

Fundamental Concepts in Contemporary European Historiography

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Introduction

The aim of the study support is to trigger reflection on old and new ways of history in both teaching and research. It is not possible to attempt to describe the various fields and periods of history. Here, it is appropriate to mention that though there are many other historical approaches that are not discussed in this study support on account of delimitations of time and space, this brief survey of contemporary historiography attempts to cover major influential thoughts in recent history. Historians have always been thinking increasingly of new ways in which to deal with the past. They have sought the best ways to research the past, have tried new modes of historical narrative, have cut history into pieces, have come back to grand long-term interpretations, have doubted their own ability to learn about the past. The various historical fields, the new ways of history and the theoretical trends need a single volume, not only a brief survey. Moreover, specialisation in history is such that historians tend to read, publish and communicate only with historians of their own field, area or period of study. The main strengths of this text is that it gives an overview of developments during the last thirty years and the changing agenda of questions in several historical fields, chronological, thematic and regional. Of course, “in real”, it must have been done by historians practising in a particular field of history; however, in this study support, it has been done it by a single person.

The main concepts around which other demands revolve are inheritance, memory, celebration of anniversaries, “the present”, identity, crimes against humanity, globalisation. The historian has to deal with the media, or various pressure groups, which implement strategies of “history” that explain “who we are” or give an identity. Futhermore, the concept of globalisation and its influence on historiography or the so-called global history elicits relevant answers of post-modernism. Is this a transitional stage or the domination of “the present” in historical thought?

It is appropriate to mention that the following text is consisted of parts of various academic texts, which was written in English in the past. The study support is thus based on scholarly literature, as well as open-access sources. These open-access sources, as well as other reference books are not quoted. However, all of them are cited at the end of the study support. Although there are my own words in the text, they are in the minority. Most of the texts are not mine. Still, the quotations are not marked since my job was just to compile a study support, not to write a new text. After all, the following text, I hope, provide its readers the easy of reference in various ways of the contemporary historiography in Europe. The “West” neither invented nor enjoyed a monopoly on history. Nor has history been the cosely guarded possession of history’s high priesthood, academics working mainly in institutions of higher education. Hopefully, the readers get a clearer picture of the recent trends in history as a whole. I have tried to reflect on the different views of history, on existing traditions, limitations and ways to go ahead. In this way from the juxtaposition of various approaches of different historical fields. After all, history is always renewing itself, in both old and new directions.

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Milestones

1929	The journal <i>Annales</i> is established
1938	C. L. R. James's <i>The Black Jacobins</i> is published, a forerunner of what would become postcolonial scholarship decades further on
1939	Georges Lefebvre's <i>The Coming of the French Revolution</i> is published in English Marc Bloch's <i>Feudal Society</i> is published
1940	<i>Journal of the History of Ideas</i> is established
1941	Fan Wenlan's <i>General History of China</i> is published in Chinese
1946	Mary Ritter Beard's <i>Woman as Force in History</i> is published
1949	Fernand Braudel's <i>The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II</i> is published
1952	The journal <i>Past and Present</i> is founded
1956	Hungarian Revolution crushed; many Marxist historians depart from Britain's Communist Party
1958	Modern "psychohistory", drawing on S. Freud, exemplified in E. H. Erikson's <i>Young Man Luther</i>
1963	E. p. Thompson's <i>The Making of the English Working Class</i> is published
1964	UNESCO inaugurates a <i>General History of Africa</i> (comp. 1990s)
1966	Beginning of the Cultural Revolution in China
1973	Hayden White's <i>Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe</i> is published in the USA
1974	Robert William Fogel and Stanley Engerman's <i>Time on the Cross</i> is published
1978	Edward Said's <i>Orientalism</i> is published
1982	First volume of <i>Subaltern Studies</i> published under leadership of Ranajit Guha
1986-1989	The <i>Historikerstreit</i> in West Germany
1988	Joan Wallach Scott's <i>Gender and the Politics of History</i> is published; beginning of Australian "History Wars"
1989	Fall of Berlin Wall and beginnings of the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc; interaction between western and eastern academic communities increases
1992	Controversy in the USA over celebrations of 500 th anniversary of Columbus' voyage; there are subsequent clashes over textbooks, school curricula and museum displays Francis Fukuyama's <i>The End of History and the Last Man</i> is published
1995	Francis Fukuyama's <i>Trust: Social Virtues and Creation of Prosperity</i> is published
1996	Samuel P. Huntington's <i>The Clash of Civilizations</i> is published
1996-2000	Irving vs Lipstadt libel trial, over allegations by Deborah Lipstadt of the inaccuracy of David Irving's writings on the Holocaust
1999	John Cornwell's <i>Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII</i> is published
2011	Friedrich Beiser's <i>The German Historicist Tradition</i> is published
2012	Gordon Thomas' <i>The Pope's Jews: The Vatican's Secret Plan to Save Jews from the Nazis</i> is published

I/ What is History Today?

Our subjects aren't idealistic either.

For, in the 1980s and 1990s, we gave up on teaching great texts and urging students to debate about great ideas. Instead of feeding the young bread, the best that has been thought and said, we handed them something worse than a stone: a sausage machine, named Theory, that transformed everything we put into it, from Homer to Walcott and Sappho to Woolf, into a single, uniform, and displeasing product.

