁶⁰

In his introduction to the anthology, history educationist Peter Seixas, the leading figure of the symposium and the publication, set the stage for the discussion of the project, referring to two definitions of historical consciousness, both approaching the concept from an epistemological perspective:

We are aligned with the abbreviated definition of historical consciousness presented by the journal *History and Memory*, as “the area in which collective memory, the writing of history, and other modes of shaping images of the past in the public mind merge”. It is also consistent with the definition growing out of the extensive work of European historical consciousness: individual and collective understandings of the past, the cognitive and cultural factors that shape those understandings, as well as the relations of historical understandings to those of the present and the future.⁶¹

Let us have a closer look on these definitions, especially since they are the definitions that opened the theoretical discussion of historical consciousness in the third millennium. The first introduces a new element that, in fact, makes the concept somewhat unclear: historical consciousness is presented as an “area”, but it is not clear what kind of area it is supposed to be—is it a cognitive, historiographical, sociohistorical, or epistemic area, or something else? And which, or what, are these other “modes of shaping images of the past in the public mind”? And which is the relationship between this “area” and these “modes”? And how do collective memory, historiography, and shaping images of the past merge?

The second definition is interesting for two reasons. The first is that it implicitly combined the elements of historicity and temporal

consciousness. On one hand, it speaks about the historicity of the way in which we understand the past, on the basis of cognitive, epistemological, and cultural factors. On the other hand, it speaks of our understandings of the past as related to our understandings of the present and future. The second element that makes this definition interesting is that it speaks explicitly of a collective dimension of historical consciousness, which is not simply an individual state of mind but also something that might be developed at the collective level—based on the fact that historical consciousness is related to cultural factors, we might claim that these collectivities are groups with a common cultural identity.⁶²

Just a few years later, in 2006, Peter Seixas published an essay titled “What is historical consciousness?” As the title reveals, the essay was an introductory contribution to the discourse on the concept of historical consciousness, which had experienced a revitalization in the 2000s. In this article, Seixas operated on the basis of the following definition: “I cannot imagine a better definition, than the intersection among public memory, citizenship, and history education”.⁶³ As you might see, the definition is similar to the one published in *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, but not exactly the same. This one also presents historical consciousness as an “area” in which memory, history education, and citizenship interplay. But you should pay attention to the small but conceptually important details. First, now he speaks not of merging but of intersection (which sounds more logical). Second, in this definition, the three elements intersecting are public memory (which is most probably used as a synonym for collective memory), history education (and not the writing of history), and citizenship (and not other modes of shaping images of the past in the public mind). This is a good example of how even the most prominent theorists of historical consciousness have changed their understanding of the concept on the way.

Seixas claimed that the way to historical consciousness gets through a series of questions “asked by everyone, from elementary school children, to politicians, to historians”. These questions are as follows:

1. How did things get to be as we see them today? Which aspects are signs of continuity over time, and which are signs of change?
2. What group or groups am I a part of, and what are its/their origins?
3. How should we judge each other’s past actions? By extension, what debts does my group owe to others and/or others to mine?
4. Are things basically getting better or are they getting worse?
5. What stories about the past should I believe? On what grounds?
6. Which stories shall we tell?
7. Is there anything we can do to make things better?⁶⁴

This approach to historical consciousness differs considerably from those of Jeismann and Gadamer. The questions making up the path to historical consciousness focus on the influence of the past to the present (points 1 and 2), continuity and change in historical development (1 and 4), historical narratives and their trustworthiness (5 and 6), evaluating the past in ethical and moral terms (3), and taking history into consideration in preparing a better future (7). Reflecting on these questions, it is logical to wonder how they (or the answers to them) manifest the intersection between collective memory, history education, and citizenship, as well as what the role of non-educational study of history is, in addition to the role of history-writing, which was central in Seixas’ definition of 2004.

I am returning to the relationship between historical consciousness and historical thinking in [Chapter 10](#). For now, let us continue the presentation of the ways in which historical consciousness has been defined so far, this time turning our focus on its relation to collective memory and the application of history.

Historical consciousness, collective memory, and the use of history

Explicitly or implicitly, historians relate historical consciousness to collective memory and the use of history. To avoid misunderstandings, let it be clear that historical consciousness and history use are not connected in definitional terms. Their relation is rather part of a triangle, in which these two phenomena and concepts are related to collective memory, especially as elements of identity making. Usually, the combinative study of historical consciousness, history use, and collective memory is related to history didactics and to the development of historical consciousness as supporting a healthy and sustainable function of democratic societies. The first part of this section focuses on historians and history educationists who connected historical consciousness to collective memory. The second part focuses on relating historical consciousness to the use of history.

I will start with Swedish history educationist Klas-Göran Karlsson, who approached historical consciousness in relation to collective memory. In fact, he did so by underlining their differences. One of the differences, he writes, is that historical consciousness is based on the historicity of everything, while collective memory lacks the notion that history exists in the present. He claims that historical consciousness has a larger autonomy than collective memory, as the latter can more easily be used by power-havers. At the same time, he makes clear that historical consciousness is itself historical, in the sense that it changes from one historical time to another.⁶⁵

Jan Bjarne Bøe also links historical consciousness to memory. Bøe defines historical consciousness as the certainty that the human is a historical being, that our interpretation of the past, understanding of the present, and perception of the future have a decisive impact on who we are and what we do.⁶⁶ Linking historical consciousness to memory, he writes that it is synthesized of several memory processes, adding that the experiences of what once was, the past,

are both varied and understood in varying ways.⁶⁷ This happens because our experiences are influenced by our interpretations and expectations, in addition to our intentions and our sociocultural norms and values.

I would also like to refer to my colleague May-Brith Ohman Nielsen, who has linked historical consciousness to memory and her two-sided model of history and historical consciousness. I will start with the latter. Ohman Nielsen believes that at its two extremes, history is scientifically analysable and enigmatically poetic (note that these are extremes; as Ohman Nielsen writes, history exists in a multitude of different intermediate forms and mixtures). At one extreme, there is history as science with its professional methods, skills, use of theory, and so on. At the other extreme, there is the enigmatic and poetic history, dealing with existential questions, identity and belonging, myths, aesthetics, aspects of the past that are non-rational and non-analytical, and so on. Historical consciousness is similarly two-sided, in the span between history as science and history as identity, enigma, and experience. Ohman Nielsen understands historical consciousness as the relationship between understanding of the past, perception of the present, and expectations of the future and believes that everyone has a historical consciousness, which is more or less conscious, more or less consistent, and more or less reflected. She also links historical consciousness to being history-made and -shaped. Regarding the relationship between historical consciousness and memory, Ohman Nielsen believes that our historical consciousness consists of a memory mass (meaningful elements that help us perceive the past, present and future), which have different structures or patterns of meaning (they are created by ideational figures, concepts, stories, etc.), which, in turn, form or are included in "links" between the past and the present that we call "memory traces". Our historical consciousness consists of memory traces, and it can be further developed in two ways, namely, by developing or changing some memory traces or by reflecting on our own understanding of history.⁶⁸

In their introduction to the anthology *Contemplating Historical Knowledge: Notes from the Field*, Anna Clark and Carla Peck relate historical consciousness to temporal orientation and collective memory. In their own words, “the concept of historical consciousness refers both to the ways people orient themselves in time, and how they are bound by the historical and cultural contexts which shape their sense of temporality and collective memory”. Clark and Peck acknowledge that historical consciousness is a slippery term, “describing not only humanity’s changing interest in its past, but also how people learn and engage with historical knowledge and practice over time”.⁶⁹ They also state that the historical consciousness of one and the same person might be manifested in various types simultaneously, and that the different types might be in tension between them.⁷⁰

I am closing this discussion by referring to Alexandre Dessingué. In an essay published in 2020, Dessingué discusses the development of historical consciousness through focusing on the dynamics between history and memory in history education.⁷¹ Dessingué opens the article by noticing that history education has had for decades a “dualistic approach between epistemological and ontological considerations of history”, relating these considerations to historical thinking (as an epistemological, disciplinary competence of using historical tools method) and historical consciousness (reflecting on the historicity of the human being). He then proceeds to propose an alternative conceptual framework for history education. This “third way” adds a focus on the role played by memory in dealing with the past and aims at the development of “a critical historical and memory consciousness”.

Dessingué’s synthesis of historical consciousness, historical thinking, and memory is visualized as a triangle formed by what he coins as “historicity of the being” (how history and memory influence the understanding and construction of cultural identities), “epistemology of history” (how and why historical knowledge is constructed) and “phenomenology of memory” (what is remembered, forgotten, or silenced, and how and why this is done).

His proposal is that to develop a critical historical consciousness (which includes a critical memory consciousness), we should combine a critical approach to both history and memory. In his words,

teaching history with the ambition of developing a critical historical consciousness cannot be reduced to an epistemological approach to past representations. It should also engage with the way the past is used and transmitted in society and it should engage with the role memory plays in this transmission.⁷²

Another scholar who related historical consciousness to memory is Bernard Eric Jensen. This relation is not part of Jensen's definition, which, as we have seen in the relevant section, presents historical consciousness as the interplay between interpretation of the past, perception of the present, and anticipation of the future. What is important for us here is that Jensen stresses that historical consciousness is not possible without memory, especially without the so-called "autobiographical memory". This special sort of memory is present- and future-oriented and aims at supporting the individual in solving present problems and anticipating the unfolding of events from the present towards the future.⁷³

Jensen can function as a nice bridge between the two subjects of this section, collective memory and history use. This is because he also related historical consciousness to the use of history, through what he calls "actor history". He claims that among at least ten partly different types of history, there are two which might be called "actor history" and "observer history". This means that every time we deal with history, we "can use the past in an interventionist and forward-looking actor perspective but also view it from a distancing observer perspective". Observers study history to have a better understanding of the past, the present, and themselves. Actors do not only study but also use history to influence "historical-social

processes” in the present and future. Historical consciousness, Jensen writes, belongs within the framework of actor history.⁷⁴

Similar to Bernard Eric Jensen and Klas-Göran Karlsson, Swedish history educationist Peter Aronsson defines historical consciousness as the perception of the interplay between past, present, and future. What is interesting for us here is that he adds an element that relates historical consciousness directly to history use and indirectly to historical culture (another concept that has been defined in varying ways). Historical consciousness, he writes, both guides history use and is established and reproduced within it. This is how he defines the three concepts and presents their relation:

Historical culture consists of sources, artifacts, rituals, customs, and statements with references to the past that offer significant opportunities to connect the relationship between past, present, and future. In exceptional cases, they constitute direct and explicit interpretations of this connection. *History use* is the processes in which parts of the historical culture are activated to shape specific meaning-making and action-oriented enterprises. *Historical consciousness* is the perceptions of the connection between past, present, and future that guide history use and are established and reproduced within it. A particular selection of the historical culture is staged in history use and shapes a historical consciousness.⁷⁵

In addition, Aronsson relates historical consciousness to the Koselleckian categories “space of experience” and “horizon of expectation”. He states that what we know about the past and the narratives we make about it create a space of experience, which, in its turn, shapes the canvas for certain conceptions of the future. At the same time, our horizon of expectation, which consists of our present hopes and fears for the future, affects the ways in which we organize the relationship between what we remember and what we forget. Thus, our horizon of expectations forms our space of

experience. This way of approaching our historical culture, writes Aronsson, places our conscious or unconscious history use at the centre of the dynamic process that connects our space of experience and our horizon of expectations in any given situation.⁷⁶

Another scholar who related historical consciousness to the use of history, along with historical narratives and historical culture, is Robert Thorp. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Thorp defines historical consciousness as "an understanding of how matters past, present, and future relate to each other in a way that enables the individual to create a specific kind of meaning in relation to history".⁷⁷ In addition, he claims that "historical consciousness can be discerned through three different manifestations that are on different levels; narratives, uses of history, and historical culture". Elaborating on the latter, he comes up with the following statements. First, an individual's historical consciousness is expressed in how she understands narratives. Higher historical consciousness means a better understanding of narratives and a better orientation in life, especially in terms of identity and morality. Second, when we narrate history, we portray a use of history. In fact, "narratives can be applied to uses of history on an individual level and historical culture on a societal or public level". Third, history use is always related to a historical culture. Thorp defines historical culture as "an agglomeration of different uses of history, ... the societal historical landscape that individuals are born into". He adds that our relationship with our historical culture is bidirectional: One's historical culture influences the individual, but the individual can also influence her historical culture through her use of history, a use that is determined by her historical consciousness.⁷⁸

Ketil Knutsen also studies historical consciousness in relation to the use of history and historical culture. He takes Aronsson's tripartite division between historical awareness, historical use, and historical culture as his starting point, but he further develops the idea by discussing the three concepts together. He defines historical consciousness as "our perception of the relationship between past, present, and future", the use of history as "doing something active

with history that serves a purpose by connecting history to the present and/or the future”, and historical culture as “the way in which historical consciousness and the use of history are expressed in society”. He distinguishes between two types of historical consciousness: the *diagnostic*, which is used to understand the present, and the *anticipatory*, which is used to develop future scenarios. He writes that

to develop historical consciousness is to understand how we perceive the relationship between past, present, and future and use history with a historical culture. In other words, to understand how we are history-made and history-making, with a present, a past, and a future.⁷⁹

* * *

All the approaches and definitions presented so far in this chapter are of historical and conceptual value. At the same time, they demonstrate in a clear way the biggest challenge related to the study of this significant historical concept: its polysemy, which cannot function as a stable fundament for getting closer to both the concept and the phenomenon of historical consciousness. This is why, in the following chapters, I am elaborating on the meaning and quality levels of historical consciousness. Before doing so, I would like to close this chapter with a section dedicated to a theoretical discussion of its contestation, which is a very interesting dimension of its polysemy.

Historical consciousness as an essentially contested concept

The polysemy of historical consciousness has been noted by several historians over the years. Bernard Eric Jensen wrote that “there has never been established an academic consensus on how the concept

should be precisely defined".⁸⁰ Studying the theorization and definition of historical consciousness in Sweden, Robert Thorp also signed under the perception that the concept is "generally perceived as a problematic one due to its vagueness".⁸¹

Discussing historical consciousness and its definition in German history didactics, Andreas Körber speaks of the (German) concept of historical consciousness as "too imprecise" and states that "the widespread recognition of the term 'historical consciousness' by many didacts of quite different orientation" does not mean that they refer to the same concept. He understands the concept as "a catch-all term", which can be used in different ways and with varying content. Körber adds that "German history didactics as a discipline does not possess one concept of 'historical consciousness', but several of them, and has to date not succeeded in clarifying and disentangling them". He further states that

there is no given entity of "historical consciousness" which can be researched using one single concept and model, however complex, but that the concept of "historical consciousness" is a psychological and didactical construct, and that therefore all concrete definitions and concepts of it are models whose purpose is not to fully represent such a given entity, but to selectively highlight aspects and to enable research and teaching.⁸²

The unclarity about the ontological meaning of historical consciousness is also shown in the fact that it is perceived by some historians as having a dual nature of being both a status and a process, or both a set of abilities and their usage, which cannot logically stand.⁸³

Considering everything that has been presented in this chapter, I am tempted to claim that historical consciousness should be approached as an essentially contested concept. The idea of essentially contested concepts was introduced by [Walter Bryce Gallie in 1956](#), when he published his seminal homonym article.⁸⁴ He

defined essentially contested concepts as concepts for which “there is no one clearly definable general use ... which can be set up as the correct or standard use”. He adds that these are “concepts the proper use of which inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their user”.^{[85](#)}

Gallie used the following seven criteria to get closer to the meaning of an essentially contested concept, the first four being “the four most important necessary conditions to which any essentially contested concept must comply”.⁸⁶ I am presenting them in relation to historical consciousness as an essentially contested concept. Before doing so, I need to notice that these criteria have been treated by modern scholars as not definitive on whether a concept is essentially contested or not.⁸⁷ Furthermore, both Gallie and other scholars “have expressed concern that the approach can encourage a conceptual relativism that is undesirable and destructive”.⁸⁸

1. *Appraisiveness*. The concept must be “appraisive”, in the sense that “it signifies or accredits some kind of valued achievement”. In our case, it is easy to argue that historical consciousness is praised in various ways. It is praised in relation to its potential in improving political, social, and cultural reflection on and performance in subjects like the proper function of democracy and society, as well as social and racial identity, or religion and feminism.⁸⁹
2. *Internal complexity*. “This achievement must be of an internally complex character”, writes Gallie, even though the concept’s worth “is attributed to it as a whole”. Historical consciousness is indeed attributed as one phenomenon (either as a process or as a result, and in my approach, as a state of mind). At the same time, as the previous sections have demonstrated, it is approached as a phenomenon including various elements and dimensions.
3. *Diverse descriptibility*. As a result of this internal complexity, “the accredited achievement is *initially* variously describable”, in the sense that “any explanation of its worth must ... include references to the respective contributions of its various parts or features”.⁹⁰ This simply means that different users of the concept might understand and define it in different ways. A

recall of the varying definitions presented in the previous pages proves that historical consciousness is not simply *describable* in various ways, but it has already been *described* so. What makes the case stronger is that Gallie underlines that “there is nothing absurd or contradictory in any one of a number of possible rival descriptions” of the total worth of an essentially contested concept.

4. *Openness*. The concept must be “open”, in the sense that its meaning is suspect to “considerable modification in the light of changing circumstances; and such modification cannot be prescribed or predicted in advance”. One example related to historical consciousness might suffice: When historical theory turned its focus on history as a text, with the so-called “linguistic turn”, historical consciousness was approached in terms of narrative, in fact being defined as a narrative competence, something that had not been used as an approach to the concept in its original discussion. This characteristic of historical consciousness causes its conceptual stretching, which, in its turn, increases its contestability.
5. *Reciprocal recognition*. This criterion stresses that each user of the concept recognizes the fact that his/her own use of it is contested by other users, and that “each party must have at least some appreciation of the different criteria in the light of which the other parties claim to be applying the concept in question”. This is a criterion that, as Collier, Hidalgo, and Maciuceanu have noticed, “is not always pertinent”.⁹¹ In the case of historical consciousness, there is not really such an intense dispute, as the two different “schools” of historical consciousness, the more philosophical German/Scandinavian and the more practical Anglo-American, have not entered a debate, except the dialogue between Jörn Rüsen and Roger Simon in the symposium “Canadian Historical Consciousness in International Context: Theoretical Perspectives”, held at the University of Columbia on 27–29 August 2001.⁹² Since then, the

two schools got closer, which resulted in the stretching of the concept.

6. *Exemplar*. This criterion presupposes “the derivation of any such concept from an original exemplar whose authority is acknowledged by all the contestant users of the concept”. This means that users of the concept have specific paradigmatic examples in mind. Users of the concept “democracy”, for example, might think of the Athenian democracy of the fifth century BCE. This is a criterion not applicable to historical consciousness, as it refers to empirical concepts, while historical consciousness is an abstract one.
7. *Progressive competition*. This last criterion refers to how the discourse of essentially contested concepts causes an increase in the quality of the relevant argumentation. In Gallie’s words, “in any proper instance of essential contestedness might ... be expected to be a marked raising of the level of quality of arguments in the disputes of the contestant parties”. As we have seen in the previous pages, and if we take into consideration the chronological dimension of various approaches and definitions, we can indeed see that the discourse on historical consciousness made the argumentation better. It should be noted that progressive competition as a characteristic of essentially contested concepts does not necessarily mean that the understanding of the concept gets better (in some cases, it might mean the opposite), and this has also been the case with historical consciousness.

One of the main questions on the consideration of these criteria is put by Gallie himself and has been discussed, directly or not, by almost all scholars who have used his theoretical framework: Are all these criteria necessary to have an essentially contested concept? Gallie, explicitly and implicitly, claims that the first four characteristics are always there.⁹³ Nevertheless, his definition makes clear that the most important definitional element of an essentially contested concept is that no one of the uses of the concept can be accepted as the correct or standard use, and definition, of it. Collier,

Hidalgo, and Maciuceanu also state that “it might be implausible to expect that all elements are salient or correct all of the time”.⁹⁴

Based on everything presented in this section, I am claiming that historical consciousness is essentially contested. Arguing for the need of its decontestation as a concept is easy. Coming up with a definition that can easily be accepted by “everyone”, on the other hand, is an almost impossible task. The different “schools”, approaches, and definitions are already well established, and it is an innate characteristic of the essentially contested concepts not to be easily decontestable. But, especially since there is a consensus on the need to improve the historical consciousness of individuals, groups, and societies, every step in the decontestation path is important and valuable. Taking such a step (please notice: just one step of the many needed) is the aim of the rest of this book.

Merging reflections

All the definitions of historical consciousness presented in this chapter are valuable, and I would recommend further study of the relevant publications to anyone (especially teachers, history students, and history educationists) who needs or wishes to delve deeper into historical consciousness and its relationship with other historical-theoretical phenomena and concepts, such as historical thinking and historical culture. Additionally, there are several publications that address, directly or indirectly, historical consciousness. The diversity of understandings of historical consciousness reflected in these definitions illustrates one of the challenges (likely the most important) associated with the study of historical consciousness: its conceptual ambiguity.

I would like to close the chapter with an overall observation. The vast majority of publications on historical consciousness relate it directly to history didactics. In fact, most of them try to answer questions related to how historical consciousness can be developed (and sometimes measured) in the classroom. The theorization of the

concept has also been related, even if indirectly and implicitly, to history teaching. This is not something negative per se, but I believe that, over the years, this approach has been naturalized and has hegemonized the study of historical consciousness.

This is one of the reasons why the ontological discussion of historical consciousness has been limited. I would dare to claim that what has been called “theorizing historical consciousness”, since the publication of the homonymous book and almost to the present, is in fact more a theorization of historical consciousness teaching, or, more precisely, the theorization of historical-consciousness-related history teaching. This means that historical consciousness has been more “methodized” than “theorized”. Again, this is not something negative or badly done. Quite the opposite: It is highly needed, especially in relation to history didactics, and it is done in a thorough and sophisticated way. But this methodization should be based on a clear conceptual and historical theorization, which is what I am trying to contribute to. To do so, it is important to make clear not only “what historical consciousness is” but also its relation to other key concepts, such as historical reality, historical knowledge, historical thinking, historical temporalities, and history use. The least that should be done is for every author to make clear her/his understanding of the concept and present the operational definition her/his study is based on. This is the main aim of the following chapter.

Notes

1. See, for example, [Voss \(2016\)](#) (politics); [Hobson \(2021\)](#) (sociology); [Glencross \(2015\)](#) (international relations); [Lang \(2015\)](#) (religion); [Bacigalupo \(2014\)](#) (ethnology); [Budick \(1989\)](#) (fiction); and [Were \(2022\)](#) (literature). ↵
2. See [Körber \(2015\)](#). ↵
3. Notice that here I am talking about the field of history education. The discussion of historical consciousness started at least a century ago, and was revitalized from 1960 with the publication of Lukacs' homonym book, which will be discussed a little later in the chapter. ↵
4. [Karlsson \(2011: 37\)](#). ↵
5. [Gadamer \(1987\)](#) (a brief history of the life of the essay and the background work is presented by Gadamer and the translator of the text, Jeff L. Close, on pp. 103–104). ↵
6. [Gadamer \(1987: 110\)](#). There are many publications discussing Gadamer's understanding of historical consciousness and the implementation of his approach. See, for example, [Grever & Adriaansen \(2019\)](#) and [Edling et al. \(2020\)](#). ↵
7. [Gadamer \(1987: 108\)](#). ↵
8. [Gadamer \(1987: 109–110\)](#). ↵
9. [Gadamer \(1987: 104\)](#). ↵
10. For Dilthey's influence on Gadamer's understanding of historical consciousness, see [Gadamer \(1989: passim\)](#) (all quotes in this paragraph are from p. 225). ↵
11. [Gadamer \(1989: 307\)](#). ↵
12. [Gadamer \(1987: 109\)](#). ↵
13. [Gadamer \(1989: 228\)](#); [Gadamer \(1987: 121\)](#). ↵
14. [Gadamer \(1987: 111\)](#). ↵
15. [Gadamer \(1987: 111\)](#). ↵
16. [Gadamer \(1989: 290\)](#). ↵
17. Jeismann was not the first to discuss the concept, which has a much longer history, but he was the one who opened its study, especially in the field of history didactics. For a brief overview of the history of the concept from the nineteenth century to the present, see [Adriaansen \(2022\)](#). ↵
18. [Schieder \(1974: 78 ff.\)](#). ↵
19. [Jeismann \(1979: 42\)](#), translated by [Thorp \(2017: 7\)](#). Let it be noted that Jeismann does not refer to Gadamer at all in the article. ↵
20. [Jensen \(2017: 27\)](#). For Koselleck's space of experience and horizon of expectation as historical categories, see [Koselleck \(2004: 255–276\)](#). Notice that Koselleck did not use the term historical consciousness. ↵
21. [Roitman \(2014: 16\)](#). ↵

22. [Thorp \(2016: 46\)](#). ↵
23. [Thorp \(2016: 47\)](#). ↵
24. [Thorp \(2014: 21–22\)](#). ↵
25. [Thorp \(2016: 40\)](#). ↵
26. [Grever \(2020: 225\)](#); emphasis in the original. ↵
27. [Cicero \(2014: book II, § LIII\)](#). ↵
28. [Augustine \(2016: 231 \(§20\)\)](#). ↵
29. [Jensen \(1996: 5–6\)](#). See also [Jensen \(2012: 16\)](#), where he makes clear that this interplay is related to the lives of both individuals and societies. Historical consciousness, he writes, is “a conceptualization and articulation of a factual matter, namely that in lived human life (and thus social life) there is an interplay between people’s interpretations of the past, understandings of the present, and expectations of the future”. ↵
30. [Jensen \(1996: 7–8\)](#). ↵
31. [Jensen \(2012: 25\)](#). ↵
32. [Jensen \(2009: 50\)](#). ↵
33. [Bøe \(2002: 26\)](#). Jensen influenced several other Norwegian historians who follow his definition and understanding of historical consciousness. See, for example, [Stugu \(2000\)](#); [Ohman Nielsen \(2004\)](#); [Lund \(2004\)](#); [Lund \(2011\)](#); and [Folkenborg \(2022\)](#). ↵
34. [Bøe \(2002: 36–43\)](#). Those elements are influenced by Jeismann’s definition. ↵
35. [Karlsson \(2014: 58\)](#). For an analysis of the various ways, in which Karlsson approaches historical consciousness and its function and operationalization, see [Thorp 2017](#). ↵
36. [Bracke et al. \(2014: 23\)](#). ↵
37. [Nordgren \(2016: 481\)](#). ↵
38. [Duquette \(2015: 53\)](#). In this, Duquette is of course influenced by the Canadian focus on historical thinking as a central tool and approach in studying and teaching history (see, for example, [Seixas & Morton 2013](#)). ↵
39. Cicero, *De oratore* II, 36. ↵
40. [Glencross \(2015: 413–422\)](#); the emphasis in the last citation is mine. ↵
41. [Grever & Adriaansen \(2019: 814\)](#). ↵
42. Rüsen’s theory and typology are presented in an essay that was published thrice, first in the journal *History and Memory* (vol. 1, no 2, 1989, pp. 35–59), then as a chapter in the anthology *Theorizing Historical Consciousness* ([Rüsen 2004](#)), and finally as a chapter in his book *History: Narration–Interpretation–Orientation* ([Rüsen 2005: 21–39](#)). It should be noted that while the text of the essay is the same, the title is different. In 1989, the title was “The Development of Narrative Competence in Historical Learning—An Ontogenetic Hypothesis Concerning Moral Consciousness”. The 2004 title was “Historical Consciousness: Narrative Structure, Moral Function, and

- Ontogenetic Development". In 2005, the title was "Narrative Competence: The Ontogeny of Historical and Moral Consciousness". [↗](#)
43. [Rüsen \(2004: 67\)](#); [Rüsen \(2005: 24–25\)](#). [↗](#)
 44. [Rüsen \(2011: 18\)](#); the essay is republished in [Rüsen \(2012\)](#). Let it be noted that in another publication, Rüsen uses the same definition not for historical consciousness but for history: "history is the totality of the cultural practices through which human beings interpret their past in order to understand the present and anticipate the future" ([Rüsen 2015](#)). The difference between the two definitions is that historical consciousness is approached as mental activity, while history as a totality of cultural practices—it is logical to guess that the mental activity is based on this totality. [↗](#)
 45. On all these points, see [Rüsen \(2005: 25–35\)](#); see also [Rüsen \(2017: 170–177\)](#). [↗](#)
 46. [Rüsen \(2005: 26–27\)](#). [↗](#)
 47. [Rüsen \(2005: 21–23\)](#). [↗](#)
 48. On the four types of historical consciousness, see [Rüsen \(2005: 21–39\)](#). An identical typology of historical *narratives* is presented in pp. 9–19 of the same book. [↗](#)
 49. [Rüsen \(2015: 35\)](#). [↗](#)
 50. [Lévesque \(2014\)](#). [↗](#)
 51. [Popa \(2022: 172\)](#). Let me note that the article is an excellent review of relevant bibliography, the main focus being on historical consciousness as meaning-making and on how historical consciousness might be operationalised in history education. [↗](#)
 52. [Popa \(2022: 174\)](#). [↗](#)
 53. [Zanazanian \(2025: xiv\)](#) (Kindle). [↗](#)
 54. [Körber \(2015: 19\)](#). [↗](#)
 55. [Lukacs \(2017: passim.\)](#). He also writes that "historical consciousness depends on the cultivation not only of a certain imagination, but of *a certain kind of memory*" (p. 246, Kindle; my emphasis). [↗](#)
 56. [Lukacs \(2017: 5\)](#) (Kindle). [↗](#)
 57. [Lukacs \(2017: 13\)](#) (Kindle). [↗](#)
 58. [Lukacs \(2017: 15\)](#) (Kindle). [↗](#)
 59. [Lukacs \(2017: 22\)](#) (Kindle). [↗](#)
 60. [Seixas \(2004b\)](#). [↗](#)
 61. [Seixas \(2004a: 10\)](#). [↗](#)
 62. Klas-Göran Karlsson also states that "like the related concepts of experience and memory, historical consciousness has both individual and collective dimensions" ([Karlsson 2014: 57](#)). [↗](#)
 63. [Seixas \(2006: 15\)](#). [↗](#)
 64. [Seixas \(2006: 15\)](#). [↗](#)
 65. [Karlsson \(2014: 59\)](#). [↗](#)
 66. [Bøe \(2002: 26\)](#). [↗](#)

67. [Bøe \(2002: 27\)](#). ↵
68. [Ohman Nielsen \(2004\)](#). ↵
69. [Clark & Peck \(2020: 14\)](#) (Kindle); for their definition, they refer to [Rüsen \(2004\)](#) and [Seixas \(2006\)](#). ↵
70. [Clark & Peck \(2020: 16\)](#) (Kindle). ↵
71. [Dessingué \(2020\)](#). ↵
72. [Dessingué \(2020: 10\)](#). ↵
73. [Jensen \(2012: 22–25\)](#). ↵
74. [Jensen \(2012: 29–30\)](#). ↵
75. [Aronsson \(2004: 17–18\)](#). ↵
76. [Aronsson \(2004: 18\)](#). ↵
77. [Thorp \(2014: 21\)](#). ↵
78. [Thorp \(2014: 20–23\)](#). ↵
79. [Knutsen \(2023: 12–13, 22–23\)](#); see also [Knutsen \(2025: 71–74, 118–121\)](#). ↵
80. [Jensen \(2012: 15\)](#). ↵
81. [Thorp \(2017: 1\)](#), referring to [Duquette \(2011\)](#); [Körber \(2016\)](#); and [Seixas \(2016\)](#). A few years later, Thorp writes that “scholars from different countries with differing theoretical backgrounds have approached the concept resulting in a variety of approaches and understandings of historical consciousness” ([Thorp 2020: 50](#)). ↵
82. [Körber \(2015: 6–7\)](#). ↵
83. See, for example, [Körber \(2015: 19\)](#). ↵
84. [Gallie \(1955–1956\)](#); see also [Gallie \(1964: 157–191\)](#). Essentially contested concepts have also been studied by [Collier, Hidalgo & Maciuceanu \(2006\)](#); [Freeden \(2004\)](#); [Freeden \(1998: 47–95\)](#); [Collier & Mahon \(1993\)](#); [Swanton \(1985\)](#); [Gray \(1977\)](#); and [MacIntyre \(1973\)](#). ↵
85. [Gallie \(1955–1956: 168 and 169\)](#). Gallie used Christian life, art, democracy, and social justice as examples of essentially contested concepts. The influence of his article resulted in the study of the essential contestability of a long list of concepts, including, among others, art ([Gallie 1956](#)), democracy ([Doughty 2014](#)), law ([Ehrenberg 2011](#) and [Spaić 2014](#)), the rule of law ([Waldron 2002](#)), human dignity ([Rodriguez 2015](#)), philanthropy ([Daly 2012](#)), power ([Lukes 1974: 26–27](#)), and rape ([Reitan 2001](#)). ↵
86. The criteria are presented in [Gallie \(1955–1956: 171–180\)](#) and all quotes in my presentation below (Points 1–7) come from these pages. The quote here comes from p. 172. For a discussion of these criteria, see [Collier, Hidalgo & Maciuceanu \(2006\)](#). ↵
87. See [Collier, Hidalgo & Maciuceanu \(2006\)](#). ↵
88. [Collier, Hidalgo & Maciuceanu \(2006: 212\)](#). ↵
89. See, for example, [Zanazanian \(2025\)](#); [Hobson \(2021\)](#); [Robinson \(2021\)](#); [King \(2020\)](#); [Wilschut \(2019\)](#); [Voss \(2016\)](#); [Friedrich \(2014\)](#); and [Zanazanian \(2010\)](#). ↵

90. As closely connected, Points 2 and 3 have often been studied together; see, for example, [Collier, Hidalgo & Maciuceanu \(2006: 216–217, 223, 229\)](#); [Daly \(2012: 539–540, 544\)](#). [↗](#)
91. [Collier, Hidalgo & Maciuceanu \(2006: 219\)](#). [↗](#)
92. See [Simon, Rüsen & others \(2004\)](#). [↗](#)
93. [Gallie \(1955–1956: 174, Footnote 2 and passim.\)](#). [↗](#)
94. [Collier, Hidalgo & Maciuceanu \(2006: 215\)](#). [↗](#)

3 Defining historical consciousness

DOI: [10.4324/9781003767657-3](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003767657-3)

Historical consciousness has been studied during the last decades on the basis of several starting points and approaches related mainly to history didactics. Excellent historians and history educationists have produced high-quality treatises on how history teaching in schools might develop the historical consciousness of the students and prepare them as society members and citizens. I would like to make clear once more that my discussion of historical consciousness, as well as this book in general, is *not* related to history didactics. My aim is to contribute to the conceptual theorization of historical consciousness. In this effort, I am following another line of historians and others who, at least from Hans-Georg Gadamer onwards, approached historical consciousness from an ontological perspective, related to the historicity of the human being and the world, as well as to how historical consciousness is related to our perceptions and conceptualizations of past, present, and future. Some of these historians did so explicitly, while some others indirectly and implicitly, while discussing other subjects of equal importance, for example, historical narratives or historical identities.

To get closer to the meaning of historical consciousness, I would start by taking into consideration its nominal value, which shows that it is a kind, or type, of consciousness somehow related to history. But how? What is the meaning of “consciousness” in the framework of studying history to understand who we are? And what is the meaning of “historical” in relation to human consciousness? To answer these questions, I will start with a more straightforward one: What is the meaning of “history” and “consciousness”?

Let us start with *history*. In various discourses, the term history is used to signify three related but different things. In other words, the term has three dimensions: ontological, sociocultural, and epistemological.

Ontologically, history means what I would call “the content of time” (not only of the past but also of the present and future). More precisely, it means the content of time which we have access to (through the study of anything that might function as a source) and which is evaluated as worthy of being registered, remembered, anticipated, and re-presented in textual and non-textual ways. Let me underline something important: It is not time itself that becomes history, but the *content of time*, in other words, elements of the in-time relation and interaction of the human being to its animate and inanimate environment.

Socioculturally (i.e. as a technology of social and cultural learning and agency), the term history signifies the textual and non-textual narratives we make about selected parts of the content of time—what we usually call “the history of ...” (of a country, a place, a period, a people, a community, a nation, an institution, a phenomenon, a technology, or anything else). These narratives are the means through which we understand ourselves and the animate and inanimate environment around us. They are pieces of immaterial technology (which means social and cultural inventions used as means to meet specific ends), and they are transmitted synchronically (between peers or groups of people) and diachronically (between generations) in various ways and with the support of individual and collective agents.¹ These narratives might be produced by academic historians or amateurs, and they might be the result of research or memory.

Epistemologically, History (with capitalized initial) means the discipline that studies both the content of time and the narratives about it. History might be served by professionally trained historians or by amateurs. As a discipline and activity, it is based on specific practices, methods, strategies, and theories.

To avoid misunderstandings, in the rest of the book I am using the word history to signify the content of time, History (capital H) for the discipline, and the terms narratives and historical narratives for any representation of the content of time, in textual, oral, or visual form. This means that I consider various visual products (e.g. photographs, paintings, sculptures, various objects, videos, tables, or diagrams) as narratives.

What is important for this book is that historical narratives of any kind and History as a discipline aim, or at least should aim, explicitly or implicitly, at a trustworthy orientation in life—unfortunately, both historical narrative of any kind and History as a discipline are often used to disorient through misinformation or disinformation, especially, but not only, in authoritarian regimes. The quality of this history-based orientation in life is influenced by the development and maintenance of historical consciousness. The more advanced your historical consciousness, the better your orientation in life.

Definition of consciousness

So much with history. Let us now turn to the meaning of the term consciousness. Consciousness is more difficult to define. It is one of these concepts we all believe we have a clear understanding of, until we are asked to define it. It is so essentially contested that experts in various fields prefer to avoid defining it at all.² The problem is, once more, that consciousness is one of the concepts that have been studied by experts in various fields, who approach it and study it (just a few taking the effort to define it) in different ways. This makes its consideration by a historian especially challenging. I believe that the best we can do as historians might be to clarify the operational definition on which we base our discussion of the phenomenon. I will try to do so by combining neuroscientific and philosophical approaches.

In an article dedicated to discussing common elements and differences between conscience and consciousness, G. Vithoukas

and D.F. Muresanu define consciousness as “the function of the human mind that receives and processes information, crystallizes it and then stores it or rejects it”. This happens with the help of our five senses, the reasoning ability of the mind, imagination and emotion, and memory, in the following process: “The five senses enable the mind to receive information, then imagination and emotion process it, reason judges it, and memory stores or rejects it”. Vithoulkas and Muresanu also make clear that the relevant parts of the brain involved in the process “are supposedly defined by neurophysiology”.³

The definition of Vithoulkas and Muresanu is valuable because it presents consciousness as something related to the world as it is experienced through our senses, as well as to the mind’s cognitive and emotive processing of this evidence, and its registration in our memory. In other words, this definition presents consciousness as related to both the physical and the temporal dimensions of reality and life. On the other hand, the definition lacks an element that many scholars underline as crucial in any discussion of consciousness: The consideration of subjectivity.⁴

Vithoulkas specializes in homeopathic medicine, and Muresanu specializes in neuroscience. With these starting points, it is logical that they approach consciousness as a function of the mind, in fact of the brain. Actually, this is how most scholars in neuroscience and medicine perceive consciousness: As a function, a process.

Philosophers, on the other hand, approach consciousness more as a state of mind than as a process. In the philosophic discourses on the ontology of consciousness, the relevant questions are considerably more than the answers. Philosopher Robert van Gulick approaches consciousness as an umbrella term covering “a wide variety of mental phenomena”, whose understanding requires “a diversity of conceptual tools for dealing with its many differing aspects”.⁵

Van Gulick states that there are various sorts of consciousness. To understand consciousness in a generic way, he uses three questions as starting points, which he calls the *descriptive question* (what is

consciousness?), the *explanatory question* (how does consciousness of the relevant sort come to exist?), and the *functional question* (why does consciousness of the relevant sort exist?). Each of these questions incorporates several other questions, whose study shows how complex and difficult it is to define such a general and broad phenomenon as consciousness.⁶ Thus, the best we can do is to clarify the operational definition we adopt, in relation to the needs of our study. This applies to any sort of consciousness, and this is what I am going to do for the perception of the terms consciousness and historical consciousness in this book. Regarding the term consciousness, combining the two definitions presented earlier, I would state that I am perceiving it on the basis of the following definition:

Consciousness is a state of mind related to our internal and external worlds and our subjective perception of them; it is the result of a process including the sensual configuration of information and the logical and emotive processing of this information, and aims at supporting our orientation in the physical and temporal realities we live in.

