

## **Why Has Analytic Philosophy Almost Completely Failed to Exert any Influence on German Historical Writing and Reflections on Methodology?\***

### **¿Por qué la filosofía analítica ha fracasado casi por completo en la historiografía alemana y en las reflexiones metodológicas?**

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#### **Abstract**

The paper is a response to the question why analytic philosophy, which dominated philosophical Faculties in the English-speaking world, exerted virtually no influence on historical thought and writing in Germany. It examines major historiographical trends in Germany from the beginnings of history as an academic discipline in the nineteenth century to the present: the anti-democratic, nationalist tradition with its focus on politics and diplomacy associated with *Historismus*, which dominated German historical writing until after World War II, the democratically and socially oriented “historical social science” (*Historische Sozialwissenschaft*) of the 1960s and 1970s, committed to the analysis of social structures and historical processes, and the “history of everyday life” (*Alltagsgeschichte*) which aimed at a “history from below”. Yet what made analytic philosophy unacceptable to all these trends was that it proceeded in an abstract logical manner which neglected the concrete context in which historical explanation takes place.

#### **Key Words**

Ranke, Droysen, Meinecke, Abusch, Wehler, Historismus, *Historische Sozialgeschichte*, *Alltagsgeschichte*.

#### **Resumen**

Este artículo es una respuesta a la pregunta de por qué la filosofía analítica, que ha dominado las Facultades de Filosofía en el mundo angloparlante, no ha ejercido prácticamente ninguna influencia en el pensamiento histórico y en la historiografía alemanas. Se examinan las principales corrientes historiográficas alemanas desde los comienzos de la Historia como disciplina académica en el siglo XIX hasta la actualidad: la tradición antidemocrática y nacionalista, centrada en la política y la diplomacia, asociada al Historicismo (*Historismus*), que dominó la historiografía germana hasta después de la

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Segunda Guerra Mundial; la “historia-ciencia social”, orientada social y democráticamente (*Historische Sozialwissenschaft*), de las décadas de los sesenta y setenta del siglo XX, comprometida con el análisis de las estructuras sociales y los procesos históricos; y la “historia de los cotidiano” (*Alltagsgeschichte*) dirigida a la “historia desde abajo”. Sin embargo, lo que hizo inaceptable la filosofía analítica a todas estas corrientes fue el hecho de que aquella procedía de un modo lógico-abstracto, desatendiendo el contexto concreto en el que tienen lugar las explicaciones históricas.

### **Palabras clave**

Ranke, Droysen, Meinecke, Abusch, Wehler, Historicismo, Historia-ciencia social, historia de lo cotidiano.

### **What is Meant by Analytic Philosophy?**

Before we can begin to discuss this question we must arrive at some sort of a definition of what is meant by analytic philosophy. Michael Beaney in his Introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Analytic Philosophy* avoids a definition, perhaps rightly because of the diversity among the philosophers identified with the school, and instead prefers to provide a history of the analytic tradition as the only way to answer the question “What is analytic philosophy?”<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, there is a certain consensus about the ways in which the early advocates who were later identified with analytic philosophy understood their position, theorists forming a circle in Cambridge including Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore, Ludwig Wittgenstein and others, influenced by the German logician of mathematics Gottlob Frege, and slightly later the circle in Vienna around Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, Otto Neurath, and Karl Popper, who, except for Schlick who was murdered in 1936, fled from Austria to English speaking countries after the Nazi seizure of Austria and merged with the Cambridge group. The key principle for both circles is “that there are no specifically philosophical truths and that the object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts”.<sup>2</sup> Logical positivism was often identified with analytic philosophy and for both “only statements verifiable either logically or empirically would be *cognitively meaningful*”.<sup>3</sup> This meant for both a clear rejection of metaphysics and the reduction of aesthetics and ethics to matters of taste or choice which elude philosophical analysis. And this requires linguistic clarity, ideally a language which is free of ambiguities. It also involves a rejection of history. Science for them is not concerned with the history of its findings but with empirical validity and logical consistency.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Beaney, Introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 29. See also his chapter 2, “The historiography of analytic philosophy”, 30-60. Judging by the index in the 1,184 pages of the book, not a single historian is mentioned.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony J.P. Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (London: Penguin, 1973), 230.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Wikipedia, “Logical Positivism”, 1, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logical\\_positivism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logical_positivism) [accessed on 1 June 2015].

