History, Historicity and Science

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philosophical and historical knowledge, §§50–54 for the historical knowledge of philosophy); see also Meier (1752), p. 157.

27   KrV B 865/A 837 (my emphasis).
28   KrV B 838/A 866 (my emphasis).
29   I want to thank Tom Rockmore for pointing our to me this further aspect of the problem.
30   See *Logik*, §38.

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Chapter 4

Historicity, Social Psychology and Change

Rom Harré and Fathali M. Moghaddam

1   The Very Concept of Historicity

The dictionary definition of 'historicity' is 'historical quality or authenticity based on fact.' Historicity is a quality of a discourse perhaps, or even of an opinion. The most general concept would something like this: the historicity of a claim about the past is its factual status. The multi-faceted discipline of psychology implicitly makes claims about the past (and the future) by its resolutely ahistorical stance. The results of contemporary studies are presented as, and probably believed by mainstream psychologists to be, universal, pan-temporal laws of human nature. 'Mainstream,' official psychology of human beings is atemporal, or to put this another way, it assumes that the organizing principles of human association have always been the same. This presupposition is surely contestable. We shall contest it by critically examining the practice of contemporary social psychology. To make the force of what we have to say clear, a preliminary sketch of social psychology is in order.

Social psychology is typically and (vaguely) defined as the scientific study of social behavior.[1] Even a cursory survey of the literature makes it clear that neither term in the *definiens* is uncontestable. Neither a grasp of the nature of the scientific tradition nor a clear idea of social behavior is evident in this literature. This issue has been worked over many times. Our interest is in something rather different, the role of temporal assumptions in the practice of psychology. Social psychology, as such, first appeared in the United States about one hundred years ago in the writings of two major figures, a psychologist, McDougal,[2] and a sociologist, Ross.[3] Although social psychology is typically American in its emphasis on individuals as the sites of the relevant psychological processes and its dependence on experimental methodologies, it is a rapidly growing specialty around the world.[4] The expansion is in effect due to the export of doctrines of American

social psychology reflecting American culture. This material is marked by its atemporality. The issue of the historicity of social psychological claims, reports and doctrines in the contemporary context sketched above, is clearly of the first importance.

The issue of the historicity of the discipline is also of importance because of the relative closeness of it to history proper. Some scholars have argued that social psychology can be regarded as history,[5] while others have gone so far as to declare that it *is* history.[6] Such questions as 'What is the "historicity" of the hypotheses of social psychology?,' 'What is the status of assumptions about the psychology of people of the past?,' 'How do these compare with assumptions about the chemistry of the geological past, the biological assumptions given form in alleged facts of descent described in the genealogy of a family?,' and so on require examination.

Even though there are very few social psychological studies that look back to past historical periods, in several important ways social psychology has been 'historical.' For example, undergraduates reading social psychology books come across many studies that were published before they were born, such as those by Sherif[7] and Milgram.[8]

Gergen has argued that in reading social psychology of another era, students are reading social history.[9] Social psychology just is the keeping of a record in past terms of past aspects of past forms of social life. Now comes the problem of how these documents can be read in the present. How do students from this era interpret the social behavior of students (in laboratory experiments) in earlier eras?

There seems to be a much greater problem with the historicity of claims about what people believe, think, feel and so on, rather than what they do. The historicity of a description of the Battle of Borodino, for instance, as to the number of casualties is quite different from the historicity of Tolstoy's famous remarks about Katusov and his attitude to the battle. Yet even the casualty figures are subject to the problem of historicity. For example, the figures given by Shakespeare for the Battle of Agincourt (hundreds of French dead, a couple of dozen English) look 'massaged'!

But if there has been change in meanings, conventions and so on between then and now, how would one know it? How would we get a handle on what psychic life was like before the end of the Napoleonic era if our psychological lives are different? The hermeneutic circle seems to close very tightly around this problem.

This investigation clearly involved several matters:

1 By what criteria or method do we sort out traces and remnants of the past in some particular order? Need the chosen order be the simple order of modern clocks or calendars? The choice of the order of clock-time presupposes some sort of mapping from cause/effect sequences to significant sequences of events as time sequenced. Thinking in terms of intentional actions of people with projects on hand might lead to highlighting the significance of events in a different hierarchy. Only if causes are what matter does a narrative have to take the picaresque format.
2 How we know how to categorize an event as a *social* event? How do we demarcate or individuate such events? Are there pan-temporal criteria for arriving at the very material on which a historically sensitive social psychology could be based?
3 Items 1 and 2 together drive us towards the idea of a systematic process or processes of *social* change. But is this any more than a myth? What would be needed to ground the idea of social *change*, particularly if that idea were to be grounded in the idea of the changing psychology of the people who live a different kind of social life? Sexual arrangements have greatly changed in the last fifty years. What is the quality of the claim that people in the 1950s were different in some psychologically significant way from the people of the twenty-first century? This is to question the historicity of theses derived from alleged examples of social change.

We cannot discuss the historicity of a claim, a putative factual claim about 'what happened,' unless we have taken some sort of stand on the three issues above.

How would one determine the historicity of a claim about the psychological processes of Genghis Kahn, Adolf Hitler or Albert Einstein? So to discus 'historicity' in the social psychological/psychological content thoroughly, one would need to examine the broad claims of psycho-history. In this chapter we will concentrate our attentions on the field of social psychology because the historicity of its claims is most fundamental and has been most strongly contested.

2   The 'Historicity Problem' in the Context of Social Psychology

2.1   *The Absence of Time in Social Psychology*

At first glance, it would seem that traditional social psychology is not seriously concerned with time, with the past. At most there is a paradoxically atemporal focus on the future. About 85 per cent of social psychological studies concern brief episodes, typically about an hour, involving undergraduates in laboratories. The main objective of such studies, often explicitly stated, is to identify causal factors leading to specific behaviors, in order to achieve more accurate predictions about future behavior. But the methodology ensures that future behavior must be the same type as behavior that can be identified in the hour or two in the 'laboratory.' The small number of field studies conducted by social psychologists also adopt this 'causal' objective. For example, a central goal of social psychologists over the last century has been the prediction of behavior from declarations of attitudes.[10] The idea that wholly new forms of behavior might emerge from certain identifiable conditions *cannot* be realized within this 'experimental' methodology.