Anthony Grafton

First and foremost, it would be pertinent to understand **these three concepts** – **history**, **philosophy of history** and **historiography**. Etymologically, **history** is a Greek word meaning an investigation and inquiry. Generally, history is considered both a set of written records of the past human actions and an academic discipline (as Noam Chomsky said: *History is not a science, it is more story-telling.*¹) that not only uses a narrative to represent the past events and but also studies the chronological records of events affecting a nation or people. According to *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, history “...refers to two distinct, though related, things. One the one hand it refers to the temporal progression of large-scale human events primarily, but not exclusively in the past; and on the other hand, *history* refers to the discipline or inquiry in which knowledge of human past is acquired or sought.” (7:386) It is here evident that human beings and their action are the core concern of history. The *Encyclopedia Americana* defines history as “...the past experience of mankind. More exactly, history is the memory of that past experience, as it has been preserved, largely in written records. In the usual sense, history is the product of historians’ work in reconstructing the flow of events from the original written traces or sources into a narrative account.” (Vol 14)² And the historians have always their limitations – tendency, ideology, insufficient education, wrong choice of sources, historians may be subjective, not understanding, close-minded, liars (!), too technocratic in attempt to be objective, and so on. The repertoire of history thus consists of sources like documents, evidence, written records, and “reconstructed” narratives by historians. On the other hand, **philosophy of history** is, as *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*³ avers, conventionally associated with the “...philosophical reflection on the historical process itself, or it can mean philosophical reflection on the knowledge we have of the historical process.” (7:386) Unlike **historiography** that mainly deals with method, process and various modes of writing history, philosophy of history primarily aims at the goal, objective, orientation, nature and scope of history. *Britannica Encyclopedia* defines historiography as “the writing of history, especially the writing of history based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particulars from the authentic materials in those sources, and the synthesis of those particulars into a narrative that will stand the test of critical methods. The term historiography refers to the theory and history of historical writing.” (Micropaedia, 948-

¹ Alternatively, see these sayings: *The Historian, before he begins to write history, is the product of history.* (E. H. Carr); *History is what we think that happened in the past.* (Dávid Tužinčin. II.C, 2013); *History is not a very clear picture of the past, made up from facts that we think are important.* (Adam Jerguš Dzurňák, I.C, 2015); *History is everything we have and we know from the past.* (Matej Dudák I.B, 2015).

² *History.* The Encyclopedia Americana. 2001 ed. Print.

³ David CARR, *Philosophy of History.* Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. Ed. Donald M. Borchert. 2nd ed. Vol. 7. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006. Print.

49).⁴ Though historiography and philosophy of history seem to be interlinked with each other, they noticeably differ in meaning and motif vis-à-vis writing and purpose of history.



Secondly, it is necessary to say: the humanities are in danger in the West in the twenty-first century. Since the 1960s, politicians and pundits, creative destroyers and creative writers point out, humanities enrolments have crashed, and about time. Teachers in the humanities deserved to loose their students. Common people saying with politicians: your subjects aren't practical. Pundits agree that college should prepare students for the world of work – while the humanities prepare them for something more, like irresponsible, and impractical, intellectual play. That is the position of the humanities including history in the population in the West.

Major methodological advances in the humanities are usually not as frequent, nor as dramatic, as advances in the natural sciences. Two notable exceptions to this rule are found in the period of the Enlightenment and in the current revolution in the storage and retrieval of information. However, the research interests of historians change over time, and there has been a shift away from traditional diplomatic, economic, and political history toward newer approaches, especially social and cultural studies. From 1975 to 1995 the proportion of professors of history in American universities identifying with social history increased from 31 to 41 percent, while the proportion of political historians decreased from 40 to 30 percent.⁵ In 2007, of 5,723 faculty in the departments of history at British universities, 1,644 (29 percent) identified themselves with social history and 1,425 (25 percent) identified themselves with political history.⁶ Since the 1980s there has been a special interest in the memories and commemoration of past events – the histories as remembered and presented for popular celebration.⁷

We all know now that advances in technology are currently influencing the humanities on a scale comparable to the impact of the scientific method during the Enlightenment, and scholars are now talking about the influence of the computer, the Internet including social nets on the study of history as a paradigm-defining change. This change was adumbrated two decades ago at a time prior to the massive impact of electronic books, online journals, and

⁴ *Historiography*. The New Encyclopaedia Britannica. (Micropaedia). 15th ed. Vol. 5. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2010. Print.

⁵ Diplomatic dropped from 5 to 3 percent, economic history dropped from 7 to 5 percent, and cultural history grew from 14 to 16 percent. Based on the number of full-time professors in U.S. history departments. Stephen H. HABER, David M. KENNEDY, and Stephen D. KRASNER, *Brothers under the Skin: Diplomatic History and International Relations*, International Security, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer, 1997), pp. 34–43 at p. 42 online at JSTOR.

⁶ See *Teachers of History in the Universities of the UK 2007 – listed by research interest*. Archived 2006-05-30 at the Wayback Machine.

⁷ David GLASSBERG, *Public history and the study of memory*. The Public Historian 18.2 (1996), pp. 7-23 online.

above all digitalisation projects of major collections of rare books and archival collections. Thirty-five years ago even in the USA and Western Europe it was commonly thought that the use of computers and sources in microform applied to only certain types of historical investigation, such as economic and social history, or more narrowly, to those areas that were susceptible to quantification.

Yet a number of well-known scholars resisted the so-called “new history” with a passion that bordered on paranoia. They feared that the new methods would drain history of meaning; most of the critics worked in the field of intellectual history (of them church historians the most), and in their apprehensions, the spectre of economic determinism was always standing in the wings. However, innovations in storing and searching documents have simply passed all these critics by and placed the debate on an entirely new footing. It is now evident that scholars in all areas of history and other humanities must become thoroughly acquainted with the new and constantly developing techniques. The revolution in the manipulation of information made possible by the computer and the Internet is clearly transforming the nature of research, though, to be sure, the mental habits of disciplined study and critical judgment remain unchanged. In most fields of historical inquiry, the nature of critical study today thus necessarily entails the utilisation of new searching techniques based on the Internet. The new technology bodes well for the creation of new research projects, old topics can now be re-examined, but with more extensive documentation, and, hence, greater precision.