Although logical positivism was at an early stage often identified with it, analytical philosophy ultimately went in other directions. Yet in practice there was a difference which went beyond the stress of analytic philosophy on logically and of logical positivism on empirically verifiable truth.<sup>4</sup> In the course of time philosophers who identified themselves with analytic philosophy began to concern themselves with the above named topics, including religion, literature, and even Marxism, which had once been avoided. This justifies Michael Beane's decision to deal with an intellectual tradition rather than a well defined philosophy. Yet although the title of the *Oxford Handbook* suggests that it presents the historiography of analytic philosophy, in fact it consists of a series of isolated articles about individual thinkers with little consideration of the historical context in which they formulated their thought. It seems that the *Handbook* was written by philosophers for philosophers who tend to think that the historical context is of secondary importance. Because of the highly abstract nature of this thought, it has had little to offer to the practicing historian. There is in fact no chapter dealing with the question how basic concepts of analytic philosophic methods are actually applied to historical writing. In the index of the 1,161 page *Handbook*, not a single historian is mentioned. It is not surprising that historians in the German tradition, with whom we are dealing in this paper, either took no notice of analytical philosophy or misunderstood it as a form of positivism. In the last several decades analytical philosophy has come to dominate philosophy departments in the English-speaking world and to a lesser extent also elsewhere, but has received little attention from historians.

## **Two Approaches to Historical Theory and their Relation to Analytic Philosophy**

We shall distinguish between two categories of theorists, those who deal with questions of historical theory in the abstract with little concrete application to historical writing, and another category of practicing historians, who implicitly operate with theoretical assumptions without necessarily spelling them out. In this section we shall deal with three theorists of the first category.

They share with analytic philosophy the concern with the basic concepts employed in historical writing without analyzing historical writing directly. Three very recent works of this first category come to mind: Frank Ankersmit's *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation* (2012),<sup>5</sup> Jörn Rüsen, *Historik: Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft* (2013),<sup>6</sup> and Doris Gerber, *Analytische Metaphysik der Geschichte. Handlungen, Geschichten und ihre Erklärung* (2012).<sup>7</sup> Ankersmit devotes an important part of the introduction and conclusion of his book to Ranke, but it is not Ranke the historian

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<sup>4</sup> The affinity of analytic philosophy to positivism is suggested by Jonathan Wolff in chapter 27 "Analytic Political Philosophy" of the *Oxford Handbook* when he notes on p. 813 "it may often appear that analytic philosophy looks towards mathematics and the empirical sciences for models of methodology, whereas continental philosophy looks more towards literary and interpretative studies". The same may be said of history too.

<sup>5</sup> Frank Ankersmit, *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Jörn Rüsen, *Historik: Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Doris Gerber, *Analytische Metaphysik der Geschichte. Handlungen, Geschichten und ihre Erklärung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2012).

but the theorist of history. Only once does he very briefly cite a historical work, Ranke's *English History*. The main part of the book is devoted to the analysis of a number of concepts which he considers to be central to historical representation such as time, interpretation, representation, truth, meaning, experience, and subjectivity, dealt with purely in the abstract with virtually no reference to how they appear in actual historical writings. Rüsen in an excellent Introduction comes closer to what historians do, setting out to examine what is meant by history as a "science" (*Geschichtswissenschaft*), a term with a very different meaning in German from English, here in the case of history seen in the context of a professional discipline (*Fach*) as it emerged in the nineteenth century. He is fully aware in the Introduction of the challenges which this discipline with its Eurocentric orientation has undergone since the 1960s in the face of culturalism and globalism. These challenges have led Rüsen to rewrite the earlier formulation of a *Historik* from the 1980s.<sup>8</sup> But once he leaves the Introduction, he proceeds in a way similar to Ankersmit, analyzing basic concepts, although these relate more closely to historical study and questions of methodology than do those of Ankersmit.<sup>9</sup> This tendency to deal with history in the abstract also marks the work of Doris Gerber. Gerber is less concerned with the analysis of concepts than with the question of historical knowledge. She develops her idea of the centrality of intentional motivations in history against both structuralist and narrativist approaches to history such as those of Karl Marx or Hayden White.<sup>10</sup> But historians do not appear in her book, or in the case of Reinhard Koselleck deal only with his theoretical, not his historical writings. The one exception is a brief section on Hans-Ulrich Wehler's and Jürgen Kocka's theoretical underpinnings of their social history.<sup>11</sup> All three authors are fully justified in dealing with theoretical aspects of historiography, but they proceed on a level of abstraction which has little direct applicability to what historians do. My presentation here may sound critical, but then the topic of this session is "why has Analytic Philosophy almost completely failed to exert any influence on German historical writing or on reflections on methodology?"