2.2   *Neglect of the Past*

A major reason for a lack of interest in the past is the research design accepted in traditional social psychology. This design calls for the manipulation of independent variables (assumed causes) to measure their effect on dependent variables (assumed effects), holding all other factors constant. Given that it is not possible to go back in time and manipulate variables in past social life, it is not surprising that traditional social psychology focuses on (slices of) the present, in order to arrive at predictions for future behavior.

   A small number of social psychologists have attempted to study the past in order to better understand social behavior. McClelland's original studies on achievement motivation come to mind.[11] The main proposition underlying these studies is that economic profess arises from certain attitudes and behaviors that add up to a 'need for achievement' (an idea not unlike the Weberian notion of 'Protestant Ethic'). To test this proposition, McClelland developed measures of a 'need for achievement' and reviewed different historical eras, from the time of the Roman Empire to the twentieth century.[12] He claimed that each era of economic prosperity was predicted by a rise in the 'need for achievement' as measured by his instruments.

   A 'finding' from a psychology experiment represents a point in time, a particular juncture in process. We show our biases by identifying one point in a process as a 'finding,' while other points are neglected as 'non-findings.'

3   The Very Idea of Change Presupposes Continuity

There could be no perceived change unless there were perceived stabilities and continuities.[13] This cliché sounds like a profound metaphysical principle. But on reflection it begins to seem much more like a linguistic rule: no event sequence should be called 'a change' unless there is also opportunity for the application of phrases like 'remained the same.' However, this change of status does not diminish the central importance of the principle in everything to do with human life.

   There is another principle, less frequently cited and so less of a truism. It is that history is narrative. A catalog of events lacking any of the characteristics of a story is empty, even for such dry matters as the geology of one of the moons of Jupiter. Without an implicit principle of progression, development, teleological thrust or something similar, there is no story and so no history.

   Reflections on the stabilities and instabilities of social life must be constrained by these two principles above all. Yet there is something deeper to be seen in both. The perception on temporality and the phenomenon of memory are inseparably bound up. This observation too may seem to be hackneyed. What could be more obvious than that for a change to be perceived some recollection of a relevant previous state must have occurred? Research into the apprehension of melody, an ideal test frame for hypotheses about temporality and cognition, has shown that when studied closely, the hackneyed observation above fragments into a variety of memorial processes.[14] Summing up the results of a great deal of work we can say that changes are perceived only with respect to some implicitly recollected frame. For instance, whether the interval C to F is a change from tonic to subdominant or from dominant to tonic depends on whether the key that has been established is C major or F major. The auditory experience of the same frequency ratio is phenomenologically different in the two frames. Not only does one have to recollect the events of the past in considering the status of an event in the present, but one must maintain throughout a certain frame of reference within which both past and present take on a certain stability of meaning.

   In what follows we shall be criss-crossing a textual landscape, in a pale imitation of the techniques advocated by Witttgenstein, as we try to give an account of historicity as it is manifested in the temporality of *discourses* in

the realm of the social. The Leitmotif will be an emphasis on presentations of continuity and conservation, on the persistence of themes and practices, against which we experience social life as a flux. Our emphasis on continuity is in line with recent writings by historians who point out the perils of 'periodization': the tendency to categorize and apply stereotypes to people living in different historical periods. Periodization has been associated with a tendency to exaggerate differences between such loosely defined epochs as 'The Middle Ages,' 'The Dark Ages,' 'The Roman Period' and so on. This leads to a neglect of important continuities.[15] A succession of disconnected and discontinuous happenings is not a pattern of social change. It is, if and when it occurs, a frightening descent into chaos. Paradoxically, the more closely we are concerned with change, that which at first sight seems to be the essence of temporality, the more we will emphasize continuity.

A point of central importance for the historicity of a claim is whether we see change or continuity depends in part on the magnification of our analytical lens. Using low magnification, we look at long stretches of time and tend to see discontinuities and change, while with high magnification, we look at short stretches and tend to see continuities. A good example of the different views obtained at different powers of magnification is the alleged scientific revolutions of the seventeeth and the twentieth centuries. From the hegemony of a Catholic Aristotelian conception of the universe in the fifteenth century to a Protestant Newtonian picture in the eighteenth century, a huge change, there intervenes three centuries of gradual shifts and refinements. This is one of the sources of the 'periodism' we drew attention to above. At a sufficiently low magnification, there do seem to be distinctive periods, the boundaries between which seem to vanish when the magnification is increased.

4   Bearers or Carriers of Continuity

If we are right about the 'logical' structure of the concept of change, namely that it must always be understood in tandem with the concept of continuity, what are the bearers of social and historical continuities? What is it that is the same at a later time? And what is it that changes, so that it is possible to perceive that time as later? So to apply the concept of change, there must be ways of applying the concept of continuity. From a positivistic standpoint, all one would need to do would be to compute practices, institutions and so on at different times to see whether indeed there were sufficient and relevant similarities to declare that some had persisted unchanged. But the deeper question is this: what lies behind the practices whose comparison one with

another we can make by simply observing them? Here we must ask about the kinds of bearers of continuity that there might be. The principle involved here is that practices are grounded in rules or rule-like habits so that the variety of such normative constraints provides the basic taxonomy of bearers of continuity. How do we upgrade fragmentary relics of the past into a full-blown historical fact? By what discursive devices is the transformation achieved? It is not by digging deeper into the subsoil of Anatolia or finding more dusty documents in the library of the Escorial! Identifying something as a 'bearer of continuity' *establishes* something as the basis for perceptions or judgments of historical continuity. It is not a discovery.

4.1   A Typology of Carriers or Bearers

Still using the biology analogy, just as bodies are interpreted by Dawkins as vehicles or 'carriers' for genes,[16] we can conceptualize carriers for norms rules, and other aspects of normative systems. Such carriers are of enormous variety, but we can discuss them in a more manageable way by classifying them as public or personal, opportunistic or stable.[17]

Let us begin by considering simplified examples of each type. The stars and stripes is a public carrier, in the sense that this flag represents of Americans the values, traditions and so on of their nation. Each new generation of children in US schools learns to chant the allegiance to the flag, and this public act is seen to be a continuous thread linking children with past generations.