Definition of historical consciousness

Let me now turn to *historical consciousness*. Something that is important to underline from the very beginning, before proceeding to my operational definition, is that historical consciousness (as any sort of consciousness) is a phenomenon including a strong qualitative dimension of subjectivity. This subjectivity might be related to the mental abilities of the individual (dependent on the function of the person's brain as a hardware), as well as to her intellectual abilities (related to the function of her mind as a software formed by her education, personal experiences, and various influences from her sociocultural environment). People with a dysfunctional brain have a different subjectivity and, thus, a different

historical consciousness, in comparison to mentally healthy people, and well-educated people have a different (but not necessarily better) subjectivity and historical consciousness than illiterate people.

At this point, let us take into consideration something noted by Jan Bjarne Bøe, namely, that historical consciousness is a phenomenon which is not merely cognitive, but also experiential; in his words, it is "something that 'exists' in our mental world". Furthermore, he views historical consciousness as something that is shaped, in various ways, throughout our entire lives. As he writes, it is "a result of comprehensive and fundamental processes that occur throughout life, namely the question of our own conceptions of who we are and who we should be, and the evaluations and reactions from people we interact with". Bøe also argues that the processes resulting in historical consciousness "are driven by mental, social, and cultural developmental factors".²

So, let me clarify how I am perceiving historical consciousness. I am approaching the phenomenon of historical consciousness as a state of mind and a property of utmost importance in a world where disinformation is often based on fake historical narratives. This state of mind is horizon-like. While you move towards it, it changes content and demands new perceptions and further consideration. This means that historical consciousness is a dynamic state of mind under constant and endless development. At the same time, in this "horizon", there is also a focal point: Our consciousness is always related to something (this is why there are various sorts of historical consciousness), and this something is related to either our internal or our external world (and sometimes to both). Our consciousness of our internal world is, in fact, a consciousness related to our identity, while our consciousness of the external world is related to life, and often to our roles in it.

Before presenting my definition, I would like to clarify two things. The first is that the definition is of the type "per genus et differentia". I see historical consciousness as a type of consciousness (genus), and then I implicitly present what differentiates historical

consciousness from other types of consciousness. Other types of definitions might approach the concept from different angles and produce equally good, or even better, definitions. I should stress that the type of definition I do not have faith in, when it comes to abstract concepts of broad extension as historical consciousness, is the lexical one. Unfortunately, short lexical definitions of historical consciousness are often used, which reduces the conceptual clarity in the discussions of the phenomenon.

The second thing I would like to clarify is related to the concept "awareness". In several publications, and in everyday parlance, awareness is used as synonymous to consciousness. I do not agree. Awareness is a basic state of mind, the state of being informed or cognisant of something, that is, that something exists or happens. It is a fundamental capacity of the human being, and it is a prerequisite for consciousness, usually the first step that opens the process that finally leads to consciousness.

Having made these basic approaches clear, I can now present my operational definition:

Historical consciousness is a dynamic horizon-like state of mind related to the historical dimensions of our individual and collective selves, of the world, of time, of the narratives we make about the content of time, and of the ways in which we develop historical knowledge, we think historically, and we use history in life. It is one of the results of the mental evolution of humankind and it is rooted in our need for orientation in the physical and temporal realities we live in. Historical consciousness might be cognitive, metacognitive, and epistemological. *Cognitive historical consciousness* is related to the content of time, in other words to how the humankind and the world function and interact, how this function and interaction has evolved in time, and how this evolution makes us who we are, individually and collectively. *Metacognitive historical consciousness* is related to the dimensions of historical time, the construction of historical narratives, and the use of history. *Epistemological historical consciousness* is

related to historical knowledge and its limits, and to historical thinking, in other words to the ways in which we think about everything in historical terms. There are various quality levels of historical consciousness, which might broadly be categorized as *innate*, *reflective*, and *scholarly*.

In other words, historical consciousness is an advanced form of consciousness, including the following seven different types of consciousness:

1. A cognitive consciousness of what we might call "historicity of the world", that is, a consciousness of everything that exists in the present and everything that existed in the past as history-made, as a product of historical evolution.
2. A cognitive consciousness of what various historians and philosophers call "historicity of the being", that is, a consciousness of the human being as a historical creature that exists and operates in time and is history-made and history-making (which means that we have an agency that influences, and sometimes shapes, historical evolution).
3. A metacognitive histotemporal consciousness, that is, a consciousness of the various dimensions of historical times and historical temporalities, and the coinherence and constant dialogue and interaction between them.
4. A metacognitive consciousness of the various ways in which historical narratives are constructed and used by individuals and groups, in the sense that the production and use of historical narratives is also a product of historical evolution (and one of the ways in which humans make history).
5. A metacognitive consciousness of how individuals and communities use veritable perceptions of the past, fake stories about the past, past or past-oriented material and immaterial technologies (objects, rituals, customs, etc.), and/or anticipations of historical futures as means to understand themselves and others, or as tools to reach specific goals.
6. An epistemological consciousness of historical knowledge and its limits, in other words, of what is possible (and what is not) to know about the content of time, the process that leads to gathering historical knowledge, and the challenges related to various phases of this process.
7. An epistemological consciousness of the difference between thinking about history and thinking in historical terms, of

historical thinking as something fundamental in the process of getting from historical awareness to historical consciousness, as well as of the existence of various types of historical thinking.

These seven types of historical consciousness will be discussed in the following chapters. [Figure 3.1](#) presents the main subjects I am discussing in relation to each one of them.

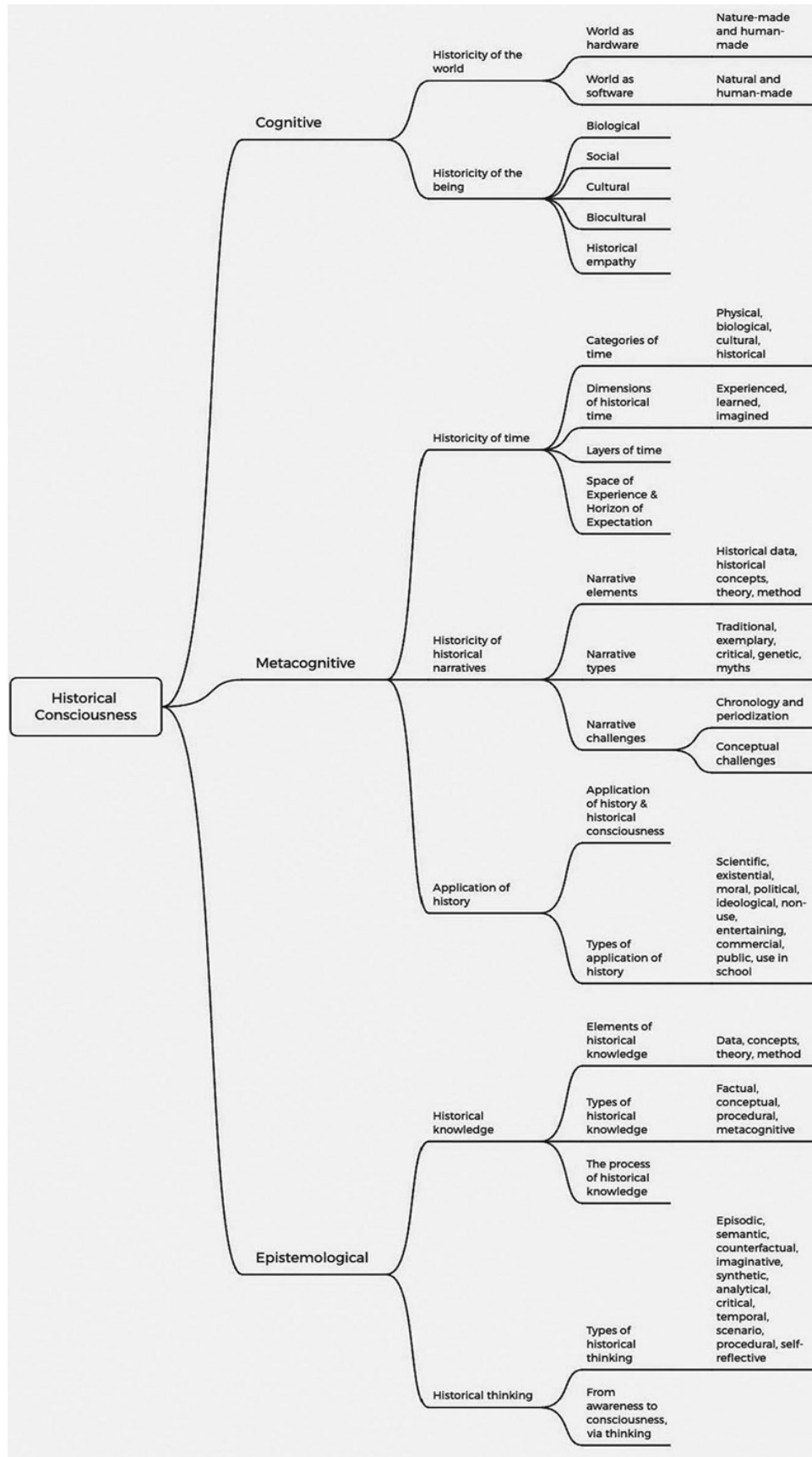


Figure 3.1 Historical consciousness: categories, types, and subjects explored in the book. 

In [Chapter 11](#), I will reflect on the quality levels of historical consciousness, which might be broadly categorized as innate, reflective, and scholarly. I prefer doing it after discussing the epistemological dimension of historical consciousness, because the quality of historical consciousness, and thus this perception of quality levels, depends on the quality of historical thinking of the conscious or consciousness-seeking subject.

One of the points that almost all students of historical consciousness agree on is that it is closely related to our orientation in life. So, I would like to close my definitional approach to the concept with a few words on how historical consciousness orients us in life. It does so in two different ways, one existential and the other epistemological-phenomenological.

The *existential orientational function* is related to our historical existence in a historical world. This means that it is directly and intensely related to how we perceive the natural and sociocultural worlds we live in and our position and role in them, as well as to the ways in which we perceive and realize our social, political, and cultural agency in relation to our past, present, and future. In other words, the existential orientational function is related to: (a) How we might better identify, understand, and evaluate ourselves and/or others by thinking of us and/or them as history-made, that is, as products of historical processes, some of which are not yet completed. (b) How we can better understand ourselves in time and space by focusing on our relationship with other humans (individuals and communities), the world, and time. (c) How we can better understand ourselves and/or others in time and space by focusing on us and/or others as history-making, that is, as agents whose decisions and actions influence historical evolution, which means the world around us, at least at a micro level.

The *epistemological-phenomenological orientational function* of historical consciousness is related to how we can optimize our existential orientation. The epistemological part of this function is related to how historical knowledge is constructed, while the

phenomenological is related to how our individual and collective memory is developed and maintained as an alternative way of approaching our past, present, and future. So, the epistemological-phenomenological orientational function of historical consciousness is related to: (a) How we can search for historical knowledge. This is related to which sources we use to construct it, how we approach these sources, what kind of questions we pose to our sources, and if and how we analyse the answers by using relevant theories, that is, by setting the answers into a broader perspective. (b) How we develop and maintain our individual or collective memories. This is related to the individual mental processes that allow us to store and recall information (let it be noted that these processes are based on our individual interpretation of reality and our selection of what is worthy of remembering) and to the collective decisions of which memories will be registered and communicated as elements of collective identity. (c) How we form our knowledge and memories into narratives of any kind. This is related to the textual and non-textual ways in which we communicate our historical knowledge and our individual and collective memories. (d) How we use these narratives in our life. This is related to how history, as the knowledge-based or memory-based content of time, is used cognitively (to better understand ourselves and the world) or sociocultur-ally (to achieve specific goals in practical life).⁸

The following chapters are dedicated to the seven types of historical consciousness, each representing an “area” of studying our history and dealing with it. My aim is to present an overview of how you can improve your historical consciousness by studying and reflecting on concrete elements related to these types and areas.

Notes

1. Let it be noted that my perception of both material and immaterial technology is based on the definition of technology as the knowledge-based or trial-and-error-based use of specific means to meet specific ends, that is, to achieve specific aims or solve specific problems. [↗](#)
2. See, for example, [Van Gulick \(2021\)](#) and [Blackmore \(2017\)](#). [Blackmore and Troscianko \(2018\)](#) open their book *Consciousness* by stating that “if you think you have a solution to the problem of consciousness, you haven’t understood the problem”. [↗](#)
3. [Vithoulkas & Muresanu \(2014: 104\)](#). [↗](#)
4. See, for example, [Blackmore \(2017: 8\)](#), who claims that “if you are really talking about consciousness, then you must deal with subjectivity”. [↗](#)
5. [Van Gulick \(2021\)](#). [↗](#)
6. [Van Gulick \(2021\)](#). [↗](#)
7. [Bøe \(2002: 31\)](#). [↗](#)
8. My thoughts on the epistemological-phenomenological orientational function are inspired by the work of Alexandre Dessingué who in a paper on how to develop a critical historical and memory consciousness in history education combines the historicity of being and the formation of cultural identities to the epistemology of history and the phenomenology of memory ([Dessingué 2020](#)). [↗](#)

4 Being conscious of the historicity of the world

DOI: [10.4324/9781003767657-4](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003767657-4)

The first step towards cognitive historical consciousness is the insight that the world around us, both the natural and the human-made world, has a historical dimension, is in fact history-made. This dimension of the world can be better understood if we focus on how the world is structured and how it functions, with a special consideration on how humankind interacts with nature. I am claiming that this can be done in a very creative way if we study the world as a system in terms of hardware and software.

The hardware dimension of the world consists of everything in nature (including the human being) and material technology (the human-made environment). The world's software includes a natural and a human-made part: the natural software is energy, while the human-made software is what I call "immaterial technologies", that is, social and cultural inventions that are fundamental for our survival and prosperity. (I would like to clarify that my perception of both material and immaterial technology is based on the definition of technology as the knowledge-based or trial-and-error-based use of specific means to meet specific ends.)

My main point in this section is that the study of the historicity of the world as an element of historical consciousness might function as an eye-opener if we focus on the interaction between the world's hardware and software and if we focus on both hardware and software as results of historical evolution, in other words of processes and activities that have shaped this hardware and software, and which sometimes are still active and ongoing.

But what is included in the world's hardware and software? This chapter presents my thoughts on nature-made hardware, human-made hardware, nature-made software, and human-made software.

Nature-made hardware includes the geosphere, the hydrosphere, the atmosphere, and the biosphere, the latter including humankind as its most important (in our anthropocentric perception of the world) and most dangerous species. Each of these spheres has its own history (in fact, it is shaped by its history) and, at the same time, influence in various ways historical evolution in general and human evolution in particular. Not only because they constitute the scenery of our historical life, but also because they are an active arena of whatever we register as history, in the sense that they actively influence historical evolution. You might think, for example, of how nature influences economy (and thus political, social, and cultural evolution) or the outcome of battles and wars. In addition, think of how migration to new places (which often means to different geospheric, hydrospheric, atmospheric, and biospheric conditions) influences even our biological evolution—reflect on skin colour, or on humans having larger lungs when they live in places with higher altitude. And let us not forget that our own hardware, our body, is part of the biosphere; and our biological evolution (of both our body and our brain) is of central importance for human and historical evolution.

Human-made hardware refers to all material technology produced from the Stone Age to the present. Humble objects, for example, stone axes, and complex sophisticated inventions, for example, medical robots or spacecrafts, might be included here. The human-made hardware answers to countless needs. For example, it supports our life on the planet (buildings and any object related to them, protective walls, etc.), facilitates transportation (roads, bridges, or vehicles of various types), supports communication (various devices, from optical beacons to mobile phones), protect life or cause death (weapons, medicines and poisons), and are central in production (tools, or industrial and agricultural structures).

Nature-made software refers to energy. There are various types of energy (gravitational, kinetic, electromagnetic, thermal, nuclear, etc.)

and various types of energy dynamos (the first in human history being the human body, followed by animals, and then by human-made machines). Energy is central, not only for our survival (without energy from food and heat, we are condemned to die) but also for the survival and prosperity of societies. This is why access to, and control of, energy resources is, particularly in modern times, one of the most important causes of war. To understand the importance of energy as nature-made software in historical evolution, you might reflect on the fact that there is a direct analogy between what we call the development level of a society and its access to, and use of, energy. What we call developed countries are *high-energy societies*, while the so-called under-developed countries are *low-energy societies*.¹

Human-made software includes what I call “immaterial technologies”, that is, specific immaterial means that humans invent to make possible, regulate, or improve our relationship to other humans and to the world around us. This refers to social (including political and economic) and cultural (including religious) inventions, without which our historical evolution would be very different, most probably similar to that of other mammals. The most important immaterial technology is language, as it gave us the ability to communicate in any given present, register our pasts, and plan the future. (It should be noted that language is not a natural ability of humans; our natural ability is to communicate by making visual and voice-made signals, as most other animals; without social learning, we have no language—in a hypothetical scenario of a child growing up with animals, the child would be able to communicate with the animals, but not with us.)² Other important immaterial technologies are mathematics, religion, law, as well as social institutions, rules, and norms, or any cultural principle you might think of. Human-made software is related to the historicity of the being, and thus, it is discussed in the following chapter.

The earth’s hardware is historically important in two different ways. One is related to historical evolution itself. Both nature-made and human-made hardware has a history, which, in most cases, can

be studied by historians and other scientists. We know, for example, how natural monuments such as the petrified forest of Lesbos in Greece were formed (in the case of the petrified forest, because of a volcano eruption some 20 million years ago) or when and how the pyramid of Giza was built (and for what reason). The other way in which nature-made hardware is historical is not related to history but to our perception of the world around us, more precisely, our perception of the earth as our property. I am talking about geography, about how the earth has been historically divided between human communities we today call states. Our picture of the earth is based on the existence of borders, which is something imaginary (an immaterial technology) that influences both the earth (think of a forest belonging to two countries having totally opposite environmental policies) and our lives in general (think of people who live 500 m from each other, on either side of the border between two hostile countries).

I would like to add that nature is historical not only as history-made but also as history-making. Both nature-made hardware and nature-made software influence historical evolution, not only in cases of radical natural phenomena or natural disasters but also by limiting and dictating human activities. Agricultural production, warfare, communication, and transportation, along with several other areas of human activity, have historically been strongly related to the powers of nature. Radical natural events, such as volcanic eruptions, and powerful natural phenomena, such as climate patterns like El Niño, function as unpredictable elements of history which make historical evolution even more chaotic than the human agency makes it (let us not think of our times, when we have a lot of knowledge about natural phenomena, but of the past, when humans did not have it, and these phenomena were truly unpredictable and chaotic). During the period we call Anthropocene, human agency has influenced the balance of nature-made and human-made hardware and nature-made software in a way that seems to get more and more dangerous for the whole planet, both in the present and in the future. It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that because of that, the earth system has become natural-technological

and partly human-made—the example of microplastic contamination in fish bodies might suffice.

From the agricultural revolution onwards, sapiens plays a leading role in how the historicity of the world evolves in time. We have established ourselves in permanent settlements that would become heavily polluting megacities. We domesticated animals that came so close to us that we even transmit our diseases to each other. We are the main reason for the extinction of thousands of species, which we have condemned as not worthy of sharing the world's hardware and software with us (in many cases, we eliminated them without a plan, simply because of our narcissistic lack of future perspective). We have enriched the earth's hardware with buildings and structures that sometimes serve specific needs and sometimes stand as witnesses of personal or collective manifestations of vanity (e.g. the Egyptian pyramids or the Eiffel Tower).

Furthermore, human quantitative hardware evolution from a few thousand people in Africa to more than eight billion people around the globe today has influenced directly (in both quantitative and qualitative terms) the historicity of the world, in terms of both hardware and software. Climate change, deforestation, pollution of the atmosphere and hydrosphere, abuse of energy resources (in our days to serve unnecessary needs), and many other similar historical phenomena demonstrate our power over the historicity of the world, as well as our responsibility to preserve both hardware and software in sustainable ways.

Human-made technology, both material and immaterial (especially the latter), influences historical evolution both directly and indirectly. Technology not only changes our lives, or at least a small part of it, but it also reshapes our thinking. By altering our world as a system and its dynamics, technology prompts us to adopt new perspectives. Often, technologies help us, or even force us, to perceive and sometimes evaluate ourselves, others, and the world in new ways.³ This is not something new. The invention of steam-powered machines, for example, triggered a scientific process that opened a new field in physics, namely, thermodynamics, which, in its turn,

reshaped the way we think about cosmology and, indirectly, human historical evolution⁴—by the way, this is also an excellent example of how hardware innovations lead to software evolution. To underline the importance of this, let me say that the secondary effects of decisions, acts, and events are often more significant than their first-order effects. This means that the impact of adopting a novel mindset based on a new material or immaterial technology often outweighs the direct influence of the technology itself.

Let me close by referring to something important. Natural historical evolution is unpredictable, in fact, chaotic. Certain events that have altered the course of history (whether by introducing novel phenomena or by accelerating history) could not have been predicted just a short time before their occurrence. To quote political scientist Shiping Tang, “evolution allows accidents”.⁵ Probably, we could claim that historical evolution does not only allow accidents, but it is, in fact, based on them. Think of hardware biological evolution. Countless biological accidents over millions of years created the breathtaking diversity of life on earth. Unpredicted natural events and phenomena, such as storms, floods, droughts, volcano eruptions, or earthquakes, formed historical evolution in the past. Despite the advance of science, many of them still remain unpredictable, and they still have the same power to change the route of history. At any time, your life might be changed dramatically, or even end, in the few unexpected seconds of an earthquake.

Being conscious in terms of historicity of the world has various sides and dimensions. As historical beings, we live in time and space. The space we live in is physical and sociocultural. Our sociocultural world is basically software, and as such, it is related to the historicity of the being. But it also has a hardware dimension, which makes it part of the physical world in which we live, and thus a part of the historicity of the world. Individuals and communities live and function in a present world that has a past and a future. Being conscious about how humankind has interacted with our physical environment, and how this environment has been shaped

over time, and how natural evolution and events influenced historical evolution is of utmost importance in being conscious of our place and our role in the world.

Notes

1. [Smil \(2017: 395\)](#) writes that “by the end of the twentieth century the West (the EU and North America), with less than 15% of the global population, consumed nearly 50% of all primary commercial energy”. [↗](#)
2. On the development of language as technology, see [Mufwene \(2019\)](#). [↗](#)
3. See, for example, [Walker Rettberg \(2023\)](#). [↗](#)
4. [Frank \(2013: 211\)](#). He also claims (p. 19) that “what altered the human mind was not simply the introduction of new ideas in our heads but new encounters with the world through what we built with our hands”. [↗](#)
5. [Tang \(2020: 8\)](#) (Kindle). [↗](#)

5 Being conscious of the historicity of the being

DOI: [10.4324/9781003767657-5](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003767657-5)

We are historical beings, living in history and having a historical agency, as both individuals and communities. But what does this mean? I would say that our historicity as humans might be summarized in three sentences, which are discussed briefly in the three following paragraphs.

First, *we are history-made*. I would dare to claim that we are nothing but products of our individual and collective history. Indeed, we are *creations of historical processes*, processes that in some cases have not yet been completed. These processes unfold in three different areas: biology, society, and culture (I will elaborate on that in a minute). The social and cultural processes that form us might unfold at the tiniest micro levels (e.g. of families) or at the largest macro levels (e.g. of global health politics). There might also be natural processes at local, regional, or global levels, which directly influence our biological, social, and/or cultural evolution (the examples of ice melting in the deep past, which resulted in more parts of the earth being inhabited, or global warming that will result in millions of forcibly displaced people in the near future might suffice).

Second, *the historical processes that shape us do not refer to the past only, but also to the present and the future*. Our interpretation of the past, as well as the narratives we make about the past, is always related to our present and future interests and priorities. In addition, every decision we make in any given present is the result of a (usually internal) dialogue which considers what we (believe

we) know about the past and what we expect for the future. This dialogue is also history-made, as it is based on thoughts and related to structures, rules, and norms that are also historical (which means structures, rules, and norms that are relevant only in the specific social and cultural environment we belong to—if we were living in another country, or even in another place, the dialogue would be different). This means that our contribution to the historical processes that shape us (as well as the contribution of any other individual or collective entity) is also essentially historical.

Third, *we create history*. Individuals and small groups might be the creators of local microhistories, while both individuals and larger collective entities, such as corporations, research centres, or states, might play a crucial role in the national, transnational, international, or global macrocosm. I would like to underline that we create history in two different ways. On one hand, we create history in the form of our ideas and doings (creating thus new content of time)—notice that in our “doings”, we should include the creation of material and immaterial technology, anything from tools and monumental structures to religious doctrines and science-based knowledge. On the other hand, we create history in the form of narratives about the content of time—not only about the past but also about the present and the future. To be precise, the moment they are shared, these narratives become doings and thus also content of time. It is important to underline that some of these narratives are fake. Even so, they might gain tremendous power and greatly influence the further evolution of history.

The history-making human appears, directly and indirectly, in [Chapter 7](#) (on the historicity of historical narratives). The relation of past, present, and future is the subject of [Chapter 6](#). The rest of this chapter discusses how we could be historically conscious in terms of our biological, social, cultural, and biocultural evolution.

Biological consciousness

Being historically conscious in terms of biological evolution includes various elements of consciousness. First, it means having a cognitive consciousness of our qualitative and quantitative biological evolution, the first being related to the evolution of our body and brain, and the second to the evolution of the human population (what is called “human biomass”) over time. I will return to the qualitative evolution in a minute. Regarding the quantitative evolution, we should be aware of how the increase of the human population has influenced the environment (pollution, energy use, etc.) and how it has caused sociocultural and political phenomena, such as wars, migration, colonization, or policies of birth control. Second, being historically conscious in terms of biological evolution means having reliable and well-argued-for answers to questions related to the importance of the genetic evolution of the human body and brain over time, the ways in which biological evolution has influenced sociocultural evolution, or the ways in which environmental conditions have influenced biological evolution over time. Third, it means being conscious of the ways in which the evolution of societies and cultures has influenced biological evolution, including the evolution of our brain. Fourth, it means being conscious of the ways in which the growth of the human population has influenced historical evolution. Finally, it means being reflected on the ways in which technology and biotechnology have influenced human biology in the past and how we can anticipate that they will influence it in the future.

Being conscious about how our biological evolution has made us what we are today includes various insights. One of them is related to the oldness of some of our bodily features, which sometimes have their biological roots in other hominins. We know today, for example, that the roots of some modern health conditions (e.g. Lupus, Crohn’s disease, or type 2 diabetes) are transmitted to homo sapiens from the Neanderthals.¹ Another is related to the importance of biological features that were developed when sapiens was living (and exactly because we were living) as hunters-gatherers—we tend to forget that sapiens lived as hunters-gatherers for more than 99% of our

existence on earth.² A third insight is related to the importance of the quantitative and qualitative evolution of our brain (which happened over a very long period in the Pleistocene), which gave us a totally different biological, social, and cultural evolution than any other animal.³ In relation to the evolution of the brain, it is also important to be conscious of the significance of what is called “evolution of the mind” during the period coined as “Cognitive Revolution”, sometime between 70,000 and 30,000 years ago.⁴

To be conscious in biohistorical terms also means reflecting on some of the basic principles of biological evolution. One of these basic principles is the much-celebrated “survival of the fittest”. In the original Darwinian perception of biological evolution, the survival of the fittest as a principle was related to natural selection. In simple words, the theory says that in any given period, and for any population of any given species, since there are more offspring produced than the surrounding environment can support, it is only some of the offspring, the fittest, that will survive and transmit their genes to the next generation. Fitness in this context is related to the ability of an organism to adapt to the environment, survive, and reproduce at the highest possible level. In historical terms, human evolution can be divided into two periods: the period before the Cognitive Revolution and the period after it. In the period after, which means in the last 30,000–70,000 years, it would be more correct to speak about the “survival of the smartest”, or, sometimes, “survival of the smarter” (any kind of selection, even biological selection, can also function on the basis of comparison between alternatives, not on the basis of perfectness). In other words, in terms of human evolution, we might think that “fittest” means smartest or smarter, as it is the smarter ones who survive and pass their genes to the next generation. This is probably why science and culture become more and more elaborated and sophisticated with the passage of time. And, to reflect on the game-changing possibilities offered by cyborg engineering and genome editing, probably in the future, “smartest” might not mean naturally, but tech-naturally smartest.

In historical terms, human smartness has been reflected in our sociocultural evolution. Our ability to organize ourselves in communities of varying nature, size, structure, and purpose is unparalleled in nature. The same applies to our ability to establish and develop cultural norms and values related to almost every area of human life and activity. It is to these two areas, society and culture, that I am turning next.

Social consciousness

Being historically conscious in terms of social evolution is of utmost importance for our self-identification and self-understanding, and the identification and understanding of others. In various ways, it influences our overall social life, including our political activity (and mainly the quality of direct and indirect participation in political activities). Our histosocial consciousness consists of a variety of elements, which could never be presented in the limited space of this section (I am afraid not even a book would be enough, something that also applies to the biological and the cultural evolution). Our historical reflection on social evolution might focus on issues like the following (the list is by no means exhaustive):

What is a society? Usually, we do not reflect on how we identify this omnipresent concept. My understanding of the concept of society is based on the definition of Shiping Tang, who perceives it as "a system comprising agents or actors (i.e., individuals and collectives of individuals), a structure (however defined), and the physical environment (including time and space)".⁵ Notice the elements of time and space. Indeed, every society manifests itself in a concrete space and a concrete time. The space, with its natural and environmental conditions, influences the social evolution of individuals and collectives, in terms of food nutrition (arable land, access to natural food resources), production (raw material and energy resources), security (natural fortification), and so on. Time, on the other hand, defines a society in juxtaposition to other

societies that functioned in the same space in previous periods of time and in the future.

When did societies appear? Societies, in the modern meaning of the term, appeared from the agricultural revolution onwards, when sapiens established themselves in permanent settlements that in time became larger and more complex, as new professions appeared to cover the new needs of everyday life and its organization. New political and social institutions also appeared, as the new life created new needs for regulation.

Without social groups and societies, we would not be able to survive. Our weakness in nature is the main reason for the very existence of societies. We are a rather weak animal, with a long infancy, and alone, or in very small groups, we cannot survive against predator animals and cannot face several natural challenges (some of them we cannot even face in our present organization and having developed amazing technological tools). Being social has historically been a *sine qua non* for our survival and prosperity. The main aims of social coexistence are related to solving the problems of survival and nutrition. The coexistence in communities, and later in societies, created a new need, that of identity, which decided who deserves protection and access to the community's or the society's resources.

Social evolution unfolds at various geosocial levels, related to the size of the relevant groups and the geographical areas they inhabit. The term "geo-social" has a geospatial and a biosocial component: On one hand, it signifies the geographical space (in our times, this might also be a virtual space) in which the society expands; on the other hand, it signifies the number of people who constitute the society. To make the point clear, I am asking you to compare the local groups of hunter-gatherers to small agricultural societies 10,000 years ago, to the ancient city of Rome, and the city of Tokyo today. Thinking of modern national societies and their geospatial dimensions, we should also reflect on them as what Benedict Anderson has coined as "imagined communities", that is, entities that only exist in the collective imagination of people.⁶

Social organization, viewed diachronically, manifests in two distinct forms: one rooted in interaction and the other in power dynamics. First, there is an *inherent, bottom-up structuring* of the relationships between individuals and groups within any given society, which results in various forms of social stratification. This structuring appears to emerge organically, meaning that the organization is not imposed by an authority, but is based on criteria related to social activities (economic or cultural production, contribution to the social welfare, etc.). Second, there is a top-down *power-based* organization of societies. This process has resulted over time in the political systems and regimes that have existed since the time of hunter-gatherers. Often, this process is closely related to religion.⁷ Notably, political and religious authorities have frequently collaborated, especially in the last three millennia, with religious doctrines often serving to bolster political regimes.

Diachronically, since the agricultural revolution, social stratification has unfolded in two different modes: (a) a horizontal stratification related to the division in groups that have different biological and/or cultural (and in recent times political) identities and (b) a vertical stratification related to the division of society in groups with different access to resources, authority, and/or power. Horizontal stratification was for millennia based on tribes, and since the agricultural revolution, also on gender, and for at least some millennia, also on race. Gender and race have been central in social division, as they divide people in all vertical strata of a society. As both have been until recently visually perceived identities, they have existed in every place and every period in recorded history, even in communities with loose vertical stratification. Vertical stratification, on the other hand, has existed from at least the period of hunter-gatherers. Vertically stratified societies, consisting of two or more higher and lower strata, are one of the strongest universals in history.

Social immaterial technologies are of crucial importance for social evolution. Yes, there are mechanisms we could call “immaterial technologies” (human-made social software) that are developed to support the structure, organization, and function of societies. Their

main aims are to make our social life safer, easier, more controlled, and more predictable. There are countless such technologies. Think, for example, of (a) family as the molecule of social and economic life; (b) patriarchy as a social institution subjugating women to men; (c) social rules, norms, and rituals of various types as practices of interaction, identity and memory; (d) the maintenance of collective memory (i.e. memories shared by the members of communities) as an instrument of identity-making and orientation; and (e) the use of myths as a prism through which we understand the world and build our identities. The roots of all these technologies are so deep that they cannot really be dated.

Social evolution is complex and chaotic. We should always be aware that social evolution is a highly complex and chaotic process that unfolds at different levels: individual, collective, and systemic. It is easy to understand that individuals are highly chaotic and unpredictable; the same person might react very differently to the same stimuli on different occasions, depending on their physical and emotional status at the moment, the social or cultural context, or even physical conditions, such as the weather. Social evolution is also complex and exponentially more chaotic than biological evolution. One example might suffice: Our biological evolution as species has been predictable from the appearance of the homo sapiens to the present (a homo sapiens some 150,000 years ago had almost the same body as you and me). But our sociocultural (read scientific) evolution guarantees that it is a matter of time that our bodies will function, and probably look, differently; cyborgs are just around the corner. There are countless starting points and ways of approaching the sociohistorical evolution of sapiens, and various disciplines have shed light on various dimensions of it.

These are just a few elements of reflection that could lead to historical consciousness in terms of social evolution. There are, of course, many more subjects, approaches, and starting points that might be equally, if not more, productive. What is important is that you reflect on these issues while keeping in mind that social evolution is in constant and intense interinfluence, in fact, in coinherence, with cultural evolution. A historical study of social

evolution without the consideration of culture and a historical study of cultural evolution without the consideration of society are doomed to be incomplete. So, let us turn to culture.

Cultural consciousness

Every effort to reach historical consciousness in terms of cultural evolution should start with the consideration of a question that has challenged experts for decades: *What is culture?* There are hundreds of expert definitions of this slippery concept. Any historical study of cultural evolution should start by adopting one (anyone is better than none). In my writings, I understand culture as *a system of patterned ways of thinking and doing which functions as the fundament of individuals' decisions and actions and distinguishes members of one cultural community from the members of any other.*⁸ This is how the concept is used in the following. Please notice that it is not the total of what we think and do that is culture, but the commonly accepted (patterned) ways of thinking and doing, on the basis of which we make decisions and execute them. These ways make our cultural group or community different from any other, and us, individually, similar to the other members of the group/community and different from the members of any other.

In the following paragraphs, I am presenting just a few subjects you might reflect on if you want to improve your historical consciousness. Of course, these are just a few of the countless issues you could focus on, but I hope that they will help you build up a fundamental understanding necessary for a deeper and broader reflection on the historical dimensions of your sociocultural identity and life.

In every historical society, culture is transmitted between peers or between generations through a process of imitation or social learning. This process results in what social psychologist and anthropologist Geerd Hofstede calls "collective programming of the mind", explaining that "the 'mind' stands for the head, heart, and

hands—that is, for thinking, feeling, and acting, with consequences for beliefs, attitudes, and skills”. Hofstede distinguishes three levels in mental programming, namely, a universal, a collective, and an individual level. The universal level, which we are born with, is shared by all humans and is the “biological operating system” of our body. The individual level, what we usually call personality, is partly inherited and partly the result of environmental processes. Finally, at the collective level of mental programming, which dictates most of our intellectual and social decisions and acts, “most or all of our mental programming is learned, which is shown by the fact that we share it with people who have gone through the same learning processes but who do not have the same genetic makeup”.⁹ So, to be historically conscious, you might try to reflect on what kind of universal (biological), individual, and collective “programming” has made you the person you are. You might also think about what kind of programming you are getting through in the present (be sure you are) and what kind of programming you should expect to have in the future.

Every individual and every society have a cultural identity, which is, in fact, multidimensional. Everywhere and always, cultural identities are multidimensional, as they include various types of culture adopted by the majority of the members of the society (they are what we might call “cultures with adjectives”: Social culture, political culture, religious culture, intellectual culture, etc.). In other words, every culture includes varying combinations of cultural elements that regulate or influence human life. You are indeed influenced by your educational background, your metaphysical beliefs, the cultural norms of the society you live in, the beliefs on the relationship and interactions between genders, races, social classes, and so many other things. Furthermore, cultures are cumulative, as over time new cultural elements get created and diffused, sometimes mutated or combined with other elements. In addition, as history unfolds, different cultures are forced to coexist because of political and other reasons (e.g. migration), something that results in cultural exchanges.¹⁰ So, which are the dimensions of

your culture, and which are the cultural dimensions of the groups and communities you belong to? How have these cultures evolved in time, and how do they influence your life?

Cultural evolution, that is, the evolution from simple forms of culture to more advanced and complex ones,¹¹ is a prerequisite for survival over time. Societies that do not evolve culturally—in terms of science (including philosophy), technology, ethics, skills, or principles and practices of social organization—are doomed to extinction. But how does culture evolve in time? Most theorists of culture underline that culture is mainly learned socially. This means that cultural evolution is a result of the need to transmit to the next generations specific pieces of information that (a) are not genetically transmitted and (b) are important for the survival and prosperity of the group. The transmission of cultural elements from one generation to the next is realized through a process that historians, anthropologists, and sociologists call “social learning”—a process that includes both individual and collective teaching.¹² Apart from social learning, cultural elements might also be transmitted through observation and imitation: We observe others (especially those we esteem, respect, or admire) and we follow their paradigm. Let it be noted that we do not only observe and imitate people from previous generations; cultural transmission also takes place through peer-to-peer interaction. Over time, some cultural elements become so strong that they are also transmitted genetically (this is one of the main points of the theory of biocultural evolution, to which I will return in the next section of this chapter).

Cultural transmission might be studied in various ways and from various perspectives. A very influential method since the 1970s has been to focus on the very content of historical evolution by considering the evolution of core elements of culture, which evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins coined, in his seminal work *The Selfish Gene*, as “memes”.¹³ According to Dawkins (and many other scholars after him), a meme is a piece of cultural information that is transmitted through imitation (this means that a meme is replicated by being implanted in new brains, whose owners use it in

their own lives). A meme might be anything, from an idea (e.g. all humans are born equal) to a scientific thesis (relativity of time), a belief (there is life after death), a value (altruism), a practice (vegetarianism), a fashion (tattoos), or an immaterial artefact (the tune of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*)—there are countless memes and forms of memes. They might be transmitted in space, that is, from humans to other humans, or in time, that is, in texts, visual representations, or objects that are transmitted from the time they are produced to the relevant future. Some memes are results of high-quality research (e.g. that the brain can be primed), some are pseudoscientific (e.g. racism), while some other are as foolish as it gets (e.g. that blond women are stupid)—unfortunately, some of the most stupid memes can endure for centuries and are much stronger and more influential than the scientific ones (think of the superstition of black cats causing bad luck).

