

COMMEMORATION: ON THE FIRST AND SECOND HISTORY¹

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In this article, following an indication of Meijer C. Smit, I make a basic distinction between the first and the second history. By the first history I mean history as we experience it from within on the basis of personal interest and active involvement in our historical past. The second history is history as academics construct it on the basis of critical research into historical facts. The central question that arises is that of how these two paradigms of history are related. I discuss commemoration as one of the most telling expressions of our involvement in the first history. I analyze it as a hermeneutic, dialogical, and anamnestic experience contrasting anamnestic and academic history as experienced versus constructed history: is the latter value-free? I conclude with the question whether we must regard commemoration as serviceable to the project of academic history or the latter as serviceable to commemoration.

In this article I make a basic distinction between the first and the second history. By the first history I mean history as we experience it from within on the basis of personal interest and active involvement in our historical past. The second history is history as academics construct it on the basis of critical research into historical facts. Well then, the central question that arises is that of how these two paradigms of history are related. How does the historical interest that is typical of the first, lived and experienced history relate to the historical-critical investigation of the facts that has become determinative for the second, constructed history? I want to devote attention in the first place to the peculiarities of these two paradigms of history. Next, I discuss commemoration as a specific manifestation and one of the most telling expressions of historical interest and of the first history. In a third section I indicate the difference between small and large stories and appraise Fukuyama. Then I analyze commemoration as a hermeneutic and critical experience before going on in a fifth section to clear up the romantic misconception of commemoration. Thereupon I contrast anamnestic and academic history as experienced versus constructed history: is the latter value-free? I conclude with the question whether we must regard commemoration as serviceable to the project of academic history or the latter as serviceable to commemoration, which is to say to our intimate involvement in the first history.

1. *Two paradigms of history*

We, people, are by nature familiar with the things we find around us. We know how to breathe air, lift things, use a keyboard. Our existence is from the outset

¹ Translated from the Dutch by Herbert Donald Morton. An earlier version of this article appeared in *Koers: Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 71 (2006), 101-134, entitled 'Gedenken: over de eerste en de tweede geschiedenis.'

inter-esse — “interest” in the literal sense of the word: a being *between*, in and amongst things, a being involved in the world. Our existence is especially historical interest, involvement in the course of things in time. We feel ourselves caught up in the process of time. The world around us changes and so do we. *Tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis*, said the Romans, the times change and we in them. In this we are different from the animals. Animals are also involved in the world they live in, but they never reflect on time. We do, for being human means being “interested in history” (Wittram 1963, 1-11).

Interest in history is engagement. It is something different from idle curiosity about earlier times. Interest in history is a being involved and implicated in history. Wilhelm Schapp, a student of Dilthey’s, once said: we are “in Geschichten verstrickt” (entangled in histories) (Schapp, 1953). All our experiences are historical experiences. Assimilated into them are the experiences of our forefathers. There are even traditions in these experiences that go back to the earliest primitive cultures. I have in mind here — insofar as western man is concerned — the Caucasian semi-nomads of the Yamna culture (3500 B.C.). These were vigorous figures who invented the wheel and tamed horses, who also formulated PIE — the Proto-Indo-European primal language — with the help of word and sentence constructions we still employ today.

In general people are keenly interested in tales of bygone days. A mark of man is “the inability to forget,” said Nietzsche.² Through the centuries people have borne their story, their history, with them as a living legacy in order to know who they are and in order not to fall back into barbarism. What about us? Are we also saturated by the process of time, the load-bearing plane of our existence? Or is history just bother and ballast? Modern humans live in the present: we think of tradition as past worries, of the future as worries for later. Memories may slumber until we are confronted with a drastic choice in life, a serious illness, or a horrible loss. Then a process of reflection may set in; we may become conscious of who we are in the presence of history.

The rise of historical awareness may occur at the individual but also at a collective level. Some of us have experienced how after the Second World War the European Jews who survived death camps returned to their homelands, to Amsterdam from Auschwitz, totally bereft of their human dignity. They had to cope with their numbered past, not by repressing their memories but by reintegrating them into a new existence. Sometimes that succeeded wonderfully well, sometimes painfully not at all. People and peoples can lose their history. After 1945 the Federal Republic of Germany was *geschichtslos*, without a history, for decades, economically recovered but for all that powerless to pick up the thread of the past, incapable of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Something of the same sort afflicted Argentina following the epoch Videla-Viola-Galtieri (1967-1983). What followed was a flight from history. Only the “Mad” Mothers (*las locas*) of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires radiated historical consciousness. And how many peoples on the African continent have not likewise been cast adrift because colonial rulers erased their history and with it their identity?

