Historical Methodology and Critical Thinking as Synergised Concepts

DAVID ČERNÍN

ABSTRACT

The post–truth era is plagued by numerous pseudoscientific theories and narratives that took root in various disciplines. History and historical knowledge belong to the enterprises abused today. The output of historical inquiry in a narrative form is often considered as a correct description of the real past from which we may draw normative conclusions about society. However, the endemic plurality of historical narratives and theories presents an opportunity for intentional misinterpretation. This paper aims to sketch a solution to this threatening situation with the help of contemporary philosophy of historiography. It is argued that it is necessary to move from historical narratives to the process of historical inquiry itself. The historiography developed over its existence many useful tools on how to guard itself against various logical fallacies, cognitive biases, and pseudoscientific methodology. The situation of a historian encountering contradictory sources about the same subject is strikingly similar to the situation of an inquisitive person confronted by pseudoscientific articles and fake news. The paper highlights a strong synergy between fully developed methods of scientific historiography and critical thinking that is considered as a possible cure to our current predicament. We should teach history as critical thinking, not as stories.

WORK TYPE

Article

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received:
29–May–2019
Accepted:
8–August–2019
Published Online:
24–November–2019

ARTICLE LANGUAGE

English

KEYWORDS

Evidence
Critical Thinking
Philosophy of Historiography
Narratives

D. Černín (✉)
University of Ostrava, Czech Republic
e–mail: cernin.d@gmail.com

Disputatio. Philosophical Research Bulletin
Vol. 9, No. 13, Jun. 2020, pp. 0–00
ISSN: 2254–0601 | www.disputatio.eu

Historical Methodology and Critical Thinking as Synergised Concepts

DAVID ČERNÍN

§1. Outset

THE CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC AND POLITICAL DISCOURSES are experiencing something we may call the upsurge of irrationality. Scientific knowledge is under constant attacks that do not conform to the basic principles of critical thinking, rational discussion, or scientific methodology. Appeals to masses or to emotions, anti–establishment rhetoric, and pseudoscientific theories are gaining attention through the various types of media and the solution to this situation is not clear. It might be viable to identify and isolate the sources of irrational beliefs and limit their proliferation. This may be done either by targeting and uprooting guilty sources or by teaching the populace how to recognize and dismiss irrational belief. Without resorting to the dreaded limiting of free speech, we may rely predominantly on education and popularisation of scientific knowledge. However, do we fully utilise all the possibilities of how to pass on the critical thinking skills to the wider populace? Are we not unintentionally strengthening the vulnerability to fake news and deceiving narratives in some areas?

This paper focuses on the case of history as a specific scientific discipline as well as a frequently abused source for legitimatization of political narratives. The origins of the philosophy of historiography, a branch of philosophy that deals with the reflections of history[1] as a distinct type of professional practice, can be traced back to the philosophy of science and to the debates about the demarcation of science.[2] Since the inception of this field, philosophers have

[1] A term "history" will be predominantly used to denote the discipline of history in this paper. The course of events in the human past will be referred to as "the past". For further discussion of these terms see (Tucker 2009).

[2] It would be more precise to say that the philosophy of history owes much to the philosophy of science. The very idea of social constructivism, which will be stressed in this paper, was not developed solely by the philosophers of history and many of them explicitly stated that they utilised ideas from the philosophy of science. Many topics discussed in this paper are not endemic to the philosophy of

been aware of an uneasy relationship between historical theories or narratives and ideological colouring. Thus, the paper tracks the development of this subject since C. G. Hempel's and Karl Popper's seminal works until the advent of the narrativist philosophy of history and the critical reaction to the narrativist approach. During the course of this exposition, several key aspects will be identified and later utilised in the final philosophical account of historical disciplines today. Based on the presented conception, several conclusions will be drawn regarding the role of history, historical knowledge, and historical methodology in the contemporary situation. It will be argued that there are strong parallels between critical thinking and historical inquiry that mirror our everyday experience of encountering fake news or pseudoscientific explanations. It is argued that if we teach history as a mere set of narratives (contextualised or not), we sorely miss a great opportunity to teach the basic skills pertaining to critical thinking and interaction with evidence. However, we should neither ignore the findings of the narrativist philosophy of history, nor we should we rely either on purely inquiry–based learning.

§ 2. History and society

The ubiquitous historical narratives do have a serious impact on our lives, values, and decision making. Their force is not based solely on the question of whether they are produced by serious and professional historians or moulded and employed by public figures of various backgrounds and persuasions. Such pervasive narratives include national history, which stresses certain values and characteristics of a specified group of people, narratives of important historical events and processes that shaped the world and bear some normative claims about what we should strive for and what we should avoid, narratives of great ancestors, who may serve as a moral ideal for us today, or narratives about the timeless progress of humankind that should be maintained and guarded against any backward tendencies.

Historical narratives retain their impact even if we do not draw direct conclusions or predictions from them. Directly referencing particular narratives (genuine or fake[3]) at the right time may have a strong emotional impact on an

historiography. An interesting bridge between both philosophical disciplines could be provided by Derek Turner's book *Making Prehistory* (2007) where he examines those natural sciences that inquire into past events (see esp. Turner 2007, pp. 130–161). The established philosophers of history who explicitly draw from the philosophy of science include Aviezer Tucker, Murray G. Murphey, or Leon J. Goldstein.

[3] A comprehensive analysis of selected pseudo–historical narratives and their influence is provided by

audience. Seeing certain political developments, we may find it challenging to avoid reminiscence of past developments that had supposedly led to other (in)famous events in the past. While some people might be reminiscing of the rise of Nazism, others might be concerned with the Fall of Rome in the very same context of unfolding events. Philosophers and historians are usually inclined to warn people against any conclusions based on such historicist and speculative deliberations. However, that does not mean that we can get rid of them in a blink of an eye. Many well–identified cognitive biases play an essential role in sustaining this common habit, including the confirmation bias, the overconfidence bias, or the hindsight bias.

Not only that historical narratives can be (mis)used to achieve various political goals, but they are also numerous and sometimes even contradictory. There are many unresolved issues in historical discourse that are deeply underdetermined by present evidence and contending theories or explanations are bound to exist. This pluralism endemic to history can be seen both as a fatal flaw of the field as well as the condition necessitated by its subject matter. Nonetheless, this kind of uncertainty and underdetermination makes historical narratives more fluid and easily susceptible to ideological manipulation. According to Hayden White, one of the most prominent narrativist philosophers of history, history is essentially ideological.

It would be an unjustified exaggeration to claim that there is only a minimal consensus among professional historians. Quite the opposite, there is a significant agreement between the experts on the central issues. The contemporary philosopher of historiography Aviezer Tucker even considers this fact to be a crucial proof that scientific knowledge is produced by historians: "Consensus in a uniquely heterogeneous, large, and uncoerced group of historians is a likely indicator of knowledge" (Tucker 2004, p. 39). The Finnish philosopher Jouni–Matti Kuukkanen understands historiography as an inherently argumentative intersubjective professional discourse that should be studied as such by means of "microhistorical epistemology" (Kuukkanen 2017, p. 118). These philosophical conceptions do an excellent work of safeguarding professional historical discourse against any potential charges of being pseudoscientific. However, they do not concern public use and misuse of historical knowledge. We may try to insist that all our deliberations about the lessons from the past must be founded on the scientific historiography, but that

Ronald H. Fritze in *Invented Knowledge: False History, Fake Science and Pseudo–Religions* (Fritze 2009). I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for this recommendation. The relation of fake histories and fake news is tackled by Polage (2012).

is often difficult to put into practice. Contemporary philosophical conceptions of history aim to describe the historical enterprise, but I will try to briefly show that the original debates about historical explanation were motivated by a slightly different idea than solely describing historical practice (which is a worthwhile and valuable aim on its own).

Similarly to astronomers and flat–earthers, historians have their own opposition going against the established historical theories, e.g., the holocaust deniers.[4] Nonetheless, these extreme examples of a historical dissent driven almost exclusively by extremist ideologies may overshadow some more subtle signs of the post–truth[5] reasoning in history and its public reception.

