

## *Historicism: Notes on a Paradigm*

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### ABSTRACT



The objective of this article is to make some considerations on Historicism, and the possibility of examining it as one of the paradigms for establishing a scientific history for the Twentieth Century. The first point discussed is related to the origins of the historicist paradigm during the transition between the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. Next, it approaches the conservative appropriation of the historicist paradigm by the new context, in which the European bourgeoisie is in power, combined with the consolidation of the modern state-nations. The specifications of this paradigm's characteristics are at the center of our analysis.

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There are no great disagreements among historians about the moment in the history of the Western historiography that a new historiography, already identified as scientific, began to emerge. In fact, this new historiography, which started to appear at the end of the Eighteenth Century and beginning of the Nineteenth Century, constitutes one of the greatest novelties of the second modernity, contextualized by the generalization of the industrial revolution in Europe and by the social-political world that emerged after the French Revolution and Restoration. However, if the new scientific history presents itself as the greatest novelty compared to previous historiographic genres, it also, in reality, brings, intertwined in its origins, a conservative dimension, found in one or another of its paradigmatic trends. As a matter of fact, a new scientific history will have to deal with this paradox: despite the significant advances it will bring to History theory and methodology, great part of the historians will still try to meet the interests of the ruling power, particularly those related to the consolidation of the state-nations and the European bourgeoisie.

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While the French Positivism of the Nineteenth Century can be seen, in general, as a conservative configuration of the Enlightenment heritage, German Historicism, on the other hand, with its ramifications in other European countries and the Americas, must be understood in direct relation with the State-National affirmation context. Thus, historicism<sup>2</sup> can also be viewed, in the beginning and during great part of the Nineteenth Century, as part of an equally conservative context. However, the interests which it represents more directly are not those of the industrial bourgeoisie while dominant class, but the interests of the great states, of the state bureaucracy that finances its historiographic projects. It is clear that these interests are articulated, on a certain level, by the states and elites that control the industrial society<sup>3</sup>. But, on a more direct level, they have specificities that deserve consideration.

So, the two greatest issues raised by German historians are related to two main objectives: the willingness to unify Germany - since the vast territory of German language was divided into several smaller political realities - and the project of leading modernization without taking great revolutionary risks. In addition, particularly within the German History School, historicists of the hour presented themselves habitually as the fulcrum of monarchic structures - being the Prussian Monarchy particularly strong as the financial supporter of the national historicist project under its jurisdiction. Moreover, there were many historicists who searched for justification in the past for the permanence of the feudal institutions that persisted in their times. In general, within the Restoration context and due to the visceral/fierce opposition between the Germans and the French, historians from the German Historic School were critics of the French Revolution, and never despised previous times - the Middle Age, inclusively - as the Enlightenment had done in the Eighteenth Century. For a German historian, any time had its own importance which should be examined based on adequate criteria and according to its own values. The same line of thought was used for several geographic spatialities, and they should be understood according to their uniqueness. The German Historicism initial project, as presented before, is, on one side, as conservative as the French Positivism; however, it already introduces a new element, the elaboration of a specifically national history, thus non-universalist.

In addition, it is timely to remember that, from the Prussian state standpoint, there was a tendency inherited from knowledgeable tyrants to carry out reforms of limited reach to prevent counter revolutions. While the French absolutist rulers remained inflexible before the popular pressures when facing the strengthening and the radicalization of the French revolution, the knowledgeable tyrants, responsible for the regions which had relations with the Austrian-Hungarian Empire - such as Friedrich II of Prussia and Joseph II of Austria -, had to learn how to follow the moves of their times to remain in power. Some of these monarchs became moderate

<sup>2</sup>For a study on Historicism's possible senses (IGGERS, 1995, p.129-152; SCHOLTZ, 1974; OEXLE, 1986, p.119-155).

<sup>3</sup>The defense of the English parliament interests combined with an apology to industrialization, within the context of an English historicist historiography that represents the progressive-reformist viewpoint of the Whigs, can be well represented by Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859). / On the influence of the German Historicism on the Eighteenth Century England (DOCKHORN, 1950).

“Enlightenment scholars” and arts and sciences benefactors during their times. In the Eighteenth Century, they offered a discourse of modernity and small reforms; now they were offering history to people.

In reality, both Positivism and Historicism were born out of the same need, represented by the paradox of leading a political modernization with an industrial development that would meet the demands of the triumphant bourgeoisie and, at the same time, preserve some of the social privileges of the nobility (FONTANA, 2004, p. 222). However, Positivism and Historicism responded differently to this common need to find a consensus between the nobility and the bourgeoisie: French Positivism found a consensus in the universalism ideals; German Historicism searched for a social consensus in the nationalist ideals. To do so, it was necessary to create a new form of history based on the recovery of German documentations from medieval times and the development of a new criticism method for these sources, with philological inspiration.

As mentioned previously, the political motivations of the French and German elites regarding the need to establish a consensus and demobilize revolutionary postures were not much different; however, their reactions to this demand established very distinct routes, and the historical particularism proposed by German Historicism will soon oppose itself more or less radically to positivist universalism. Likewise, to the “universal man”, once the object of study of the Enlightenment, now claimed as key concept by the positivists of the Twentieth Century, Historicism opposed the “concrete individual”, private, historical and subject to finiteness. At least to one of the foci of the historiographic operation – that which referred to historical sources and examined societies (i.e. historiographic object) – Historicism was, to a certain degree, relativist. Thus, when we mention this relativist aspect of Historicism, we refer to the way it deals with historiographic objects, recognizes the particularities of the studied societies, and realizes that the sources also constitute a discourse of a time and a place. In this relativist way of dealing with historical sources and understanding societies – or by adopting this “relativist focus”, so to speak – lied its advancement, its novelty regarding the universalist schemes that the Positivism inherited from the Enlightenment; however, already dispossessed of its revolutionary character.

It is important to remember that Historicism had among its precursors some of the romantic philosophers and historians of the late Eighteenth Century, such as the Italian erudite Giambattista Vico (1688-1774) or the German philosopher Johan Gottfried Von Herder (1744-1803), who considered the need to write a particularizing history capable of apprehending the uniqueness of each people. Similarly, Historicism could have hardly been developed, mainly its methodological base, without the contribution of some German theologians and philologists who had already leaned over the problems regarding the interpretation of texts and the inevitable articulation of these texts with specific historical contexts and writers’ viewpoints. At least, we

can find surprising anticipations of the historical perspectivism in one of these philologists: Johann Martin Chladenius (1710-1759).

This philologist will try to reflect systematically on the elaboration, on one hand, of the “history of more recent generations” anchored in oral testimonies (“present and future histories”), and, on the other hand, of “old histories”, which goes back to the most remote periods and other types of documentation are investigated. Indeed, what interests Chladenius the most are the recent periods, what we would call today, approximating roughly one historiographic time to another, a “present time history”. The “old history”, although unwillingly, lacks the vivacity and greater veracity of the “recent generations history”, since it cannot count on testimonies of live people<sup>4</sup>.