A very different approach to the analysis of concepts, closer to what historians do, was undertaken by the *Begriffsgeschichte* (history of concepts) in the eight-volume *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe, historisches Lexikon politisch-sozialer Sprache in Deutschland* (1973-1997) which aimed at approaching the history of society through an

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<sup>8</sup> Jörn Rüsen, *Grundzüge einer Historik*, 3 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983-1989).

<sup>9</sup> Rüsen does cite a number of historians including Johann Gustav Droysen, Jacob Burckhardt, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Saul Friedländer, and Hans Medick, but with a focus on their theoretical pronouncements, again without a close analysis of their actual historical writings. Although Rüsen elsewhere has made an important contribution in making German and English readers aware of non-Western historical traditions, in his *Historik* he deals almost exclusively with German-language literature, with Hayden White being a notable exception as he is also for Doris Gerber, although neither accepts White's reduction of history to pure narrative. Gerber is much more aware of the Anglo-American and French theoretical writings.

<sup>10</sup> Gerber on Marxism, *Analytische Metaphysik*, 147-148, and Wehler and Kocka as representing *Strukturgeschichte*; "Kritik des Narrativismus", 145-49; Rüsen, *Historik*, 219-22, Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination of Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 222-27.

<sup>11</sup> On Wehler and Kocka, see Gerber, *Analytische Metaphysik der Geschichte*, 145-48. Koselleck and White are mentioned more extensively, but as theorists; Droysen, who is discussed extensively in Rüsen's *Historik* (but with reference only to Droysen's *Historik*, not his historical works), in Gerber is merely cited among the names of several theorists.

examination of the underlying concepts which determined social consciousness, specifically in Germany in the period from about 1750 to 1850 during which a modern discourse was born.<sup>12</sup> Yet this conceptual approach to history differed markedly from analytic philosophy; while analytic philosophy was concerned with the logical analysis of concepts independently of their historical context, for *Begriffsgeschichte* the historical context in which concepts relating to social structures are embedded in historical processes is basic for historical understanding.

### **The Politics of “Historismus” and the Rejection of Positivism in Germany between 1825 and the early 1960s**

To understand the transformation of historical methodology and writing after 1945, which is the theme of this conference, we have to turn to the tradition of Historism (*Historismus*), to be distinguished from Historicism (*Historizismus*) as defined by Karl Popper in his *Poverty of Historicism*.<sup>13</sup> Popper identifies historicism with the belief in historical laws as propagated in diverse forms by Hegel, Marx, and the French positivists which he identifies with authoritarian political doctrines. He does not discuss the German school of Historism (*Historismus*) which rejects the very idea of causal explanation and laws of history.<sup>14</sup>

The term Historism was first used later, but the basic ideas were formulated as early as the 1820s by Leopold von Ranke, who is considered the founder of history as an academic discipline in Germany.<sup>15</sup> Ranke wished to elevate history to the rank of a science (*Wissenschaft*), but of a science which took into account the unique character of historical studies. “History”, he wrote, “is distinguished from all other sciences in that it also an art. History is a science in collecting, finding, penetrating; it is an art because it recreates and portrays that which it has found and recognized”.<sup>16</sup> He emphatically did not believe that history could be reduced to laws. Instead he stressed that the historian must recognize the individual character of all historical subject matters and epochs and sought to understand them (*verstehen*) rather than explain them in abstract terms. Only through the immersion into the subject matter was an intuitive understanding of the forces operating in history possible. He stressed the centrality of the state, as the expression of a moral idea, and its right to maintain itself by force in the international struggle for power, but unlike his later followers remained committed to a European balance of the great powers rather than endorsing Prusso-German nationalism.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe, historisches Lexikon politisch-sozialer Sprache in Deutschland*, 8 vols. (Stuttgart: Klett, 1972-1997).

<sup>13</sup> Karl Popper, *Poverty of Historicism* (New York: Basic Books, 1960).

<sup>14</sup> He in one sentence writes that historicism should not be confused with Historism without defining what is meant by Historism or mentioning a single historian or theorist connected with it, *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> See Georg G. Iggers, “Historicism”, in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, vol. 2 (New York: Scribner, 1973-74), 456-64; Iggers, “The History and the Meaning of the Term”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 56 (1995): 129-52.

<sup>16</sup> Leopold Ranke, “On the Character of Historical Science”, in Leopold von Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History*, ed. Georg G. Iggers, transl. Wilma A. Iggers (London: Routledge, 2011), 8.

<sup>17</sup> See Leopold Ranke, “The Great Powers”, *Ibid.*, 29-53.

