

## 14

## IMAGINATION AND REVISION

*Giuseppina D'Oro and Jonas Ahlskog*

**Introduction**

Historians, like detectives, arrive at the crime scene after the murder has taken place and the perpetrator has fled. Their job is to find out what happened and, since the past is no longer present and cannot be directly observed, they must *in some sense* imaginatively re-create it. The consideration that the past is not available for observation and that the events of the past cannot be recreated under experimental conditions is sometimes adduced as a reason for regarding historical knowledge as intrinsically less certain than scientific knowledge and for justifying a sceptical attitude concerning its very possibility. White, for instance, writes:

I do not see how the truth of our knowledge of the past or more specifically the historical past – not to mention their meaning – could be assessed other than relatively to the cultural presuppositions of those who made them and in the light of the presuppositions of those who wish to assess them. This is not an argument for universal relativism, since I am perfectly willing to accept the criteria of both correspondence and coherence as ways of assessing the truth of knowledge about entities still open to ostensive indication and direct perception and those which are in principle “reproducible” under laboratory experimental conditions.<sup>1</sup>

The reasoning behind the view that historical knowledge is problematic can be roughly summarized as follows:

1. There is no direct access to the past because it is not present.
2. The past is accessed indirectly by imaginatively reconstructing it on the basis of surviving evidence.
3. The surviving evidence underdetermines the way in which the past can be imaginatively reconstructed.
4. There is no way of checking which reconstruction is the correct one because past events can neither be known by direct acquaintance nor can they be reproduced under experimental conditions.
5. Historical claims, unlike scientific claims, cannot, therefore, be assessed for truth and falsity.

These considerations are often advocated in support of an uncompromisingly “presentist” and revisionist conception of the historical imagination according to which a) the past is understood from the perspective of the present (presentism) and b) the past’s meaning changes as the arrow of time moves on (revisionism). This presentist and revisionist conception of the historical imagination has governed the philosophy of history since the narrativist turn. According to the narrativist conception of the historical imagination, the significance of past events is uncovered through the writing of narratives that contextualize the events of the past in the light of the concerns of the present. The dominant narrativist conception of the historical imagination does not simply make the uncontroversial claim that the significance of past events often becomes apparent in the light of subsequent developments (one could not have known on the day when Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated that his assassination would trigger the First World War). It makes the much more controversial claim that the past is seen through the lens of the epistemic biases and the political preoccupations of each generation of historians and that, for this very reason, there is no such thing as a historical past that can be known in its own terms. This view of the role of the historical imagination and its revisionist conception of the past is found, with varying degrees of emphasis, in the postmodern narrativism of Hayden White,<sup>2</sup> Frank Ankersmit<sup>3</sup> and Keith Jenkins,<sup>4</sup> and in the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer.<sup>5</sup>

The conception of the historical imagination, however, was not always presentist and revisionist in character. The generation of philosophers of history prior to the narrativist turn did not assume that the unavailability of the past to present observation necessarily required a revisionist stance. This earlier generation of philosophers of history believed knowledge of the past to be possible *in principle*, even if the events of the past are neither available for observation nor are they reproducible under experimental conditions. This more optimistic view concerning the possibility of historical knowledge is found in the late form of idealism espoused by Robin George Collingwood and Michael Oakeshott, both of whom defended the claims that a) the past can be known in its own terms rather than those of the present (anti-presentism) and b) denied that the meaning of past events needs to be constantly revised from the perspective of future presents (anti-revisionism). Their anti-revisionism was a direct implication of their rejection of presentism. They undertook to defend a notion of the *historical* past that is distinctive and irreducible both to the *natural* past (the past as studied by natural scientists) and the *practical* past (the past understood from the perspective of the present and its concerns).

In this contribution, we explore the revisionist and anti-revisionist conceptions of the historical imagination. The focus will be on how these conceptions of the historical imagination determine how one ought to answer the question of whether or not it is *in principle* possible to know the past in its own terms rather than from the perspective of the present. The contrast that we are seeking to draw is that between a conception of the historical imagination which is revisionist in the sense that it is committed to the claim that knowledge of the past is *in principle* impossible, and one which is anti-revisionist in the sense that it regards knowledge of the past in its own terms to be *in principle* possible. Revisionism, as we understand it here, is not the contingent claim that in some cases (where, for example, new evidence which was previously unavailable comes to light), the historical understanding of the past may be revised; rather, it represents a priori claim about the impossibility of knowing the past in its own terms in all cases, and not just in some. Likewise, anti-revisionism, as we understand it here, is the view that historical knowledge is *in principle* possible; it is not the claim that it is always achieved as a matter of fact. The debate between revisionist and anti-revisionist conceptions of the historical imagination is, therefore, a second-order debate about the nature of historical knowing, about

whether it is possible, and if so, about what its conditions of possibility are. It is not a first-order debate about whether or not such knowledge has been achieved in any given case.

The first section explores the anti-revisionist view of the past in Collingwood and Oakeshott. The second section explores the revisionist conception of the historical past in the narrativism of Ankersmit and White. The third section briefly explains why some of the most influential considerations invoked to undermine the idea of a distinctively historical past are far from compelling.

### **The anti-revisionist conception of the historical imagination**

Collingwood and Oakeshott shared the view that to understand the past *historically* is to understand it in its own terms. They believed that if there is such a thing as a distinctive *historical* past, then there must also be a distinctive way of knowing it. Their efforts were therefore aimed at identifying the distinctive inferences or judgments which are at work in understanding the past historically, defending them from the encroachment of scientific and political discourse alike, and outlining a notion of the *historical* past as distinct from both the *natural* and the *practical* past. In the course of defending the distinctive nature of historical explanation and the idea of a distinctive *historical* past as the correlative of an irreducible form of historical inference, they developed different but equally uncompromising anti-presentist and anti-revisionist views of the nature of the historical imagination, views which stand in sharp contrast to those of their narrativist successors.