Interesting enough, despite all the important contributions he offered to this new and emerging scientific history, Chladenius worked with a highly traditional bias which considered eyewitness testimonies more important and reliable than the written documentation, thus establishing a distinction between “future histories” and “old histories”. Herodotus (c.485-420 A.C.), in Ancient Greece, had already established a hierarchical value system for testimonies given by eyewitnesses, which for him would be preferable to those based on the “I heard”, and placing, later on, at the lower end of the scale, other documentation and types of sources that provided information for which there were neither eyewitness testimonies nor second-hand testimonies. But the problem is that our Seventeenth Century philologist begins to recognize that the statements provided by witnesses (eye and ear) are always related to “viewpoints”. Then, Chladenius ends up extending this “viewpoint relativity” to the historian himself, implying that it is from a viewpoint that he selects his own testimonies and documents, to later on start an interpretation work which will also be interfered by this same viewpoint. So, what we have here, with a Cartesian clarity, is the awareness that the historian examines “viewpoints” from his own “viewpoint”<sup>5</sup>. From this we can conclude that there will not be only one history, or, at least, one sole history representation, but “several representations”, according to several “viewpoints”<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> In this aspect, the interests of Chladenius coincide with those prioritized by ancient historians, notably the Greeks. He can be compared to Thucydides. Archaeologia, in the beginning of Thucydades’s report on the Peloponnesian War, is merely a small excerpt of the work, as indicated by Juliana Bastos Marques (2008, p. 53). The Greek historian intended to give more attention to a history closer to his time, to his own present and to that which would coincide with him. Chladenius seems to reveal, already in the Eighteenth Century, an analogous preference. For him, as mentioned by Koselleck (2006, p. 168), “the old history starts when there are no more live eyewitnesses, and it is impossible to interview hear witnesses connected with the events”. In addition, “past histories, which are not part of the collective memory, constitute a mere complement of the present historical experience” (p.172). This game of priorities was about to change, and the passage from the Eighteenth Century to the Nineteenth Century would witness the flourishing of interests in studying the most remote periods of history.

<sup>5</sup> Based on the comments of Chladenius himself, it seems that Leibniz (1646-1716) was the first thinker to use the expression “viewpoints” outside the optical context and referred to in a general sense, proposing the use of the expression to symbolize the diversity of conceptions around the same question or subject. Nowadays, the use of the expression is current and not perceived as a metaphor as before.

<sup>6</sup> “This concept [‘viewpoint’] implies that those who contemplate something from different points of view must necessarily construct different representations of this object”(CHLADENIUS, 1741, p.185).

The preoccupation in using interpretation techniques that were already offered by Hermeneutics for the analysis of testimonies and documents, and the pioneer recognition of the presence of a multiplicity of “viewpoints” in them reveal, in Chladenius, some of the elements that would soon be incorporated by historicism, and will soon triumph in establishing a scientific historiography. In some aspects, it can be said that Chladenius crosses the limits of the historical relativism reached by the first historians of the German Historic School. This way, the German philologist even anticipates a more advanced relativist position - that which is not interested merely in attesting the multiplicity of viewpoints found in the sources, but extends this recognition to the historian, and applies it to the subject that writes history. This position still needs some decades to become dominant among future historicists, and it is particularly notable to find it in Chladenius in the mid Eighteenth Century<sup>7</sup>. With Chladenius, an authentic reflection on the conditions of historical knowledge production begins.

It is obvious that Chladenius’ relativist perspective also had to deal with its own limitations. His reflections on the relativity of viewpoints are that of a philologist, not a geographer or historian. Therefore, he still approaches it as a “person” – as a “soul” with “body and circumstances” –, a subject that places himself at the nodal point of the relativist perspective. But he does not go beyond, to a point where he could also perceive the importance of “place” and “time”. Nowadays, when it is clear that inter subjectivities are inscribed in this triad constituted by “people”, “place” and “time”, we have the impression that Chladenius covered only part of the problem. However, still in the second half of the Eighteenth Century, other philosophers and philologists emerged to complete Chladenius’s relativist insight, becoming more aware of the ways “place” and “time” could interfere in the “viewpoint”. For Thomas Abbt, in his *History of Mankind* (1766, p.219), “place” would already make a difference, despite the invariability of the people.<sup>8</sup> Soon after, Gatterer (1768), Büsch (1775) and Schlözer (1784) – three authors of the second half of the Eighteenth Century which were examined by Koselleck - showed that a timeless perspective would also be inscribed in the “viewpoint”. Schlözer calls our attention to the fact that “a determined fact may appear, for a moment, completely irrelevant, and sooner or later, become decisive for history itself or even for criticism” (1784, p.7)<sup>9</sup>. But, then, we already find ourselves at the gateway of German historicism.

<sup>7</sup> It is surprising to find in Chladenius a passage that is very similar to a comment made by Droysen, a historian that already adopts a relativist viewpoint in his work *Historik* (1858). More than one century separates these authors, but we can see here Chladenius anticipating a position that would begin to be stressed more insistently by Droysen and other historians of the last decades of the Twentieth Century. Chladenius’ passage: “Those that expect that the historian behaves as a man with no religion, country and family are mistaken, since such a demand is impossible” (CHLADENIUS, 1752 apud KOSELLECK, 2006, p.170). Droysen’s passage: “I aspire nothing more and nothing less to expose the relative truth of my viewpoint. I want to show my country, my political and religious convictions and my systematic study that helped me arrive at this point of view” (DROYSEN, 1858; edition: 1977, p. 235-236).

<sup>8</sup> “The History of the same people will be different in Asia and in Europe”(ABBOT, 1766, p. 219). This passage, and the two that follows it, are commented by Koselleck (2006, p.172) in his essay on “Viewpoints”.

<sup>9</sup> In addition to this passage from Schlözer, Koselleck (2006, p.173) transcribes the following passage from Büsch: “In this moment, events that only now have become perceptible will confer importance to a history that, before, would have interested us very little or would have not interested us whatsoever” (BÜSCH, 1775, p.12).

It is also important to note that the authors that explored the idea of a relativist perspective for History in the second half of the Eighteenth Century were still fairly isolated thinkers. They provided insights and materials which could only be worked out more systematically by the Historians of the German School, already under a perspective of a methodological approach that would define parameters for a new scientific history. And, despite this, there were still a certain resistance from the first historians, such as Ranke and Niebuhur, who would still be advocating a “realistic historicism”, by recognizing the inter subjectivity of the author himself/herself. They were ready to recognize human subjectivity, especially in regard to the sources and societies to be examined by historians. However, they had to wait for the contributions of historians from the second half of the Nineteenth Century, such as Droysen or Dilthey, who already represented a stronger branch of the relativist Historicism, to fully accept the subjectivity of the historian. Only then the full historicist relativism would return with greater vigor and plenitude, expanding it once again from the perception of subjectivity of the sources and human societies to the recognition of the subjectivity that affects the historian that elaborates History.

Still, there is also another issue related to this brief but important relativist impetus/drive established by the encounter of Chladenius’ philology and his contemporaries, with an innovative reflection on history. It can be said that the relativist school of the philologists and seventeenth century erudite, which can be represented by the figure of Chladenius, constituted a kind of “thunder” announcing the historicist “storm” that would soon be imposed on the Eighteenth Century historiographic means. This discreet relativist school from the second half of the Eighteenth Century, which includes only a few authors, was for the Historicism that was about to emerge what the “*Sturm und Drang*” movement was for the Romanticism of the Nineteenth Century<sup>10</sup>. Historicist relativism is forecasted here by Chladenius’ relativist impetus/drive and other German erudite as a storm is precluded by a flight of birds.

This movement had one problem only - a kind of epistemological “Achilles’ heel” - which impeded an effective leap to a new historical approach which would only be achieved by the future German Historicism. Chladenius and his followers (over) estimated eyewitness sources (oral testimonies) when compared them to written sources, favoring a type of “present time history” over the history of past times. Only when this trend became outdated and the limitations of eye witnesses sources and the decline of the kind of “oral history” (as we could, a bit anachronistically, call it) were definitely confirmed is that “the past was not maintained in the memory through a written and oral tradition anymore, but started to be “reconstructed by a

<sup>10</sup> We can explain this metaphor. *Sturm und Drang* (“Storm and Stress”) was an aesthetics-literary German movement which was in effect between the years of 1760 and 1780, during the predominantly European Enlightenment scholars Classicist period. It corresponded to a kind of momentary aesthetics excitement which anticipated anti-classicists values that would soon return strongly to the Eighteenth Century Romanticism. Here the metaphor is timely. The relativist drive launched by Chladenius was not strong enough to counterargument the Universalist/Enlightenment scholars, and extended only to a few brains. However, it brought about the first signs of a new historiographic perspective that would soon dominate the historiographic world through a historicist paradigm, though opposed by the positivist alternative.