² This citation became the title of Schaap (2001).

From Descartes' day onward the modern world has had difficulty with the past. Descartes himself already desired to free himself from tradition. He established the primacy of reason. Man must present himself as *cogito*, the independent thinking subject, and as such subject the world to himself. With the help of science and technology, he must show who we are: 'maîtres et possesseurs de la nature', the masters and possessors of nature. Descartes' point of departure was thus not historical interest, the intimacy of man and the world in the gathering place of history, but the separation of subject and object.

With the primacy of reason and such separation from the world Descartes stamped modernity. A modern person in the Cartesian sense of the word ignores ties with the past, preferring to seek the measure of human existence in up-to-date self-realization. We have banished interest in history or, better said, farmed it out to academic professionals. History experts archive the past for us. They study the historical sources. They form an objective judgment. They seek to arrange the facts of earlier times in a causal connection and in this manner to fulfill Descartes' ambition of rational control even with respect to history.

How does the historical interest expressed in the first or experienced history relate to the historical-critical investigation of the facts that is so determinative for the second or constructive history? My answer follows in many steps. Let us focus on the memorableness of our story.

2. *The memorableness of history*

"By the rivers of Babylon we remembered Zion," says Psalm 137. Never were the Jews so intensely connected with their history as in the days of their exile in Babylon. No wonder. Only when we feel threatened in our existence does it come home to us what history means for us and our identity.

For many people nowadays this verse is incomprehensible. They have a love/hate relation with history. They turn away from the past. Memory is only stirred by severe turning points in our existence. Then the questions assail us: Who am I, Where do I come from, Where am I going? Then we reflect on our story as the matrix of our present existence, as *speculum historiale*, a mirror in which we catch a glimpse of ourselves as participants in history. This turning inward to ourselves also occurs with people seeking their family *roots*. Or with pilgrims during the *Hajj*, the pilgrimage of Moslems to the source territory of their religion. Turning to the intimacies of history may seem to convey us far from home, but sometimes it turns out to be the shortest route to ourselves.

There is reason to position oneself consciously in the history we live and experience. For as a historical subject I see myself as being conditioned — but not determined — by history! I only become determined, flotsam on its waves, if I allow its driving force to surge over me. Freedom is a self-realization that I must seize from history. The better the view I attain of the path along which my life developed, the better I rediscover myself, discern alternatives, and acquire room to consider how I will continue on my way. It is with an eye on tomorrow that I seek to learn what overcame me yesterday.

Naturally, one can only be partially successful in this. Historical recollections dwell in the cellars of the mind, also in the catacombs of our collective consciousness. And still, there are times in which history becomes transparent and people return to the roots of their existence. Something like this happens when villagers encounter themselves in a local folk museum. Or when lovers rediscover their deepest feelings in faded love letters. Or when believers know themselves touched by a word of comfort from the Bible. Or when a nation regains its liberty after years of oppression.

Such appropriation of the past in the experienced or primary history I indicate with the key word “commemoration” (Dutch: *gedenken*). Why this word? No mental effort is so pointedly aimed at landing historical meanings as the act of commemoration. Commemoration is not a psychological capacity that one can activate at a memorial service. Commemoration is according to Gadamer³ an essential characteristic of man, who realizes himself in history. By “commemoration” I understand the inner appropriation and conscious assimilation of what happened in the past that was of decisive importance for me or for us on our way toward the future.

I use the word “commemoration” *a potiori*, i.e. by way of preference. It is for me the most telling form of expression of our coping with the first history. There are related words, such as “remember,” “memorize” and “memorialize.” There are other words, such as, “ponder,” “recollect,” “recall,” “bring to mind,” “reflect upon,” “mull over,” and “meditate.” Yet some words convey the merely banal; recollections often include matters of no consequence. Others are solemn: ceremonies of remembrance are often accompanied by flags, horses and uniforms. Still other expressions are purely factual; thus I can memorize all the counts of Holland (885-1299) but they mean little or nothing to me. Commemoration is different, and so is remembrance. When I commemorate a person or remember an event, then I focus on the importance this person or event from the past may have for me today.

Commemoration also sets the tone in entirely different matters, as I stroll through the old inner city of Amsterdam or listen to the music of Mahler or browse the dialogues of Plato. Here too there is a connectedness with something that looms up out of its historical context and acquires significance for me. A chasm between past and present closes. Commemoration is effected in rituals, wakes and celebrations, in masses and vespers, parades and protest demonstrations, in a walk to Rome or a pilgrimage to Santiago di Compostella. The core of every ritual of remembrance is a turning inward to the heart of history.

