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## PSYCHOLOGIST'S CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT HISTORICAL THINKING

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### ABSTRACT

This paper discusses particular traits of historical thinking, including the role of the historian's mentality in the perception of history.

Key words: historical thinking, lay psychology, lay philosophy of history, mentality of historian

Historical thought operates through references to human history, images and insights as well as, and primarily, on concepts and ideas. It is strongly anchored in language, limited through categories "marked by" culture and is composed of solving problems typical of historiography through extensive use of metaphor. Because of the inalienable property of thinking "as such" but also due to the nature of its reference to the past, it is subject to various cross-roads and deformations.<sup>1</sup>

### DRAWING FROM EVERYDAY PSYCHOLOGY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PECULIARITIES OF HISTORICAL THINKING

Theoretically, history is sometimes accented by the prevalent impact of the time and place of the pre-conception of the historical process which controls historians' thinking. Although these peculiarities are not discussed in deliberations, it is usually difficult to observe appeals to academic

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Dymkowski, *Skłonności do deformacji poznawczych a interpretacje historyczne*. "Historyka" 39, 2009, pp. 3-19; as well as *Afterthoughts on Biases in History Perception*, "Polish Psychological Bulletin" 41, 2010, pp. 84-90.

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psychology.<sup>2</sup> This of course sheds much light on human thought which, regardless of its content, conforms to certain rules.

If in this typical discourse regarding the past there is reference to psychological knowledge, then these connections occur as veiled and strictly regulated. They can be observed from time to time particularly alongside attempts to clarify the behaviour of “other people.”<sup>3</sup> The knowledge used, derived from psychology, is sometimes colloquial or lay rather than its equivalent academic achievements.

The first (lay psychology) offers a certain understanding of phenomena and mental processes characterised by people treated as passive participants or active actors/creators of the historical process. The historian employing this style of model poorly assesses, like all other lay psychologists, the covariation of human attributes, behaviours and situations. He refers to widespread beliefs and stereotypes from the environment rather than to actual, completed observations.<sup>4</sup>

Not only does he draw on his way of thinking from an imprecise concept of such psychology, but also concludes that usually the behaviour of the participants/actors in historical materials had no impact. The people he portrays are placed in the context of the past, thus those adjudicating claims regarding them and their actions cannot even perform tests, as is usually undertaken by various ‘naïve’ psychologists in everyday life. He stands before a vast number of controls not subject to any factors that used to affect those human activities constituting historical events.

Of course, the historian consciously refers to academic psychology or to a particular philosophy of history, treating the knowledge accumulated there as a kind of reservoir of signs in their thinking and in the interpretations made. But more often the information derives from readily available concepts belonging to lay psychology and philosophical history, widespread in intellectual climates typical of the cultural environment which is influenced by everyday matters. General concepts are implicitly accepted of the

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2 Recently interesting regarding historical thought, but without any references to it, is W. Wrzosek (*O myśleniu historycznym*, Bydgoszcz 2009, chap. 2).

3 Sometimes it is variously conceived; see J. Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię. Tajemnice narracji historycznej*, Warszawa 1996, chap. 9. The implementation of the objectives in certain types of explanation appears to be more appropriate than in others: see J.V. Bouwel, E. Weber, *A Pragmatist Defense of Non-Relativistic Explanatory Pluralism in History and Social Science*, “History & Theory” 47, 2008, pp. 168–182.

4 In particular, see R.E. Nisbett, L. Ross, *Human Inferences: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgments*, New Jersey 1980.

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world and of human nature, which affect his thinking and the content of the courts of the past, “saturated” with human actions, constituting the use of cognitive maps and stereotypes and, as meta-knowledge, influence the reflection of their own knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

The composition of the lay philosophy of history pre-orientation concepts determine thought of history, establishing a comprehensive picture of the volatility of the world. The dominant historiographical metaphor “sets” this thought and saturates its specific content; in the cultural milieu of the West they are metaphors, primarily genesis and development.<sup>6</sup> Each of the traditional historical process models emerging here has its weakness, none being sufficient to adequately describe and explain.<sup>7</sup>

The historian’s cognitive activity is organised through experience over time, which from the psychological perspective can be treated as an effect of the interaction of memory and thought.<sup>8</sup> This experience provides a framework for the digressions of the past. There is no one common sense of time. Concepts are different, sometimes mutually interpenetrating. Rooted in the West, the perception of causal relationships between historical events is a clear temporal reference, associated with bending (shortening) the time created in thought.<sup>9</sup>

In various cultures and eras it was measured and experienced differently, sometimes even discussing a sense of absence. The dynamism of its expiry is felt in various ways, which are not without effect on the perception of the “pulse” of history as well as the selection of criteria for its periodisation. Only a dramatic increase in the accuracy of time measurement in the

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 5 See, for example, K. Lachowicz-Tabaczek, *Potoczne koncepcje świata i natury ludzkiej jako metawiedza i metaregulator działania* (pp. 31–46), in: *Motywacje umysłu*, eds. A. Kolańczyk, B. Wojciszke, Sopot 2010.