*critical procedure*” (these last words are from Koselleck, 2006, p. 174). This application of a critical method to the examination of written sources, both from the remote past as well as from less remote periods in relation to the historian’s present, would be a crucial for the upcoming Historicism. Only with the full exercise of this critical procedure, history started to become modern.

Besides this “relativist impetus/drive”, the developing Historicism would also incorporate another disperse element among these anti-universalist resistances which had already become widespread in the European culture of the Eighteenth Century. We refer to the “criticism” which, not “openly” against the instituted power and biases of all kinds anymore, aims at the self-evaluation of each discipline, which should cast its eyes into itself. In the history of historiography, already in the second half of the Eighteenth century, we come across the first signs of this “look into itself” approach, through which historiography submits the historians’ own work to a careful exam. historiography are found in the second half of the Eighteenth Century. The presence of the historiographic criticism is already visible in Johann Salomo Semler (1725-1791), a theologian and historian from the old “theology history” tradition – a historiographic approach that had its heyday in the Seventeenth Century with Bossuet (1681), but that would continue alive in the next two centuries. Semler wanted to apply the historical-critical method to the biblical sciences, to constitute what he would later call “liberal theology” (*liberalis theologia*)<sup>11</sup>. But his most notable contribution to the history of historiography was the recognition of the need to carry out permanently a critical elaboration of the previous historiography by the historians themselves. For him, historiography is part of history since the changes imposed by a series of historical moments ( “historical times”) demanded the presence of new historians with a fresher look into the periods that preceded their present.

Nowadays, at least in the academic environment that prepares the professional historian, this may sound like a cliché. However, we should take into consideration, that in the second half of the Eighteenth Century, this perception was still a disperse element among the current visions that there was a single “historical truth” whose *speculo* should be, as much as possible, the historical reconstitution that will be carried out by the historians. The idea that each time produces its “historical truth” would still sound odd for most people. The equally popular idea today that it is useful and necessary to re-update the history of historiography, currently converted into a solidly established discipline of the historians’ education curriculum, it would also sound odd in the second half of the Eighteenth century. It is precisely this strangeness that is confronted by Semler, still in 1777, when he emphasizes that, in that time, “very little attention had been given to the history that preceded the history of the so-called historians (SEMLER, 1777,

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<sup>11</sup> Although a theologian, Semler worked with the perspective that God never interfered in human history so that his “theologian history” were not marked by miracles but proposed to apply a historical-grammatical method to the interpretation of Old testament passages.

p.9)<sup>12</sup>. Semler confronted this lack of consideration with his conviction that this look into historiography would be indispensable for historians. Thus, each new historiographic generation should submit the previous ones to a critical analysis, including the unmasking of the specific interests that led it to produce one historical vision over the other<sup>13</sup>.

This historiographic practice of “looking into itself”, only casually and sporadically, until mid Eighteenth Century, would soon become a demand from History’s own “disciplinary matrix”. Due to its relativist predisposition, Historicism, more than the Positivism, always had greater affinity with the need to constantly re-elaborate the “look into itself” that constitutes the Theory of History. Its genesis, in the late Eighteenth Century and on the brink of the new century, encompasses this self-critical element together with the “relativist stress/drive”, and makes them coexist with another long-lived tradition: “documental criticism”. From the rigorous practice of evaluating the origin and authenticity of written documents, which had in *De Re Diplomática* (1709) of the Benedictine monk Jean Mabillon (1632-1707) its most famous diplomatic treaty, Historicism will extract a third element for its paradigmatic system. Later on, “documental criticism will migrate to the historian own *métier*, regardless of his/her paradigmatic choice or historical school. However, in the beginning, the incorporation of a rigorous documental criticism method into History was unquestionably an original contribution of Historicism, which had already extracted it from a previous diplomatic tradition, developed mainly among the Ecclesiastics<sup>14</sup>.

Historicism was then constructed from disperse elements. It took advantage of documental criticism techniques already developed by theologians and also made use of the relativist impetus/drive launched by Chladenius and other philologists. From Hermeneutics, a technical knowledge also originated from the Ecclesiastics and that soon would be promoted to

<sup>12</sup> Koselleck (2006, p.176-177) mentions this and other passages from Semler as indications of an important moment in the history of historiographic relativism.

<sup>13</sup> To admit that each time produces its own “historical truth” already constitutes an important novelty. It would be impossible for a Seventeenth Century historian to imagine that there wouldn’t be a “greater truth” to always try to reach, and each time closer. Therefore, as Koselleck emphasizes, Semler ended up associating his relativist perception of history with the idea of progress which was beginning to be supremely established, making him understand that each new time was better prepared (by God) to produce a truer historical knowledge (KOSLECK, 2006, p.177).

<sup>14</sup> There is no need to recover here the history of this long tradition from which Historicism will apprehend the necessary for the first aspects related to documental analysis. Some important milestones of the Diplomatic History may be recalled here. Significant advances in the precision and efficacy of documental criticism were already being made during the Renaissance Period, and they culminated with the great erudite from the Eighteenth Century. The Church and critical theology surely brought great knowledge and contributions to the progress of documental criticism, and, in the Seventeenth Century, names like those of the Jesuit priests Jean Bolland (1596-1665) and Daniel von Papenbroeck (1628-1714), who, in 1675, would publish a text for the *Acta Sanctorum* in which he would write about “the true and the false in old parchment documents” (LE GOFF, 1990, p.543). In this text, Papenbroeck casted some doubts on some documents attributed to the Merovingian period kept in the Saint Benedict’s Order Archives – another important center of ecclesiastic documents criticism at that time, which would rival with the Jesuit critics. Thus, a true Diplomatic War was established between these two erudite centers from the Catholic Church, and the benedictine monk Jean Mabillon (1632-1707) decided to replicate in 1681 with his work *De re diplomática*, an extensive work in six parts that intended to set fundamental diplomatic rules (BELLOTO, 2002, p.15-16). Marc Bloch, in his essay *Apology of History* (1949, posthumous) raises Mabillon’s work to the status of the event that founded modern criticism in archives documents. From this long development and adapting it to its own objectives, Historicism would benefit, later on.



“an interpretation art”, it extracted a new identity trait. Historicism still developed from the lack of value of a certain sector of historiographic practice based on eyewitnesses (this proto-oral history), and took advantage of the decline of the “proto-history of the present time” cultivated by Chladenius and other German erudite. All these aspects were important for the origin of Historicism, which to create a new history put together elements otherwise dispersed: “the relativism drive/impetus”, “documental criticism”, thematic interests directed to all historical periods”, “historiographic self criticism” and “interpretative potential”. To this, it aggregated a strong wave of specializations which were already claiming for well defined sciences rather than the multidisciplinary practice adopted by most Enlightenment scholars. Finally, the state-national affirmation context will certainly will help the new historicists as well as the affinities with the upcoming Romanticism - as aesthetics movement that also valued particularism. A touchstone will be brought by its easy adaptation to the already mentioned self-criticism practice typical of the second modernity, making each field of knowledge intensify the ‘reflections about themselves’ (Kant’s “criticisms”, an Enlightenment scholar who is already typical of this second modernity, constitute clear signs of these new times)<sup>15</sup>.

It was from this dispersion of several elements of different origin that something new was constructed: a new historiographic matrix. All this mixed in a boiling cauldron of “temporal acceleration” detonated by the French Revolution political events and by the technology that, since the onset the industrial society has not stopped to bring innovations and produce ruptures caused by steaming boats (1803), locomotives (1804), photographs (1823), telegraphs (1844), telephones (1860), electrical power (1879), and automobiles (1885). Each one of these inventions and novelties, and all of them together, promoted direct changes not only in our practical life but also in the way human beings think and feel, in their imaginary and in the intellectual elaborations of those who experienced them<sup>16</sup>. The new century, under the sign of the time acceleration caused by political and technological transformations was then bound to become “the century of history”<sup>17</sup>. Here then we have a draft of the origins of Historicism, which will

<sup>15</sup> In one of the prefaces of Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason (1781), this philosopher stated that “our time is a time of criticism, to which everything should be submitted”. This new predisposition, typical of the second modernity that starts with the Nineteenth Century, affected History, obviously. In this case, there is still and additional reinforcement implied by relativism itself that tends to configure the look of the historian, at least according to the historicist perspective (and later on to the Historical Materialism).