There are many current and past examples to choose from, however, to contrast the predominantly Anglo–American philosophy of history and historiography, which will be discussed in this paper, we will examine some examples from the history of one Central–European country — the Czech Republic. The most influential Czech historical narrative was created in the 19th century during the so–called "National Revival", which encompassed valuable historical and linguistic research as well as a literary production and language restoration. Alas, among the works of Czech intellectuals, writers, and patriots, there were also less honourable (but important) creations, especially literary forgeries that were meant to justify tracing the origins of the Czech nation back to the early Middle Ages and to prove its sovereignty and independence. These manuscripts were at first welcomed by the Czech intellectual community and any criticism or doubts concerning their authenticity were regarded as adversary to the idea of an independent Czech state.[6] Peculiarly, some of the early critics included a philosopher and the future first Czechoslovakian president T. G. Masaryk who had been temporarily despised for his opposition. However, by the beginning of the 20th century, both manuscripts were acknowledged as inauthentic by the overwhelming majority of scholars via the methods of linguistic analysis, source criticism, and other ancillary historical sciences. Today, the forgeries remain in school textbooks as an example of the Czech strife for independence during the 19th century that helped to establish the

[4] The topic of holocaust deniers represents a common example of a strong dissent, which is based on ideological grounds, from the general consensus. See White (1982) and Ginzburg (2012).

[5] The post–truth era is notoriously difficult to define (see, eg., Harsin 2018), Hayhoe (2017), or Heit (2018)). Various scholars highlight features like facts being less influential than emotions and personal beliefs, distrust in science and expert knowledge, data cherry–picking, and proliferation of fake news. In this paper, the post–truth era will be used as denoting the period starting in 2016 which is plagued by fake news, populism, and rising distrust in science and expert knowledge.

[6] For an English overview of the debate, see, e.g., Orzoff (2009) or Janeček (2017).

Czech nation[7] even though it was based on a lie. Both texts still retain their status as historical evidence, but they are evidence for a different narrative than it was originally claimed. Thus, the influential fake news from the 19th century became a historical example of fake news.

Interestingly, people are still protective of their precious historical theories and narratives. In the recent annual report, The Security Information Service of the Czech Republic has criticised history lessons in the Czech schools, stating that:

> Modern history presented in schools is de facto a Soviet version of modern history and even the education of the Czech language, or more precisely literature (National Revival), is influenced by pro–Russian pan–Slavism to a degree. The enduring influence of Soviet propaganda and the fact that Russians control modern history (Orwell: He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past.) form the basis for various current Russian influence operations and thus also for hybrid strategies (The Security Information Service of the Czech Republic 2018, p. 7).

This unexpected comment hidden in the footnote sparked broad public discussion. Many people, including high–profile politicians, have expressed their worries and disapproval over the security agency focusing on the generally accepted narratives about Czech history. Without inquiring into this topic any further and analysing the education system and the political motivations, these discussions show that people are attached to the historical narratives they were taught in schools during the compulsory education and they look unfavourably on any criticism levelled at the stories they perceive as forming their own identity and basing their values. The consensus of experts becomes less important than the emotions and attachment to the historical narratives that drive people. Historical inquiry can serve political goals and some attempts at revising the accepted narrative are wrong (e.g., criticism of the history education at schools in the 21st century), while others are right at some time (e.g., rewriting the Czech history on the basis of questionable evidence in the 19th century). Can philosophy of history help us mitigate these pressing issues which are becoming more and more apparent in the post–truth era?

These illustrative examples from the distant and the recent past show us the influence of historical narratives or theories on society.[8] However, how should

[7] For further general discussion on nation–building and historical narratives, see, e.g., Smith (2000).

[8] It could be objected that this paper omits a crucial distinction between scholarly history, popular history, and public history. The following reflections will target especially professional history and its presentation to the public. Nonetheless, it can be argued that professional history, public history, and

we treat this significant aspect of the historical enterprise? The answer to this pressing question has developed over time.

§ 3. The ideology – friend or foe?

Let us now follow one brief historical overview of the philosophy of historiography[9] that could help us to see some important points about this discipline. The origins of Anglo–American discussion can be traced back to the uneasy situation in Central Europe between the World Wars and to the works of two famous political immigrants. Both Popper and Hempel were the philosophers of science, sympathising with neo–positivism, who were forced to leave their country because of the oppressive ideology coming to power. Both noticed that theories and narratives pushed and promoted by the Social–Nationalist party were, to a certain extent, backed by an elaborate historical structure that exercised substantial influence over the masses. Popper wrote his influential *Poverty of Historicism* where he criticised the idea that the historical knowledge can help us to predict development, events, and the course of history itself. He had only little interest in the methods historians use to arrive at historical knowledge. For him, the goal of history was knowledge of particular events and of free human actions, not knowledge and application of general laws of historical development which he denied as a result of his belief that any laws of historical progress do limit individual agency.

On the other hand, Hempel was much more interested in the historical explanation and the works of historians themselves. This created an unusual situation when the philosopher interested overwhelmingly in the philosophy of

professional history are deeply intertwined. Historians generally consider their target audience and the questions they found pressing and important. These various roles of historians and public audience were analysed by the prominent Finnish historian Jorma Kalela in his book Making History (Kalela 2012), where he states: "The fundamental lesson was that sensible historians do not think about their audience as mere consumers of "specialists" findings, but as people who create their own histories – most often, without our participations" (Kalela 2012, p. 57) The consumers and professional historians share their cultural background and they utilise it for communicating their interest in the past. For the purposes of this article, I will focus on the scholarly history and how to translate it for a wider audience with the intention to promote critical thinking, i.e., how to comprehensively mediate methods established by professional historians to a wider public.

9 It is neither possible nor necessary to provide an exhaustive account of the philosophy of history and historiography in this paper. A great overview is offered by Tucker's *Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography* (Tucker 2009) with 50 chapters written by leading authors. It is also possible to recommend Doran's *Philosophy of History After Hayden White* (Doran 2013) as another good selection of papers. Kuukkanen's *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography* (Kuukkanen 2015) currently stands as one of the most influential books in the field.

natural sciences wrote one of his first English texts on the topic that fell outside his area of expertise. Hempel's paper "The Function of General Laws in History" could be summed up as a claim that the historical explanation obeys the very same principles as explanations in other sciences. The e*xplanandum* is explained by the *explanans* encompassing antecedent conditions and general laws. Hempel was aware of the fact that general laws[10] employed by historians in the course of historical explanation are of a more dubious quality than the ones used by natural scientists; therefore, he termed them explanation sketches — provisory explanations hinting at more fundamental general laws. Proving that history follows the same rules as other sciences was meant to disprove unscientific approaches to the historical explanation, like empathetic understanding or historical destination of a certain race. These examples imply that at least some of the unscientific approaches criticised by Hempel originated in the ideological convictions he encountered in Germany.[11] In his radio interview in 1939, he was even more specific:

> This criticism of unscientific methods in philosophy also has a practical use, since unscientific reasoning in philosophy also "involves the danger that [its results] might be misused to give a pseudo–justification of principles which in fact do no admit of any scientific justification". Hempel, implicitly referring to Nazism, adds "And such misuse has happened" (Dewulf 2018, p. 163).

The narrow scope of Hempel's article "The Function of General Laws in History" meant that he was solely interested in the historical explanation, i.e., a set of statements, and in explaining specific events under description by other events under description and general laws. Historical explanation is thus a kind of a probabilistic retrospective prediction (O'Sullivan 2006, p. 206). Such conception vastly differs from the philosophical approaches to history and historiography that was prominent in German philosophy during the first half

[10] Hempel's general laws employed by historical explanations are different from the laws of historical development criticised by Popper. Hempel's laws are usually derived from other sciences like psychology, economy, or social sciences. He gives an example of historical general law: "This explanation rests on some such universal hypothesis as that populations will tend to migrate to regions which offer better living conditions" (Hempel 1943, p. 41). Such rules do not help us to predict future historical development accurately. However, Popper's criticised historical laws that are uniquely historical and that aim to predict the progress of society by the help of identifying underlying processes, e.g., (Popper 1957, p. 62).

[11] For a comprehensive overview of political situation influencing the philosophy of science, see Reisch (2005). I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for this recommendation. For further reading, focusing more on C. G. Hempel, see Dewulf (2018).

of the 20th century. Hempel sought to prove that historical explanation is of the same kind as an explanation employed by the natural sciences which he believed to be more resistant to the grip of ideologies. This underlying motivation seems to be a common feature of both Popper's and Hempel's conceptions. Both referred to the peculiarities of historical methodology and the treatment of evidence and Hempel also mentions that even the idea of a "pure description" (devoid of all explanations) of the past presupposes application of general laws in order to determine what happened from present evidence (Hempel 1943, p. 47). Since the subject of historical explanation is "the descriptions of particular events of the past" (Hempel 1943, p. 35), we could argue that Hempel is implying some kind of *historical realism*, i.e., the subject of historical explanation (or inquiry) is the real past.

