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# IV

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HISTORICAL FACT AND HISTORICITY

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## HISTORICAL FACT AND HISTORICITY

Mario Sambarino, *Montevideo*

Both the notions of historical fact and historicity and their mutual interconnections play a preponderant rôle in the contemporary problems of the Philosophy of history. The first notion has opened the way to a wide variety of uncertainties due to endless efforts to determine the object or the subject-matter of the historical science; the second one has been getting favourable hearing as a concept of fundamental value, mainly since some attempts were made to disclose a form of temporalness which tries to characterize human existence ontologically. A study on the relationship between both terms shows their inner link with the interpretation one gives to the thesis asserting that man is a historical being, because such a thesis is by no means univocal. And though it is true that sometimes the assertion is taken to mean that man has no "nature" but is simply the result of history, it is also true that some understand it in the sense that man is of himself — that is, according to his own being's structure — a course, a process that is historical in so far as in him there intertwine the dimensions of past, present and future in which time explicits itself.

Regarding everyday language, "history" — in its basic and proper sense — points to a complex of past and memorable events (be it of peoples or of figures, of public or collective interest) as well as to anything that has a significant reference to a process of changes that take place in time according to the structure or content of cultural forms socially instituted. In this primary sense, 'the historical' refers always to a supra-

individual reality, for it is only in relation to this reality (as, for instance, that which attains a 'public figure') that the historically individual bears any importance.

There is a double knowledge with regards to the facts that partake of that category — the generally historical. On one side, this knowledge appears within an organized, well-founded body of knowledge that is present either in the historical science or in the knowledge transmitted by tradition; on the other hand, it is a sort of knowledge acquired from direct experience, a kind of knowledge of the vital presence of a reality to which we feel referred, as it were. In this way the historical, as a sector of the real, offers itself both as matter to a form of knowledge and as content or lived experience.

In the first case the historical lies on a past that becomes present through traditional transmission or systematic knowledge, unless we know of that past because we have lived it directly; in the second case, the historical becomes present to us by means of its contemporaneous relation to our own existence, the vital centre of which it shares. These two roads to the historical are but partially coincident: neither everything lived as historical may be handed down to the historian, nor everything that the historian considers 'historic' has necessarily been lived as historical.

From the point of view of some situation, some position, some public post, one may be aware of actively taking part in the course of historical events. But we are also aware that the historical will not be known by the historical science. There is in addition to that, the awareness of anonymously participating in that history-making process that occurs in the marginal cooperation to an important cultural achievement, in a general election, in a battle. That consciousness cannot be identified with the mere fact of being one's own activity implied in the self-making of the collective. That is why there is also a marginal consciousness to the historical, as when we think we are witnessing something that seems to be worth being noted in history by future historians (something that — we think — will be 'historic', in other words) even though we do not share in the event. There is knowledge of being or of having been witness to the historical. But there is as well the experience of undergoing the historical as an objective process within which we are, but for or against which we cannot do anything; a process that carries us in and casts us aside at the same time. Such an experience occurs *in* people whose individualised relationship to the historical will become a subject for the historical science; but it also occurs in those anonymous levels in which we know the historical exists, although it passes by or alongside or over them, with the result

of the individual's lack of integration to it. On the other hand, it is usual for the historian to make reference to collective facts which integrate themselves into anonymous individual facts in which the individual record, as such, bears so faint a mark that, in them, individuals seem interchangeable.

We can, therefore, be *in* the historical and undergo it as well. We may even be agents of the historical, without our understanding it as historical. So the historical does not seem dependant on our awareness of it; nor is it conditioned either to the historian's consciousness which makes him depend upon his contingent interests and the variation of his criteria. But, does all this take for granted that there exists a being-per-se of the historical? A historical event may have happened without having been known; this is the assumption of historical investigation. And the distinction between the what-has-been and the what-is known holds true when, due to the absence of sources or reliable records, the what-has-been happens to become factually — that is, accidentally — impossible to ascertain. But it is evident that we cannot say of an isolated fact that it is historical in itself since in it alone we cannot see anything conveying the idea that it should be a historical fact different from other facts. If we say that it becomes historical because of its correlation to other facts which are understood in its light, we must still ask for the historical character of those other facts. If we say that such a fact is historical on account of its relevant connections, we are still in the position to ask how this relevancy may be **determined**.

Shall we admit, then, that every human fact in the past is historical of itself, set aside its being eventually taken or not taken into consideration by a historian? In order to answer this it is necessary to study the relationships of identity or divergency between the notions "past fact" and "historical fact". The words "the past" set off in people's minds the multiplicity of contents of any equivocal notion. Such an equivocity is usually made clearer according to the context in which it appears. "Past" points out first, to that which no longer matters (just because it is no longer present); second, to that which having been past still influences the present; finally, "past" is said, generically, of anything that happened in a section of time no longer present, disregarding whether it influences the present or not, and whether it may have influenced its own present or that has not been the case.