Oakeshott discussed the distinctive nature of historical inference by addressing the question of how it is possible for historians *causally* to explain the events of the past (by saying, for example, that German militarism was an underlying cause of the First World War) without at the same time denying the contingency of the historical process (the First World War was not inevitable; it may not have happened, German militarism notwithstanding). It is possible to speak of historical events as being *caused* without committing ourselves to hard determinism because historical explanations operate with a distinctive notion of “causation” where the notion of cause captures the idea of “significant antecedents to the situation the enquiry is concerned to understand historically.”<sup>6</sup> To identify militarism, alliance systems, imperialism and nationalism (as historians often do) as the cause (in the sense of “significant antecedents”) of World War I is to point to a convergence of antecedents that explains the event without necessitating it. Oakeshott illustrates this notion of causation through the analogy of a dry stone wall:

Historical events (...) are related to one another contingently. This kind of relationship is, first, one of proximity and of “touch”, an immediate relationship. An historical past, composed conceptually of contiguous historical events, has no place for extrinsic general terms of relationship – the glue of normality or the cement of general causes. When a historian assembles a passage of antecedent events to compose a subsequent he builds what in the countryside is called a “dry wall”: the stones (that is, the antecedent events) which compose the wall (that is, the subsequent event) are joined and held together, not by mortar, but in terms of their shapes. And the wall, here, has no premeditated design; it is what its components, in touching, constitute.<sup>7</sup>

This notion of causation is neither nomological nor teleological. In nomological explanations, an event is explained by inferring it from the antecedent conditions and a general law.<sup>8</sup> This is not how the notion of causation operates in the context of historical explanation. Historians do

not claim that, given certain antecedent conditions (militarism, alliances, etc.), World War I had to happen, in the sense that water must freeze if the temperature drops below 0°C. Nor is the notion of historical causation teleological. Teleological explanations present events as directed towards an end and show that they had to happen, not by invoking general laws (as in nomological explanations), but by rationalizing those events in the way in which Leibniz invoked a divine plan to justify how things have to be as they are: “Historical inquiry is not, strictly speaking, an explanatory engagement in which reasons are sought for past events being as they were.”<sup>9</sup> Neither nomological nor teleological explanations preserve the contingency of the historical process: nomological explanations retrodict the past in the way in which natural scientists predict the future; teleological explanations encourage an “incubator” conception of the past “in which subsequent historical events are ‘hatched.’”<sup>10</sup> History, for Oakeshott, neither retrodicts the past in the manner of nomological explanations nor presents it as the unfolding of a plot, as teleological ones do; history has no plot or dialectical order.<sup>11</sup>

There are two important features of this notion of historical causation that directly bear upon the notion of the historical imagination and which provide an interesting contrast with the notion of the historical imagination which prevailed after the narrativist turn. The first important feature of this conception of the nature of historical inference, as presented through the analogy of the dry stone wall, is that the historian is constrained by the evidence in the way in which the mason is constrained by the shape of the stones out of which the dry stone wall is built. The stones cannot be arranged in just any way the historian wants to because they have to fit. There are consequently robust constraints that govern the historical imagination. The second important aspect of this notion of causation as a set of “significant antecedent conditions” is that to understand an event historically is to understand it in the context of the circumstances which preceded it, *not* those which followed it. To understand World War I *historically*, for example, is to understand how militarism, nationalism, and the system of alliances in place at the time converged to provide an explosive cocktail which only required igniting by the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand; it is not to understand World War I as sowing the seeds for World War II. This does not mean that World War I cannot be understood retrospectively in this way (as paving the way for World War II) but that, when so understood, it provides historical knowledge of World War II, not of World War I.<sup>12</sup> World War I did not lead to World War II in the way in which a chick hatches out of an egg or an acorn develops into a full-blown oak. Earlier events, Oakeshott says, “cannot be made more historically intelligible in terms of later events. It is, of course, true that earlier happenings may acquire new characters on account of later, as Ruth, *post mortem* acquired the character of an ancestor of King David; and in virtue of hindsight (that is, of our acquaintance with later happenings) earlier happenings may earn new meanings. But these cannot be historical characters or meanings.”<sup>13</sup> Considered together, these two features of the nature of “causation” as “significant antecedent conditions” entail that the context of historical explanation cannot be that of the historian; it must be that of the event for which an explanation is sought. When the past is understood from the perspective and circumstances of the historian, it is not understood historically.

Oakeshott was critical of attempts to mobilize the past at the service of a political agenda, of what Herbert Butterfield called the “Whig” approach to historical writing, an approach which sought to “produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present.”<sup>14</sup> But while critical of this *practical* outlook on the past, his main point is not that there is no such thing as the practical past, that one cannot look back at the past through the lens of present concerns, but that there is such a thing as a historical past, a past understood in its own terms, and that the historical past should not be conflated with the practical past. His argument is directed against an aprioristic commitment to presentism (the view that the past is knowable *only* from the

perspective of the present) and revisionism (the implication that since the past is knowable only from the perspective of the present, it must be revised from the changing perspectives of different presents), a commitment that rules out the very possibility of knowing the past for its own sake.

Oakeshott's defence of a kind of past that can be known in its own terms has often been misunderstood as resting on a questionable commitment to a crude empirical realism thinly disguised as a defence of historical professionalism.<sup>15</sup> But this view is based on a misunderstanding: Oakeshott was no naïve realist. His defence of the possibility of knowing the past in its own terms was unlike that of empirically minded historians<sup>16</sup> who believe the facts speak for themselves and require no interpretation. For Oakeshott, history is not a mere chronicle; it emerges through the process of historical explanation. On this, he agrees with narrativists. Nor is Oakeshott a realist about the causal relation: the connections between the events of the past and their "causes" in the sense of "significant antecedent conditions" are forged through the process of historical explanation; they do not correspond to metaphysically real relations which exist independently of how events are (historically) explained. Historical events are "circumstantial convergencies of antecedent historical events; what they are is how they came to be woven."<sup>17</sup> The notion of correspondence either to atomistic facts or to pre-existing metaphysical relations holding between them independently of how they are explained plays no role in Oakeshott's understanding of what it means to explain the past historically. The historical past emerges through the process of historical explanation. For this reason, the activity of the historian should not be likened to that of a person who assembles the pieces of a puzzle by consulting the image on the jigsaw puzzle box:<sup>18</sup> assembling the evidence is not a matter of grasping a pre-established harmony between the pieces like the harmony which, for Leibniz, holds amongst monads. Without historical explanation, there would be no history (only annals and chronicles), just as without the specific skills of the mason, there would be no dry stone walls, only piles of unassembled stones. What Oakeshott *does* deny is a further assumption which later philosophers of history working within the narrativist tradition certainly make, i.e. the assumption that rejecting the view that historical explanations capture metaphysically real relations that hold independently of how the events are described necessarily entails a libertarian freedom of interpretation that gives historians a licence to re-write the past by reassembling the evidence from the perspective of their present. Just as masons cannot arrange the blocks in a dry stone wall any way they wish, so historians who connect the events of the past operate under strict constraints and lack the freedom of a bricklayer who constructs a house out of standardized factory bricks and can lay them in any direction. Therefore, while historical explanations do not simply reflect the facts or mirror pre-established metaphysically real relations of the kind which hold among Leibnizian monads, they are not free-floating constructions that can be revised by different generations of historians in the light of their own present circumstances.