Hempel's brief excursion into the field of history and historiography marked the beginning of the continuous philosophical debate about the discipline of history in the Anglo–American philosophy. The newly invigorated debate was soon joined by several authors who had dealt with history and historiography before the Second World War (e.g., Maurice Mandelbaum, Michael Oakeshott) and it renewed the interest in authors like R. G. Collingwood. Some philosophers were inspired by Hempel's approach and tried to refine it by adding missing elements, e.g., intentionality of historical agents (von Wright 1971), others followed Hempel's train of thought until they came to realise that it fails to account for some specific features of history (Murray G. Murphey, L. J. Goldstein) and produced their own philosophical conceptions of historiography. At the same time, one loosely connected philosophical tradition that has opposed Hempel's covering law model of history has established itself as the prominent competitor —the narrativism.

One of the forerunners of the narrativist philosophy of history was A. C. Danto with his concept of narrative sentences. He fully realised that the sentences found in historical literature have a very specific structure. By saying that "The Thirty Years War started in 1618", we refer both to the beginning and to the ending of said war (Danto 1962, p. 155). Nobody would be able to state in 1618 that "the Thirty Years War started today". Danto characterises them: "Narrative sentences refer to at least two time–separated events, and describe the earlier event" (Danto 1962, p. 161). All historical events are events under description and these descriptions are done retroactively; therefore, they cannot be easily understood by the actors they entail. It does not make sense to ask Thomas Aquinas what it is like to be "a medieval philosopher" (Danto 2013, p. 116). For narrativists, Danto's contribution represents the beginning of a "linguistic turn" in the philosophy of history, which is fully manifest in

Metahistory by Hayden White in 1973 (Ankersmit 1986, p. 18).

Hayden White also exhibits another significant shift in philosophical thinking about history that moves him away from the anti–ideological stances taken by Hempel and Popper. White famously studied history as a literary artefact with a complex linguistic structure that purports to tell a story and answer our contemporary needs. According to White, historians first organise various elements of the historical field (unprocessed historical record) into *a chronicle*, which represents the chronological arrangement of events (White 1975, p. 6). These statements about the real past are classified and ordered into *a story*. It is important to note that these transformations are done willingly and freely by contemporary historians. White especially stresses the fact that historical narratives are *created deliberately* by historians, not found in any way. White notes that: "The arrangement of selected events of the chronicle into a story raises the kinds of questions the historian must anticipate and answer in the course of constructing his narrative" (White 1975, p. 7).

The questions that readers of historical texts may ask are answered by means of explanation by emplotment, explanation by argument, or explanation by ideological implication. The ideological implication is, therefore, one of the available strategies. In his *Metahistory*, White offers a fascinating analysis of famous historical and philosophical texts from the 19th century to illustrate his theoretical framework of historical writing. Without exploring White's conception of history any further in this paper,[12] I wish to focus primarily on a significant shift that White's approach introduced to the philosophy of history.

While some philosophers praised White for his innovative approach, bringing linguistic turn to the philosophy of history, and abandoning epistemological constraints, other philosophers and historians were deeply disturbed by the lurking threat of relativism they have perceived in White's suggestions that historical texts contain ideological implications. White did not hesitate to strengthen this position even further in his interview with Ewa Domanska: "History was always ideological. It is not a bad thing. Better a right wing ideology than none at all. Ideology at least shows that you are interested in the present and future" (Domanska 2008, p. 20).

In many other places, White stressed that it is impossible to write history without ideology.[13] The very idea that such a task is feasible is an ideology on its

[12] For a more exhaustive overview of Hayden White's conception, see Doran (2013), Ankersmit (1998) and Kansteiner (1993). The most important works of White include White (1975) and White (1978).

[13] It should be noted that White's concept of ideology is vastly different from Popper's or Hempel's. While Popper uses this term as an evaluative statement and he criticises ideologies, Hayden White

own (see White 1978, p. 69). Even when we strive to distinguish between an exemplary piece of historiography and a bad one, we often decide on the basis of an ideological appeal. This idea understandably startled many historians and philosophers who have sought any kind of objectivity and certainty in historical inquiry. Several discussions revolved around sensitive historical issues including the Holocaust, its deniers, and Zionism. Although White reluctantly acknowledges that there is a certain difference between gaining and asserting a historical fact in contrast to employing various narrative strategies (Kansteiner 1993, p. 295), he remained committed to the claims that ideology is necessary for history as demonstrated by the interview above (Domanska 2008).

The shift from the preceding struggle for more scientific and exact history is evident, even though some of Popper's claims in *Poverty of Historicism* are significantly resembling White's stance:

> Aiming at objectivity, they *[historians]* feel bound to avoid any selective point of view; but since this is impossible, they usually adopt points of view without being aware of them. This must defeat their efforts to be objective, for one cannot possibly be critical of one's own approach, and conscious of its limitations, without being aware of it (Popper 1957, p. 152).

Popper's statement is strikingly similar to White's view at first glance:

> Thus, even those historians who professed no particular ideological commitment and who suppressed the impulse to draw explicit ideological implications from their analysis of past societies could be said to be writing from within a specifiable ideological framework, by virtue of their adoption of a position vis–a–vis the form that a historical representation ought to take (White 1978, p. 69).

Popper's solution to this conundrum was to maintain awareness of the historian's own position in space and time; however, for White, even this conscious situatedness is not required (Domanska 2008, p. 21). The historical discipline must simply accept its ideological nature and historians should create and tell stories that answer our contemporary needs. It is important to note that the narrativist philosophy of history has managed to explain one intricate feature of historical writing: the plurality of narratives and theories that are sometimes contradictory and irreconcilable. It helped to recognise how political

> understands ideology as a necessary system of ideas, beliefs, and opinions of every individual. We can evaluate certain ideologies as "evil" or "dangerous" only from the point of view of another ideology.

and ideological considerations are invading historical discourse and how we judge various narratives on the basis of our own value system. The narrativist position could be understood as a specific kind of constructivism. Historical past, presented in historical literature, is a constructed past that is different from the real past. Historians construct their narratives in a similar way as writers of fiction and they can enjoy a considerable degree of liberty in telling a story. However, there is something that ties them to the real world and the real past — *a chronicle*. Without a chronicle that "organises elements of historical field" (White 1975, p. 6), it would not be history.

Nonetheless, the creation of *a chronicle* itself was not a subject for the narrativist philosophy of history. Presumably, it was a subject for the theory of history or actual historical practice and not a matter for philosophical reflection. To a certain extent, this disinterest may mirror the elusive distinction between the context of discovery and the context of justification. The real past still has something to say, but its voice is muffled by the contemporary needs and ideological implications created by historians. *A chronicle*, regardless of being overlooked in the texts of the narrativist philosophers of history, still plays an important role and it could be viewed as a trace of historical realism inside a predominantly constructivist conception of history.

§ 4. From the narrative back to the inquiry

The fluidity of historical narratives highlighted by the narrativism, the minuscule role of the real past, the importance of the message that historian (or any other storyteller) aims to convey, and the insistence on the questions that readers wish to have answered are all aspects of the post–truth era that we can witness in the public discourse today (and in the past as well). Alas, the narrativism generally accepts these features as necessary characteristics of history and historiography, and thus it does not offer any method how to guard ourselves against abuse of historical knowledge. There are no clear guidelines how to defend or to denounce a specific message of historical narrative on other than ideological grounds, provided that the historical narrative follows some vaguely specified methods for stating historical facts (an element of historical chronicle). We cannot blindly deny the plurality of contending theories in the field of historiography and yet we presuppose that there should be some way of choosing between historical narratives on different grounds than just our ideological convictions and political goals.

One possibility would be to pursue some kind of historical realism,[14] to defend the thesis that historians discover some pre–structured past and then they report findings to their audience with varying degrees of accuracy. We may wish to insist that many cases in history are overwhelmingly justified by available evidence and the room for interpretation is exaggerated by the narrativist philosophers of history. This suggestion could mean that all misinterpretations and clashes over the past should be resolved by an intervention of professional historians who will report the outcome of their research and thus put an end to a public debate. The veracity of a historical statement would be derived from its correspondence to the past reality.[15] However, this approach fails to account for many concepts employed by professional historians, e.g., historical periods, philosophical traditions, or historical processes. When did the Middle–Ages start and when did they end? Do we need to account for every Greek that has ever philosophised to have the proper idea of the Greek philosophy? Does longue durée truly exist, or is it just a constructed concept that helps us to make sense of historical data?