Dawkins approached memes as the analogy to genes: As genes are the replicators in biological evolution, so are memes the replicators in cultural evolution, through cultural transmission from one person to another (in fact, from one brain/mind to another). Every idea, practice, symbol, or artefact transmitted from one individual to another, from a group to its members, and from one generation to the next is a cultural unit that gets transmitted sometimes in itself and most times together with other pieces of a relevant cultural set.

While the theory of memes, introduced in 1976, revolutionized how experts understand cultural evolution, it has also encountered significant debate. Supporters have emphasized its creative potential, while sceptics have avoided aspects that don't fit their frameworks.¹⁴ Having the theory of memes as a starting point, in the rest of this section, I am proposing a new approach to the basic particles of culture and their combinations in cultural sets and systems. The basic idea is the same as that of the meme: Culture (as a system of patterned ways of thinking and doing) consists of individual particles, which humans adopt or reject in a lifelong process of ontological importance. To overcome epistemological and

theoretical issues with meme theory—notably, its perceived overreliance on biological evolution and insufficient explanation of cultural transmission—I introduce a new theory (and a new concept). I see these particles as cultural atoms, in the original Greek nominal value of the term atom: An atom is something indivisible, something that cannot be cut into smaller pieces. To avoid a relation of these cultural particles to Physics, I am calling them “cultoms”.

Approaching cultoms as core particles of culture, I am focusing on their historicity, that is, their historical construction and use, in other words, on how their construction is a component of cultural evolution and how their adoption, use, and transmission contribute to historical evolution. Being conscious of that is a central element of histocultural consciousness.

Reflecting on cultoms, we should keep in mind that they are historical; they have a historical dimension. They are created in specific historical contexts in order to answer specific needs. Their importance, and indeed their survival, is related to their adoption and diffusion, synchronically (from one individual or cultural group to another) or diachronically (from one generation to the next). During the process of adoption and diffusion, cultoms might remain the same or get their content mutated, and often they get combined with other cultoms in cultom sets. We should also keep in mind that cultoms, because of their role in expressing and forming our ways of thinking and doing, are historical factors that influence historical evolution drastically.

On the basis of the definition of culture as a system of patterned ways of thinking and doing which functions as the fundament of individuals' decisions and actions and distinguishes members of one cultural community from the members of any other, a cultom is a piece of information related to a way of thinking and/or a way of doing. Thus, cultoms might be categorized as “doing cultoms” and “thinking cultoms”. Thinking cultoms might include anything from proverbs to political ideologies and religious doctrines. Doing cultoms might include anything from gaming skills and practices to principles of social organization and interaction, to techniques in art and

architecture. What is important to remember is that customs do not only exist in theory, but they also exist in your head and in the heads of others, and influence your life, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly, but always intensively and decisively.

Thinking of cultoms in terms of historical consciousness includes a number of reflections, related to the past, the present, and the future of cultoms and of our relation to them. For example:

1. *The evolution of cultoms reflects cultural and historical evolution.* This might be illustrated by referring to cultoms related to politics (related, e.g. to the power of monarchs), economy (related to the power of markets), fashion (clothing, rings, tattoos etc.), identities (national, gender, professional and other identities), social interactions and practices (sexuality, politeness, dignity, etc.), and other dimensions of human life.
2. *Cultoms have a history.* Understanding them as particles of culture is impossible without the consideration of the context(s) in which they were created, the reasons for their creation, and their evolution over time (often by mutation). To understand, for example, religious cultoms that oblige women to be dressed in specific ways, you must consider when and by whom they were originally developed. Doing so, you will realize that they have nothing to do with the specific religion (because they pre-existed it) and they are, in fact, cultoms of social suppression that were, in time, given a religious character, so that they will become more powerful.
3. *The adoption of cultoms influences, and often dictates, your present and your future.* Any decision you make and your anticipation of the future is based on thinking, and sometimes doing, cultoms. The fact that, for reasons you should reflect on, you have adopted religious cultom set X (e.g. Buddhism) or political cultom set Y (socialism) is of crucial importance for how you have made up your life so far and for how you will think and perform in the future (if you, of course, continue keeping them as elements of your cultural identity).
4. *There are various types of cultoms* (in fact, various possible typologies of cultoms). As mentioned above, we might think of thinking cultoms and doing cultoms. On the basis of the human need for orientation in space and time, we might think of physical cultoms and temporal cultoms. Physical cultoms, such

as cultoms related to diet, might influence not only what you eat and drink (and what not), but they also inform, and sometimes dictate, your social life. Temporal cultoms, such as cultoms related to whether you should be precise or not when you are invited to someone's place (yes, there are cultures in which you are expected to be late), influence your everyday life, especially when you interact with people with different cultural backgrounds. In addition to thinking/doing and physical/temporal cultoms, other starting points might result in other typologies. It should be noted that there are cultoms that belong to various types simultaneously. Think, for example, of the cultom "the human being is the only animal that has a soul". It is an example of a human identity cultom (answering to our need of differentiating ourselves from all other animals), but, at the same time, it is a metaphysical (mythical) cultom related to our origin and our transcendental future, as our soul is supposed, at least in some cultures, to be immortal.

Being historically conscious in terms of cultural evolution means reflecting on all the issues presented in this section, but it also includes a reflection on any other issue related to how culture is influenced by historical evolution and how cultural evolution influences history, as well as you as a historical creature. While reflecting on all these matters, you should be conscious of the complexity and chaotic nature of cultural evolution, which is equally complex and chaotic as the social one (and thus, equally unpredictable). At the same time, it would enrich your reflection to remember that in some cases, cultural evolution is closely and reciprocally related to our biological evolution. It is this interaction between biology and culture that the next section is dedicated to.

Biocultural consciousness

The study of the human genome and the functional mapping of the human brain in recent decades have opened new windows to the

study of both biology and culture. Among other things, they have shown that genetic evolution and cultural evolution interact in various and complex ways. Biologists Nicole Creanza and Marcus Feldman, for example, claim that “genetic changes, for example those that affect brain architecture, can promote large-scale changes in human culture, but cultural changes can also alter the selective advantage of genetic mutations, fostering their spread”.¹⁵ It has also been claimed that most aspects of human biology are shaped by culture, something that also applies to nonhuman species. Culture, manifested in specific ways of living and organizing life, affects biology in ways that are equally intense as the ways in which biology influences human life.¹⁶

The interplay of culture and biology in history is called “biocultural evolution”. On one hand, scholars who study biocultural evolution focus on how our biological evolution has influenced our sociocultural history, especially from the Cognitive Revolution onwards. On the other hand, they also study how human culture, manifested in everyday life over generations, influences our genome, that is, our hardware biological evolution. Think, for example, of how the domestication of milk-producing animals in the Agricultural Revolution changed our biology, as in time relevant genes were mutated, so that we would tolerate lactose beyond infancy (yes, lactose intolerance was the normal condition for most part of human history). Or think of how the evolution of our communication skills, with the evolution of language and facial expressions, caused genetic changes in the parts of our head that are related to talking, hearing, and controlling the movements of our face.¹⁷

In addition to being conscious about this direct interplay between biology and culture, being bioculturally conscious means reflecting on how culture influences biological evolution by influencing the environment we live in. One of the theories that focuses on that is the “niche-construction theory”, which claims that (a) various species have the tendency to modify the natural environment in which they live, to make it fit their own needs, and (b) these changes influence the further evolution of the species that caused them.¹⁸ In our case,

human sociocultural evolution has influenced the further biological evolution of sapiens. A typical example is, again, that of the Agricultural Revolution. Plants and animals were domesticated, others got extinct because they were evaluated as useless or dangerous, forests were transformed into cultivated areas, villages, towns, and cities were established, as well as communication networks between them. On the other hand, sapiens adopted from the Agricultural Revolution onwards a new way of life and a new diet that had both positive and negative sides, as we could eat better, but our body had to get used to new ways of working and living. At the same time, the burning of forests got humans in closer contact to new pathogens that killed a lot of individuals until we developed immunity towards them.

Being historically conscious in biocultural terms means having a consciousness on how human biological evolution influences our cultural evolution and how our cultural evolution influences our genetics and epigenetics, the latter meaning the mechanisms that determine when, where, and how our genes are turned “on” (active) or “off” (silenced) in the short- or long-term function of our organism. Deep down, being historically conscious in biocultural terms means being conscious of the fact that you are a creature that combines biological and cultural, and at least partly social, elements and functions.

Historicity of the being and historical empathy

Searching for historical consciousness related to the historicity of the being is a multidimensional process. It includes, without being limited to, reflections on our biological, social, cultural, and biocultural evolution and how this history-made evolution interacts with the world as a history-made system.

As mentioned before, our historicity has two sides: We are history-made and history-making. Our history-making dimension has a very interesting manifestation, which is central for our own perception of

how we are history-made. In a slightly paradox statement, I would claim that the past that creates us is a past that we have constructed ourselves, in the present. This is something that applies equally to individuals and communities. And this construction of the past has two dimensions. First, our cognitive creation is based on what we know in the present. Often, it is just a portion of our narratives about the past that come directly from the past at question. The rest comes from hindsight knowledge and contemporary perceptions and evaluations of the evidence on the past (this includes anachronisms, retrodictions, and imagined history). And, most of all, the past is interpreted on the basis of present perceptions and evaluations. Second, our narratives about the past are always influenced by our present needs and desires and (perhaps most importantly) by our expectations for the future. Some of these issues will be discussed in the following chapters.

Let me close by recalling Bernard Eric Jensen, who claimed that historical consciousness is closely related to meeting the “other”, the different. Such a meeting cannot really be conscious if we simply limit ourselves to knowing about the “other” humans of the past and their ideas and practices, without an effort to understand them in their own terms. There is something called “historical empathy”, and I am claiming here that we cannot reach a reflective historical consciousness without being historically empathetic. What does this mean?

Historical empathy has been defined as “the process of students’ cognitive and affective engagement with historical figures to better understand and contextualize their lived experiences, decisions, or actions”. It involves “understanding how people from the past thought, felt, made decisions, acted, and faced consequences within a specific historical and social context”.¹⁹ In such a process of empathetic understanding, it is of utmost importance to avoid presentism, in other words, our tendency to think about the past in terms of our own world, with our own values and principles as a starting point. The “others” must be understood in their own terms, taking into consideration the natural and sociocultural worlds in

which they were living, and how these worlds had shaped them. A good way of doing so is by putting yourself in their shoes, and, on the basis of what you know about their worlds, reflect on how you would think and act under the same circumstances. Three preconditions are extremely important here: The first is that you know enough about their world, and the second is that you will be honest and strict with yourself. The third is that you are conscious of the fact that they, exactly as you yourself, lived in a temporal continuum of present–future–past, which influenced their decisions and actions heavily. It is this continuum, more precisely its historicity, that the next chapter is dedicated to.

Notes

1. See [Sankararaman et al. \(2014\)](#); for a summary of the study, see [Gibbons \(2014\)](#). For a further discussion of the importance of prehistorical and ancient DNA in the biological evolution of modern humans, see [Reich \(2018\)](#). ↵
2. On how we are influenced by our hunter-gatherer past, see, for example, [Sanderson \(2018: 81–83\)](#). ↵
3. On the evolution of the human brain see, for example, [Hofman \(2019\)](#); [Allen \(2009\)](#); [Fitch \(2010\)](#); and [Kaas \(2013\)](#). ↵
4. On the evolution of the brain and the mind and its historical importance, see, for example, [Tattersall \(2016\)](#); [Lieberman \(2016\)](#); and [Falk \(2016\)](#). ↵
5. [Tang \(2020: 10\)](#) (Kindle). ↵
6. [Anderson \(2006\)](#). ↵
7. See, for example, [Haynes \(2022\)](#). ↵
8. My definition is inspired by definitions by [Richerson & Boyd \(2005: 61\)](#); [Kroeber, Kluckhohn & Untereiner \(1985 \[1952\]: 86\)](#); [Hofstede \(2001: 9–10\)](#). ↵
9. [Hofstede \(2001: 1–10\)](#). ↵
10. On the cumulative nature of culture, see [Enquist et al. \(2008\)](#). ↵
11. It is important to make clear that I use the term “cultural evolution” in this basic meaning, and not in direct relation to theories from the field of cultural evolution studies. ↵
12. On social learning in relation to cultural evolution see, for example, [Boyd & Richerson \(2005: 19–34\)](#). See also [Manning \(2020: 18\)](#) (Kindle), who writes: “The theory of cultural evolution argues that humans, with their large brain capacity, can learn and preserve new techniques through social learning.... Cultural evolution argues that humans could not only learn new techniques through trial and error but pass them on to the next generation, as members of the next generation learn the techniques by observation, imitation, or through mentored teaching. The new knowledge, stored in the brains of the individuals, is passed on through the process of learning rather than through genetic reproduction”. [Mesoudi \(2015: 483\)](#) claims that “cultural traits (words, ideas, artefacts etc.) exhibit variation; these variants have different rates of survival and reproduction; and they are transmitted from person to person via social learning mechanisms such as imitation or speech”. ↵
13. [Dawkins \(2016: Chapter 11\)](#). ↵
14. Among countless high-quality publications on the memes, both pro and against, see [Blackmore \(1999\)](#); [Aunger \(2000\)](#); [Sperber \(2000\)](#); [Boyd & Henrich \(2002\)](#); [Shennan \(2002\)](#); [Distin \(2004\)](#); [Richerson & Boyd \(2005\)](#); [Sterelny \(2006\)](#); [Henrich, Boyd & Richerson \(2008\)](#); [Brodie \(2009\)](#); [Roy \(2017\)](#); and [Ermakov & Ermakov \(2021\)](#). ↵
15. [Creanza & Feldman \(2016: 85\)](#). ↵
16. See, for example, [Creanza, Kolodny & Feldman \(2017: 7785\)](#). ↵

17. These are just two examples of what is coined in cultural evolution studies as “gene-culture coevolution”, on which see [Feldman & Laland \(1996\)](#) and [Laland, Odling-Smee & Feldman \(2000\)](#). ↵
18. On niche construction, see [Odling-Smee, Laland & Feldman \(2003\)](#); [Laland, Odling-Smee & Myles \(2010: 139–141\)](#); [Laland & O’Brien \(2012\)](#); [Scott-Phillips et al. \(2014\)](#); [Creanza, Fogarty & Feldman \(2012\)](#); [Creanza, Kolodny & Feldman \(2017\)](#); [Tomlinson \(2018: 35–58\)](#); and [Kobayashi, Wakano & Ohtsuki \(2019\)](#). ↵
19. [Endacott & Brooks \(2013: 41\)](#). ↵

6 Being conscious of the historicity of time

DOI: [10.4324/9781003767657-6](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003767657-6)

The first step towards historical consciousness related to the historicity of time is the awareness of the difference between physical time and historical time. *Physical time* is the time we count in clocks and calendars. *Historical time*, on the other hand, is a very different thing. Historical time is mainly related not to the movements of celestial objects, but to human and natural events, as well as human structures and interactions. Historical time is approached, understood, and communicated through categories like “before” and “after”, “early” and “late”, “quickly” and “slowly”, and many other similar categories. You understand the difference between physical and historical time if you think of two ways of speaking about the same day: you might say “March 25, 2021” or “the day we met each other”.

These are just two categories of time, but time is more complex than that. There are indeed various categories and types of time, and being conscious of them, as well as of the various dimensions of time and their coinherence, is an important part of historical consciousness. In the following sections, I am proposing four different ways in which you might be historically conscious in temporal terms. The first is related to the existence of different *categories of time*. The second considers the dimensions of historical time—what do we really mean when speaking about past, present, and future? The third presents historical theories related to how different layers of time (mainly of the past) coexist and interplay in any given present. The fourth integrates the future perspective,

referring to a theory that claims that everything we think and everything we do in the future is the result of an internal dialogue between our past and our future.

Categories of time

Time is everywhere in our lives. We indeed live and think in time. We usually simplify things by speaking about one “time”, but this is not correct. There are various times, and they have varying dimensions and features. Being conscious about their differences and their different roles in our lives is the first step of being conscious in histotemporal terms. This section is dedicated to four categories of time, namely, physical, biological, cultural, and historical time. All these time categories exist in your everyday life. You experience and deal with them constantly, and you are, at least in general terms, aware of them, most of the time unconsciously.

It is logical to open the presentation of these time categories by referring to *physical time*, the time we use to organize our everyday life, in other words, the time that we count in clocks and calendars. In various publications, academic and non-academic, it is also called “clock-time”, “natural time” (as its measurement is related to the double orbit of the earth around the sun and around its axis), or “geographical time” (as its measurement is related to geography—think, e.g., of the 24 time zones of the planet).

Biological time is based on your body and your brain functioning, for reasons related mainly to our survival, as time reckoning devises. One of the most important functions of our body and our brain is to keep track of various aspects of time in our life and orient us in the timespaces in which we live, so that we will be able to satisfy our core needs. The most recognizable concept of hardware biological time is the circadian cycle, an innate “clock” that operates independently of our mind. But the circadian is not the only temporal cycle of your life. There are cycles as short as a second (our cardiac rhythm), shorter than a second (our brain waves that have a cycle of

approximately one tenth of a second), or a bit longer than a second (our breathing cycle which is circa six seconds long), cycles longer than an hour (our REM and non-REM sleeping cycles, each lasting about one and a half hour), cycles related to our day-to-day life (our normal body temperature is higher every evening than what it is every morning), or cycles equal to a lunar month (the 28-day menstrual cycle). There are more than 100 such cycles in your life.¹

All these cycles are of utmost importance for our life and our quality of life, and (more often than you think of) they influence, directly or indirectly, our decisions and acts. One example might suffice. One dimension of our biological timing operates at the level of seasons, usually related to monthly and annual biological and social activities and conditions, and might influence our way of living in various ways. One of them might be related to various seasonal affective disorders, which means that environmental conditions affect the chemical operation of the body (and mainly the brain) in specific seasons, especially winter, heavily influencing the ways in which we approach and evaluate life.²

Cultural time refers to time and time-related terms and concepts as cultural products whose meaning might vary between different societies, different communities, and different historical periods. Understanding the cultural dimensions of how we all perceive time and orient ourselves in time is of crucial importance in our effort to understand how our existence in time shapes our lives, identities, and thoughts. In fact, understanding the cultural dimension of time means understanding how the societies or ultrasocieties we live in shape the time, which, in its turn, shapes us.

If you want to think of cultural dimensions of time, you might start by thinking of the temporal units we use in order to structure and organize life. You will realize that units such as the week and solar month do not exist in nature. The same applies to hours, minutes, and seconds. All these are cultural inventions, and this is why there have been different ways of reckoning months, weeks, and hours in history. Furthermore, throughout history, there have been various calendars and various chronological systems, many of those based

on varying calculations of the year for the creation of the earth. And let us not forget that in many periods and areas, life was understood in relation to a cyclical perception of time, which was closer to the cyclical rhythms of nature, before a linear understanding of time dominated during the last two millennia.³

In our lives, we perceive and organize time in two ways: in relation to a clock and a calendar, or in relation to events. So, we might arrange to meet someone at nine o'clock or "after work". We can also measure the time needed for something to be done in temporal units (a university class usually lasts 45 minutes) or in event terms, which are sometimes literal (a distance as long as "cigarette-smoking") and sometimes metaphorical ("in the blink of an eye"). There is also something else, called "structural time". This is a time that is related to our function in society. Think, for example, of how being old enough to get married or to have political rights has been defined in various periods and places in history.⁴

Historical time is related to physical, biological, and cultural time, but it is something different. To understand the difference between physical and historical time, think of the difference between saying that something happened on 10 November (physical time) and "my first day at work". Historical time is mainly related not to the sun-earth-moon relationship, but to human and natural events, human interactions, social rules and structures, and cultural practices, values, and norms. You should remember that at any moment there is just one physical time (when I am writing these lines, it is 18 July 08:19), but at this very moment, there are many historical times that coexist simultaneously—this will be explained in the following sections.

Dimensions of historical time

Historical time has traditionally been divided into three parts: past, present, and future. We always start from what we at any time call

“present”. Anything before this present is registered as past, and everything after the present is perceived as future. Defining past, present, and future in historical terms is a promising opening of the temporal path leading to historical consciousness. Let me do so.

To define the past, I am following the simple and accurate approach of Herman Paul, who claims that “in everyday language, ‘the past’ refers to ‘historical reality’, that is, to the world as it existed at some earlier moment in time”, adding that “everything people say about ‘the past’ stems from present-day admiration, anxiety, fascination and/or study”.⁵ Reflecting on the past, we should remember that the historicized past, that is, the content of time that has been evaluated as worthy of being registered and remembered, has various forms: it might be experienced, learned, or imagined. What does this mean?

- *Experienced* is the past you yourself are a witness to. Notice that this does not mean that your reproduction of this past is “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth”. For decades now, there have been heated debates on historical representation and historical truth. And we know that our reconstruction of our experienced past only presents a part of the “truth”, filtered through our perception and interpretation of our experience.
- *Learned* is the past you have not experienced yourself but learned about from others. This past might include anything, related to the history of the whole mankind, to the history of your nation or your family, or some social event that happened just yesterday and is represented to you by a friend. Challenges or historical truth and representation apply to this past as well. The learned past is always edited and sometimes manipulated, especially if the narrator uses it as a tool to achieve anything.
- *Imagined* is a past that does not reflect actual events in the past. It might be divided into retrodicted or fantasized. The fantasized past refers to narratives that are products of pure imagination. Retrodictions are based on historical knowledge and are logical predictions of what it would be expected to have followed, based on what we know.⁶

I am closing the definition of the past by adding that we should also be conscious of the basic fact that, in historical terms, the past has a meaning only as a part of the continuum past–present–future. Its main role is to function as the north pole in the cognitive, and sometimes emotive, compass that is responsible for our orientation in life.

Defining the present is a little more challenging, due to its conceptual elasticity. In historical terms, to speak about the present, we use different words and expressions, which do not have the same meaning. Sometimes we say “now”, sometimes “today”, sometimes “in our times”, and sometimes “in the present”. And these expressions are not only different from each other; each of them might have varying meanings. In physical time, “today” means a specific day, 24 hours, from midnight to midnight. But in historical time, depending on the context, when we say “today”, we might mean days, weeks, years, or even decades. The same goes for the words “now” or “present”. This happens because the present is not a temporal unit (as, e.g. the hour or the minute is) but a historical category. And as a historical category, it only exists in relation, in fact, in contradiction, to a past (time before it) and a future (time after it). When we speak about something as “present”, what we really say is that this something is neither past nor future. It coexists with us, being an integrated part of our lives, of our reality, as we live it “right now”. This, by the way, is not a new idea. The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BC) wrote that the present is “a kind of in-between-point” (*Physics* 251b), an interval between things that do not exist anymore and things that do not exist yet.

Reflecting on the things that do not exist yet, we usually speak of “the future”. In fact, historians speak of “historical futures” in plural. What does this mean? A historical future could be defined as a future that can only exist in relation to a specific past. As Zoltán Boldiszár Simon and Marek Tamm write, “the notion of historical futures traces how change is expected to occur from past to future, as seen from the present viewpoint in different societal, human, technoscientific, and naturalcultural practices dispersed in space and

time”.⁷ This means that on the basis of what we know about historical evolution from the past to the present, we anticipate historical evolution from the present to the future. The scenarios we make are called historical futures. Something you should keep in mind as a historically conscious person is that, because of the chaotic nature of historical evolution, one and the same past might result in countless different historical futures (this is why we cannot predict what will happen tomorrow, not to speak about the longer future). What is important for the case of historical consciousness is to remember that the scenarios we make in our heads about the possible historical futures influence, sometimes intensely, our decisions and actions in the present.

An important element of histotemporal consciousness is that time is always spatial; this applies to both physical and historical time. When I am writing these lines on my beloved home island of Lesbos in Greece, it is 10:58 in the morning of Monday, 18 July 2025. In 23 of the 24 time zones of the world, the physical time is different—in some of them, the date too. 17 May is a date that means nothing to 99% of the world. But in Norway, it is one of the most important days of the year, when the whole country commemorates and celebrates the signing of the Norwegian Constitution in 1814.

So, reflecting on how physical and historical time are multiple in spatial terms (i.e. in relation to geography) is part of your historical consciousness. Equally important is to be conscious of the fact that physical and historical time are also multiple in temporal terms. This means that when we reflect on the content of time before the present, we should take into consideration that there is not just one past but many different pasts, and that all these pasts are still active in the present as coexisting temporal layers. Some of these layers survive as traditions, others as political, social, or cultural structures of various kinds, and still others as elements of our mindset, that is, as ways of perceiving and evaluating the world around us.

Layers of historical time

History theorists have been speaking for almost a century about historical times, or layers of historical time. In 1930, philosopher Ernst Bloch presented the idea of the “non-contemporaneity of the contemporaneous”, claiming that people do not live in “the same now” but in a temporal “multi-versum”, as they “carry earlier elements with them”.⁸ This means that a given moment in the present (the contemporaneous) includes varying elements of the past that are still active in the present. This, in turn, means that various things from different pasts influence the way you think and act in the present. Since the 1930s, several historians have enriched the discourse on temporal multiplicity.

In the middle of the twentieth century, one of the most prominent and celebrated theories was proposed by Fernand Braudel, who argued that history unfolds in three different and parallel historical rhythms, or temporalities, and that there are thus three types of history. He coined them as factual event-based history (the history that is usually taught in schools), social history (dealing mainly with communities of all kinds and dimensions), and “*longue durée*” (the history of humankind in relation to nature).⁹ It is the latter that, since the publication of the theory, has enjoyed most attention.

Let it be noted that, in many cases, it is difficult to identify the boundaries between social history and *longue durée*. Indeed, how long should a content of time be to be evaluated as *longue durée* and not as social history? This is not clear in the work of Braudel. In addition, it should be noted that the great French historian himself had seen that the theory had another weak point, related to the dimensions of his temporalities, especially of the long duration. That is why Braudel spoke of the existence of a “very long duration” and a “too long duration”.¹⁰

Another great historian who theorized historical time is Reinhart Koselleck, who focused, among other things, on what he coined as “contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous” (or simultaneity of the non-simultaneous)—notice the relationship with Bloch’s thesis on “non-contemporaneity of the contemporaneous” that I mentioned earlier. The term signifies the phenomenon in which different

historical times coexist at one and the same time, in one and the same event, or in the perception of one and the same event. This means that at any moment in history, each individual and each community lives, at the same time, in different temporal strata, that is, in natural, biological, social, and cultural elements of various periods of the past (as experience), present, and future (as expectation).¹¹ Let me illustrate by using an example from academic life: if you study in the humanities, much of the content of your studies was fixed centuries or decades ago (to answer to needs that are perhaps outdated), the teaching and learning methods include elements very old (the 45-minute lecture is some 800-years old) and state-of-the-art (using artificial intelligence (AI) assistants), and the main goals of you and the university are related to specific ideas about a historical future based on sustainability and other sociocultural principles.

Koselleck spoke about time in terms of space, using a metaphor coming from stratigraphy, namely, that of "layers" or "sediments" of time, similar to the geological layers of the earth. "Historical times", he writes, "consist of multiple layers that refer to each other in a reciprocal way, though without being wholly dependent upon each other".¹² As with geological layers and Braudel's temporalities, these layers of historical time have different lengths and originate in different historical periods, and they coexist in any given present. Any moment in time consists of these coexisting layers, and each one of us lives, simultaneously, in all of them.

Space of experience and horizon of expectation

Speaking about historical layers of time is one of the ways in which Koselleck related past, present, and future. He did that even more explicitly in another theory, one of the most meaning-making theories in history, namely, what he coined as the dialogue between "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation". These are two

out of many spatial metaphors we use to speak about time. Koselleck perceived the past as a space in which individual or collective experience is gathered, and the future as a horizon to which we provide our expectations, both positive and negative expectations, in other words, our hopes, dreams, fears, or what we believe it would be logical or likely to happen.

There are two things that should be underlined in relation to space of experience and horizon of expectation. First, they are coinherent: none of them exists without the other. As Koselleck himself writes, "no expectation without experience, no experience without expectation".¹³ Second, both experience and expectation are realized in the present, experience as "present past", that is, a past that is still present, and expectation as "present future", that is, a future that is already present.¹⁴

Being aware of the constant dialogue between space of experience and horizon of expectation is a significant element of historical consciousness. This is exactly what Jaspers meant with the second element of his definition, which has become the most common definition of historical consciousness ever since. But there is something important we should be aware of. Exactly because of this constant dialogue between space of experience and horizon of expectation that unfolds in any given present, past, present, and future are not three different time dimensions with clear and impenetrable borders, but three elements of one time-and-space continuum, in which we live, as both biological and cultural units. This means that historical consciousness does include not only our perceptions of the past but also our perceptions of the present and our expectations for the future. Our narratives about the past influence our present and our future. And our future expectations influence the way we perceive our present and our past.

Furthermore, this also means that we should always include the present in the consideration of experience and expectation. Indeed, the consideration of any past experience and any future expectations starts in a present and unfolds in a present. And both experience and expectation are influenced by our present. And when we

consider the interplay between past, present, and future, sometimes we put more weight in the past and sometimes in the future. But we always start, consciously or unconsciously, from the present. This is why it would perhaps be more correct to speak about the temporal continuum as present–past–future or present–future–past, based on where the weight lies.

A last element of temporal historical consciousness is related to the future as part of history. Since 2021, historians and history theorists have started reflecting on the future in historical terms, in a new and innovative field called “historical futures”, established through a series of articles published in the journal *History & Theory*. As mentioned earlier, in their foundational editorial, Zoltán Boldiszar Simon and Marek Tamm write that the concept “historical future” signifies a future that is not perceived as a time dimension in itself, but a future that can only exist in relation to a specific past.¹⁵

Considering our experiences and our expectations, we should be aware that they both are history-made and cannot be evaluated properly without taking into consideration the context(s) in which they are formed. Furthermore, reflecting on the interplay between historical pasts and historical futures, we should also consider something we as historians should never forget: It is logical to think that in the relationship between past and future, it is the past that influences the future. This is exactly one of the main points in Koselleck’s theory, as well as in other theories related to historical time. But let us notice that when it comes to *our perception* of the past, in other words, to the way we understand the past in any given present, it often goes the other way around; it is our expectations about the future and our future plans that decide how we will perceive the past and, of course, the present. (I will return to these points in the next chapter.)

* * *

Summing up, I would note that being conscious of the historicity of time starts with being aware of the difference between physical time and historical time. In addition, it is important to think of past–

present–future (or present–past–future, or present–future–past) as one temporal continuum, in which historical evolution unfolds. Historical decisions and actions made or performed in any given present are the result of a dialogue between what we “know” about the past and what we anticipate for the future, that is, between our space of experience and our horizon of expectation. Our past includes several temporal layers, called historical times, which coexist in any given present. This past is in constant dialogue with various historical futures that might occur as a result of historical processes that started in the past and continue in the present. Pasts, presents, and futures are all history-made and related to our perceptions of experienced or anticipated content of time. These perceptions are manifested in historical narratives, which are themselves active elements of historical evolution. The next chapter is dedicated to their historicity as the fourth element of historical consciousness.

Notes

1. See [Aveni \(2002: 24\)](#). ↗
2. [Golombek, Bussi & Agostino \(2014\)](#). ↗
3. On all these subjects, see [Aveni \(2002\)](#); [Birth \(2017\)](#); [Levine \(2006\)](#). ↗
4. On structural time see, for example, [Aveni \(2002: 156–157\)](#). ↗
5. [Paul \(2015: 19\)](#). ↗
6. On retrodiction, see, for example, [Turchin \(2006\)](#). ↗
7. [Simon & Tamm \(2021: 13\)](#). ↗
8. For a short but comprehensive overview and analysis of the subject, see [Simon & Tamm \(2023: 19–45\)](#) (here p. 21). ↗
9. [Braudel \(1980: 3\)](#). The theory on the three types of history and historical time was originally presented in the preface of Braudel's monumental work *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris 1949). The preface was reproduced in [Braudel \(1980\)](#). Later, the theory was analysed in [Braudel \(2009/1958\)](#). ↗
10. [Braudel \(2009/1958: 195–197\)](#). ↗
11. [Koselleck \(2004: 95\)](#). ↗
12. [Koselleck \(2018: 4\)](#). For the theory in general, see [Koselleck \(2018\)](#) and [Koselleck \(2004: 93–104\)](#). ↗
13. [Koselleck \(2004: 257\)](#). ↗
14. [Koselleck \(2004: 259\)](#). ↗
15. [Simon & Tamm \(2021: 13\)](#). ↗

7 Being conscious of the historicity of historical narratives

DOI: [10.4324/9781003767657-7](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003767657-7)

A first step towards historical consciousness related to how past, present, and future are communicated is the distinction between history-writing and storytelling. In your life, you encounter narratives communicating history (i.e. the content of time) that might be understood as histories or stories. What is the difference? This is not the place to discuss this subject in depth, so I hope it suffices to say that history-writing means the writing of narratives about the content of time on the basis of research, which means on the basis of specific rules of how to identify the most trustworthy evidence and how to perform a critical inquiry on this evidence, in order to compose a narrative that is as close as possible to the “truth”. Storytelling, on the other hand, means the creation of narratives in our everyday life; it aims at making sense of the world and our lives, and it might include factual and fictional elements, or a combination of the two. Despite the fact that, in historical studies, we tend to call historical narratives only the products of history-writing, I am using the term here for the products of both history-writing and storytelling. The reason is that seeking orientation in your everyday life, you should be conscious for the historicity of both. And let us not forget that in your everyday life, storytelling is probably much more important and powerful than history-writing—and more present; think of political debates, films, fiction, or historical games.

As we have seen earlier in the book, a number of historians, for example, Jörn Rüsen and Bernard-Eric Jensen, have approached historical consciousness in relation to what they call “narrative

competence”.¹ I would like to make clear that my approach is not related to narrative competence in this sense. This chapter discusses historical narratives as cultural products and focuses on the need to be reflective and critical in relation to the production of historical narratives, their content, the existence of various types of narratives, and challenges related to their study and composition.

Historical narratives and their content

A historical narrative is a textual, oral, and/or visual story of varying size that communicates a meaning-making perception of a specific part of the registered content of time. It might be made of experienced, learned, or imagined historical data and historical concepts. It is usually arranged in a chronological sequence. It is almost unavoidably enriched with the author’s ideas, which might be expressed explicitly as explanations, evaluative arguments, or conclusions, or implicitly in the language and vocabulary used (there is a difference between a “war” and a “military operation”, and the term used in a narrative might change the main message of the whole narrative). Finally, a historical narrative reflects the cultural and political context in which it is produced.²

Every historical narrative has a cognitive structure that organizes data (on events, actions, ideas, individuals and groups, and background historical structures) and concepts in a temporal frame with a beginning and an ending, in a way that gives meaning to the total of the actions and events included in it. Every narrative is a temporal whole that must have a beginning, an ending, a clear development in time, and a purpose. Its overall role is to give meaning to something that is somehow related to the present. The main focus is usually on events, natural or human in origin. Often it also presents the intentions of the protagonists, even if this is, in most cases, impossible—except for memoirs, which, on the other hand, are only exceptionally trustworthy. Historical narratives tend to

generalize ("the participants of this or that revolution were innocent fighters for freedom and equality") and to place the events in easily recognizable frames and patterns (this is done with the use of relevant concepts). They aim at explaining something that is more often presented as the outcome of (some of) the events included in the narrative. And, as Jörn Rüsen has claimed, narratives let the events included in them "maintain their unique character as events and their distinctive temporal significance in the order of the world"—it is this combination of "peculiarity of events" to an "idea of ordered time" that gives historical meaning to whatever occurs in human lives.³ This combination is one of the core elements of historical narratives.

Historical narratives consist of facts (processed historical data of any kind), arguments, and communicative elements (textual and non-textual symbols and concepts) structured in a composition that might include elements of scientific research, or amateur study, with elements of art. The scientific dimension is related to the detection and analysis of evidence: selection, examination, and critical analysis of sources, use of historical and other methods to identify the evidence and construct the argumentation, and use of historical and other theories to analyse the evidence and support the argumentation. The amateur study might be reflective or not. Unreflective study means taking into consideration what is easy to get access to, sometimes without even trying: search for information on the Internet and social media or simply recalling what you already "know". Reflective means problematizing your sources and critically thinking about both the sources and the facts, even if you do not use historiographical methods. Finally, the dimension of art in history-writing or storytelling is related to narrative style, grammatic and syntactic level, literary and metaphorical expressions, and so on.

As mentioned before, the data included in historical narratives might derive from direct experience, for example, when we participate in or witness a historical event. They might also be learned, directly or indirectly, in an official process of teaching and learning history or through other channels, such as historical novels,

films, or games. They could also be imagined, because of either a dysfunction of memory, a weak use and interpretation of sources, or a conscious effort to manipulate a historical narrative in order to serve specific goals of social, political, ideological, religious, or other nature. Experienced, learned, or imagined data are included in narratives that are almost always linear, in a chronological sequence from the past to the present and sometimes to the future. Most of the time, what connects data together is a relationship of causes and effects.

Even when not imagined, data are enriched with the author's ideas, perceptions, and evaluations, which sometimes are biased. In a paper on biases in historical description, interpretation, and explanation, C. Behan McCullagh claimed that there are four main ways, in which historians might be biased (this of course is also the case with storytellers): (a) we might misinterpret evidence; (b) in an account of a person, an institution or an event we might omit elements that are so significant, that our account is unbalanced; (c) we might include in our accounts false evidence; and (d) in our explanation of a historical event, we might neglect some important causes, so that the account is misleading. McCullagh adds that these failures are biased not when they occur accidentally, as mistakes or oversights, but when they are conscious, so that the historian will serve a certain interest.⁴ He also identifies two different types of historical bias: there are individual biases, related to a historian's personal interests, and cultural biases, related to the interests of the culture a historian lives in and is a product of, and to how this culture perceives the world and historical evolution.⁵ Indeed, historical narratives reflect the cultural and political context in which they are produced—this applies equally to historians and storytellers in the past as well as in our times.

An important element of historical consciousness in terms of historical narratives is the importance of narratives in understanding ourselves and the world around us and in our spatial and temporal orientation. Historical narratives are a central part of historical evolution. And as elements of historical evolution, they have a

double function: they are cognitive and performative. *Cognitively*, they are the means through which we make sense of everything in the present–past–future continuum and its spatial dimensions. *Performatively*, they are the fundament for perceptions and evaluations that inform our decisions and actions (our own history-making). To quote Herman Paul:

Stories not only have a *referential* aspect, in the sense that they refer to reality and try to interpret it, but also a *performative* dimension. That is to say: they intervene in reality by providing people with frameworks in the light of which they think and act.⁶

Every historical narrative, in both history-writing and storytelling, is, in fact, the result of an interpretation of the experienced, learned, or imagined data. This means that the composition of any historical narrative, of any type and size, is inextricably interrelated to the narrator's interpretation of the spatial and temporal reality the narrative is supposed to communicate.

When you reflect on the performative function of historical narratives, you should remember that they play a central role in the formation and maintenance of various kinds of identities, national identities being the most celebrated example. In their performative function, historical narratives are history-making, directly or indirectly.