Oakeshott's defence of the historical past, a past that is understood in its own terms rather than from the perspective of the historian, is motivated by an attempt to disambiguate the distinctive sense of causation that characterizes the nature of historical explanation as distinct from the sense of causation which is operative in teleological and nomological explanations. It is not motivated by the view that the facts speak for themselves, and there is such a thing as direct, non-inferential historical knowledge of the course of events. He rejects a form of naïve empiricism, the view that history is just a purely factual endeavour, and he also rejects, like the narrativists, a metaphysical realism, according to which the connections linking the events of the past capture real causal relations that exist independently of how the events are connected historically. But unlike the narrativists, he does not take the rejection of naïve empiricism and metaphysical realism concerning causal relations to imply that the past is necessarily constructed

from the perspective of the historian (presentism), and those historical constructions are necessarily revised as the arrow of time moves on (revisionism).

Like Oakeshott, Collingwood believed that knowing the past historically requires understanding it in its own context, not in that of the historian. He was particularly interested in what he called the “thought-context,” the set of cultural assumptions and norms which governed the actions of historical agents, and argued that if it is to be understood historically, the past must be viewed through the categories that mediated the historical agents’ own understanding of reality. The historical past, in this respect, is like a “foreign country,”<sup>19</sup> and the task of understanding the past historically is not significantly different from that of understanding agents who are contemporaneous with the interpreter. While understanding agents who are long dead and cannot be engaged in a live conversation poses additional obstacles, it is not a task that is different in kind from that of understanding other people in general.<sup>20</sup> To avoid misunderstanding past agents, historians, just like travellers to faraway lands, should acquaint themselves with the beliefs and social customs of the period they are studying, rather than try and extrapolate from those of their own culture. The presuppositions which govern historical enquiry are, therefore, quite different from those that govern scientific enquiry. When approaching its explanandum, the natural scientist presupposes that nature is uniform and assumes, for example, that water freezes at 0°C in the Middle ages as well as under the reign of Queen Victoria because the formulation of inductive generalizations relies on the principle of the uniformity of nature.<sup>21</sup> Historians, by contrast, when approaching their explanandum, presuppose that historical agents are responsive to norms that vary from time to time (just as they may vary from place to place).

Historical understanding, therefore, requires suspending rather than projecting the historian’s own set of cultural assumptions so as to view reality from the perspective of the agent. This is not to say that historians have to believe what the historical agents believe to be true. The Egyptologist, for example, need not believe that mummification ensures the safe passage of the dead to the afterlife in order to understand the role that mummification plays in the Egyptian civilization. But to understand the past *historically*, one must take on board the epistemic norms and social conventions to which past agents were responding and approach the latter like characters in a period drama, rather than stand as judges of their moral depravity or epistemic naivety. As Collingwood puts it:

If the reasons why it is hard for a man to cross the mountains is because he is frightened of the devils in them, it is folly for the historian, preaching at him across a gulf of centuries, to say “this is sheer superstition. There are no devils at all. Face facts, and realize that there are no dangers in the mountains except rocks and water and snow, wolves perhaps, and bad men perhaps, but no devils.” The historian says that these are the facts because that is the way in which he has been taught to think. But the devil-fearer says that the presence of devils is a fact, because that is the way in which he has been taught to think. The historian thinks it a wrong way; but wrong ways of thinking are just as much historical facts as right ones, and, no less than they, determine the situation (always a thought situation) in which the man who shares them is placed. The hardness of the fact consists in the man’s inability to think of his situation otherwise. The compulsion which the devil haunted mountains exercise on the man who would cross them consists in the fact that he cannot help believing in the devils. Sheer superstition, no doubt: but this superstition is a fact, and the crucial fact in the situation we are considering.<sup>22</sup>

Contrary to what has become received wisdom after the narrative turn, the projection of the historian's own epistemic framework is an obstacle to, rather than an enabling condition of, historical understanding. To understand *historically* the role that mummification played in ancient Egypt's cult of the afterlife, for example, is to recover the conceptual connections *the ancient Egyptians* would have made: "if you are not mummified your soul will not be able to re-enter the body in the afterlife." This is the key claim that underlies Collingwood's much-misunderstood account of re-enactment.<sup>23</sup> Historians should not project their own norms and conventions onto the agents in the way in which a natural scientist subsumes an event under a general empirical law to either predict it or retrodict it since there is no guarantee that the norms and conventions by which they are governed reach beyond the historian's own times. As Collingwood puts it:

Types of behaviour do, no doubt, recur, so long as minds of the same kind are placed in the same kinds of situations. The behaviour-patterns characteristic of a feudal baron were no doubt fairly constant so long as there were feudal barons living in a feudal society. But they will be sought in vain (except by an enquirer content with the loosest and most fanciful analogies) in a world whose social structure is of another kind (...). A positive science of mind will, no doubt, be able to establish uniformities and recurrences, but it can have no guarantee that the laws it establishes will hold good beyond the historical period from which its facts are drawn.<sup>24</sup>

As in the case of Oakeshott, Collingwood's claim that the past should be understood in its own context rather than that of the historian is not premised on an acceptance of naïve realism. NH's claim is not that the behaviour of historical agents is a fact that is immediately transparent and that knowing it requires no interpretative work. The claim is rather that the categories that are relevant to understanding past agents historically are those of the agents themselves, not those of the historian. His critique of the epistemic priority of the present is the offshoot of his attempt to defend a distinctive notion of the *historical* past that is irreducible to that of the *natural* past.<sup>25</sup> The past is not something that is studied by historians alone, for it is studied by big bang physicists and palaeontologists too. But the scientific investigation of the past treats all events, past, present, and future, as subject to the same empirical laws because it relies on the principle of the uniformity of nature. By contrast, the actions of past agents are understood historically when they are understood as responding to culturally specific norms, not to those of historians. Failure to take note of the fundamental presupposition of history leads to misunderstanding of the actions of others, whether they are past agents or contemporaries who do not share the same "form of life," to use Wittgenstein's expression.