The historical realism is also problematic for historians who inquire into the subjects that lack an overwhelming amount of evidence. In the cases of ancient history, it seems that the idea of historical realism invites justified sceptical doubts, especially in cases where we have just two major but contradictory sources.[16] The underdetermination of historical narratives and theories by evidence becomes a glaring issue when we realise that, e.g., uncovering of sole Irish tombstone may lead to the conclusion that the entire Irish settlement existed on the English coast.[17] The history of the Mesoamerican cultures[18] is also plagued by the lack of empirical data although we can confidently state that this does not prevent historians from conducting historical research and we can

[14] Works by historian Geoffrey Elton are generally considered to be examples of historical realism. Murray G. Murphey defends *constructivist realism* (Murphey 2009, pp. 12–3) and Maurice Mandelbaum argues for *historical realism* in the case of general history (i.e., history of societies), while he favours historical constructivism in the case of special histories (history of literature, history of philosophy, history of art, etc.) in his book *Anatomy of Historical Knowledge* (Mandelbaum 1977). *Natural ontological attitude* (Arthur I. Fine), which tries to escape realism/antirealism debate altogether, is another viable position that could be utilised by philosophers of history. Its merits are explored by Derek Turner in relation to the natural historical sciences in Turner (2007).

[15] Waites (2011) provided a staunch defence of historical realism. A statement "The truth or falsity of that knowledge is determined by its correspondence with the independent reality of the past" (Waites 2011, 327) was central to his argument against Keith Jenkins.

[16] A specific example of this occurrence will be discussed later in section *Abstraction of narrative*.

[17] A specific example discussed in detail in Goldstein (1976, p. 125).

[18] A comprehensive collection of various examples from Mesoamerican history is Boxt et al. (2012).

distinguish between proper historical theories and fantasies. Amount and quality of evidence affect the historical inquiry, but it does not force us to be sceptical towards its role and importance.

Let us now consider an alternative approach that identifies certain features of both the neopositivst and the narrativist approaches as misleading, focuses on historical practice and inquiry, and is committed neither to naïve historical realism nor to an extreme historical antirealism and relativism. Leon J. Goldstein has inspired many contemporary philosophers of history (most notably Paul Roth, A. Tucker, J. M. Kuukkanen, etc.) and provided a thought–provoking and complex philosophical view of history and historiography. *Historical Knowing* from 1976 is his most influential book, although he developed and refined his thought in the following years. In *Historical Knowing*, Goldstein coined a distinction between the superstructure and the infrastructure of history in the chapter called "The narrativist thesis". According to Goldstein, both Hempel and the narrativists (personified mostly by W. G. Gallie) overlooked the critical difference between the finished product of historians (books, textbooks, i.e., the textual output, mostly in the narrative form), which he termed *the superstructure of history*, and the process of historical inquiry itself — *the infrastructure of history*. This infrastructure entails the essential features of the discipline of history, namely the intellectual activity of historians in which the historical past is produced, interaction with evidence, source criticism, and uncovering of historical knowledge. Both the narrativists and the neopositivists failed to identify this essential aspect of history and instead, they focused on the written product and its content — historical explanation or historical writing. While Goldstein later acknowledged that historical writing and explanation themselves represent fascinating and fruitful subject for philosophical examination (Goldstein 1986, p. 83), he insisted on focusing on the epistemological issues in stark contrast to Frank Ankersmit and other narrativists who praised the departure from epistemological issues exhibited by the Hayden White's approach (Ankersmit 1986, p. 17).

Despite Goldstein's strong opposition to the narrativism and his focus on history as a proper way of knowing, he has denounced the historical realism as well (Goldstein 1980). His approach is constructivist and leaning towards the antirealism (O'Sullivan 2006), although he does not embrace the view that history is fundamentally ideological, and he tries to refute sceptical or relativist doubts about historical practice. He highlights the trivial fact that historians cannot claim to have an approach to the real past as it was. Historians work with historical evidence and they predominantly aim to explain the present empirical data that was identified as historical evidence which is the starting

point of an inquiry. He fully realises that the label historical evidence is given according to fluid rules and he analyses this process.

Another essential distinction made by Goldstein is the one between the real past and the historical past (Goldstein 1996). Goldstein is not interested in any questions concerning the real past, although he neither denies its ontological status nor confirms it. Moreover, according to Goldstein, historians are not inquiring into the real past either. Historians are interacting with the present evidence and they are construing the historical past in order to explain given evidence. Goldstein is aware that we generally presuppose that the historical past and the real past are identical, but he denies this common–sense suggestion (Goldstein 1996, p. 334). He stresses Collingwood's suggestion that "all history is contemporary history" (Collingwood 1994, p. 202) and "much of the past has perished, in the sense that we have no documents for reconstructing it" (Collingwood 1994, p. 202) because our evidence is limited and theory–laden. This fact is not harmful to the discipline of history, but, on the contrary, is essential to it. The historical past should be understood as a model that helps us explain present empirical data that requires a postulation of an inaccessible past that requires to be understood. History helps us to understand old texts, documents, artefacts, tools, or buildings which we cannot easily understand in the present context. We can, based on our everyday experience, identify some object as a coin, but the coin from the 16th century is vastly different from the coins we use today, it does not fit our everyday experience (Goldstein 1962, p. 176). We can explain this coin by referring to the historical past, i.e., a constituted model in which the similar coins, like the present one, have specific roles and functions. The identical empirical data can be apprehended as different evidence for different theories by various historiographic traditions, which leads to the plurality of historical theories and traditions. However, these processes of historical research do not exist in a vacuum. Goldstein stresses the intersubjectivity of historians and the importance of procedural historical discourse (Goldstein 1996, pp. 252–253).

We can add that different models of historical past can highlight different objects in our world as historical evidence, e.g., feminist historiography focuses on different empirical data (texts, artefacts) in order to constitute historical past specifically sought by its proponents. Resulting widening of accepted evidence allows for a "progress" in historical research and produces new narratives. The ability to utilise new types of evidence is understood as progress in historiography by Tucker (Tucker 2004, p. 133)

Goldstein's constructivist approach is seemingly counter–intuitive. Various

philosophers criticised him for cherry–picking examples from distant past (Nowell–Smith 1977, p. 4) by how well they suit his theory. Inquiry into the recent past and the memory supposedly refute his conception and by ignoring the narrativist philosophy, he missed the linguistic turn in the philosophy of history. The very attempt to answer the criticism aimed at Goldstein's philosophical conception may help up us to highlight some underappreciated features of historical inquiry that might inform us about its importance in the age of post–truth. In order to answer these critical remarks, we will utilise an example from a distant history and examine then its ramifications for the recent history and for the current political issues.

§ 5. Abstraction of narrative

It is important to stress that Goldstein has never denied that the output of historical research is usually presented in a narrative form. However, he did not find this aspect of history to be as essential as the fact that historians are interacting with the various kinds of present evidence to produce the historical past which strongly resembles the narrativist's concept of a chronicle. It might be a missed opportunity that Goldstein failed to consider another level of narrativity that plays a vital role during the process of inquiry. Historical evidence can be textual or non–textual. The cognitive process of identifying non–textual artefact as historical evidence (e.g., old factory as a valuable piece of industrial heritage that should be preserved for future generations) is fascinating on its own and Goldstein has devoted a significant portion of his writing to this type of evidence.

Textual evidence, on the other hand, may include various documents, lists, letters, chronicles, diaries, or even works of ancient historians. Texts of past historians, in accordance with the narrativist philosophy of history, are written in a narrative form and even include features that can be identified as ideological (in a broader sense) implications. For example, famous biographies by Plutarch are explicitly made in order to educate a reader about the lives of famous Greeks and Romans and to pass on the ethical and moral message. Therefore, the biographies themselves contain numerous evaluative judgements, morals, and philosophical reflections. Considering this aim and taking into account the fact that Plutarch is writing about historical figures much older than him (sometimes even mythical founders of Rome or Athens) suggest that contemporary historians should not take his narrative at face value and they should apply caution when using Plutarch's texts as evidence. However, some of these biographies belong to the significantly limited pool of

textual evidence about specific historical agents and cannot be entirely overlooked as incredible. Plutarch often quotes sources that have not been preserved (which we cannot identify today) and thus his work is a valuable source for many notable figures. One of those irreplaceable sources is the biography of the Hellenic king of Sparta Cleomenes III, who is depicted as an honest and just ruler who respected ancient laws of Lycurgus. Alas, this glorifying account of the Spartan king can be contrasted with only one comprehensive testimony from (or near) his times. The second relevant textual source we have is *The Histories* by Polybius, who considered himself to be an objective historian and who criticised the preceding historians for their biases and superstitions. Although he does not focus on Cleomenes III directly, his occasional remarks on the Spartan king diverge significantly from the Plutarch's narrative. Cleomenes III is depicted as a ruthless tyrant who violated ancient codes and laws in Sparta and whose war campaigns had to be stopped by the allied Greek and Macedonian forces. However, upon further examination, we may discover that even Polybius might have been biased in his depiction.[19]

Contemporary historians are thus in an unfavourable position. How should they treat these deeply polarised narrative accounts that cannot be easily compared to other sources or reconciled? It is clear that the possibility of obtaining an account of the real past is in this case highly improbable.