But a particular flag might serve as a personal carrier. Joe always has on his person a tiny flag given to him by his friend Jack, who died in Vietnam. Joe does not show this flag to anyone else, but each time he brings it out of his pocket it reminds him of the promises he made to help Jack's wife and children. The flag embodies these promises, as well as his resolve to keep his word. One day Joe gets fed up with the disrespect shown to him by Jack's family, and in disgust throws away the tiny flag, deciding that he has done all he can to honor his promise to the dead friend. Nobody else ever learns about the flag and what it has meant to Joe, but the throwing away of the flag is of great significance to him. It represents a break with the past, and a dramatic change in his behavior.

The public/personal distinction blurs in most real-life cases, because the same carrier has both a public and personal role. This is particularly the case when other people serve as personal carriers, in the sense that in the public domain they represent certain values, ideals and so on, but they also have special personal significance as carriers in a private way for each individual. Part of the mystery of 'fame' and 'charisma' is explained by this: famous

people like the late Princess Diana have an enormously wide appeal because they successfully act as carriers in both personal and public domains. She both represented the traditions and values associated with some aspects of British aristocracy, and she became integrated as a carrier in the private lives of countless individuals, she had personal meaning and symbolism. Roger Brown's notion of 'flashbulb memory' captures some of this idea: John Kennedy's assassination was a public event that served to act as a 'flashbulb' for private memories, everyone of that generation could remember where they were and what they were doing when they heard the news of the assassination.[18]

Above all, carriers are plastic and malleable. Most carriers are opportunistic, in the sense that they are adopted for a particular purpose and will be abandoned if they fail to serve the required function. There has been in the 1990s an ongoing battle between supporters and opponents of the 'old' flag of the State of Georgia. The former view the flag as 'carrying' important and cherished traditions of the Old South, including Southern hospitality and chivalry. The latter see the flag as carrying hated traditions, such as slavery and inequality. During interviews with flag supporters, participants said they would 'fight' for the flag, but they often also added that if the flag was changed they would adopt other symbols to represent the Old South. Of course, such changes involve costs. One cannot invest in and abandon carriers without costs.

Novelists rather than psychologists have best captured the personal suffering people experience when a carrier important to them fails to perform adequately. A dramatic example is provided by George Eliot in *Adam Bede*, the story of a talented young carpenter who, like everyone else in the region, considers Arthur Donnithorne, the heir to the great aristocratic estate in the region, to represent progress as well as valued traditions. But Adam makes a terrible discovery: Arthur Donnithorne has seduced a young girl much below him in rank and status, a girl he could not possibly marry. In that instant, the gallant carrier of great aristocratic traditions is transformed to an unfeeling boy only concerned with satisfying himself. But because of the carrier role this boy had, much more is transformed:

> For the rest of his life he [Adam Bede] remembered that moment ... as a man remembers his last glimpse of home where his youth was passed, before the road turned and he saw it no more.[19]

The historicity of a huge range of such past-tense statements that is inherited from the status ascribed to carriers plays a major role in such cultural matters as identity, national or ethnic.

Carriers, then, are also 'investments,' in the sense that people use them as anchors for their emotional and social worlds. Giving up a carrier can be costly, and may involve giving up aspects of the world that are valuable to us. Carrier reference or carrier talk established the historicity of a discourse for all practical purposes. 'This was the *very robe* my grandmother was Christened in,' 'I was named 'Emmeline' after her!' and so on.

4.2   Public Carriers across Historical Eras

A remarkable feature of life in many parts of the world is continuities across long periods, hundreds and sometimes thousands of years. How is such continuity achieved? Part of the answer to this question is revealed when we consider the role of certain public, formal and fairly stable carriers. Religious ceremonies, such as marriage and christening, come to mind. But we shall take our example from a non-Western culture, to consider the role of *Ta'ziyeh* in Shi'i Islam.

Ta'ziyeh is a Shi'i Muslim tradition about the martyrdom of Hossein, the third Imam of Shi'i Muslims and the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed. Hossein was killed in 680 AD, in the Islamic lunar month of Moharram. Hossein and his followers are said to have suffered greatly, being without food and water for many days before being cut down on the plains of Karbala, in present-day Iraq. *Ta'ziyeh* is performed throughout Iran, as well as other regions where Shi'i Muslim communities are found. *Ta'ziyeh* preformances are enormously popular, particularly among the poorer sections of the population.

Ta'ziyeh may appear to Western audiences to be something like a mixture of opera and drama, with the 'good' characters chanting their parts in melodic verse, but the 'bad' characters portraying their evil nature by the way they say their lines. *Ta'ziyeh* performances can be extravagant and lengthy; one of us attended a three-hour performance in Iran where some characters came 'on stage' on horseback and whole armies of supporting players were involved. The success of the performance is judged in large part by how much it moves the audience from one emotional state to another, and particularly on how much the audience is moved to weep. In this respect *Ta'ziyeh* is similar to another very important ritual in Shi'i Islam, *rauzeh-khani*, which typically involves a man (the *rauzeh-khan*) reciting the story of Hossein and moving an audience to weep for the martyrs of Karbala. What *Ta'ziyeh* achieves through action drama, *rauzeh-khani* tries to achieve through power of language alone. Obviously the latter is more economical.

Although *Ta'ziyeh* enjoys popular support among the masses, several powerful groups have in the past attempted to co-opt it to suit their own purposes, and even to ban it. *Ta'ziyeh* has not enjoyed support from some conservative mullas, in part because it seems to go against Islamic rules forbidding making images of The Prophet. Also, *Ta'ziyeh* attracts attention and money away from the clergy, and puts it in the hands of actors, artists and other such 'unholy' types. *Ta'ziyeh* has had a love–hate relationship with the Shahs of Iran, being formally banned for several decades in the first half of the twentieth century, but revived in the 1960s and 1970s.

A number of important values central to Shi'i Muslim culture are carried by the *Ta'ziyeh*. A first is the acceptance of ones fate, even if that involves defeat and death. But, second, this is not necessarily a fatalistic value system, because the *Ta'ziyeh* can also be interpreted as a call to arms, a determination to fight *even in the face of enormous disadvantages*. Shi'i Islam is a 'minority religion,' not only because of the break away from the main Sunni Muslim Body, but also because just about every Shi'i leader has died at the hands of enemies.