Neither Collingwood nor Oakeshott argued that historical knowledge of the past is always possible, nor did they claim that such knowledge is infallible and never subject to revision. Collingwood remarks that the naming of certain ages as "Dark ages" says nothing about the ages themselves, but it does say something about the persons who use the expression, "namely that they are unable to re-think the thoughts which were fundamental" to that way of life.<sup>26</sup> Oakeshott concedes that the "discovery of hitherto unknown survivals, the critical re-interpretation of already known record" provide good reasons for holding "even the most carefully composed historical event a somewhat tentative construction subject to revision." Considerations of this nature, he says, "are the occasions of what is properly to be called the 'rewriting' of an historical past." But this kind of re-writing of the past should be distinguished from revisionism, understood as an aprioristic commitment to the claim that knowledge of the past must necessarily be revised because it awaits the "criticism of the future."<sup>27</sup>

The view that the past is in principle knowable and the anti-revisionist conception of the historical imagination which informed Collingwood's and Oakeshott's work came under Nattack by a later generation of philosophers of history who criticized it on two counts. First, the view that historical understanding requires bracketing the epistemic and moral values of historians analogous to the suspension of disbelief required by audiences of a period drama was sidelined in favour of the view that one should embrace the epistemic framework of historians as an enabling rather than as a distorting condition of the possibility of historical understanding. From Gadamer's claim that readers must bring their prejudices to the interpretation of past texts<sup>28</sup> to White's claim that value judgments are required to convert annals and chronicles into narratives that have an ending (in the sense of a moral closure, point or meaning), and not merely an end in the sense of a terminus,<sup>29</sup> the view that the past can be known in its own terms, has come relentlessly under attack.

Second, the idea of a distinctively historical past, a past that should be understood in its own terms, has also been dismissed for failing to appreciate how the study of the past could be relevant to the understanding of the present and future. White, for example, claimed that a focus on the historical past turns historical studies into an interest in antiques which places history into a "quarantine as a guide to present activity and future aspiration."<sup>30</sup> The target of White's criticism was Croce, but this remark could have been easily directed at Oakeshott's distinction between the practical and the historical past. It is to the revisionist and presentist conception of the historical imagination on which such criticisms are premised that we now turn.

### **The revisionist conception of the historical imagination**

White's wide-ranging works constitute arguably the most influential account of historical imagination in the post-1970s theory of history. It is also important to note that the historical imagination was already placed centre stage in his 1973 break-through book *Metahistory* – a paradigmatic text in historical theory in which White sets out to investigate "the deep structure of the historical imagination."<sup>31</sup> The unifying idea in White's multifaceted work is that the deep structure of historical imagination consists of fictionalizing frameworks of literary form, essentially involving modes of emplotment (tragedy, comedy, romance, and satire) and rhetorical strategy. The topic of the imagination is prevalent in most of White's subsequent work, and the concept plays a crucial role also in White's last book, *The Practical Past*. There White argues that the ethical and existential meaning of the past can only be understood by showing how "the practical past can be grasped imaginatively as a space of experience."<sup>32</sup> This space of experience is one in which the individual's and the community's identity are expressed and negotiated by imagining different forms of meaning and significance for events in the past. According to White,<sup>33</sup> the concept of the practical past will allow us to take seriously ethically engaged relations to the past that have often been dismissed as myth or fiction, such as we find in novels or witness literature. Focusing on the practical rather than the historical past will thereby liberate us from the idea that the significance of the past can ever be fixed.

Importantly, White views his own account of historical imagination as a response to alleged shortcomings in Collingwood's writings on the same topic.<sup>34</sup> He challenges Collingwood directly by arguing that Collingwood's Kantian account of the historical imagination relies on unwarranted assumptions about the transhistorical continuity of human experience. According to White, it is only by presupposing transhistorical similarity in the "sense of the *possible* forms (...) that human situations *can* take"<sup>35</sup> that allows Collingwood to conceive the historical imagination to be on par with Kant's a priori imagination with respect to physical objects (which for example



informs us about the back of a table when only its front is seen) and not as a faculty that acts “capriciously.”<sup>36</sup> By this unwarranted assumption, Collingwood is erroneously led to believe that the reality of the past as meaningful narratives can be derived from the evidence by way of the historian’s constructive imagination. In addition, White seems to construe Collingwood as an empathy theorist by claiming that, for Collingwood, the truth of the historian’s imaginative construction comes down to having a “nose for the ‘story’”<sup>37</sup> hidden in the historian’s evidence. Consequently, White finds two principal flaws in Collingwood’s account of the historical imagination: (i) the assumption of transhistorical unity in human experience stemming from the analogy with Kant’s a priori imagination (ii) the supposed ability of historians to transpose themselves psychologically back in time in order to know the true meaning (stories) of culturally foreign contexts.

The main contrast to Collingwood lies in the fact that White disputes any kind of unity in human experience and claims therefore that stories can never be found but are always constructed through the cultural concepts of the historian. The reason for this, according to White, is that the set of possible stories available to synthesize the historical record are limited by culturally specific ideas in the present about the kinds of stories that are possible: “The types of stories that can be told about the French Revolution are limited to the number of modes of emplotment which the myths of the Western literary tradition sanction as appropriate ways of endowing human processes with meanings.”<sup>38</sup> These contentions will, of course, mean that, for White, there can be no significant distinction between *understanding* the meaning of past events and *assimilating* the meaning of past events to the culturally specific conceptual framework of the present. Equally, White’s account seems also to rely on the problematic idea that similarity in the sense of the possible forms that human situations can take is a condition for the possibility of understanding meaning in a historically and culturally foreign context. This contention entails that understanding will be possible only when there are no substantial differences in perspectives of meaning – this line of thought implies, paradoxically, that understanding others is possible only when there is no need for it.