6 W. Wrzosek, *Historia – kultura – metafora. Powstanie nieklasycznej historiografii*, Wrocław 2010 (2nd ed).

7 According to Hayden White’s (*Kosmos, chaos i następstwo w przedstawieniu historiologicznym*, pp. 85–102), in: *Pamięć etyka i historia. Anglo-amerykańska teoria historiografii lat dziewięćdziesiątych*, ed. E. Domańska, Poznań 2006) models of: linear, cyclic, dualistic, and fractal, confronted with the completely unsuitable for description process models of chaos and immutability.

8 C. Nosal, B. Balcar, *Czas psychologiczny: wymiary, struktura, konsekwencje*, Warszawa 2004. The widely used metaphors of the representation of time in the mind depends strongly on the emotions: see Richmond, Wilson, Zinken, *A Feeling of the Future: How Does Agency in Time Metaphors Relate to Feelings?*, “European Journal of Social Psychology” 42, 2012, pp. 813–823

9 D. Faro, A.L. McGill, R. Hastie, *Naive Theories of Causal Force and Compression of Elapsed Time Judgments*, “Journal of Personality and Social Psychology” 98, 2010, pp. 683–701.

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modern Western world has caused the proliferation of this abstract vision as uniformly divided, passing regularly and evenly.<sup>10</sup>

A great deal can be learned from a colloquial variation of history, reaching into the social sciences and theoretical considerations of history.<sup>11</sup> Momentous cognitive findings also provide psychologists with the results of comparative cross-cultural research. They distribute a coherent panorama of varying perceptions of the past by people socialised in different cultures. This is especially evident in the lay characteristics of the individualistic philosophy of the history of the West, which appears to be explicitly and systematically different from their counterparts in the collectivist East, for centuries remaining in the sphere of influence of Chinese culture. These differences can have a significant impact on the cognitive activity of professional historians, operating in these fundamentally different cultural environments.

A variety of historiosophical concepts can be seen among the Greek philosophers of classical antiquity. Later, during long periods in Western history, different variants often coexisted, especially the primary vision of a world without history, a vision of cyclical and linear changes.<sup>12</sup> The colloquial historical philosophy prevalent nowadays appears to be a continuation of their counterparts throughout the centuries of the dominant elites but differing from those in the Far East.

The thought of those differs from those raised in the West in various respects, including assigning a greater complexity to social reality and the perception of volatility as well as more holistically. What is especially important is the way in which people of the Far East specifically perceive the past and how they think about it. Unlike Westerners, they locate the source of the activities of participants in history in changing situations in it, while being cautious of ignoring or even downplaying the context. The past is particularly important to them, an essential frame of reference for the interpretation of the present. They are not attached to a linear perception of

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10 See G.J. Whitrow, *Czas w dziejach. Poglądy na czas od prehistorii po dzień dzisiejszy*, Warszawa 2004; and M. Kula, *Zegarek historyka*, Warszawa 2001. The perception of time and the ratio changes were sometimes different even within the same periods, e.g. very different positions in this regard can be found among the ancient Greek philosophers.

11 See for example K. Zamorski, *Dziwna rzeczywistość. Wprowadzenie do ontologii historii*, Kraków 2008, chap. 5 about the so-called reflection of the first (pre-scientific) in cultures penetrated by cultural anthropologists; and see J. Topolski, *Świat bez historii*, Poznań 1998, chap. 2 and 3.

12 See J. Topolski, *ibidem*; K. Zamorski, *ibidem*.

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the passage of time and to extrapolate the earlier perceived regularity of the future, allowing for their volatility, fluctuations to the rules. They take seriously into consideration the possibility that the trend (increase or decrease in a given dimension) is only local. Changes placed in the past are perceived as running cyclically, allowing for a modification of future trends observed thus far, their disappearance, or even reversal.<sup>13</sup> If historians are shaped in this kind of environment that shares general concepts of change over time, you can expect it to reveal congruencies to their thinking.<sup>14</sup>

Dominant in a given place and time are diagrams of these changes which provide criteria for the selection and prioritisation of validity for the causes of the explanation of historical events. For example, those which are far apart in time are often underestimated or overlooked by the people of the West. Here, the importance of proximal causes is overly emphasised, even directly preceding the event at the expense of further clarified events that affect it, directly or indirectly, in the long run. The first expressively attract attention and can play an excessively large role in the scheme of explanation.<sup>15</sup>

