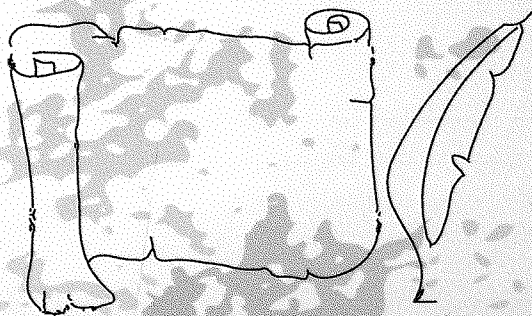


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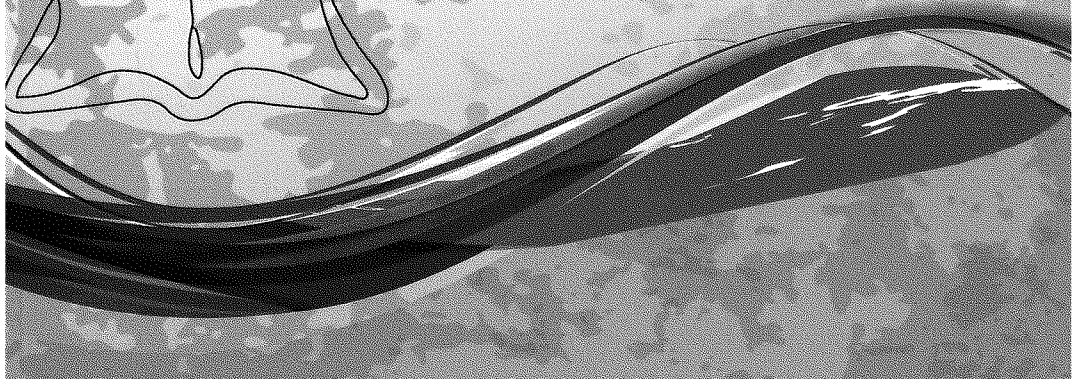
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Secretariat Bureau

E-mails: hofburg@sgemvienna.org

URL: www.sgemvienna.org

HISTORICAL FACTUALITY AND REPRESENTATION

Assoc. Prof. Vinicio Busacchi

University of Cagliari, Italy

ABSTRACT

Historical facts are not objects. 'Historical-real' is constitutively *representational* and constitutively *temporal* because it is a *process*. The question of what is a given truth in history then becomes the dilemma of creating a representative reconstruction of the process of (past) events that is close to the 'real' events as they are given in that specific time. Those 'real' events have been conceived, represented, lived, created, and narrated. The interweaving of the theory of history and the [cognitive] theory of representation is revealed as a central interlacing that could be proposed between the theory of history and the theory of narrative on the one hand and the theory of history and the theory of action on the other. From one perspective, history is about other people, other institutions, other representations and other visions of the world. It is about people who lived in different eras, who have created and inhabited different institutions, who spoke other languages, who embraced other conceptions and beliefs and so on. From another perspective, however, historians are not faced with a *radical otherness*. History describes *people like us*, but it is we who are the heirs of those cultures, those institutions, that wealth of knowledge, those skills, those beliefs and so on, and we are not without tools to recover, reproduce or re-present them.

Keywords: representation, historical knowledge, time, past, reality

THE CONCEPT OF REPRESENTATION: A PROBLEMATIC RICHNESS, A PRODUCTIVE WAY

The conceptual and theoretical richness explicitly and implicitly connected to the notion of representation finds immediate reverberation in linguistic uses, which are significantly varied in all Neo-Latin and Anglo Saxon languages. It constitutes a pre-theoretical and pre-philosophical level of information that immediately reveals how much a number of these meanings have a direct or indirect connection-with, origin-from or reference-to quasi-philosophical conceptions. In fact, retracing and summarising this whole complex of references is almost equal to retracing, in a certain way, the history of philosophy, the theory of knowledge and language and the philosophy of the mind, not to say of rhetoric, logic, aesthetics, psychology and history. Already in Aristotle's *On the Soul*, we find a definition of representation as a gnoseological, as well as psychological, element. This idea appears again at several moments during the medieval and modern eras, which is in parallel with the progressive differentiation of philosophical knowledge into specific, specialised and disciplinary domains. Immanuel Kant's study around knowledge and representation is of particular significance because it summarises the fundamental modern theoretical-speculative use of the concept, as well as constitutes a synthetic reference valid beyond the philosophical framework, being part of a gnoseological theory for science. Kant explains that representation is one of the axes of knowledge. Actually, all of human knowledge is representational, because