In developing his own account, White can be understood as reinterpreting and radicalizing one of Collingwood’s well-known claims about the historical imagination.<sup>39</sup> This is Collingwood’s claim that the historical imagination is “a self-dependent, self-determining and self-justifying form of thought.”<sup>40</sup> However, for Collingwood, this autonomy denoted the sense in which history is conceptually distinct from natural science; for White, on the other hand, autonomy means that historical accounts, typically historical monographs, are to be understood as self-justifying literary units based on contemporary discourses and genre conventions. According to White, historians are comparable to novelists since they have the freedom to imagine the significance of past events any way they wish by choosing between different ways to narrate events of the past. Crucially, White also claimed that the historian’s narrative is not constrained by the facts of the past – which he believes can be known in terms of descriptively thin chronicles – and that the narrative choices historians make are not based on epistemological but on aesthetic and political grounds. Against Collingwood, White argued that the historical imagination is a synthesizing faculty of fictionalization that employs literary forms:

What Collingwood failed to see was that no given set of casually recorded historical events can in itself constitute a story; the most it might offer to the historian are story *elements* (...) [H]istorical situations do not have built into them intrinsic meanings in the way that literary texts do. Historical situations are not *inherently* tragic, comic, or romantic. (...) *How* a given historical situation is to be configured depends on the historian’s subtlety in matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical

events that he wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind. This is essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making, operation.<sup>41</sup>

In other words, White agrees with Collingwood that the historical imagination is self-justifying but argues that history can justify itself only by using modes of representation that essentially fictionalize its own stories about the past. Thus, while Collingwood construed imagination as a necessary condition for historical knowledge, White argued that the very necessity of imagination entails that the historian's account is always radically underdetermined by the evidence. The reason for this is, for White, that historians are never able to tell whether their constructive imagination, which is directed at a culturally foreign context, does in fact correspond with the reality of that context, or whether their imaginative constructions are merely fictionalizing products of literary creation in the present. The imagination is therefore not to be construed as a neutral and necessary condition for knowing the historical past, but as necessary evil that endangers the very possibility of knowing the past as it "really happened." White writes:

Imagination is dangerous for the historian, because he cannot know that what he has "imagined" was actually the case, that it is not a product of his "imagination" in the sense in which that term is used to characterize the activity of the poet or writer of fiction. Here, of course, the imagination is disciplined by its subordination to the rules of evidence which require that whatever is imagined be consistent with what the evidence permits one to assert as a "matter of fact." Yet "imagination," precisely in the sense in which it is used to characterize the activity of the poet or novelist, is operative in the work of the historian at the last stage of his labors, when it becomes necessary to compose a discourse or a narrative in which to represent his findings, that is, his notion of "what really happened" in the past. It is at this point that what some theorists call the style of the historian, considered now as a writer of prose, takes over and an operation considered to be exactly like that of the novelist, an operation that is openly admitted to be literary, supervenes.<sup>42</sup>

This quote perfectly expresses the ambivalent core of White's account of the historical imagination. The historical imagination is, on the one hand, somehow "disciplined" by the rules of evidence for knowing facts about the past, but on the other hand, the historian's narration, in which facts are synthesized, entails that a literary concern "supervenes" on the restriction of evidential concerns. What does this mean: is or is not the historian's imaginative narration of the past constrained by what the evidence obliges historians to believe about the past? This is one of the most discussed problems of narrativist philosophy of history.<sup>43</sup> Concerning White's own relation to this problem, the only thing one can conclude with certainty is that he wavers between different positions. For instance, in "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact"<sup>44</sup> White seems to be saying that narrations can indeed "misfire," but that this is due only to incongruence in the present between the historian's narration and present sense-making capacities of a culture, and not because a particular narration is disqualified by failing to do justice to meaning in the past. However, faced with the question of whether also the events of the Holocaust can legitimately be narrated as a comedy if the historian so wills, without any restraints related to meaning in the past context, White made what seems like a complete turnaround and claimed instead that the historian *is* justified in discriminating between competing narratives by appealing to the reality of the past.<sup>45</sup>

If White's account of the historical imagination is epistemologically ambivalent, then it was very much the implicit sceptical consequences that proved so important for subsequent writers

in the narrativist tradition. The necessity of prefiguration in historical imagination was recast as an argument for the claim that historians are stuck in some kind of constructionist prison of their present conceptions. Historians, it is claimed, are free to choose whichever meaning to bestow on the remains of the past that they want to, and thus, any meaning that historians “find” in material from the past is going to be whatever meaning they choose to put there themselves. Such views are often coupled with the idea that history is merely a linguistic construction prefigured by the structures of (present) language. The philosophical background is a form of structuralism in which language is seen as a self-referential system, and this is combined with the supposition that language itself “limits the ways in which we can know and represent the world, and offers to us as natural what is in fact conventional.”<sup>46</sup> This developed into a quite specific “narrativist” idea about a two-level hierarchy for historical knowledge: thin descriptions of historical facts can demonstrably be true or false, but the possibility of truth in narrated historical texts is analogous with the truth-to-lifeness of a novel or painting.<sup>47</sup> The result of these interpretations has, of course, been a head-on collision with defenders of realism and endless debates about whether historical knowledge is possible at all.<sup>48</sup>

However, the sceptical side of narrativism is not premised solely on ideas about confinement within the “prison house of language.” Equally important is the idea that there is simply no such thing as *the* meaning of past action and events to which the narrated historical imagination is supposed to correspond. This point has been influentially argued for by Frank Ankersmit. According to Ankersmit, the past in-itself is not narrated, so there can be no rules for translating meaning from evidence into the historian’s narration.<sup>49</sup> Ankersmit writes:

The past is by no means like a machine: it does not possess some hidden mechanism whose workings the historian has to trace. Nor is the past like a landscape that has to be projected onto the linguistic level with the help of projection or translation rules. The “historical landscape” is not *given* to the historian; he has to *construct* it. The narration is not the projection of a historical landscape or of some historical machinery, the past is only *constituted* in the narratio. The structure of the narratio is a structure *lent* to or *pressed* on the past and not the reflection of a kindred structure objectively present in the past itself.<sup>50</sup>

In this passage, Ankersmit seems to set the narrated historical imagination entirely free from any restrictions set by the reality of the past. For, as Ankersmit argues, the narrated imagination does not result in a discovery of the past as it always was, but rather in the *constitution* of the past on the basis of contemporary concepts and concerns. For Ankersmit, historical reality is a meaningless myriad of facts and chaos of data until the historian brings order by the use of narrative representation. Historical reality is meant to be completely open for the meaning-making processes of historical narration. Importantly, if there is no order or structure to be found in historical reality to begin with, then there is no sense in saying that the historical imagination, as narration, either corresponds or fails to correspond to the past-as-actuality. Historians do engage with material from the past in their constructions, but their rules for interpreting that material will only mirror the logical structure of narrative writing in the present.