For instance, it is possible now to study much more historical texts which allows us to offer new interpretations concerning the influence of ideas. The entire written corpus of less well-known persons can now be examined, and their works will often provide enough new material to sustain a new research work (articles and monographs, as well as unpublished texts, such as dissertations and theses). These techniques for identifying people in the past have implications for the study of minorities and women’s studies in history. Clearly, traditionally hard copy bibliographies, particularly in specialised fields, will remain essential, but given the current rate of proliferation of monographic literature, computerised searching has become mandatory.

Researchers on the Internet need to understand a basic distinction between the public and the hidden web – or as also identified, the visible and invisible or the surface and deep web. Nearly six hundred times as much material exists (2018) on the hidden web as on the public or surface web that is searched by standard engines. Of course, the resources of the hidden web also need to be distinguished into unrestricted and restricted (a log-in and password will be necessary) databases. There is also a middle category. It is a hidden database that asks for a log-in and password, but allows anyone the privilege of requesting a log-in and password for entrance.

II/ Historiography in Europe after 1945 – Major Concepts

Reading on the twentieth-century historiography, one can come across with the expression “postmodern historiography”. **Post-modern historiography** designates an array of approaches to historical inquiry that eschew modern historiographical assumptions. Modern historiographical assumptions rejected by postmodern historiography include teleology, coherence, totalising (or “grand”) narratives, determinism, progress, truth, realism, objectivity, universality, and essentialism. Postmodern historiographical approaches have been described variously as counter-history, metahistory, critical and effective history, new historicism, and new cultural history. Postmodern historiography is exemplified most notably in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Hayden White, and Stephen Greenblatt.

After the first quarter of the last century, the French historiography was almost dominated by the **Annales school of history** that emerged in the wake of the various subdivisions and specialisations of history: economic history, political history, social history, history of science and of arts. This school of historical thought was primarily concerned with history for history, and was shaped itself as a resistance to those multiple bifurcations of the core discipline of history. Compared to the dominant German school of history led by Leopold von Ranke who emphasised the narrative structure to history and the past event (‘as it actually happened’), the Annales refused it and developed almost contrary conviction-history, science of the past and science of the present. Started in the form of a journal by **Lucien Febvre** (1878–1956) and **Marc Bloch** (1886–1944), two French scholars much influenced by the earlier work of the sociologist Durkheim and the geographer Henri Berr, and later advanced by Fernand Braudel, the historiography of the Annales aimed at breaking down the barriers among social sciences by not only incorporating elements from geography, environment, culture, politics, but also focusing on the different periods of time (hinting at long-term and short-term). The *Annalistes*’ repudiation of the political history of previous decades – Febvre condemned Charles Seignobos for an obsession with events – in favour of an *histoire totale* that examined geography, climate, economy, and agricultural and trade patterns, as well as manners, still seems fresh after seventy-five years. It is, however, a further reminder of the recurrent swing of the pendulum of European historiographical taste between the social and the political, the broad and the particular, dating back to the Enlightenment – and beyond, as far back as Herodotus and Thucydides. As a key proponent of the Annales **Fernand Braudel** (1902–1985) gives an outline of his design of temporality in his *On History* (1980) and distinguishes three broad groups of historical time – geographical time (denotes changelessness that embodies history of man in relation to his surroundings), social time (history of gentle rhythms, of groups and groupings), and an individual time (the traditional history-history of events, of short time). He tries to illustrate history – the classic expression of this layered periodization is Braudel’s own study of *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* –, and writes *Just like life itself, history seems to us to be a fleeting spectacle, always in movement, made up of a web of problems meshed inextricable together, and able to assume a hundred different and contradictory aspect in turn*.⁸ In his opinion, history is not unilateral and has no centre at all. For Braudel, the meaning in history is relational, not substantial: the meaning of events, objects and individual actions does not lie in themselves, but in the relationship, we construct between them. He explains the objectives of history in his article *Personal Testimony*, “What the Annales proclaimed, much later, was history whose scope would extend to embrace all the sciences of man- to the ‘globality’ of all the human sciences, and which would seize upon them all in

⁸ This is a loose translation of Lucien Febvre’s aphorism, ‘*Histoire science du passé, science du présent*’. It can be compared with the Ranke’s dictum, ‘*wie es eigentlich gewesen*’.

some fashion or other to construct its own proper methods and true domains.” (457) He believed that history is as much about the present as about the past and both past and present illumine each other reciprocally. The statistical tendencies of many members of Braudel’s generation of *Annalistes* are most clearly evident in the work of **Pierre Chaunu** (1923–2009; whose history of Seville and the Atlantic established a subgenre often called “serial history” because of its attention to establishing continuous series of historical data on such matters as food prices). Intellectual historians such as **Robert Mandrou** (1921–1984) and **François Furet** (1927–1997) pioneered a quantitative approach to **the history of mentalités**, opening up what has since evolved into *histoire du livre*, **the history of the book**. In more recent decades, however, the Annales historians have veered away from quantification to the study of mentalités in Bloch and Febvre’s mode, with considerably more emphasis being placed on individual and collective beliefs, and on life experienced in local settings. **The “microhistory”** genre of the late 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, including works like **Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie**’s *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error* (a study of a mediaeval Cathar village) and **Carlo Ginzburg**’s *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*, has proved highly saleable in the academic and even popular book market and has spawned numerous European and North American imitators.