An early concise definition of the central concepts of the philosophic and political tradition of Historism as it affected historical writing was contained in Johann Gustav Droysen's article "*Erhebung der Geschichte zum Rang einer Wissenschaft*" (Raising History to the Rank of a Science) in the *Historische Zeitschrift* in 1862, a critique of Henry Thomas Buckle's *History of Civilization in England* and with it a rejection of what Droysen considered the first attempt to apply positivist notions to the writing of history as advocated by Auguste Comte. The positivism of Comte and Buckle should not be confused with analytic philosophy as it emerged half a century later, but there are some parallelisms. Similarly some analytic philosophers sought the orientation of philosophy to the natural sciences, the belief represented by theorists who came from the Vienna Circle like Carl Hempel, that the same logic of explanation which applies to the natural sciences also applies to philosophic thinking.<sup>18</sup> Analytic philosophies never accepted the positivist notion of historical progress; moreover they were not interested in causal explanation, but in analytical procedures.

Droysen draws a harp line between Buckle's attempt to explain historical events in terms of the laws of the physical sciences which for him are inapplicable to a science (*Wissenschaft*) of history which deals with what he describes as "moral communities" (*sittliche Gemeinsamkeiten*). Each of these has its individual character and cannot be reduced to abstract terms, but needs to be understood (*verstehen*). He then proceeds to what amounts to a political critique of Buckle's advocacy of individual liberty and of his view of church and state as patronizing interferences (*Bevormundung*) with the self determination of the individual (*Bildung*). It is rather "in the community of the family, state, and nation (*Volk*) that the individual lifts himself above the limits of his ephemereal self [...] The essence of freedom rests not in the unlimited independence of the individual. Without the moral powers (*sittliche Mächte*) it (freedom) amounts to nothing". Droysen then contrasts the picture which Buckle draws of civilization (*Zivilisation*), with the *Bildung* which is central to German society.<sup>19</sup> Later historians involved in German war propaganda in World War I, contrasted Western civilization (*Zivilisation*) with German culture (*Kultur*) and praised the latter as superior in its historical understanding of reality as against the supposedly positivistic outlook of the West, and with it rejected democratic values as against a superior understanding of the world in which freedom is embedded in a state which combines freedom with authority.<sup>20</sup>

All this provided an ideological basis for the Prusso-German state, as it was unified under Bismarck. This perspective persisted in the face of military defeat in the Weimar Republic. Indeed there was a younger generation of democratic historians in the Weimar Republic, but they constituted a marginal group forced into emigration when the Nazis assumed power.<sup>21</sup> This is not to say that the historian tradition led to Nazism; the majority of historians did not support the Nazi party, but their intense rejection of democracy and

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<sup>18</sup> See note 8.

<sup>19</sup> Johann Gustav Droysen, "Erhebung der Geschichte zum Rang einer Wissenschaft", in Johann Gustav Droysen, *Historik: Vorlesungen über Enzyklopädie und Methodologie der Geschichte*, ed. Rudolf Hübner (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1960), 386-405.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1919).

<sup>21</sup> Gerhard A. Ritter (ed.), *Refugee Historians and Friedrich Meinecke: Letters and Documents* (Boston: Brill, 2010).

parliamentarism contributed to the demise of the Weimar Republic. And almost all these historians supported Nazi foreign policy up to 1939 and the war after that, including Friedrich Meinecke, one of the few supporters of the Weimar Republic among the historians. Certainly disturbed by the domestic political development in Nazi Germany, Meinecke published nevertheless *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (The Origins of Historism) in 1936 while the Nazis were already in power.<sup>22</sup> The book was a direct critique of Enlightenment rationality, showing how in an almost progressive manner, German thinkers since Leibniz and Herder replaced the rigid natural law concept of a common human nature by a historical philosophy of value which recognized the elements of individuality, diversity, and change in historical reality. Now disillusioned about Germany's political development, to which he does not refer here but which he had hailed before World War I in *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat*, where he stressed the merger of Prussian military power and Weimar culture positively, he nevertheless still proclaimed the spiritual superiority of German historical thought.<sup>23</sup> He viewed Historism as it developed in Germany as "the highest stage reached until now in the understanding of things human", and Germany's greatest contribution to European culture since the Reformation.<sup>24</sup>

To understand why Historism so dominated academic historiography in Germany we must look at the way in which the history faculties at the Protestant German universities were recruited, which resulted in a historiographical and political consensus.<sup>25</sup> Except in the period of the Nazi and the Communist dictatorships the state intervened less in the writing of history than in many other countries. Communist East Germany is a different story as to recruitment. Except in East Germany under Communism intervention was seldom necessary because there existed a broad consensus on philosophical and political questions in accord with the establishment. Not only were Jews and until well into the twentieth century women generally excluded from university appointments, but often also Catholics. Only seldom were persons of diverse political opinions appointed. The attempt of an established historian, Karl Lamprecht, to introduce certain positivist ideas into his *German History* at the turn to the twentieth century was vigorously rebuffed by the historical profession, although it was taken seriously by a public outside the universities. Of course, there were historians who did not follow the historicist paradigm methodologically or politically, Marxists but also democratically oriented writers who retold the past as a literary endeavor like Emil Ludwig, but they had no place at the university.