5 A Metaphysical Assumption of this Way of Posing the Problem

But aren't we already slipping into the assumption that the past is there to be accessed if only we could do it well? The very idea of a carrier as a methodological concept presupposes that we can recognize a past carrier or past version of a carrier as such. But of course, the past is not there in the required sense. It is not like something to be dug up, a common enough metaphor for the past-directed enterprises. A lot of common ways of talking, replicated in social scientific discourse, might make it might look as if the foundation of the factual quality of a claim about a past event in the social world is just a special case of the correspondence principle of truth. But even if records survive, they exist only in the present, so correspondence between present claim and 'past' fact is no more than just another case of hypothesis juxtaposed to hypothesis. This point has been made before, but we need to use it to address the status of social psychological 'facts' in particular and hypotheses about 'them.' Our thesis is quite simple: such facts exist only as items in narratives.

Historical narratives are about people, nations and so on, pinned together more often than not by the continuity of the being about whom the narrative is told. Autobiographies illustrate how it can be that a story of shifts and changes of fortune can yet be the story of a person, one and only one human being. The central features of the sense of temporality in human affairs, the tensions

between change and continuity, neither of which would be intelligible without the other, is modeled rather well in the telling of stories about oneself.

5.1 Narrative in General

Narratological studies of many discourse genres, including the reporting of scientific experiments,[20] the presentation of environmentalist arguments and so on, have revealed the somewhat surprising fact that the overall structure of most tellings and writings exemplifies story-telling conventions rather than patterns of logically ordered premises and conclusions or straight forward chronicles of a 'this happened then that happened' sort. The power to persuade for example seems to reside more in the plausibility of a traditional story line than it does in the fulfilling of the strict criteria of logic. One of the most powerful analytical devices for revealing the step by step pattern of a discourse is the scheme of Vladimir Propp, originally abstracted from a study of the plots of folk tales.[21] Propp identified more than thirty steps that appear in the plots of traditional stories. Every folk tale draws on some, and always in the order they lie in the ideal totalized plot. Thus the hero suffers a loss, is sent on a quest, receives the help of a powerful being, and eventually triumphs. The same patterns are evident in Greek myths and the Homeric tales. The stories we tell about or own lives and the lives of others, the fictions we elaborate to instruct or amuse, follow a limited number of patterns, patterns the narratologists call 'story-lines.' Not surprisingly, one cluster of such patterns can be seen to fit into the Proppian repertoire. As Harriet Hawkins has argued, classics and trash obey the same dramatic conventions.[22] *Othello* and *Neighbours* share patterns of character relations and of plot. This must surely be a matter of interest to psychologists intent on explaining the unfolding of episodes of human interaction, and in the longer run, the development of a life among the developing lives of others.

The strongest narratological thesis that would link the study of the patterns of story-telling to the problem of explaining human action is this: 'Lives are lived according to the same conventions in accordance with which lives are told.'[23]

This thesis has profound consequences for the concept of autobiography. It is the fact that an autobiography has both retrospective and prospective dimensions that makes autobiographical telling a prime subject for psychological research. No only do we tell ourselves and others versions of the lives we have led, but we tell ourselves and others anticipatory stories that express the pattern of those parts of our lives that are yet to be lived. Shakespeare was very good at presenting this aspect of human psychology.

His grasp of this phenomenon appears in such famous soliloquies as that of Richard III over the corpse of his predecessor and that of Hamlet attempting to resolve the existential dilemma at the heart of his struggles to find a way to deal with the murder of his father. Should his autobiography end in suicide or in revenge?

Anticipations of this line of thought can be found in Bruner's recent discussion of autobiography,[24] and in the contributions to the understanding of murder by Jean-Pierre de Waele.[25]

5.2   Autobiographies

At first glance, the concept of autobiography as a narrative genre could hardly seem more innocent of complications. It is just the story of my life as told by me, from my point of view. Autobiographies may differ in degree of candor and self absorption, but who is the best authority on what I did and why I did it than myself? But reflection on the matter coupled with empirical studies of autobiographical narration quickly discloses all sorts of complexities.

An autobiography is above all a narrative, and in each age narrative genres have their own conventions. Caesar's *Gallic Wars* and St Augustine's *Confessions* share some narrative conventions but not others. Both are self-exculpatory. But Caesar wrote *The Gallic Wars* as the plain tale of a bluff soldier (however disingenuous that style may appear to us).

He begins his 'simple tale' thus: 'Gallium in tres partes divisum est,' as boring a geographical observation as one is likely ever to encounter. However, the great 'one-liner,' 'vidi, veni, vici' is more appropriate to the implicit drama of the narrative. St Augustine's psychological epic is as much a story of the 'inwardness' of a soul at odds with itself as it is of public action. It could hardly be more different from the style of Caesar's fragment of autobiography.

But an autobiography is a narrative in the first person. Grammatical studies show the first person is a complex indexical device expressing at least four aspects of the user's sense of self, as a singularity in arrays of other people, ordered by various and shifting sets of relations, spatial, temporal, moral and social.

An autobiography is not just one story, my story, told to some generic and anonymous listener or reader. The written tale is just one of the autobiographies that a person did tell or that they could have constructed. Research into autobiographical narration in everyday life discloses how the quality, value, detail and arrangement of the episodes recounted depends on the person to whom the tale is told, the context of the telling and the aim of the story-teller at that moment in the telling of it.[26] Everyone has a multiplicity of potential autobiographies, though few may see the light of day. That multiplicity is evident in the practice of retrospective telling. But, as I pointed out above, at least as important in the everyday practice of autobiography is the prospective telling, how my life is going to evolve, in the next hour, the next day, in the next decade, and in eternity. Autobiography not only reports and interprets action, it shapes action.

It follows directly that behind pathological lives there must lie pathological story-tellings. So it is to autobiography, as the most psychologically relevant form of narrative for the understanding of disturbed and distorted lives, that we must turn. Of course, the very idea of 'disturbed' and 'distorted' presupposes the existence of patterns of lives that are 'correct' or 'normal,' and that must surely be a topic for the anthropologist and historian to explore. At any moment in the history of human psychology there will be patterns that are the taken-for-granted background of uncontentious ordinariness. But what was ordinary for the Toltec (see Pizzaro's *The Conquest of Mexico*) or a medieval Carmelite (see *Heloise and Abelard*) might seem very strange and even pathological to a St Albans shopkeeper in the 1990s.