It is obvious that in expressions such as "fidelity to the past", "we cannot undo the past" and the like, *past* is not meant to include *all*, but only the relevant, the characteristic, the decisive or that which is some-

how or other worth being linked with these aspects. Not all past is historical. Neither is it all that can be known of the past, because this knowledge may refer to something irrelevant. For that matter not even everything in the past that is connected with the present becomes relevant, though it may be a well-preserved document or a remembrance, since all these may concur with a load of uselessness which should better inherit oblivion. But even if they *could* be related to a present interest, we should ask ourselves whose interest it is, why that interest has been brought about in our time, of what nature it is exactly and what will be the usefulness and rewards of such an attention. In addition to all this, consciousness of the historical does not assume that everything taken as historical must be past, there may be consciousness of the historical as to the present and as to the future. That explains away why there exists the possibility to record what *is* happening now or what *is going to* happen (since it seems worth being 'historic', noted in history) and why also some people dedicate their efforts to destroying what might otherwise become records. It is impossible to assert that we are historically aware of the present or of the future because we know both will eventually become past. The truth is that we do not think historical either *all* of the present or *all* of the future.

How is it then that in the course of time the character of the historical pervades sections and complexes of human deeds? What is presented as such juts forth against the background of indifference. Both the directly relevant and the indirectly relevant (that is, what is in some way linked with the directly relevant) take for granted the validity of an organic system of explicit and implicit criteria, which, in so far as being in force, are considered binding as opposed to action's interpretative-estimative problems. This criteria-complex presents a coherent style to establish what is of any importance in the past, in the present, in the future and, in turn, what importance the past, the present and the future may have as such. That is, only through a valid  $\eta\theta\omicron\varsigma$  — of which the historian is a mere interpreter — the content and value of the historical can be aptly determined; but the variability of that content and value does not hinder the existence of some sort of consciousness of the historical because any human group is ethologically conditioned. Due to this ethological relationability — variable, since along history the binding plurality of  $\eta\theta\omicron\varsigma$  changes notwithstanding partial or nuclear coincidences — there is no being-per-se of the past, there is not any way-per-se to determine the value of everything related to it either. That which becomes valuable as tradition, the tradition itself as historical continuity, and the validity of such and such

a way of relation to tradition, are not determined ontologically but axiologically. Objective and collective historicity's temporal dimensions are, therefore, as to their content and value, themes still at issue. They do not constitute an ontological texture valuable of itself.

That is why within the frames of a differentiated society, in which there come up partially ethological divergencies from time to time, it is possible to find divers perspectives as to its past, as to what has to be taken as such and as to how the so-called past has to be interpreted. The relation to the past differs according to the different classes. Due to this ethological relationality of the being and value of the historical both the conservative and the revolutionary consciousness are possible in a given society; but in neither case can it be argued that one of the consciousness is *authentic* on account of an ontological structure of temporalness. Only at the ethological level there can be authenticity; but of course, this assertion does not imply that any axiological system of validity must necessarily make sense in a determined instance of a social process. "Historical time" is not the equivalent to "mere time". So much so that historical time has a rhythm never in accordance with the uniform passing of mere time, though the latter may allow the dating of the former. Historical time may have gaps; mere time never has them. In this sense it is enough to recall that there is memory of time in which there happened **nothing worth to remember. Historical time has a sort of intensity that makes present an order of realities quite different from the extensive magnitude of mere time.** Because of their content of real or possible events, axiologically significant, expressions of the type "it is too late a time to-", "now is the time to —", "it is still the time to —" constitute integrating dimensions of historical time along with many others that explicit estimating dimensions of actualities or possibilities situationally conditioned. It is due to this relation with estimates ethologically grounded in the connection between historical facts and historical time that we find some sense in the notions of social evolution and decay.

But the content axiologically different of historical time departs from the axiologically different individual time. This explains why there are instituted forms and societies for which there is no historical future, even though they may still have temporal future and some of their members may or may not have emphatical future. In this light, too, we understand the existence of pastless societies, since their members' pasts cannot be considered proper pasts.

From what we have said up to now it follows that no temporalness-theory may sufficiently found a theory of historicity. On the contrary,

it is historicity itself which must found any theory of temporalness, for only through the historical — determined by the relevant to an  $\xi\theta\omicron\varsigma$  — time becomes more than a mere course. Consciousness of the historical supposes both the existence of temporal course and the transinstantaneous structure of an apprehensive consciousness that, in its actuality, links and determines the dimensions of past, present and future; but it also supposes the existence of a valid and estimative arrangement that allows the axiological distinction and qualification of past, present and future contents not only in the individual but in a communitary order in relation to which any individual experience conveys a meaning. Even if it has collective validity, a recording limited to comprehending ontological relationships of past, present and future would never be historical consciousness. Neither the historical would exist for such a consciousness, nor would it even meet the possibility to compromise.