### **The Political and Philosophic Rejection of both *Historismus* and Analytic Philosophy in the Federal Republic of Germany after 1960**

The immediate period after 1945 saw a continuation of national traditions of historiography in West Germany by an older generation of historians who continued to

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<sup>22</sup> Friedrich Meinecke, *Entstehung des Historismus* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1936); also *Werke III*. English, *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1970).

<sup>23</sup> Friedrich Meinecke, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat: Studien zur Genesis des deutschen Nationalstaats* (Berlin: R. Oldenbourg, 1919). English: *Cosmopolitanism and the National State* (Princeton University Press, 1970).

<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Meinecke, *Entstehung des Historismus*, *Werke III*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Wolfgang Weber, *Priester der Klio: Historisch-sozialwissenschaftliche Studien zur Herkunft und Karriere deutscher Historiker zur Geschichte der Geschichtswissenschaft 1800-1970* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1985).

dominate the universities. Slightly more critical than most of these historians the aged Friedrich Meinecke in his *The German Catastrophe* essentially defended the German intellectual and cultural past even if he now distanced himself from the excessive militaristic aspects of Prusso-German nationalism.<sup>26</sup> A much more critical note appeared in 1946 in East Germany in Alexander Abusch's *Irrweg einer Nation* (The Erroneous Path of a Nation) in which he made the failure of Germany to develop democratic institutions responsible for the rise of Nazism.<sup>27</sup> But the East German authorities very soon distanced themselves from Abusch's critical assessment of the German past. For them the rise of Nazism was to be understood not as a peculiarly German phenomenon with roots in the anti-democratic traditions of Germany's political thought but as the international product of monopoly capitalism.

Yet quite independently of Abusch the idea of a failed German path was also taken up by a younger generation of historians in West Germany beginning in the second half of the 1960s who critically examined the German past to explain the Nazi seizure of power. Hans-Ulrich Wehler in *Das deutsche Kaiserreich* (The German Empire) in 1973 argued that Germany in the process of industrial modernization had traveled a "special path" (*Sonderweg*) different from that of West European societies and America.<sup>28</sup> "The progressive economic modernization of German society", he wrote, "should have been accompanied by a modernization of social relations and politics. Industrialization in its permanent technological revolution should have brought with it a development of a society of legally free and politically responsible citizens capable of making their own decisions", which in the German case it definitely did not. This conception of a "special" path to modernity was ultimately sharply criticized because it oversimplified the social and political development of the West in general and of Germany in particular.<sup>29</sup> But it marked a radical challenge to the historical narrative which had dominated academic history in Germany since the early nineteenth century, an end to the hostility against the West and Western values, but by now means an acceptance of the positivism inherent in analytic philosophy.

Wehler called for the transformation of history into a social science, but a "historical social science" (*Historische Sozialwissenschaft*).<sup>30</sup> He relied heavily on Max Weber's conception of a social science. Already in 1884 the Viennese economist Carl Menger in *Die Irrtümer des Historismus in der deutschen Nationalökonomie* (The Errors of Historism in German National Economics) had charged that the German historical school of economics

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<sup>26</sup> Friedrich Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe: Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen* (Wiesbaden, Zurich: E. Brockhaus, Aroverlag, 1946; reprint Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1949). English: *The German Catastrophe. Reflections and Recollections* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1950).

<sup>27</sup> Alexander Abusch, *Der Irrweg einer Nation: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis deutscher Geschichte* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1960). Despite the fact that the official GDR distanced itself from the book, it was republished in 1949 and 1960.

<sup>28</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich, 1871-1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973).

<sup>29</sup> Geoff Eley and David Blackbourn, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Culture in 19-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 11.