all knowledge is a union of thought and intuition. To represent is to think and to grasp or express by intuition. Studying representation, Kant balances his analysis between three similar-but-different terms that the German language uses to conceive of representation, that is, *Vorstellung*, *Repräsentierung* and *Vertretung*. Interestingly enough, Kant distinguishes two main uses of the notion of conscious or mental representation: (1) the singular representation or intuition (*Anschauung*) and (2) the general representation or concept (*Begriff*). First of all, every representation is intrinsically directed towards an object, consequently, *Vorstellung* refers to and defines an intentional relation of representation. [1] Second, *Vorstellung* is 'within us', in the sense that it is intrinsically subjective and psychological. This notion implies a differentiation between the represented object and the manner of representing it. It seems to me that Kant's use of *Vorstellung* serves better than other Germanic conceptions of representation as a theoretical-philosophical support term for a certain contemporary hermeneutical tradition of research that shows defined interests in theories of knowledge applied to the sciences, specifically to the human and social sciences. This productive correlation seems to emerge with a particular strength in Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics as applied to the problem of historical knowledge. In fact, both the aspect of the subjectivity of representation as a cognitive and psychological dimension and the double aspect of representation as an object and an operation are reflected in the Ricoeur's historiographical-speculative research. His entire book on *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2000) is articulated and developed around phenomenological, epistemological and hermeneutical research on the problematic of representation in history, or be, more aptly, the problematic of representation in relation to theoretical-practical and speculative research on memory, history and forgetting. Ricoeur explains that 'a common problematic (...) flows through the phenomenology of memory, the epistemology of history, and the hermeneutics of the historical condition: the problematic of the representation of the past'. [2] The first aspect, that is representation as an *object*, conveys the problem of realism/non-realism in history, as well as the question of the status of scientificity of historical knowledge. Moreover, both of the former maintain to a sort of dialectical connection that clarify the relationships between cognitive representation and reality, memory and historical past and the historians' reconstruction and historical facts. Not only the problematic of the object-representation precedes the question of the representation-as-operation, but the question of reality-factuality of what happened (in the 'real' past) enters the triple polarity of representation-memory-history (in which 'representation' implies both subjective experience and knowledge; 'memory' implies both personal remembering and mental-brain re-presentation; and, 'history' implies both what really happened in a specific past and the knowledge of that past). This problematic is complicated by the fact that, in it, there is an intertwining between, on the one hand, the historiographical interest concerning the epistemological and methodological questions around how proceed in constructing history and with what degree of rigour and the philosophical interest concerning the philosophy of the mind, ontology of time, epistemology and the theory of knowledge, phenomenology and narrative hermeneutics on the other. [3] Ricoeur's distinction between *représentation-objet* and *représentation-opération* and this deep and interdependent intertwining between historiography and philosophy appear evident from the beginning of Part II, Chapter 3. [4] Here the concept of representation finds perhaps its maximum point of exposure to the critique, still widespread today, of non-conceptuality and non-scientificity. For certain historians and

scholars, this notion should be abandoned in the context of historical knowledge. Ricoeur considers and discusses the problem revealing the legitimacy and productivity of this concept. Essentially, his strategy is to approach the ambiguity and instability of the many uses, meanings and implications of representation under the perspective of a hermeneutics that is not unilaterally angulated and we will see later how he will respond. The problem of representation is immersed in an epistemologically specific context, that of a theoretical-methodological perspective of historical knowledge and procedure arranged between explication and comprehension under the rule of interpretation.

A PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTION OF REPRESENTATION BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGY AND MEMORY