Types of historical narratives

There are countless types of historical narratives—and numerous ways of categorizing them. There are scientific and non-scientific narratives, public and historiographical narratives, textual and visual narratives, and even object narratives (think of monuments and statues). There are narratives that are very long and thorough, and there are narratives expressed in one or two words or numbers

(Hijrah, Holocaust, Hiroshima, 9/11, Apartheid, Brexit, etc.). There are narratives that originate in a desire to represent historical reality in an accurate, or at least trustworthy, way, and there are narratives that are fake. Jon Levisohn states that

narratives come in various shapes and sizes. Some are explicit, and many are implicit or embedded in larger narratives. Some are specific stories, and some are more like story-archetypes. Some are proto-narratives that offer only a bare-bones sketch, and some are fully elaborated historiographical accounts. Some are first-hand eyewitness accounts, some are narratives about physical evidence or other historical data, and some are secondary sources.⁷

Sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel identified various narrative types (he calls them scenarios or plotlines) on the basis of how their content is structured in social memories that shape our past as an element of our collective identity. He speaks, for example, of progress and decline narratives (narratives that speak about the historical evolution in a period as progressing or regressing), circles and rhymes (narratives presenting historical evolution as circular or repeating itself), or legato and staccato narratives (narratives in which historical evolution is presented as gradual and continuous or as abrupt).⁸

Jörn Rüsen proposed a typology of historical narratives, which includes four types of what he calls "formation of meaning", as he approaches historical narration as a meaning-making process. His types are coined as traditional, exemplary, genetic, and critical. *Traditional narratives* represent history "in such a way that its primary meaning (that grants meaning and practical orientation) is presented as staying the same over time". The main aim and function of such narratives are to confirm and reinforce continuity in history. *Exemplary narratives* aim at orienting us in the present by presenting the accumulated experience from the past as "general rules of action with timeless validity". Rüsen refers to Cicero's

understanding of history as a teacher of life (*magistra vitae*) to illustrate how this type of narrative functions. In his words, "history facilitates our agency". *Genetic narratives* are "based on the idea that change creates or makes meaning". The focus here is on development, and "the past appears as change that relates our own way of life to previous ones in such a way that change can be seen as an opportunity". Rüsen presents change as a factor related to the formation of our own identity and a process of self-education (*Bildung*). *Critical narratives* have, according to Rüsen, a special status: a critical narrative "only asserts itself as a negation of the other three narratives", as it "destroys and deconstructs culturally predetermined traditional, exemplary and genetic interpretive patterns", focusing on "events that challenge established historical orientations". Here, the focus is not on continuity or change, but on disruption, discontinuity, and contradiction. Rüsen makes clear that these four types do not exist individually, but they usually appear together in varying combinations.⁹ Their relationship, illustrated by Rüsen in [Figure 7.1](#), is explained in these words:

On a purely logical level, the traditional narrative shapes the conditions for the other types of narrative. The exemplary transcends the realm of experience established by the traditional type, while the genetic brings time into the timeless dimension of meaning as articulated in the exemplary type. Critical narrative is manifest in the execution of changing from one type to another (when it does not remain within the horizon of meaning in one of the other three and only offers alternatives, for example, making one tradition replaceable by another).¹⁰

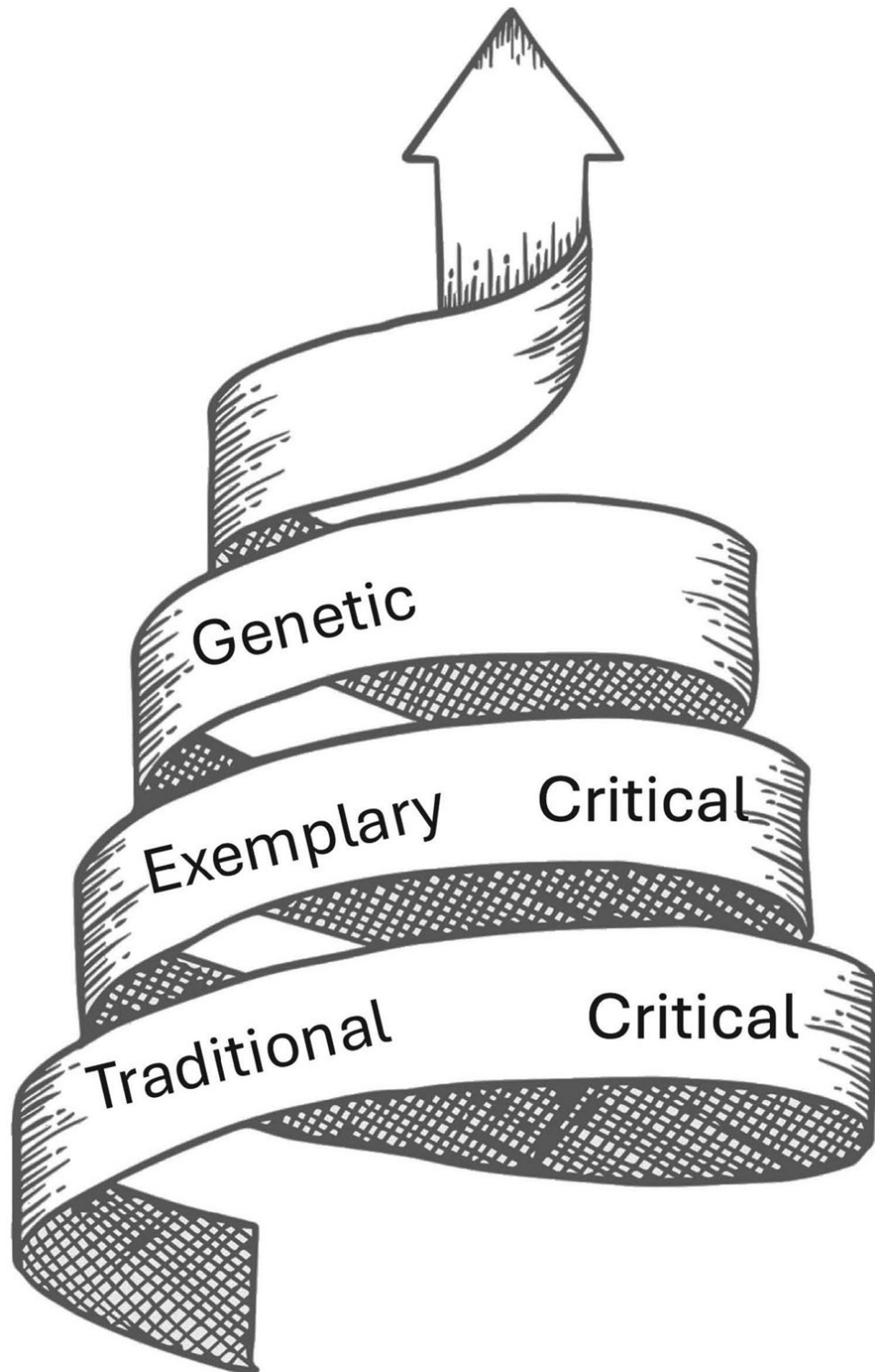


Figure 7.1 "Schematic spiral of the levels of competency in historical learning", from *Evidence and Meaning: A Theory of Historical Studies* by Jörn Rüsen. [↗](#)
Copyright © 2017 by Jörn Rüsen. Used by permission of Berghahn Books.

Let me now turn to a very specific type of historical narratives, namely, myths. A historian, or anyone else seeking historical consciousness, should pay attention to the importance of myths as historical narratives. A myth is a pseudohistorical narrative, didactic in nature, and usually of unknown origin, which aims at interpreting and giving meaning to historical events and structures (sometimes to the whole world and humankind) on the basis of unquestionable “truths” which are not verifiable, usually communicated with the use of symbolic language and imagery.¹¹ When we think of myths, we usually think of religious and ethnic (and in modern times national) mythology, often related to the so-called myths of origin. Indeed, these are the main categories of myths, which have existed for thousands of years and played a central role in collective identification—and mainly self-identification. But there are also other types of myths: social myths (including gender myths, race myths, and other types of myths), philosophical myths, epistemological and scientific myths, and so many others. What is important to remember is that myths influence considerably, and sometimes dangerously, the ways in which we perceive and evaluate ourselves and others, and the ways in which we understand and communicate historical evolution. Being conscious of the myths that shape our lives and culture is of utmost importance for our historical influence and our orientation and performance in life.

Chronology, periodization, and concepts as challenges

Both composing historical narratives and studying them are challenging tasks. There are a number of issues that might challenge you, both as the author and as the student of historical narratives. Being historically conscious in terms of narration of the content of time demands a reflection on these challenges. The following paragraphs discuss some of them briefly.

An important element of narrative consciousness is related to one of the most central features of any historical narrative, its chronology and the related periodization. Periodization is central in any historical study. In fact, it is impossible to do history without relating our subject to one or more periods, on the basis of one or more systems of periodization. All historical narratives should be clear in their chronological dimensions, as this is one of the main ways in which they support our orientation in time. And all narratives are related to at least one external and at least one internal periodization. When you narrate, for example, an event related to the history of your own homeplace, you might relate it to a local chronology ("the first period after the liberation of the island from an occupation by a foreign power"), an international chronology (the Enlightenment period), or a global chronology (modern times). Your narrative might also have an internal periodization, based on specific events or actions that function as milestones (e.g. before and after a natural disaster). But the practice of periodization, in general, as well as specific periodizations, has been challenged, with good arguments.¹²

There are several things that we should be conscious of in relation to chronology and periodization. The first is the choice of which external chronologies we will relate it to. Do they really serve our narrative? Sometimes, adopting an external periodization uncritically can decrease the quality of our narrative. Second, we should remember that periodization is more related to us than to the period we study and its people (Renaissance people had no idea that they were living in a Renaissance). Any periodization label is created (much) later than the period it signifies, to make the study of the past, and the period, easier. The problem is that these human-made (i.e. history-made) periodizations limit our understanding of the past. Among other things, they create the phenomena that sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel has coined as intraperiod "historical assimilation" (assigning blocks of history a single common label, as, for example, "medieval times", and pretending that everything within the period was homogeneous, everywhere) and interperiod "historical

differentiation" (presenting periods before and periods after as totally different and ignoring all the elements of continuation).¹³

In addition, we should keep in mind Jacques Le Goff's aphorism: "Dividing history into periods is never—I repeat, never—a neutral or innocent act".¹⁴ Indeed, periodizations often come with historical evaluations ("everything" in Antiquity was bright, and "everything" in medieval times was dark) and sometimes aim at serving political and other purposes (especially in cases of conflicts related to the rights of nations over specific areas).

Let me now turn to another important historiographical challenge. Every historian should be conscious of the *importance of concepts* in historical narratives. I will dedicate some more space to concepts and their significance in historical narratives, because this significance is essential. To start with, it is of fundamental importance to keep in mind that it is impossible to describe, understand, identify, analyse, and evaluate anything or anyone around us, and any element of historical reality and evolution, without using concepts. Could you think, for example, how historical evolution could be narrated without the use of concepts such as politics, economy, society, culture, religion, development, continuity, change, cause, or tradition? And keep in mind that every historical narrative is composed with the use of historical data and historical concepts.

But what is a historical concept? To identify that, we should start by making clear what a concept is. As the term "concept" has been discussed in various disciplines and contexts, there are varying definitions and approaches to it. Among the historians who have discussed the meaning of "concept", I would like to refer to Reinhardt Koselleck and Jörn Rüsen. Koselleck focused on the difference between a word and a concept. He writes:

The concept is connected to a word, but is at the same time more than a word: a word becomes a concept only when the entirety of meaning and experience within a sociopolitical

context within which and for which a word is used can be condensed into one word.^{[15](#)}

The most important element of this statement is the focus on the relation between every concept and the sociopolitical context in which it is created and/or used. Let it be noted that Koselleck was interested in social and political concepts, and this is why he connected concepts in general to sociopolitical contexts. Reflecting on concepts in a more general perspective, we might think of concepts being related not only to political and social contexts but also to any type of relevant historical context.

Jörn Rüsen defines concepts and historical concepts on the basis of their function as an element of differentiation between various facts and circumstances and in relation to the temporal dimension of historical narratives. He writes:

Concepts are terms used to designate facts and circumstances and differentiate them from other facts and circumstances. Historical concepts must provide information from the past (events and combinations of events) with a temporal qualification that reveals this information to be much more than mere happenings or occurrences.^{[16](#)}

To get even closer to what a historical concept is, I am building my understanding on a more general and ontological approach to the term concept. A concept is a mental representation of natural or ideational elements, in other words, of elements existing in the universe or in human minds. This means that a concept is a cognitive symbol representing in the human mind:

1. Something observable through the senses, such as "book", "university", or "revolution".
2. Something observable only with the use of relevant technology, such as "cell" or "black hole".
3. A process, such as "decomposition" or "integration".
4. An abstract idea, in other words, something that only exists in our minds and gives meaning to the world, to our lives, and to our interaction with other humans and the world, such as "truth", "justice", or "deity".

Let it be noted that what the concept communicates is not necessarily real; it might be simply imagined or wished for. In other words, I would say that concepts do not only represent mentally the natural world as it is, but they also represent our perception of the world (including ourselves), which is sometimes enriched with fantasized elements that make its perception easier, especially in things where our knowledge is not enough to offer logical explanations and reasoning.

Based on this understanding of the term concept, a historical concept could be defined as a generic and intrasystemic word, or combination of words, which represents:

1. An existing or imagined category of historical elements (people, objects, events, processes, practices, and phenomena) generated on the basis of a considerable number of identical or very similar historical elements;
2. An abstract idea related, directly or indirectly, to historical evolution or the study of historical evolution;
3. A procedure (method) related to how historians study the content of time.

I wrote earlier that historical concepts are generic and intrasystemic words. *Generic* means that the concept is, in fact, a category generalized from a considerable number of similar instances. When you encounter the concept “revolution”, for example, you think of specific events and activities that might appear in any revolution, in any period in history. *Intrasystemic* means that the concept is the product of a specific system of thinking (scientific, social, political, cultural, religious, etc.) and thus has (or at least should have) the same meaning for all people belonging to this system, and to this system only. To illustrate, by using the same concept, revolution, note that it has a totally different meaning when related to different systems of thinking, such as politics, science, or art.

Every time we set out to study or reflect on a concept or to include a concept in one of our narratives, we should start by answering the “what-is” question.¹⁷ What does this concept speak about? A mere word signifies an object, something we might experience through our senses. But what does a concept signify? Simplifying, I may say that concepts in general and historical concepts in particular are generic communicative symbols of people, ideas, events, practices, actions, or phenomena that help us better understand the world around us, by organizing what we know and then by using a common code of communication to categorize this

cognitive knowledge. So, concepts are supposed to be elements of communication that are understood in a more or less common way by everyone participating in a discussion, or any other type of communication.¹⁸

In their efforts to narrate historical evolution, historians and storytellers consider and use two different types of concepts: empirical concepts and abstract concepts. *Empirical concepts* are communicative generalizations of historical data; they are usually the results of categorization. They are generic and have their roots in observable and unobservable, measurable, or specifiable historical elements (people, objects, events, processes, practices, and phenomena). The concept "national myth", for example, signifies a pseudohistorical narrative, usually communicated with the use of symbolic language and imagery, which presents an unquestionable and not verifiable "truth" about the origins and/or the special historical importance of a nation. As a concept, it is formed on the basis of two other concepts, namely, "nation" and "myth", and on the evidence of many relevant, and similar between them, instances/cases of national narratives that have the features of a myth. Other examples of empirical concepts might be the concepts "mammal", "election", and "earthquake". *Abstract concepts* refer to ideas that cannot be materialized or measured. Think, for example, of the concepts "justice", "dignity", "happiness", "love", or "history". Let me illustrate with just a few comparative examples: kilogram is empirical, weight is abstract; antiquity is empirical, periodization is abstract; reading is empirical, knowledge is abstract; and so forth. A special category of abstract historical concepts is those related to theories and methods on how historical studies might be performed and how historical time might be understood. Think, for example, of theoretical concepts such as "source criticism", "narrative competence", "historical temporalities", "space of experience", or "historical consciousness".

Both empirical and abstract concepts might have varying levels of abstraction or generalization. There are concepts that are highly abstract and general, such as "animal" or "change", and concepts

less so, such as "hominin" or "interview". There are also what could be called "concepts with adjectives", in other words, subcategories of concepts which might be related to ideas (a very good illustration is the concept "idea" itself and various types of ideas, as for example "philosophical idea" or "ground-breaking idea"), people (e.g. "historian" and "amateur historian"), objects ("book" and "electronic book"), events ("war" and "civil war"), processes ("evolution" and "social evolution"), practices ("ritual" and "initiation ritual"), or phenomena ("earthquake" and "tectonic earthquake").

Every scientific discipline creates and uses its own *procedural concepts*, which are abstract concepts representing methods, that is, processes and practices, used by the practitioners of the discipline. History is not an exception, and this means that reflecting on historical concepts, we should also pay attention to methodological concepts related to how historical work is conducted in order to understand and narrate historical evolution. History's procedural concepts include, for example, concepts such as "source criticism", "narrative construction", or "historical reasoning".

Some of the concepts historians study and historians and storytellers use should be approached in an interdisciplinary way. Think, for example, that, as a historian, you study equality in a given place and a given period. The concept "equality" could be studied from various perspectives, by using political, social, cultural, economic, gender, or religious approaches. And a complete historical study should take into consideration as many approaches as possible. This means that, when necessary, a historian should not hesitate to enter the fields of other disciplines and adopt theories and methods that could help her better understand and analyse the core concepts and phenomena she is studying. Ideally, this should be done by any person seeking historical consciousness.

The study and use of concepts often face challenges. And it is important that historians and storytellers are aware of these challenges and reflect on how we should face them. But first of all, it is important that we identify the most important concepts in our study or our narrative, and we reflect on their meaning and use in the period we study or narrate, as well as in our own period, since

our analysis will unavoidably be based on the use of these concepts. Peter Mair writes that “the first task of any researcher is to specify the nature of the objects of their research, and hence to define the primary concepts with which she is concerned”.¹⁹

Working with concepts as elements of historical narratives is not unproblematic. One of the main challenges we may encounter is related to the fact that concepts do not always have the same content, the same meaning. Concepts such as democracy, justice, culture, or truth have been debated for centuries without getting a content we all, or at least most of us, may agree on. This happens because concepts are history-made; in different historical periods, or in different contexts, the same concept might have varying meanings. Cultural theorist Mieke Bal claims that concepts have a history, are constantly changing, and are not given but created.²⁰

Bal has also coined the theory of *travelling concepts*. She claims that concepts travel “between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities”. This means that the same concept might be defined differently in History, Economy and Management, Sociology, Social Anthropology, or Cultural studies. More importantly, the same concept might mean in the present something very different from what it meant in the past—it could also have varying meanings in different periods in the past. Our work, when studying or using a concept, is exactly to identify the meaning of the concept in its specific temporal and spatial environment. Bal adds that, especially between historical periods, “the meaning and use of concepts change dramatically”. She proposes that we should study the processes of differing before, during, and after each “trip”.²¹

Travelling concepts is one of the main challenges in trying to understand and narrate reality through concepts, but not the only one. The world is in constant change. New ideas, new practices, new forms of organizing and structuring social interaction, new ways of understanding ourselves and the world around us come up the whole time—think, for example, of how social media changed our

lives and how AI chatbots are changing the way we work. Unfortunately, language is, in many cases, slower than historical evolution—and rather conservative. There are times when the new realities cannot be covered by the arsenal of existing concepts. Historical evolution demands the creation of a new concept. But we do not dare to do so. Instead, we use an already existing concept to speak about a new phenomenon, a new activity, a new practice, or a new idea. And we use a concept that has been used to speak about a phenomenon, activity, practice, or idea that is similar, or very similar, but not identical to the new one we speak about. This means that we include in the elements defining the old concept a new element, related to the new phenomenon, activity, practice, or idea. So, to use a celebrated metaphor, the concept becomes “larger”, like a balloon to which we have blown new air. This phenomenon is coined by the Italian political scientist Giovanni Sartori as “conceptual stretching”.²²

Conceptual stretching is related to one of the most characteristic features of concepts: their elasticity. This means that concepts have the capacity of being extendible, in terms of including new components in their definitional content. The elasticity of concepts has several positive sides, but it might also result in the concept being very difficult to define, understand, and use clearly. Due to their elasticity, some concepts have acquired a polysemy, which makes their definition and use very difficult. For concepts such as “culture” and “innovation”, for example, there are literally hundreds of definitions and dozens of usages.

* * *

Summing up, being historically conscious in terms of how historical narratives have a historicity has many dimensions. These dimensions are related to how historical narratives are made, on the basis of historical data and historical concepts, as well as of the different types of historical narratives and their function. It is also important to always remember that there are a lot of challenges related to historical narratives, which might be unclear, false, or even fake.

Reflecting on both the content and the communicative dimension of historical narratives is crucial for the quality of your historical consciousness. Equally important, it is to reflect on how textual and non-textual historical narratives are used as tools to reach various ends, in various areas of life. It is this use that the next chapter is dedicated to.

Notes

1. For other approaches relating historical consciousness to narration and psychology, see [Straub \(2005\)](#). ↗
2. On historical narratives see [Rüsen \(2017\)](#); [Rüsen \(2005\)](#); [Paul \(2015: 56–69\)](#); [Levisohn \(2010\)](#). ↗
3. [Rüsen \(2017: 244\)](#). ↗
4. [McCullagh \(2000: 40\)](#). ↗
5. [McCullagh \(2000: 52–59, 64–66\)](#). ↗
6. [Paul \(2015: 64\)](#); emphasis in the original. ↗
7. [Levisohn \(2010: 16\)](#). ↗
8. See [Zerubavel \(2004: 11–36\)](#). ↗
9. [Rüsen \(2017: 261–265\)](#); see also [Rüsen \(2005: 9–19\)](#). ↗
10. [Rüsen \(2017: 265–266\)](#). ↗
11. On various definitions of the concept myth, see [Bouchard \(2018: 39–42\)](#). ↗
12. On periodization and relevant challenges see [Le Goff \(2015\)](#); [Jordanova \(2019: 145–166\)](#); [Blackbourn \(2012\)](#). ↗
13. [Zerubavel \(2004: 85–88\)](#). ↗
14. [Le Goff \(2015: 17\)](#). ↗
15. [Koselleck \(2004: 85\)](#). ↗
16. [Rüsen \(2017: 188\)](#). ↗
17. On the what-is question see [Mair \(2008: 179–182\)](#). ↗
18. I would like to underline this “more of less”, because more often than not our understanding of concepts, particularly the most abstract ones, is not identical. I believe that the example of the concept “truth” is enough to illustrate the point. ↗
19. [Mair \(2008: 179\)](#). ↗
20. [Bal \(2002\)](#) (Kindle, loc. 1018). ↗
21. [Bal \(2009: 20\)](#). ↗
22. On the phenomenon of conceptual stretching in relation to political and social concepts, you might read, for example, [Collier & Mahon \(1993\)](#); [Collier & Levitsky \(1997\)](#); [Sartori \(1970\)](#). ↗

8 Being conscious of the use of history

DOI: [10.4324/9781003767657-8](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003767657-8)

Using history is an integral part of our lives. We do it so often (probably in everything we do) that it has become a unconscious activity. We use history, for example, every time we identify ourselves and others (individually and collectively), most of the time when we are making important decisions for life, or when we must evaluate someone or something. In identification, we think mainly of the past as history. In decision-making and evaluation, we usually think of both past and future. Historians and non-historians, we use history every time we create a narrative that includes a temporal dimension.

The use of history has become, during recent decades, an individual area of historical study, sometimes related to teaching history in school. In fact, there are two starting points in history-use research. The first is cognitive/empirical and focuses on how specific events and periods (e.g. the American Revolution or Antiquity) are used to serve present goals (e.g. the establishment and maintenance of national identities). The other is metacognitive/theoretical and focuses on the different ways in which history is used, on the intentions and the needs of the users, as well as on the results of the use. As a result of this research, several typologies of history use have been composed, based on varying criteria. They all contribute to a better understanding of how history is used, the main aims that are covered by this use, and the most prominent collective users of history.

Kenneth Nordgren claims that “there are three basic reasons for using history: to explain the surrounding world, to form identities,

and to exert influence”.¹ Let us recall that to survive and have a life as prosperous as possible, we need to orient ourselves in time and space, be aware of who we are, and have an optimal relation to, and interaction with, our animate and inanimate environment. It is exactly these aims that the tripartite objective of using history (explanation of the world, identity making and maintenance, and exertion of influence) supports in everyday life of both individuals and (especially) communities.

This chapter aims to present the most important types of history use and discuss how being conscious on the different uses and abuses of history and the different areas in which history is used contributes to our historical consciousness. I am basing myself on the excellent work of historians and history educationists who have studied the use of history or reflected on it in various periods and from various perspectives. Before doing so, I would like to make clear how I perceive and approach the use of history as a concept. I will do so by proposing the following operational definition that is close to my perception of historical evolution and the terminology of this book:

History use is an action realized in the present, by applying history existentially and/or performatively as means to meet specific ends. History here might include veritable perceptions of the past, fake stories about the past, past or past-oriented material and immaterial technologies (objects, rituals, customs etcetera), and/or anticipations of historical futures. Existentially, history is used as a means to identify, and often evaluate, our selves or others as biological, social and cultural creatures and agents. Performatively, individuals or groups use the past and/or the future, in order to reach specific ends in the present or in the future (orientation, meaning-making, identity communication, legitimization, urge to action etcetera).

Rethinking history use in relation to historical consciousness

We use history as a tool to achieve various goals. Both individuals and communities use history to address various needs and purposes: among other things, to understand the world around us, to get inspiration on how we should act in the present and future, to legitimize policies and even start wars, to claim property and other rights, to evaluate others in positive or negative terms, or to identify ourselves and others. National identities, for example, are almost exclusively based on the use of history, often enriched with myths that give us a feeling of proudness.

Our use of history is based on our historical knowledge, that is, on what has been evaluated as worthy to be registered, narrated, and remembered. Our reflection on how history is used should be based on the awareness that *what is registered in the present or was registered in the past as history, and what is/was not (what has been left out), is/was the result of needs and decisions related to the relevant present and the relevant future*. Often, we choose to erase from the historical record specific contents of time which are negatively evaluated by us and/or by others, especially contents that are disgraceful or even traumatic. I would like to underline that historical oblivion, also called non-use of history, is different from forgetting. It means that people and deeds are deliberately erased from historical records and public memory, in a way that aims at leaving no trace behind, thus making their future rehabilitation a very demanding task (the aim is to make it impossible).

Most of what is written on history use focuses on the use of the past. This is not wrong, of course, but to enhance our historical consciousness, the study of history use should be approached from a perspective related to the coinherence of past, present, and future. As mentioned before, history use is an action unfolded in the present, relating the past (Koselleck's space of experience) to the present and mainly the future (our horizon of expectation). Given that, as we have seen earlier, there is no expectation without

experience, and there is no experience without expectation,² any action of history use employing the past is also, explicitly or implicitly, related to the future.

This means that history use also includes, always, what I presented earlier as “historical futures”, that is, anticipated futures that can only exist in relation to specific pasts. History use as an existential action is mainly related to the present: we use the past to identify ourselves in the present, so that we will orient ourselves and others about our position and role in the physical and temporal realities we live in, in our animate and inanimate worlds. History use as a performative action is more related to the future. We use history to lead historical evolution to specific directions that (we hope) will create a desirable historical future. We also use it to legitimize actions of the past (sometimes of a past so short that it could be understood as part of the present) in order to avoid consequences in the future (sometimes of a future so near that it could also be understood as part of the present). But every time we use history, what we in fact do is trying to create a specific path of historical evolution which fits our hopes and misfits our fears about how our relationship with the world will be in a specific moment or period ahead.

Given that the composition of any historical narrative is an action of history use and given that (as we have seen in [Chapter 7](#)), historical narratives are also history-made, we should also be conscious that the composition (or construction, or invention) of historical narratives is a deliberate action related to the performative dimensions of history use. Indeed, there are historical narratives composed only for that reason: to be used as historical arguments, supporting claims, or provoking and legitimizing actions and events.

A final element of historical consciousness in terms of history use is the following: History use is based on textual, oral, and visual narratives. Given that all historical narratives are history-made and given that we use history to meet history-made needs (identification, orientation, history-making related to specific aims, etc.), our history use is also history-made. This is why the same history (i.e. the same

content of time) might be used differently in different historical narratives that are made in different places, in different periods, or by different people. This historicity of history use is exactly the reason why there exist so many different ways, and types, of using history. Some of them (by no means all) are presented in the following pages.

Types of history use

History is used to serve various aims and purposes. Different aims and different purposes call for different uses of history. For example, we use history when we need arguments to make individual and collective decisions. We also use it to explain how things are or to justify them. These are just a few out of many ways in which the past becomes a means related to specific ends. In addition, come the ways in which we use anticipated historical futures as arguments or the ways in which we connect the present to the future—either when we want the present to get extended into the future or when we need to design a future different from the present. In any case, the way we use history is always related to the needs and purposes we want to serve. This means that there are different types of history use. There are also various ways of categorizing the use of history. In the following pages, I am presenting various types and typologies. Before doing so, I would like to underline that it is important to avoid thinking about various ways in which history might be used in either/or terms. More often than not, various types of history use and various purposes are combined in one and the same narrative, which aims at reaching a goal by using the past and/or the future. As mentioned a few lines over, recent research on history use has resulted in various typologies, some of which I am presenting in the following pages. But I would like to start with an old one.

Friedrich Nietzsche, who had a special interest in history and philosophy of history, discussed various ways of dealing with history

in his long essay *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, originally published in 1874. His typology, which discusses the use of history in relation to politics, includes three different uses of history (three different species of history, in Nietzsche's words), which he calls monumental, antiquarian, and critical. In the *monumental use*, history becomes an exemplary source of inspiration in the present. The focus here is on historical narratives about heroes and great deeds, masterpieces in architecture and art, and anything else that can inspire for action. The monumental use of history aims at creating the feeling that all the greatness presented in narratives and masterpieces can be achieved again, in the present or in an imagined future. The *antiquarian use* of history focuses on the ancestors and their cultural heritage as a kind of treasure that must be maintained. The past is related to identity, and it is used to create the feeling of continuity and security. The antiquarian history user admires the past and hopes that past conditions will continue to exist in the present and the future. Nietzsche writes that both the antiquarian and the monumental use of history are dangerous and proposes as a solution the *critical use* of history, which is more focused on the present and the future. The critical approach does not consider history as something ideal or as a valuable treasure, but as something we must free ourselves from. The focus in this type of history use is on injustices of the past and their correction in the present, or at least on their use as a compass pointing to the right direction leading to the needed changes. The main aim of critical history, which is, according to Nietzsche, necessary, is to help us understand the cruel human nature. It is our duty, he meant, to free ourselves from what he saw as the despotism of history.³

At the end of the second millennium and the beginning of the third, history use has become a popular subject in historical theory and history didactics. Klas-Göran Karlsson is one of the most prominent theorists of history use in the last two decades. Karlsson's typology is based on various motives behind the use of history and includes six types of history use, each one related to a different motive. One of them is the *scholarly-scientific* use of history, which

aims at establishing knowledge about the past after a thorough examination of the relevant sources and the analysis of the relevant evidence in a scientifically defensible way. Second, Karlsson speaks of the *existential* use of history, which is related to the need of both individuals and communities to remember and preserve specific important dimensions of their past and to orient themselves in difficult situations. A third type is the *moral* use, which identifies and demonstrates injustices committed in the past, in order to correct wrongdoings that still exist and prevent their continuation or their repetition in the future. Fourth, there is the *ideological* use of history, performed not by politicians, but by everyone of us. This use aims at justifying decisions or deeds by referring to a reason in the past. Karlsson's fifth type is the *non-use* of history, in other words, the effort to conceal events or people, to erase their existence from the historical register. Finally, Karlsson added to his typology a political type of history use coined by Göran Rystad, namely, the *political-pedagogical* use of history. History is here used as a didactic tool to illustrate or acknowledge something or to initiate a discussion on it. He underlines that some of the uses overlap, that the typology "is unlikely to supply complete coverage", and that "the various uses differ in strength at different times, at different stages of development, and in different geographical spheres".⁴

In her book *The Uses and Abuses of History*, Margaret MacMillan discusses the phenomenon of history use without presenting an explicit typology.⁵ Her discussion, using several examples from various parts of the world, is based on subjects such as the popularity of history in the present, the use of history for comfort, the ownership of the past, the relationship between history and identity and history and nationalism in particular, what she calls "history wars", and the use of history as a guide.

Norwegian historians Jan Bjarne Bøe and Ketil Knutsen published in 2012 an introduction to the use of history, where they discuss the commercial, public, political, entertaining, and school history use. Bøe and Knutsen also discuss the use of history in relation to time and context, place and belonging, and the visualization of history.⁶

Another Norwegian historian, Håkon Rune Folkenborg, approaches history use in a three-dimensional way, by focusing on the use-of-history functions, forms, and areas. He claims that (a) there are four main *functions* of history use: identity-making, entertaining, legitimizing, and exploratory-researching; (b) there are three *forms* of using history: textual, visual, and audio; and (c) there are four *areas* of using history: scientific, commercial, public, and political-ideological.⁷

A fourth Norwegian historian, Ola Svein Stugu, claims that we might use history in mainly three different ways: first, as a tool that helps in finding meaning in the past, which might support us in both understanding the past and making sense of the present. This might be done by focusing on the existential and emotional functions of historical knowledge. Individuals and groups use history to make sense not only of their own existence but also of their relations to others. Second, we may use history as an instrument in order to convince and persuade others. This is how politicians and other actors use history to serve sometimes noble and sometimes not-so-noble goals. Third, history might be used as a pedagogical tool, in order to serve normative and moral aims, to strengthen norms and values in the present. This is how history is used in school, but also by mass media and other actors. This use focuses on history as a mine of values and normative principles.⁸

In the following pages, I am briefly presenting some of the types of history use I find most important, making clear that other approaches to the use of history as a phenomenon might result in different typologies. What is important in terms of historical consciousness is having an insight into the fact that history can be used in various areas and in many different ways.

Scientific use: We use history to describe the temporal dimensions of the world in our effort to understand it and orient ourselves in it. The scientific use of history aims at providing reliable knowledge about the past, and thus operable temporal orientation, and is often juxtaposed to historical myths, which aim at providing temporal orientation too, but are not based on verifiable evidence. A scientific

approach to history is based on a thorough examination of the relevant empirical evidence (often based on the study of textual and non-textual sources), the use of specific methods, and the implementation of relevant theories to analyse the evidence—keep in mind that history is a multimethodical and multitheoretical discipline, which means that a historian might use theories and methods originating in many other disciplines, anything from psychology to mathematics. The scientific use of history might be diffused in various ways. Academic publications and research-based documentaries are the usual ones, but popularization in newspapers, blogs, and vlogs, in video lectures and presentations, as well as in graphic novels, have also become important channels of spreading historical knowledge.⁹

Existential use: We study history to orient ourselves in the world and understand who we are and what our position is in the animate and inanimate environments around us. History functions as a compass. At the same time, history is one of the core elements of our identity. Whoever we are as individuals and whatever we are as collective entities is a product of our history and of the history of the world around us. Based on this awareness, we use history to establish and confirm identities, not only our own but also of others. Our narratives about our individual and collective evolution are the prisms through which we try to understand our present and plan for the future, on the basis of a reflection on ourselves and our surroundings. What is important in this use of history is that our reflections on the past should be as honest as possible, particularly in relation to historical elements that cause discomfort, shame, or even trauma. National days and relevant celebrations are a typical example of how the commemoration of specific past events might function as a starting point for reflections on national identity and national historical futures. Existential history use is of high significance for nations, which (almost without exception) build up their identity on the use of the past, especially on the use of historical myths manifesting the origins of the nations (known as creation myths).¹⁰

Moral use: The past is often promoted as an arsenal of moral principles that have (or at least are supposed to have) diachronic value and relevance. This type of history use is often related to what Nietzsche coined as critical history. It focuses on cases of historical injustices against specific human groups (e.g. women, slaves, native populations, people of colour, or Jews) and directly or indirectly asks for a correction of the injustice or at least an expression of regret, in case a correction is no longer possible. A specific dimension of the moral use of history is related to how history teaching or reacting with history in movies, TV series, re-enactments of the past, and digital games might support the individual to develop historical empathy. In premodern and religious modern societies, the role of the guardian of moral values was played by the religious authorities. But in modern secular societies, "history takes on the role of showing us good and evil, virtues and vices".^{[11](#)}

Political use: This is probably the history use that is easiest to understand. States, national and local governments, political parties, international organizations, and many other actors use historical arguments to argue for decision-making or to legitimize executed policies and other political acts. Past events, deeds, or omissions are used in the present as an argument that legitimizes decisions and acts in the present or the future. History might be used in both high and low politics (by governments and social movements, for example) and in both hard and soft politics (e.g. in diplomacy and the function of cultural, health, environment, and other fora where policies are prepared, discussed, or promoted). This use is so intense that some experts speak of "history wars".^{[12](#)} The content of history used in politics might vary. Most of the time, politico-historical argumentation refers to concrete deeds and events. But there are also cases when history is used at a considerably more general level. Think, for example, of how Nazi propaganda used a pseudohistorical perception that specific human races have historically been biologically and culturally inferior to legitimize racism and the persecution of specific groups. The main aims of the political use of history are to convince or influence the relevant

stakeholders, locally, nationally, or internationally. During the last two centuries, as Margaret MacMillan has noted, “history has become important in another way—as a basis for claiming land, both within countries and between them”.¹³ A typical example is the conflict between Israel and Palestine over the possession of a geographical area that has been historically inhabited by both Palestinian and Israeli people. In this conflict, the claims of both sides are based on historical arguments promoting the historical rights of each side, the common history on the area being systematically ignored.¹⁴ In politics, history use is not only about the past but also about the anticipated future, more concretely about promises on building desired futures and avoiding undesired ones.

Ideological use: This type is closely related to the political use, as it often refers to legitimization of political ideologies and systems, policies, and regimes. A typical example is political discussions on the historical pros and cons of capitalism and communism. Another is the use of Middle-East history by Israeli and Palestinian historians and politicians. Add that every national or religious fundamentalism is based on a usually distorted use of the past to legitimize its aims and means. As in the political use in general, ideological history use might suffer from actors who do not hesitate to use fake histories to gain public support for policies and other actions that would not be accepted by the relevant communities otherwise. Political propaganda often uses history ideologically, directly (e.g. by presenting modern political leaders as new Gandhis, or new Hitlers) or indirectly, in slogans (“make America great again”) and whole communication campaigns and policy making.¹⁵

Non-use: This is a systematic, and usually long-term, effort to erase individuals, groups, and events from public history and memory. Individuals and groups might be erased because they are the victims of physical or social elimination or because they do not fit in the prevailing narrative about recent or longer history. Events might be erased because they are vicious, shameful, or traumatic. What is important to underline is that historical erasure, what we call non-use of history, is not simply about forgetting but about a

process that I would call “forgetting oblivion”. This means that oblivion is realized in two phases. In the first, all relevant evidence will be thoroughly erased. The second step is erasing all evidence about the first phase, so that no one in the future will ever know neither about the erased people or events nor about the process of erasing them from historical narratives and memories. In a lighter version of non-use, peoples and events are not erased but simply silenced, until the times are more suitable for “resurrecting” them again. Closing, let it be noted that non-use of history is not a modern phenomenon. It has existed at least from ancient times.^{[16](#)}

Entertaining use: History might be used as one of many possible answers to our need to be distracted, amused, encouraged, or seduced. This might be done by employing various media, the most common being movies, TV series and documentaries, novels, and other types of literature, or historical games. Internationally and nationally produced movies present historical and mythical events covering a long period from ancient times to the present. History is so popular as a subject in documentaries that there exist various international and national History channels. Historical novels have been popular among readers and authors for centuries. History-based digital games have become very popular during the last few decades, but history was also central in card and board games from at least the nineteenth century. The quality and validity of history presented in all these forms are discussed in various publications, focusing on the balance between the need to entertain (and thus sell—see also the next paragraph) on one hand and accuracy and authenticity on the other.^{[17](#)}

Commercial use: History might be used to serve commercial purposes in various ways. Various types of advertisements of products and services use slogans, visual elements, and other content that is directly related to the history of products, areas, or peoples related to the advertised commodity. Advertisements in the tourism industry are typical examples: most countries or places use their history as a central attractive element in their invitation to potential visitors. But tourism is not the only area; a lot of other

products and services are promoted with the use of easily recognizable historical places, events, and figures. Think also of popular history magazines, which have become more and more saleable in recent decades. Furthermore, companies and organizations use history as an element of their corporate identity. To limit myself to the use of ancient Greek and Roman mythology, think for example of: (a) companies such as Olympus (the mountain that was the residence of the ancient Greek goddesses and gods), Hermes (god of trade), or Pandora (the protagonist of the myth on Pandora's box); (b) products named Venus, Mercury, or Ajax (a hero of the Trojan War); (c) projects like the NASA project Apollo; and (d) sports clubs as Ajax (Netherlands), Sparta Prague (Czech Republic), Atalanta (Italy), Toronto Argonauts (Canada), Olympique des Marseille (France), or Titans (in various countries).¹⁸

Public use: A short walk in the city or town you live in, or to the nearest city or town, is enough to reveal cases of public history use. Monuments, statues, names of streets, and squares are direct and indirect remnants of a past that is important for the inhabitants of the city or town, or for the whole country they belong to. All these public memory elements are bridges between the present observer and individuals, groups, and events that have been registered as important and evaluated as exemplary. Public history use is also related to anniversaries, jubilees, and various ceremonies that are, in fact, immaterial memorials. The typical example is once more national celebrations of events and periods of the past that create a feeling of togetherness and proudness for the nation's temporal dimension (the longer it is, the better) and its historical role (heroic deeds, usually idealized through exaggeration, being the absolute reason to be proud). Public history is often related to the so-called "sites of memory", material or immaterial sites that have a very specific function: visiting them or even thinking about them recalls automatically specific memories that are important for the community and might be related to its identity. Think, for example, of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Simply mentioning their names, everyone recalls the first nuclear attacks in world history. A

special role in public use of history is played by museums, which have the double mission of preserving history (through treasured artefacts) and educating the public by designing exhibitions and other products and activities.^{[19](#)}

History use in school: Schools are among the most influential arenas of history use and the most prominent factories of national and religious myths. The use of history in schools is influenced by several actors. The relevant authorities design the educational and pedagogical frame, teachers are attributed with its execution, students (and indirectly their families) are its receivers, authors, and publishers of textbooks provide the raw material that is used in the classroom. The use of history in school is a combination of probably all the types of history use presented earlier. It is scientific as based on relevant research, existential as introducing the students to the identity and significance of the nation and various national and international organizations and communities, moral as it often takes up discussion on what is historically right and wrong, and political as it might shape the students as citizens. It also has its commercial size, related to the production and trade of history textbooks. And finally, it might also have a non-use dimension, in relation to shameful or traumatic events or actions carried out by our own community (discussing in the classroom genocides executed by our own state is something that requires thorough work with history as a collective burden).^{[20](#)}

Merging reflections

Historical consciousness related to the use of history starts with the awareness of the existence of the past and the future in the present. Past ideas, actions, events, and material and immaterial technologies survive in our contemporary perceptions of them and become elements of our orientation in time and space. We not only use history to get oriented, but we also use it in our relation to and

interaction with others, sometimes to help them get oriented and sometimes to get them disoriented, in ways that serve our purposes. This applies not only to individuals but also (and considerably more) to collective entities of all kinds and sizes, from small groups to the whole humankind.