<sup>30</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Historische Sozialwissenschaft und Geschichtsschreibung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980); Georg G. Iggers, *Vom Historismus zur Historischen Sozialwissenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978).

of Gustav Schmoller in its attempt to deal with economic processes in the context of a specific German culture had avoided formulating the clear concepts necessary for scientific research.<sup>31</sup> Weber criticized the ahistorical level of abstraction on which Menger and classical economics operated, but also the lack of clear concepts of the historical school.<sup>32</sup> He called for a sociology which sought to formulate clear concepts within their historical context.

At the same time a group of historians separate from the Wehler circle in 1973 launched the multi-volume *Begriffsgeschichte*, to which we already referred, which aimed at approaching the history of society through an examination of the underlying concepts which determined social consciousness, specifically in Germany in the period from about 1750 to 1850 during which a modern discourse was born.<sup>33</sup> Yet this conceptual approach to history differed markedly from both analytic philosophy and historical social science; while the former was concerned with the logical analysis of concepts independent of their historical context, for the latter the historical context is crucial in which clear concepts relating to social structures embedded in historical processes are basic for historical understanding. But it also differs fundamentally from the ways of empirical and often quantitative methods applied by a large segment of social sciences in America and to a lesser extent in Western Europe.

And just as German Historism involved a particular political position, so the *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* viewed itself as actively socially and politically involved. It sought to contribute to the construction of a socially oriented democracy. Without generally admitting its debt to Marx, historical social science was deeply concerned with the extent of social inequality and class structures, while at the same time strongly opposed to authoritarian and dogmatic aspects of state socialism as practiced in the Soviet Union and its satellites. The opposition to socialist dictatorship and the commitment to liberal democracy was shared by most thinkers in the analytic philosophic tradition, Karl Popper is a clear example and Bertrand Russell was an outspoken pacifist committed to extensive social reform; and although Popper who favored a free market economy and Russell differed on this, their philosophy assumed a society in which free communication was possible. Nevertheless they made a clear cut between their political commitments to a free society and their philosophy which in its logical analysis was value free while the philosophy of German *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*, also known as the Bielefeld School, saw a clear connection between its social theory and its political and social activism.

There is an element of positivism in the attempt by the advocates of a historical social science to examine social structures and historical processes empirically, but also a conscious attempt to overcome positivism. If Weber represented a major influence, the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School represented another decisive influence.<sup>34</sup> We have

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<sup>31</sup> Carl Menger, *Irrtümer des Historismus in der historischen Nationalökonomie* (Wien, 1884; reprint Aalen Scientia Verlag, 1966).

<sup>32</sup> Max Weber, "Roscher und Knies und die logischen Probleme der historischen Nationalökonomie", in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (Tübingen: Mohl, 1968), 1-145.

<sup>33</sup> See note 11.

<sup>34</sup> John Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer and the Foundation of the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

already seen how Marxist ideas of social inequality and class conflict played an important role in the historical social science of the Bielefeld School, modified by the inclusion of cultural factors. Consciously moving away from positivist positions, they accepted the distinction which Max Horkheimer initiated in 1937 in his essay “Traditional and Critical Theory” in which traditional theory is essentially positivistic in accepting the world as it is and critical theory examines society in terms of basic values of social equality.<sup>35</sup> Horkheimer criticized the “logico-mathematical” prejudice of positivism, and this critique would also apply to analytic philosophy, which separates theoretical activity from actual life without consideration for ongoing human activities.<sup>36</sup> These are ideas which are integrated into the historical social science of the Bielefeld historians who, however, are less involved in philosophic discussions than in writing history, aware of maintaining intersubjectively acceptable standards of historical study.

In the period beginning in the 1960s and extending until now Jürgen Habermas became the most important representative of critical theory. He developed a theory of what he called “communicative” reason which reaffirmed the centrality of human reason which has been questioned by postmodern thinkers like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, and sought by “communicative reason” to arrive at a more humane, just, and egalitarian society, which also was the aim of the Bielefeld historians.<sup>37</sup> Habermas reaffirmed the rational values of the Enlightenment and called on Germany to accept the democratic values which he saw predominant in the West. His own democratic convictions like those of the Bielefeld historians were those of social democracy.

It is important to mention that at this time a fundamental change took place at the universities which became much more open in their recruitment of faculty which now included women and a greater diversity of opinions, and the admission of students from a much broader segment of the population. All this occurred at a time of changes in the political climate affected by the student movement of the 1960s.