Who is the subject of an autobiography? One's sense of self, though elusive, is certainly among the experiences that are ineluctably private. But what sort of experience is that? Not, it seems, of some inner entity. While we try to work with the assumption that talking about ourselves is descriptive and that 'I' refers to something, we will be inclined to wonder to what should our personal history be ascribed. However, if we drop that assumption, encouraged by Wittgenstein's general distinction between describing and expressing, we are close to a resolution of the seeming paradox that the phenomenological elusiveness of 'the self' threw up. If words like 'I' are used to express structural properties of experience, and to present ourselves as responsible for what we say and do, there is no 'thing' to which 'I' refers and which is being described when we express how we feel or what we are thinking. The only singularity around which anyone's life is built is the person they are. Once we have accepted that much of speaking is expressive, we can turn to ask what linguistic acts give public expression to the sense of self. A fourth element in a person's sense of self is the sense of living a life in time. The pattern of events in which one has a sense of the uniqueness of one's life is a multiply ordered pattern of various stories each of which recounts retrospectively recollected and prospectively anticipated events. There are many ways of telling one's life, each of which has some claim to our allegiance. In different circumstances and for different purposes and to different audiences, different stories are told. And yet each of us, as the author of a multitude of personal narratives, had little difficulty in maintaining them all as versions of our one and only life.

Unitas multiplex is a motto which captures the most characteristic feature of our own lives, and is effortlessly achieved by most of us.

One's brain and nervous system provide one with recollections, but language provides one with memories, and memory provides one with a host of ordered series of recollections, fragments of autobiography. One's autobiographies provide one with a life. Language and other symbolic devices permit one to anticipate the future, by imaging events in which one could have a role. For most people these futures too are multiple. It is language that provides one with the possibility of autobiographies, recollections indexed not only by the indexical 'I,' but as located in sequences of recollections ordered as stories by reference their indexing as past, present and future with respect to their temporal relation to acts of telling. This grammar certainly facilitates and perhaps makes it seem natural to suppose that there is just the one *timeless* person persisting through the various versions of that one person's life events that are remembered as that cluster of stories we are tempted to call *the* autobiography. It seems that it is the indexicality of the first-person singular that allows many versions seamlessly to express one life.

The temporality of the sense of self, the singularity of a continuous trajectory in time, is not a simple function of the ability to present just one autobiography, since most people not only can but do have different stories to tell about themselves. Studies of how people tell their lives show that each of us, having a sense of our singularity in the three dimensions of our relations to other embodied persons, experience our life retrospectively and prospectively in relation to more than one autobiography. Like positions, autobiographies are functions of the situation and persons to whom they are told, including autobiographical soliloquies, which are more often than not directed to some imagined other.

Furthermore, as we have pointed out, autobiography has both a backward and forward direction. There is not only what one is telling oneself about one's past, but also what one is telling oneself about one's future. The future dimension of autobiographical telling is no more unitary than is the past. At each moment one locates one's present self at a moment, this moment, on some suitable world line, and so establishes one's temporal singularity as a self. But that trajectory may be abandoned for another at some subsequent moment. Whereas in space one has and can only have one self, since one exists in one and only one body, in time one can and does have many selves. How is this possible? Provided we keep the two major senses of 'self' distinct, there is no paradox. Self as singularity is different from a set of beliefs about the person one is. While in relation to the body the former must be singular in non-pathological life stories, the latter is under no such constraints. Whereas

the criteria of identity of human bodies are such that at one place in the material world there can exist only one body at a time, say at the moments of an act of speaking, the criteria of identity for events, as they form elements in the temporal trajectory of a life, are potentially multiple. There is always the interpretation that lies between sentences and the statements they are used to make, between actions and the acts they are used to perform. Indeed, the study of real symbolic interaction shows that most linguistic and other symbolic acts are to some degree indeterminate.[27] Sometimes the situation requires that we must make them more precise, but we rarely need to bother. There are huge numbers of events in our lives, so the possibility of making different selections for different purposes also makes multiplicity possible.

5.3   Pronouns as Indexicals

In telling a tale in the first person, one is committed, everything else being equal, to the four indexing forces of the use of the pronoun 'I' and equivalent grammatical devices. Thus a report of what has been seen, heard or touched by me is indexed with the place of my body, the time of my speaking, the position I occupy in the local moral order, and in some cases, with my social position too. All of these indexing acts can be qualified. An alibi will place the embodied me far from the scene reported, and the uses of tenses, in tales told in an Indo-European language, will modify the temporal relation of my act of speaking to what that speaking describes, commits me to and so on. Autobiographical telling in ordinary life involves the claiming and disclaiming of responsibility for actions, for what has occurred. The ordinary indexical force of the first person is to take or claim responsibility positioning oneself as an agent. This is, as linguists say, the unmarked use. Unless it is explicitly repudiated, the use of the first person is agentive. Therefore, it indexes what has been done with the moral standing of the actor, and so with the level of responsibility that position entails. To see how this works, we must lay out a sketch of the grammar of agentive discourse.

Usually when 'me' is preferred to 'I,' the implication is that the actions reported are not those of the speaker as agent. Roughly, 'I did it' and 'it happened to me' are the poles of a simple contrast between speech acts in which the speaker presents him or herself as agent or as patient. When I appear as patient in a fragment of autobiography, I am repudiating responsibility for what has happened. Things which 'just occur to me' are not brought about by me.

However, this contrast is too crude for much that must be achieved in autobiographical discourse. To be an agent is to have the power or capacity to

do something, if unimpeded. The generative explanation of what happens takes its start from an act of the person responsible for the action. If the situation is right, my powers and capacities, tendencies and intentions, projects and plans will be executed if there is no impediment to the activity or power or lusts of the person involved.

When we bring this aspect of agentive discourse into line with the way in which the normal indexical force of 'I' expresses my sense of responsibility for an action, a further level must be examined. There is a contrast between 'I do what I intend unless I am prevented from doing so' and 'I indulge my lust for Belgian chocolates unless I am prevented from doing so'; they are at opposite ends of the spectrum of discursive devices for taking and repudiating responsibility. In the former example, the implication is that I arrived at an intention by a process of reflection that I myself initiated, and that the impediments are independent of my wants and powers, while in the latter case the implication seems to be that the lust for these famous and delicious confections is not something I brought about by reflections (and hence not my responsibility), while there is at least the weak implication that the impediments placed in the way of such self-indulgence might be self-erected.