What is most important to remember, as historians and in our everyday life, is that both individuals and communities use and abuse history constantly, in order to serve various aims and purposes. To quote Margaret Mac-Millan, "the past can be used for almost anything you want to do in the present".²¹ To be historically conscious, it is important to be able to identify the various history uses (including the non-use of history), the relevant actors and media of history use, and, if possible, the motives behind them. Doing so, we become not only critical citizens but also more reflected members of the society we live in. It is important to include ourselves in the picture, reflecting on how we apply history, as individuals and members of various communities, to identify ourselves, understand and evaluate the world (including other people), and meet specific ends.

When it comes to the ways of abusing history, MacMillan writes that this happens by "creating one-sided or false histories to justify treating others badly, seizing their land, for example, or killing them".²² I will add that history can be abused in two ways. First, when individuals and groups create historical narratives that are one-sided or false. In this case, it is historical truth that is abused. In other words, history is abused in relation to its content. Second, history is abused when we use historical narratives to harm other people or to serve our own purposes, at the expense of others. In this case, history is abused in relation to its utility. I would like to underline that in this way of abusing history, whether the narratives we use are historically correct or historically incorrect is of secondary importance. Our focus should be on the reasons for (ab)using history.

Let me close this discussion of historical consciousness and history use with a comment on terminology. In general, when historians

speak about the use of history, they mean the use of the past. The present and the future are usually neglected in relevant discussions and publications; they are not parts of this "history" that is used. A historian who is an exception to that is Bernard Eric Jensen, who clearly and consistently has been talking about "fortidsbrug", which, in Danish, means "use of the past".²³ My proposal is that this correct term should be used in general, along with "use of the future" (a politician asks for your vote exactly by using specific historical futures as hope-making or frightening arguments), so that the term "history use" will only be implemented when both the past and the future, and perhaps the present, are used as arguments, tools, or weapons.

Notes

1. [Nordgren \(2016: 488\)](#). He presents briefly the three uses in pp. 488–489. [↗](#)
2. [Koselleck \(2004: 257\)](#). [↗](#)
3. [Nietzsche \(1997: 67–77\)](#). [↗](#)
4. [Karlsson \(2003: 38–43\)](#) (the citation is from p. 42). [↗](#)
5. [MacMillan \(2010\)](#). [↗](#)
6. See [Bøe & Knutsen \(2012\)](#). [↗](#)
7. [Folkenborg \(2022: 36\)](#). [↗](#)
8. [Stugu \(2008: 13–15\)](#). [↗](#)
9. On the scientific use of history, see [Karlsson \(2003: 39\)](#); [Bøe & Knutsen \(2012: 105–125\)](#); [Nordgren \(2016: 488\)](#); [Folkenborg \(2022: 59–76\)](#). [↗](#)
10. On the existential use of history, see [MacMillan \(2010: 53–78\)](#); [Karlsson \(2003: 39\)](#); [Nordgren \(2016: 488\)](#). On history and nationalism, see [MacMillan \(2010: 81–90\)](#). [↗](#)
11. [MacMillan \(2010: 20\)](#). On the moral use of history, see [Karlsson \(2003: 39–40\)](#). [↗](#)
12. See, for example, [Paul \(2015: 70–71\)](#). [↗](#)
13. [MacMillan \(2010: 100\)](#). [↗](#)
14. On the political use of history, see [Folkenborg \(2022: 173–202\)](#); [Karlsson \(2003: 40–41\)](#) (political-pedagogical). [↗](#)
15. On the ideological use of history, see [Karlsson \(2003: 41\)](#); [Crowley \(2017\)](#). [↗](#)
16. On the non-use of history, see [Karlsson \(2003: 41\)](#). On the diachronic dimension of non-use, see [Whitling \(2010\)](#). [↗](#)
17. On the entertaining use of history, see [Bøe & Knutsen \(2012: 127–143\)](#); [Folkenborg \(2022: 88–117\)](#). On history-based games, see, for example, [Hofer \(2003: 62–63\)](#). On history and films, see [Rosenstone \(2014\)](#); [Hughes-Warrington \(2007\)](#). On historical representation in games, see [Chapman \(2016\)](#); [Kapell & Elliott \(2013\)](#); [Denning \(2021\)](#). On accuracy and authenticity in using history in movies, see [Saxton \(2020\)](#); [Classen & Kansteiner \(2009\)](#). [↗](#)
18. On the commercial use of history, see [Bøe & Knutsen \(2012: 81–91\)](#); [Folkenborg \(2022: 77–117\)](#) (he presents entertaining and commercial use in the same chapter). On history use in corporate identity, see [Blombäck & Brunninge \(2009\)](#). [↗](#)
19. On the public use of history, see [Bøe & Knutsen \(2012: 93–104\)](#); [Folkenborg \(2022: 119–153\)](#). On sites of memory, see [Nora & Kritzman \(1996–1998\)](#). [↗](#)
20. On the use of history in school, see, among many other publications, [Barton & Levstik \(2004\)](#); [Cajani \(2007\)](#); [Psaltis, Carretero & Čehajić-Clancy \(2017\)](#); [MacMillan \(2010: 113–138\)](#). [↗](#)
21. [MacMillan \(2010: xiii\)](#). [↗](#)
22. [MacMillan \(2010: xiii\)](#). [↗](#)

23. See, for example, [Jensen \(2017: passim.\)](#). 

9 Being conscious of historical knowledge

DOI: [10.4324/9781003767657-9](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003767657-9)

The more and the deeper you study history, the more you realize that reaching trustworthy historical knowledge is not an easy task. Being conscious of the limits of historical knowledge and the challenges a historian faces in her inquiries is probably the most central element of metacognitive historical consciousness. This applies, at different levels, to both historians and non-historians. Such a subject could not be covered in the limited space of a chapter, so the text of the following pages does not have the ambition of a comprehensive study. Like other parts of the book, it is just an introductory invitation to further study and reflection.¹

This chapter focuses on being historically conscious of the limits of historical knowledge and on challenges related to it. As a first step, I am presenting a few thoughts on historical knowledge, historical truth, and objectivity. Then, I am presenting briefly four types, in fact areas, of historical knowledge: factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive knowledge. Finally, I am communicating some fundamental thoughts on the process of historical knowledge and its limits.

Opening this chapter, I feel the need to underline that historical consciousness is related not only to knowledge *about* history but also (and perhaps mainly) to knowledge *from* and *through* history.

Touching on (parts of) historical knowledge

Before touching on just a few of the challenges any of us face when dealing with the content of time, I would like to underline something of axiomatic nature: there is not one objective “historical truth”, but a multiplicity of relative subjective historical narratives about the content of time. To recall David Lowenthal’s statement, “history is protean. What it is, what people think it should be, and how it is told and heard vary with time, place, and person”.² Some of these narratives are fully or partly correct, others are partly incorrect, and still others are fabrications deliberately made to serve specific political, ideological, social, economic, or other purposes. This is one of the reasons why the study of history, at any level, is an investigative activity. Unfortunately, this is also the reason why it has been used and abused countless times and in so many ways.

Historians themselves have discussed questions related to our knowledge of the past, its explanation and interpretation, or the objectiveness of the discipline in general. And they are not in agreement. The two extreme opinions are that (a) history is an objective cumulative discipline and historical narratives are objective when their producers have followed the rules of how to do history, and (b) history is nothing more than the historian’s personal perception and interpretation of the past—and it should be noted that these personal perceptions are in fact more collective than individual, as they are programmed in our heads through social learning that starts very early in our lives, already before going to school. There are, of course, more opinions between these two extremes.

Another introductory point I would like to stress is that we study history on the basis of two methodological approaches, one empirical and the other theoretical. In other words, we study history on two different levels: the first aims at producing evidence-based narratives about the past, and the second aims at presenting the relevant evidence and analysing it on the basis of relevant theories. Our effort to perceive and understand history indeed starts with an investigation aiming at detecting the relevant evidence. Historians study original sources of any kind (textual, oral, or material) and

anything else they can get access to, such as scientific books and articles, documentaries, newspapers, or products of edutainment (magazines, movies, historical games, etc.). Non-historians get through a similar process, but in their case, the process is not that thorough, both quantitatively and qualitatively. This means that non-historians use the easiest approachable sources, no matter their quality and trustworthiness, and they do not reflect critically on the evidence coming out of these sources.

The initial, evidence-based historical quest aims at finding answers to the six most typical orientation questions: who, what, when, where, how, and why. The answers might be related to individuals, groups, events, structures, natural phenomena, and so forth. The most difficult question is, of course, the question “why?”—the question that makes the difference between recalling and understanding. The answer is sometimes to be found in relevant sources, and sometimes, it can only be assumed after the study of the relevant evidence. Let it be noted that the answer to any present “why” is usually located in the past or in the future, or in the dialogue between them.

But what should a historian (or any other person seeking historical knowledge) do when trying to study individuals, groups, events, structures, phenomena, or anything else that constitutes the content of time we evaluate as worthy of becoming history? For a long time, from the establishment of History as a scientific discipline in the nineteenth century, the main aim of historians was supposed to be the accumulation of true and accurate evidence on the past and its re-presentation in meaning-making narratives.³ From the second part of the twentieth century, historical research has focused more and more on the analysis of past evidence, on the basis of theories originating in the field of history itself, but also in the broader areas of human, social, and natural sciences. Gathering the relevant evidence is important and necessary, but it is not doing history in itself. To transform a stack of evidence into historical knowledge, the historian must analyse the evidence by using theory or theories. This is something that might sound abstract and difficult, but it is not. In

fact, we all use theories to analyse everything in our everyday lives, unconsciously.

There is something important that should be underlined at this point: the word “theory” in this context does not have the same meaning as in everyday parlance. In everyday parlance, we often call “theories” our own beliefs or hypotheses (recall the expression “I have a theory about ...”). But this is *not* what theory is. Historical theories are statements which have a high degree of generalization⁴ and are based not only on logic (if so, they are theses or hypotheses) but on the cognitive study of relevant evidence, and the meta-cognitive insight of (a) how history functions as a science, (b) how historical narratives are made, and (c) the dimensions of historical time and their interaction in any given present.

This means that, in History, there are three types of theory:

1. *Evidence-based theories* (usually called “object” theories), deriving from the generalization of evidence. This presupposes that somebody studies a considerable amount of evidence and comes up with a generalization, a general statement, about a specific subject. For example,

there have been a great many times in the past when societies, peoples and cultures have proved unable to adapt [to new conditions]. Indeed, in some respects, the human story of progress is about batons being repeatedly dropped and picked up by others.⁵

Such theories can derive from other scientific disciplines, such as sociology or political studies.

2. *Metatheories on historical studies and the work of historians.*⁶

These are theories on the use of history, historical method, source criticism, evidence analysis, historical narrative, and so on. For example: “In approaching the sources, the historian is anything but a passive observer”.⁷

3. *Historical theories deriving from philosophizing time.* Think, for example, of Braudel's theory of the three dimensions of historical time (what is coined as "historical times" or "historical temporalities") or Koselleck's theory of historical development as a constant dialogue between what he coined as "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation", in other words, a dialogue between our experiences from the past and our expectations for the future.⁸

Any study of history that aims at getting deeper than the surface should include the use of at least one theoretical approach in analysing the relevant empirical evidence (whatever our sources and the literature we read tell us about the event, structure, individual, group, phenomenon, or anything else we study).

Investigating for evidence and analysing with the use of theory are core elements in the discipline of History. Regarding the trustworthiness of historical sources and the evidence that we can get out of them, an intense and difficult discussion has been going on for decades on whether it is possible at all to know the historical "truth". This discourse, which has demanded tons of ink and thousands of hours in relevant panels, could not be presented in just a few paragraphs, so I will limit myself to just mentioning some of its elements.

For long, history was juxtaposed, by historians and non-historians, to literature: the idea was that literature speaks about things imagined, while history deals with things that truly happened. But in the second half of the twentieth century, several history theorists claimed that it is not possible at all to get access to historical truth. A part of them focused on the narrative dimension of doing History, claiming that it is impossible to know historical truth and that historical narratives are in fact no more than fiction based on the use of sources and following scientific methods of building up and structuring a text. Some others have claimed that it is indeed possible to be sure about the truthfulness of specific facts, but there

are countless ways in which we can process these facts as parts of different and varying narratives reconstructing “the past”.⁹

What is important to be conscious of is that historical knowledge might be true or false at two different levels. The first level is that of *representation* (i.e. in making the past present again): a historical narrative is true when its content corresponds to the factual events, structures, phenomena, and/or historical agents it aims at representing. The second level is that of *interpretation*: a historical narrative is true if the meaning it assigns to specific events, structures, phenomena, or historical agents is correct (or at least not totally wrong). Historical narratives do not only recite but they also explain events of the past by, for example, providing the cause/effect relationship between them. For a historical narrative to be true, it is not only the facts that must be verified or verifiable, but the explanations incorporated in the narrative must also give a correct meaning to the facts included in the narrative and the relationship between them.

I would like to close this section by saying a few words on history and the past. What is the relationship between them? To the non-experts, the question might sound silly. *History is the past*, they might think. But, in fact, this is not fully correct. Indeed, the past is central in any approach to history and is the temporal dimension studied by every human interested in history. But, as I have mentioned in other parts of the book, history, as the content of time, includes the whole temporal continuum that consists of past, present, and future in a constant and unresolvable relation and interplay. Furthermore, a collection of evidence about things that happened sometime in the past is not history in itself. Jörn Rüsen is one of history theorists who have claimed that “a summary of what happened in the past is not history”.¹⁰ The idea is that past happenings do not become history in their own force, but only when there exists a connection of the past with the present (this means: the present of the people who consider them as historical elements). I would like to add that the past’s connection to the present usually extends to the future as well.

Historian and geographer David Lowenthal has claimed that history is both more and less than the past. By “history”, Lowenthal means the narratives we make about the content of time. It is these narratives that are more and less than the past itself. One of his main points is that no historical inquiry can possibly cover the vastness of the past. In addition, the distance between any historian and the past makes it impossible to know “everything” about the period or the subject we study. Furthermore, every historical narrative is shaped by the narrator, who always takes into consideration the needs and the preferences of her audience. On the other hand, a historical narrative is more than the past. As historians are present-oriented, any historical narrative is influenced by the present, and it includes present perceptions and sometimes hindsight.¹¹ As mentioned earlier, historical narratives might also include elements of imagined history and retrodictions.

To better understand the challenges related to historical knowledge, we should take into consideration that historical knowledge is something multilevel. In other words, there are various cognitive and metacognitive levels in knowing about the content of time. In the following section, I am drawing a sketch of a typology including four types of historical knowledge, based on how knowledge is categorized in the revised version of Bloom’s taxonomy of learning objectives: factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive. The presentation of the four types is linked to the elements of historical knowledge presented in the Introduction of this book. I would recommend reading them once more before delving into the typology.

Types of historical knowledge

Bloom’s taxonomy is, in fact, a matrix of (a) six cognitive processes, through which we learn whatever we learn, namely, remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating, and (b) four categories of knowledge, which are perceived as advancing

from concrete to abstract, namely, factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive knowledge.^{[12](#)}

Already in 1971, Bloom proposed in a memorandum that each field should develop its own taxonomy of objectives, according to its own needs and using its own "language". In his own words, each specialized taxonomy should be "more detailed, closer to the special language and thinking of its experts, reflecting its own appropriate sub-divisions and levels of education, with possible new categories, combinations of categories and omitting categories as appropriate".^{[13](#)} In the following pages, I am trying to use Bloom's revised taxonomy to create a typology of historical knowledge. Inspired by the work of Bloom and his colleagues and successors, I propose that historical knowledge might be achieved cognitively and metacognitively, at four different levels.

In the following short historical modification of the typology, historical data are related to factual knowledge, historical concepts to conceptual and procedural knowledge, and historical theory and method to procedural knowledge. The metacognitive knowledge of a historian is related, directly and indirectly, to her own understanding and implementation of data, concepts, theory, and method, as well as to her reflection on the cognitive and emotive dimension of her learning strategies and techniques, and her own relationship to the content of the time she studies.

Factual historical knowledge is related to historical data. Remembering and understanding factual knowledge is one of the cornerstones of historical studies and a prerequisite for the production of any kind of historical narratives. Analysing and applying them are what makes us reflective citizens. Often, all these cognitive activities related to factual knowledge are impossible without a basic conceptual knowledge, as historical data are always contextualized in spatial and temporal canvases that are not comprehensible without access to at least some basic concepts related to them. So, factual knowledge includes, directly and indirectly, three types of knowledge:

1. Recognizing and recalling *specific historical data*, for example, names of historical agents and places; basic information on agents, places, events, and phenomena; dates related to agents, events, and phenomena; and knowledge about material and immaterial technologies.
2. Recognizing and recalling *empirical historical concepts*, for example, any concept related to dividing time into periods (Stone Age, Antiquity, and Anthropocene).
3. Knowledge about *relevant textual and non-textual sources and publications*, which might be deposits of historical data (e.g. the works of Plato as a source on the life and teaching of Socrates).

Conceptual historical knowledge is not about concrete bits of information, as factual knowledge is, but about “more complex, organized knowledge forms”.¹⁴ Conceptual historical knowledge includes the knowledge of the following:

4. *Empirical historical concepts*. Notice that here it is not about recognizing and recalling these concepts (as in factual knowledge) but about understanding their meaning and function in historical narratives.
5. *Abstract historical concepts*, for example, justice, dignity, happiness, divine providence, or history. It is important to know both what an abstract concept means today and what the same

concept (may have) meant in the period and the society or culture we study.

6. *Theoretical concepts*, that is, concepts referring to historical theories, for example, historical determinism, historical empathy, or linear time. We should remember that historians use theories and theoretical concepts originating not only in History but also in other scientific fields, for example, biological evolution (biology), cultural hegemony (sociology), clash of civilizations (cultural studies), cultural materialism (anthropology), entropy (physics), or path dependence (innovation studies).
7. *Procedural concepts*, that is, concepts related to the methods used by historians in their effort to register, understand, analyse, and narrate the content of time, for example, primary sources, historical data, historical reasoning, or periodization. Being aware of the meaning of procedural concepts is of crucial importance for the professional historian, but it is also significant for anyone who is interested in studying the content of time.

Procedural historical knowledge is in Bloom's taxonomy related to "knowledge of skills and algorithms, techniques and methods, as well as knowledge of the criteria used to determine and/or justify 'when to do what' within specific domains and disciplines".¹⁵ I would like to make clear that this subtype of knowledge is not related to the relevant concepts (see above), but to the relevant strategies, methods, techniques, and practices (usually identified with the use of procedural concepts). It includes the following:

8. *Knowledge of historical skills*, that is, skills that are performed by a historian to secure the production of trustworthy factual and conceptual historical knowledge. These might be general skills and domain-specific skills. General skills might include critical thinking, analytical sufficiency, or writing competence. Domain-specific skills are the skills needed for a historian to be able to study the content of time by identifying and examining

the relevant sources, producing and analysing the relevant historical data, and composing well-made and reliable historical narratives.

9. *Knowledge of technologies supporting the study of history.* For a long time, these technologies were analog, but during the recent decades, historical studies experienced a digital turn related to new technologies, such as the digitization of archives or computational modelling, while recently AI tools are used to identify historical data (e.g. through machine learning) or systematize and analyse them.^{[16](#)}
10. *Knowledge of domain-specific techniques and methods* is related to the ways in which experts in a given field or discipline operate and try to solve the tasks and subjects they study. For historians, this includes, among other things, knowledge of quantitative and qualitative research methods of doing history, methods of studying various types of sources, methods of doing oral or material history, and methods of using various types of theory to analyse historical data. It also includes techniques related to composing user-friendly textual and non-textual historical narratives.
11. *Knowledge of criteria for determining when to use appropriate procedures*, something that is often connected to knowing when (in which inquiries and under which circumstances) these procedures were used in the past. This includes, for example, knowing whether your topic could be better studied in qualitative or quantitative terms, or in a combination of the two.

Metacognitive knowledge is related in Bloom's taxonomy to awareness of and knowledge about cognition in general and about our own cognition in particular. It includes three subtypes: strategic knowledge, knowledge about cognitive tasks, and self-knowledge. I would claim that this type of knowledge is generic, without any special features for the historian.

12. *Strategic knowledge* includes having an insight into the various strategies for learning, thinking, and problem-solving. We should know, for example, that there are three general categories of learning strategies: rehearsal, elaboration, and organizational. Strategic knowledge also includes knowledge of metacognitive strategies for planning, monitoring, and regulating our own cognition. Finally, it includes our knowledge of strategies for solving problems and thinking in general. So, a historian should be conscious of the strategies she follows to conduct research, learn, and communicate her knowledge.
13. *Knowledge about cognitive tasks* includes appropriate contextual and conditional knowledge. This means having the cognition of when and why we use our knowledge strategies to address a given task, after having identified the task itself. For a historian, this includes knowing that original sources are more difficult to study than textbooks. This type of metacognitive knowledge also includes knowing which cognitive process fits best to the task we need to solve. Anderson and Krathwohl also include the knowledge "of the local and general social, conventional, and cultural norms for how, when, and why to use different strategies".¹⁷
14. *Self-knowledge* includes knowledge of our strong and weak cognition and learning sides, as well as knowledge of our motivation for learning. The former includes an awareness of our "known unknowns" (what we know we don't know) and "unknown unknowns" (what we don't know we don't know). It also includes being aware of our tendency to rely on specific strategies (and not other existing alternatives) when we are solving specific types of tasks, or that we usually perform highly in specific types of tasks. Knowledge of our motivation is related to being aware of the reasons why we undertake a specific task and our goals in doing so.

Categorizing a single piece of historical knowledge in one of these types is, more often than not, a difficult task. Historical knowledge is multidimensional. Let me illustrate by referring to what might be

evaluated as the simplest type of historical knowledge, namely, factual knowledge: The term “Hellenistic Age”, for example, as a historical datum of terminology combines two concepts, namely, “Hellenism” and “age” (Hellenism being an empirical and age an abstract concept). The example shows that factual knowledge is often directly related to conceptual knowledge. The same applies to procedural knowledge: it is almost impossible without an insight into the meaning of theoretical and methodological concepts. On the other hand, procedural knowledge is useless without factual knowledge, which is the fundament of every historical study, and very limited without conceptual knowledge, which is the fundament analysis and narrative construction.

Which of these types of historical knowledge you need depends on your history-related identity, that is, if you are a historian, a history student, a history teacher, or a person seeking historical knowledge and historical consciousness for the sake of life orientation. Independent of which ones you need directly, it is important to have an overview of all of them. And even if you are not a historian or a history teacher, you also need to be conscious in procedural and metacognitive terms. You also need an understanding of the process leading to historical knowledge, as well as a consciousness of the limits of this knowledge and the main odds against reaching it. The following section aims at helping you develop, or improve, such a consciousness.

The process of historical knowledge—and its limits

We understand the present by juxtaposing it to the past and sometimes to the future. And we understand the past by “translating” it into the “language” of the present. But how do we do so? Which processes do we use? And which categories and concepts support our perception of the past and our understanding of the present through the past?

Studying history, and independently of the period or the subject we focus on, a historian usually has the feeling that whatever she studies is simultaneously known and unknown to her. As Sam Wineburg put it, every time we deal with the past, we feel “the tension between the familiar and the strange, between feelings of proximity and feelings of distance in relation to the people we seek to understand”.¹⁸ I would dare to say that the more we study history, the more intense this feeling gets. The same, of course, is the case with thinking about the future, which is unknown to us, in relation to not only *what* future we will experience but also *what kind* of future it will be—the feeling of a future fully unknown and even unthinkable gets stronger and stronger in our days, mainly because of the explosive development of technology.

Many non-historians have an absolute and idealistic notion of History. According to this notion, History and historical narratives are supposed to present a complete and objective account of the content of time.¹⁹ This account is also imagined as a linear narrative explaining everything in detail and clarifying the sequence of causes and effects. The historian is seen in popular imaginary as a superhero who can travel in time and present a full picture of any historical event—and know “everything” about the past. She is also supposed to stay away from any type of partisanship and serve the truth and nothing but the truth. Unfortunately, historiographical reality is far from imagination. There are two main reasons for that. The first is related to historical knowledge itself. The second is related to us, historians, and the narratives we make about this content of time. Let me explain:

Our historical knowledge is doomed to be limited. Why is it so? First, independently of what we study, the sources we have at disposition is just a tiny fraction of what was produced in the past. This, of course, varies in relation to different subjects and different periods. The historical record is poor for many periods in the deep past and for many subjects in the more recent past, but there are also periods and subjects well-covered by existing source material. But even in the latter cases, what we have access to does not cover

“the whole truth” and sometimes is “anything but the truth”. Second, every historical source is a cultural product that was created for a reason. This means that it was produced within a specific cultural context, which we probably are not aware of, or do not have a clear picture of. At the same time, every historical source was created to serve a purpose, or a combination of purposes, which we often do not, or cannot, know about. Religious texts, for example, or religious imagery might have been produced to serve political aims.²⁰ Ideally, the study of any source should consider the intentions of its producers, something that in most cases is very difficult, if at all possible. The least we can do is approaching our sources critically and being conscious that (a) they must be interpreted, while (b) our interpretation abilities are limited, given that we ourselves are cultural products of a world different than the one in which the sources were produced.

Here is where we all, past and present students of the content of time, come into the picture as factors influencing the finitude of historical knowledge. To illustrate our role, I would like to say just a few words on the process of historical knowledge, as it is visualized in [Figure 9.1](#). As you see, this process might be understood as a circle constituted by specific steps that influence each other or interact with each other. Let us consider them step by step:

1. Every historical inquiry is built on a specific question, thesis, or hypothesis, which is often related, explicitly or implicitly, to a big question, a question that aims at explaining a general phenomenon in historical evolution. A historical inquiry might also start with a big question. To answer the big question, we will have to create specific inquiries, based on specific questions, theses, or hypotheses.
2. To answer our concrete inquiry, we always start by considering what we already know about the subject. On the basis of this knowledge (which is factual and conceptual), we might reform our question, thesis, or hypothesis.
3. Then, we set on the search for historical evidence that might help us answer our question or prove or disprove our thesis or hypothesis. We do so by studying relevant sources and literature, on the basis of suitable and verified methods—here comes procedural knowledge into the picture.
4. The next step is the analysis of the evidence we have gathered. We might analyse it by comparing different pieces of the evidence or by comparing our own evidence to evidence related to other similar cases. We might also analyse it by contextualizing the evidence in various ways related to the sociocultural environment of the time-space of our subject. Finally, we might analyse it by using one or more theoretical approaches (the more theoretical approaches we use, the deeper the analysis is). This step combines factual, conceptual, and procedural knowledge.
5. The analysis of the evidence results in the answer to our inquiry. This answer takes the form of a narrative, which might also be

visualized in several ways. Often, our narrative is related to one or more master narratives, that is, to “culturally shared stories that guide thoughts, beliefs, values, and behaviors”.²¹ Ideally, at this point, we should reflect on all steps of the process, from the formation of our question to the construction of our narrative. This step combines all four types of historical knowledge: factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive.

6. Our answer could then be related to one or more big questions and contribute to answering them, at least partly.
7. Both our answer to our specific inquiry and our answer to the big question get implemented in our professional, social, or cultural life. This is what is meant by “application of knowledge” at the centre of [Figure 9.1](#). One of the most important forms of application is related to our historical consciousness.



Figure 9.1 The process of historical knowledge. [↗](#)

Let me now return to the discussion of how we, as academic or amateur historians, influence the finitude of historical knowledge. As mentioned earlier, every historical work is an interpretation of the material it is based on. And every historian approaches this material on the basis of our specific backgrounds of various kinds: cognitive, cultural, political, ideological, and so forth. This background

functions as a canvas for our historical narratives. This is why a number of history theorists see these narratives as constructions that reflect not only the past but also the present. Some get one step further, claiming that historical narratives are not only constructions but also inventions.²² Indeed, the historical craft is the combination of two activities: first, investigative research to detect the relevant historical data (as many and as trustworthy and verified as possible), and then the construction of the data into a narrative that is composed according to the narrative technique(s) we have chosen. As mentioned earlier, ideally, this narrative does not only present a compilation of the relevant evidence, but it also analyses it on the basis of specific methods and theories. The final result is an oral or written narrative that interprets the past in a way that gives meaning in the present. It is this narrative that is thought by several history theorists as a construction.

Most historical narratives are (more or less) trustworthy. But sometimes, there appear conscious manipulations of history in the construction of historical narratives. The reason for this manipulation might be ideological, social (including political, religious, and economic), or cultural (including religious). Politicians, religious leaders, other actors, and even historians and each one of us in our political, social, or cultural life might falsify history to serve a political idea or interest, an authoritarian regime, a religious purpose, our personal interests, or anything else. We might also project our own social, cultural, national, ethnic, or otherwise preferences into our narratives.²³ Some other times, the manipulation of history is unconscious, caused by the misreading of evidence, a mistaken use of theory, or by one of many other possible reasons. But even the work of the most well-intentioned historians cannot be certain and definite. As access to the past and our understanding of it is limited, our narratives will always be interpretations and partly constructions.²⁴

At this point, I would like to add a few words on a very interesting phenomenon in the process of historical knowledge, which is called “imagined history”. To explain what imagined history is and why it is

unavoidable, I must start by referring to our cognitive abilities in general. At any moment and in relation to any subject, what we know is *just a part* of whatever unfolds around us. In addition, our “knowledge” about anything is *just a subjective interpretation of just a part of the relevant information*. A substantial portion of what we perceive as historical knowledge is generated by our mind’s tendency to interpolate missing data and construct a narrative that is partly true and partly fictional. This is something that our brain often does in other functions as well, for example, in seeing. Of what we “see” (in other words, of the visual information about everything around us), it is approximately 20% that actually comes from the eyes. The rest is filled in by the brain itself, on the basis of what we already know or of what our brain chooses as logical additions. Experts who have studied the phenomenon claim that, remarkably, we trust the made-up visual percepts more than the veridical ones.²⁵

This is also the case with the past: Given that our historical knowledge is anything but complete, most historical narratives, even by outstanding historians, tend to fill in the gaps with elements that cannot be verified but sound logical. We take into consideration what is indeed documented about past events, and then we predict what is logical to have followed—the phenomenon is known as retrodiction.²⁶ Retrodictions, and other forms of what is known as imagined history, are then included (as parts of the truth) in our narratives about the past. I would like to underline that these imagined contents of time are extremely powerful, as they are the fundamentals for most of our decisions and actions. This is why myths, which are stories often simplified and leaving no question unanswered (even if in an illogical way), are usually very strong—the same applies to conspiracy theories. In addition to retrodictions, everyone, even practising historians, adds details and guesses to our narratives when, for example, we speak and write about what this or that historical figure “thought” or “desired” some centuries or millennia ago.

David Staley speaks about two different types of historical imagination: *mimetic imagination* (which he defines as

“reconstructing previously experienced parts of the actual world”) and *creative imagination* (which is “creating new objects and experiences, with no direct connection to the actual world”). He also claims that every historical narrative combines both. In his words, “imagination in history ... means using the mind’s eye to picture both actual and inactual occurrences *at the same time*”.²⁷

What makes things even more challenging is that it is a part of the historical inquiry to get as close as possible to the thinking—in fact, the ways of thinking—of the historical agents related to the subject we study. Almost every act in history is based on a decision, which, in its turn, is based on relevant thinking (including perceptions, understandings, evaluations, visions, desires, etc.). In a very creative metaphor, R.G. Collingwood spoke about the “outside” and “inside” of historical events. The “outside” is the elements that might be described as perceived by the senses of a witness, and the “inside” is related to the thoughts that resulted in decisions which, in their turn, made the event happen. Going a step further, the British historian and philosopher claimed that there is a difference between “mere events” (which do not have an inside) and “actions” (which have both outside and inside, and thus can be understood as historical events in the full sense of the term). Historians should, according to Collingwood, investigate actions, focusing on both their outside and their inside dimensions. Some 70 years later, the passage, which follows, is worth reading. While doing so, keep in mind that the challenges related to historical events (actions) are related to both their inside and their outside.

The historian, investigating any event in the past, makes a distinction between what may be called the outside and the inside of an event. By the outside of the event I mean everything belonging to it which can be described in terms of bodies and their movements: the passage of Caesar, accompanied by certain men, across a river called the Rubicon at one date, or the spilling of his blood on the floor of the senate-house at another. By the inside of the event I mean

that in it which can only be described in terms of thought: Caesar's defiance of Republican law, or the clash of constitutional policy between himself and his assassins. The historian is never concerned with either of these to the exclusion of the other. He is investigating not mere events (whereby a mere event I mean one which has only an outside and no inside) but actions, and an action is the unity of the outside and the inside of the event. He is interested in the crossing of the Rubicon only in its relation to Republican law, and the spilling of Caesar's blood only in its relation to a constitutional conflict. His work may begin by discovering the outside of an event, but it can never end there; he must always remember that the event was an action, and that his main task is to think himself into the action, to discern the thought of its agent.²⁸

Let us pay attention to the last words of this passage. What does it mean to "think ourselves into the action, to discern the thought of its agent"? It means two things. The first is to search for any piece of evidence that might shed light on the personality of an agent, or at least on the sociocultural context in which the agent was functioning (mentalities, norms, principles, restrictions, laws, rules, etc.). Then, on the basis of that, we might get closer to the agent's thinking—which often means implementing imagined history. The second way in which we could "think ourselves into an action" is through historical perspective-taking or historical empathy. This means that to better understand the experiences, decisions, or actions of historical figures, a historian should try to contextualize them and reflect on them on the basis of the social (including the political) and the cultural (including the religious) system of interactions, rules, norms, values, principles, and structures the historical figures at question were living in.²⁹

Doing so is not easy. The effort of "thinking ourselves into the past" has its own challenges, one of the most central ones being related to a phenomenon coined as anachronism. Anachronism is a

specific type of historical inaccuracy, caused by projecting elements from one historical period to another. The most usual form of anachronism is the projection of elements from our own times to the past, but it is also possible to project elements from one past period to another, usually to an older one. A typical example of anachronism is the evaluation of Jesus Christ as “the first communist”. Another is when we speak about “nations” in periods before the appearance of nationalism and the nation-state towards the end of the eighteenth century. A third form of anachronism is when we project analogies from the past to the present, when, for example, we see new Hitlers in present political leaders. Sometimes, anachronism is clearly expressed, but sometimes, it is covert—and more dangerous. And I am afraid that it is a phenomenon more widespread than we would like to admit. Indeed, we often understand the past on the basis of what we know about the present, without reflecting (or without reflecting enough) on whether our present knowledge is appropriate, or even relevant. Anachronisms create a distorted understanding of history. They are a projection of “what we know” to the next three circles of [Figure 9.1](#), a projection that influences our answer to our original question.

One of the central interests in historical studies is the relationship between causes and effects. Among the many things that could be said about causation in history, I would like to say a few words on an important division between two types of historical causes. In every historical event, there are proximate and ultimate causes. This is why historians speak about proximate and ultimate factors in historical evolution. This is how Stephen Sanderson explains the difference between the two:

Proximate causes are immediate things, often consciously recognized, that induce us to act in a certain way. Humans, for example, like sweet foods. If you are served apple strudel and you like the taste, a proximate explanation of your liking for apple strudel is straightforward: apple strudel is sweet and you, like most people, like sweet things. But another question remains: why do most people like sweets? To answer that

question is to provide an explanation in terms of ultimate causes. Darwinian thinking provides us with a two-step ultimate explanation. Step one says that eating a lot of sweet foods in the ancestral environment contributed to survival, good health, and by extension reproductive success. Step two says that evolution crafted the human brain to like sweet things so people will eat more of them and thus be healthier and leave more progeny.^{[30](#)}

To illustrate the function of proximate and ultimate factors and causes in history, let us study the diagram in [Figure 9.2](#), showing a model used by geographer Jared Diamond to illustrate how these two types of historical factors influence historical evolution on a large scale, over thousands of years. Diamond started with a simple working question: how did European farmers win out over the famous warrior local tribes (still hunters until modern times) in America, establishing their dominance there? To answer this question, which is directly related to the big question of why Europeans dominated most of the world in modern times, he took into consideration not only the proximate causes but also the ultimate ones, some of which are prehistoric.

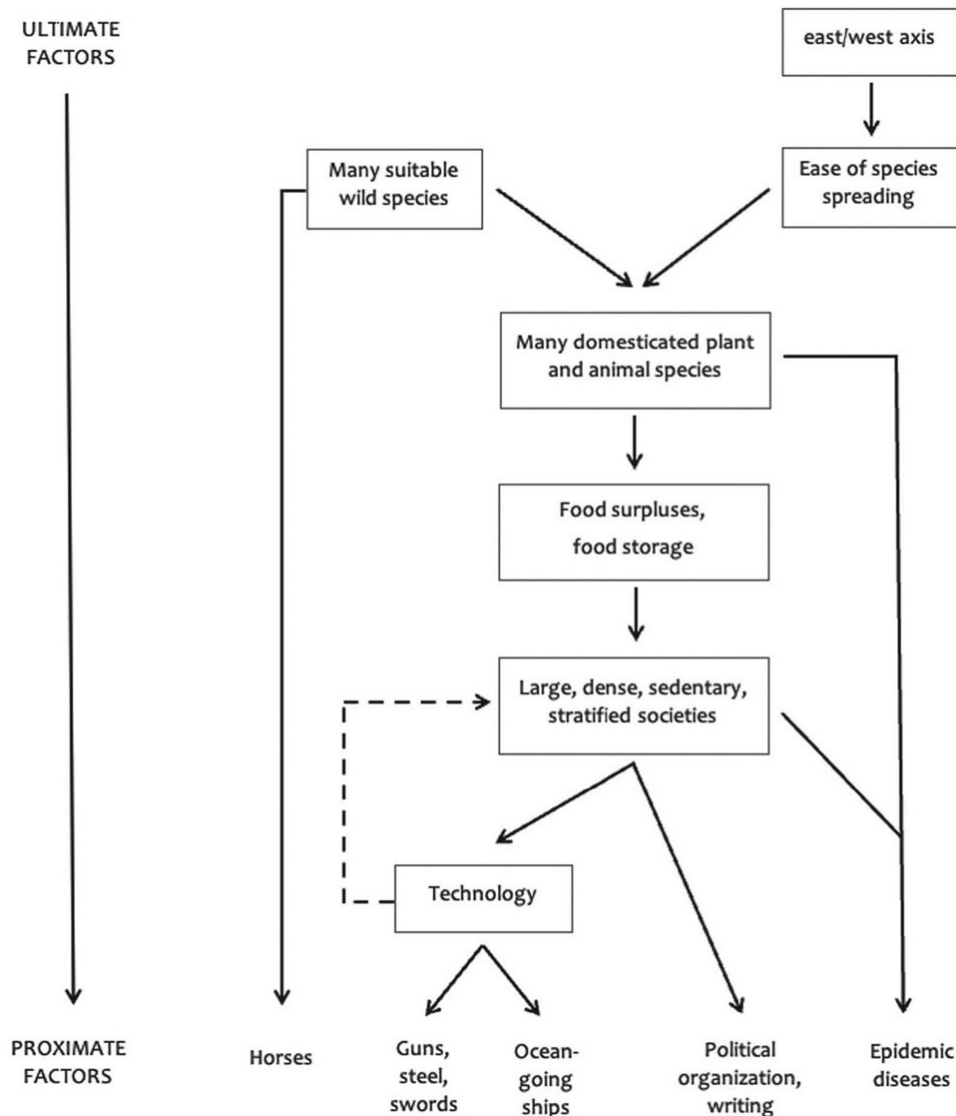


Figure 9.2 Factors underlying the broadest pattern of history. [📄](#)
Source: [Diamond 2005/1997](#): 87.