That the strong insistence on the possibilities of scientific approaches to history advocated by the Annales school of historiography paved the way for a new formulation on history-writing and it was, in effect, the role of narrative that brought out significant changes to existing historiography. One of the most prominent theorists who have championed the interrelationship between narrative and history is **Paul Ricoeur** (1913–2005) whose three-volume work *Time and Narrative* (1984–88) deals with the reconfiguration of human time through narrative. His idea on the nexus between history and narrative is shown through his conviction which asserts that, *My thesis is that history the most removed from the narrative form continues to be bound to our narrative understanding by a line of derivation that we can reconstruct step by step and degree by degree with an appropriate method.* (Vol I, 91) Ricoeur’s thesis on the entanglement of temporality and narrativity delineates a systematic distinction between historical narrative and fictional narrative in the light of temporality that is the structure of human existence. His narrativist interpretation of history has gained much wider currency in poststructuralist discourses on historiography since many historiographers like Hayden White, Frank Ankersmit, etc. have strongly upheld Ricoeur’s formulation later. His theory of the construction of historical time is one of the major enterprises that impacted contemporary historiography.

Against the backdrop of *history proper* as a discipline that strictly seeks the continuity from the past to the present and often tries to establish the stable relationship between them, a new methodology in history formulated by **Michel Foucault** (1926–1984) appears to locate discontinuity instead. He argues that recent developments in postmodernist and poststructuralist historiography have substantially exhibited strong potentiality for proliferation of discontinuity in the history of ideas. Mark Poster in Foucault, *Marxism and History* (1984) presents Foucault’s concept of discontinuity:

Foucault attempts to show how the past was different, strange, threatening. He labors to distance the past from the present, to disrupt the easy, cozy intimacy that historians have traditionally enjoyed in the relationship of the past to the present. He strives to alter the position of the historian from one who gives support to the present by collecting all the meanings of the past and tracing the line of inevitability through which they are resolved in the present, to one who breaks off the past from the present and by demonstrating the foreignness of the past relativizes and undercuts the legitimacy of the present. (74)

In other words, history seems to be abandoning the traditionally associated tasks of defining relations of simple causality, of circular determination, and of expression between facts. In defence of discontinuity, Foucault argues in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) that “It has now become one of the basic elements of historical analysis.” (Introd., 9)⁹ His conviction for new methodology in history displays a paradigm shift from a total history to general history. Foucault aptly points out that, “a total description [history] draws all phenomena around a single centre- a principle, a meaning, a spirit, a world-view, an overall shape; a general history, on the contrary, would deploy the space of a dispersion.” (Introd., 11) This point of departure from a total history to a general history is marked with a remarkable change in the *modus operandi* of the use of documents (used by traditional historians to build a narrative of the past that is continuous and that merges with the present). As a result, it is bound to evaluate the metamorphosis in terms of the function that history is assigned with. With regard to changed function of history, Foucault mentions that, “...history now organizes the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders it, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, defines unities, describe relations.” (Introd., 7) Hence, his endeavour is directed to detach the image of history which has been constituted since the beginning of historiography.

It is widely agreed that the project of the narrativist interpretation of history that was started systematically by Paul Ricoeur, is further carried out and is elaborately theorised by American historiographer **Hayden White** (1928–2018) in his magnum opus *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in the Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973). Here he sets forth the interpretative principles on which a historical work is interpreted. For him, the historical work is “...a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of explaining what they were by representing them.” (Introd., 2) White argues that historians use three kinds of strategy to gain different kinds of *explanatory effects* – explanation by formal argument, explanation by emplotment and explanation by ideological implication. Within each of these strategies he identifies four possible modes of articulation. They are, in effect, proved to be instrumental in ascertaining a particular kind of explanatory effect in a work of history. In short, he believes that historiography does not differ from fiction but is a form of it. Like in fiction, White argues, the role of language is crucial in order to provide a desired explanation to any historical writing, because the past is invented or imagined, not found by the historians. Thus, a historical work is designed after a combination of explanatory strategies and modes of articulation and that in turn, brings a historiographical style of a specific kind to historians who practise it in their own ways, though differently. White’s enterprise is demonstrated in his effort that tries to establish the relation between narrative discourse and historical representation. Later he tried to elaborate this theory of narrative and history in his two books, viz. *The Tropic of Discourse* (1978) and *The Content of the Form* (1987).

If irrationalism, scepticism, and pessimism were the dominant chords struck in Western Europe and, to a lesser degree, in North America, the dissonant sound from further east came in the form of **Marxism**. Just prior to the Bolshevik Revolution, Kliuchevskii’s former pupil, **Mikhail Nikolaevich Pokrovskii** (1868–1932), developed a Marxist version of Russian history in his multivolume study *History of Russia from the Earliest Times to the Rise of Commercial Capitalism* (1910–1914; English trans. 1931). This was endorsed by Lenin and for a time Pokrovskii was the dominant force in early Soviet historiography; after his death,

⁹ Michel FOUCAULT, *Introduction*. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. London: Routledge, 1972, pp. 3-19. Print.

however, he was condemned by Stalin and abandoned by Party historians for his lack of nationalist sentiment. Initial tolerance of intellectual autonomy in the 1920s gave way to rigid Party control in the 1930s, and the state would have an overbearing influence on history-writing from the purges of scholars in the 1930s to the collapse of the Soviet Union seven decades later. This control spread far beyond the borders of the USSR to include the various Soviet satellite states and Warsaw Pact allies in Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, East Germany, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Without state sanctions to support it, academic Marxism never attained a dominant position in the West, but had a profound influence nonetheless through the 1980s. Marxist, socialist, or left-leaning historiography began to appear in the Western democracies relatively early in the twentieth century; the leading Norwegian historian of the first half of the twentieth century, **Halvdan Koht** (1873–1965), for instance was an early self-avowed Marxist. The attraction of Marxism increased in the aftermath of the financial collapse of 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression, which seemed to bear out Marx’s views of the inevitable collapse of capitalism. The dalliance of many interwar British and some American intellectuals with communism provided the earliest examples of historiography that, in the 1960s, would evolve into Labour history, “radical history,” and what is sometimes called “history from below.” Several classics of late twentieth-century historical writing such as **E. P. Thompson**’s (1924–1993) *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) and **Georges Lefebvre**’s (1874–1959) many books on the French revolution were written from an explicitly Marxist, albeit more humanistic, perspective that emphasised the daily lives of the history’s underclasses. A modified version of Marxism articulated by the Italian socialist **Antonio Gramsci** (1891–1937), with its concept of cultural “hegemony,” has retained an influence in much non-Marxist historical scholarship and literary history.