Especially fraught for historical thinking is the hindsight effect. This is the overestimation of chance occurrences of events that actually occurred and underestimating the probability of occurrence of those that did not occur, which therefore favours a deterministic interpretation of the historical process. This effect is also observed in characterising the different mentality of the people of the Far East, underscoring the intensity in them.<sup>16</sup>

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13 L.J. Ji, T. Guo, Z. Zhang, D. Messervey, *Looking into the Past: Cultural Differences in Perception and Representation of the Past*, "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology" 96, 2009, pp. 761–769; R.E. Nisbett, *Geografia myślenia. Dlaczego ludzie Wschodu i Zachodu myślą inaczej*, Sopot 2009, chap. 4. The results of research on children (Chinese and Canadian of European descent) indicate that intercultural differences in a colloquial concept of change increase with age: L. J. Ji, *The Leopard Cannot Change His Spots, or Can He? Culture and the Development of Lay Theories of Change*, "Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin" 34, 2008, pp. 613–622.

14 Regarding the peculiarities of Chinese historiography see for example C-C. Huang, *The Defining Character of Chinese Historical Thinking*. "History & Theory" 46, 2007, pp. 180–188.

15 F. Voss, J. Wiley, *Expertise in history* (pp. 569–584), in: *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, eds. K.A. Ericsson, N. Charness, P.J. Feltovich, R.R. Hoffman, New York 2006, pp. 580. However, the results also indicate (D.J. Hilton, J. McClure, R.M. Sutton, *Selecting Explanations from Causal Chains: Do Statistical Principles Explain Preferences for Voluntary Causes?*, "European Journal of Social Psychology" 40, 2010, pp. 383–400) that while it is particularly keen to invoke to better explain the final link by nearer event in the causal chain of events, remote cause is preferred over that immediately preceding it, as explained, when her action actor is perceived as the result of free choice preceded by considerations.

16 R.E. Nisbett, *Geografia myślenia...*, *op. cit.*, chap. 5.

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Mainstream psychologists treat ordinary human beings as intuitive researchers who test their beliefs about the social world according to the rules available to them. This is characterised by a number of constraints in collecting and processing information, inalienable properties of the mind which result in deformities of the perception of the world. Typically, they think subjectively rationally but use only a few useful clues available in managing their actions.<sup>17</sup> The presence of weak links of the actions with attitudes and dispositions, or of their strong dependence on variable situation, is repeatedly confirmed empirically.<sup>18</sup>

In light of the results of many studies, only rarely and after meeting a number of conditions remains a person the entity independent of internal and external constraints. Typically, there is small or mediated access even to his/her own mental processes, which consciously control the final stages of processing.<sup>19</sup> An important place in the mental and behavioural functioning of automatic processing is extending beyond the control of consciousness. Reflective mental adjustment plays a minor role and appears less.<sup>20</sup>

Since, however, the development in Western humanities is widely attributed to individual far-reaching autonomy and subjectivity, it is not surprising that researchers who have shaped here often exaggerated recognise the person as active creator of history. Belief in the overwhelming role of intentionality-volitional processes in ignoring environmental constraints, its own actions and far-reaching control over them appears to be a widespread illusion, firmly fixed on the individualistic West.<sup>21</sup> The socialised

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 17 R.E. Nisbett, L. Ross, *Human Inferences...*, *op. cit.*

18 L. Ross, R.E. Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation*, New York 1991.

19 R.E. Nisbett, D.T. Wilson, *Telling More than We Can Know: Verbal Reports on Mental Processes*, "Psychological Review" 84, 1977, pp. 231–259; A. Herzyk, *Procesy świadome i nieświadome w negocjacjach mózgu z rzeczywistością. Integracje i dysocjacje* (pp. 115–133), in: *Psychologia w perspektywie XXI wieku*, eds. Z. Chlewiński, A. Sękowski, Lublin 2004. Often when we think we consciously decide certain facts had already occurred at the pre-conscious level: see J. Trzópek, *Czy w psychologii społecznej jest miejsce dla kategorii podmiotowości?* "Psychologia Społeczna" 7, 2012, pp. 115–139.

20 J. LeDoux, *Mózg emocjonalny. Tajemnicze podstawy życia emocjonalnego*, Poznań 2000; see also J. Trzópek, *ibidem*.

21 The results of comparative studies indicate that Westerners have a stronger sense of internal control than people socialized in East Asia: R.E. Nisbett, *Geografia...*, *op. cit.*; D. Matsumoto, D.L. Juang, *Psychologia międzykulturowa*, Gdańsk 2007.