The proximate factors/causes were that the Europeans had horses, guns and steel, ocean-going ships, political organization, and writing as a communication technology, and carried with them epidemic diseases the locals did not have immunity to. But this was not enough for Diamond. Deeper “whys” were created by the answer: why, for example, was it European farmers who had all these assets and not American hunter tribes? This is how ultimate factors came into the picture. With the agricultural revolution, Europeans had established food production, which meant access to more calories and thus higher populations. At the same time, food

production resulted in a sedentary lifestyle. People started establishing permanent settlements, storing food, and spending more time at home. The proper function of villages, towns, and cities could only be reached with the production of supporting material technology, which created new tasks and new roles in the economy and society, anything from builders and ceramists to kings and bureaucrats (what Diamond calls “non-food-producing specialists”). This was the fundament of a technological evolution that got more and more advanced. In time, this evolution included innovation in the transportation of goods and people and, of course, weapons of various types. Technological advance was exactly the main factor for the dominance of European farmers over the American hunters. In addition, they had developed immunity to germs that originated in domestic animals, something the American hunters did not have. Finally, living in permanent societies had created the need for social and political organization (state, law, bureaucracy, etc.), which the Europeans had and could implement in the new world to secure their dominance. In Diamond’s own words:

In short, plant and animal domestication meant much more food and hence much denser human populations. The resulting food surpluses, and (in some areas) the animal-based means of transporting those surpluses, were a prerequisite for the development of settled, politically centralized, socially stratified, economically complex, technologically innovative societies. Hence the availability of domestic plants and animals ultimately explains why empires, literacy, and steel weapons developed earliest in Eurasia and later, or not at all, on other continents. The military uses of horses and camels, and the killing power of animal-derived germs, complete the list of major links between food production and conquest that we shall be exploring.³¹

Diamond’s diagram illustrates how creative a historian can be by asking new “whys”, in proximate and ultimate terms, to the answer(s) he got to his previous question. By doing so, he enters

varying areas and considers varying dimensions of historical evolution. To understand why some peoples are technologically superior in the present, Diamond ended up considering nature and geography as factors of historical evolution in the deep past.³² Furthermore, to get a better understanding of how proximate and ultimate factors can help him answer his original working question, Diamond considered geography, interaction between humans and nature, the establishment of societies, politics, culture (writing), technology, warfare, medicine, and other issues in an interdisciplinary way. Notice that every level of the diagram (and almost every box) belongs to a different area: from top to bottom, nature and biology, agriculture and husbandry, food production, social organization, technology, and (in the bottom row) animals, warfare technology, transportation technology, political organization, writing as communication technology, and health.

Merging reflections

Being historically conscious in terms of historical knowledge includes several elements. To start with, it means that we are aware that, independently of the subject or the period we focus on, there is not one objective historical truth, but a multiplicity of relative subjective historical narratives about the content of time. As a next step, it means being aware of the fact that the narratives we make about the content of time are constructions, or even inventions, that reflect not only the past but also the present. Furthermore, it means keeping in mind that the narratives we make about the past make it both familiar and strange; finding a balance between familiarity and strangeness leads to better historical orientation.

When it comes to the content of time and especially the understanding of historical events, being historically conscious means keeping in mind that, for most events, there are both proximate and ultimate factors and causes, some of which might be thousands of years old. It also means being conscious of the

meaning of historical truth and its relativity, while at the same time being able to understand what it means that history is both more and less than whatever we register and communicate as “the past”. In relation to the creation of historical narratives, both by historians and anyone else, you should be able to identify cases of imagined history, reflect on anachronisms, and how they influence the understanding of history. Finally, regarding the study of historical sources and historical narratives, historical consciousness is related, among other things, to being able to function on two different levels, one related to the identification and study of evidence and the other to its theory-and-method-based analysis.

Everything presented in the last two paragraphs is related to factual and conceptual historical knowledge. Being aware of these two types of knowledge, what is included in them and how they interplay, as well as what is their main difference, is also an element of historical knowledge. But there are two more types of historical knowledge, equally important. Procedural knowledge is related to historical theory and method. Being conscious about how we generalize historical knowledge, how we approach historical sources, historical data, and historical concepts, and how we compose historical narratives makes us better students of history, and thus more informed and reflective citizens, co-humans, and inhabitants of a planet that is the home for countless other species. Meta-cognitive historical knowledge functions like standing in front of the mirror of History as a discipline or as an amateur activity and trying to identify our strong and weak sides, in order to deal with the content of time in an optimal way.

Closing the chapter, I need to make clear that the quality and level of our historical consciousness in terms of historical knowledge is not necessarily analogous to the quality and level of how we use this knowledge and for what purpose. Historically conscious people might manipulate history and use manipulated or fake historical narratives to commit atrocities of the worst kind or influence other people to commit them.

Thus far, I have discussed historical consciousness as a state of mind and in relation to historical knowledge. To better understand

historical consciousness as a state of mind, we must consider the process that leads to it, namely, the process of thinking about everything in historical terms. Where and when does this process begin? How does it unfold? And does it have an end? The following chapter discusses these questions in an attempt to better understand the process that leads from historical awareness to historical consciousness through historical knowledge.

Notes

1. On historical knowledge and its limits, see, among others, [Downey & Long \(2016\)](#); [Davies \(2018\)](#) (Introduction and Chapter 1); [Tosh \(2013\)](#) (Chapter 7); [Claus & Marriott \(2012\)](#) (Chapter 1); [Fulbrook \(2002\)](#) (Chapter 2); [Elliott \(2003\)](#). ↵
2. [Lowenthal \(2015\)](#): 333). ↵
3. This understanding of History is known as *positivism* (see, for example, [Tosh 2015](#): 150–151). ↵
4. Jörn [Rüsen \(2005\)](#): 77) defines theories as “statements which are, in a complex way, linked to each other and have a high degree of generalization”. ↵
5. [Frankopan \(2023\)](#): 838). ↵
6. On the two types of “object” theories and metatheories on historical studies and the work of historians, see [Rüsen \(2005\)](#): 77–78). On historical theory in general, see [Paul \(2015\)](#); [Fulbrook \(2002\)](#); [Rüsen \(2005\)](#): 77–92). ↵
7. [Tosh \(2013\)](#): loc. 3291). ↵
8. [Braudel \(1980\)](#); [Braudel \(2009/1958\)](#); [Koselleck \(2004\)](#): 255–275). ↵
9. See, for example, [Fulbrook \(2002\)](#): 3–30). The thesis that history is more a discourse than objective truth is part of the “linguistic turn” in historical studies, which again is part of a “school” of understanding history (and many other things) in a relativistic way, which is called “postmodernism”. This school claims, among other things, that (what we know about) the whole world is nothing but a text. On postmodernism in History, see [Fulbrook \(2002\)](#): 18–24). ↵
10. [Rüsen \(2006\)](#): 1). In the same vein, Robert Williams writes that “the past ... is not history. The past and its traces provide the raw material of history. History gives an account of the past in the present” ([Williams 2020](#): 5). ↵
11. [Lowenthal \(2015\)](#): 336–343). ↵
12. What is known today as Bloom’s taxonomy was originally published in 1956, in a handbook of education, which has affected teaching design and curriculum development until today ([Bloom 1956](#)). The taxonomy is named after the editor of the book, educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom. In 2001, curriculum theorists and instructional researcher Lorin Anderson and testing and assessment specialist David Krathwohl, on board with a team of cognitive psychologists, curriculum theorists and instructional researchers, and testing and assessment specialists, published a revised version of the taxonomy ([Anderson et al. 2001](#)). It is version of the taxonomy I am referring to in this book. For all four knowledge types, see [Anderson et al. \(2001\)](#): 27–62) (a table of the categories, subcategories and examples of all four knowledge types is published on pp. 29 and 46). ↵
13. Quoted from [Anderson et al. \(2001\)](#): xxvii–xxviii). ↵
14. [Anderson et al. \(2001\)](#): 48). ↵
15. [Anderson et al. \(2001\)](#): 27). The authors clarify that “whereas *Factual knowledge* and *Conceptual knowledge* represent the ‘what’ of knowledge, procedural knowledge

- concerns the 'how'" (pp. 5 and 52 respectively; emphasis in the original). [↗](#)
16. On digital history, see [Fridlund, Oiva & Paju \(2020\)](#); [Torgerson \(2022\)](#); [Salmi \(2021\)](#); and various publications in the *Journal of Digital History*. [↗](#)
 17. [Anderson et al. \(2001: 59\)](#). [↗](#)
 18. [Wineburg \(2010: 83\)](#); [Wineburg \(2001: 5\)](#). [↗](#)
 19. To quote Mary Fulbrook, "there is a very widespread view that history is about real people and real events, which really happened, and from the surviving traces of which relatively accurate account can be constructed. This is without doubt the most prevalent view among lay people, who read history books, go to museums, look at exhibitions, watch documentaries, in the faith that they can rely on the professionals to present to them some approach to an accurate picture of the past 'as it really was'" ([Fulbrook 2002: 18](#)). [↗](#)
 20. See, for example, [Spanos \(2014\)](#); [Spanos \(2010\)](#); [Spanos & Zarras \(2010\)](#). [↗](#)
 21. [McLean & Syed \(2015: 323\)](#). Herman Paul writes that "master narratives are simple, linear stories of progress and regression, which are therefore as attractive as they are problematic. They create order and coherence in a jumble of historical events, but they do so selectively and without much sense of complexity" ([Paul 2015: 62](#)). [↗](#)
 22. See [Rüsen \(2006: 1\)](#). Robert Williams agrees that "*historical research is a process of discovery and construction... We discover evidence, but we construct a history*" ([Williams 2020: 9](#); emphasis in the original). Herman Paul also writes that "historical knowledge is always a construction", adding that "knowledge in general has an element of construction. This applies as much to knowledge of the present as it does to knowledge of the past. As soon as we form an idea of reality, we use concepts which do not *cover* reality, but *illuminate* one of its aspects" ([Paul 2015: 92](#); emphasis in the original). [↗](#)
 23. On history and partisanship, see, for example, [Fulbrook \(2002: 164–184\)](#). Discussing the political commitment of historians, Herman Paul writes that historians "need not wonder *whether* they want to be politically involved; the question rather is which political aims they serve" ([Paul 2015: 78](#); emphasis in the original). [↗](#)
 24. To recall Stéphane Lévesque, "probability, rather than certainty, governs the crafting of historical explanations" ([Lévesque 2008: 69](#)). [↗](#)
 25. See, for example, [Ehinger et al. \(2017\)](#). [↗](#)
 26. On retrodiction, see, for example, [Turchin \(2006\)](#). [↗](#)
 27. [Staley \(2021: 10–11\)](#) (emphasis in the original). On mimetic and creative historical imagination, see [Staley \(2021: 2–15\)](#). [↗](#)
 28. [Collingwood \(1961/1946a: 213\)](#). [↗](#)
 29. On historical perspective-taking and historical empathy, see [Endacott & Brooks \(2013\)](#). [↗](#)
 30. [Sanderson \(2018: 10\)](#). [↗](#)
 31. [Diamond \(2005/1997: 92\)](#). [↗](#)

32. One of his most popular theses is that Eurasia had an advantage over the other continents because its geographical axis is horizontal (east-west), while in the other continents is vertical (north-south). This results in Eurasia having a similar climate, similar food production conditions (crops and animals can live more or less in its whole territory), same big tameable animals (in fact, almost all of them live in Eurasia) that were used early in production and transportation, relatively easy communication between its various areas and many other advantages (see [Diamond 2005/1997](#): passim). 

10 Being conscious of historical thinking

DOI: [10.4324/9781003767657-10](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003767657-10)

As I mentioned earlier, two of the seven areas of historical consciousness are related to a metacognitive consciousness of the various ways in which historical narratives are constructed and used, in the sense that the production and use of historical narratives is also a cultural product, in other words, a historical product. This means that historical consciousness is a state of mind related, among other things, to the appropriation of historical perceptions and reflections that are incorporated in historical narratives. Thus, to be historically conscious, it is not enough to accumulate historical evidence. What is necessary, in addition to the *cognitive overview* of historical evidence, is to be able to *critically reflect* on it, to critically reflect on the historical narratives and on the sources on which these narratives are based, and to be able to use the results of this reflection in your everyday life. This reflective process starts with an innate awareness that we are not only spatial but also temporal beings, that our lives unfold in two realities, a physical and a temporal.

The *physical reality* consists of what we experience around us, in addition to millions of things we do not experience (at least not directly), anything from the atomic microcosm to the universal macrocosm. The physical reality also includes non-material components, such as ideas and thoughts, given that they unfold in a present—in fact, ideas indeed belong to the material world, as they are electrochemical activities in the brain.

The *temporal reality* has a tripartite dimension, related to past, present, and future. First, it includes our perception of the physical

world in any given present—please notice that what we perceive as “present” is a very flexible thing, as sometimes the “present” (or “now”) might mean this very moment, and sometimes it might mean longer periods of time, which might extend to several decades. Second, it includes what we know (or we believe we know) about the past, anything from the Big Bang some 13.7 billion years ago and the appearance of the first humans on earth some 2.7 million years ago, to the last nonsense that was posted on social media just some moments ago. Third, it includes our hopes, fears, and expectations about the future. There is something in our lives that should not be underestimated: we live not only in the present but also in the past (which is still present in many ways) and the future (which is also present in equally many ways). This means that most of our decisions in the present are, consciously or unconsciously, based on the past and oriented towards the future—I would claim that some of our present decisions are dictated by our imagined future and that there are people that live more in the future than in the present (workaholics believing that they invest to a better life in the future is a typical example).

To survive and make the best out of our lives, we need constant orientation in both realities. It is not difficult to argue for the need for orientation in the physical world. If you have ever been in a jungle or out at the sea during a dark night, you know. To understand the need for orientation in time (and thus, to understand the significance of history in our lives), you might imagine someone with amnesia: she does not remember who she is, where she lives, what her profession is, if she has a family or friends, or if she is religious or not. Such a person is obliged to constantly discover herself and the world around her from scratch. Her quality of life is challenged, and in extreme cases, her lack of memory can even prove lethal. The same applies to an individual or a group suffering from *historical amnesia*, in other words, an individual or a group ignoring its individual, social, national, or cultural history. Such an individual or group will have serious problems of identity and orientation in their interactions with the world around them. To avoid misunderstandings, let me note that no one is fully amnesiac in

historical terms. But the quality of your life will be negatively influenced by your limited historical knowledge and understanding—this is what I call historical amnesia. And the healthy function of societies and political systems can be threatened, sometimes in very dangerous ways, even by the partial ignorance of the historical background of a society, a country, or a geopolitical area.

Now take something more into consideration. People with amnesia cannot imagine their future. I opened the introduction of this book, referring to neuroscientist Dean Buonomano, who claims that some people suffering from amnesia struggle to project themselves not only into the past but also into the future. Many more studies show exactly the same, that the malfunction of memory negatively influences our relation to the future.¹ I will claim the same about historical amnesia: individuals and groups who present a limited or unreflective relation with their past have a limited understanding of (and thus orientation in) both their present and their anticipated future.

Our evolution as a species, mainly our social and cultural evolution, has equipped us with an innate propensity for both physical (spatial) and temporal orientation. Memory is a function directly related to both orientations, and it is of crucial importance, not only to survive (remembering what is eatable and where and when to find it, but also the places and the times that are dangerous), but also to thrive, or at least have a better life. Our propensity for temporal orientation is the reason for the pursuit of historical knowledge and the fundament of historical consciousness, which might be achieved through historical thinking.

Two things should be underlined here. The first is that even spatial orientation benefits from historical thinking and historical consciousness, given that every space has historical (temporal) dimensions, the consideration of which creates a better relation between human and space—let it be noted that I am speaking of space in both natural and geographical (i.e. human-made) sense. Imagine that you move into a new country and you need to build a house for you and your family. To be able to build a safe house, you

need to know the natural and geological history of the area. Climate, earthquakes, floods, and other natural phenomena in the past, especially those that tend to appear periodically, will decide how your house will be built and how it will look like. And now imagine that you want to establish yourself in a city or an island that is split between two countries. On which part of the city or the island will you settle? You can be sure that your decision is based on an internal dialogue between the quality of future life you hope for, your knowledge about yourself, and your knowledge about the two parts as history-made (i.e. on how their present and anticipated future are formed by their recent and deeper past).

The second thing that should be underlined is that historical time always has a spatial dimension, as it is related to humans and nature in several ways. You can be sure that the present, the past, and the future of the city or the island you are about to settle in are not perceived and evaluated in the same way in its two parts, especially if the two parts are not on good terms with each. At the same time, our ways of putting historical time into “boxes” that make its study easier (what in historical studies is called periodization) are directly related to space. Antiquity and the Renaissance, for example, would not make any sense to someone outside Europe. The same applies to the Vedic period in Indian history (ca. 1500–500 BC), the Lapita Culture period in Oceania (ca. 1600–500 BC), the Classic Maya period in the Americas (250–900 AD), the Mississippian Culture period in North America (800–1600 AD), or the Dynastic Periods in Chinese history (e.g. the Ming period that lasted from 1368 to 1644 AD).

Both historical thinking (as a process) and historical consciousness (as a result of this process) focus on the temporal reality, but constantly consider its coexistence with the physical reality. And it is not an exaggeration to say that there is no individual and no collective entity that does not think historically or is completely unconscious historically. Both historical thinking and the pursuit of historical consciousness are an integral part of human nature and collective function. What varies among individuals and among collective entities is the *quality* of historical thinking and historical

consciousness—to a degree which corresponds to the quality of individual and collective thinking and consciousness in general. This quality depends on various things. In individuals, it depends on intellectual capacity, educational background, and life experience. In collective entities, it depends on a number of variables, such as the educational average of the community, the power that conservative institutions (e.g. religions) enjoy over the members of the community, or the level of political freedom and freedom of speech.

But what is historical thinking? As with historical consciousness, historical thinking is a concept largely discussed but not clearly defined. More often than not, scholars writing on historical thinking do not define it as a concept at all—this applies even to publications dedicated ad hoc to historical thinking. Most scholars working on historical thinking approach it more as a technical than an anthropological term. As such, they relate it to varying sets of historiographical concepts, which are, in fact, tools we might use to understand the past and relate it to the present. Some other scholars follow Hans-Georg Gadamer, who stated that “to think historically means, in fact, to perform the transposition that the concepts of the past undergo when we try to think in them”.² For these scholars, historical thinking is related to understanding the difference between the past and the present.³

One of the few scholars who tried to define historical thinking and clarify it as a concept is Peter Seixas. In a book he published with Tom Morton in 2013, historical thinking is defined as “the creative process that historians go through to interpret the evidence of the past and generate the stories of history”. The two Canadian history educationists add that “it would be naive to expect to find one universal structure of historical thinking that would apply to all cultures for all time. The differences between oral and written histories are only the most obvious of examples”.⁴

In the period from 2006 to 2014, Peter Seixas led the Canadian *Historical Thinking Project*, which tried to systematize and theorize the phenomenon of historical thinking, with the aim of improving the quality of history education. It focused on six metahistorical concepts, that is, concepts not related to empirical evidence but to its detection, synthesis, and analysis. These concepts, according to Peter Seixas, “function, rather, as problems, tensions, or difficulties that demand comprehension, negotiation and, ultimately, an accommodation that is never a complete solution”.⁵ The concepts are presented under six rubrics (which, in the following paragraphs, are followed by some of my own thoughts on the six elements of historical thinking Seixas and Morton name)⁶:

1. *Historical significance*. As I mentioned earlier, it is not the whole content of time that gets registered as history. What will be registered and thus remembered and what will be neglected and forgotten (which sometimes is considerably more important) is always decided by a historical agent, that is, an individual or a collective entity. So, searching for historical consciousness, we should reflect on the following questions: what do we choose as significant enough to get included in our history? And according to which criteria?
2. *Primary source evidence*. Any historical inquiry should be based on the consideration of sources. This element of historical thinking is related not only to how we detect and critically use historical sources but also to the contextualization of the sources at disposition and the construction of optimal working questions that might be the fundament for the study of sources. Two things should be noted here. First, it is not possible to “read” a historical source correctly without understanding the context in which it was produced. Second, historical questions about the past are always rooted in, and sometimes dictated by, contemporary interests and concerns. So, which primary sources do we choose to use in our inquiries about the past? How do we use them? What kind of questions do we ask in order to get

historical evidence out of them? Do we cross-examine the evidence they offer to evidence from other sources on the subject?

3. *Continuity and change*. The study of what remained the same over time and what was changed in various periods or between periods has always been one of the main points of historical focus and analysis. Traditionally, historians were interested in detecting continuity *or* change, but in recent decades, the focus has shifted towards the study of the co-existence of continuity *and* change. Historical evolution being a multidimensional process, there is neither pure continuity nor pure change in history. Any event, phenomenon, or period a historian studies is complex and compound. So, a historically conscious person should be able to identify both “change in continuity” and “continuity in change”.
4. *Cause and consequence*. The identification of causes has always been one of the aims of historical inquiries. In the *Historical Thinking Project*, historical thinking was related to causation, which, in its turn, was related to human freedom and agency. In this line of understanding historical thinking, contextualization of decision-making is of crucial importance. Of equal importance is the reflection on the role played by well-established structures of various types (political, social, cultural, etc.) in individual and collective decision-making. Furthermore, historical thinking should include the consideration of irrational decision-making and of unintended consequences of acts based on both rational and irrational decisions.
5. *Historical perspective-taking*. Seixas defines this concept as “the impossibly difficult question of how we can understand the minds of peoples who lived in worlds so different from our own”.² The difficulty lies in finding the boundary between what is humanly universal in time and what is related to specific periods and places. Perspective-taking was related in the *Historical Thinking Project* to all the other elements of historical thinking, as employing a historical perspective is a prerequisite

for a thorough study of the past. More historians have enriched the work on perspective-taking by reflecting on historical empathy.

6. *Ethical dimensions of history*. This concept is related to (a) judging actors and actions of the past, (b) dealing with past crimes and injustices that are still “alive” in the present, and (c) the “memorial obligation” that should be offered, in the present, to historical figures whose actions were, or still are, beneficial for the relevant collective entities. This way of thinking about history is close to what Friedrich Nietzsche coined as “critical use of history”.⁸ But a historical consciousness-seeking person should be aware that judging or evaluating the past is not an easy task. A challenge related to it is what might be called “ethical anachronism” or “ethical presentism”, that is, the projection of contemporary ethical standards to previous times, which often makes contemporary judgements too strict and thus historically unfair.

Another Canadian history educationist, Catherine Duquette, presented in 2015 a thorough definition of historical thinking. She defines it as “a series of specific cognitive operations needed to carefully interpret the past”. Following several other scholars, she states that historical thinking has two composite elements: historical perspective and historical method. Duquette perceives historical perspective as “the framework guiding the interpretation of past events”. Historical method she defines as “a deductive approach that requires students to question the past, propose a hypothesis, check the available sources, and analyse sources with respect to their reliability in order to offer a response to the initial question”. Finally, she states that the combination of historical method and historical perspective enables the interpretation of the past and the development of its understanding.⁹

Another model of historical thinking is proposed by Matthew T. Downey and Kelly A. Long in their book on how to teach historical literacy.¹⁰ The model is based on concepts that are “the core of historical thinking” and which the authors coin as “disciplinary” concepts. Notice what the authors underline that these concepts are “interrelated in complex ways”. They are the following:

1. *Change and continuity*: This set of concepts is related to thinking on the difference of things in relation to an “afterward” and a “before”, on the relationship between things being changed and remaining the same, and on the impact of specific events in the historical evolution.
2. *Significance*: The concept is related to thinking that some changes had, or still have, a bigger and more enduring impact than others. It is also related to reflecting on the significance of an event as something related either to the event itself or to our perception of it—is, or was, the event perceived as significant by “everybody” or not? This means that the significance is not only related to the past but also to the present, to how this effect influences our lives and/or our thinking today.
3. *Causation and agency*: This set is related to explaining the reasons why things change or resist change, as well as the role individuals and groups play, or played, as agents of bringing about change. As the authors stress, focusing on causes and effects is of key importance in historical interpretation and understanding. It is of equal importance to be able to think that it is not only the “big” historical figures that bring about change, but also less focused-on individuals and groups, for example, various minority groups, women, or blue-collar workers.
4. *Time and chronology*: Historical thinking related to time and chronology deals with the time when events happen, their chronological sequence, and the duration of historical periods and eras. Chronology is related to the relationship between events and, as such, is related to causation. Periodization, with

its positive and challenging dimensions, is of central importance in the construction of historical knowledge.

5. *Perspective analysis*: This concept is based on the idea that the past is different from the present. This includes something central in historical thinking, namely, the insight that people in the past thought in a different way than we do. So, historical thinking is also about trying to understand how people in the past perceived the world around them and how they made the decisions they made, in other words, understanding the cognitive and emotive background of their historical agency. This includes an understanding that people in the past thought in different ways from each other. The authors claim that perspective analysis "is where critical historical thinking begins".
6. *Accounts and evidence*: This set of concepts is based on the claim that history is not the past itself, but what we make out of the past, based on our interpretation of what happened in the past. Historians and historical thinkers create written or graphic explanations based on sources and evidence from the past. These explanations usually focus on what has changed and why.

All definitions and approaches presented so far are excellent, but they limit historical thinking to the work done by historians. Historical thinking is thus related to specific methods and specific ways of dealing with the past. This is challenging in two ways: the first is that historical thinking is something that all humans possess, as historical creatures living in time, thinking in time, deciding in time, and acting in time. The second is that historical thinking should not be related only to the past. Historical thinking is often related to the coinherence and interaction of present, past, and future, especially in cases when any kind of temporal agency is demanded. To make a decision and put it into action, you always think historically, even when you sometimes do it unconsciously.

I would like to underline that historical thinking is not simply thinking *about* the content of time but thinking about it in historical and metahistorical terms. Historical thinking is analytical, critical, and reflective. It is always based on empirical evidence, and at its most simple level, it focuses on detecting evidence and on the reliability

and validity of this evidence. This is something done by everyone, not only by historians or people educated in history. In its more advanced forms, it synthesizes pieces of evidence and analyses them by applying relevant theories and methods. This indeed demands a background in history education.

Stéphane Lévesque claimed that there are two different types of historical knowledge: the so-called “substantive”, which is related to events, people, dates, periods, and other specific historical information, and the so-called “procedural”, that is, knowledge related to history as a discipline and the ways in which we study the past. He also claimed that historical thinking is “far more sophisticated and demanding than mastering substantive (content) knowledge”, adding that

sophisticated historical thinkers are not those who have successfully moved away from content acquisition to the mastery of procedural knowledge but those who have made significant progress in understanding both the substance of the past and the ideas (procedures and concepts) necessary to make sense of it.^{[11](#)}

This means that sophisticated historical thinkers do not think only on the basis of “what” but also on the basis of “how” and “why”.

I believe that historians, history educationists, history teachers, and everyone who is interested in getting their historical knowledge and historical consciousness improved need a better understanding of historical thinking and its various forms and functions. In the following section, I am opening the discussion by proposing various types of historical thinking. This is a presentation of preliminary thoughts, and I am including them in the book as an invitation to further thinking and research on a typology of historical thinking.

Types of historical thinking

Historical thinking includes various cognitive activities unfolding in any given present. Some of them are related to the past, some to the future, and some to the continuum past–present–future. Some of them are related to memory, and some to other faculties of the brain and the mind. And some are related to us humans as history-made and history-making students of history. So, historical thinking is always related to our “Knowledge/Memory” apparatus, and it functions on the basis of our “Know/Remember” procedures. In other words, historical thinking is a cognitive process that puts together elements of memory and knowledge in order to make sense out of them. Let it be noted that our historical thinking and its quality are independent of whether the elements on which it is based on are true, false, or fake. In terms of historical consciousness, and on the basis of the understanding of historical consciousness as temporal consciousness (coinherence and interplay of interpretation of the past, perception of the present and anticipation of the future), it is easy to understand that historical thinking combines memory (individual and/or collective), interpreting the past, perceiving the present, and thinking about the future.

This is not the place to discuss the relationship between history and memory and the role of memory in historical knowledge—others have already done a great job on that.¹² What I would like to underline, in relation to memory as a constructive element of historical knowledge and historical consciousness, is that memory plays a leading role in our decision-making, and it is the fundament on which future thinking is based. To quote neuroscientist and memory expert Charan Ranganath, “memory is much, much more than an archive of the past; it is the prism through which we see ourselves, others, and the world. It’s the connective tissue underlying what we say, think, and do”.¹³ This is why memory will be mentioned several times in the following preliminary typology of historical thinking.

In the following pages, I am presenting 11 types of historical thinking, divided into three categories. The first category is related to the content of our historical thinking, and it includes episodic

thinking, semantic thinking, counterfactual thinking, and imaginative thinking. The second category is related to the operation of historical thinking, and it includes synthetic thinking, analytical thinking, critical thinking, temporal thinking, and scenario thinking. Finally, the third category is epistemological and includes procedural thinking and self-reflective thinking.

Let me make something clear from the beginning: My typology does not include any element of evaluation between the types, or any hierarchy of the types. There is not, in my mind, any sequence in which they appear when we think historically. I claim that in any process of historical thinking, several of these types coexist and interplay. My aim by presenting the typology is to create a framework that might support a reflection on the ways in which we think historically. Such a reflection will improve our historical consciousness. As a preliminary effort, the typology is, of course, open to additions and corrections. What is important, I think, is to open the discussion on the types of historical thinking.

Content-related types

This section focuses on the content of historical thinking and presents four types, namely, episodic thinking, semantic thinking, counterfactual thinking, and imaginative thinking. Let me start with the first two, which are based on memory studies. I call them episodic and semantic thinking, and I am inspired by studies related to episodic and semantic memory. As an introduction to the types, I would like to briefly present episodic and collective memory. Episodic memory is the kind of remembering that allows us to recall, and sometimes reexperience, specific events from the past. Semantic memory, on the other hand, is related to our encyclopaedic knowledge, in other words, to recalling things we know about the world in general. It stores facts, ideas, the meaning of concepts, and pieces of general knowledge on the world and humankind. For example, recalling your own wedding (or any specific wedding) is

episodic, while recalling anything you know about weddings as rituals and social events, or your personal ideas about weddings and getting married, is semantic. So, episodic memory is your own individual recollection of events you experienced, while semantic memory is collective, general knowledge about the world that is shared by the members of a given culture. These two types of memory are highly and intensively interactive at almost every moment in life. Dealing with the past demands that you activate both.¹⁴ The same I would like to claim about episodic and semantic thinking. But first, let us see what semantic and episodic thinking is.

Episodic thinking is in neurobiology and psychology related to future thinking, so it is widely known as “episodic future thinking” (EFT).¹⁵ In historical terms, there is no reason for relating it just to the future. So, I am approaching *episodic historical thinking* as a cognitive process of recalling actual events from the past or constructing imagined events that supposedly happened in the past or might happen in the future. Studies in cognitive psychology have shown that imagining the future is clearly related to recalling the past or thinking about it.¹⁶ Recalling events from the past is, of course, related to episodic memory. You think in episodic historical ways when you focus on specific events of the past and you try to connect them to specific anticipated events in the future. For example, your memories of your last visit to a specific place will be of decisive importance in planning your next visit to the same place (or in your decision to never visit it again). The contribution of historical episodic thinking to historical consciousness is that it relates factual knowledge and the process of remembering to a better understanding of historical evolution and, on the basis of this understanding, to a better orientation in life.

Semantic thinking is related to semantic memory and often to creativity.¹⁷ *Semantic historical thinking* is understood here as a cognitive process, in which we apply semantic knowledge, that is, general knowledge about the world, the human, and historical evolution, in order to make sense of our life in the continuum past–present–future. For example, to better understand the history of this

or that country, you must be able to recall pieces of general knowledge, related, for example, to political systems, social structure, economic activity, religion, or culture. This general knowledge will help you better understand and categorize elements of factual and conceptual knowledge related to specific events and people in the history of this country. To make sense, semantic historical thinking must be combined with historical episodic thinking, which provides illustrative examples and meaning-making arguments. For example, to make sense of a military coup, you need to employ whatever you know about the specific coup and other coups (episodic memory and thinking) and what you know about military coups in general (semantic memory and thinking). This way, you can better understand how and why this coup happened, and you can anticipate possible historical futures (e.g. semantic knowledge might help you understand that it is not very probable that a military coup will lead to a democratic regime). The contribution of semantic historical thinking to historical consciousness is that it relates factual and conceptual knowledge to the processes of understanding and analysing the world and historical evolution.

Counterfactual historical thinking means imagining alternative versions of historical evolution based on the outcomes of events that could have happened but did not occur. Counterfactuals are usually thought experiments and heuristic tools, initiating the discussion of hypothetical alternative historical trajectories to explore the significance of specific historical actors and factors, such as specific political leaders, specific policies, or political movements. They are much more common than we believe, especially those that might be evaluated as *implicit counterfactuals*. Such counterfactuals we all use, silently, in causal explanations, that is, when we try to explain the causes of historical events or the importance of historical actors and factors. When we, for example, say that event A led to event B (the assassination of Arch-duke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary led to World War 1), we imply that without event A, event B would not have happened (in fact, it could have happened for many other

reasons).¹⁸ Counterfactual thinking is not only applied at the macro level (what if Hitler had died in World War 1?) but also at the micro level. In your own microcosm, for example, you might make decisions (e.g. to quit your job and pursue a long-held dream) based on alternative what-if scenarios in which following that dream would have made you more creative, happy, or wealthy. Note that counterfactual scenarios can be useful only if they are based on solid and worthy factual evidence and only if they depart minimally from actuality (this is the so-called “minimal-rewrite” rule). Counterfactual historical thinking is related to factual knowledge, and its contribution to historical consciousness is that they help us better understand historical events and processes and their significance in historical evolution, thereby improving this way our understanding of historical causation. At the micro level, it helps us reflect on ourselves as history-made—what if the history that forms us had been different?

Imaginative historical thinking is related to what I presented earlier in the book as imagined history. As we have seen, because of our need to make and use fulfilled narratives about the past, we often fill in some of the gaps that bother us with historical elements that sound logical but cannot be verified by the sources we have at disposition. In addition, myths of any kind are by their nature products of imaginative thinking. We also have seen that a form of imagined history is the so-called retrodictions. Finally, counterfactuals are also a sort of imaginative thinking. So, dealing with history, we use our imagination in several ways. The process is simple: we use the evidence we have to create a historical narrative, but this narrative almost always includes some of our own inferences, which might be logical and fitting to the narrative. On the basis of the evidence, we might also make our own hypotheses or theses, which become parts of the narrative.¹⁹ All this is about the past. But, as I have stated a number of times in this book, dealing with history includes not only our interpretations of the past, but also our anticipations of the future, which cannot be anything but imaginary. Imaginative historical thinking helps us to compose

historical narratives in which any gaps in our knowledge or memory with elements that are logically acceptable and thus satisfy our need to complete and sense-making narratives. I wrote earlier that any time we speak about the wills of a given historical actor, we employ imaginative thinking. We do the same in our personal lives, when we include in our explanations of a given event our own perceptions about the thoughts and aims of other people, which led them to make specific decisions and perform specific actions. In terms of historical consciousness, identifying imaginary narrative elements is of crucial importance in our orientation as to whether these narratives might depart from historical truth, in ways that sometimes distort it considerably.

Operation-related types

The main criteria used for categorizing these types are related to how historical thinking helps us to improve our historical knowledge and get from historical knowledge to historical consciousness. This category is related to the operation of historical thinking and includes five thinking types, namely, synthetic, analytical, critical, temporal, and scenario thinking. All these thinking types are related to both factual and conceptual historical knowledge. They all contribute to our historical consciousness by improving the quality of historical knowledge that becomes the fundament of being conscious of how history shapes us and the worlds in which we live, and of how history has been shaped by us and others.

Synthetic historical thinking is a cognitive process of combining historical data and concepts to form a coherent historical narrative, a historical argument, or a complex historical piece of evidence. To illustrate the point, you might think of putting together data originating from different and unrelated sources or sets of sources. We do that as historians, for example, when we compare differing narratives on the same event, but we also do it in our everyday lives, when, for instance, we, as members of a jury, have to make a

decision on whether the accused is guilty or not. The aim of synthetic thinking is to identify, analyse, and communicate relations and connections between actors, factors, events, and/or processes. It should be noted that while thinking of history in synthetic terms, we often prioritize information that is consistent with our pre-existing beliefs and stereotypes (this is one of the reasons why we are susceptible to fake news).²⁰

Analytical thinking is defined by Ayman Amer as “the ability to differentiate between existing facts and opinions by analyzing their strengths and weaknesses, to analyze data, and to develop thinking capacity and use information effectively by reasoning”.²¹ *Analytical historical thinking* can be approached as the opposite of synthetic historical thinking. While the latter combines data and concepts, analytical historical thinking is a cognitive process that breaks down wholes (e.g. a corpus of evidence, a set of complex data, a concept, a narrative, etc.) into their composite parts, to make sense of the evidence. It includes, among other things, gathering relevant historical data, identifying the main issues included in the data, comparing data from different sources, reflecting on the relevant concepts, identifying causes and effects, and drawing relevant conclusions from the analysis of the data. As all types of historical thinking, it is significant at both the macro level and micro level. Analytical thinking is, in general, approached as an element of critical thinking.

Critical thinking has been defined by Michael Scriven and Richard Paul as “the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skilfully conceptualizing, applying, analysing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action”.²² This is a definition that can also be used for *critical historical thinking*, in our case, related to historical information, that is, historical data, sources, concepts, and issues. Earlier in the book, we saw that critical historical thinking has been indirectly discussed by historians and others, such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Jörn Rüsen.²³ The approaches of both Nietzsche and

Rüsen are only partly related to critical historical thinking as defined here, given that they are mainly related to the ethical evaluation of the past—which is indeed a considerable element of critical thinking. Here, critical historical thinking includes more cognitive activities, all co-working to give historical knowledge meaning and thus lead us to historical consciousness. Critical thinking is needed at all phases of the construction of historical knowledge, from the choice and examination of our sources, to analysing and evaluating the evidence, to reading critically the literature we consider, to rethinking the meaning of empirical and abstract concepts in our readings and in our own narratives, to identifying imagined history, to thinking about the significance of the past and the future in shaping the present, and in several other ways. I would claim that critical thinking is fundamental for the quality of our historical knowledge, and thus, it is of utmost importance for the development and quality of our historical consciousness. In [Chapter 11](#), I will present three different quality types of historical knowledge, namely, innate, reflective, and scholarly. Please note that critical thinking is one of the main elements which make the difference between innate and reflective. Keep also in mind that critical thinking is central in both epistemological types of historical thinking that are presented in the following section.