In order to evaluate the significance and strength of Ricoeur's use of representation within the domain of the problematics of historical knowledge, we need to have a deeper understanding of his philosophical approach. In Ricoeur's 2000 book, the concept of representation is mainly treated via both its psychological-experiential dynamism and its cognitive-mnemonic mechanisms. Ricoeur develops a vast phenomenological description and analysis of representation paralleling the polysemic notion of trace and proceeding between speculation and science, with reference to neurology, psychoanalysis and history. [5] Ricoeur's work demonstrates that, in as much as representation is considered the core of historical knowledge, cognitive psychology must play a central role in both historiography and the philosophy of history. In fact, through cognitive psychology it is possible to reveal the regularity, continuity, potential coherence and potential experiential-historical accuracy of representational functioning in the human mind. It is by exerting leverage on its substantial cognitive stability (instead of narrative coherence, as historians and hermeneuticians like Ankersmit prefer to do [6]) that representation may assume scientific validity. In addition, we can advance with representation other significant aspects that reinforce its efficacy and meaningfulness, for example, the idea or presupposition of human behavioural, motivational and psychological stability in making decisions, in acting and reacting, in managing emotions and drives, etc., throughout the centuries and millennia. The behaviours of historical agents were behaviours and actions of people like us. Thus, if it is true that, as a *historical* (and social) being, my personal identity and current experience is linked to culture, history and the past, it is also true that, as a *human* being, my knowledge and understanding of mental and psychological life open the way to better know and understand historical actors. Ricoeur oscillates between the point of view of a realist ontology that looks at the problematic dialectics between historical-*reconstruction* and historical-*fact* and an onto-epistemology that conceives of representation as a tendentially figurative or metaphorical function. Historical representation or reconfiguration seems variously tending to have a unified rhetorical and ontological structure to a reconfigured-represented past, marginalising the problem of the past-as-past or the historical-fact-as-historical-fact because of the strict, unifying interconnection between knowledge-representation, understanding-reconstruction and description-narration. As the metaphoric trope: the seeing-as-how of historical reconstruction interprets the 'being' of the being-state as being-like. And it is the function, mechanism and 'logic' of representation to define the nature and substantiality of this analogic relationship between cognition and reality or memory and historical past. Ricoeur recognises the

inevitability or, even, necessity of some metaphorical uses in historical knowledge. In *Time and Narrative*, his narrative on prefigurative, configurative and refigurative processes not only refers to narrative hermeneutics but also parallels his historical research. In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur reflects around Ranke's formula that it is not the task of history to judge the past but to show events 'as they really happened'. [7] The 'logic' of argumentation that Ricoeur follows mirrors efforts to maintain the triad of 'same'- 'other'- 'analogous' as distinctive but interconnected terms. Following Collingwood, he uses the notion of 'same' in connection to the process of the re-enactment of the past. Following Michel de Certeau, he uses the notion of 'other' to thematise and analyse the problem of the past as 'absent from history'. And finally, challenging Hayden White's tropological approach, [8] he deepens the notion of 'analogous' within a gnoseological perspective. The linguistic-hermeneutical orientation of this interpretative passage, which finds its speculative legitimation in Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative 3* (1985), puts Ricoeur's view very close to White's. However, in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, he remodulates his position towards a more realistic approach, or, more aptly, towards an approach more sensitive to realistic aspects. Thus, in Ricoeur's mature research the challenge becomes finding the right balance between a linguistic-hermeneutical approach and a realistic-factual approach, that is, between representation and fact and between language and reality. And, in no case does Ricoeur embrace a unilateral or radicalised approach, nor does his attempt to balance language and reality cross the way to become a new form of structuralism or to parallel White's post-structuralist view. For White, representation constitutes a question of linguistic aesthetics and narration. Quite paradoxically, this linguistic-aesthetic form *forms* the substance of our understanding and knowledge in history, it even *forms* the matter of our knowledge. Conversely, for Ricoeur, representation is the result of a various and complex combination of (1) imaginative and real components, (2) linguistic, experiential and factual aspects, (3) the mind's remembering and calendar time, (4) archival work on documents and the work of memories and testimonies [9] and (5) the historian's representational reconstruction and reader's refiguration by reading and understanding. Within the framework of a theory of historical knowledge, the interdisciplinary movement offered by the triad of cognitive science-phenomenology of memory-psychoanalysis can function to support, integrate and legitimise the operation of representation as a stable component of the event and its understanding *over time*. Because of the significant stability of the human mind through time, differences in culture, epoch and behaviour, the psychological and social motivations behind all human actions follow a determined and universal range of possibility over time. For Ricoeur, Durkheim was right, and his intuition and theory may be applied to history, in both social and historiographical ways. [10] In short, the validity and effectiveness of the representative functions seen in producing historical accounts does not rely solely on the motivation of the structural and psychological universality of human perception, feeling and knowledge, but on a certain historical-social-cultural stability of a given existential habitus for a given people in a given epoch. In a different way, both the institutions and the social-legal norms contribute to generate and maintain over time that dimension of regularity that is necessary for the permanence of representation. There is a close connection between that certain regularity of social action and the regularity and hierarchy of motives for action, representation, understanding, interpretation and (re-)narration of people experiences and accomplishments. Even the same representational forms in historical knowledge can be ordered on the axis of temporality, neither more

nor less so the same historical events or transformations in mentality and customs. Social practices would be endowed with regularity and in a representational and representative form that mirrors the trends, ways and predominant values in choice, motivation and interests that characterise a specific epoch. With such perspective, the process of institutionalisation exposes two aspects of the effectiveness of representations: on the one hand, in terms of identification (this is the classifying of representational logical function), on the other hand in terms of coercion, of constraint (this is the practical function of conforming behaviours). [11]