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people here are inclined to regard themselves as fully autonomous entities, even if they do not affect the course of events or if that effect is very small. For this purpose, they use appropriate rationalisations and appropriately deform their self-image.

Similarly as instrumental to this self-image memory unit, the collective memory is subject to various deformations being often useful for building / maintaining a positive image of the community. In particular, negatively rated events of the past are distorted, invested and organised in such a way that they can play an important role in maintaining, building or retuning collective identity.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the collective memory described by historians is at times rather poorly linked (and differently in various cultural contexts) to individual autobiographical memory.<sup>23</sup>

Research on collective memory, conducted by historians on the basis of the social sciences, especially sociology and cultural anthropology, does not usually find an explicit reference to the knowledge of the regularities of the functioning of the memory unit. Rather, collective memory is sometimes understood as an aggregation of individual memories.<sup>24</sup> The boundary be-

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22 Also, the continuity of the native history of the disorder promotes cognitive range of treatments for strengthening group identity: see J. Jetten i M.J.A. Wohl, *The Past as a Determinant of The Present: Historical Continuity, Collective Angst, and Opposition to Immigration*, "European Journal of Social Psychology" 42, 2012, pp. 442–450. In the instance of tough challenge events consisting of harming another community and therefore threatening their own (positive) group identity, increasing the distance to this community can effectively reduce the feeling of collective guilt without manifestation of behaviours that may compensate the harm: J. Peetz, G.R. Gunn, A.E. Wilson, *Crimes of the Past: Defensive Temporal Distancing in the Face of Past In-Group Wrongdoing*, "Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin" 36, 2010, pp. 598–611. „Translating” a sense of guilt for such behaviour requires cultural proximity of victims: M. Kořta i P. Sławuta, *Kolektywne poczucie winy a postawy wobec Żydów i procesy ich (de)humanizacji: rola bliskości kulturowej* (pp. 147–167), in: *Wobec obcych. Zagroźenia psychologiczne a stosunki międzygrupowe*, eds. M. Kořta, M. Bilewicz, Warszawa 2011.

23 T. Maruszewski, *O splataniu się pamięci indywidualnej i kolektywnej, czyli o tym, czym jest życie w ciekawych czasach*, in: *Motywacje umysłu, op. cit.*, pp.47–63. Research results (see. *ibidem*, pp. 59–60) indicate that the typical autobiographical memory in Chinese culture contains significantly more historical and social memories than in the culture of the United States.

24 T. Maruszewski, *ibidem*. For the different types of collective memory and the relationship between them see for example: A. Gabryś, *O badaniach pamięci*, "Historyka" 35, 2005, pp. 35–149; B. Szacka, *Historia, pamięć zbiorowa i pamięć kulturowa Paula Connertona*, pp. 13–20, in: *Pamięć jako kategoria rzeczywistości kulturowej*, eds. J. Adamowski, M. Wójcicka, Lublin 2012.

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tween historical knowledge and collective memory (or rather memories, specific to each community) appears blurred or even fuzzy. Only at times is this memory identified with the historical consciousness, a special kind of intentional penetration and critical self-reflection.

The collective memory fulfils different symbolic functions. It can mobilise support – often using one or another ideology – for a specific historical policy. The focus on the regulation of intergroup relations can serve disadvantaged social strata or ethnic groups, particularly the various minorities, for example, by providing justifications to delegitimise the authenticity of the existing social and political order. However, it can also be useful to defenders in strengthening the existing *status quo*.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, the instrumentality of collective memory to the implementation of such or any other purpose is always associated with deformities in thinking about the past. If the historian fits its image to the content of one or the other, usually the “here and now” dominate collective memory, it is especially difficult for him to be outstripped, impartial and critical observer in the course of his research.

#### THE RESEARCHER’S MENTALITY AS A BIAS SOURCE OF THINKING ABOUT HISTORY

Methodologists and historical philosophers, regardless of their relationship to academic psychology (if at all an attitude can be assigned to it), obviously consider the indelible impact of the mentality of the historian on the course and the products of his thinking. They agree that a permanent mark is made on interpretations of the past; the incidence and severity of bias in the narrative does not tend to be the same among their various authors. However, they have varying preparation workshops and a variety of “outsourced” knowledge, at times accepting in congruent hierarchies of values. A confident faith which once nourished the possibility of constructing a historical narrative showing “how it really was today” appears as a sign of gullibility for those researchers.

Thought about the historical process is shaped by the inalienable tendency of the mind to the curvatures of social perception which is unwittingly

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25 C.G. Sibley, J. H. Liu, J. Duckitt, S.S. Khan, *Social Representation of History and the Legitimation of Social Inequity: The Form and Function of Historical Negation*, “European Journal of Social Psychology” 38, 2008, pp. 542–565.