If any word most characterises twentieth-century and especially post-1945 historiography, it would have to be fragmentation (a more optimistic descriptor might be **diversity**, or perhaps more neutrally, **specialisation**), or, in Jeremy D. Pokin’s words, “**glorious confusion**”. This is not a new concern. There have always been those across all the global traditions who called for integration of the various pieces of history into a meaningful whole. Even Leopold von Ranke worried about specialisation and spent his last years attempting a *Weltgeschichte*; so did his younger contemporary and sometime critic, the ancient historian Theodor Mommsen (1817–1903). The popularity of the first modern wave of “world history” during the 1960s and 1970s produced an early tranche of reformed introductory courses in university curricula, competing with the older, Eurocentric “Western Civ” or “Plato to NATO” surveys. Practitioners such as **Jerry H. Bentley** (1949–2012), **William H. McNeill** (1917 – 2016) and his son, the environmental historian **J. R. McNeill** (b. 1954), have contributed well-known texts in the field. The earliest raft of such works, in the 1960s and 1970s, coincided with the heyday of historical sociology, with the beginnings of what is sometimes called “world systems theory”, articulated by social scientists such as the Fernand Braudel-trained American historical sociologist **Immanuel Wallerstein** (b. 1930), and with the comparative work of fellow sociologists **Barrington Moor, Jr** (1913 – 2005) and **Theda Skocpol**. The same period saw the early emergence of modern medical history and an interest in biological and ecological transference (for instance in Alfred W. Crosby’s classic *The Columbian Exchange*, or the elder McNeill’s *Plagues and Peoples*) and an upward spike in the popularity of Latin American and African history among undergraduates (sometimes as part of interdisciplinary programmes such as International Development Studies or Environmental Studies). Historians are now political, military, family, gender, women’s, economic, social, environmental, intellectual or cultural, and the expansion of

university history departments especially in the 1960s¹⁰ has encouraged a high degree of subspecialisation, together with a proliferation of journals and book series (which the introduction of the Internet shows no sign of slowing down given its capacity to offer cheap alternatives to conventional print). Although Marxism has by and large faded from most North American history departments, social history has been maintained, albeit now often dissolved into various components. Among these, women's history and its offshoot, the history of gender (now including masculinity studies) have perhaps been the most successful in reshaping the recent agenda of the entire discipline. The history of particular ethnicities and religions or sexual orientations has also become more firmly established in departments and often in specialty journals. Interdisciplinary approaches to history began seriously in the 1960s with historians looking to the social sciences, especially sociology and economics, for the theoretical underpinnings that appeared to be lacking from history itself (it is remarkable how often in the history of historical writing a great cataclysm has been followed by a search for new certitudes, a pronounced scepticism toward old ones, or both in combination). Among the more interesting if controversial experiments one must include psychohistory (best represented by **Erik H. Erikson**). Equally debatable has been the use of "counterfactuals" (the supposition that events in history occurred in ways other than they actually did, and the attempt to model mathematically a hypothetical projected course of events from that alternate starting point), especially in the "Cliometric" or **New Economic History** of American academics such as Robert W. Fogel. In the 1980s and 1990s, as the stock of sociology and economics began to fall in the judgment of historians, many turned instead to the work of **cultural anthropologists** such as **Clifford Geertz, Marshall Sahlins, and Victor Turner**. (In contrast, social scientists, as **Eric H. Monkkonen** and others have argued, maintain a steadfast claim to the appropriation of history across their various disciplines, without necessarily intending by "history" the discipline that historians actually practice.) Meanwhile, the "history of ideas" has been transformed at one end into cultural history (including most recently the history of the book), and at the other into the pursuit of the meaning of terms and of texts in their linguistic and/or social contexts. The latter stream is in turn divisible into a so-called **Cambridge School of the history of political thought**, associated with **Quentin Skinner** (b. 1940) in Britain and **J. G. A. Pocock** in the United States, the **Begriffsgeschichte** (history of political and social concepts) approach associated with the German **Reinhart Koselleck** (1923–2006), and the "New Historicist" and "cultural materialist" movements in literary criticism.

In the last quarter of the 20th century, a grave concern was displayed on the perpetuation of historiography (history as well for that matter) through an apprehension that tried to predict the end of it in the contemporary period, because history as a discipline is extensively affected by the emergence of interdisciplinary nature of various discourses of human sciences. But recent developments in the field of historiography betray that apprehension, for a host of **postmodernist and poststructuralist historiographers** has carried forward the project of historiography in tandem with the changing pattern of discoverable complexity in historical studies. It may be argued that of late, in the wake of the scientific advancement and the postmodern challenges, many historiographers who try to counter such challenging forces, have arisen to prominence either by expounding new approaches to history or by extending the horizons of existing theory of history-writing. Some names, for examples, would illustrate the point further – **Alun Munslow (deconstructive historiography)**, **Keith Jenkins, (history as literary narrative about the past)**, **Dominick LaCapra (integrating critical theory with**

¹⁰ The expansion of university history departments throughout the West, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, along with considerably greater pressure on academics, since the 1980s, to publish early and often, has encouraged a high degree sub-specialisation.

the rethinking of history), Frank Ankersmit (proposing “representation” in history over explanation and interpretation), etc. Apart from European and American historiographies that are here dealt with, many other important historiographies are remained out of the domain of discussion – Chinese, Islamic and Indian historiography.