For Keith Jenkins, the same point is derived from what he calls White’s “radical philosophy of history.” According to Jenkins, the radical aspect is the claim that, even if historians can establish thin facts, the meaning of those facts is never found but always construed by the historian. As Jenkins interprets White: “one must face the fact that when it comes to apprehending the historical record, there are no grounds found in it for preferring one way of construing it from another.” Jenkins, therefore, concludes, as White does, that the only grounds

for preferring one perspective on history rather than another are aesthetic, political, and ethical. Furthermore, Jenkins connects this with White's supposedly liberating claim in *Metahistory*: "we are free to conceive history as we please just as we are free to make of it what we will."<sup>51</sup> Although the sceptical and relativist implication of White's work is contested, Jenkins conclusion is that White's work shows that "historical narratives are inexpugnably singular/relativistic (...). 'the past' has no legitimate gatekeepers who can tell us what we can and cannot do with it."<sup>52</sup> Similar to Ankersmit, Jenkins argument is underpinned by the idea that, at the level of meaning, there simply is no such thing as "the past" to which the historian's account is supposed to correspond, which was an idea also endorsed by White in his much-contested claim that "no one and nothing *lives* a story."<sup>53</sup> Consequently, historical imagination is in no sense constrained by the reality of the past. As Jenkins emphatically writes,

[The past] consists of nothing independent of us that we *have* to be loyal to, nothing we *have* to feel guilty about, no facts we *have* to find, no truths we *have* to respect. It is clear that the past doesn't exist "historically" outside of historians' textual, constructive appropriations, so that, being made by them, it has no independence to resist their interpretive will, not least at the level of meaning.<sup>54</sup>

From these claims, one may conclude that the narrativist conception of historical imagination is radically presentist. This feature is common to White, Ankersmit, and Jenkins, even if individually they may place different emphasis on the nature of the presentist condition and its consequences for historical practice. Interestingly, this presentism dissolves the very idea of the historical imagination being a "self-justifying" faculty of the understanding, which was important for Collingwood. For surely, if claims to imagine the historical past correctly are justified internally, i.e. by the conditions and presuppositions of history as an epistemic practice, then such justification derives its meaning not only from applying the rules of the game correctly but also from the possibility of being right or wrong about the object of knowledge. However, if there is no such thing as "the past as it always was" at the level of meaning, then there can be no meaningful disputes about whether the historical imagination, in narrated form, corresponds with historical reality. From this idea, White concluded that it is only through practical relations that the actual significance and meaning of past events appear in the present; Ankersmit argued that historical understanding must be transcended in order to experience the past directly; and Jenkins questioned whether one should bother with history at all.<sup>55</sup>

The most interesting epistemic consequence of narrativist presentism is that the imagination becomes not only a condition for historical knowledge but also one of its main obstacles. This is because, for the narrativists, to imagine historically *is* to endow past events with meaning borrowed from the present cultural context. As White writes: "historians provide historical events with all of the possible meanings with which the literary art of their culture is capable of endowing them."<sup>56</sup> Essentially, if all meaning is present meaning, then the presentism of narrativism will effectively collapse the distinction between a practical and a historical past. For every attempt to know the past in its own terms – the historical past – will be conceptually impossible if *understanding* past meaning is synonymous to *endowing* it with meaning from the present cultural context. Epistemically, this means that narrativism is committed to the idea that the possibility of knowing the past is inversely proportional to the use of the historian's narrative imagination: The more that historians synthesize facts in narratives, the less they will be able to know the past as it always was. In proportional terms: The more historians speak about significance and meaning, the more their account will be a product of the present culture. This influential idea that the (narrated) historical imagination is an obstacle to knowing the past has

recently also been endorsed and discussed by critics of narrativism in the philosophy of history.<sup>57</sup>

### **Beyond the revisionist orthodoxy**

The narrativist conception of the historical imagination has been largely presentist and revisionist. Yet while this sceptical orientation has dominated the philosophy of history, it is far from clear whether it has prevailed on the basis of sound argument. Here we will look at some considerations that underpin the widespread success of the narrativist conception of the historical imagination and suggest that they do not, in fact, stand up to scrutiny.

The first consideration is that if the past is studied for its own sake, it becomes irrelevant to the present and politically inert because it stops “with the recovery of the record of past human actions, of what men had *already* done” and is irrelevant to “what they might or ought to do in the future.”<sup>58</sup> This consideration may resonate with many who understandably think it is important to learn from the past because, as Santayana said, “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”<sup>59</sup> But while a concern with understanding the relevance of the past for the present is legitimate, the inference that understanding the past in its own terms rules out invoking it as a guide to present concerns is a *non sequitur*. Both Oakeshott and Collingwood would agree that the past *can* be a guide to the present and future, but only *if* comparisons between the present and the past are meaningful. Yet, in order for such comparisons to be meaningful, the distant past with which more recent pasts and the present are compared must be understood historically in the first instance. Hand gestures, for example, can have one meaning in one culture and a completely different one in another. To make meaningful non-arbitrary comparisons, one must first understand what they signify in their respective historical contexts. Collingwood argued that to find out what the historical evidence means, one must go beyond the kind of superficial comparisons that can be made by adopting purely quantitative tools. Statistical research, as he put it, “is for the historian a good servant but a bad master. It profits him nothing to make statistical generalizations unless he can thereby detect the thoughts behind the facts about which he is generalizing.”<sup>60</sup> This is not to say that generalizations have no place in history, but rather that the kind of generalizations that form the basis for meaningful comparisons are reliant on historical understanding. Oakeshott echoed this claim by saying that, to be useful, an analogy “must have some plausible resemblance to the situation to which it is to be related.”<sup>61</sup> He, too, was critical of superficial comparisons based on quantitative methods. A statistical correlation, he says, “has the insignificance of a merely external relationship,”<sup>62</sup> which could be purely fortuitous, such as the correlation between the yearly number of births in a certain Tyrolean village and the number of storks on the rooftops.<sup>63</sup> Neither Collingwood nor Oakeshott would have denied that any comparison between historical situations can be made. But they would concur that for such comparisons to be meaningful, the events compared must be understood historically in the first place.