Commemoration is consummated first in one’s intimate circle, when one pauses for a birthday, thumbs through a photo album, noses about in yellowed old papers, or recalls to mind a song from childhood. Yet commemoration also transpires as a collective event, in the cherishing of our language and culture, in the respecting of our traditions and social institutions, in the rites of passage

³ “Es wäre Zeit, das Phänomen des Gedächtnisses aus seiner vermögenspsychologischen Nivellierung zu befreien und es als einen Wesenszug des endlichen-geschichtlichen Sein des Menschen zu erkennen,” states Gadamer (1965, 13).

surrounding birth, marriage, sickness and death. Remembrance also manifests itself in the public domain, in memorial services and special days named Independence Day, Revolution Day, Remembrance Day, and the like. Every country has monuments of national pride, every church its calendar of saints, every university its Founders Day or *dies natalis*.

Modernity had and has little affinity with history. But today, in the world of postmodern experience, things have changed. Commemoration is once again totally “in.” Formal ceremonies are not in fashion but everything happens in the form of “wild devotion.” You again see silent processions, a “wave” in a stadium, children laying a wreath, flickering candles, balloons ascending skyward, new rituals for disasters and accidents. Parties are dressed up with billboards featuring the *jubilans* welcoming his guests with a big smile. Attic rooms are decorated with posters of pop stars. People are again trekking *en masse* to Lourdes or other places of real or imagined grace, including Elvis Presley’s Graceland in Memphis.

Actually, commemoration is neither modern nor postmodern but a defining characteristic of humankind. Amongst nonwestern peoples and in cultures without writing, the craving for commemoration is many times greater than with us. There, ancient myths are passed on from generation to generation. Bards sing the heroic deeds of glorious warriors. Genealogical registers offer anchorage and identity. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the colossal epic poems of Homer, were recounted with rhythmic precision for four hundred years before they were committed to writing in about 800 B.C. For centuries people imprinted the actions of the ancients in themselves, around a gnarled oak, within a circle of megaliths, before a towering obelisk, in the dance of whirling dervishes and the incantations of shamans, or during the annual procession of white clad priests along a *via sacra*.

It has been said, incorrectly, that primitive natural peoples have no history and follow only the rhythm of the seasons. Out of the question! It is rather the case that they experience the connection with their ancestors so intensely that the walls between past and present coalesce in a mythical world picture. Haunting spirits of yore prowl about in the land of the living. The living identify themselves with the totem of the tribe or revive ancestral ordinances. The fiftieth year of jubilee of both the Mayan Indians and the tribes of Israel is illustrative. And yet, however penetrating here historical memory may be, in the mythical experience of time something crucial has disappeared: historical distance, and the challenge to bridge it. The primal beginning draws us, but intervening times have dropped away. Turning inward has become turning back, a restoration of what once was. In the urge to restore, the creativity of commemoration is cast overboard.

3. *Large and small stories and Fukuyama’s mistake*

The first history only surrenders the secret of its meaning along the path of remembrance and commemoration. Commemoration rests not only on personal recollections but also on institutions and traditions. It is borne especially by

stories that are transmitted from one generation to the next. Yet there is an enormous difference between large and small stories.

One who commemorates seeks the meaning of what happened but is not interested in a story that embraces the whole of history. Anyway, the latter is impossible. Who can penetrate into the prehistory of humanity, say, into the life three million years ago of Lucy, an ancestor of the humanlike, whose fossil remains Donald C. Johanson discovered in 1974 in Ethiopia? Who can fathom what moved *Homo sapiens*, who from prehistoric times — some two hundred thousand years ago — wandered about in southern Africa? Who can know the motives of Ötzi, the European hunter who, five millennia ago, pursued in the Austrian Alps, made a misstep and became frozen in glacial ice? Yes, who can recover the course of the lives of the billions of people who inhabit the earth today and decipher the meaning of their often wretched existence?

It is the idealistic systems thinkers and positivist engineers of a malleable, constructible society who have charted the Great Plan of world history. Yet their megastories are worth zilch. They degrade earlier generations to preparers of the way for modern man, to dung on the acre of the future. As if the hard lives of hunters, gatherers, shepherds and farmers had no significance for themselves and their own surroundings! Large stories lack pity and commiseration because historical memory is missing. They lack truth because they afford us, pilgrims *in* history, no overview *of* history.