<sup>16</sup> Some metaphors appear, for instance, to help understand the “train of history” in its unstoppable march towards the Future. The invention of Photography, which would shake profoundly the representative ideals of the pictorial art, also opens a new array of metaphorical allusions to be used by the science of history. Would History be able to reproduce an image of reality as photography does? The image of History as speculo can have the sophistication of the photography metaphor, according to the Positivists. However, Karl Marx himself, impressed by the invention of photography, also wondered if his conception of “ideology” as an “inversion of reality” could not benefit from the photography metaphor, since the photographers’ “dark cameras” also reproduced “inversions of images” (the metaphor is used by Marx and Engels in German Ideology).

<sup>17</sup> According to Reinhart Koselleck (1979), “this temporalizing of perspectives was certainly favored by the fast transformations of the experience caused by the French Revolution”. Such continuity ruptures wanted to get rid of a past whose increasing strangeness could only be clarified and recovered by historical research” (KOSELLECK, 2006, p.174). It is Koselleck himself, as a matter of fact, who collects this impressive declaration from Friedrich Perthes (1772-1843) on the discontinuity sensation of the new Eighteenth Century time: “Our time gathered in the three generations that now coexist things entirely incompatible. The huge contrasts found in the years 1750, 1789 and 1815 do not present transitions,

began to develop its internal alternatives to this essential tension between a fast-changing world, with intense expectations in relation to the future, and an academic environment that has early on submitted itself to a conservative political system, as in the case of the German Historical School.

Before going on, it will be worth looking into some of the other precursors of Historicism already found during the Enlightenment, and more specifically as part of the romantic intellectual-artistic group. Here we must remember that Johan Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) already anticipated the particularizing perspective of Historicism in 1774, in his essay *Another Philosophy of History*. In this work, the German philosopher calls our attention to each people's particularities, each tradition, each national reality, placing himself in the countercurrent of the Universalist/Enlightenment thoughts, becoming the main representative of History romantic philosophy in the end of the Eighteenth Century:

Each human perfection form is, to a certain extent, national and temporal, and, more specifically, individual.<sup>18</sup>

Before Herder and the romantics of the late Eighteenth Century, it is important to also mention the anticipations of Vico (1668-1744), who in his *New Science* (1725; 1744) had already developed a perspective for the apprehension of the singularity of each people, still in the first half of the Eighteenth Century. Vico already called the attention to the unity illusions that could assault those who were studying human societies and taking themselves or their societies as the measure for all things.

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so they seem to the people today, being them grandparents, parents or grandchildren, not as a sequence of events but simultaneous events" (PERTHES, 1815, p.320). Perthes wrote this in the beginning of 1815, right after the fall of Napoleon. However, the revolutions of 1830 and 1834 had not occurred yet, neither the Paris Commune in 1871. Had he lived 100 years, he would have witnessed more discontinuities. Thus, to Perthes, the temporal acceleration of the last decades of the Eighteenth Century and first decades of the Nineteenth Century seemed astonishing, leading him to affirm: "One cannot expect anything permanent or real from a history that is being written now".

<sup>18</sup> It is also Herder who says: "each nation has in itself its center of happiness as each sphere has its gravity center" (HERDER, 1995, p.42). On the other hand, even Herder's philosophy of history is impregnated with a teleological optimism common among Enlightenment scholars, as seen in the following passage: "It really means to advance, progress, progressive development, even though no particular man gained anything from it! However, the process aims at something bigger! It refers to truly advance, progress, progressive development, although no particular man gained anything from it! It becomes the stage for of a conducting intention on earth, even though we cannot see the real intention from this intention! It is a Divinities' stage, even though we can only see them through the openings and ruins of particular scenes" (HERDER, 1995, p.46).

Due to the undefined nature of the human spirit, wherever it finds lost in its ignorance, man takes itself as the measure for all things (VICO, 1953, p.120).

Together with the historiographic view in tune with the human singularities brought by names such as Vico and Herder, a romantic historiography is also mentioned, both in reference to the few precursors of the historical particularism in the Eighteenth Century as well as in reference to some romantic thinkers of the Nineteenth Century. They do not differ much from the historicists themselves. One of the few points of contrast is the fact that the Romantic Historiography preached a new intuitive method for the construction of historical knowledge as opposed to the rigorous method of documental criticism already adopted by historicist of German inspiration. The romantic literates and romantic artists in general also had many affinities with Historicism, particularly in regards to its nostalgia for the Gothic past, revaluing of the Middle Ages, and rejection of the rationalist abstractions put forward by the Enlightenment scholars of the Eighteenth Century. Thus, a single movement will be considered here, without the discussions over the romantic variation of Historicism, and we will only talk about Historicism in general, as opposed to the positivism of its own time.

By going back to the Nineteenth Century, we could say that the Historicist paradigm since the contribution of a Ranke that still seemed to affirm the possibility of “telling the facts as they really happened”, was giving more room to the historical relativism, to the consciousness of the radical historicity of all things, which are sank in the endless upcoming history<sup>19</sup>. Historicism, in many of its sectors, was refining the perception that the historian cannot detach himself from the society as proposed by the natural sciences model put forward by the Positivism and other scientific branches of the Human Sciences. On the contrary, the idea that the historian speaks from a place and from a viewpoint became stronger in the historicist universe, and, therefore, cannot aim neither absolute neutrality nor absolute objectivity, not to mention speak about a truth in absolute terms. Hermeneutics- a knowledge field dedicated to the interpretation of texts and cultural objects – became an important reflection space for philosophers and historians who emphasized the relativity of objects, subjects and historical methods.

In general, it would take a long way for Historicism to open a space for the German historiographic sector, responsible for this relativist turn of events in all of its aspects. In fact, by examining the works of several eighteenth century historicists, we can identify, in some of them,

<sup>19</sup> Even in relation to Ranke, many controversies around the pretense rankean neutrality appeared, concluded hastily from the famous saying “wie es eigentlich gewesen”. Josep Fontana, in his book *The History of Men* (2000), goes back to the discussion raised by Gooch (1968) and tries to show that Ranke serves, consciously, to the interests of the Prussian state and to the project of combating revolutionary ideas, which is put forward by the *Historical-Political Magazine*, directed by him. Josep Fontana closes his analysis of Leopold Von Ranke’s personal context by saying: “Nothing close to “explaining things as they happened”, especially “in the divorce of present passions”. Ranke was an ideological employee of the Prussian state, useful, loyal and conscious of the role he had to play” (FONTANA, 2004, p.226-227). According to Gooch, Ranke’s statement referred most to an expression of modesty than anything else.

characteristics that seem to somewhat remind us of the positivist ideals of neutrality. In order to understand this, it is important to consider that – contrary to the Positivism, which was already formed in the first decade of the Nineteenth Century, since it had inherited from the Enlightenment its main paradigmatic characteristics (although adopting it conservatively) – Historicism will build, step- by- step, its paradigm along the Nineteenth Century. This explains why, in the beginning, the German Historicism, or at least one of its schools, the rankean, still presents clear conservative positions, always serving the great state-nationals. In this new context, its very important to note that Ranke still declares to be able to “tell facts as they really happened” (even though there is much controversy about this declaration. Thus, Ranke already does not believe in a human universal history, but in particular national history, showing here the beginning of an acceptance of a historiographic relativity – in this case as an object of study.