It is in the social order where the historical finds its proper ground. But social being is not enough to explain the appearance of the historical. Neither everything social is historical, nor any partaking of the social means participation in the historical. The social, too — to be truly based as it is in the human level — needs that the consciousness of integrating a collective order experiences the unity of the whole in the estimative and transinstantaneous manner shown above. The differentiated and positional knowledge in relation with a process is not possible without that manner. **Not even as individual experience, because the very individual cannot be possible as such but in the realm of the social.** There is no possible historicity without the transinstantaneity of the "we". The historical exists only in those societies in which there is a binding  $\xi\theta\omicron\varsigma$ ; and the  $\xi\theta\omicron\varsigma$  determines not only content but also the historical value of the historical in so far as it limits the value of all time-dimensions. Just for this reason it is feasible to find societies faithful to the historical, regardless of it or even at war with it.

Thus it is clear, that the proper being of "the historical" is that of a relationality ethologically determined, that has objective value and that — due to this last fact — asserts itself on the historian, even though the historian's work — when manifesting that side of what-has-been that still maintains a relationship of relevancy with the present values — may contribute to the building up of the same  $\xi\theta\omicron\varsigma$ . It is not necessary to explain that by "relevant" here we mean not only the positively valuable but also anything that matters for an estimative negative judgment. This meaning does not oppose the historian's necessary scientific objectivity that has to disclose and expose the relevant as such, be it negative or positive.

It does not affirm, either that the determinant relationality must be isolated or punctual; but that it participates in a connective system that tries to integrate itself into a whole. Nor, finally, does it defend that to show the relation with an  $\xi\theta\omicron\varsigma$  is the foundation of the being of the historical implies a form of idealistic concientialism, since on the one hand it says nothing about the foundation for the validity of that  $\xi\theta\omicron\varsigma$  and, on the other hand, the being of what-has-been or of what-will-be are as they are themselves, and their historical character happens to occur to them through a form of relation, meaning obviously by this that what occurs through a relation exists or ceases to exist according to the existence or non-existence of its originating relation.

Due to its ethological relationality, the historical — notwithstanding a certain margin of indetermination, unavoidable with regards to the limits of the relational connections — does not remain given once and for all; it may be re-built in its exact content and significance. The validity of an  $\xi\theta\omicron\varsigma$  is also a process at the same time, may be substituted by other validities and partakes itself of the historical. Both that which maintains itself in the changes of the estimate perspectives about the relevant through partial coincidences, and that which is marked as characteristic points of divergence, tend to appear as fixed data, as the natural theme of the historical; thus fomenting the illusion of a being-per-se different from a presentative objectivity of ethological character.

In the same way we can understand that the consciousness of the historical reaches its progressive development in the conflicting experience among different forms of  $\xi\theta\omicron\varsigma$  and their transformations. It may be said that man has made history and has 'historised' himself at the same time. That is why to speak of a pre-history has full meaning; a more radical and deeper meaning than some people think. Man is not historical, but has become historical, developing his consciousness of it, himself. The most important event in history is that history has become history and knows of itself as being history.

#### *Synopsis*

In its most proper sense and according to linguistic usages, "history" refers to anything worth recalling in socio-cultural and supra-individual changes, since it is only in relation with these that the deeds of certain individuals present any interest. It follows that we may ask for the type of being possessed by the historical and for that which makes something possess a "historical" character.

We have a kind of indirect knowledge of the historical which comes either from the historical science through objective data critically examined. But we also have a sort of direct knowledge when we take part in, know of, witness or undergo something we think to be historical.

In so far as the historical is patent to us as objective reality it seems to depend neither on the consciousness of the historical nor on the historian's selective interest. What-has-been and what-is-known do not fully coincide. But it is difficult to think of the possibility of a being-per-se of the historical which could allow us to distinguish it from what is not so. Not everything past may be called historical. There is also a consciousness of the historical that refers to the present and to the future.

The historical becomes present as relevant; that is, as something that asserts itself from the accumulation of indifferent human deeds. That relevancy presupposes the binding validity of criteria that allow it to be appreciated. Such criteria are found in a system of estimate validities that at a certain instance of a social group merit with a collective character — total or partial — the name  $\xi\theta\omicron\varsigma$ , since what may be thus named in the individual has meaning only 'in', 'for' or 'against' a collective or partially collective validity.

The  $\xi\zeta\theta$  conditions not only what is thought to be relevant in past, present and future, but also what the past, the present and the future value as such. That is why the conservative and the revolutionary consciousness are feasible; that is why there is no authenticity in the being of the temporalness but through the validity of an  $\xi\theta\omicron\varsigma$ . This does not mean that at a given social moment, any axiological validity can be binding. In any case, the foundation of the historical cannot be found in a theory of temporalness; on the contrary the historical gives significance to time.

In its turn history's place happens to be the social level, and its being happens to be its relation with the validity of an  $\xi\theta\omicron\varsigma$ ; so much so that it offers itself objectively to man, thus conditioning historians.

So, the struggle among the wide plurality of  $\xi\theta\omicron\varsigma$  makes more conspicuous the sense of the historical and, in point of fact, we can say that man is not a historical being: he has become such a being that has 'historised' himself; he has made himself while making history, since history itself as a process of collective significance is the most proper foundation to what man actually is.