III/ Historiography in Europe in the Twenty-First Century

At the start of the twenty-first century, there was a high degree of disintegration and remarkably little consensus as to what a “proper” historical method is, what phenomena constitute legitimate subjects of historical inquiry or whether any historical narrative merits “privileging” (a favoured term of literary criticism) as true – or at least more true – over any other. But in facing our own postmodern confusion, we would be entirely wrong to project a nostalgic, supposititious, and comfortable uniformity of opinion onto the historical thought of earlier times.

There are periodic efforts to put history together again, such as the establishment in the late 1990s in the USA of a new Historical Society by the one-time leftist-turned-conservative **Eugene Genovese** (1930–2012) and others to redress the compartmentalisation of history and its association with identity politics. The Canadian historian **J. L. Granatstein** (b. 1939) has similar pleas. The International Congress of Historical Sciences, which meets at five-year intervals in different locations, routinely includes world history themes in its programmes and draws historians from around the globe. Academic journals are increasingly publishing articles devoted to transnational topics, and new journals such as the *Journal of World History* (1990) and *Journal of Global History* (2006) have appeared. Even that most insularly Western of sub-disciplines, intellectual history, is now being revisited from a global perspective. Sceptics there been, who point to sometimes superficial similarities adduced by enthusiastic comparativists, who gloss over critical differences. R. G. Collingwood, a firm Eurocentrist, did not think much of comparison, and believed that it added nothing to our understanding of a particular event. The resurgence in the past two decades of a reconfigured “global history”, with much of the planet now divided rather differently than during the Cold War, has lent those earlier efforts renewed relevance.

But “putting back together” is often really only a polite way of saying that the agenda ought to be re-narrowed and focused on “traditional topics” such as political and military history, at least partly on the grounds that these are overwhelmingly more popular as subjects among casual readers than more specialist works. Inaccessible jargon has also become a target (with some causes, though this presumes that academic history should somehow be more accessible than other disciplines, the sciences especially, which have technical terminology of their own) of those who believe that university-based historians have lost the ability to communicate clearly and in sentences understandable by a reasonably educated, non-specialist reader. Stylistic complaints against historians, too, are scarcely new – recall the complaints of many Renaissance humanists about the unreadability of mediaeval chronicles, or of Enlightenment philosophers with respect to the fact-laden tomes of the erudite. Historians, like other professionals, are often forced to make hard choices between the presentation of highly nuanced and qualified views of the world (past and present) that will confuse and frustrate a general audience, and the simplification of complex issues (“dumbing down”) into assertions easily accessible to a reading public (and suitable for 15-second sound-bites, or 140 character tweets). Social media have provided a forum for some especially vicious historical debates.¹¹ The old debate between the nature of historical knowledge versus the empiricism of the natural sciences even arose when a geneticist argued that science offered the only legitimate route to understanding the past, rather than “historian hearsay

¹¹ One such debate flared up on Twitter in 2017 on the issue of whether Roman Britain had a “diverse” population. Apart from the inevitable uninformed “trolls”, the debate featured an eminent Cambridge classicist, Mary Beard (b. 1955), arguing that there was indeed evidence for non-white population in Roman Britain, against opponents who (incorrectly) deemed this absurd, politically correct revisionism.

bullshit”. (A position repudiated almost immediately, it should be stressed, by at least one other geneticist.) The abuse and lack of civil discourse evident in social media and commentary elsewhere on the Internet would have embarrassed the most scathing book reviewer in an academic journal.

At the same time, the internet has proved an enormous boon in other ways. Major international collaborative projects are occurring across borders and oceans at an impressive pace, suggesting both a new cosmopolitanism and an international commitment to large-scale initiatives. Apart from the obvious uses (email communication, for instance) the world wide web has made sources previously inaccessible other than by travel to remote archives much more readily available for both teaching and research purposes. The drawback of this situation is a loss of touching original documents, or visiting exact sites described.¹² If we can get past disciplinary turf-protection, it has the potential to enrich historical research with newer techniques developed by geneticist, microbiologists, environmental scientists and palaeontologists, as well as more traditional allied disciplines such as archaeology.

¹² This “immediacy effect” is described by David Lowenthal’s *The Past is a Foreign Country* (1985), published before the digital revolution. See also Arlette Farge’s *Le Goût de l’archive* (1989, English ed. *The Allure of the Archives*, 2015).

IV/ Church / Ecclesiastical History: New Approaches in an Old Discipline

Church history is the broadest of all the traditional disciplines dealing with the church's past. The discipline of church history encompasses the practice of the church as well as the thought of the church; it studies both dogma and the intersection of the church with society and the larger world. The broad field of church history is increasingly complex and highly fragmented. While the scholarly competence and reputation of church historians generally has never been greater, the danger of overspecialisation, as in all related disciplines in the humanities, remains very real. Competing claims with respect to methods of investigation have also resulted in a widespread malaise concerning the possibility of generally agreed upon standards in scholarship.