By the way, it is important to keep in mind that, although we can aggregate under the rubric of German Historicism a series of historians of Germanic origin who worked hard to put forward the new historicist paradigm, other differentiated historiographic sectors can be noticed in the interior of this paradigm. When dealing with this question, Júlio Bentivoglio demonstrated with efficacy the presence of two schools in the interior of the Eighteenth Century German Historicism: the *Rankean school* and the *Prussian school*, which started to become strong in one of the historiographic sectors of Berlin University in the mid-1840, organizing itself around exponents such as Gervinus (1837) and later on Droysen, culminating with the creation of the Historical Magazine in 1859 by Heinrich Von Sybel (BENTIVOGLIO, 2010, p.22)<sup>20</sup>. This second school- the Prussian – will make a criticism of the primordial Rankean school (however, the school will not disappear, surviving in parallel with the *Prussian school* during the second half of the Nineteenth Century). In our analysis – more concerned with the perception of the essentials of the historicist paradigm – the *Prussian school*, with the philosophers from Baden, will correspond to the more relativist branch of German Historicism. Therefore, it can be said that the historicist paradigm encompasses both the *Rankean school* and the *Prussian school* (if we adopt Bentivoglio’s terminology), specially when opposed to the positivist paradigm.

Now, let’s return to the fact that Historicism will have to face the Enlightenment - Positivist idea of the universal nature of the historical man – which, at the same time, leads to the viability of a universal human history – to produce, on the contrary, a perspective of construction of particular national histories that try to apprehend the uniqueness of each people and each group of circumstances<sup>21</sup>. Under our perspective, this is the fundamental characteristic that

<sup>20</sup> The Prussian school criticism against the Rankean tendency is subtle and complex. Bentivoglio opposes to the comments made by Robert Southard (1995), who had emphasized that, to be born, the Prussian Historical School needed to overcome the Rankean interdict of neutrality and “ direct non-involvement of the historians with political issues” (BENTIVOGLIO, 2010, p.31). The Brazilian historiographer tries to show that, even to Ranke, it was impossible, in the German state context, not to get involved somewhat with the politics of his time.

<sup>21</sup> The national histories produced by historicists are already well differentiated from the national history such as *The History of England* by David Hume (1754), Scottish philosopher who followed the Enlightenment investment in the idea of a universal nature of the historical man. See also Hume (1734).

involves the historicist attitude, the “general color” that crosses and illuminates everything, producing other ramifications<sup>22</sup>. Historicism is pioneer in presenting a new perspective on Man, highly distinct from the perspective of the previous century presented by the dominant trend of the illustrated thought, and that in its own century, would go on supported by the Positivism. In the “Man” that Enlightenment scholars and Positivists saw as universal and characterized by an immutable nature, historicists were already seen something different, movement. In one word: historicity. Man (or Men) and human societies are realities in movement, and should be perceived as such. Instead of searching for the universal, the historicist attitude looks for the difference, the singularity, the specific, the unique, the particular. Instead of becoming obsessed by discovering the immutable nature of man, the historicist idea enjoys, and even inebriates itself with the movement perception. In another word, it means to apprehend with radical historicity all and every reality, so that nothing in the universe would be static and immobilized, and, at the same time, nothing would be the same as another in this endless history yet to come.

This general color that constitutes in Historicism a closer look into diversity and mobility, produces its immediate ramifications. A century, however, is only a brief moment in the construction of a new historiographic paradigm, and, therefore, we should not find it odd that this model was not presented ready from the very beginning. It took decades of history and historiography for the historians, as a group, to explore radically all the implications of this new attitude in favor of the difference and movement. Eighteenth century Historicism, throughout the years, only finished to construct integrally from the acute criticism developed by the Prussian school of Droysen (1868) against the Rankean school, plus the indispensable contribution of the important essays on human sciences developed by Dilthey (1883) and the influence of the *Baden school* led by Windelband (1894) and Rickert (1899)<sup>23</sup>. In general, we can summarize three fundamental principles of this paradigm under construction:

The complete historicist paradigm starts emphatically with (1) the recognition of the “relativity of the historical object”. According to this principle, there are no laws, of general character which are invalid for all societies, and any social, cultural or political phenomena can only be rigorously understood within history. The historicity of the examined object (a human society, for instance, but also an individual human life, or any other event or process already occurred or underway) must be the starting point of the investigation – and not as proposed by

<sup>22</sup> It is important, on the other hand- together with the possibility to identify general traits that could characterize Historicism as a developing paradigm in the Nineteenth Century - to recognize all the internal diversity of Historicism. For a study on this diversity, some works from the last decades are highly significant references: Reill (1975); Hardtwig (1982, p.147-181); Jaeger and Rüsen (1992); Muhlack (1991); Wittkau (1992), as well as texts from the collection organized by BLANKE (1994) and by Blake and Rüsen (1984), involving the period that goes from the Enlightenment historiography to the Historicism. For an analysis under the perspective of the Historical Materialism see JAMESON, 1979.

<sup>23</sup> Within the scope of Philosophy and Political Sciences, the Baden school developed in opposition to the Marburg school. This school believed that knowledge is conditioned exclusively to the apprehension of the generic. The Baden school, however, affirmed that, together with the generic knowledge, there was also the knowledge of the particular. Thus, the mathematics-natural sciences would be the only possible ones, as the Marburg philosophers (Cohen and Natorp) intended, stressing that also the historical sciences should be considered. This point of view is in complete harmony with the historicists’ intentions, which pointed at a conception of History as the science of the particular.

the Positivism, the “universality of the human societies” or the fundamental unity of human behavior. To apprehend with radical historicity all and any reality, being social or natural (or both) will be the watchword for a historicist: the blind spot from which all originates.

Secondly (2), History, as well as the other human sciences, should require a specific methodological posture, radically distinct from the methodological standard typical of the natural sciences or exact sciences. Here the distinction between two types of sciences is formulated – or, in other words, the right of another type of knowledge to postulate scientifically without having to coincide literally with the model presented by the natural sciences. Soon, the renowned opposition between the “comprehension”, attitude that should govern the methodological stand of human sciences, and the “explanation”, which would be typical of the natural and exact sciences, would appear from this formulation. Based on this distinction, it would be possible to talk about the fundamental difference between historical facts and natural events. Finally (3), Historicism would be ready to recognize the “historian subjectivity”, with all the implications involving the idea that the historian or social scientist is also submerged in history, what would turn the Positivist ambition of reaching the total “neutrality of the social scientist” nothing more than a chimera.

The three characteristics mentioned above as essential to the historicist thought will become more complete if benefited by a “particularizing perspective”, typical of the Historicism, for being opposed to the “generalizing perspective”, a characteristic of great part of the Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century as well as the Eighteenth Century Positivism. If these lines of thought frequently searched for “general laws” to explain the behaviors and development of human societies, Historicism, in general, disregards this search and tries to concentrate on the particular, on something that makes each society unique, on the aspects that make each historical process something specific<sup>24</sup>.

Here is, therefore, the triad of the historicist thought: (1) the relativity of the historical object, (2) the specificity of history methodology, and (3) the subjectivity of the historian<sup>25</sup>. It is a triad which was developed slowly, since the historicist paradigm was constructed during the Nineteenth Century. Thus disconnecting itself from the old Enlightenment proposals, and facing the Positivism of its own time, more and more the historicist thought would invest in the idea that the human sciences should look for their own methods rather than borrowed

<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to check Grondin’s (1991, p.143) comments on the relations between the particularizing searched by the historian (historicist) with the whole, from which the particular emerge, and inversely, “the whole from the particular, in which it expresses itself”. We have here, in this complex relation between the particularism and totality, an important trait of this historicist paradigm.