Nowadays universal history is correctly subject to a methodological taboo. One who commemorates must deconstruct ideological bombast, break world history down into events of a recognizable format. One who commemorates gropes for a secret of life, bent over a crib. Or he contemplates the blessings of a generation, narrated in a family circle. Or he recalls to memory the suffering of a nation, mediated by tradition. Commemoration is listening to life stories, *petites histoires*, that are small enough for us to grasp. One who commemorates is not out to explain but to cope, that is, to give meaning in the present to what happened in the past. How do children hold the memory of their parents in honor? What do Germans do with the Memorial Center in Plötzensee, where the Nazis executed their opponents? How do western nations deal with their colonial past? How do believers do justice to Francis of Assisi and his ideal of following Christ through poverty and love for nature?

Alas, the message of the history we live is fleeting. That is why we objectify it, capturing it in stories or songs, and pressing it into monuments of wood, stone and bronze. Burial mounds, memorial stones, statues, the Gilded Coach in The Hague and the Eiffel Tower in Paris radiate a message, in the same way that the Dutch national tricolor and an Olympic medal do. In the memorial sign a meaning that was once lived is elevated in a solidified form. Objectification preserves the memory and bestows upon a story a global action radius. How many oppressed people from Europe, embarked for the New World, did not shed a tear when on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean they first caught sight of the Statue of Liberty?

In the Bible too the call to commemorate resounds. Of the patriarch Jacob it is told that in special situations he set up a memorial stone, as upon his

meeting with God at Bethel (Genesis 28). Yes, Israel upon its entry into the promised land was required to take along from the Jordan River twelve stones as a memorial against the time to come, when children would ask of their fathers the meaning of these stones (Joshua 4). Many psalms are also a call to remember the marvelous works of God (Psalm 105). And Jesus preserved the memory of his death on the cross by breaking bread with these words: "This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me."⁴ In the celebration of the Eucharist God's salvation is historically present and yet close by. In the Eucharist we recognize, touch and taste the fulfillment of the Messianic dream.

Commemoration is a core moment in the transmission of cultural values. By commemorating we make a tradition our own, we become at once heirs and testators of a culture. It is in this that we differ from animals. Animals too adapt to new circumstances, but they take little or nothing of their past with them. Amongst higher animals adults teach youngsters the art of hunting. Amongst primates one even observes the transmission of individually acquired knowledge. Once it was observed that amongst chimpanzees an older female having no status was able during a period of drought to lead the troop to a water source of which only she had knowledge. Yet animals do not write history. Beavers build the same dam through the ages and lemmings cast themselves into the sea according to a fixed pattern during periods of overpopulation. Whence this stereotypical, mimetic behavior? Animals do not commemorate.

Will we continue to pass on our *petites histoires* even in the new millennium? The possibilities seem favorable. Information and communication technologies can benefit commemoration; digital media bring the past into the living room. Yet the danger is not imaginary that in the flood of information we will lose our orientation to meaning. There are no longer any story tellers. Nothing seems equal to the *fast food* that is dished up for us when we plug into the internet. Historical series are *big business* nowadays in the publishing world, but they satisfy curiosity more than they serve remembrance. Nevertheless, the knowledge that is forthcoming functions like a gong in time. The atomic bomb that reduced Hiroshima to ashes on Augustus 6, 1945 burns deeper into the conscience today than it did sixty years ago. The Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, once set up as a tourist attraction, has grown into a house of worldwide reflection through which 966.000 visitors passed in 2005. In that same year the United Nations proclaimed January 27 — the day of the liberation of Auschwitz — as Holocaust Memorial Day.

Therefore I reject the neoconservative argument served up to us by Francis Fukuyama (1992) in *The end of history and the last man*. Fukuyama asserts that as a result of recent developments in society, including the fall of the Berlin wall and since then the coordinated advance of science, technology and capitalist economy in the whole world, liberal democracy has triumphed as the political economic form of society. With that we have reached the end of the centuries long struggle between world embracing ideologies, yes, the end of history itself.

⁴ In both Luke 22:19 and I Corinthians 11:24 the Greek term "anamnesis" (Latin: *commemoratio*) is used.

Given the rules of the game of democratic consultation and liberal tolerance, no one needs to be exercised any longer, as he sees it, by the differences between good and evil that used to stir passions, dividing people and threatening world peace. Henceforth we need be concerned only with health, security and personal happiness.

Fukuyama's concept of history is itself a megastory, a smooth myth of universal progress, one more attempt to breathe new life into Hegel's idea of world history. It is a dream that was rudely disturbed on September 11, 2001 and by the following War on Terror. It is anew disturbed by the financial crisis of 2008 and its economic consequences. Yet on one point the man was right. The link he lays between the end of history and the last man is not that absurd. Imagine that the present arrangement of society should become self-evident and that people should be fully satisfied with themselves. Then there would be no more dialogue with the past and no more transmission of culture. Then dreams would end and history would slam shut. Without history, people are like lemmings.