Studies of fragments of autobiography offered by convicted and indeed self-confessed murderers[28] brought to light a discursive convention that routinely presented the speaker as patient. One might make a case, from the frequency and taken-for-granted character of the use of this convention that 'telling a personal story in the patient mode' is the unmarked version. The phrase that carries implication of passivity is 'and then *I caught a charge* ...': The model for this construction is something like 'I caught a cold.' Things you catch are personal states and conditions all right, but they are, as it were, out there, floating about, and by chance and through no fault of your own you run into them. A killing may be reported as something that happened, in a neutral style that neither takes nor repudiates responsibility, but that the police should hold me responsible for it, to the extent of charging and ultimately trying and even condemning me, is something that position the speaker in their own moral order as 'the one who should be held responsible for doing it.'

The fourth component of the indexical grammar of English story-telling is the indexing of what has been described or avowed as an event in the life history of the speaker. Lacking the tensed first-person pronoun, English speakers must use tense to order their autobiographies, and at the same time, the continuity of the story-line is ensured by the transtemporal sense of 'I' and 'me.' The same is not true of 'we,' since the collective, membership of which it expresses, can and does change with time. Lying about one's past and fantasizing about one's future are obvious temporal pathologies of the autobiography. But in this

paper we are concerned with pathologies which infect the indexicality of the story-telling. It is not only pronouns that bear temporal indexicalities, but also tenses. What if someone lacked a sense of the past and had no anticipations of the future? The first person might survive in their autobiographical tellings, but there would be no verbs inflected for tense. Or perhaps some reportings would be indexed as past and others as future, but with those categories no order would be expressed, because, according to the discursive point of view, no order in recollection would be experienced. In the case notes of psychiatrists (for instance, in those of the redoubtable Oliver Sachs, in whose consulting room some remarkable cases seem to congregate) there must be material that would be of the greatest interest to those discursive psychologists who are interested in the indexical pathologies of autobiography. There is lots to do in charting these divergences and using their light to reveal what, in this culture or that, counts as the right and proper away to order a life.

It might seem obvious that an autobiography is a window into its author's soul. But pathological 'souls' can find expression either in the unusual content of their stories or in the use of a strange grammar. The study of expression of self in stories is part of discursive psychology. This development is based on a Vygotskian thesis about the shaping of mind in the learning of linguistic and practical skills in symbiosis with another person, and on a Wittgensteinian insight that how we feel and how our thoughts are organized are expressed in characteristic language-games. The selfhood of autobiographical telling is expressed predominantly in the uses of first- and second-person (indexical) pronouns and in the choice of narrative conventions within which to tell the story. Pronouns are used to index what is said with the various locations of the speaker as a person among persons in several patterns of relations.

In summary, we can see how the uses of 'I,' together with the tenses of verbs, and in accordance with local narrative conventions, express the shapes of the many stories we can tell about ourselves. It is quite usual for each person to have many autobiographies. But when non-standard uses of pronouns appear, we must be alert to a kind of linguistic pathology which, given the strength of the expressive account of language uses, may express a pathological structuring of the mind of the speaker.

6 The Nature of Time

One thing that would knock a great hole in any attempts to use correspondence theory of truth in historical social psychology would be a demonstration that

only the present exists, and nothing but the present has ever existed. The concepts of past and future are narratological, not existential,

There are two arguments towards the conclusion that there is only the present.

6.1   *The Grammar of Temporal Discourses*

The Character of 'Now'   One might be tempted to think of the word 'now' as a special kind of name or referring expression that picks out a certain moment in the flow of time, within which the events of life are embedded. There are all the nows, the river of time. And then there are the events which match some of them. However, 'now' is an indexical. It indexes the temporal relations of an event to the event of the utterance of a statement describing or prescribing and so on that event. Thus 'now' is a relational expression between two events. It is not the name of the moment in time. There are no such moments. There is no frame of pure moments of time. To think there is, is just to confuse the grammar of indexicals with that of nominative expressions. There are no past 'nows', nor are there future 'nows' to come. Some past events have been simultaneous with the utterance of descriptions of them, and some future events no doubt will be similarly related to the utterance of descriptions of them. But neither past nor future exist as temporal regions, strings of moments, to be contingently occupied by events.

Narratives as Conjunctions and as Disjunctions   There is another 'grammatical' source of the illusion that as well as events there is a time manifold for them to occur in or with. The illusion can be seen clearly if we highlight the difference between the logical structure of a historical *narrative*, and the logical structure of the totality·of existence claims that support or are presupposed by the narrative.

A historical narrative is a conjunction of statements which purport to be true. A happened *and* B happened *and* C happened *and* so on. The logical form is as familiar to logicians as that of truth function '&,' the properties of which include the principle that one false conjunct renders the whole false. If, however, we examine the corresponding sequence of statement asserting the existence of the events in question, then the logical form is disjunctive. A exists *or* B exists *or* C exists and so on. This is the truth function 'vel,' and obeys the principle that so long as there is just one true clause, the whole disjunctive statement is true. This is just what we would want for a grammar of time as the sequence of events which actually exist.

There is no temptation to create a sempiternal manifold out of the disjunctive form. However, since each clause of the conjunctive form must be true if the whole story is to be true, there is a temptation to think that somehow there is a queer kind of way in which the past, present and future coexist, as referents of each of the true statements comprising the narrative. The grammar of conjunction tends to case a shadow on the world. It might appear as the metaphor of time as a river, of life as a journey or some other of the models that tend to draw the imagination in to creating a picture of a events as a kind of panorama.

Seeing the matter in this light helps to strengthen the point about 'now.' There is no manifold of nows either, a dimensionless sequence of pure temporal moments within which the events of the everyday would occur.

The point has been nicely made by Latour.[29] We have all this surviving stuff, records, artefacts, human memories and so on, left-overs from all sorts of ears and 'times.' The attic is full of this rubbish. We go about sorting the items according to some principle or other. Maybe we arrange them so that what is most important comes first, tailing off into the irrelevant. Or we use some conception of a pattern of cause/effect sequences which some philosophers have suggested is the foundation of our sense of time. Thus historicity, the very idea that there is history as a record of past facts, and that we have lived it and are still living it, is only one of the many possible organizing principle for currently managing what does not now exist, whether because it already has been or because it has yet to come to be. 'It is the sorting that makes the times, not the times that make the sorting.'[30]

6.2   *Narratives through which Social Time is Created*

Tradition   Another candidate for the bearer or carrier of continuities in social order, and thus the forging of the historicity of the discourse, is tradition or traditions. At first sight it is above all the traditions of a community, its immemorial traditions, that define it for what it is. We think of a traditional Christmas, traditional weddings and so on. This appears to be at least the revival or preservation of forms from a former time. The very notion of 'Christmas' has that quality of the past in the present we call 'historicity.'