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drawn from lay psychology and philosophy of history. Quite often, historians are also influenced by the “all explanatory” ideology. If it is consistently shunned and at the same time does not have any coherent model of the past, difficulties in gradation of importance of described phenomena or processes causes tend to be a problem. Besides, “cold” scientism and ostentatious avoidance of exposure outlooks may, in the case of a particular historian, mask the effect of one or another system of attitudes and views on the narrative being prepared by him.<sup>26</sup> Taking a neutral position, the researcher does not guarantee full impartiality, although the consistent display of such a position may favour a reduction in its bias. The procedure of fictionalisation, which gives meaning and describes consistent events, requires the adoption of a perspective devoid of axiological neutrality.

Methodologists and theoretical historians allow for the formation of different stories about the same events, but usually recognise that not all of them describe said events equally well. Criteria for the estimation of “goodness” can be very different: walking can, for example, by one way or another allow for the narrative conceived to comply with the described reality but also about its usefulness, justifying the level of its wording, coherence, elegance, and taking into account many different points of view whether confirmed by sources or not.<sup>27</sup>

As is known, historical narrative metaphors are always involved. Although their use does not preclude the assignment of the relevant pronouncements of cognitive functions,<sup>28</sup> the saturation of their historical thinking raises specific epistemological problems. They do not have literal counterparts in the naturalistic traditions of science where the fulfilment of the requirements establishes a criterion subject to greater control.

In any case, it is easier to believe in the restrictions of bias historian, who created the image of the past through a tendency of pragmatic eclecticism and diversity of colours used, and even the incoherence (though not excessive) of values. Such eclecticism is usually associated with distancing

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26 See for example R. Stobiecki, *Historyk i jego rola we współczesnym świecie*, in: *Gra i konieczność. Zbiór rozpraw z historii historiografii i filozofii historii*, eds G.A. Dominiak, J. Ostojka-Zagórski, W. Wrzosek, Bydgoszcz 2005, pp. 35–48.

27 See W. M. Runyan, *Historie życia a psychobiografia. Badania teorii i metody*, Warszawa 1992; J. Appleby, L. Hunt, M. Jacob, *Powiedzieć prawdę o historii*, trans. S. Amsterdamski, Poznań 2000; C. Lorenz, *Przekraczanie granic. Eseje z filozofii historii i teorii historiografii*, trans. M. Bobako, R. Dziergwa, Poznań 2009.

28 C. Lorenz, *Przekraczanie*, *op. cit.*

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oneself from any political, historical or ideological projects, but does not necessarily indicate their utter negatively evaluated lack of ideals in our culture.

In particular, it does not promote bias formulated in narrative a simultaneous recognition of colliding values which is often seen in people involved in positions close to the political centre. They must constantly reconcile these values with each other, intensively overworking cognitive positions.<sup>29</sup> This activity is usually accompanied by cognitive openness, avoiding the polarisation of the courts and the resignation of a simplified, black and white image of social reality.

An important determinant of curvatures and biases in historical thinking is to close the cognitive structures of the experience, the stiffness and dogmatized mind. It hinders respect for different points of view, reinforcing these deformities in thinking. Dogmatists profess subjectively coherent system of beliefs that impair the synthesis of new data and require assumptions other than those previously considered. This system is rigid and resistant to change. The incoming information against it is accepted and assimilated only if it comes from an authority.<sup>30</sup> It is reasonable to expect that this kind of historian will think about the past very selectively, in a biased way, and schematically.

The results of non-historians' research suggest that the more they are characterised by a so-comprehended dogmatism, the more the linear image of the historical process is accepting, thinking that it is a string of events aimed at a designated direction.<sup>31</sup> Professional historians of dogmatic system of beliefs also may unnecessarily make use of this kind of common historiography.

The results of this research also show that authoritarianism – understood as the mentality to think about social reality as a strictly hierarchical structure, the belief that you must submit to traditional standards and strong leaders – is in part similarly related to the perception of history as

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29 M. Dymkowski, *Z rozważań psychologa o stronniczości ideowych historyków*, in: *Na drogach i bezdrożach historii psychologii*, eds. T. Rzepa, C.W. Domański, Lublin 2013, pp. 13–26; P. Tetlock; *Cognitive Style and Political Belief Systems in the British House of Commons*, "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology", 1984, 46, pp. 365–375.

30 M. Rokeach, *The Open and Closed Mind*, New York 1960; see also: M. Kossowska, *Umysł niezmienny. Poznawcze mechanizmy sztywności*, Kraków 2005, chap. 3.

31 A. Gabory, *Autorytaryzm i dogmatyzm a spostrzeżenie historii*, unpublished masters thesis, SWPS, Wrocław 2011. 170 people, including 104 women, aged 18 to 85 years (mean 34.5), the majority of university graduates and students were studied.