Temporal historical thinking is related to everything presented in [Chapter 6](#) on the various categories, dimensions, and layers of time, as well as how past and future interplay in any given present. Thus, it is not related to thinking about physical time *per se*, but to thinking about the world and our lives in terms of biological, cultural, and historical time. In other words, temporal historical thinking might be defined as a cognitive process related to the historical dimensions of time and in considering events, processes, phenomena, humankind, and the world in relation to these dimensions and their coinherence and interplay. Temporal historical thinking is related to all other types of historical thinking and every element of factual historical knowledge. In terms of historical knowledge, it is related not only to chronology and periodization but also to analytical approaches, such as any kind of contextualization,

the detection of continuity and change, and the identification of causes and effects. The contribution of temporal thinking to historical consciousness is of crucial importance, because without it we cannot analyse historical information properly, and we cannot reflect on how present, past, and future cohere and interplay in our understanding of the world and our historical place and role in it.

Scenario thinking is a concept usually related to business strategy. There, it is defined as “a cognitive process concerned with imagining how the future might unfold in multiple ways through the analysis and judgement of the effects of the actions and reactions of shaping forces”.²⁴ As a type of historical thinking, scenario thinking is related to what Bernard Eric Jensen calls “scenario competence”, that is, the ability to establish, enact, and evaluate socio-cultural scenarios.²⁵ It is also related to the ways in which we create plotlines that function as templates for our historical narratives. Eviatar Zerubavel, for example, has discussed scenarios of progress and decline, “circles and rhymes” as historical scenarios, or legato and staccato scenarios.²⁶ And, of course, our future thinking, that is, our anticipation of “historical futures”, is also based on scenario thinking. Scenario thinking is thus related to episodic future thinking, counterfactual thinking, and imaginative thinking. At the same time, when its function is to create evidence-based scenarios of historical evolution in the past, it is related to factual historical knowledge. To function well, it should be based on solid procedural knowledge of how history functions as a discipline.

Epistemological types

The third category is based on epistemological criteria, related to the processes of doing history and to our reflections on ourselves as history-made, history-making, and producers and students of historical narratives. It includes two types, namely, procedural thinking and self-reflective thinking.

Procedural historical thinking is related to procedural knowledge, as it was presented in the previous chapter. It is a cognitive process aiming at solving domain-related tasks, in other words, a process related to how history functions as a discipline. This might include thinking about the skills necessary for conducting academic or amateur historical research, the techniques and methods of historical research, the technologies that might support historical research, the configuration of historical knowledge, the composition of historical narratives, and the ethical aspects of dealing with history. Notice that all the elements of the previous sentence apply not only to academic historians, but to anyone of us dealing with history and using it in our everyday lives. Procedural historical thinking improves our historical consciousness in terms of the historicity of historical narratives and the composition of historical knowledge.

Self-reflective historical thinking is related to metacognitive knowledge. It includes reflecting on ourselves as history-made and history-making, as well as on ourselves as producers and students of historical narratives. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this type of thinking is related to being conscious of our strong and weak cognition and learning sides, as well as being conscious of our motivation for dealing with history. It is also related to being conscious of our “known unknowns” and “unknown unknowns”. Finally, it is related to being able to reflect on how we are shaped by history and how we make history with our thoughts, acts, and historical narratives. Self-reflective historical thinking enhances our historical consciousness by helping us reflect on our strong and weak sides in our effort to reach historical knowledge and historical consciousness.

From awareness to consciousness, via thinking

This section is dedicated to the relationship between historical thinking and historical consciousness. To make the discussion easier, I am visualizing the process leading from historical awareness to

historical consciousness through historical thinking and historical knowledge in the diagram illustrated in [Figure 10.1](#).

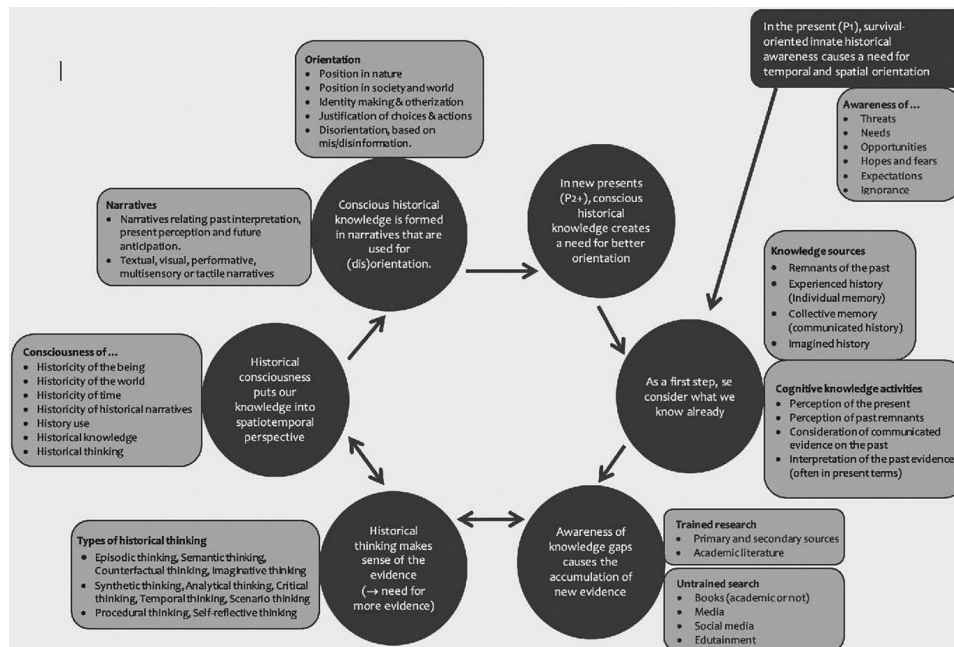


Figure 10.1 The process leading from historical awareness to historical consciousness. [📄](#)

The process leading to historical consciousness starts with an innate awareness of historicity, temporal agency (that we and others, even non-human elements, form events and life, and how history unfolds), and that past, present, and future are somehow connected and interinfluence each other. This awareness is related to our need for survival, and it exists, in a basic form, even among animals—the dogs in the experiment of Pavlov, salivating at the sight and the sound of the footsteps of the assistants bringing them food, connected their past experience of being fed, to the sight or sound of the present and their anticipation of getting food soon, while at the same time could recognize the agency of the assistants who were responsible of keeping them fed.

This innate historical awareness is part of a mechanism aiming at our survival through temporal and spatial orientation, in order for an individual or a group to be able to deal with whatever the subject of the awareness is. I would like to underline that it is never abstract; historical awareness is always an awareness *of something concrete*,

usually of our basic needs, potential threats and opportunities, as well as our hopes and fears, and our expectations. In some cases, it can also be the awareness of our ignorance, or limited knowledge, of the natural and human worlds in which we live.

Our first step towards orientation is to consider the historical knowledge we all have (sometimes historical knowledge of the simplest level and content, for example, on the natural environment in which an individual or a group lives). This knowledge is the product of our perception of the present, our experience and interpretation of the past (through its remnants in the physical world and/or in our memory), and the consideration of communicated evidence on the past (textual and non-textual narratives). In addition to remnants of the past and our own memories, our basic historical knowledge might come from the collective memory of various groups we belong to (anything from the family to the nation and beyond), which means from history communicated through various channels (school, books, documentaries, edutainment etc.). Sometimes, both memories and communicated history might be imagined, due to dysfunctions of our brain, unintended mistakes in the process of composing a historical narrative, or intended distortion of historical facts.

The consideration of what we know creates a new awareness, related to what we do not know. This new awareness creates the need for the accumulation of (more) empirical evidence on the subject (which sometimes intensifies the need for orientation). This need is covered differently by people who are trained in gathering historical evidence and people who are not. The latter search for any source that offer more data (media, social media, books, etc.) without thinking critically on the quality of the content and the purpose served by these sources. The trained ones conduct research on the basis of critically approached and used sources.

Ideally, the accumulation of new evidence is not enough in itself. The new evidence is convenient only if processed through historical thinking. This includes contextualizing the evidence, setting it into physical (natural and/or biological) and temporal (social and/or cultural) perspectives. It also includes evaluating the significance of

the evidence, focusing on how things unfold in time, or identifying the causality of specific events. It is also important to think historically by trying to take a historical perspective, in other words, by trying to understand how and why people in the past thought decided and acted the way they did (what is usually called historical empathy).

Notice the double arrow between the need for more evidence and historical thinking. Thinking historically on the evidence we have might create an extra need for accumulation of more evidence, so that our historical thinking will have a more solid basis. This means that we might need to get a few “rounds” of accumulating more evidence and reflecting on it. This double arrow between the two circles illustrates what gathering historical knowledge is about: collection of evidence and thoughtful reflection on it.

The processing of evidence on the basis of historical thinking leads to historical consciousness, which mainly has one or more of the following forms: consciousness of the historicity of the being and the historicity of the world, histotemporal consciousness, and consciousness of how historical knowledge is generated and of the various ways in which historical narratives are constructed and used. Our historical consciousness is related to both space and time. In fact, it is related to both physical space and socio-cultural space, and how they both influence the evolution of history and us, as individuals and communities. When it comes to its temporal dimension, historical consciousness is not only related to the coinherence of present, past, and future but also to the “dialogue” between them and how our perception and interpretation of each one of them influences our perception and interpretation of the other two.

Notice now the second double arrow, between historical thinking and historical consciousness. As any kind of consciousness, historical consciousness needs constant maintenance. This might be done through historical rethinking and historical reflection, on the basis of new elements of historical knowledge, which appear as a result of our more and more conscious historical thinking. This means that historical thinking and historical consciousness increase and improve

each other. Historical thinking results in historical consciousness, which results in historical thinking of higher quality, which results in historical consciousness of higher quality, and so forth.

The historically conscious historical knowledge is formed in textual and non-textual narratives that serve orientation and sometimes disorientation. These narratives do not only present “what” happened, happens, or is expected to happen, but they also analyse the “hows” and “whys” related to “what”. Whether these narratives serve orientation or disorientation is related to their content and/or their use. Content abuse of history means that individuals and groups might create historical narratives that are one-sided or false, or even fake. History might also be abused when we use historical narratives, even correct ones, aiming to harm other people or to serve our own purposes, at the expense of others.

As historical consciousness enriches historical knowledge, new subjects and areas of awareness are created and our need for orientation gets more advanced and elaborated. As a result, the circle starts again, creating in fact a spiral process of historical awareness leading to historical consciousness through historical knowledge and historical thinking. What is important to remember is that awareness, orientation, and thinking get more and more conscious in every round, which means that in every round, our historical consciousness gets more and more reflective and orientation in life better and better. (To avoid misunderstandings, I need to say that better orientation in life does not necessarily mean that your life itself gets better; the quality of your life is not only a result of your orientation, and perhaps you are not ready to deal with your better orientation, which might cause anxiety and other challenging situations.) Please notice that conscious historical thinking and conscious historical knowledge are not only related to the past (as the innate awareness and historical knowledge are), but they are also related to the whole content of time (i.e. the continuum present–past–future) and to the relation of individuals and groups with it, as history-made and history-making units.

According to my operational definition, historical consciousness is a dynamic horizon-like state of mind related to the historical

dimensions of our individual and collective selves, of the world, of time, of the narratives we make about the content of time, and of the ways in which we develop historical knowledge, we think historically, and we use history in life. The horizon metaphor can be explained by taking into consideration the process presented above and visualized in [Figure 10.1](#). Both the presentation and the visualization are oversimplifications of a process that is in reality more complex in its temporal structure. The accumulation of historical knowledge, historical thinking, and historical consciousness, the formation of historical narratives, and the use of these narratives interact essentially and ceaselessly, and their interactions constantly create new horizons, which we take into consideration to orient ourselves. The quality and the depth level of the process that leads from historical awareness to historical consciousness and its use dictate whether the horizon is two-dimensional and black/white, or multidimensional and multicolour.

Notes

1. [Buonomano \(2017: 198\)](#) (Kindle); see also, among others, [Klein, Robertson & Delton \(2010\)](#); [Zheng, Luo & Yu \(2014\)](#); [MacLeod, Schacter & Welker \(2016\)](#). ↵
2. [Gadamer \(1989: 398\)](#). ↵
3. This is, for example, what [Collingwood \(1961/1946b\)](#) and [Wineburg \(2001\)](#) do. ↵
4. [Seixas & Morton \(2013: 2\)](#). ↵
5. [Seixas \(2017: 597\)](#). ↵
6. On these six dimensions/areas of historical thinking, see [Seixas & Morton \(2013\)](#); [Seixas \(2017\)](#); and <http://historicalthinking.ca/>. ↵
7. [Seixas \(2017: 601\)](#). ↵
8. [Nietzsche \(1997: 75–77\)](#). ↵
9. [Duquette \(2015: 52\)](#). ↵
10. [Downey & Long \(2016: Chapter 2\)](#). ↵
11. [Lévesque \(2008: 27 and 31\)](#). ↵
12. See, for example, [Ricoeur \(2006\)](#); [Nora \(1989\)](#); [Assmann \(2011\)](#); [Erl, Nünning & Young \(2008\)](#); [Landsberg \(2004\)](#); [Lorenz \(2014\)](#); [Dessingue & Winter \(2016\)](#); [Barash \(2016\)](#); [Dessingué \(2011\)](#); [Zerubavel \(2004\)](#); see also various publications in the journal *History and Memory*. ↵
13. [Ranganath \(2024: 6\)](#). ↵
14. On episodic and semantic memory and their relation to what in neuroscience is called “mental time travel” (i.e. the human ability of travelling to the past and the future in our minds), see [Renoult et al. \(2019\)](#); [Ranganath \(2024\)](#); [Michaelian \(2016\)](#); [Morris et al. \(2005\)](#); [Suddendorf & Corballis \(1997\)](#). ↵
15. On episodic future thinking, see [Schacter, Benoit & Szpunar \(2017\)](#). ↵
16. See [Zheng, Luo & Yu \(2014\)](#); [Staley \(2006\)](#). ↵
17. On semantic thinking and creativity, see [Beaty et al. \(2023\)](#). ↵
18. On counterfactual thinking, see [Rellihaan \(2025\)](#); [Staley \(2021: 117–133\)](#); [Waldenegg \(2011\)](#); [Schacter et al. \(2015\)](#); [De Brigard & Parikh \(2019\)](#); [Evans \(2013\)](#); [Tetlock & Parker \(2006\)](#); [Wenzlhuemer \(2009\)](#). Counterfactual history is also called “virtual history” and “what-if history”; see, for example, [Fergusson \(1997\)](#) and [Cowley \(2001\)](#). ↵
19. On historical imagination, see [Staley \(2021\)](#). ↵
20. [Ranganath \(2024: 187\)](#). ↵
21. Quoted from [Demir \(2022: 191\)](#), who refers to [Amer \(2005\)](#). ↵
22. [Scriven & Paul \(1987\)](#), quoted from [Demir \(2022: 190\)](#). ↵
23. Nietzsche’s *critical use* of history focuses on injustices of the past and their correction in the present or at least on their use as a compass pointing to the right direction

leading to the needed changes. In this sense, the term *critical* is related to orientation in life (and thus historical consciousness) through the evaluation of the past. Rüsen speaks about *critical historical consciousness*, which is based on challenging established traditions and exempla and aims at deconstructing problematic present and historical value systems by revealing their immoral origins or consequences. [↗](#)

24. [Mackay & McKiernan \(2018: 39\)](#). [↗](#)

25. [Jensen \(1996: 7–8\)](#). [↗](#)

26. See [Zerubavel \(2004\)](#). [↗](#)

11 Innate, reflective, and scholarly historical consciousness

DOI: [10.4324/9781003767657-11](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003767657-11)

R. G. Collingwood famously claimed that history is the only way in which we can know ourselves.¹ To do so, we need to be historically conscious, on the basis of historical knowledge founded on historical thinking. But we should be aware of the fact that *even our historical knowledge, our historical thinking and our historical consciousness are history-made*. Our historical thinking is based on a historically created cognitive background, which influences considerably our perceptions and evaluations. As Peter Seixas writes, “there is no stepping outside of history in order to do history”.² The same applies to storytelling. The ways in which we study history, we think about history, we use history, we communicate history, or we reflect on history are the result of social and cognitive structures that are formed over time—some of them are indeed very old, or even so old that are outdated.

Historical consciousness has various results. The result of cognitive (empirical) historical consciousness is an insight into the content of time and its evolution, the historicity of the being (at individual, collective, and human-kind levels), and the historicity of the world. This includes an insight into the human being as history-made and history-making, in the sense of the human being as content of time and as creating content of time. The result of metacognitive (theoretical) and epistemological historical consciousness is an insight into historical narratives and their creation and use, in other words, into the human being as history-making in terms of the

construction of narratives about the content of time. These insights contribute to our better orientation in the physical and temporal realities we live in. These realities constitute what we usually understand as “the world”.

A challenging question is whether historical consciousness is something innate or something acquired and thus teachable. I am claiming it is both. All humans are historical creatures, living in time and thinking about the content of time constantly. This is such a central part of our lives, that when it is related to experiencing our lives from day to day, we do it unconsciously or subconsciously. To survive, we have an innate mechanism that orients us in the natural and human worlds we live in. But with the passage of time, historical and human evolution have become more complex and more advanced, something reflected in our relationship and interaction with the various worlds we live in. This has naturally resulted in (a need for) a more advanced historical consciousness. Our innate one is no longer enough, and this is why it is needed to get introduced to historical consciousness in school, or through other channels of social learning. Thus, in modern times, we can speak about three types of historical knowledge, which might be coined as innate, reflective, and scholarly.

Innate historical consciousness is basic and fundamental and related to our practical life. All humans have historical consciousness, at least at a basic level. We all, for example, take into consideration the past and the future, when we are about to make important decisions. When you must decide about your professional life, you will always take into consideration what you like, what you are good at, what kind of experiences you have had so far, and what you know about a company or institution you are interested in working in. This is the past. And you will always take into consideration your dreams, hopes, and fears about the future, how you imagine yourself in five or ten years from the present, and even what kind of guarantees you might have for a good retirement. This is what you do in other occasions as well, for example, when you vote, or you choose what to study. And you might imagine many other cases, in which this fundamental historical consciousness influences or

dictates your decisions. At the same time, we all understand that we are history-made and we evaluate the others as history-made, every time we identify ourselves (then we select carefully which parts of our past and of our future thoughts we will present) and when we evaluate people on the basis of their past. We evaluate by saying that someone “is” something, in the present, but when we must argue on that, we almost always refer to this someone’s past. Furthermore, we all use historical narratives to achieve something, and we all perceive historical narratives as tools employed to inform, misinform, or disinform us. This is what I identify as innate historical consciousness, which I am tempted to approach as informed historical awareness.

Reflective historical consciousness is different from the innate one only in relation to their quality and depth. Reflective historical consciousness is more advanced. I would claim that its main difference from the innate is that it is not impulsive and, in fact, is based on a kind of historical thinking that is not the aftermath of special training but the result of life experience and human intellect.

Scholarly historical consciousness is learned, the result of relevant education. It is based on a different type of historical thinking, related to History as a discipline. It is usually based on the implementation of disciplinary concepts like the ones presented in the introduction and [Chapter 9](#), and on the use of theory and method to detect, choose, and approach the relevant source, use them in a critical way, analyse the relevant evidence, and produce clear, verifiable and trustworthy historical narratives. It is logical to think that the method mentioned here is what we might call historical method, but this is not the whole truth; since History is a multitheoretical and multimethodical discipline, almost any kind of theory and any kind of method might serve historical knowledge and historical thinking, and thus historical consciousness.

I wrote before that our historical knowledge, our historical thinking and our historical consciousness are history-made. Now I can elaborate by saying that our innate historical consciousness is history-made basically in biological terms, while our reflective and scholarly historical consciousness are history-made not only in

biological but also, and mainly, in sociocultural terms, given that both our reflections and our learning are always related to our biological, social, cultural and of course educational background. In addition, as Gadamer noted, “historical consciousness is itself situated in the web of historical effects”.³ This means that the political, economic, or cultural context in which we live influences our historical consciousness considerably.

Closing this chapter, I would like to repeat that what has been presented in the previous pages is not a final or exclusive answer to the perplexing question on the ontology of historical consciousness. It is just a clarification of how the phenomenon is perceived and approached in this book.

Notes

1. [Collingwood \(2005: 180\)](#). ↗
2. [Seixas \(2017: 598\)](#). ↗
3. [Gadamer \(1989: 300\)](#). ↗

12 Conclusions

DOI: [10.4324/9781003767657-12](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003767657-12)

Reflecting on historical consciousness is a matter of practical rather than theoretical significance, a matter related to our orientation in everyday life and our everyday interaction with the material and immaterial worlds we live in, even with our own selves. We and the worlds we live in are history-made, and being conscious of what this means in cognitive terms (related to biological, social, and cultural evolution) and metacognitive terms (related to how we approach and narrate biological, social, and cultural evolution) is of crucial importance for the life quality we will enjoy, individually and collectively. Sometimes, it is also important in relation to our very survival and/or the survival of other species. Think, for example, of the climate crisis and how different things would be, if we (we all, not only the politicians) were more historically conscious on what the Anthropocene means and on why we even had to invent such a term.

We understand ourselves and everything around us by using models, that is, simplified and sometimes abstract representations of complex systems, processes, phenomena, and even physical objects (think of a model of the human body). Models help us perceive, understand, analyse, and communicate knowledge related to all of these. Our perception of the world is in fact based on the construction of specific, sometimes collective and sometimes individual, models of the world, in which we place everything our senses perceive, and our mind creates: nature, other humans, ourselves, and material and immaterial technologies. We create models of ideal agricultural productions in relation to what natural

and weather conditions allow or dictate in specific places, models of how small and large societies function, models of political and economic systems, models of ideal families, models of ideal diets related to specific body types and social modes of life (which are also models), and models of how production and consumption interinfluence each other. Then we reflect on these models on the basis of intellectual models—think, for example, of any philosophical, social, cultural, or political theory, or of any simulation or other technology-based model that helps us understand the world. Often, we combine various models in our efforts, and sometimes we enrich them with elements of our own thinking, which again become elements of thinking models that are partly collective and partly individual.¹ Being historically conscious includes being conscious of the historicity of the models and whatever you put into them (this is a part of what I previously called cognitive consciousness), as well as of the historicity of yourself as the perceiving and evaluating agent (metacognitive and epistemological consciousness). In other words, it means being conscious of the fact that whatever you include in the models is history-made, something that also applies to yourself and the models you make or use.

Throughout the book, I have approached historical consciousness as the consciousness of our relation to the historical dimensions of our individual and collective selves, of the world, of time, of the narratives we make about the content of time, and of what we know about history and how we narrate and use it. In [Chapter 3](#), I talked about the seven cornerstones of historical consciousness: historicity of the world, historicity of the being, historicity of time, historicity of historical narratives, history use, historical knowledge, and historical thinking. I also referred to the cognitive, metacognitive, and epistemological dimensions of historical consciousness. Closing the book, I will claim that at a very general level, being historically conscious means having an insight of the historicity of every side and dimension of biological, social, and cultural evolution, as well as of the historicity of all knowledge and its transmission within and between communities and generations. I will make the claim

stronger, by saying that the historicity of all knowledge is axiomatic and absolute: all knowledge (not only historical knowledge, but knowledge in general) is history-made and historical, that is, related to the timespace(s) in which it is, or was, produced and adopted.

The fundament of historical consciousness is the awareness that the reality we live in is (and all the various “worlds” that constitute this reality are) history-made. Everything exists in time, everything is historical, and thus the only way of understanding life is by thinking historically, by thinking in terms of historical evolution and by thinking of the reality we live in as the result of this evolution.

Our historical consciousness is both innate or acquired, which also means that it can be improved through learning. As creatures living in time and thinking in time, we have an innate survival mechanism that orients us in the natural and human worlds we live in. Historical and human evolution, which makes the world, and thus our lives, more complex and more advanced, created the need for a more advanced, reflective, historical consciousness. And much later, in modern times, History as a discipline created a scholarly form of historical consciousness.

As mentioned in various parts of the book, there is cognitive and meta-cognitive historical consciousness. It is impossible to identify when humans started having a (sort of) historical consciousness. But what we can claim with certainty is that for thousands of years historical consciousness was simply cognitive. Humans oriented themselves in time in terms of repeatable events and phenomena, which were beneficial or which they needed to protect themselves from. Reflective and scholarly cognitive historical consciousness came into the picture much later (again, it is difficult to spot in which period and where in the world), when the advancement of education and philosophy created the background for reflecting on matters that exceeded the limits of survival and interaction with nature. Metacognitive historical consciousness is a very recent phenomenon, based on the evolution of history as a scientific field that was supposed to explain the present by studying the past and the future, and on the cooperation of historians with scholars from other fields,

mainly philosophy and sociology. And epistemological historical consciousness is even more recent.

Historical consciousness is directly related not only to the temporal reality we live in but also to the physical one, both being history-made. To understand both these realities in a way that might lead to historical consciousness, we must approach them by implementing historical thinking. Simple logic is not enough, as the realities (i.e. the worlds we live in) are the complex result of a multifaceted and multidimensional historical evolution. So, historical consciousness can only be reached, and then improved, by historical thinking—while, at the same time, historical consciousness makes historical thinking, and thus the understanding of the worlds and realities, more sophisticated and productive.

Indeed, including historical consciousness as a subject in school teaching and university study programmes is a policy that will undoubtedly make a change, not only in history teaching and education in general but also in terms of identification and self-identification, reflection on ourselves and all the “others” around us (in biological, social, and cultural terms), social performance, and the function of democracy. But what is of vital importance is that in teaching and learning of historical consciousness will be based on the ontological approach to this central historical concept and phenomenon. Historical consciousness should always be approached in ontological terms, not only when it comes to its meaning and content but also in relation to its function, and its importance in our lives and identity.

I feel the need to close with an exhortation: we as historians should fight for historical consciousness to be learned at all levels of education and be included in every university study programme, and as an introduction to the historicity of every academic discipline. How is it possible that a future servant of any scientific field will serve optimally without being conscious of the historicity of the discipline and of herself as a history-made and history-making human? How is it possible that somebody will be a good citizen and a good fellow human without being able to reflect on her own historicity, the historicity of the world(s) she lives in, of the historicity

of every individual and group around her? Especially because historical evolution gets more and more advanced and complex, being able to orient ourselves in time and space is, probably more than ever, a matter of survival; not of us as individuals or groups, but for the whole humankind—and our planet.

Note

1. On using models in thinking and science, see [Epstein \(2008\)](#). Let it be noted that here I am not talking about models of historical thinking, but models making easier to understand human life and human interaction with our animate and inanimate environment. For a model of historical thinking (one out of many possible), see [Seixas \(2017\)](#). 

Bibliography

- Adriaansen R.-J. (2022), Historical Consciousness, in S. Berger, B. Bevernage, M. Grever, T. Loughran, Q. E. Wang & O. E. Williams (eds.), *Bloomsbury History: Theory and Method Articles*, Bloomsbury. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350927926.113> ↵
- Ahlskog J. (2021), *The Primacy of Method in Historical Research: Philosophy of History and the Perspective of Meaning*, Routledge. ↵
- Akker C. V. D. (2021), *The Routledge Companion to Historical Theory*, Routledge. ↵
- Allen J. S. (2009), *The Lives of the Brain: Human Evolution and the Organ of Mind*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. ↵
- Amer A. (2005), *Analytical Thinking*, Cairo University, Center for Advancement of Postgraduate Studies and Research in Engineering Sciences. ↵
- Anderson B. (2006), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso. ↵
- Anderson L. W., D. R. Krathwohl, P. W. Airasian, K. A. Cruickshank, R. E. Mayer, P. R. Pintrich, J. Raths & M. C. Wittrock (2001), *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, Longman. ↵
- Aronsson P. (2004), *Historiebruk: att använda det förflutna*, Studentlitteratur. ↵
- Assmann J. (2011), *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*, Cambridge University Press. ↵
- Augustine (2016), *Confessions: Books 9–13* (edited and translated by C. J.-B. Hammond) (Vol. 2), Harvard University Press (Loeb Classical Library). ↵

- Aunger R. (Ed.) (2000), *Darwinizing Culture: The Status of Memetics as a Science*, Oxford University Press. [↗](#)
- Aveni A. (2002), *Empires of Time: Calendars, Clocks and Cultures*, University Press of Colorado. [↗](#)
- Bacigalupo A. M. (2014), The Potency of Indigenous “Bibles” and Biographies: Mapuche Shamanic Literacy and Historical Consciousness, *American Ethnologist* 41(4): 648–663. <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12103> [↗](#)
- Bal M. (2002), *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, University of Toronto Press. [↗](#)
- Bal M. (2009), Working with Concepts, *European Journal of English Studies* 13(1): 13–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13825570802708121> [↗](#)
- Barash J. A. (2016), *Collective Memory and the Historical Past*, University of Chicago Press. [↗](#)
- Barton K. C. & L. S. Levstik (2004), *Teaching History for the Common Good*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. [↗](#)
- Beatty R. E., Y. N. Kenett, R. W. Hass & D. L. Schacter (2023), Semantic Memory and Creativity: The Costs and Benefits of Semantic Memory Structure in Generating Original Ideas, *Thinking and Reasoning* 29(2): 305–339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13546783.2022.2076742> [↗](#)
- Birch K. K. (2017), *Time Blind: Problems in Perceiving Other Temporalities*, Palgrave Macmillan. [↗](#)
- Blackbourn D. (2012), “The Horologe of Time”: Periodization in History, *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 127(2): 301–307. <https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2012.127.2.301> [↗](#)
- Blackmore S. (1999), *The Meme Machine*, Oxford University Press. [↗](#)
- Blackmore S. (2017), *Consciousness: A Very Short Introduction* (2nd ed.), Oxford University Press. [↗](#)
- Blackmore S. & E. Troscianko (2018), *Consciousness* (3rd ed.), Routledge. [↗](#)
- Blombäck A. & O. Brunninge (2009), Corporate Identity Manifested through Historical References, *Corporate Communications* 14(4): 404–419. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13563280910998754> [↗](#)

- Bloom B. S. (Ed.) (1956), *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals. 1. Cognitive Domain*, McKay. 
- Bøe J. B. (2002), *Bildene av fortiden: historiedidaktikk og historiebevissthet*, Høyskoleforlaget. 
- Bøe J. B. & K. Knutsen (2012), *Innføring i historiebruk (Introduction to History Use)*, Cappelen Damm Høyskoleforlaget. 
- Bouchard G. (2018), *Social Myths and Collective Imaginaries* (translated by H. Scott), University of Toronto Press. 
- Boyd R. & J. Henrich (2002), On Modeling Cognition and Culture: Why Cultural Evolution Does Not Require Replication of Representations, *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 2(2): 87–112. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853702320281836> 
- Boyd R. & P. J. Richerson (2005), *The Origin and Evolution of Cultures*, Oxford University Press. 
- Bracke S., C. Flaving, M. Köster & M. Zulsdorf-Kersting (2014), German Research on History Education: Empirical Attempts at Mapping Historical Thinking and Learning, in M. Köster, H. Thunemann & M. Zulsdorf-Kersting (eds.), *Researching History Education: International Perspectives and Disciplinary Traditions* (pp. 9–55), Wochenschau Verlag. 
- Braudel F. (1980), *On History*, University of Chicago Press. 
- Braudel F. (2009/1958), History and the Social Sciences: The Longue Durée (translated by Immanuel Wallerstein), *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 32(2): 171–203. 
- Brodie R. (2009), *Virus of the Mind: The New Science of the Meme*, Hay House, Inc. (Kindle edition). 
- Budick E. M. (1989), *Fiction and Historical Consciousness: The American Romance Tradition*, Yale University Press. 
- Buonomano D. (2017), *Your Brain Is a Time Machine: The Neuroscience and Physics of Time*, W. W. Norton & Company. 
- Cajani L. (Ed.) (2007), *History Teaching, Identities and Citizenship*, Trentham Books. 
- Chapman A. (2016), *Digital Games as History: How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice*, Routledge. 

- Cicero M. T. (2014), *De inventione: De optimo genere oratorum; Topica*, Harvard University Press (Loeb Classical Library, vol. 386, translated by H. M. Hubbell). [↵](#)
- Clark A. & C. L. Peck (2020), *Contemplating Historical Consciousness: Notes from the Field*, Berghahn Books. [↵](#)
- Classen C. & W. Kansteiner (2009), Truth and Authenticity in Contemporary Historical Culture: An Introduction to Historical Representation and Historical Truth, *History and Theory* 48(2): 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2303.2009.00495.x> [↵](#)
- Claus P. & J. Marriott (2012), *History: An Introduction to Theory, Method and Practice*, Longman. [↵](#)
- Collier D., F. D. Hidalgo & A. O. Maciuceanu (2006), Essentially Contested Concepts: Debates and Applications, *Journal of Political Ideologies* 11(3): 211–246. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310600923782> [↵](#)
- Collier D. & S. Levitsky (1997), Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research, *World Politics* 49(3): 430–451. [↵](#)
- Collier D. & J. E. Mahon (1993), Conceptual “Stretching” Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis, *The American Political Science Review* 87(4): 845–855. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2938818> [↵](#)
- Collingwood R. G. (1961/1946a), Human Nature and Human History, in R. G. Collingwood (ed.), *The Idea of History* (pp. 205–231), Oxford University Press. [↵](#)
- Collingwood R. G. (1961/1946b), *The Idea of History*, Oxford University Press. [↵](#)
- Collingwood R. G. (2005), *The Philosophy of Enchantment: Studies in Folktale, Cultural Criticism, and Anthropology* (edited by D. Boucher, W. James & P. Smallwood), Oxford University Press. [↵](#)
- Cowley R. (2001), *What If? Eminent Historians Imagine What Might Have Been*, Penguin. [↵](#)
- Creanza N. & M. W. Feldman (2016), Worldwide Genetic and Cultural Change in Human Evolution, *Current Opinion in Genetics & Development* 41: 85–92. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gde.2016.08.006> [↵](#)

- Creanza N., L. Fogarty & M. W. Feldman (2012), Models of Cultural Niche Construction with Selection and Assortative Mating, *PLoS One* 7(8): e42744. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0042744> ↱
- Creanza N., O. Kolodny & M. W. Feldman (2017), Cultural Evolutionary Theory: How Culture Evolves and Why It Matters, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science of the USA* 114(30): 7782–7789. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1620732114> ↱
- Crowley M. (2017), Why the White House Is Reading Greek History: The Trump Team Is Obsessing over Thucydides, the Ancient Historian Who Wrote a Seminal Tract on War, *Politico*. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/06/21/why-the-white-house-is-reading-greek-history-215287/>, accessed on November 15, 2022 ↱
- Daly S. (2012), Philanthropy as an Essentially Contested Concept, *Official Journal of the International Society for Third-Sector Research* 23(3): 535–557. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-011-9213-5> ↱
- Davies M. L. (2018), *How History Works: The Reconstitution of a Human Science*, Routledge. ↱
- Dawkins R. (2016), *The Selfish Gene* (40th anniversary ed.), Oxford University Press (Kindle edition). ↱
- De Brigard F. & N. Parikh (2019), Episodic Counterfactual Thinking, *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 28(1): 59–66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721418806512> ↱
- Demir E. (2022), An Examination of High School Students Critical Thinking Dispositions and Analytical Thinking Skills, *Journal of Pedagogical Research* 6(4): 190–200. <https://doi.org/10.33902/JPR.202217357> ↱
- Denning A. (2021), Deep Play? Video Games and the Historical Imaginary, *The American Historical Review* 126(1): 180–198. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhab002> ↱
- Dessingué A. (2011), Towards a Phenomenology of Memory and Forgetting, *Études Ricoeuriennes* 2(1): 168–178. <https://doi.org/10.5195/ERRS.2011.42> ↱

- Dessingué A. (2020), Developing Critical Historical Consciousness: Re-Thinking the Dynamics between History and Memory in History Education, *Nordidactica* 1: 1–17. [↗](#)
- Dessingue A. & J. M. Winter (2016), *Beyond Memory: Silence and the Aesthetics of Remembrance*, Routledge. [↗](#)
- Diamond J. (2005/1997), *Guns, Germs, and Steel: A Short History of Everybody for the Last 13,000 Years*, Vintage. [↗](#)
- Distin K. (2004), *The Selfish Meme: A Critical Reassessment*, Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511614286> [↗](#)
- Doughty H. A. (2014), Democracy as an Essentially Contested Concept, *Innovation Journal* 19(1): 1–21. article 9. [↗](#)
- Downey M. T. & K. A. Long (2016), *Teaching for Historical Literacy: Building Knowledge in the History Classroom*, Routledge. [↗](#)
- Duquette C. (2011), *Le rapport entre la pensée historique et la conscience historique. Elaboration d'une modèle d'interprétation lors de l'apprentissage de l'histoire chez les élèves de cinquième secondaire des écoles francophone du Québec*, Université de Laval. [↗](#)
- Duquette C. (2015), Relating Historical Consciousness to Historical Thinking through Assessment, in K. Ercikan & P. Seixas (eds.), *New Directions in Assessing Historical Thinking* (pp. 51–63), Routledge. [↗](#)
- Edling S., H. Sharp, J. Löfström & N. Ammert (2020), The Good Citizen: Revisiting Moral Motivations for Introducing Historical Consciousness in History Education Drawing on the Writings of Gadamer, *Citizenship, Social and Economics Education* 19(2): 133–150. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2047173420936622> [↗](#)
- Ehinger B. V., K. Häusser, J. P. Ossandón & P. König (2017), Humans Treat Unreliable Filled-In Percepts as More Real Than Veridical Ones, *Elife* 6. <https://elifesciences.org/articles/21761> [↗](#)
- Ehrenberg K. M. (2011), Law Is Not (Best Considered) an Essentially Contested Concept, *International Journal of Law in Context* 7(2): 209–232. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S174455231100005X> [↗](#)
- Elliott J. (2003), The Limits of Historical Knowledge, *European Review* 11(1): 21–25.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798703000036> ↗

- Endacott J. & S. Brooks (2013), An Updated Theoretical and Practical Model for Promoting Historical Empathy, *Social Studies Research and Practice* 8(1): 41–58. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SSRP-01-2013-B0003> ↗
- Enquist M., S. Ghirlanda, A. Jarrick & C. A. Wachtmeister (2008), Why Does Human Culture Increase Exponentially?, *Theoretical Population Biology* 74(1): 46–55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tpb.2008.04.007> ↗
- Epstein J. M. (2008), Why Model?, *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation* 11(4): 12. <http://jasss.soc.surrey.ac.uk/11/14/12.html> ↗
- Erl A., A. Nünning & S. B. Young (Eds.) (2008), *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, Walter de Gruyter. ↗
- Ermakov D. & A. Ermakov (2021), Memetic Approach to Cultural Evolution, *Bio-systems* 204: 104378. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biosystems.2021.104378> ↗
- Evans R. J. (Ed.) (2013), *Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History*, Brandeis University Press/Historical Society of Israel. ↗
- Falk D. (2016), Evolution of Brain and Culture: The Neurological and Cognitive Journey from Australopithecus to Albert Einstein, *Journal of Anthropological Sciences (JASs)* 94: 99–111. ↗
- Feldman M. W. & K. N. Laland (1996), Gene-Culture Coevolutionary Theory, *Trends in Ecology & Evolution* 11(11): 453–457. ↗
- Fergusson N. (1997), *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals*, Picador. ↗
- Fitch W. T. (2010), *The Evolution of Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511817779> ↗
- Folkenborg H. R. (2022), *En fortid—mange fortellinger: introduksjon til historiebruk* (2nd ed.), Cappelen Damm Akademisk. ↗
- Frank A. (2013), *About Time: From Sun Dials to Quantum Clocks, How the Cosmos Shapes our Lives—and We Shape the Cosmos*, Oneworld. ↗

- Frankopan P. (2023), *The Earth Transformed: An Untold History*, Bloomsbury (Kindle edition). [↗](#)
- Freeden M. (1998), *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach*, Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/019829414X.003.0003> [↗](#)
- Freeden M. (2004), Editorial: Essential Contestability and Effective Contestability, *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9(1): 3–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1356931042000176697> [↗](#)
- Fridlund M., M. Oiva & P. Paju (Eds.) (2020), *Digital Histories: Emergent Approaches within the New Digital History*, Helsinki University Press. [↗](#)
- Friedrich D. (2014), *Democratic Education as a Curricular Problem: Historical Consciousness and the Moralizing Limits of the Present*, Routledge. [↗](#)
- Fulbrook M. (2002), *Historical Theory*, Routledge. [↗](#)
- Gadamer H.-G. (1987), The Problem of Historical Consciousness, in P. Rabinow & W. M. Sullivan (eds.), *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader* (pp. 103–160), University of California Press. [↗](#)
- Gadamer H.-G. (1989), *Truth and Method: Second Revised Edition* (translated by J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall), Continuum. [↗](#)
- Gallie W. B. (1955–1956), Essentially Contested Concepts, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56: 167–198. [↗](#)
- Gallie W. B. (1956), Art as an Essentially Contested Concept, *Philosophical Quarterly* 6: 97–114. [↗](#)
- Gallie W. B. (1964), *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding*, Chatto & Windus. [↗](#)
- Gibbons A. (2014), Human Evolution: Neandertals and Moderns Made Imperfect Mates, *Science* 343(6170): 471–472. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.343.6170.471> [↗](#)
- Glencross A. (2015), From 'Doing History' to Thinking Historically: Historical Consciousness across History and International Relations, *International Relations* 29(4): 413–433. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117815608233> [↗](#)
- Golombek D. A., I. L. Bussi & P. V. Agostino (2014), Minutes, Days and Years: Molecular Interactions among Different Scales of Biological Timing, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*

B 369(1637): 20120465. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2012.0465> 

- Gray J. N. (1977), On the Contestability of Social and Political Concepts, *Political Theory* 5(3): 331–348. 
- Green A. & K. Troup (1999), *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century History and Theory*, Manchester University Press. 
- Grever M. (2020), Epilogue: Why Historical Consciousness?, in A. Clark & C. L. Peck (eds.), *Contemplating Historical Consciousness: Notes from the Field* (pp. 224–232), Berghahn Books. 
- Grever M. & R.-J. Adriaansen (2019), Historical Consciousness: The Enigma of Different Paradigms, *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 51(6): 814–830. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2019.1652937> 
- Haynes J. (Ed.) (2022), *The Routledge Handbook of Religion, Politics and Ideology*, Routledge. 
- Henrich J., R. Boyd & P. Richerson (2008), Five Misunderstandings about Cultural Evolution, *Human Nature* 19(2): 119–137. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12110-008-9037-1> 
- Hobson J. (2021), *When God Lost Her Tongue: Historical Consciousness and the Black Feminist Imagination*, Routledge. 
- Hofer M. K. (2003), *The Games We Played: The Golden Age of Board & Table Games* (with a foreword by K. T. Jackson), Princeton Architectural Press. 
- Hofman M. A. (Ed.) (2019), *Evolution of the Human Brain: From Matter to Mind*, Academic Press. 
- Hofstede G. (2001), *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations* (2nd ed.), Sage. 
- Hughes-Warrington M. (2007), *History Goes to the Movies: Studying History on Film*, Routledge. 
- Jeismann K.-E. (1979), Geschichtsbewusstsein—Theorie, in K. Bergmann, A. Kuhn, J. Rüsen, G. Schneider & K. Fröhlich (eds.), *Handbuch der Geschichtsdidaktik* (pp. 42–44), Pädagogischer Verlag Schwann. 