But there is more to it. If asked 'Why do we have turkey at Christmas?' we would not be surprised to get the answer 'It's a tradition.' But in a way that is not an answer at all. We suggest that it is a distinguishing mark of traditions that they do not admit of anything but a pleonastic answer to the question 'Why do we do that?' In some ways this is like 'It's customary' as a way of stopping a regress of why questions. But not the same. There is in

the case of tradition a sense of antiquity, of an origin lost in the mists of time, certainly before living memory. And that has some of the power of imposing the authority of the tradition.

Lévi-Strauss remarks that there may be nothing special about the event that initiates a tradition.[31] It must, however, occur at some appropriate moment, and be distinguished enough to be readily and naturally repeatable. For example, at Linacre College, Oxford, there was insufficient money to provide a tray for everyone having lunch. This meant that people had to return their trays after they had taken their meal to the table. So Linacre people do not eat off trays. Wolfson, well endowed to begin with, had trays for everyone, so that there people do eat off their trays and return tray and dishes when they are done. However, Linacre people will from time to time express their sense of superiority in the quality of life at their college by remarking that at Wolfson people are so uncouth as to eat off their trays.

Of course, this points to the other aspects of tradition, that traditions serve to characterize and to maintain the character of a particular community. Traditions such as the Catholic meatless Friday, seriously under consideration for reinstatement, serve to maintain a sense of belonging to a particular Christian sect, and perhaps to do more, reminding people of the ascetic side of Christianity, of the legend that the crucifixion was on a Friday and so on.

Custom If one is advised on a procedure by being told 'It's the custom here,' say to hang one's coat on the banisters, the implication seems to be that it is what is generally or as a matter of course done. There is little implication of the sanction of antiquity, nor that something else is achieved by adhering to this pattern, as the use of the word 'convention' would imply. The traditional anthropological distinction between 'law' and 'custom' fits in with this account, since a custom is something that is done routinely, by habit, rather than in conformity with an instruction or an edict. Custom may be pan-temporal, but is not, we believe, a source of historicity.

Heroic Exemplars The celebration of President's Day and Martin Luther King Jr Day come close together in the calendar of national festivals in the United States. On these days Washington, Lincoln and King are mentioned, their achievements are described, excerpts from their speeches are repeated and so on. From a more objective historical viewpoint, none of these great personages can compare with Thomas Jefferson as the architect of the United States, both literally and figuratively. Yet he has no 'day' in which his virtues and his influence are celebrated. The rise of Lincoln as a repository of national virtues, that is, as a carrier or bearer of a sense of national continuity, is instructive,

since the sense of historical past to which his life refers is a retrospective construct-historicity of a discourse as the result of the projection of the narrative forms of the present and some typical devices into the 'grammars' of discourses marked as tales of the past.

As Barry Schwartz says:

> Every society ... displays, and perhaps even requires, a minimal sense of continuity with the past and its memories cannot be serviceable to the present unless it secures this continuity with the past and failed to outlive changes in society, the society's unity and continuity would diminish ... Society's memory of its great men is one part of this 'symbolic code' [through which a sense of national identity is maintained].[32]

It was not until the early years of the twentieth century that Lincoln became 'the most cherished of national possessions.' Schwartz argues that it was largely through the extraordinary national celebrations of the centenary of Lincoln's birth that his status was transformed. But why Lincoln, and why that time? Schwartz points out that until that time the identity of the United States turned on the myth of origin, in the heroic figures of the National Congress at Philadelphia, where such men as Washington, Jefferson and Hamilton created a nation in their own image. After all, Jefferson wrote the words, designed the buildings, and bought most of the real estate. But this was an America of an educated elite. The new century required the mythic celebration of equality, the American Dream, new minted, of the man from nowhere who rises to lead the nation in the very conflict in which the ideal of equality was embedded. The shift in focus was most visible in a new genre of writings that compared Washington and Lincoln, in which the fame of the latter began to outstrip that of the former, as the emphasis shifted toward a nation seeing itself as a democracy and distancing itself from its past. The creation of exemplars creates a continuity that did not exist before them. Continuity is to a large extent retrospective. National memories are not true recollections of the past, but creations through which a national past is forged.

7 Models for the Processes of Social Change

It seems that historicity is a property of texts and discourses. It is a way of managing the structure of a discourse, so that it develops according to one possible sequencing mode, namely that of the order of temporal existence of the events in question. We might then be tempted to think that causality

was the deep operating principle behind the up-front temporality, supporting historicity as the reflection of causality. Thus the historicity of a claim would be established by working causality 'backwards' so to speak, retrodicting to *what must have happened* and what caused it to happen. However, such a simple solution to the ordering problem posed by Latour is easily seen to be unsatisfactory. There are many difficulties in trying to set up a scheme for understanding social change in which the causal processes are presumed to be simple, and positive. A past event or state is singled out, *ceteris paribus*, from a background of stable states, as the cause or part of the cause of whatever succeeds it. This did not work in biology, nor does it work well in the social sciences. It seems that selectionist explanations, negative causality, what exists in what is left over from causal processes of the deletion of those alternatives not fitted in some way to survive are unacceptable.

Philosophers of science, for example Toulmin[33] and van Parijs[34] have noticed that there are two rather different formats for the construction of historical explanations. Some formats make use of the idea of positive causality, that some state or condition or event that exists or occurs at a certain time produces, generates or is a sufficient condition for the occurrence of some subsequent state or event. The past or some aspect of the past brings it about that some states of affairs comes to be in its future. The complexity of interaction factors, such as the project developing a positive explanation on anything but the smallest of scales, would be worth pursuing.

However, there is another format, that of negative causality. The conditions of the past destroy or frustrate the originators of all options but the one which survives. Darwinian evolution theory is the most famous historical explanation that is couched in the format of negative causality. But at the level of generality at which that theory would serve as a model for an account of social change, there is insufficient detail to provide convincing accounts of change. Remember that in the scheme of negative causality, change is a kind of illusion. The overall picture has changed because the alternative possibilities that might have co-existed with the survivor have been eliminated. But the survivor has not changed.