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dogmatism.<sup>32</sup> But the greater the authoritarianism, the greater the tendency to think of history in personalised transformations and the stronger the belief that individuals who know what they want tend to have a large impact on historical events. Authoritarian people perceive history as a linear sequence of events but the more authoritarian they are, the more they are convinced that human history will sooner or later come back to a starting point.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the image of the historical process turns out to be saturated with inconsistent beliefs in the light of which different regularities also govern. It can be expected that authoritarianism of professional historians, is similarly linked with the perception of history.<sup>34</sup>

Overrepresented among those authoritarian individuals is a mental ailment known as political paranoia. Evidence of conspiracy thinking about history and politics is sometimes a sign of adaptation to a state of helplessness and a loss of authoritarian persons. They feel threatened and wrongly describe socio-political aspects, ignoring realities.<sup>35</sup>

Political paranoia differs from the clinical version of paranoia which is understood as a mental illness.<sup>36</sup> The first is sometimes equated with the mentality of drawing on the current understanding of history and politics, saturated with excessive suspicion and hostility towards other people, accompanied by delusions of persecution. It is reflected in the peculiar vision of important events, tends to think of them as the results of om-

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32 The concept of authoritarianism has evolved, breaking its ties with Freudian psychoanalysis and finding a place on the basis of cognitive psychology. A great deal of effort was inserted to no longer serve as a tool for describing the variety of right-wing political extremisms, although these attempts to study the leftist authoritarianism may hardly be considered successful. See: B. Altemeyer, *The other "authoritarian" personality*, "Advances in Experimental Social Psychology" 30, 1998, pp. 47–91; and K. Korzeniowski, *Autorytaryzm i jego psychopolityczne konsekwencje* (pp. 59–81), in: *Podstawy psychologii politycznej*, ed. K. Skarżyńska, Poznań 2002.

33 A. Gabory, *Autorytaryzm*, *op. cit.*

34 The result of research (K. Karczocho, *Autorytaryzm a myślenie o historii*, unpublished master's thesis, SWPS, Wrocław 2012) indicates that among PhD candidates in history from the University of Wrocław (30 tested) authoritarianism is (on the average) lower than among other PhD candidates from Technical University in Wrocław and both students and graduates. The higher it is among them (future historians), the stronger their belief that great leaders decide the fate of the world and that the mass of people can together change the story.

35 K. Korzeniowski, *Polska paranoja polityczna. Źródła, mechanizmy i konsekwencje spiskowego myślenia o polityce*, Warszawa 2010; and *O dwóch psychologicznych przesłankach myślenia spiskowego. Alienacja i autorytaryzm*, "Psychologia Społeczna" 4, 2009, pp. 144–154.

36 Regarding the political paranoia relations with other versions of paranoia, different meanings broadcast this concept in psychiatry and psychopathology, and use it in historical biography see: M. Dymkowski, *Wprowadzenie do psychologii historycznej*, Gdańsk 2003.

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nipresent, secret and effective conspiracy plotting. And although the concepts of conspiracy do not necessarily reflect the paranoid perception of reality and sometimes aptly describe a particular sequence of events, their links with political paranoia are confirmed both by psychologists and political scientists.<sup>37</sup> Various labelled conspiracy theories provide interpretations of history which differ from those usually encountered in mainstream narratives.<sup>38</sup>

The results of the non-historian's research suggest<sup>39</sup> that political paranoia is accompanied by a tendency to overestimate the impact on the historical process of its participants. The higher the severity of political paranoia, not only stronger is the belief that its course depends on the actions of the masses stronger, but also on the behaviour of great leaders and individuals who "know very well what they want." The increase in political paranoia also coincides with the severity of the conviction that what once took place did not have to happen, as it depended on coincidence. Such situated indeterminism leaves a lot of room which is sought among the determinants of the history of secret conspiracies and is undertaken by various categories of people considered to be very influential and therefore demonised or stigmatised.<sup>40</sup> The carriers of political paranoia – amateurs as well as professional historians – discern within them, not without exaggeration, the important causes of historical events.