- Jensen B. E. (1996), Historiebevidsthed og historie—hvad er det, in H. Brinckmann & L. Rasmussen (eds.), *Historieskabte såvel som historieskabende: 7 historiedidaktiske essays* (pp. 5–18), OP. [↗](#)
- Jensen B. E. (2009), Usable Pasts: Comparing Approaches to Popular and Public History, in P. Ashton & H. Kean (eds.), *People and Their Pasts: Public History Today* (pp. 42–56), Palgrave Macmillan. [↗](#)
- Jensen B. E. (2012), Historiebevidsthed—En nøgle til at forstå og forklare historiskosociale processer, in P. Eliasson, K. Hammarlund, E. Lund & K. T. Nielsen (eds.), *Historiedidaktik i Norden 9. Del 1: Historiemedvetande—historiebruk* (pp. 14–34), Malmö högskola og Högskolan i Halmstad. [↗](#)
- Jensen B. E. (2017), *Historiebevidsthed/fortidsbrug—teori og empiri*, Historia. [↗](#)
- Jordanova L. (2019), *History in Practice*, Bloomsbury Academic. [↗](#)
- Kaas J. H. (2013), The Evolution of Brains from Early Mammals to Humans, *WIREs Cognitive Science* 4(1): 33–45. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcs.1206> [↗](#)
- Kapell M. W. & A. B. R. Elliott (2013), *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*, Bloomsbury Academic. [↗](#)
- Karlsson K.-G. (2003), The Holocaust as a Problem of Historical Culture: Theoretical and Analytical Challenges, in K.-G. Karlsson & U. Zander (eds.), *Echoes of the Holocaust: Historical Cultures in Contemporary Europe* (pp. 9–57), Nordic Academic Press. [↗](#)
- Karlsson K.-G. (2011), Historical Consciousness: The Fundament of Historical Thinking and History Teaching, in K. Nordgren, P. Eliasson & C. Rönqvist (eds.), *The Processes of History Teaching: An International Symposium Held at Malmö University, Sweden, March 5th–7th 2009* (pp. 34–41), Karlstad University Press. [↗](#)
- Karlsson K.-G. (2014), Historia, historiedidaktikk och historiekultur—teori och perspektiv, in K.-G. Karlsson & U. Zander (eds.), *Historien är närvarande: historiedidaktik som teori och tillämpning* (pp. 13–89), Studentlitteratur. [↗](#)
- King L. J. (2020), What Is Black Historical Consciousness?, in A. Clark & C. L. Peck (eds.), *Contemplating Historical Consciousness:*

- Notes from the Field* (pp. 163–174), Berghahn Books. [↗](#)
- Klein S. B., T. E. Robertson & A. W. Delton (2010), Facing the Future: Memory as an Evolved System for Planning Future Acts, *Memory and Cognition* 38(1): 13–22. <https://doi.org/10.3758/MC.38.1.13> [↗](#)
- Kleinberg E., J. Wallach Scott & G. Wilder (2022), Theses on History and Theory, in Z. B. Simon & L. Deile (eds.), *Historical Understanding: Past, Present and Future* (pp. 91–101), Bloomsbury Academic. [↗](#)
- Knutsen K. (2023), *Historiebevissthet og historiebruk i skolen: En praktisk veileder for lærere og lærerstudenter*, Cappelen Damm Akademisk. [↗](#)
- Knutsen K. (2025), *Hvordan historisk bevissthet forandrer verden: En systematisk tilnærming til historiebruk*, Fagbokforlaget. [↗](#)
- Kobayashi Y., J. Y. Wakano & H. Ohtsuki (2019), Evolution of Cumulative Culture for Niche Construction, *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 472: 67–76. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtbi.2019.04.013> [↗](#)
- Körber A. (2015), Historical Consciousness, Historical Competencies —and Beyond? *Some Conceptual Development within German History Didactics*, 1–56. https://www.pedocs.de/frontdoor.php?source_opus=10811, accessed on March 26, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.25656/01:10811> [↗](#)
- Körber A. (2016), Translation and Its Discontents II: A German Perspective, *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 48(4): 440–456. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2016.1171401> [↗](#)
- Koselleck R. (2004), *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Columbia University Press. [↗](#)
- Koselleck R. (2018), *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories* (translated and edited by S. Franzel & S.-L. Hoffmann), Stanford University Press. [↗](#)
- Koselleck R. & H. White (2002), *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, Stanford University Press. [↗](#)
- Kroeber A. L., C. Kluckhohn & W. Untereiner (1985/1952), *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, Greenwood Press. [↗](#)
- Laland K. N. & M. J. O'Brien (2012), Cultural Niche Construction: An Introduction, *Biological Theory* 6(3): 191–202.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13752-012-0026-6> ↵

Laland K. N., J. Odling-Smee & M. W. Feldman (2000), Niche Construction, Biological Evolution, and Cultural Change, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 23(1): 131–146.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X00002417> ↵

Laland K. N., J. Odling-Smee & S. Myles (2010), How Culture Shaped the Human Genome: Bringing Genetics and the Human Sciences Together, *Nature Reviews / Genetics* 11(2): 137–148.

<https://doi.org/10.1038/nrg2734> ↵

Landsberg A. (2004), *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, Columbia University Press. ↵

Lang T. J. (2015), *Mystery and the Making of a Christian Historical Consciousness: From Paul to the Second Century*, De Gruyter. ↵

Le Goff J. (2015), *Must We Divide History Into Periods?*, Columbia University Press. ↵

Lévesque S. (2008), *Thinking Historically: Educating Students for the Twenty-First Century*, University of Toronto Press. ↵

Lévesque S. (2014), Between Memory Recall and Historical Consciousness: Implications for Education, *Public History Weekly*, 2: 33.

<https://public-history-weekly.degruyter.com/2-2014-33/memory-recall-historical-consciousness-implications-education/>

<https://doi.org/dx.doi.org/10.1515/phw-2014-2593> ↵

Levine R. (2006), *A Geography of Time: The Temporal Misadventures of a Social Psychologist, or How Every Culture Keeps Time Just a Little Bit Differently*, Basic Books. ↵

Levisohn J. A. (2010), Negotiating Historical Narratives: An Epistemology of History for History Education, *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 44(1): 1–21.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9752.2010.00737.x> ↵

Lieberman P. (2016), The Evolution of Language and Thought, *Journal of Anthropological Sciences (JASs)* 94: 127–146.

<https://doi.org/10.4436/jass.94029> ↵

Lorenz C. (2014), Blurred Lines: History, Memory and the Experience of Time, *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 2(1): 43–63. ↵

- Lowenthal D. (2015), *The Past is a Foreign Country—Revisited*, Cambridge University Press. [↗](#)
- Luarsabishvili V. (2022), *Ideas and Methodologies in Historical Research*, Routledge. [↗](#)
- Lukacs J. (2017), *Historical Consciousness: The Remembered Past* (3rd ed.), Routledge. [↗](#)
- Lukes S. (1974), *Power: A Radical View*, Macmillan. [↗](#)
- Lund E. (2004), Historiebevissthet og historisk tenkning som operative begreper i dansk og engelsk historiedidaktikk, in S. Ahonen, M. Vega Poulsen, O. S. Stugu, M. Thorkellsson & U. Zander (eds.), *Hvor går historiedidaktikken? Historiedidaktikk i Norden 8* (pp. 101–116), Institutt for historie og klassiske fag—NTNU. [↗](#)
- Lund E. (2011), *Historiedidaktikk: en håndbok for studenter og lærere*, Universitets-forlaget. [↗](#)
- MacIntyre A. (1973), The Essential Contestability of Some Social Concepts, *Ethics* 84(1): 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1086/291897> [↗](#)
- MacKay B. & P. McKiernan (2018), *Scenario Thinking: A Historical Evolution of Strategic Foresight* (1st ed.), Cambridge University Press. [↗](#)
- MacLeod A. K., D. L. Schacter & M. Welker (2016), Prospection, Well-Being and Memory, *Memory Studies* 9(3): 266–274. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698016645233> [↗](#)
- MacMillan M. (2010), *The Uses and Abuses of History*, Profile Books. [↗](#)
- Mair P. (2008), Concepts and Concept Formation, in D. Della Porta & M. Keating (eds.), *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences* (pp. 177–197), Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511801938.011> [↗](#)
- Manning P. (2020), *Methods for Human History: Studying Social, Cultural, and Biological Evolution*, Palgrave Macmillan (Kindle edition). [↗](#)
- McCullagh C. B. (2000), Bias in Historical Description, Interpretation, and Explanation, *History and Theory* 39(1): 39–66. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0018-2656.00112> [↗](#)

- McLean K. C. & M. Syed (2015), Personal, Master, and Alternative Narratives: An Integrative Framework for Understanding Identity Development in Context, *Human Development* 58(6): 318–349. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000445817> ↵
- Mesoudi A. (2015), Cultural Evolution: A Review of Theory, Findings and Controversies, *Evolutionary Biology* 43(4): 481–497. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11692-015-9320-0> ↵
- Michaelian K. (2016), *Mental Time Travel: Episodic Memory and Our Knowledge of the Personal Past*, The MIT Press. ↵
- Morris R., G. Hitch, K. Graham & T. Bussey (2005), Learning and Memory, in R. G. M. Morris, L. Tarassenko & M. Kenward (eds.), *Cognitive Systems: Information Processing Meets Brain Science* (pp. 193–235), Elsevier Science & Technology. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-012088566-4/50015-5> ↵
- Mufwene S. S. (2019), The Evolution of Language as Technology, in A. C. Love & W. C. Wimsatt (eds.), *Beyond the Meme: Development and Structure in Cultural Evolution* (pp. 365–394), University of Minnesota Press. ↵
- Nietzsche F. (1997), On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life, in D. Breazeale (ed.), *Nietzsche: Untimely Meditations* (pp. 57–124), [Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy], Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511812101.007> ↵
- Nora P. (1989), Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de mémoire (translator by Marc Roudebush), *Representations* 26: 7–25. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520> ↵
- Nora P. & L. D. Kritzman (Eds.) (1996–1998), *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past, Vol. 1: Conflicts and Divisions, Vol. 2: Traditions, Vol. 3: Symbols*, Columbia University Press. ↵
- Nordgren K. (2016), How to Do Things with History: Use of History as a Link Between Historical Consciousness and Historical Culture, *Theory and Research in Social Education* 44(4): 479–504. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2016.1211046> ↵
- Nordgren K. (2019), Boundaries of Historical Consciousness: A Western Cultural Achievement or an Anthropological Universal?,

- Journal of Curriculum Studies* 51(6): 779–797.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2019.1652938> ↵
- Odling-Smee F. J., K. N. Laland & M. W. Feldman (2003), *Niche Construction: The Neglected Process in Evolution*, Princeton University Press. ↵
- Ohara J. (2022), *The Theory and Philosophy of History: Global Variations*, Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009036313> ↵
- Ohman Nielsen M.-B. (2004), Historiebevissthet og erindringsspor: Undervisningsog forskningserfaringer fra arbeid med begrepsrelasjoner i historieutdanning og praksisveiledning, in S. Ahonen, M. Vega Poulsen, O. S. Stugu, M. Thorkellsson & U. Zander (eds.), *Hvor går historiedidaktikken? Historiedidaktikk i Norden 8* (pp. 211–228), Institutt for historie og klassiske fag—NTNU. ↵
- Paul H. (2015), *Key Issues in Historical Theory*, Routledge. ↵
- Popa N. (2022), Operationalizing Historical Consciousness: A Review and Synthesis of the Literature on Meaning Making in Historical Learning, *Review of Educational Research* 92(2): 171–208.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543211052333> ↵
- Psaltis C., M. Carretero & S. Čehajić-Clancy (2017), *History Education and Conflict Transformation: Social Psychological Theories, History Teaching and Reconciliation*, Palgrave Macmillan. ↵
- Ranganath C. (2024), *Why We Remember: Unlocking Memory's Power to Hold on to What Matters*, Doubleday. ↵
- Reich D. (2018), *Who We Are and How We Got Here: Ancient DNA and the New Science of the Human Past*, Pantheon Books. ↵
- Reitan E. (2001), Rape as an Essentially Contested Concept, *Hypatia* 16(2): 43–66. ↵
- Relliham M. (2025), Causes, Counterfactuals, and Counterfactual History, *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 1–23.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/18722636-12341561> ↵
- Renoult L., M. Irish, M. Moscovitch & M. D. Rugg (2019), From Knowing to Remembering: The Semantic–Episodic Distinction, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 23(12): 1041–1057.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2019.09.008> ↵

- Richerson P. J. & R. Boyd (2005), *Not by Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution*, University of Chicago Press. [↗](#)
- Ricoeur P. (2006), Memory—Forgetting—History, in J. Rüsen (ed.), *Meaning and Representation in History* (pp. 9–19), Berghahn Books. [↗](#)
- Robinson N. (2021), Developing Historical Consciousness for Social Cohesion: How South African Students Learn to Construct the Relationship Between Past and Present, in H. Åström Elmersjö, B. Norlin, D. Lindmark & M. Keynes (eds.), *Historical Justice and History Education* (pp. 341–363), Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-70412-4_16 [↗](#)
- Rodriguez P.-A. (2015), Human Dignity as an Essentially Contested Concept, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 28(4): 743–756. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2015.1021297> [↗](#)
- Roitman J. L. (2014), *Anti-Crisis*, Duke University Press. [↗](#)
- Rosenstone R. A. (2014), *History on Film / Film on History* (2nd ed.), Routledge. [↗](#)
- Roy D. (2017), Myths about Memes, *Journal of Bioeconomics* 19(3): 281–305. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10818-017-9250-2> [↗](#)
- Rüsen J. (2004), Historical Consciousness: Narrative Structure, Moral Function, and Ontogenetic Development, in P. Seixas (ed.), *Theorizing Historical Consciousness* (pp. 63–85), University of Toronto Press. [↗](#)
- Rüsen J. (2005), *History: Narration—Interpretation—Orientation*, Berghahn Books. [↗](#)
- Rüsen J. (2006), What Does “Making Sense of History” Mean?, in J. Rüsen (ed.), *Meaning and Representation in History* (pp. 1–5), Berghahn Books. [↗](#)
- Rüsen J. (2011), Forming Historical Consciousness: Towards a Humanistic History Didactics, in K. Nordgren, P. Eliasson & C. Rönqvist (eds.), *The Processes of History Teaching: An International Symposium Held at Malmö University, Sweden, March 5th–7th 2009* (pp. 15–33), Karlstad University Press. [↗](#)
- Rüsen J. (2012), Forming Historical Consciousness: Towards a Humanistic History Didactics, *Antíteses* 5(10): 519–536. <https://doi.org/10.5433/1984-3356.2012v5n10p519> [↗](#)

- Rüsen J. (2015), History: Overview, in J. D. Wright (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (2nd ed., Vol. 11, pp. 114–119), Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.62141-4> ↗
- Rüsen J. (2017), *Evidence and Meaning: A Theory of Historical Studies* (translator by D. Kerns & K. Digan), Berghahn. ↗
- Salmi H. (2021), *What Is Digital History?*, Polity. ↗
- Sanderson S. K. (2018), *Human Nature and the Evolution of Society*, Routledge (Kindle edition). ↗
- Sankararaman S., S. Mallick, M. Dannemann, K. Prüfer, J. Kelso, S. Pääbo, N. Patterson & D. Reich (2014), The Genomic Landscape of Neanderthal Ancestry in Present-Day Humans, *Nature* 507(7492): 354–357. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature12961> ↗
- Sartori G. (1970), Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics, *The American Political Science Review* 64(4): 1033–1053. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1958356> ↗
- Saxton L. (2020), A True Story: Defining Accuracy and Authenticity in Historical Fiction, *Rethinking History* 24(2): 127–144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2020.1727189> ↗
- Schacter D. L., R. G. Benoit, F. De Brigard & K. K. Szpunar (2015), Episodic Future Thinking and Episodic Counterfactual Thinking: Intersections Between Memory and Decisions, *Neurobiology of Learning and Memory* 117: 14–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nlm.2013.12.008> ↗
- Schacter D. L., R. G. Benoit & K. K. Szpunar (2017), Episodic Future Thinking: Mechanisms and Functions, *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 17: 41–50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2017.06.002> ↗
- Schieder T. (1974), Geschichtsinteresse und Geschichtsbewusstsein heute, in C. J. Burckhardt (ed.), *Geschichte zwischen Gestern und Morgen* (pp. 73–102), List Verlag. ↗
- Scott-Phillips T. C., K. N. Laland, D. M. Shuker, T. E. Dickins & S. A. West (2014), The Niche Construction Perspective: A Critical Appraisal, *Evolution* 68(5): 1231–1243. ↗
- Scriven M. & R. Paul (1987), *Defining Critical Thinking*, Paper presentation, 8th Annual International Conference on Critical

Thinking and Education Reform. 

Seixas P. (2004a), Introduction, in P. Seixas (ed.), *Theorizing Historical Consciousness* (pp. 3–20), University of Toronto Press.



Seixas P. (Ed.) (2004b), *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, University of Toronto Press. 

Seixas P. (2006), What Is Historical Consciousness?, in R. Sandwell (ed.), *To the Past: History Education, Public Memory, and Citizenship in Canada* (pp. 11–22), University of Toronto Press. 

Seixas P. (2016), Translation and Its Discontents: Key Concepts in English and German History Education, *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 48(4): 427–439.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2015.1101618> 

Seixas P. (2017), A Model of Historical Thinking, *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 49(6): 593–605.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2015.1101363> 

Seixas P. & T. Morton (2013), *The Big Six: Historical Thinking Concepts*, Nelson Education. 

Shennan S. (2002), *Genes, Memes and Human History: Darwinian Archaeology and Cultural Evolution*, Thames & Hudson. 

Simon B. Z. & M. Tamm (2021), Historical Futures, *History & Theory* 60(1): 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.12190> 

Simon R., J. Rüsen & others (2004), A Dialogue on Narrative and Historical Consciousness (edited by K. den Heyer), in P. Seixas (ed.), *Theorizing Historical Consciousness* (pp. 202–211), University of Toronto Press. 

Simon Z. B. & M. Tamm (2023), *The Fabric of Historical Time*, Cambridge University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009103947> 

Smil V. (2017), *Energy and Civilization: A History*, MIT Press. 

Spaić B. (2014), On the Essential Contestedness of the Concept of Law: Gallie's Framework for Essentially Contested Concepts Applied to the Law, *Synthesis Phil-osophica* 29(1): 175–189. 

Spanos A. (2010), Imperial Sanctity and Politico-Ecclesiastical Propaganda in Byzantium (9th–15th c.), in A. Michael, M. Kitts, B. Schneidmüller, G. Schvedler, E. Tounta, H. Kulke & U. Skoda

- (eds.), *Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual: Volume III. State, Power, and Violence* (pp. 197–213), Harrassowitz. [↗](#)
- Spanos A. (2014), Political Approaches to Byzantine Liturgical Texts, in R. Eriksen & P. Young (eds.), *Approaches to the Text: From Pre-Gospel to Post-Baroque* (pp. 63–81), Fabrizio Serra Editore (Early Modern and Modern Studies 9). [↗](#)
- Spanos A. & N. Zarras (2010), Representations of Emperors and Royals as Saints in Byzantine Virtual and Textual Sources, in M. Borgolte & B. Schneidmüller (eds.), *Hybrid Cultures in Medieval Europe: Papers and Workshops of an International Spring School* (pp. 63–78), Akademie Verlag (Europa im Mittelalter. Abhandlungen und Beiträge zur historischen Komparatistik 15). [↗](#)
- Sperber D. (2000), An Objection to the Memetic Approach to Culture, in R. Aunger (ed.), *Darwinizing Culture: The Status of Memetics as a Science* (pp. 163–173), Oxford University Press. [↗](#)
- Staley D. J. (2006), *History and Future: Using Historical Thinking to Imagine the Future*, Lexington Books. [↗](#)
- Staley D. J. (2021), *Historical Imagination*, Routledge. [↗](#)
- Sterelny K. (2006), Memes Revisited, *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 57(1): 145–165. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjps/axi157> [↗](#)
- Straub J. (2005), *Narration, Identity, and Historical Consciousness*, Berghahn Books. [↗](#)
- Stugu O. S. (2000), Frå undervisningslære til teori om historiemedvid og historiekultur—Nokre nyare utviklingslinjer i historiedidaktikken, *Småskrifter fra Historisk Institutt, NTNU* 1: 1–18. [↗](#)
- Stugu O. S. (2008), *Historie i bruk (History in Use)*, Samlaget. [↗](#)
- Suddendorf T. & M. C. Corballis (1997), Mental Time Travel and the Evolution of the Human Mind, *Genetic, Social and General Psychology Monographs* 123(2): 133–167. [↗](#)
- Swanton C. (1985), On the “Essential Contestedness” of Political Concepts, *Ethics* 95(4): 811–827. <https://doi.org/10.1086/292685> [↗](#)
- Tang S. (2020), *On Social Evolution: Phenomenon and Paradigm*, Routledge. [↗](#)

- Tattersall I. (2016), A Tentative Framework for the Acquisition of Language and Modern Human Cognition, *Journal of Anthropological Sciences (JASs)* 94: 157–166. [↗](#)
- Tetlock P. E. & G. Parker (2006), Counterfactual Thought Experiments, in P. E. Tetlock, R. N. Lebow & G. Parker (eds.), *Unmaking the West* (pp. 14–44), University of Michigan Press. [↗](#)
- Thorp R. (2014), Towards an Epistemological Theory of Historical Consciousness, *Historical Encounters: A Journal of Historical Consciousness, Historical Cultures, and History Education* 1(1): 20–31. [↗](#)
- Thorp R. (2016), *Uses of History in History Education*, PhD Thesis, Umeå University & Dalarna University. [↗](#)
- Thorp R. (2017), Deconstructing Karlsson, Part 1: Historical Consciousness, *Historical Encounters* 4(2): 1–10. [↗](#)
- Thorp R. (2020), How to Develop Historical Consciousness through Uses of History: A Swedish Perspective, *Historical Encounters: A Journal of Historical Consciousness, Historical Cultures, and History Education* 7(1): 50–61. [↗](#)
- Tomlinson G. (2018), *Culture and the Course of Human Evolution*, The University of Chicago Press. [↗](#)
- Tønnes Hansen J. (2001), *Selvet som rettethed*, Klim. [↗](#)
- Torgerson J. W. (2022), Historical Practice in the Era of Digital History, *History and Theory* 61(4): 37–63. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.12276> [↗](#)
- Tosh J. (2013), *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, Routledge (Kindle edition). [↗](#)
- Tosh J. (2015), The Limits of Historical Knowledge, in J. Tosh (ed.), *The Pursuit of History* (pp. 162–193), Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315728131-15> [↗](#)
- Turchin P. (2006), Scientific Prediction in Historical Sociology: Ibn Khaldun Meets Al Saud, in P. Turchin, L. Grinin, A. Korotayev & V. C. de Munck (eds.), *History and Mathematics: Historical Dynamics and Development of Complex Societies* (pp. 9–38), Russian State University for the Humanities—Volgograd Center for Social Research. [↗](#)

- Van Gulick R. (2021), Consciousness, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/consciousness>, accessed on May 2, 2022 
- Vithoulkas G. & D. F. Muresanu (2014), Conscience and Consciousness: A Definition, *Journal of Medicine and Life* 7(1): 104–108. 
- Voss M. T. (2016), *Regimes of Twentieth-Century Germany: From Historical Consciousness to Political Action*, Palgrave Macmillan. 
- Waldenegg G. C. B. (2011), What-If? Counterfactuality and History, in D. Birke, M. Butter & T. Köppe (eds.), *Counterfactual Thinking—Counterfactual Writing* (Vol. 12, pp. 130–149), De Gruyter.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110268669.130> 
- Waldron J. (2002), Is the Rule of Law an Essentially Contested Concept (in Florida)?, *Law and Philosophy* 21(2): 137–164.
<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1014513930336> 
- Walker Rettberg J. (2023), *Machine Vision: How Algorithms Are Changing the Way We See the World*, Polity Press. 
- Wenzlhuemer R. (2009), Counterfactual Thinking as a Scientific Method, *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 34(2 (128)): 27–54. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.34.2009.2.27-56> 
- Were M. N. (2022), Genealogies as an Interpretive Paradigm for Engaging African Women Writers' Historical Consciousness, *Journal of the African Literature Association* 16(1): 23–38.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21674736.2021.2016250> 
- Whitling F. (2010), *Damnatio Memoriae* and the Power of Remembrance. Reflections on Memory and History, in B. Stråth & M. Pakier (eds.), *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics or Remembrance* (pp. 87–97, 321–346), Berghahn. 
- Williams R. C. (2020), *The Historian's Toolbox: A Student's Guide to the Theory and Craft of History* (4th ed.), Routledge. 
- Wilschut A. (2019), Historical Consciousness of Time and Its Societal Uses, *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 51(6): 831–849.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2019.1652939> 

- Wineburg S. (2001), *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past*, Temple University Press. [📄](#)
- Wineburg S. (2010), Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts, *Phi Delta Kappan* 92(4): 81–94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171009200420> [📄](#)
- Zanazanian P. (2010), Historical Consciousness and Ethnicity: How Signifying the Past Influences the Fluctuations in Ethnic Boundary Maintenance, *Ethnic Studies Review* 33(2): 123–141. [📄](#)
- Zanazanian P. (2025), *Historical Consciousness and Practical Life: A Theory and Methodology*, University of Toronto Press. [📄](#)
- Zerubavel E. (2004), *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*, University of Chicago Press. [📄](#)
- Zheng H., J. Luo & R. Yu (2014), From Memory to Prospection: What Are the Overlapping and the Distinct Components Between Remembering and Imagining?, *Frontiers in Psychology* 5: 856. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00856> [📄](#)

Index

Note: Page references followed by n indicate notes.

2T see [two-dimensional](#)

3T see [three-dimensional](#)

actor history [35](#)

Adriaansen, Robbert-Jan [11n10](#), [12n12](#), [23](#)

anachronism [10](#), [70](#), [120–121](#), [124](#)

Anderson, Benedict [63](#)

Aristotle [76](#)

Aronsson, Peter [35](#), [36](#)

Augustine of Hippo [20](#)

awareness [15–19](#), [21](#), [23](#), [24](#), [26](#), [36](#), [49](#), [50](#), [73](#), [96](#), [100](#), [104](#),
[114nn11](#), [14](#), [125](#), [127](#), [140–144](#), [147](#), [150](#)

Bal, Mieke [92–93](#)

Bloch, Ernst [77](#), [78](#)

Bloom, Benjamin [111–112](#), [125n12](#)

Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives [111](#), [113](#), [114](#),
[125n12](#)

Bøe, Jan Bjarne [21](#), [22](#), [33](#), [42nn33](#), [34](#), [48](#), [99](#), [105n17](#),
[106nn18](#), [19](#)

Bracke, Sebasti [22](#)

Braudel, Fernand [78](#), [79](#), [81n9](#), [109](#)

Buonomano, Dean [128](#)

Cicero, Marcus Tullius [20](#), [23](#), [86](#)

Clark, Anna [34](#), [43n69](#)

Collingwood, R.G. [119](#), [146](#)

competence [29](#), [34](#), [113](#); of experience [25](#); of interpretation [25](#);
narrative [14](#), [21](#), [22](#), [24](#), [25](#), [30](#), [39](#), [82](#), [91](#); scenario [21](#), [139](#)
concept: abstract [5](#), [9](#), [49](#), [91](#), [92](#), [112n5](#), [115](#), [139](#); empirical [5](#),
[39](#), [91](#); procedural [92](#), [113](#); theoretical [13](#), [91](#), [112–113](#);
travelling [92](#), [93](#)
concept stretching [29](#)
consciousness: cognitive [50](#), [60](#), [150](#); epistemological [50](#), [150](#);
histocultural [67](#); of historicity [8](#), [14–20](#); histotemporal [8](#), [50](#),
[77](#), [143](#); metacognitive [50](#), [127](#); moral [24](#), [26–28](#); narrative [25](#),
[88](#); social [61–64](#); temporal [8](#), [14](#), [20–25](#), [27](#), [31](#), [134](#)
Creanza, Nicole [69](#)
cultom (definition) [67](#)
cultom (types) [67–68](#); doing [67](#), [68](#); physical [68](#); temporal [68](#);
thinking [67](#), [68](#)

Dawkins, Richard [66](#)
Dessingué, Alexandre [34](#), [53n8](#)
Diamond, Jared [121–123](#)
Dilthey, Wilhelm [15–16](#), [41n10](#)
Downey, Matthew T. [132](#)
Duquette, Catherine [23](#), [42n38](#), [43n81](#), [132](#)

Feldman, Marcus [69](#)
Flaving, Colin [22](#)
Folkenborg, Håkon Rune [99](#), [105–106nn17–19](#)

Gadamer, Hans-Georg [15–17](#), [32](#), [41nn6](#), [10](#), [45](#), [130](#), [148](#)
Glencross, Andrew [23](#), [41n1](#)
Grever, Maria [12n12](#), [19](#), [23](#)
Gulick, Robert van [47](#)

Hansen, Jan Tønnes [2](#), [11n2](#)
hardware [5](#), [8](#), [9](#), [48](#), [54](#), [57](#), [58](#); human-made [54–56](#); nature-
made [54](#), [56](#)
Herman, Paul [75](#), [84](#), [126nn21–23](#)
historical concept (definition) [5](#), [90](#), [91](#)

historical consciousness [48–50](#), [52](#); anticipatory [37](#); cognitive [8](#), [49](#), [54](#), [150](#); critical [26](#), [34](#), [145n23](#); developed [16](#); diagnostic [36](#); epistemological [10](#), [49](#), [146](#), [151](#); exemplary [26](#); genetic [26–27](#); innate [10](#), [142](#), [147](#), [148](#); metacognitive [9](#), [49](#), [50](#), [107](#), [124](#), [150](#), [151](#); nonreflective [23](#); reflective [10](#), [71](#), [147](#), [150](#); scientific [100](#); temporal [20–24](#), [80](#); traditional [27](#); undeveloped [16](#)

historical consciousness, orientational function of [52](#); epistemological-phenomenological [52](#), [53n8](#); existential [52](#)

historical empathy [70–71](#), [101](#), [112](#), [120](#), [131](#), [143](#)

historical futures [50](#), [77](#), [78](#), [80](#), [96–98](#), [101](#), [105](#), [136](#), [140](#)

historical knowledge [4–6](#), [107–125](#); conceptual [112](#), [113](#), [124](#), [138](#); factual [112](#), [139](#), [140](#); metacognitive [124](#); procedural [113](#); strategic [114](#)

historical perspective taking [10](#), [120](#), [131](#)

historical thinking (definition) [130](#), [132](#)

historical thinking (types) [30–32](#), [127–144](#); analytical [138](#); counterfactual [136](#), [137](#); critical [133](#), [139](#); episodic [136](#); imaginative [137](#); procedural [140](#); scenario [77](#), [139–140](#); self-reflective [140](#); semantic [136](#); synthetic [138](#); temporal [139](#)

historical truth [10](#), [76](#), [107](#), [110](#), [124](#), [137](#)

historicity (types): of the being [8](#), [9](#), [15](#), [17](#), [34](#), [50](#), [56](#), [58–71](#), [143](#), [146](#), [150](#); of historical narratives [9](#), [60](#), [82–86](#), [88–94](#), [140](#), [150](#); of time [9](#), [73–80](#), [150](#); of the world [8](#), [50](#), [54–58](#), [143](#), [146](#), [150](#), [151](#)

history use (definition) [35](#)

history use (types): antiquarian [98](#); commercial [103](#); critical [98](#), [131](#), [145n23](#); entertaining [102–103](#); existential [100–101](#); ideological [102](#); as instrument [100](#); meaning-making [35](#); monumental [98](#); moral [101](#); non-use [102](#); as pedagogical tool [100](#); performative [97](#); political [101–102](#); political-ideological [99](#); political-pedagogical [99](#); public [103](#); in school [103–104](#); scientific [100](#)

Hofstede, Geert [65](#)

horizon of expectation [18](#), [22](#), [36](#), [79–80](#), [97](#), [109](#)

imagination [22](#), [47](#), [63](#), [76](#), [116](#), [119](#), [137](#); creative [119](#); mimetic [119](#)

imagined communities [22](#), [63](#)

imagined history [10](#), [70](#), [111](#), [118–120](#), [124](#), [137](#), [139](#)

Jeismann, Karl-Ernst [16–20](#), [22](#), [24](#), [32](#), [41n17](#), [79](#)

Jensen, Bernard Eric [18](#), [21](#), [22](#), [35](#), [37](#), [42nn29](#), [33](#), [71](#), [82](#), [105](#), [139](#)

Karlsson, Klas-Göran [7](#), [13](#), [22](#), [33](#), [35](#), [42n35](#), [43n62](#), [98–99](#)

Knutsen, Ketil [36](#), [99](#)

Körber, Andreas [29](#), [37](#)

Koselleck, Reinhardt [18](#), [22](#), [36](#), [78–80](#), [89](#), [97](#), [109](#)

Köster, Manuel [22](#)

Le Goff, Jacques [89](#)

Lévesque, Stéphane [28](#), [126n24](#), [133](#)

Levisohn, Jon [85](#)

Long, Kelly A. [132](#)

Lowenthal, David [107](#), [111](#)

Lukacs, John [30](#)

MacMillan, Margaret [99](#), [101](#), [104](#)

Mair, Peter [92](#)

McCullagh, C. Behan [84](#)

meme theory [67](#)

memory: collective [8](#), [14](#), [31–35](#), [52](#), [63](#), [135](#), [142](#); self-biographic [35](#)

memory, phenomenology of [34](#), [53n8](#)

memory consciousness [34](#), [53n8](#)

mnemonic communities [19](#)

Morton, Tom [130](#)

Muresanu, D.F. [47](#)

narrative (types) [82](#), [85](#); critical [86](#); exemplary [86](#); genetic [86](#); traditional [85](#), [86](#)

narrative competence [14](#), [21](#), [22](#), [24](#), [25](#), [30](#), [39](#), [82](#), [91](#)

niche-construction [70](#)

Nietzsche, Friedrich [98](#), [101](#), [131](#), [139](#), [145n23](#)

Nordgren, Kenneth [7](#), [11n9](#), [22](#), [95](#)

observer history [35](#)

Ohman Nielsen, May-Brith [33](#), [34](#)

past: experienced [76](#); imagined [76](#); learned [76](#)

Peck, Carla [34](#)

Popa, Nathalie [28–29](#), [43n51](#)

Ranganath, Charan [134](#)

reality (types): physical [10](#), [127](#), [129](#); temporal [10](#), [48](#), [49](#), [85](#),
[97](#), [127](#), [129](#), [156](#), [151](#)

retrodiction [70](#), [76](#), [111](#), [119](#), [137](#)

Roitman, Janet Lee [18](#)

Rüsen, Jörn [8](#), [14](#), [22](#), [24–28](#), [30](#), [39](#), [42nn42](#), [44](#), [82](#), [83](#), [85](#), [86](#),
[89](#), [111](#), [125n4](#), [139](#), [145n23](#)

Rystad, Göran [99](#)

Sartori, Giovanni [93](#)

Schieder, Theodor [17](#)

Seixas, Peter [31](#), [32](#), [130](#), [131](#), [146](#)

Simon, Zoltán Boldiszar [77](#), [80](#)

software [5](#), [8](#), [9](#), [48](#); human-made [9](#), [54–58](#), [63](#); nature-made
[54–56](#)

space of experience [5](#), [18](#), [22](#), [36](#), [42n20](#), [79–80](#), [91](#), [97](#), [109](#)

Staley, David [119](#)

Stugu, Ola Svein [99](#)

Tamm, Marek [77](#), [80](#)

Tang, Shiping [57](#), [62](#)

temporality [18](#), [23](#), [25](#), [28](#), [29](#), [34](#), [41](#), [50](#), [78](#), [79](#), [91](#), [109](#)

Thorp, Robert [7](#), [18](#), [19](#), [36](#), [37](#), [43n81](#)

three-dimensional [4](#), [11n5](#)

three-dimensional history [4](#), [11n5](#)

time (categories/types): biological [9](#), [74](#); cultural [9](#), [74](#), [75](#);
historical [2](#), [5](#), [6](#), [9](#), [19](#), [33](#), [49](#), [50](#), [73](#), [75–80](#), [81n9](#), [91](#), [109](#),
[129](#), [139](#); physical [9](#), [73–77](#), [80](#), [139](#); structural [75](#)

two-dimensional history [4](#), [11n5](#)

Vithoulikas, G. [47](#)

Wineburg, Sam [115](#)

Zanazanian, Paul [29](#), [44n89](#)

Zerubabel, Eviatar [85](#), [88](#), [140](#)

Zulsdorf-Kersting, Meik [22](#)