<sup>25</sup> Its is also worth check the analysis made by Schulz (1977, p.470). This author expands the Historicism concept, treating it as a kind of epistemological turn of events in the history of Western thought, which, in favor of historicity, overcomes the models dominated by the metaphysical perspective. In fact, for Schulz, the key traits of historicism correspond to (1) the rupture with metaphysics; (2) the already mentioned search for its own method in opposition to the natural sciences, and (3) the return to interiority. On the proposal of Schulz, see CALDAS, 2007, p.50. As for the idea that the historical consciousness represents a rupture with Metaphysics, this argument is also supported by Gadamer (2008, p.3, v.2).



procedures from the natural sciences. Soon, Hermeneutics would appear to oppose to the “explanation”, characteristic of the natural sciences, and to the “comprehension”, specific methodological posture of the human sciences. And, finally, in the last decades of the Nineteenth Century, some historicist sectors finalized their relativist turn: they already believe that also the historian, and not only the examined societies, is viscerally implicated in its whole singularity. At this point, Positivism and Historicism mirror each other perfectly in relation to the main aspects of the relation between objectivity and historiographic subjectivity.

### *The gradual installation of the Historicist Paradigm*

Since we have already seen as Historicism was formed from disperse elements that started to acquire a new meaning for the historiographic practice, we will have now the opportunity to examine how this historicist paradigm was triumphantly being installed in Europe in the Nineteenth Century, from its beginnings, as an alternative that begins to compete frontally with the Positivism. The contextual starting point for the academic implementation of the Historicism, as we mentioned before, was as conservative as that of the Positivism. The historicists were also summoned to elaborate a new historiographic model which would renounce social criticism that was once key for the discourse of the more radical philosophers of the Illustration. In the case of the historicism of German inspiration, its financing agents are the states-nationals (FONTANA, 2000, p.223)<sup>26</sup>. As in the case of Germany, Theodor Mommsen (1874) already signaled during the Nineteenth Century, with special clarity, the intertwining between the development of the German historical science and the political unification process (BENTIVOGLIO, 2010, p. 23).

Here it is important to mention that there are different readings about the development and nature of Historicism. If before we indicated that the Enlightenment as the origin of the Positivism, the latter already configured as a branch that gives a conservative destiny to some assumptions that had already being presented for the first time by the Illustrated thought, there are also readings that try to connect Historicism to with the illustrated past. It is the case, for

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<sup>26</sup> Josep Fontana mentions a passage from Ranke that illustrates well his conservative and compromising position of classes, according to the interests of the Prussian state. According to the passage, History’s objective would be to “lead the way to a healthy and sure politics, dissipating the shadows and misunderstandings that, in the time we live in, obscure and fascinate the minds of the greatest men” (RANKE, 1979, p.516-517). Also Charles Beard, North American historian from the “presentist” current, who had already made, in 1943, a systematic criticism on the partiality of Ranke in favor of conservadorism, mentioned in his article That Noble Dream the analysis of the German historian on the German victory of the French-Prussian wars (1870-1871) as the “victory of a conservative Europe against the Revolution”, or still the position of Ranke pro Guilherme of Prussia in his fight against a more democratic constitution (BEARD, 1935, p.74-87). For a more updated and controversial interpretation of Ranke, see Bentivoglio (2010b) and Mata (2010).

instance, of Meinecke's analysis (1862-1954), himself a historicist, who, in his essay of 1936 on *Historicism and its Genesis*, considers Historicism as if it were in a continuous line with Illustration, but that during the passage from Illustration to Historicism there was a substitution of the tendency to "generalize" by a "process of individualizing observation" (MEINECKE, 1982, p.12). It is, however, a problematic interpretation, since the generalization and the universalizing perspective were strong traits of the Enlightenment, and their suppression by a particularizing view is certainly a rupture.

Another complexity issue is the intellectual migration from one area to another. Jorge Navarro Perez, in his essay on *The Philosophy of History by Wilhelm Von Humboldt* (1996), tries to show how the linguist and founder of the University of Berlin – Wilhelm Von Humboldt (1767-1835) – had gone from the illustrated search for progress laws to a perspective that put forward the need to evaluate each period according to its individuality. This migration of ideas can also be seen in the *Philosophy of History Writings* by Wilhelm Von Humboldt (1997).

It is also timely to remember that Historicism, with its new particularizing paradigm, influenced other fields of knowledge such as Law and Economics. In the first case, a German Law School would appear which, through names such as Friedrich Karl von Savigny (1779-1861), rejected the universalism implicit in the natural law theory, to search for the historic singularity of each people's set of laws. In the case of Economics, the historicist influence would contribute to the formation, in the second half of the Nineteenth Century, of a German school of Economy History that would carry out a comparative study of specific cases, being Schmoller (1838-1917) one of its main names.

Now, going back to the Historicism paradigmatic aspects, it is timely to highlight its close connection, or at least overriding, with the History of Politics (i.e., a History of Politics still in the strict sense, referring exclusively to the State realm and the confrontation among States). In fact, Ranke's books – main representatives of the first generation German Historicism – have always as the central theme the relations that are established among states, either through wars or diplomacy (1824, 1833). Nations, in Ranke, are always understood in the interior of the states; this will be an interesting theme for historicists, as Wolfgang Mommsen (1996, p.5-28) showed in his study on the transformation of the idea of nation in the German historiography. In addition, it is a history of the elites, or of the people led by the elites, and there is certainly several rankean passages on that which was conventionally called "History of the Great Men". Symptomatically, Ranke wrote *The History of Popes* (1836) and the "History of Frederick the Great" (1878). The History of Politics elaborated by the German Historicism of rankean inspiration is also a History

of Politicians. There are personal histories of kings, descriptions of the court and references to ministers and other politicians<sup>27</sup>.

It must be noted that, in this biased picture, Historicism would soon be divided into two distinct branches: a more conservative Historicism – politically as well as epistemologically – and one more advanced Historicism in relation to the assimilation of the relativism. In the first half of the Twentieth Century, the most conservative sector of Historicism, through the figure of its heirs or memory of its founders, would go through a rigorous attack by more modern historical schools, such as the *Escola dos Annales* in France or the North American presentist school. This more conservative sector of Historicism is that which practically immobilizes itself in Ranke's contribution, almost ossifying itself into an aspect of its "historicist realism", missing the relativist turn that would bring to the historian full awareness of his own historicity. It is this more retrograde Historicism that maintains the diffuse traits of the Positivism, which will become easy targets for the renown articles of Lucien Febvre in *Combats for History* (1953), during the rising of the *Annales* movement to the French institutional space.

As for the Historicism sector that was touched by the winds of renovation – or by that same relativist wind that one day blew on the Seventeenth Century intellectuals such as Chladenius, Abbt e Herder – it can be said that this "relativist historicism" finally completes this relativist turn through the names of Johann Gustav Droysen (1808-1884) or Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), moving forward through the rigorous and creative contribution of philosophers and historians, and much later would include names such as Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) and Reinhart Koselleck (1923-2006). But before arriving at these notable contributions, a peculiar historical path needed to be trodden. It is very curious the fact that, while the revolutionary Enlightenment developed to reach its inflexion point and turn into a conservative positivism, Historicism is born marked by conservative interests and even reactionaries, but ends up moving inexorably towards the most advanced proposals of the relativist Historicism<sup>28</sup>.

The extraordinary success of Historicism already in the mid-Nineteenth Century was due to the unquestionable progresses related to the criticism of sources, which was firstly implemented by historians such as Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) and Barthold Georg Niebuhr

<sup>27</sup> Josep Fontana, in the chapter related to Historicism in *History of Men*, illustrates this question with a brief synthesis about a work, in 1827, that Ranke dedicates to the Spanish Monarchy of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries (RANKE, 1946; FONTANA, 2004, p.227).