## HISTORIANS' DISTRUST TOWARDS ACADEMIC PSYCHOLOGY

Of course, by no means is the centre of historians' interests always people with their experiences, feelings, thoughts, motivations and actions. It is

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37 R.S. Robins, J.M. Post, *Paranoja polityczna. Psychologia nienawiści*, Warszawa 1999. Conspiracy interpretations of political/historical promotes extremist beliefs as right-wing and left-wing. See: D. Pipes, *Potęga spisku. Wpływ paranoicznego myślenia na dzieje ludzkości*, Warszawa 1998; Unfortunately, the scales used by psychologists to measure political paranoia in Poles refer to conspiracies to threaten values, above all esteemes on the right; see: K. Korzeniowski, *Polska, op. cit.*

38 See L. Zdybel, *Idea spisku i teorie spiskowe w świetle analiz krytycznych i badań historycznych*, Lublin 2002.

39 E. Belka, *Paranoja polityczna w spostrzeganie historii*, unpublished masters thesis, SWPS, Wrocław 2013. 98 persons, including 47 women, aged 18 to 80 years were examined (mean 34.0), the majority of which were university graduates and students.

40 Regardless of their source (political paranoia is just one of them) conspiratorial interpretations of history appear to be pervasive. See for example: J. Tazbir, *Pożegnanie, op. cit.*; D. Pipes, *Potęga, op. cit.*

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not, for example, oriented in the social sciences, depersonalised and “non-subjective” modernist historiography, which is interested in processes and social structures.<sup>41</sup> It consistently rejects the assumption of methodological individualism in all its versions<sup>42</sup> and is dominated by a holistic orientation, making it difficult, even preventing recourse to any kind of psychological knowledge. Also seen today is a fascination with the role of various cultural artefacts in history, accompanying the adoption of a non-anthropocentric perspective<sup>43</sup> which obviously cannot favour such a references to this knowledge.

Using lay psychology at times is not unique in traditional event-driven history. It is also noticeable in some currents of contemporary non-modernist historiography. Psychological determinants are taken into account rather than the effects of human activities. How wonderful, says the psychologist: variables mediate between objective conditions and these activities, constituting historical events.

A specific situation can be observed based on historical anthropology, where acting people are seen and appreciated. They are treated as actor-abusers of historical events, while importance is attached to their personal functioning.<sup>44</sup> However, it is difficult to discern explicit references to academic psychology, often lacking in fictionalised, widely read micro histories, narratives that are often ostentatiously ideologically engaged, breaking mainstream conventions and giving them an attractive alternative. This is so despite the fact that they focus on the issues of emotion; empathy, sincerity, and appeal to the sense of justice sometimes even in the slogans used.<sup>45</sup> The need for professional psychological knowledge in the mainstream of

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 41 See A.F. Grabski, *Dzieje historiografii*, Poznań 2003; też W. Wrzosek, *Historia, op. cit.* A prototypical example of this practice is a monumental work of F. Braudel, representative of the modernist “global history” (*Morze Śródziemne i świat śródziemnomorski w epoce Filipa II*, Warszawa 2004); only a third of its parts can be found a few references to the psychology of the everyday.

42 Regarding these assumptions, see K.R. Stueber, *The psychological basis of historical explanation: Reenactment, simulation, and the fusion of horizons*, “History & Theory” 41, 2002, pp. 25–42; J.W.N. Watkins, *Wyjaśnianie historii. Indywidualizm metodologiczny i teoria decyzji w naukach społecznych*, Wrocław 2001.

43 See: B. Latour, *Przedmioty także posiadają sprawczość* (pp. 525–560), and B. Olsen, *Kultura materialna po tekście: przywracanie obecności rzeczom* (pp. 561–592), in: *Teoria wiedzy o przeszłości na tle współczesnej humanistyki*, ed. E. Domańska, Poznań 2010.

44 See for example: W. Wrzosek, *Historia, op. cit.*; E. Domańska, *Mikrohistorie. Spotkania w międzyświatach*, Poznań 1999.

45 Interesting comments can be found in E. Domańska, *Historie, op. cit.*; *Mikrohistorie, op. cit.*

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biographical history is also faint, eschewing “the penetration of the soul” which is described as a spacer to “psychologisation.”<sup>46</sup>

Drawing from psychological knowledge in practice of historians is sometimes limited, even when the strings contain interpretations easily translated into the language of psychology. Various historical narratives reveal what is prone to anthropomorphising various wholes, recognizing them as an acting man, but it is difficult to see where the references to scientific psychology are.<sup>47</sup>

Quite often it is certain that replacing the concepts straight from the everyday psychology to academics would bring something (if anything) new in divagating the author of such a narrative. It can recall variations of memory (collective, historical, cultural) without compromising the quality of the narrative and without worrying about the theories of memory in contemporary academic psychology.