4. *Commemoration as hermeneutic and critical experience*

In this section I want to consider for a moment the nature of commemoration and notice eight basic characteristics.

1. Commemoration is an *inner* experience. It is the attempt to interiorize history. In commemoration I actualize the formative power of history in my own existence. I learn from what has happened to me or us. History is 'Erinnerung,' observed Hegel. It is a keeping in us and a being able to call up what transpired once in time and seemed to be lost (Hegel 1952, 564).⁵ It is in other words a kind of appropriation, not by conquering or violence but by receptiveness. I open myself to that which life as it is lived has to say to me, just as Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi were touched at a turning point in their lives by Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

2. Commemoration is a *hermeneutic* experience. If we want to interiorize history, then we must interpret its meaning. The point of departure of hermeneutics, that is, of the theory of understanding meaning, is that people and events, however separated they may be from us by a gulf of time, have not lost their meaning. By commemorating we lift meanings across the threshold of time. We gauge the meaning of the past in order to understand, translate and apply it in the present. Thus the desire for *aggiornamento* at the Second Vatican Council was a legitimate form of commemoration: a hermeneutic understanding of ecclesiastical tradition cut to fit our times.

⁵ I reject the idealist context of these words, that is, Hegel's notion that the recollection of finite minds is the way that conveys us to the final goal of history, the apotheosis of the self-consciousness of the absolute spirit.

3. Commemoration is a *dialogical* experience. In commemoration awareness grows that people need people in order to become truly human, as in the monumental words of Martin Buber: “Ich werde am Du.” I become in the encounter with you (Buber 1974, 18). Commemorating, I am not an autonomous subject; there is an exchange between me and others, between present and past. I see today in the light of the past and at the same time I interrogate the past in the light of the present. People call such interaction a hermeneutical circle but it is more like an onward rolling disk. For in dialogue, both participants come into action. Commemorating history changes something in me, and such changes in me cast a different light on history. I will give two examples of such a progressive interaction.

A first example is remembering the Second World War. In the first decades after the war, memorial events in many countries focused on the fight against a totalitarian regime, on the celebration of political and intellectual liberties, and on material recovery. However, there was scarcely any attention for the suffering of the war’s victims. Otto Frank initially could not find any publisher at all for the now world renowned *Diary* of his daughter Anne. Nowadays we remember in World War II primarily the struggle against tendencies that disturb us at this moment: racism, disenfranchisement, xenophobia and intolerance.

As a second example I would mention William the Silent, known in the Netherlands as the Father of the fatherland! This name of honor is well deserved for the sacrifices William of Orange made during the war against Spain. Now the countries of Europe, including Spain, have united in the European Union. Does the profile of the Father of the fatherland now fade? No, but the message has changed. It is only in our time that we have gained an eye for just how European an allure the statesmanship of this prince of Orange already had in the sixteenth century. Beyond the borders of the Dutch Republic, he strove *pro religione et libertate*. Not without success, for in spite of its uncompromising calvinism, the Netherlands became a haven of refuge for dissidents from many lands.

4. Commemoration is a *receptive-productive* experience. We open ourselves to the past for the sake of the present and future. Living from remembrance results in living from hope. Some say: commemoration is looking back at the past, but the progressive catholic Eighth of May movement formulated it more tellingly: commemoration is looking back at the future. Historical reception aims at creative innovation. That is the fruitfulness of history. Commemoration is a golden opportunity to escape the treadmill of history. That is why totalitarian regimes reject commemoration out of hand. It is not without reason that in March 2001 the Taliban blew to smithereens the two Bamiyan Buddha statues on the old Silk Route in Afghanistan. These iconoclasts appreciated that images store meaning.

5. Commemoration is a *selective* experience. “Remembrance is not remembrance everywhere and for everything,” states Gadamer (1965, 13). Indeed, commemoration is not a mnemonic technique. We must be prepared to cast

overboard as ballast elements of the past that are of no use to us. "There is a measure of sleeplessness, rechewing and historical meaning whereby the living ... suffer damage and ultimately destruction," warns Nietzsche (1963, section 2.1). But beware of relativism! With Troeltsch and Toynbee, Jaspers and Voegelin I am of the opinion that the history of humanity offers enduring points of cultural focus.⁶ Freight loads of meaning lie stored in the classical centers of civilization, in Thebes, Jerusalem, Athens and Rome, not to mention the ancient Chinese imperial city Xian.