A further consideration invoked to defend the claim that history needs to be re-written from the constantly changing perspective of the present relies on the assumption that retrospectivity is an essential characteristic of historical knowledge and that accepting that historical knowledge is retrospective in nature entails a commitment to revisionism. Paul Roth has recently revived Danto’s claim that narrative sentences such as “The Thirty Years War began in 1618”<sup>64</sup> provide descriptions of events that could not have been known to be true by a contemporary chronicler. Roth deploys this claim to support the revisionist conclusion that there are multiple versions of the past, as many as the different descriptions under which it can be brought from different standpoints in time.<sup>65</sup> In other words, if one accepts the common-sense view that historical

knowledge is retrospective, that historians look back at the past from a vantage point that is unavailable to the contemporary observer, one must also accept the rather extraordinary and counter-intuitive conclusion that there is not just one past but many because there are multiple descriptions of it. Yet, it is unclear that the description of a past event from a future perspective has any bearing upon the historical explanation of that event. For example, retrospectively, one might change the description of World War I and no longer claim that it was the conflict with the highest number of casualties (for there were more in World War II), but this re-description has no bearing on the causes of World War I. The occurrence of World War II does not retrospectively change the course of events leading up to World War I (the causes in Oakeshott's sense of "significant antecedent conditions") unless of course one is willing to espouse the idea of backward causation. This is why Oakeshott denies that historical events can be made "historically intelligible in terms of later events," no matter how these earlier events may later be re-described.<sup>66</sup> Just as the re-description of the Great War as World War I after 1939 has no bearing on the historical explanation of its causes (the system of alliances in place between nations etc.) so the historian's hindsight cannot change the antecedent conditions of its explanandum. Selecting antecedent conditions may be a complex matter, and there may be disagreements among historians about which particular set of antecedent conditions might be significant and should be included in the kind of causal explanation that historians provide. But this kind of disagreement among historians presupposes agreement about what it means to select *historically* for causes. Moreover, there is no need to commit to the possibility of backward causation in order to uphold the view that historical knowledge is retrospective or post facto. One could argue that historical explanation is retrospective or post facto, not because the events of the past are necessarily coloured with the significance they have from the perspective of future presents, but because history (unlike natural science) operates on the assumption that the course of events is not determined. Given this presupposition, the notion of causation operative in historical explanation must accommodate the possibility that things may have been otherwise, for example, that World War I may not have happened, the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, and the system of alliances in place notwithstanding. Historians have special powers of hindsight that are not available to contemporary observers because to explain an event such as World War I *historically* is to explain why it happened *without* retrodicting it or assuming that it had to happen (in the way in which scientific explanations retrodict the freezing of water in a car radiator). We, qua contemporary observers, can surmise (and even get a pretty good idea of) what new world order the weakening of the European Union combined with Russian expansionism may lead to. But precisely because the course of history is not like the script of a play waiting to be performed on stage, only future historians looking back at the erosion of the EU with the wisdom of hindsight will be able to identify this factor as a cause qua "significant antecedent condition" of the events they seek to explain. There is, therefore, no need to commit to the counter-intuitive view that there are different pasts because the past is changed by future descriptions of it in order to account for the retrospective character of historical explanations. Historical explanations are retrospective because, unlike their scientific counterparts, they operate on the assumption of the contingency of the historical process. It is the presumption that the course of historical events is contingent that rules out we could *presently* have *historical* knowledge of the events that will happen in the future, although we can *presently* have *scientific* knowledge that water will freeze tomorrow if the temperature drops below 0°C.

A third influential consideration that might explain why presentism and revisionism have become the new orthodoxy in the philosophy of history has to do with the assumption that the denial of presentism (the view that the past is known from the perspective of the present) and its corollary, revisionism (the necessity of revising the past from every new present), entails a

commitment to some form of naïve realism, the historical equivalent of what Wilfrid Sellars called “the myth of the given.”<sup>67</sup> Since all knowledge is conceptually mediated (so the reasoning goes), knowledge of the past must also be conceptually mediated. Further, since historians approach the past from a particular *Zeitgeist*, denying that the past is necessarily known from the perspective of the historian’s present seems to assume the possibility of conceptually unmediated knowledge. But the inference which leads to the claim “if you reject presentism you thereby commit to the possibility of conceptually unmediated knowledge” is yet another *non sequitur*. Collingwood, as we have seen, did not claim that historians aim to achieve conceptually unmediated knowledge of the past “in-itself,” understood as the historical equivalent of Kant’s *Ding an sich*. What he did maintain is that the past is known historically when it is known via the categorical system of the agent. He was concerned with the past for historical agents (the Ancient Greeks, the Ancient Egyptians), not the past as it is in itself.<sup>68</sup> He was inimical to the presentist view that, for example, the way in which the ancient Greeks mediated reality retrospectively changes the way in which the ancient Egyptians did. But he rejected this presentist (and revisionist) view of the past without forging any alliances with the kind of realism that narrativists eschewed.

Collingwood and Oakeshott agreed with narrativists that the past can neither be accessed by direct observation nor reproduced under experimental conditions; but they did not infer from this (as White did) that science enjoys a privileged epistemic status vis-à-vis history, and that whereas science is a form of knowledge, history is a literary genre. They regarded science and history as standing on an equal epistemic footing and took them both to be forms of knowledge, i.e. “sciences” in the Latin sense of the term *scientia*,<sup>69</sup> which differ from one another because they have different explanatory goals and different methods of achieving those goals. In their view, all knowledge claims arise within the explanatory framework of a specific form of inquiry. Therefore, just as scientific claims are deemed to be true or false on the basis of an inductive test, so historical theses are “verified” and “falsified” by the standards of the epistemic practice of history, whether, for example, they succeed in establishing a fit between an event and a set of significant antecedent conditions. From a metaphilosophical standpoint in which natural science does not enjoy an epistemologically privileged position vis-à-vis history, the argument often invoked to motivate scepticism concerning the possibility of historical knowledge, namely that the (historical) evidence underdetermines historical explanation, is substantively weakened once it is exposed as resting on a philosophical double-standard. For if the underdetermination of any one particular scientific theory by (scientific) evidence does not provide sufficient reason to motivate a wholesale rejection of scientific method, the underdetermination of any one particular historical claim by the (historical) evidence should not be taken as providing good reasons for rejecting the historical method as a whole.