### **The Cultural Turn in Historical Thought and Its Methodological Implications from the 1980s to the 2010s**

In a way the diverse social science approaches to history, whether German *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*, French *Annales*, varieties of Marxism, and American Cliometrics, shared with analytic philosophy the concern to formulate generalizations to explain social formations, but unlike analytic philosophy sought not logical consistency but historical contexts. What joined the various social sciences and analytic philosophy was the commitment to rational standards of inquiry subject to validation. As late as 1979 Geoffrey Barraclough concluded that the search for quantity is undoubtedly the most powerful of the new trends in history, the factor beyond all others which distinguishes historical attitudes in

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<sup>35</sup> “Traditional and Critical Theory”, in Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Continuum, 1972), 188-243.

<sup>36</sup> See Max Horkheimer, “The Latest Attack on Metaphysics”, *Ibid.*, 132-87.

<sup>37</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984 and 1987).

the 1970s from historical attitudes in the 1930s.<sup>38</sup> In the same year Lawrence Stone in an essay “The Revival of Narrative” went in a very different direction, rejecting the illusion of “coherent scientific explanation” in history without, however, suggesting that historical narrative despite its literary form surrenders its claim to rational inquiry and realistic reconstruction.<sup>39</sup> In Germany the turn to cultural history led in the 1980s to a vigorous debate between advocates of social science history, who called for strict conceptual and analytical guidelines, and the champions of everyday history for whom these guidelines meant the death knell for lived experiences which should be the true subject matter of history. The German advocates of an *Alltagsgeschichte* (every day history) found a pattern for their methodological approach in the cultural anthropology of Clifford Geertz of a “thick description” which called for an immediate confrontation with an alien culture. The advocates of *Alltagsgeschichte* turned away from the concern of the social sciences with large impersonal social structures and historical process and sought a “history from below”, of the life experiences of common people. This stress on the every day was not only taken up by historians in West Germany, but also by historians in East Germany.<sup>40</sup> It is clear where *Alltagsgeschichte* stands politically; as advocates of a history from below they stand to the left of social democracy, wanting a democracy which stands for the welfare of the common people and very conscious of environmental issues.

Two new approaches became important in Germany, but not only in Germany, oral history and the history of memory, but differently outside of Germany. Although neither could fully rely on traditional accepted standards of evidential scholarship, they nevertheless contributed to an understanding of the past. Oral history in Germany concentrated on interviews with persons who had experienced the Nazi and Communist dictatorships, including survivors of the Holocaust. An important project undertaken by Lutz Niethammer and his team in the 1980s interviewed ordinary citizens in the Ruhr Valley of West Germany as well as in East Germany on what they experienced in the Nazi period.<sup>41</sup> At the same time an important concern with historical memory arose in Europe and in the United States. In France it turned to collective history to reconstruct how the French recollected their past, in Germany, but also in Israel, with the founding of the journal *History and Memory* in 1990 it dealt with the memories of individual survivors.<sup>42</sup>

### **The Status of Historical Writing Today and Its Relation to Analytic Philosophy**

In order to receive an oversight of historical writing and theory today, we have looked at the 2014 program of the German Historical Association (*Deutscher Historikertag*) and have made some comparisons with the 2014 program of the American Historical

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<sup>38</sup> Geoffrey Barraclough, *Main Trends in History* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979).

<sup>39</sup> Lawrence Stone, “The Revival of Narrative. Reflections on a New Old History”, *Past and Present*, 85 (November, 1979): 19.

<sup>40</sup> For East German treatments of *Alltagsgeschichte* see Jürgen Kuczynski, *Geschichte des Alltags des deutschen Volkes, 1600-1945*, 6 vols. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1980-1985).

<sup>41</sup> Lutz Niethammer (ed.), “Die Jahre weiß man nicht, wo man die heute hinsetzen soll”, in *Faschismuserfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet. Lebensgeschichte und Sozialkultur im Ruhrgebiet, 1930-1960* (Berlin: Dietz, 1983).

<sup>42</sup> Regarding France: Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de Mémoire*, 7 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-1992). English: *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, 3 vols. (New York: Columbia University, 1996-1998).

Association. In the period from the beginnings of history as an academic discipline in the nineteenth century until the late twentieth century there have been major trends to which a great deal of German historical writing has conformed, first the nationalist politics oriented historiography which dominated until World War II, then various forms of social science oriented history, followed toward the end of the twentieth century by the cultural and linguistic turn. We find no such dominant trend reflected in the 2014 program of the *Deutsche Historikertag*, instead a greater diversity than before. In fact there is no dominant paradigm apparent in the German program, and even greater diversity than before. What is the relationship of historical writing and thought to analytic philosophy as reflected in the German 2014 program? The answer is none. There is not a single section which deals primarily with questions of historical methodology or philosophy of history. The closest are sections dealing with the effect of digitalization on history and the role of new media. Implicitly elements of a consensus become apparent. None of the sections follow the model of the *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*. The latter was still macro-historical in its assumptions of modernization processes and class structures; neither appears to be dealt with now. On the other hand, they do not pursue the relativistic epistemological implications of the *Alltagsgeschichte* with its turn to micro-history. There is no recourse to the attempts of Hayden White to emphasize the fictional character of all historical narratives. Instead the sections appear to accept a high degree of historical realism.