6. Commemoration is a *controversial* experience. The significance of what we commemorate is capable of more than one explanation. I will give some examples. On May 14 Jews celebrate the date of the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, but Palestinians remember 'al-Nakbah', the day of the Great Catastrophe. Memorial events almost always evoke conflicting feelings, especially if they are expressions of nationalism. I am reminded of the annual Orange Day parades in Northern Ireland that celebrate a protestant victory at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. I think also of the pilgrimages to the Iron Monument on the river Yser in Flanders, where a German invasion was stopped in 1914. Nor must one forget the prayer rituals at the Yasukuni soldiers shrine in Japan. History speaks volumes, but what it says is ambivalent.

7. Commemoration is a *critical* experience. History's ambivalence requires a critical choice that does not coincide with either total affirmation or total negation. On September 11, 2001 two Boeings crashed into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York, praised to the sky by their designers Yamasaki and Brittiochi as an expression of belief in humanity, but symbolizing in fact the triumph of human power, or better said, of western capital. In other continents they were hated as the most outstanding symbol of inhuman violence. How to choose? In the last century this question was the Achilles heel of the Critical Theory of neomaxism. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and Horkheimer saw *Eingedenken* as a last escape from a world so overgrown by communist violence and capitalist profiteering that all that remained for us was a messianic desire and an absolutely negative critique. Even while on the run from Hitler, Benjamin in his profound "Theses on the concept of history," *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, reminds us that tradition forbid the Jews to investigate what lies hidden in the womb of the future. "The Torah and the prayers instruct them in remembrance, however." Yet besides the past Benjamin also mentions future time as being of importance to Jews. "For every second of time was the strait gate through which Messiah might enter." Only in redeemed reality, that dawns with the coming of the Messiah, is commemoration fulfilled and can justice be done to the victims of history. "To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past." Benjamin's messianic hope for the future is impressive but is mixed with a radically negative or dialectical reasoning respecting the present world. I prefer to see commemoration as a

⁶ See Troeltsch (1961, ch. 4); Toynbee (1946); Jaspers (1949); Voegelin (1956) and (1974).

critical judgment of the past for the sake of the future that extends beyond negation and affirmation.⁷

8. Commemoration is, finally, a *transcendental* experience. Every critical judgment requires a norm, a measure for assaying. People can find such norms in history in the first instance. For in commemorating we come upon people who were paragons of nonviolence (Mahatma Gandhi), truth (bishop Tutu), or self-sacrificial love (mother Teresa). Yet we do not identify ourselves with these people. Upon closer acquaintance their insights prove to be not infallible, their efforts vulnerable to criticism, the norms that they implemented a dated form of the justice that inspired them but at the same time exceeded them. This higher justice that we all seek is transcendent. Mind you, we people endeavor to give form to norms the ultimate principle of which exceeds the historicity of our existence (Klapwijk 1994). In history we find only *Chiffren*, says Karl Jaspers; traces of transcendence, says Meijer C. Smit. Thus Smit calls the first history ‘transcendental,’ i.e. connected with a divine or transcendent Origin (1987a, 100). In the work of the Jewish political philosopher Eric Voegelin too “remembrance” or “anamnetic meditation” comes to a head in transcendence.⁸ Yes, for Smit and Voegelin the act of commemoration is almost a mystical experience of unity, of oneness, an event in which the walls between the centuries fall away and the rites and symbols of all cultures become signals of divine omnipotence.

All in all, it will be clear that by commemorating we take our departure from Descartes, the philosopher of the division of subject and object, the founder of the dualism between autonomous reason and controllable reality. We must bend thinking from division into thinking from wholeness, replace separation thought by holism thought (Klapwijk 2008, ch. 11.3). We are invited to turn inward with Smit and Voegelin to the integral meeting place of history, where people grant meaning-founding events a place in their existence. Yet I must add a gloss. The idea of the first history as the meeting place of present and past may not lead to a mystical identification of present and past, or to the notion that we are actually “contemporaries” of those who have gone before us, a Plato, an Augustine, or anyone else.⁹ Such simultaneity frustrates the fecundity

⁷ Benjamin (1992; cf. 1974). The citations are taken from Benjamin's Theses B and III. I do not share his notion that the deepest, “theological” intentions of commemoration only come into their own in the dialectical reasoning of Historical materialism (Thesis 1).

⁸ In Voegelin (1966 and 1987) anamnesis and remembrance are core concepts that point to history as the primordial meeting place of man and the world. It is here that man opens himself to events that exceed him, in which God manifests himself in meaning-establishing symbols that lay a claim on all people. This claim conveys Voegelin to the premature conclusion that “The nature of man is constant” (1956, 60). See Buijs (1998, 178-188).