These diverging metaphilosophical commitments concerning the relation between history and science inform the ways in which Collingwood and Oakeshott, on the one hand, and philosophers working in the narrativist tradition on the other, approach the question of whether or not the past is in principle knowable in its own terms. Narrativists claim that different generations of historians narrate the past from the epistemic perspective of their present (epistemic relativism) and, therefore, that the past is in principle unknowable in its own terms. Collingwood and Oakeshott, by contrast, are committed to the claim that the historical past cannot be known in the same way as the explanandum of natural science because science and history have different explanatory goals and different methods for achieving them (explanatory pluralism).<sup>70</sup> Oakeshott, as we have seen, argued that the explanation of historical events such as the French Revolution must invoke a distinctive sense of causation (that of “significant antecedent conditions”), and Collingwood claimed that to understand past agents

requires tracing the kind of conceptual connections that past agents would make, rather than subsuming their actions under psychological generalizations. Unsurprisingly these contrasting views of the historical imagination have deep roots in different visions of the relation between history and science, which become evident when one digs deeper to uncover the hidden metaphilosophical assumptions on which the disagreement between revisionists and anti-revisionist conceptions of the historical imagination rest.

### Notes

- 1 Hayden White, *The Practical Past* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014), xi.
- 2 White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in 19th-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); White, *The Content of the Form. Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).
- 3 Frank Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983); Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).
- 4 Keith Jenkins, *Why History? Ethics and Postmodernity* (London: Routledge Press, 1999); Jenkins, *At the Limits of History: Essays on Theory and Practice* (Abingdon: Routledge Press, 2009).
- 5 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004).
- 6 Michael Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999), 74.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 102.
- 8 Carl Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History," *Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. 2 (1942): 35–48.
- 9 Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays*, 73.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 70.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 74.
- 12 Cf. Luke O'Sullivan, "Worlds of Experience: History," in *The Cambridge Companion to Oakeshott*, ed. Efraim Podoksik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 47.
- 13 Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays*, 73.
- 14 Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1965), v.
- 15 Cf. Chris Lorenz, "It takes Three to Tango. History between the 'Historical' and the 'Practical' Past," *Storia della Storiografia / Geschichte der Geschichtsschreibung* 65, no. 1 (2014): 29–46. Lorenz mistakenly reads Oakeshott's defence of the autonomy of the historical past as distinct from the practical past as a defence of the fact/value distinction. Oakeshott, as presented here, is not committed to such a distinction since he denies there is any such thing as non-inferential knowledge.
- 16 Cf. Geoffrey Rudolph Elton, *The Practice of History*, 2nd ed. (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002).
- 17 Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays*, 73.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 126.
- 19 David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country: Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- 20 Robin George Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, revised ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 219.
- 21 Collingwood, *An Essay in Metaphysics*, revised ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 149–152.
- 22 Collingwood, *The idea of History*, 317.
- 23 Jan van der Dussen, "The Philosophical Context of Collingwood's Re-enactment Theory," *International Studies in Philosophy* 27, no. 2 (1995): 81–99.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 223–224.
- 25 Giuseppina D'Oro and James Connelly, "R.G. Collingwood," in *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, revised ed., 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/collingwood/>.
- 26 Collingwood, *The idea of History*, 218–219.
- 27 Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays*, 73.
- 28 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 367.
- 29 White, *The Content of the Form*, 21–22.
- 30 White, *Metahistory*, 415.



- 31 Ibid., 2.
- 32 White, *The Practical Past*, 101.
- 33 White, "Politics, History, and the Practical Past," *Storia della Storiografia* 61, no. 1 (2012): 131.
- 34 White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 59–62, 83–86.
- 35 Ibid., 84, cf. 60.
- 36 Ibid., 60.
- 37 Ibid., 84.
- 38 Ibid., 60–61.
- 39 Cf. Van der Dussen, "The Case for Historical Imagination: Defending the Human Factor and Narrative," in *The Sage Handbook of Historical Theory*, eds. Nancy Partner and Sarah Foots (London: Sage Publications, 2013), 63.
- 40 Collingwood, *The idea of History*, 249.
- 41 White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 84–85.
- 42 White, *The Content of the Form*, 67–68.
- 43 Cf. Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
- 44 White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 84.
- 45 White, "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth," in *Probing the Limits of Representations: Nazism and the "Final Solution"*, ed. Saul Friedländer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 40.
- 46 Hans Kellner, "Introduction: Describing Redescriptions," in *A New Philosophy of History*, eds. Ankersmit and Kellner (London: Reaktion Books), 1–18.
- 47 Ibid., 8.
- 48 Cf. John Zammito, "Historians and Philosophy of History," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, ed. Aviezer Tucker (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).
- 49 Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic*, 87, 216, 225.
- 50 Ibid., 81.
- 51 Jenkins, *At the Limits of History*, 265.
- 52 Ibid., 266.
- 53 Ibid., 265.
- 54 Jenkins, *Why History?*, 3.
- 55 White, *The Practical Past*; Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*; Jenkins, *Why History?*
- 56 White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 92.
- 57 Aviezer Tucker, *Our Knowledge of the Past: A Philosophy of Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography*.
- 58 White, *Metahistory*, 416.
- 59 George Santayana, *The Life of Reason: Reason in Common Sense*, vol. I (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1905), 284.
- 60 Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 228.
- 61 Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays*, 47.
- 62 Ibid., 99.
- 63 Ibid., 98.
- 64 Arthur Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).
- 65 Paul Roth, *The Philosophical Structure of Historical Explanation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020), Chapter I and II.
- 66 Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays*, 73. See first section above.
- 67 Wilfrid Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," in *Science, Perception and Reality*, ed. Robert Colodny (London and Atascadero: Humanities Press and Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1963).
- 68 Jonas Ahlskog and Giuseppina D'Oro, "Against Narrativism: The Historical Past and why it can be known," in *Collingwood and British Idealism Studies*, forthcoming 2021.
- 69 Collingwood, *An Essay in Metaphysics*, 4.
- 70 Cf. Giuseppina D'Oro, "Why Epistemic Pluralism does not entail Relativism: Collingwood's Hinge Epistemology," in *Collingwood on Philosophical Methodology*, eds. Karim Dharamsi, Giuseppina D'Oro, and Stephen Leach (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

**Further reading**

- Dray, William H. *History as Re-enactment: R. G. Collingwood's Idea of History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Kuukkanen, Jouni-Matti. *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- O'Sullivan, Luke. *Oakeshott on History*. Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academics, 2003.
- Paul, Herman. *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011.
- Van der Dussen, Jan. *History as a Science: The Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981.

Taylor & Francis  
Not for distribution