Historians have observed a growing rapprochement between institutional church history and the history of doctrine in recent years, and this development has occurred at a time when the disciplines of church history are increasingly influenced by new methods of research, particularly those of **the social sciences**. This rapprochement is arguably the wave of the future. The point can be illustrated in a variety of ways: for example, one finds an increasing tendency in modern church historiography to place ideas in a wider intellectual context, sometimes broadening the latter even further, with attention to cultural symbol or "mentality". Similarly, the new areas of research opened up for us by the study of women and ethnic and religious minorities in church history have oriented us to a wider social context. Both developments are linked to new methods of investigation, and both have contributed directly to the need for reconceptualising the traditional taxonomy of church history and its subdisciplines. Ecumenical issues and the opportunities offered by religious pluralism and concerns for justice and equality have led us to become more sensitive to differences of opinion and approach, even as we discuss the progress of nominally orthodox dogma.

Despite these developments, historians of ideas, including many church historians, have continued to espouse older methodologies, while the social scientists have adopted a variety of new analytical tools to advance research and analysis. Many scholars argue that the traditional bifurcation of the field into institutional church history and history of theology or history of dogma is no longer adequate because this division itself establishes a topical grid into which the materials of history are pressed. They also argue for a necessary **distinction** between the "**history of ideas**" and "**intellectual history**", the former approach tending to reify ideas and isolate them from their cultural and social context, the latter approach attempting to locate thought in its contemporary contexts. The methods as well as the subject matters of church history will, of course, continue to be contested, because conceptualisations of the past bear so directly upon matters of our self-understanding, including our individual, social, and ecclesiastical identities. The important question for the church historian today is the suitability of the technique to the specific task of research, which in turn is determined by the overall goal of the project and the nature of the evidence at hand. The new information sources and techniques of analysis have already proven to be a strong solvent in breaking down the older distinctions between the study of *sacred* and *secular* history.

V/ Cultural Turn

The “cultural turn” of the 1980s and 1990s affected scholars in most areas of history. Inspired largely by anthropology, it turned away from leaders, ordinary people and famous events to look at the use of language and cultural symbols to represent the changing values of society. The British historian **Peter Burke** (b. 1937) finds¹³ that cultural studies has numerous spinoffs, or topical themes it has strongly influenced. The most important include **gender studies** and **postcolonial studies**, as well as **memory studies**, and **film studies**. American Diplomatic historian **Melvyn P. Leffler** (b. 1945) finds that the problem with the “cultural turn” is that the culture concept is imprecise, and may produce excessively broad interpretations, because it:

seems infinitely malleable and capable of giving shape to totally divergent policies; for example, to internationalism or isolationism in the United States, and to cooperative internationalism or race hatred in Japan. The malleability of culture suggest to me that in order to understand its effect on policy, one needs also to study the dynamics of political economy, the evolution of the international system, and the roles of technology and communication, among many other variables.¹⁴

V/1 Gender Studies

Gender studies is an interdisciplinary academic field devoted to analysing gender identity and gendered representation. It includes **women’s studies** (concerning women, feminism, gender, and politics), **men’s studies** and **queer studies**. Its rise to prominence, especially in Western universities after 1990, has been noted as a success of deconstructionism. Sometimes, gender studies is offered together with study of sexuality. These disciplines study gender and sexuality in the fields of literature, linguistics, human geography, history, political science, archaeology, economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, cinema, musicology, media studies, human development, law, public health and medicine. It also analyses how race, ethnicity, location, class, nationality, and disability intersect with the categories of gender and sexuality.

It was not until the late 1980s and 1990s that scholars recognised a need for study in the field of sexuality. This was due to the increasing interest in lesbian and gay rights, and scholars found that most individuals will associate sexuality and gender together, rather than as separate entities. Even in the USA gender studies has been taught after 1990, and the first doctoral program for a potential PhD in gender studies in the United States was approved in November 2005. By contrast, doctoral programs for **women’s studies** have existed since 1990.

Feminist History / Historiography deserves a special attention here. “Feminist historiography” is another notable facet of feminist history. Feminist history refers to the re-reading of history from a woman’s perspective. It is not the same as the history of feminism,

¹³ Peter BURKE, *What is Cultural History?* (2nd ed. 2008). There are many translations of the book including the Czech one.

¹⁴ Melvyn P. LEFFLER, *New Approaches, Old Interpretations, and Prospective Reconfigurations*, *Diplomatic History* vol. 19, No. 1 (1995), pp. 173–196, quot. at p. 185.

which outlines the origins and evolution of the feminist movement. It also differs from women's history, which focuses on the role of women in historical events. The goal of feminist history is to explore and illuminate the female viewpoint of history through rediscovery of female writers, artists, philosophers, etc. Feminist history combines the search for past female scholars with a modern feminist perspective on how history is affected by them. While many mistake it as women's history, feminist history does not solely focus on the retelling of history from a woman's perspective. Rather, it is interpreting history with a feminist frame of mind. It is also not to be confused with the history of feminism, which recounts the history of the feminist movements. Feminist historians, instead, include “cultural and social investigations” in the job description. Feminist historians collect to analyse and analyse to connect. Rather than just recording women's history, they allow a connection to be made with “public history.” However, problems remain in integrating this improved history into a curriculum appropriate for students. Finally, feminist historians must now be able to understand the digital humanities involved in creating an online database of their primary sources as well as published works done by notable feminist historians. Feminist digital humanists work with feminist historians to reveal an online integration of the two histories.

Feminist historians use women's history to explore the different voices of past women. This gathering of information requires the help of experts who have dedicated their lives to this pursuit. It provides historians with primary sources that are vital to the integration of histories. Firsthand accounts recount the daily lives of past women. It documents how their lives were affected by the laws of their government, for example “beyond the Iron Curtain”. Women's historians go on to interpret how the laws changed these women's lives, but feminist historians rely on this information to observe the “disappearing woman”. Feminist historians see mainly two specific histories. The first is the public, singular history. It is composed of political events and newspapers. The second is made up of women's history and analysed primary sources. The integration of these two histories helps historians to look at the past with a more feminist lens, the way feminist historians do.