⁹ Smit claims that in the first history the walls between the centuries and cultures give way and that all become partners in dialogue with one another: Historians must “be prepared to go where the philosophers, ethicists, theologians, jurists, etc. abide, where the representatives of all times and all nations gather, where the walls between the ages and the cultures come down... Whom do we find there? A Plato, Augustine, Alberti, Poussin, Adam Smith, but also the Hellenistic peasant, the feudal lord, the oppressed slave, also Ranke, countless others. *In the perspective of the continuous second history it is impossible that they should all be present at the same time, yet the first history enables them to be always each other's contemporaries, even while it remains obvious from what age, what nation, town or village, what milieu they come*” (Smit's italics). See Smit (1987b, 273) and (2002, 379); cf. (1987a, 114-115).

of history, extinguishes the creative potential of commemoration, and lands up in sterile conservatism.

5. *The Romantic misconception and the stranger within the gates*

It would be mistaken to draw particularistic conclusions from commemoration, as if in the first history we are directed back exclusively to our particular cultural past. Such particularism was distinctive for two centuries of the Romantic founders of historicism. These romantics held that every person is completely embedded in history, i.e. in the history of his own land and people. Every person is a cell in the living organism of the national community, and the nation is in its turn the historical embodiment of a common national spirit. The spirit of a nation would embrace all compatriots in the present and past in a mystical connection, its deepest wellsprings would be expressed by charismatic leaders in art, literature, morality and religion having a distinctive national character.

I reject this organological doctrine of community. It is based on an ethnic misunderstanding, on biological metaphors, yes, on speculative assumptions that the history of a nation or folk can be compared with the organic development of a plant that never extricates itself from its roots. Commemoration would in such a case be a nostalgic occasion, a turning inward to the *corporate spirit* of a nation, an exclusive orientation to one's own culture, religion and native soil. Such commemoration leads to ethnocentrism and self-glorifying nationalism. It can even degenerate into a *Blut- und Bodentheorie*, a speculative theory about the mythical bond of blood and soil like that of the Nazis.

There is no basis for binding anamnestic experience securely to one's own national past. To be sure, one who commemorates will reflect in the first instance on the tradition in which he stands, but not exclusively so. It is uniquely human to grow up in one's surroundings without fusing with them entirely as an animal does with its habitat.¹⁰ Man is under way. He mulls over his past in order, where necessary, to take critical distance from it and undergo learning experiences elsewhere. Sooner or later he comes to stand eye to eye with the "stranger within the gates," that is, with the mysterious figure who according to ancient oriental notions has the right to hospitality and the right to speak.¹¹ Anamnesis is a process of growing awareness in which we open ourselves to people with a mission from elsewhere.

In world history cultural interdependence is a recurring pattern. Not only indigenous mores but also cultural cross pollinations occasioned by trade or the violence of war have always contributed to the identity of a nation. Already in the Late Paleolithic period Cro-Magnon people in southern Europe, to judge from decorative stones found in excavated graves, had trade relations

¹⁰ Language psychologists have recently determined that babies already in the first months of their lives appropriate the sounds of the mother tongue, even before they learn words. Yet at a later age they also go on to learn foreign languages.

¹¹ In the Bible we regularly encounter the stranger within the gates, as in Exodus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 14:21.

with clans in far away places. At the end of the Ice Age, when mammoths and reindeer disappeared with the northern sun, prehistoric hunters opened themselves to agriculture, animal husbandry and making pottery, forms of culture developed a short while earlier in the Jordanian region and Mesopotamia. The wars between the Minoans and Dorians, Egyptians and Nubians, Babylonians and Assyrians, Greeks and Romans and the conquests of the Huns, Moslems, Crusaders and Mongols also broadened the horizon of commemoration. Thus the Minoans were subjected on Crete but Minoan-Mycenaean culture was able to spread in the Peloponnesus. The Romans disturbed the Greek city-states but Hellenism conquered the Roman Empire. The Jews were dispersed in the Diaspora but the Torah fructified the western world. The Reconquista drove the Moors out of late medieval Spain but Aristotelian philosophy and Arab medicine nestled in the top universities of Europe. And to mention something quite different, the spiritual rhythms of black American music had to withstand the humiliations of the hot South of the United States before they could begin an ineluctable advance to the world of gospel, soul and beat.

6. *Anamnesis and value-free science*

We must sharply distinguish anamnetic interest, which acquires form in the practices of commemoration and remembrance, from the interest of the historical sciences, which acquires form in historical research. Historical research is not a practical but a theoretical project. It is the systematic and critical approach to the past by delving into historical sources, weighing historical facts, and seeking intentional or causal explanations for the events of bygone days.¹² Historical research is the distinctive method of approach of historical science, but it also typifies in many respects a number of affinitive disciplines such as paleography, cultural anthropology and the social sciences.