<sup>28</sup> On the historiographic context that, in Germany of the late Nineteenth Century, favored the relativist trend and the projection of the progressive, not conservative anymore, sector of Historicism, we can recall the analysis of Michel Löwy: "Close to the end of the Nineteenth Century, the German Historicism starts to change its character: the conservative point of view appears as historically defeated. The huge and fast industrial development of Germany, the national unification of the country within a constitutional state, the penetration of the capital in a set of economic and social relations, and the advances of a powerful industrial and financial bourgeoisie appear more and more as irreversible phenomena that make anachronic any adhesion to institutions, values, and pre-capitalist forms of sociability [...] Historicism thus tends to redefine itself and start questioning all social institutions and forms of thoughts as historically relative; it stops being conservative and becomes relativist" (LÖWY, 1994, p.70).

(1776-1831), and that later continued to be developed by historians like Johann Gustav Droysen (1808-1884). While the positivist historians tended to naively get closer to the historical sources, as they were mere deposit of information which historians could extract from the documentation as they were in the presence of a precious stone mine, historicists, on the other hand, start to question the dimension of subjectivity present in these sources, and dedicate themselves in taking advantage of these inter-subjective dimensions, without considering them undesirable or even unreachable limits. The notion that there is a “pure historical fact”, seen in a positivist way as material that resides immobilized in the source and that has to be rescued by the historian in this pure form, is more and more being confronted by historicists. Johann Gustav Droysen, in a text written in 1858, and that later on was included in the edition of his *Historik*, tries to show that, if the sources brought objective references to events that were witnessed or to information in general, they would also be affected by the imaginary of the period and by the historian’s imagination:

[the criticism of sources, in addition, needs to distinguish:] 1) which general coloration it [the source] received from the dominant imaginary of the respective period and place (e.g., the demonological coloration of the Fifteenth Century, the epigonic snobbism of the Alexandrian period); 2) which particular tonality the author of the source belongs to, by its inclinations, education and character, etc. (DROYSEN, 2009, p.52)

Droysen, of course, is, here, referring to authorial sources – i.e., sources produced by one author and that can be of several types: letters, decrees, lectures, political speeches, institutional reports, reports produced by governors or official employees, travel reports, cartas, chronicles, novels, essays, testimonies, poems, declarations, papal bulls and many others. But criticism must also turn, in a non naïve way, against other types of sources, even those that seem to bring information in a rough state, as good part of archive documents. For Historicism, and for a more systematic development of a scientific historiography, this perception that human subjectivity interferes in the production of the source from the very beginning, and that therefore the historian must examine the context of the production of any document, its connections, singularities of those who registered it or interfered in it, was fundamental. Later, in another part of the text, Droysen will say: “in the ethical world [i.e., in the historical world, nothing exists without being mediated” (DROYSEN, 2009, p.53). This mediation must be an important part of the historiographic analysis as the information that may eventually be extracted from a document<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> On Droysen, see the thesis written by Pedro Spínola Caldas (2004).

The positivist trend or method of treating sources is currently associated with a naivete incompatible with current historiographic developments. Here we should recall the manual *Introduction to History* by Louis Halphen (1946) which, already contemporary to the early times of the *Annales*, suggests that the historian needs only to expect that his sources “would leave the facts to be presented by themselves”<sup>30</sup>. This predisposition derives, in a certain way, from a conception of science unique to the Positivism, which believed that science should limit itself, before any other operation, “to the discovery of facts to later on organize them scientifically” (ARÓSTEGUI, 1995, p.119). Along these same lines, Seignobos and Langlois tried to divide the operation of reconstructing the historical process in one first phase, that would include Criticism, and a second phase, that of “historical reconstruction” here seen more as “historical reconstitution”. In other words, they seem not to be concerned about showing that, since his first contact with the source, the historian needs to face the historical interpretation issue. In addition, they still evaluate the work of the historian in terms of “historical reconstitution” and not in terms of “historical reconstruction”, which corresponds to the nuance that emerges from the historicist consciousness about the intersubjectivities that affect all moments of the historiographic operation.

While the Eighteenth Century positivists from all parts of Europe and the French method scholars produced their historiographic manuals, historicists, since Ranke, also continued to reflect on the historiographic use of sources, and soon moved from the texts that before were included in the prologue or appendices of great historiographic works – such as in the *History of the Romanic and Germanic Peoples* written by Ranke in 1824 – to specific manuals that tried to theorize and fix methodologies to reconstruct the historical process. The highlight of these realizations, besides the *Historik* of Droysen, would be, for instance, the Bernheim manual, published in 1889. This work is particularly important since it illustrates well the distance of Historicism in relation to the Positivism: it already discusses the “concept of History”, and examines the “historic conception of our time”. In other words, Bernheim already understands the development of historiography itself within a historicity plan. Likewise, the perspective on the analysis of sources is not here confined by the positivist naivete anymore.

Using a richer perspective in reference to the historiographic documentation analysis, it is not surprising that the historicist paradigm, since the mid- Nineteenth Century, became soon very popular among professional historians. If a perspective closer to the Positivist paradigm – the search for pure information – seem to have attracted a significant number of philosophers who wrote history, as well as other erudite from emerging social formations, the historicist paradigm, on the other hand, reached greater status among professional historians, used to the

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<sup>30</sup> According to Halphen (1946, p.50): “It is enough to let oneself be taken by the documents, read one after the other, as they are offered to us, to see the facts reconstitute themselves almost automatically”. This passage shows that, even in the Twentieth Century, it would still be possible to find broad sectors of the historiographic community with a naive perspective of sources. As a matter of fact, this passage was the target of severe criticism by Braudel against the “methodical historiography”, in his article of 1958 on “The Long Duration”.

perception that everything that is written seems to be connected to a particular view that needs to be deciphered in the heart of its specificity and complexity.

A quick panoramic view can give us an idea of how the historicist conception of history, mainly due to this efficient method of documental criticism, established by historians from the German school, spread out rapidly to other countries. In general, the historicists from the first two-thirds of the Nineteenth Century, also outside Germany, took particularly conservative stands to legitimize states-nationals. In England, for instance, we will have the works of Thomas Babbington Macaulay (1800-1859), who intends to reconstruct the historical past to show a progressive rising “towards the forms of English constitutional freedom” (FONTANA, 2004, p.233), which implies, in the case of Macaulay, a Whig historian, in redesigning the *History of England* (1949) in terms of gradual victories of the Whigs against the Tories, who appear as defenders of the *status quo* and as restrainers of the progressive political evolution led by the Whigs<sup>31</sup>. Later on, the German Historicism would gain more strength in England, specially from the dissemination of its method by Lord Acton (1834-1902). However, a historian impartiality perspective already reappears here which reminds us of the Positivists and historians from the early Nineteenth Century. In the meantime, on the other side of the Atlantic, the North-American historian Frederick Jackson Turner (1861-1932) reinforced emphatically the relativist nature of history in a text of 1891 on “The Significance of History”, anticipating the words of Benedetto Croce who said that “all history is contemporary” and that each period rewrites history necessarily one more time”. So, the quarrel between impartiality and relativism of the knowledge producer subject is thus reedited.

Despite the returns and occasional setbacks in the complex history of the rise of historical consciousness, the early historicist conservatism did not impede that new historiographic paths were developed from this paradigm. Historiographic relativism is certainly its main contribution. If we take into consideration the implications that were already present since the first historicist principle - that of historicity and relativism of all human societies and historical objects – it is easy to notice that it would be only a question of time for the ‘relativism and the historicity of the historian himself’ be hit by the Historicism. After all, if the historical object is relative, the historian himself – he himself liable to become historical object in the far future – cannot be more than equally relative, immersed in historicity, inevitably connected to particular viewpoints and intrinsic subjectivity.