We can look to a further refinement of the biological analogy to flesh out an account of temporality in the social world as negatively causal. Since it is the genetic material that is conserved rather than the bodies of the organisms that realize it, the focus of negative causality must be in that material, or to put it roughly, on genes. Generalizing the distinction, biologists have used the terms 'replicator' for the gene or gene-like entity, and 'interactor' for the body or realization of the gene in an environment, in which its fate will determine which genes survive into the next generation. Changing patterns of

gene distribution look different, and it is they, but not the genes, which have changed. To complete the model, one must then ask what it might be that could serve the replicator function in social matters, and what the realization of such entities as interactors with the environment might be. Dawkins called them 'memes,' but we shall find that the concept of rule, taken as including both implicit rules and explicit rules or instructions, will cover most cases. Interactors will be the practices that realize the rules.

The negative causality of selectionist format for social matters has the following layout:

1   Rules are taught to new members of the society if explicit, or picked up by imitation if implicit. They serve the role of replicators. Each new generation of people will have its characteristic distribution of rules. Some rules will become very widespread in a population, while others will die out.
2   People carry out the practices of social life in accordance with or by following rules. It is practices that succeed or fail in the local environment. If a practice does not succeed, then it is less likely that the rules behind it will be taught to or picked up by the next generation.
3   New rules will serve to introduce new practices.

The upshot will be that the rules that lie behind the least unsuccessful practices in the existing environment will spread through the population.

In this way meme-rule theory serves to account for social change. But there are some reservations to be noticed. In the biological model it is only the interactors that are tested and succeed or fail. But in the social model there are many occasions in which people imagine carrying out some practice and discuss whether it is appropriate or not before they try to put it into practice. Sometimes this is enough to abandon a proposed novel rule or instruction. Parliaments are institutions set up mostly for this purpose. In biological evolution the genes of one generation can reach the next one only by being passed through the intermediate generation. But rules can be revived after many generations. For instance, Hebrew, a language long dead, was deliberately revived, by teaching the rules of this linguistic practice, and these rules were passed on. Finally, we should notice that sometimes it may seem strained to interpolate a 'rule' stage between the practices of one generation and another. Could not practices be learned directly by imitation? But if we are to take this seriously as a psychological theory of change, we must suppose that the person who has learned the practice has acquired a skill and is not simply copying the master on every occasion.

8   Conclusion and Summary

Social psychologists, despite many reminders, have generally failed to address the question of the historicity of their alleged discoveries and hypotheses. Locked into the attractive idea that the human world will yield universal laws of behavior more or less similar to those yielded by studies of the material world, the very idea that there might be an issue of the historicity of textbook 'results' is rarely entertained.

However, when we open up this issue we quickly find ourselves immersed in very deep problems, just because the issues are one of the forms of discourses. Narratives are assumed to be narrations of descriptions of sequences of events. But reflecting on the grammar of temporal indexicals like 'now' and the logic forms of such narrations, we quickly see that we never effectively break out of a discursive realm. We are always and necessarily assessing stories in relation to one another. If the coherence theory of truth has a place in philosophy, it is surely in commentaries on the methodology and metaphysics of social psychology and related enterprises.

What is it in narrative that creates the sense of history, of past, present and future? We suggest that the answer is simple in outline, but complex in practice. Both continuity and change, mutually necessary to one another, are displayed in a great variety of devices all of which are carriers of the sense of the historicity of a narration. However, there are other ways of ordering the events described in historical narrations, such as relative significance, legality, character display and so on.

Notes

1   Moghaddam (1998).
2   McDougal (1908).
3   Ross (1908).
4   Carr and Schumacher (1996).
5   Gergen (1973).
6   Billig (1995).
7   Sherif (1965).
8   Milgram (1974).
9   Gergen (1973).
10   Lapier (1934).
11   McClelland (1961).
12   Ibid.
13   Moghaddam (2002).
14   Sloboda (1996), pp. 52–5.
15   See discussion in Golden and Tooley (1997).

16   Dawkins (1976).
17   Moghaddam et al. (2000).
18   Brown (1966).
19   Eliot (1859 [1961]), p. 290.
20   Nash (1990).
21   Propp (1968).
22   Hawkins (1990).
23   Bruner (1991).
24   Bruner (1993).
25   De Waele (1976).
26   Helling (1977).
27   Pierce and Cronen (1980).
28   O'Connor (1994).
29   Latour (1993).
30   Ibid., p. 76.
31   Lévi-Strauss (1966).
32   Schwartz (1990), p. 82.
33   Toulmin (1972).
34   Van Parijs (1987).

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Chapter 5

The Reality of History

David Carr

History as a branch of knowledge begins with a distinct handicap. While there may be serious disputes about whether theology, for example, has any object, everyone agrees that the object of history does not exist at all. In view of this fact, it is perhaps no wonder that skepticism about history's claims to knowledge has always been widespread.

Reasons for this skepticism are not hard to come by. The events of the past cannot be seen, heard or felt, and any assertions we make about them must be grounded by the most indirect means. Testimony to their existence is often such that we cannot be sure even of its meaning, much less its truth. What is worse, historians may be even less trustworthy than the evidence they examine. The personal, political, religious or other prejudices of the investigator seem more likely to affect the study of past human events than they affect the study of animals, plants or inanimate nature.

In our own day skepticism abounds regarding the objectivity and truthfulness of even the physical sciences. Many feel that the 'scientific' pretensions of the so-called human sciences, history in particular, need even more obviously to be deflated. One form of skepticism about history has arisen from reflections on the narrative form in which historical knowledge is often presented. If historians are essentially telling stories about the past, their activity seems more literary than scientific. The standards of story-telling are different from those of truth-telling: the point is to produce a coherent tale with beginning, middle and end, and perhaps with a moral lesson to convey. The proper place for narrative is fiction, which is by definition unconcerned with the reality of the events it portrays. Story-telling about real events thus runs the risk of being inadvertently fictional, more concerned with aesthetic than with scientific criteria. On this view, history seems condemned by the very form in which it is written to distort or misrepresent the events about which it claims to know.

Against this skeptical view, it can be argued that the very reality of history – *res gestae*, which are human acts and experiences, plans and projects