WHAT IS MENTAL REPRESENTATION

The notion of representation has in psychology various meanings and functions. In the psychoanalytic field, the notion of a broader and more incisive use of representation goes back to Sigmund Freud, who refers to the highly debated term *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, a 'representation given by a representative or a delegate'. In Freud, this is a concept related to notions like *psychische Repräsentanz*, *Triebrepräsenz*, *Sachvorstellung* and *Wortvorstellung*. It is interesting to note that Freud's theorisation determines here a specific, new contrast between representation and affection, that is, between affective-emotional expression of a drive and expressive-communicative characterisation of the representation of affectivity. The transversal position established here between a biological and a psychic dimension offered to philosophers like Ricoeur a way to speak of a mixed epistemology in psychoanalysis. Instinct would be purely vectorial, a drive without meaning; where, within the psychic sphere, the desire would absorb and reflect this vectorial need by 'translating' it into something expressive and significant. Ricoeur uses the notion of the semantics of desire to define this representational reality, that is, something between the biological-material reality and the linguistic-conceptual-imaginative reality. In his theoretical or metapsychological works Freud always indicates that the representative operation happened at the conscious or unconscious level of the psychic life. It is within this sphere that affects can detach themselves from a specific ideative/ideational representation to another or can be converted into a symptom at a somatic level. This discourse is not really far from philosophical studies applied to historical knowledge with the specific interest in defining the nature and mechanisms of historical representation. Philosophical hermeneutics in particular are able to recognise the relevance of a similar clarification connecting the functions of mind or memory and the representative functions as knowledge tools. Ricoeur in particular recognises how the ambition of memory fidelity precedes the operational-scientific rule of the truth in history. In fact, the question of representation enters the field of historical knowledge through the question of the trace, another ambiguous, multifaceted and polysemic concept and phenomenon. [12] The fidelity of memory is a problem that refers both to the memory with respect to the experienced fact and as expressed in the words of the witness, via his or her conceptual representation and narration. Although White attributes the stability or regularity of representation to the linguistic structure, the contribution of psychology is paramount in explaining this regularity in alternative, more effective terms. The concept of 'mental representation' is one of the most fertile concepts, thanks in particular to cognitive psychology. The concept offers multiple aspects of representational mental contents, including those related to a logical-linguistic texture. Thus, semantic representations can be understood both in general terms, as (all) representations configured through the terms of a given propositional

formula, and as a determinate case of symbolic aspects behind a due representation (representative of value, honour, lineage and the like). In both cases, these propositions do not lead to the simple pictorial representation of schematisation of a scene but rather causal-already-explicative-and-interpretative relationships (e.g., I can represent the persecutor as a hero, a valorous Lyon, a triumphant spirit or as a predator, a beast, that is a cruelly rapacious person; and the victim as a 'sacrificial lamb', that is, a spiritual and pure creature, or as a weak loser and the like). In fact, history changes profoundly when historical facts are reported by the winners instead of the losers and vice versa, or when the historians are guided with doctrinal-ideological theories or conceptions more than scientific criteria, methodological rigour and purely historiographical interest (Take, for example, the well-known case of certain Russian historians who presented or interpreted the Bolshevik revolution as the fulfilment of the Jacobin revolution in France and then as the accomplishment of the ideals of the Enlightenment. Conversely, how many French revolutions happened in France? By following all the French historians' reconstructions, it is really quite difficult to determine). In cognitive psychology it is recognised that regularity and representational stability are not preformed but determined by uses, practices and models. We construct a representation of the reality we are experiencing in a tendential reference to previous experiences and according to the cognitive, comprehensive, custom and behavioural architecture to which we adhere. Representing as such is both mobile and permanent, flexible and continuous since on the one hand it is physiologically anchored to the perceptive and neurobiological functions of the human, and on the other hand, it is historically determined by the social, cultural and cognitive characteristics of a given time. Arthur B. Markman recognises the difference between analogical and symbolic representation by presenting a framework consisting of different components: 'the domain that the representations are about'; 'the domain that contains the representations'; 'the representing world is related to the represented world through a set of rules that map elements of the represented world to elements in the representing world'; and, representation as the 'content' to 'a process that uses the representation'. [13] According to this view, we can define representation as the functioning of a cognitive system structurally involved and with transformative dynamics both with respect to the adaptation of representational abilities in what is contextually experienced and with respect to symbolical-cultural, ideal and behavioural habits. This kind of perspective helps to better readdress and rebalance Ricoeur's hermeneutical interpretation of the representational functioning (as he learned and approached it by studying psychoanalysis and the psychic-dynamic approach to brain and mind). It offers a pragmatistic way to limit the hermeneutical function of narration and interpretation in historical methodology and epistemology, that is, to limit approaches like those of Hayden White or Frank Ankersmit who, in different ways, define a *debole* way for historian scientists.