Nonetheless, this absence of overwhelming evidence does not prevent historians from conducting historical research and the philosophers of history can ask how this highly constrained research proceeds. It is clear that historians do not directly copy the sentences from those accounts,[20] but they do proceed by the standards of source criticism. Original historical narrative texts of both historians gain the status of evidence which means that the narrativity is to a certain extent *abstracted* from the original (during the process that Goldstein has termed the infrastructure of history). The biases, personal backgrounds, sources, and goals of both past historians are assessed and evaluated. Their writings are correlated to the non–textual evidence, other texts, and reception. Various claims are labelled based on their trustworthiness and either highlighted or dropped in the final account. The reasons for omitting certain claims should be justified according to standards of scientific historiography and may appear in the footnotes of the final product (i.e., the superstructure of

[19] For more specialised reading concerning Plutarch, Polybius, and Cleomenes III, see, e.g., McGing (2010), Miltsios et al. ed. (2018) and Cartledge et al. (2005).

[20] See, e.g., Collingwood's criticism of "scissors and paste" historiography (Collingwood 1994, pp. 257–60).

history). Historians create the imaginary model of the past based on the present data they identify as relevant to the particular subject in the historical past. This model is then narrated in their own historical text and may include evaluative statements by the author (e.g., the importance of Cleomenes III) or some ideological implications (e.g., the importance of traditions and laws). Following Goldstein, we may say that historians hope that their account is as close to the real past as possible, however, ultimately their account is the best possible explanation of the evidence[21] that cannot be further improved by observation or experimental methods.

While other historical subjects may allow utilising experimental archaeology (e.g., researching construction methods used in given century) or interviewing living witnesses in the case of oral history[22] concerning recent events, large part of historical research must rely mostly on source criticism that consists in identifying and isolating exactly those features of historical text that are considered to be essential by Hayden White or other narrativists. The texts of past historians can be studied as both a historical narrative and historical evidence. In the former case, the narrative structure is in the centre of our attention, while in the latter case it might be necessary to identify and isolate the ideological background of the author via the inclusion of further evidence. Even though this *abstraction of narrative* in the process of historical research is not discussed in the works of Goldstein or the narrativists, it represents the inspiring intersection of both approaches to history that otherwise stand in stark contrast to each other.

The preceding segment is still open to the objection aimed also at Goldstein: it is just a cherry–picked example from the distant past that suits well his constructivist and antirealist philosophical conception of history and historiography. Supposedly, the examples from recent history exhibit fewer issues related to the lack of evidence and are thus supporting the historical realist approach. Historians and other scientists often inquire into the recent events and even into events that we remember. Historians can already ponder about, e.g., an unexpected result of presidential elections or an upsurge of irrationality and in these cases it seems that they do not encounter severe lack of evidence. Goldstein's account of historical research as a way of knowing would be seriously undermined if those cases were substantially different from his philosophical conception illustrated by the example from ancient history. Thus, this caveat must be taken seriously.

21 Cf. (Tucker 2004, p. 254).

22 For more information on oral history and its methodology, see, e.g., Bernstein (2008).

It is beyond doubt that contemporary historians researching into the recent history have access to an overwhelming amount of empirical data and they can even utilise new kinds of evidence. They are not limited to texts, letters, newspapers, or pictorial artefacts, but they can incorporate both audio and video recordings, electronic data, Twitter messages, and online profiles. Moreover, historians can interview living witnesses and they possess a complex methodology to identify and isolate personal and cognitive biases. Historians also have access to their own memory and recollections of events taking place; therefore, their access to the real past may seem vindicated at first glance.

However, it can be argued that this perceived difference is only a matter of degree. Remembering a certain event is not the same as possessing a historical account of the event. A memory or testimony of a living witness must be treated as any other kind of evidence, e.g., text or artefact, in order to form comprehensive historical theory or narrative. A series of tweets is scarcely a historical chronicle (in White's words) that just waits for ordering and emplotment. On the contrary, it necessitates a critical approach, precise selection, contextualisation, careful examination of biases, hidden agendas, and the broader discourse in which it takes place (i.e., a context). It is an artefact left over by an intentional agent that has to be grasped as evidence and consequently fitted into the broader model of the historical past. At the same time, the very fact that some historian (or any other agent) identifies a certain public statement as a worthwhile subject for historical research is an argumentative action in a complex historical discourse,[23] it is an attempt to affirm something as historically significant, and such an attempt might be contested by other researchers. Both ideological backgrounds of the historical agent and of the inquiring historian serve the same role as in the case of ancient history and once again it might be necessary to identify narrative features in order to abstract them from the pursued model. The apparent difference in the amount of available empirical data that can be used as evidence may even complicate matters since some contradictory evidence might be available as well.

Can we still justify the intuition that a historian who explains the outcomes of a recent election is representing the events in the real past? Or is he explaining the present evidence, including his own memories, by means of critical historical analysis? How much evidence does constitute overwhelming

[23] This specific strand of the philosophy of history is currently being examined by J. M. Kuukkanen (2015, 2017). The historical narratives as a product of professional practices are explored by Paul Roth (2012).

evidence in the case of history? Can historians ever be confident that no relevant evidence is escaping them either by not being available or by not being identified? Can they avoid drawing ideological implications or is the very choice of the topic synonymous with ideological implication on its own? These doubts are balancing on the verge of extreme scepticism and the philosophers of history, including Goldstein, aim to avoid scepticism about the possibility of historical knowledge. However, we should realise that these sceptical considerations are not hindering the possibility of conducting a historical inquiry. Quite the opposite, they are constitutive of historical knowledge and historians do discuss them most of the time without abandoning their enterprise as pure fiction. The present evidence, be it the elections outcome or the ruins of the ancient thermal spas, requires a historical explanation that proceeds by construing and narrating the corresponding model of the historical past.[24]

§ 6. Historical inquiry and critical thinking

Is this provisory reconcilement between Goldstein's and the narrativists' conceptions of the historical enterprise instructive for us in relation to the present issues concerning the irrationality in public discourse and post–truth era? I do believe that the idea of a historian encountering two contradictory sources concerning (presumably) the same subject is reminiscent of the everyday experience of assessing and evaluating the news presented to us by various media that might be politically biased. An encounter with the texts or reports that are to a certain degree contradictory (e.g., the evaluation of reported events) forces us to ponder about the motives, agendas, methodology, or intentions of the authors. In the era of social networks, internet, and fake news, critical thinking is often praised as a panacea to our current predicament. However, the precise meaning of what critical thinking entails is notoriously difficult to specify and even more challenging to pass on.[25]

Various definitions of critical thinking (see Ennis 2016 or Nieto at al. 2010) generally mention the ability to analyse the sources of information, to evaluate

[24] A presented philosophical account of history bears certain resemblances to other influential philosophical traditions, namely hermeneutics and pragmatism. Goldstein drew much inspiration from R. G. Collingwood who was praised by H. G. Gadamer and who influenced hermeneutics. The relation between philosophy of history and pragmatism is currently explored by J. M. Kuukkanen (2017).

[25] See, e.g., experiment by McLaughlin et al. (2017). Interestingly, this experiment inquired about the impact of teaching critical thinking during the history course.

the fidelity of the source, to make decisions about what to believe, to explain employed evidential criteria, to conduct active interpretation and evaluation of observation, to give reasons for one's beliefs, etc. Furthermore, critical thinking is often intertwined with media literacy (see comparisons of both concepts in Feuerstein 1999; Scheibe et al. 2012; Semali et al. 2018). The listed abilities associated with critical thinking represent valuable skills for any scientist or expert. At the same time, these attempts at defining critical thinking resemble the historical practice as sketched in previous segments. Both entail source analysis, fidelity or credibility evaluation, motives identification, employing evidential criteria, giving reasons, and interpreting data. Since the subject of history is human society, its deeds, and thinking, the historical evidence is not defined in the same exact manner as the evidence in natural sciences. The apprehension of historical sources and artefacts requires thoughtful consideration of motives, purposes, goals, beliefs, reasoning, and ideologies. An interpretation and comparison of historical evidence require critical thinking in a surprisingly pure form.[26] The process we termed *abstraction of narrative* utilises critical thinking and further empirical evidence (i.e., other sources, texts, artefacts, etc.) to refine our beliefs about the historical past.