Feminist historiography writers and researchers:

Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (2006)

Cheryl Glenn, *Landmark Essays on Rhetoric and Feminism: 1973-2000* (2014)

Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (2011)

V/2 Postcolonial Studies

Postcolonial studies, often associated with the literary theorists **Edward Said** (1935–2003), **Gayatri Spivak**, and **Homi K. Bhabha**, has refocused scholarship concerned with former colonies such as India on the subjected masses rather than on the imperial rulers and their indigenous elite allies or political successors. The Subaltern School of Indian historiography (the term derives from Marx and from Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony) founded by Ranajit Guha is a prominent example, the academic foundation against which it rebels having been established with the rapid increase of university history departments following independence in 1947, and the development of social-science-influenced South Asian studies.

Guha in particular has argued that the Renaissance assignment of non-Europeans to the realm of “peoples without history” was compounded by the subsequent imposition of Enlightenment ideas upon the various colonised areas of the world, in particular the notion that statehood, as well as writing, was essential for a people to achieve historical standing. The colonizers, using their control of language, education, and writing, subjected the Indian past, for example, to Western (and especially Hegelian) notions of “world-history,” limited by European standards of chronology and narrative. In other words, they imposed a kind of imperial “dominance without hegemony” over a nation’s true sense of its own history. “History” in the Western sense (projected backwards onto indigenous itihasa in an effort to make these seem protohistorical) thus permanently completed the displacement, commenced by the Persian-influenced histories of the Mughal era, of the ancient tradition and “old lore,” as well as the sense of everyday experience, embodied in the poetic myths contained in purana and in epics such as the Ramayana. Vinay Lal, a critic of Subaltern Studies has adopted an even more radical position, asserting that the accommodation of Indian scholars to the very value of history, not simply adoption of its Western forms, is an acceptance of servitude. Sumit Sarkar, an early participant in the Subaltern project, has criticised it for a growing loss of focus on the very groups it was designed to rescue from oblivion and for its swing in the direction of cultural studies, while endorsing a microhistorical approach analogous to the practice of Europeans such as Carlo Ginzburg.

V/3 Memory Studies

Memory studies is a new field, focused on how nations and groups (and historians) construct and select their memories of the past in order to celebrate (or denounce) key features, thus making a statement of their current values and beliefs. Historians have played a central role in shaping the memories of the past as their work is diffused through popular history books and school textbooks. French sociologist **Maurice Halbwachs** (1877–1945), opened the field with *La mémoire collective* (1950). Many historians examine how the memory of the past has been constructed, memorialised or distorted. Historians also examine how legends are invented. For example, there are numerous studies of the memory of atrocities from World War II, notably the Holocaust in Europe. British historian **Heather Jones** argues that the historiography of the First World War in recent years has been reinvigorated by the cultural turn. Scholars have raised entirely new questions regarding military occupation, radicalisation of politics, race, and the male body.

Representative of recent scholarship is a collection of studies on the *Dynamics of Memory and Identity in Contemporary Europe*. SAGE has published the scholarly journal *Memory Studies* since 2008, and the book series *Memory Studies* was launched by Palgrave Macmillan in 2010 with 5–10 titles a year.

Questions for Discussion

- 1) Has history become too specialised? Or is specialisation simply a mark of the maturity of the discipline?
- 2) Should historians take a public role and engage in political issues of the day?
- 3) Can counterfactual exercises be useful to serious historical thinking?
- 4) What are the strengths and weaknesses of global history? What about “Big history”?
- 5) There have been movements to remove statues and other monuments to controversial historical figures, or to rename buildings bearing their names. Is this a “rewriting of history” as some argue, or a justifiable recognition that those who held values now deemed deplorable should not be honoured, even if the values they held were commonplace in their time? Where does one draw the line? Is there a difference between a statue of a Communist politician from Czechoslovakia, for instance, and one of Adolf Hitler?
- 6) What have been the most significant developments in historical studies since the start of the present century? Where do you see the discipline of history going in the next decade or so?
- 7) What implications does the “democratisation” of historical materials (for instance their ready availability via the Internet) have for the future of the discipline and for the importance of traditional archival repositories?

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Online lectures in English:

20th Century Historiography Overview

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMmKtXLBcLQ>

19th and 20th Century Historiographical Trends

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvkqvQ4z_Gg&list=RDQMZWJXjsks9NM&start_radio=1

Historiography Nineteenth Century to the 1950s Part 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDQDCGQCp4Y>

Professor Sir Richard Evans: History since the Sixties: from Social Science to the Global

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ViUsZ1bVoI&list=PLNKpHjJ-IKEkDpEkZvJ_Jvik5rgajmjxh&index=8

Introduction to Theory of Literature with Paul H. Fry (26 chapters)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YY4CTSQ8nY&list=PLD00D35CBC75941BD> -

Philosophy of the Humanities (26 chapter), see esp. Chapters 1.4, 2.1-5, 3-1-6, 4-1-5, 5.1-5.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4ChzesrWKI&list=PLPeStI124dee1ByfcDzRvPxKDNb0GQjmo> -

Postmodernism and history

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Xoco7Vt-U> -

What Is World History?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7Yy6NQR_lk

Hayden White and Metahistory

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMrTcDuQyho>

The Death of the Author: Roland Barthes' Death of the Author Explained

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B9iMgtfp484&t=1s> –

Historiography and Philosophy of History – Mix of Lectures

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLgLjCckVzdx3ylL9jWVg59WdkBqXZ3H25>

Historiography: Strengths & Weaknesses of Narrative History

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kt_J2I3sFIg