Historicity consciousness was then inevitable, and was improved by the historicist arch as Historicism established itself throughout the Nineteenth Century. It was this way that the most relativist sector of Historicism got stronger from the works of scholars such as historian Gustav Droysen (1808-1884) and the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911). While Ranke was never

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<sup>31</sup> The Whig Party in Great Britain was the party that gathered liberal ideals as opposed to the Tory Party which constituted a more conservative trend. On Whig historians, see Burrow (1981). On Twentieth Century British historiography, see Parker (1990).



tormented by doubts in relation to history objectivity in the early times of Historicism development (IGGERS, 1968, p.80), Gustav Droysen, a German historicist from the second half of the Nineteenth Century, starts to support more or less clearly the historicity of the historian, as exposed in his text of 1881 entitled “The objectivity of the Eunuch”. This short essay brings a quite revealing expression of his ideas<sup>32</sup>:

I consider it [the fact that a historical writing without any perspective is conceived as excellent] an Eunuch partiality; and if impartiality and historical truths consist in observing things this way, then the historians are the worst and the worst the best. I don't wish anything rather than expose the relative truth in my point of view. I want to show how my country, political and religious convictions and my systematic study allowed me to arrive at my point of view. The historian must have the courage to recognize these limitations, and accept the fact that the limited and the particular are richer than the common and general. With this, objective impartiality, the unbiased attitude of the highly honored viewpoint, from the outside and above all things, as recommended by Wachsmuth in his theory of history, is, to me, inhuman. Human, to me, is to be partial” (DROYSEN, *Historik*, 1858; edition: 1977, p. 235-236).

Positions similar to those of Johan Gustav Droysen, which accepts the impossibility of neutralizing the historian, had also been taken, even before, by Gervinus (1805-1871) and Sybel (1817-1895), among other historians connected with the German historicism (RÜSEN, 1996, p. 85). Gervinus discussed the issue in an essay entitled *The Great History Lines* (1837), and Sybel in a text entitled *On the State of Modern German Historiography* (1856)<sup>33</sup>. If Droysen and other historicists had already started to recognize quite openly the historicity of the historian himself and the need to take it into consideration by the historiographic operation, the most sophisticated defense of the need to delineate a specific methodological posture for History and other sciences of the spirit, by opposition to the natural sciences standards, must be attributed to

<sup>32</sup> The image connecting “eunuch” with “objectivity” will also appear in Friedrich Nietzsche, in his well-known text “On the uses and disadvantages of history for life”, published in 1874 as the Second Intempestive Consideration: “Or before it was necessary a race of eunuchs to keep the large harem of universal history? Thus, the most pure objectivity will fit it quite well. It seems that his task consists in inspecting history so that nothing is extracted from it other than histories, but never events”. (NIETZSCHE, 2005, p.110). Later, in the same essay, Nietzsche continues: “But, as already said, this is a race of eunuchs, and for an eunuch, a woman worths the same as another woman, it is always a woman, a woman in itself, eternally unaccessible – it does not matter, therefore, what you do, providing that history remains preserved in its beautiful “objectivity”, watched by those who could never, by themselves, make history [...] They are no women and men, not even collective entities, but neutral beings, i.e., Eternal objectives, expressing myself in a more erudite way” (NIETZSCHE, 2005, p.114).

<sup>33</sup> Gervinus’ position, a historian closer to the next generation of historicists, is a bit more ambiguous. On one hand, he recognizes a nonpartisan posture as “methodologically desirable”. However, in the same passage, he also preached that the historian should be “a man from the destiny party, a natural defender of progress, since he could not refuse to defend the ideals of freedom” (GERVINUS, 1837, p.92). While affirming this, he was doing nothing else than assuming his liberal viewpoint.

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911). However, even before, Dilthey and Droysen had already established in *Historik* (1858) the need to clarify the methodological specificity of History and other human sciences. For him, there were three scientific methods with their own specificities: the speculative (from Philosophy), the Physic (from the Exact and Natural sciences), and the 'historical method'. Three specific theoretical- methodological gestures would correspond to these three fundamental types of methods: the "recognizing", "explaining" and "understanding" gestures.

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) will put on great efforts to try to delineate the methodological specificity of the historical sciences<sup>34</sup>. For him, the discussion could be dichotomized in terms of an opposition between the 'sciences of the spirit' (*Geisteswissenschaften*) and the 'sciences of nature' (*Naturwissenschaften*), considering that this opposition would be related to the fundamental contrast between two methodological postures: the "understanding" and the "explanation", related to the sciences of the spirit and sciences of nature, respectively<sup>35</sup>. While these two sciences could attain to a "previous explanation" of the facts, History - or any other of the sciences currently called human - would be connected to the need to "understand" (*Verstehen*) human phenomena, understand them, not only externally, but also internally, checking its senses and ideological and existential implications; in other words, their meanings<sup>36</sup>. This opposition between "understanding", typical of the human sciences, and an "explanation", typical of the natural sciences, would become classic, a reference to not only Historicism but also, in general, to great part of the historiography of the Twentieth Century<sup>37</sup>. From then on, we will find in several authors, also outside Historicism, the idea of having a more clear separation between the "natural sciences" and the "societies sciences"<sup>38</sup>. Another

<sup>34</sup> For a study on the Hermeneutics of Dilthey, see Amaral (1994); Reis (2003), and also Testa (2004).

<sup>35</sup> By considering the contrast between the "explain" and "understand" gestures, Dilthey reexamines the categories proposed by Droysen, disconsidering the "recognize" gesture, which, according to Droysen (2009, p. 41) would be related to the 'speculative method' from Philosophy and Theology.

<sup>36</sup> It is interesting to note that Dilthey advances effectively towards bringing more methodological specificity to the Human Sciences. But this does not mean that it can be argued that, at some level, he also could have sought inspiration in the natural sciences model. This was a strong model at that time, and had had an additional reinforcement with the success of Darwin's evolutionism. Hans-Georg Gadamer, in a passage from *Truth and Method* (1960), tries to show the connections between Dilthey and the naturalist inspiration, although his advances in distinguishing the two methodological postures: "And yet, Dilthey was deeply influenced by the natural sciences model, although he wanted to justify the methodological independence of the sciences of the spirit" (GADAMER, 2008, p.41). See Gadamer's argumentation after these words.

<sup>37</sup> Also Wilhelm Windelband (1848-1928), the key neo-kantian member of the Baden school, explored the exemplary way the project to systematize an opposition between the nomothetic sciences (designed for the perception of "nomos", i.e., "laws") and the idiographic sciences, which work with the singularities generated by human and social phenomena. In *History and Natural Science* (1894), Windelband writes about the contrast between the "nomothetics method", which, as in Physics and Mathematics, would deal with general laws, and the "scientific method", which, like in History and other human sciences, would deal with individual facts. As a matter of fact, it is significant the observation of Windelband who said that there is no real contrast between types of facts related to one standard or another, but an opposition between approaches that focus on the perception of general laws, and approaches that focus on the singularities or "particular forms" (i.e., the same facts may be treated from a nomothetics perspective or from an ideographic perspective, lying here the differences between one science and another).

<sup>38</sup> The name of Peter Winch (1972, p.32) can be mentioned, and, in particular, his work *Idea from a Social Science* for a clear explanation of the separation between The "natural sciences" and the "social sciences" the first related to the "Explanation" approach and the latter to the "Understanding" approach. Still in relation to the separation of two

important name in this direction will be that of Georg Simmel (1858-1918), a historicist sociologist from the generation that followed Wilhelm Dilthey<sup>39</sup>. The historicist contribution continues during the Twentieth Century, and to approach them adequately in this new century, we would need to write a specific article.

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knowledge production scopes, but already refusing the designation “science” to the knowledge related to man and human societies, see the essay *Minds, brains and science* by Searle (1990, p.81). For a general overview on related positions, Hughes (1987, p.33-34).

<sup>39</sup> Simmel will criticize Positivism frontally by emphasizing that the “historical sciences”, as opposed to the “natural sciences”, constitute a spiritual activity that discusses and gives meaning to reality (apud LÖWY, 1994, p.75). By recognizing, simultaneously, the multiplicity of viewpoints and the fact, already mentioned by Dilthey, and that each one of them corresponded to a partial view of reality, the integrating solution provided by Simmel is synthetic.

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