Unlike the American programs, the programs of the *Historikertage* are organized around a problem. The problem for the 2008 *Historikertag* was the role of inequality in history, the one of the 2010 program with borders and the overcoming of borders, 2012 the conflict about resources, and 2014 winners and losers in history. Many of the sections, however, actually do not deal closely with these problems. But several things become clear from the formulation of these topics. The main concern is with contemporary issues. Nationalism is dead, as is any identification with the nation. On the other hand, it is striking how in contrast to the American program for 2014, the historical perspective in almost all sections is centered on Europe, with an occasional inclusion of the United States. Although most sections deal with the twentieth century, a few trace history back to the medieval and early modern periods, but always in Europe. Again unlike the American program there are only two sections which deal with colonialism and post-colonialism. One section deals with the divergence between European and Chinese developments, two with the reintegration of Soviet veterans of the Afghan war into Soviet society. It is surprising how little attention is paid to the Holocaust: two deal with the fate of German Jewish refugees, two with the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe. Questions of ethnicity do not play a direct role, they do to an extent in the sections devoted to migration. A very striking contrast is the absence of concern with questions of sexuality which play a major role in the American program; there is only one section devoted to questions of sexuality, one to homosexuality, and although many women participate in the program, there is no section which can be described as feminist.

## **Conclusion**

There is in fact very little contact between historians writing history and analytic philosophers. This has something to do with the extreme departmentalization of academic

studies despite the call for interdisciplinary approaches. Both have a good deal to learn from each other. The very fact that there is so little contact justifies this conference and this paper to explore ways in which this separation of analytic philosophy and historical studies may be lessened, even if not overcome. This paper has tried to show how far practicing historians have been from clearly examining the theoretical bases of their work. They can thus learn from analytic philosophy. On the other hand the analytical philosophers discussed in the *Oxford Handbook* need to realize to a larger extent that all thought takes place in a historical and social context. Thus the discussion which we are undertaking at this conference has a definite purpose.

### **Profile**

Georg Iggers is a Distinguished Professor of History emeritus at the State University of New York. He was born in 1926 in Hamburg, Germany, and in October 1938 fled from Germany to escape Nazi persecution as a Jew. He spent the rest of his youth in Richmond, Virginia (USA), and became very early involved in the civil rights struggle against racial discrimination in the American South. He did his doctorate in the interdisciplinary Committee on the History of Culture (Chicago) with a focus on comparative European intellectual and social history in the nineteenth century. He very soon became interested in the theory and history of historiography and in 1968 published *The German Conception of History. The National Tradition of Historical Thought From Herder to the Present* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press), followed by several books and editions on historiography from a transnational perspective. During the Cold War he engaged in establishing contacts between historians on both sides of the ideological divide. In 1980 he was one of the founders of the International Commission for the Theory and History of Historiography. Together with the Chinese historian, Q. Edward Wang, and the Indian historian, Supriya Mukherjee, he published *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (Harlow, New York: Pearson Longman, 2008).

Georg Iggers es Distinguished Professor of History emérito en la Universidad estatal de Nueva York. Nacido en 1926 en Hamburgo (Alemania), en octubre de 1938 huyó de Alemania de la persecución nazi contra los judíos. Pasó el resto de su juventud en Richmond (Virginia, USA), donde se implicó tempranamente en la lucha por los derechos civiles contra la discriminación racial en el Sur. Hizo su doctorado en el interdisciplinario Comité de Historia de la Cultura (Chicago) centrándose en la historia intelectual europea comparada y en la historia social del siglo XX. Enseguida se interesó por la teoría e historia de la historiografía, y en 1968 publicó *The German Conception of History. The National Tradition of Historical Thought From Herder to the Present* (Middletown, Wesleyan University Press), seguido de varios libros y ediciones de historiografía desde una perspectiva transnacional. Durante la Guerra Fría se ocupó de establecer contactos entre los historiadores de ambos lados de la división ideológica. En 1980 fue uno de los fundadores de la Comisión Internacional de Teoría e Historia de la Historiografía. Junto al historiador chino Q. Edward Wang y el historiador indio Supriya Mukherjee, ha publicado *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (Harlow, New York: Pearson Longman, 2008).

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