It might be an exaggeration to stress this similarity of historical method to both critical thinking and media literacy and it is without doubt true that other scientific disciplines can claim the same as well. On the other hand, critical thinking is mostly praised as a necessary skill that helps us to navigate in the current post–truth era, to guard us against fake news, and to aid us in forming our beliefs about the world. Information we process is coming to us from various media, sources, texts, or visual depictions. It is not rare to encounter contradictory information or information that does not fit our worldview. We must be aware not only of biased information but also of our own biases. We need the ability to assess motivations, goals, and methods of other intentional agents that are mediated to us through various sources. I believe that the preceding examples have shown that the reflections of a historian are at least vaguely similar to the reflections that each of us must practice in everyday life. At the same time, historical practice does not end with source criticism and evidence interpretation. It does also involve the rational argumentation and other discursive practices (Roth 2012) that professional historians pursue to prove their hypothesis and to establish their historical theory or narrative as a significant contribution to the professional discourse. There is considerable

[26] The historical texts provide rich material for studying various cognitive biases, argumentation fallacies, and other topics related to critical thinking, see, e.g. Newall (2009).

synergy between historical practice and critical thinking.[27] Early praise of this affinity can be found in the works of philosopher and historian David Hume, who states in his *History of England* that:

> It is the business of history to distinguish between the miraculous and the marvellous; to reject the first in all narrations merely profane and human; to doubt the second; and when obliged by unquestionable testimony, as in the present case, to admit of something extraordinary, to receive as little of it as is consistent with the known facts and circumstances (Hume 1983, p. 276).

The quoted passage could appear significant if we compare it to his famous treatment of miracles and, especially, testimonies about miracles. Apparently, it is a work of a historian to assess what is miraculous (i.e., what to believe) and what is simply evidence of extraordinary development. To a certain extent, Hume's approach to the testimonies of miraculous events, complemented by probabilistic theory, can be easily applied to the issue of fake news as well.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that all citizens should receive the training of professional historians. Such an idea is both amusing and unattainable. Can we at least hope to arrive at any positive message from this parallel between historical methodology and critical thinking that could help us to promote media literacy and hold back the current upsurge of irrationality in the public discourse? There is at least one possible way how to utilise this resemblance in our society. This idea is hardly ground–breaking for teachers (Barton et al. 2003; van Hover et al. 2016), although it has not been defended or promoted by philosophical conceptions of history so far. The comparisons between the objectives of the history education and the objectives of the media literacy education do appear in didactical handbooks side by side (Scheibe et al. 2011, p. 107). However, the philosophy of history shows us that it is not necessary to entirely abandon the narrative approach to the history education since even the selection of historical evidence for teaching purposes is a motivated action answering to a determined ideology. The empirical basis of history (in Goldstein's words, historians explain present empirical data) should not be overshadowed. The ongoing shift towards a more inquiry–based[28] education is

[27] Many researchers also stress teaching the history "in context". However, it should be clear that the so–called historical context is a construct as well, and its choice is underdetermined by the given subject. We may at least try to reconstruct the context that the historical agents considered being relevant to their actions and utterances. To a certain extent, such an approach strongly resembles the methodology outlined by the intellectual historian Quentin Skinner (2002).

[28] For a general overview of the inquiry–based education see, e.g., Barnett (2005), Brew (2012), and Scott

greatly appreciated; however, many potential pitfalls have already been identified.[29] The correct stance towards the narrative history is yet to be established and it must be specified for various regions. In order to make this goal viable, the underlying theoretical and philosophical conception of history must be clarified.

The fact that people and citizens treasure various historical narratives and they form nearly emotional attachments to the narratives taught in schools and presented in the culture may show that the common–sense idea of historical narrative as representing the real past is shared by the wider public. It is not necessary to entirely dismiss this idea and to show that historical narratives are present–day constructs with ideological colouring since there is an option to understand history as a systematic way of knowing that aims to explain the present world, artefacts, and texts that require the idea of historical past to be fully understood.

This does not mean that we should stop teaching and passing on comprehensive and simplified historical narratives because this is clearly the best way to mediate the outcomes of historical research to the public. We do not want to commit "a fundamental error to assume that the pedagogic content of the learning experience is identical to the methods and processes (i.e., the epistemology) of the discipline being studied and a mistake to assume that instruction should exclusively focus on methods and processes" (Kirschner et al. 2006, p. 78). Similarly, the development of the philosophy of history shows us that even the content of historiography is not entirely *identical* to its methods and the philosophers should not focus on the methods *exclusively*. People are interested and invested in the historical narratives and in the questions, they answer, not in the historical methodology for its own sake. Sole presenting of scientific methods is not a solution to the upsurge of irrationality.

However, it would be a missed opportunity not to show and highlight the obstacles that historians encounter during their research. This could be remedied by an occasional structured interactive exercise that would require students to engage in interaction with evidence, sources, and critical analysis. Similar exercises could be repeated for ancient history (fragmented, contradictory evidence) and recent history (intentionally coercive evidence, e.g., the Second World War or the Cold War propaganda). Students could be briefly taught about the contemporary methods of historical research, including

et al. (2018).

[29] For a strong criticism of the inquiry–based education see, e.g., Kirschner et al. (2006) or Heppner et al. (2006).

oral history or experimental archaeology.[30] Visits to museums or even open–air museums can contribute to these goals and the synergy between critical thinking and the historical method could be highlighted and mediated in this way. Various case studies and methodological handbooks for teachers should be prepared while considering local needs and specifics of historiography in a given region (e.g. the example of forged manuscripts in the first section is suitable and relevant for the Czech Republic). This attempt should be preceded by careful research of the prevalent historical narratives accepted and valued by a populace in question. A delicate balancing of these specific goals hinges on our philosophical understanding of history.

Furthermore, a particular kind of historical narratives is a *narrative of historical inquiry* itself. The scientific methodology does not transfer directly to the popular discourse; it is always mediated. Even the popular media prove that people are interested in the stories of courageous historians and archaeologists who faced a criticism of their peers while they were working on a ground–breaking discovery (once again, the example of forged manuscripts and the consequent debates resulting in invalidating the fake evidence would be a prime example of such development). Students could even be instructed to recreate these debates, they could work in small groups, each being given a different selection of evidence, and then they may attempt to create a unified account while resolving inconsistencies. Such an approach would highlight the aforementioned discursive nature of historical enterprise and the role of critical thinking in producing historical accounts. The unconstrained interpretation may not be necessary. The importance of the evidence–based policy is mentioned by the pedagogical texts concerning history as well: "Teaching the concept of evidence to facilitate knowledge growth and critical disciplinary thinking is challenging but a vital component in the education of a future citizenry" (van Hover et al. 2016, p. 216).

It should be noted that the historical evidence is of various kinds. Students should be confronted with pictures, photos, texts, artefacts, oral history interviews, etc. Different methodologies could be briefly introduced (interpretation, source criticism, oral history, experimental archaeology) and

[30] A publication *The Constructed Past: Experimental archaeology, education and the public* (2004) explores the experimental archaeology as well as its use in education. It defends a comparable constructivist idea of historical and archaeological enterprise, it is aware of ideological and political influences, and it argues for utilising the results of experimental archaeology in education: "By making students aware that the sites are experimental, and that they are not definitive models of what it was like in the past, teachers at all levels of education can develop discussion on the nature of evidence and on the nature of the past itself" (Stone et al. 2004, p. 7).

tried out while stressing the professional nature of the enterprise and retaining some "attractiveness" to the public at the same time. The differences between various kinds of evidence could be examined while keeping the characteristic features of historical inquiry in the foreground.

This briefly sketched idea may sound naïve or utopic and it is undoubtedly challenging to execute it properly, while its benefits are uncertain at best. On the other hand, similar ideas are already explored in the pedagogic literature (van Hover et al. 2016; Barton et al. 2003) and are already incorporated by various educational institutions like museums. Different countries are at different stages of implementing similar changes into the educational system and each of them faces unique problems (e.g., aforementioned criticism of the Czech educational system by The Czech Security Information Service). The comprehensive overview of the issues encountered by historians and the methods employed in producing historical knowledge may allow people to better appreciate the complexities involved (the infrastructure of history) in producing the final narrative account (the superstructure of history) of a particular subject. Therefore, the fluidity of historical narratives might be better understood, while the role of empirical data and evidence–based historical methodology with its affinity to critical thinking guards this concept of historiography against the pitfalls of extreme relativism. However, no methodological propaedeutic, no inquiry–based education and no epistemological analysis of historical inquiry can rob historical narratives of their power, which must be taken seriously. It must be realised that the narrativist account of history and the opposing inquiry–based account of history (promoted by Goldstein) are mostly compatible, despite their apparent schism, and they provide a viable philosophical account of history when combined. The same could be said about the narrative–based and the inquiry–based approaches to history education which are at their best when they are carefully employed together.