REPRESENTATION AND HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE

The theme of representation leads us to the heart of the disciplinary and philosophical problem of the epistemology and methodology of historical knowledge. In fact, speaking of representation in historiography and the philosophy of history means to discuss the following: the role of representation in the construction of historical knowledge; the role of narrative; the role of rhetorical proposition; the dialectics

between fact and experience; the dialectics between true and plausible reconstruction; the distinction *and* connection between (real) past and memory; the distinction between description and persuasion; and the distinction between explanation and understanding and the like. The contribution of cognitive science in the matter of understanding cognitive mechanisms, in particular around those mechanisms related to mental representation, seems to offer a strong argumentative contribution to limit an anti-realist and aesthetic drift in historiography. At the same time it represents a perspective that can significantly be connected with an hermeneutical approach such as Ricoeur's; that is, a hermeneutical-narrative representation working between experience and memory that is parallel with mind and brain's cognitive function and functioning. Actually, the cognitivist approach shows the close dialectics of representation and reality and also the progressive and productive interweaving between, on the one hand, the cognitive representation of perceptual experience and memory contents and, on the other, between the semantisation of this representational functions and narrativisation of a perceived-experienced or recalled fact. The Hayden White tropology certainly captures the aspects characterising the work of the historian, such as, above all, narrating, without which there is no history. [14] The major speculative-procedural dilemma becomes, then, for White, 'translating the knowing into saying'. This is a dilemma that we want to reread in the opposite direction: How does the saying enter the field of a rigorous knowledge? For White, what makes a past fact historical is that it is remembered and, then, narrated. Whether it really happened or not seems to be something secondary to him.[15] Ricoeur criticises White's unilateral view because it seems to run towards the exaltation of rhetoric and persuasion as the essential part of historian's work, instead of the exact, rigorous and true determination of historical reality and historical facts advocated by Ricoeur. Yes, of course, the past is far from us; and the people who lived in past times are different from us. However, not only have they been men and women like us, but we are the heirs of those cultures, of those institutions, of that wealth of knowledge, skills, beliefs etc. and we are not without tools to retrieve, reproduce and re-present them. This latter must be kept as a fixed point, without thereby believing that in this way one goes to discredit the scientific value of the historian's work or the authentic scientific and philosophical problematisation attending historical reconstruction and the ontology of the past. This latter also remains in history a speculative dilemma and, at the same time, a question of 'exact knowledge' and 'technique-procedure'. Historical events are not natural events: they are not natural events governed by causal, measurable laws; nevertheless, in that they are to a concatenation of events susceptible to causal explication, they are *like* natural events. In fact, they are inscribed into the same and unique universe of occurrences. The construction of the history or of stories about the past then acquires significance, value and scientificity not only in reference to the ascertainment of a given occurrence at a time in the historical calendar but in relation to the readings of the various historians over time, compared to earlier times.

CONCLUSION

This modus of ordering events and the historical interpretation of events over time is a modality of giving historical time as a paradigmatic part of the cognitive-representational procedure of making history, and as internal-but-objectified structures of events. Therefore, the 'historical-real' is constitutively *representational* and constitutively *temporal* because it is a *process*. The question of what is a given truth in

history then becomes the dilemma of creating a representative reconstruction of the process of (past) events that is the most faithful to the 'real' events as they occurred in that time. Those 'real' events have been conceived, represented, lived, created and narrated. This paper has thematised the problem of representation trying to demonstrate both the unavoidable centrality and importance of representation for scientific knowledge, in particular for the human and historical-social sciences, and the importance interactively considering the hermeneutic and the neo-pragmatistic approach to representation in order to define a stronger epistemology and methodology for historiography and historical science.

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