Nonetheless, sometimes delving into the findings of this psychology may be useful in thinking about the past. For example, the historian often accepts (not necessarily explicitly) the assumption of the essential role of deliberation, the rational action of “those people” and believes that on a mass scale they are always guided by rightly perceived self-interests.<sup>48</sup> Sometimes, creating a “personalised” narratives operates model of human as a fully conceived, autonomous entity – a model, whose appropriateness is not obvious (mentioned above) in light of the results of psychological research.<sup>49</sup>

Widespread mistrust among historians of psychology’s academic achievements can be translated and discussed in many ways. The distrust is visible even when the usefulness of these achievements in historical thinking could be quite considerable. Its sources can be found in the widespread depreciation of the attempts at “psychologisation”, in recognition to the signs of helplessness and ignorance of a particular historian’s work. One can also observe unsuccessful experiences dominated by Freud’s psychohistory as well as in the traditional cooperation with social sciences rather than with psychology.<sup>50</sup>

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46 W. Zajewski, *Kontrowersje wokół biografii historycznej* (pp. 25–33), in: *Stan i perspektywy rozwoju biografistyki polskiej*, ed. L. Kuberski, Opole 1998; and W.M. Runyan, *Historie życia*, *op. cit.*

47 W. Wrzosek describes such a procedure as a metaphor for man which is understood as Causative Separate Entity. See *O myśleniu*, *op. cit.*

48 See for example J. Topolski, *Rozumienie historii*, Warszawa 1978, chap. 7 and 8.

49 Their findings, in particular, suggest that the belief in the overwhelming role of free will in the activities of a man, when treated subjectively, can significantly affect its perception. See K. Lachowicz-Tabaczek, *Potoczne*, *op. cit.*

50 A.F. Grabski, *Dzieje*, *op. cit.*; see also P. Burke, *Historia i teoria społeczna*, Warszawa-Kraków 2000; M. Dymkowski, *Wprowadzenie*, *op. cit.*

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The legacy of the history of an event, which once quite naively exhibited the role of individuals in history, drawing from everyday psychology, seems to be fraught with consequences. It cannot be forgotten that the latter was “always” frequently used either one way or another by historians, usually without bringing them too much good.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, it can speculatively be attributed to a role in the development of human thought. Under the influence of cognitive psychology, which was cultivated in the Middle Ages under the name of philosophy, probably as an intermediary between it and today's academic psychology, a mark has been left on western mentality.<sup>52</sup>

It appears that a detachment regarding the achievements of scientific psychology is formed in college, in the course of acquiring technical skills by future historians. It is then strengthened through the low availability of knowledge about these achievements. Theorists, methodologists, and the average researchers of history seem to form a vague or even misleading idea about them. This is quite often shaped by reading readily available studies with flashy, attention-grabbing titles, and which are not necessarily representative of contemporary academic psychology.

At the same time, the historian comes into contact with the manifestations of excessive scepticism about “scientific character” of psychology. The sources of this scepticism should be invested in inflated expectations as to its possible applications, in the unfortunate treatments in its popularisation, and reinforced by influential critics who underestimate its research achievements.<sup>53</sup> Numerous claims appear to be consistent with common sense, coinciding with easily accessible lay psychological phrases and therefore appear to be trivial. And yet, at least sometimes, the triviality available to them appears only in retrospect. Results in a number of well-controlled psychological research are often not compatible with socially duplicative convictions.<sup>54</sup>

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 51 Not related through the ages but with greater success not only in historical thinking, but in general in the humanities. See: P.M. Churchland, for: A. Grobler, *Metodologia nauk*, Kraków 2006, pp. 249. The similarities between the version used already by Thucydides and by modern historians, see M. Dymkowski, *O początkach psychologii historycznej: w kręgu różnych tradycji*, „Studia Psychologiczne” 46, 2008, pp. 25–35.

52 S. Kemp, *Cognitive psychology in the middle ages*, Westport-London 1996, chap. 7. In turn, folk metaphysics, when cultivated for centuries, could mediate between the philosophy of ancient Greece and China, and the dominant mentality of today, respectively, on the individualistic West and collectivistic East. See: R.E. Nisbett, *Geografia, op. cit.*, chap. 2.

53 Regarding the public perception of academic psychology in the United States, where it is most developed and influential, see: S.O. Lilienfeld, *Public skepticism of psychology. Why many people perceive the study of human behavior as unscientific*, “American Psychologist” 67, 2011, pp. 111–129.

54 *Ibidem*.

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In conclusion, despite the often justified distrust of historians against academic psychology, it can be presumed that an explicit reference to its achievements, at least sometimes, would lead them to correct their position. Psychological, complementary to the sociological or anthropological perspectives, is perhaps too often (and still) underestimated by theorists, methodologists and philosophers of history alike, and by historians themselves.

translated by Paweł Markiewicz

### Summary

This paper includes psychological considerations of particular traits of historical thinking, especially the role of lay psychology and lay philosophy of history in the perception of history. The problem of the influence of the historian's mentality on historical thinking and the creation of narrative is drafted. The author considers why historians often avoid references to the achievements of contemporary scientific psychology.