§ 7. Conclusion

The upsurge of irrationality we may perceive in our current social and political climate is not accompanied only by fake news and declining faith in the scientific and expert knowledge. We have also seen that the historical narratives with the emotional potential they carry can influence the public discourse significantly. The dangers of similar nature have already been identified by Carl Hempel and Karl Popper in the 40s of the 20th century, however their attempt to solve these threats by approximating historical explanation to the

explanations employed by natural scientist proved to be problematic. Criticism from various sources showed that historical explanations and texts do not mirror the scientific explanations and that the structure of historical texts has its own specifics and features. The narrativist philosophers of history have progressively abandoned the original push against ideological properties of historical accounts and Hayden White claimed that history must be ideological in order to answer our present questions about the world we live in.

Another group of philosophers, including Goldstein, Tucker, Roth, or Kuukkanen, point out that historians have developed a rich and complex methodology to evaluate theories their peers produce, and they have highlighted the importance of professional practices, guidelines, and the discursive nature of the historical enterprise. Goldstein has argued for shifting philosophers' attention towards the infrastructure of history — intellectual activities involved in constituting historical past (i.e., a constructed model of the past) and he has been genuinely interested in the nature of historical evidence. Although he has been criticising the narrativists, his account is mostly compatible with their account. Both approaches can be considered constructivist and Goldstein is often labelled as a historical antirealist. History aims to explain present empirical data via the model he termed historical past, which is different from the real past. Intersubjectively accessible historical evidence, its evaluation, and standards of professional historiography provide a defensible approach to history that does not subscribe to naïve historical realism and yet it does not result in relativism and extreme scepticism. The ideology still plays an essential role in the choice of topic (or selection of evidence) and in producing the final account (the superstructure of history).

On the level of the infrastructure of history, historians encounter many kinds of evidence, including artefacts, texts, witnesses, recordings, or digital data. Especially textual sources often follow a particular agenda and the authors supposedly held various ideological beliefs. Historians must often consider these circumstances when scrutinising the evidence. To pursue their goals, historians inquire into the motives, status, beliefs, or goals of historical agents and, to a certain extent, they are subtracting the narrativity (and ideological implications) when encountering texts of past historians or biographers. Via this methodology, they constitute the historical past that is reported in their final narrative accounts.

As non–professionals,[31] we are accustomed to "consume" the outcomes of

[31] This group of "non–professionals" may potentially include even historians of science or historians of philosophy, etc. Various discussions of corresponding methodologies are often exhibiting slight

historical research in a narrative form, masquerading as a comprehensive story representing the events that took place in the real past to us. In a similar manner as in the case of entirely fictional stories, we can grow emotionally attached to certain characters and we can begin to despise other ones. We constantly (and perhaps unintentionally) look for values, messages, and lessons we can learn from the past. However, such an image of historical enterprise overshadows the complex inquiry behind it, nontrivial choices made by contemporary historians, the ambiguous nature of evidence, and especially role of critical thinking in the entire process. Historical narratives may explain,[32] they may be the most suitable form for sharing historical knowledge, and they are definitely of philosophical significance; however, they do not fully exhaust the range of philosophical issues related to the history and historiography. In our current political and social climate, we can clearly see the impact and the influence of various narratives and ideologies. The history has a long record of recognising and abstracting such narratives and ideological implications as well as constructing them. The virtues of an inquisitive historian who is dealing with often contradictory and biased sources are strikingly similar to the virtues we require from the general population in everyday life. This resemblance may not be unique to the history and it may indeed be superficial, but it can also prove to be instructive. The historical inquiry should be presented as a professional and discursive endeavour, not as an unconstrained interpretation or as a static image of the real past.

At the same time, the lesson delivered by the narrativist philosophy of history must be learned. The very choice of the object we inquire into is a motivated action. The narratives are still the best possible way of sharing the fruits of historical inquiry. It is impossible to *abandon narrative–based history education for inquiry–based education entirely*. Instead, a specific balance should be sought and the selected examples, case studies, and exercises must be adjusted for a specific region. Even the narratives of historical inquiry in the past (famous historical discoveries) may prove useful. Therefore, we should not teach history *only as stories*, but we should *highlight the inquiry and the critical thinking* behind it at *the same time*.

inclinations towards a naïve historical realist view of history, despite their otherwise well–thought approach, e.g., Guéroult (1969).

[32] See, e.g., Roth (2017) concerning the essentially narrative explanation in historiography and in the natural sciences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank the editor and both anonymous reviewers for their helpful and insightful comments. The research and the paper are supported by the scientific project IRP201820 “The Construction of the Other in Medieval Europe” (IRP University of Ostrava).

REFERENCES

ANKERSMIT, Frank R. 1986. "The Dilemma of Contemporary Anglo-Saxon Philosophy of History." *History and Theory* 25 (4): 1–27. DOI: 10.2307/2505129

ANKERSMIT, Frank R. 1998. "Hayden White's Appeal to the Historians." *History and Theory* 37 (2): 182–93. DOI: 10.1111/0018-2656.00048

BARNETT, Ronald. 2005. *Reshaping the University: New Relationships between Research, Scholarship and Teaching*. Edited by Ronald Barnett. Open University Press. DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199659821.001.0001.

BARTON, Keith C, and Linda S. Levstik. 2003. "Why Don't More History Teachers Engage Students in Interpretation?" *Social Education* 67: 358–61.

BERNSTEIN, Daniel M., Veronika Nourkova, and Elizabeth F. Loftus. 2008. "From Individual Memories to Oral History." *Advances in Psychology Research* 54: 157–81.

BIRNER, Jack. 2018. "Karl Popper's the Poverty of Historicism after 60 Years." *Metascience* 27 (2): 183–93. DOI: 10.1007/s11016-018-0303-5

BOXT, Matthew A., and Brian Dervin Dillon. 2012. *Fanning the Sacred Flame: Mesoamerican Studies in Honor of H. B. Nicholson*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado. DOI: 10.1017/s104566350001172x

CARTLEDGE, Paul, and Antony Spawforth. 2005. *Hellenistic and Roman Sparta*. London: Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9780203482186

COLLINGWOOD, Robin G. 1994. *The Idea of History*. Edited by Jan van der Dussen. oxford: Oxford University Press.

DANTO, Arthur C. 1962. "Narrative Sentences." *History and Theory* 2 (2): 146–79. DOI: 10.2307/2504460

DANTO, Arthur C. 2013. "Hayden White and Me: Two Systems of Philosophy of History." In *Philosophy of History After Hayden White*, edited by Robert Doran, 109-17. London: Bloomsbury. DOI: 10.5040/9781472548177.ch-005

DEWULF, Fons. 2018. "A Genealogy of Scientific Explanation: The Emergence of the Deductive-Nomological Model at the Intersection of German Historical and Scientific Philosophy." PhD diss., Ghent University.

DOMANSKA, Ewa. 2008. "A Conversation with Hayden White." *Rethinking History* 12: 3–21. DOI: 10.1080/13642520701838744

DORAN, Robert. 2013. *Philosophy of History After Hayden White*. Edited by Robert Doran. London: Bloomsbury. DOI: 10.5040/9781472548177

ENNIS, Robert H. 2016. "Definition: A Three-Dimensional Analysis with Bearing on Key Concepts." *OSSA Conference Archive 11* 11: 1–19.

FEUERSTEIN, Mira. 1999. "Media Literacy in Support of Critical Thinking." *Journal of Educational Media* 24 (1): 43–54. DOI: 10.1080/1358165990240104.

FRITZE, Ronald H. 2009. *Invented Knowledge: False History, Fake Science and Pseudo-Religions*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd.

GINZBURG, Carlo. 2012. *Thread and Traces*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

GOLDSTEIN, Leon J. 1962. "Evidence and Events in History." *Philosophy of Science* 29 (2): 175–94. DOI: 10.1086/287860

GOLDSTEIN, Leon J. 1970. "Collingwood' s Theory of Historical Knowing." *History and Theory* 9 (1): 3–36. DOI: 10.2307/2504500

GOLDSTEIN, Leon J. 1976. *Historical Knowing*. Austin and London: University of Texas Press.

GOLDSTEIN, Leon J. 1980. "Against Historical Realism." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 40 (3): 426–29. DOI: 10.2307/2106407

GOLDSTEIN, Leon J. 1986. "Impediments to Epistemology in the Philosophy of History." *History and Theory* 25 (4): 82–100. DOI: 10.2307/2505133

GOLDSTEIN, Leon J. 1996. *The What and the Why of History: Philosophical Essays*. Leiden: Brill.

GORMAN, Jonathan. 1977. "Historical Knowing by Leon J. Goldstein Review by: J. L. Gorman Source." *History and Theory* 16 (1): 66–80. DOI: 10.2307/2504580

GUÉROULT, Martial. 1969. "The History of Philosophy as a Philosophical Problem." *The Monist* 53 (4): 563–87. DOI: 10.5840/monist196953438

HARSIN, Jayson. 2018. "Post-Truth and Critical Communication Studies." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*, edited by Jon Nussbaum, 1-36. Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.757

HAYHOE, Katharine, Xavier Basurto, and Dominique Brossard. 2017. "Post-Truth Predicaments." *Nature* 541: 425–27. DOI: 10.1038/nj7637-425a

HEIT, Helmut. 2018. "'There Are No Facts . . . ': Nietzsche as Predecessor of Post-Truth ?" *Studia Philosophica Estonica* 11 (1): 44–63.

HEMPEL, Carl G. 1942. "The Function of General Laws in History." *The Journal of Philosophy* 39 (2): 35–48. DOI: 10.2307/2017635

HEPPNER, Frank H., Karen R. Kouttab, and William Croasdale. 2006. "Inquiry: Does It Favor the Prepared Mind?" *The American Biology Teacher* 68 (7): 390–92. DOI: 10.1662/0002-7685(2006)68[390:idiftp]2.0.co;2.

HUME, David. 1983. *History of England: From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.

JANEČEK, Petr. 2017. "Intangible cultural heritage in the Czech Republic: between national and local heritage" In *The Routledge Companion to Intangible Cultural Heritage*, edited by Michelle L. Stefano and Peter Davis, 152-66. New York: Routledge.

KALELA, Jorma. 2012. *Making History: The Historian and Uses of the Past*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: 10.1007/978-0-230-35658-0

KIRSCHNER, Paul, Sweller, John, and Clark, Richard. 2006. "Why Minimal Guidance during Instruction Does Not Work: An Analysis of the Failure of Constructivist, Discovery, Problem-Based, Experiential and Inquiry-Based Teaching." *Educational Psychologist* 41 (December 2012): 75–86. DOI: 10.1207/s15326985ep4102.

KUUKKANEN, Jouni-Matti. 2015. *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: 10.1057/9781137409874

KUUKKANEN, Jouni-Matti. 2017. "Moving Deeper into Rational Pragmatism." *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 11 (1): 83–118. DOI: 10.1163/18722636-12341362

MANDELBAUM, Maurice. 1977. *The Anatomy of Historical Knowledge*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press. DOI: 10.2307/1856346

MCGING, Brian. 2010. *Polybius' Histories*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

MCLAUGHLIN, Anne Collins, and Alicia Ebbitt McGill. 2017. "Explicitly Teaching Critical Thinking Skills in a History Course." *Science and Education* 26 (1–2): 93–105. DOI: 10.1007/s11191-017-9878-2

MILTSIOS, Nikos, and Melina Tamiolaki. *Polybius and his Legacy*. Edited by Nikos Miltsios and Melina Tamiolaki. Leck: De Gruyter. DOI: 10.1515/9783110584844

MURPHEY, Murray. G. 2009. *Truth and History*. New York: State University of New York Press.

NEWALL, Paul. 2009. "Historiographic Objectivity" In *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, edited by Aviezer Tucker, 172-80. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. DOI: 10.1002/9781444304916.ch14

NIETO, Ana M, and Carlos Saiz. 2010. "Critical Thinking: A Question of Aptitude and Attitude?" *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines* 25 (2): 19-25.

NOWELL-SMITH, P. H. 1977. "The Constructionist Theory of History." *History and Theory* 16 (4): 1–28. DOI: 10.2307/2504805

ORZOFF, Andrea. 2009. *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914–1948*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

O'SULLIVAN, Luke. 2006. "Leon Goldstein and the Epistemology of Historical Knowing." *History and Theory* 45 (2): 204–28. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2303.2006.00357.x

POLAGE, Danielle C. 2012. "Making up History: False Memories of Fake News Stories." *Europe's Journal of Psychology* 8 (2): 245–50. DOI: 10.5964/ejop.v8i2.456.

POPPER, Karl R. 1957. *The Poverty of Historicism*. Boston: The Beacon Press.

REISCH, George A. 2005. *How the Cold War Transformed Philosophy of Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1017/cbo9780511610318

ROTH, Paul A. 2012. "The Pasts." *History and Theory* 51 (2): 313–39. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2303.2012.00630.x

ROTH, Paul A. 2017. "Essentially Narrative Explanations." *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A* 62: 42–50. DOI: 10.1016/j.shpsa.2017.03.008

SCHEIBE, Cyndy, and Faith Rogow. 2012. *The Teacher's Guide to Media Literacy: Critical Thinking in a Multimedia World*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin. DOI: 10.4135/9781483387581

SCOTT, David M, Cameron W Smith, Man-Wai Chu, and Sharon Friesen. 2018. "Examining the Efficacy of Inquiry-Based Approaches to Education." *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 64 (1): 35–54.

SEMALI, Ladislaus M., and Ann Watts Pailliotet. 2018. *Intermediality: The Teachers' Handbook of Critical Media Literacy*. Edited by Ladislaus M. Semali and Ann Watts Pailliotet. New York: Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9780429499722

SKINNER, Quentin. 2002. *Visions of Politics, Volume I: Regarding Method*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1017/cbo9780511790812

SMITH, Anthony. D. 2000. *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

STEFANO, Michelle L., and Peter Davis. 2017. *The Routledge Companion to Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Edited by Michelle L. Stefano and Peter Davis. New York: Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781315716404

STONE, Peter G., and Philippe G. Planel. 2004. *The Constructed Past: Experimental Archaeology, Education and the Public*. Edited by Peter G. Stone and Philippe G. Planel. London: Routledge.

THE SECURITY INFORMATION SERVICE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC. 2018. "Annual Report of the Security Information Service for 2017." Accessed May 25, 2019.

https://www.bis.cz/public/site/bis.cz/content/vyrocni-zpravy/en/ar2017en.pdf

TUCKER, Aviezer. 2009. *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*. Edited by Aviezer Tucker. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. DOI: 10.1002/9781444304916

TUCKER, Aviezer. 2004. *Our Knowledge of the Past: A Philosophy of Historiography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1017/cbo9780511498381

TURNER, Derek. 2007. *Making Prehistory: Historical Science and the Scientific Realism Debate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1017/cbo9780511487385.007

HOVER, Stephanie van, David Hicks, and Hilary Dack. 2016. "From Source to Evidence? Teachers' Use of Historical Sources in Their Classrooms." *The Social Studies* 107 (6): 209–17. DOI: 10.1080/00377996.2016.1214903

WAITES, Bernard. 2011. "In Defence of Historical Realism: A Further Response to Keith Jenkins." *Rethinking History* 15 (3): 319–34. DOI: 10.1080/13642529.2011.588518.

WALSH, W. H. 1977. "Truth and Fact in History Reconsidered." *History and Theory* 16 (4): 53–71. DOI: 10.2307/2504807

WHITE, Hayden. 1975. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

WHITE, Hayden. 1978. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

WHITE, Hayden. 1982. "The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation." *Critical Inquiry* 9 (1): 113–37. DOI: 10.1086/448191

WRIGHT, Georg Hans von. 1971. *Explanation and Understanding*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

DAVID ČERNÍN is a research fellow at the Centre for Research in Medieval Society and Culture (VIVARIUM), University of Ostrava, Czech Republic. His research interests cover the philosophy of history and historiography, epistemology, and philosophy of science. Apart from that, he published some papers concerning the methodology of the history of philosophy.

CONTACT INFORMATION
Faculty of Arts, University of Ostrava. Reální 5, 701 03 Ostrava - Czech Republic. e-mail (✉): cernin.d@gmail.com · iD: http://orcid.org/ 0000-0001-8711-3929

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE
Černín, David (2020). «Historical Methodology and Critical Thinking as Synergised Concepts». *Disputatio. Philosophical Research Bulletin* 9, no. 13: pp. 00–00.