As anamnetic interest profiles itself in the first history, so does historical interest in the second history. Yet there is some terminological confusion about what must be understood by the first and second history. Consider, for example, Meijer Cornelis Smit (1911-1981), a philosopher of history at the Free University in Amsterdam. His famous lectures, *Beschouwingen over de geschiedenis en de tijd der geschiedenis* [Reflections on history and the time of history] — collected in Smit (1987a) *De eerste en tweede geschiedenis* and in translation in Smit (1987b) *Writings on God and History* and Smit (2002), *Toward a Christian Conception of History* — form an impressive essay that presents his distinction between the first and second history. Yet his conception of the second history and thus also of the difference from the first history is not uniform.

¹² Historical explanations can be based on the intentions or motives of historical agents. That results in *intentional* or interpretative explanations. In history, however, natural and social factors such as climate, soil, demography and the state of technology also play a role. Intentional behaviors also often have unintended collateral consequences. All these factors beg for *causal* explanations. See also Lorenz (1990, 78-95).

In his essay one can discover three threads:

1. In Smit's original presentation the first history means that all things and phenomena exist in a meaningful connection with each other and their divine Origin. The second history is the struggle to realize this original relation: historical reality is "permanently caught up in" and "intrinsically conditioned by" the primary history.
2. In the continuation Smit presents a more negative description of the second history. It is now "ruled by a polarity." On the one hand, it is "dependent" on the first history; on the other hand, it "tries at the same time to escape from it" and from its meaning. Thus the second history can be seen as a "counter-movement."
3. In concluding, Smit presents a much more formal description or definition of the second history. Here he calls the second history the continuous history of how things came about. In this regard he speaks simply of "the history of the historians."¹³

My own distinction between the first and second history corresponds in many respects with Smit's analysis. I see the first history as a supply channel of meaning conformable to Smit's initial typification. After all, it makes ongoing dialogue with the past possible and so forms the gathering space for a personal and collective turning inward toward meanings of yore. In this connection I see the second history conformable to Smit's third typification, as the domain of research of historians. Here there is no thought of an individual or collective turning inward toward the meaning of things but a reconstruction of the factual and causal connection of things. In the second history I see also, however, a moment of "escape" like that mentioned by Smit in his second typification. Yet unlike Smit, I want to construe this escaping from the first history in such a way that it is not for negative but for methodological reasons that historical science endeavors to hold off the question of meaning.

We have to understand correctly this methodological reserve toward the question of meaning. Historical science is not value-free *per se*. It is, as cultural history, necessarily connected with the values present in the material it investigates. The historian always encounters developments of meaning, for cultural history is by definition a movement of meaning directed toward the realization of values. Every political or religious community, every work group or family unit, represents and realizes certain values. It is not nature but culture, not the heartbeat or blood pressure of the Athenian statesman Pericles (495-429 B.C.) but the realization of his legislation that intrigues the historian, for Pericles' laws are an expression of the values that were established in Greek culture. The historian cannot ignore these values. For in the absence of insight into the religious and moral codes that prevailed at the time, he will lack the antennae to follow what was at stake in the struggle in the Athenian political arena.

Heinrich Rickert asserted a century ago — attached as he was, as a neokantian, to the notion of value-free science — that historical science is not based on valuating (*wertende*) but on value-oriented (*wertbeziehende*) concept

¹³ See for these three points Smit (1987b, 258, 266, 269) and Smit (2002, 367, 373, 378). Cf. Smit (1987a, 100-101, 108, 114).

formation (Rickert 1929, 339-359). In his view historians are oriented to values, but this involvement is not personal but purely formal. Researchers orient themselves to values that are found in the historical material. Their own value judgments play no role, or at least must play no role. For historical science is in itself value-free.

I do not share Rickert's theory of history, however subtle and nuanced it may be.¹⁴ What is the relation between historical science and values? The involvement of historians with values is never a purely formal connection. In some way historians always evince personal or social engagement. Why is Athenian legislation or the organization of health care in the Roman Empire or the structure of the medieval manor subject to historical investigations? It is so because today too we face the civil challenge of making laws and organizing health and labor. In every epoch we face the task of giving form anew to values and ideals and of translating them into policy. It is this shaping of standards in our own time that challenges us, with the reliable means made available by historical science, to reflect on past realizations of values.

The historical method places far-reaching restrictions on such research. Historians are not policy makers, not concerned parties. They are not called to promote what is of value, only to study what happened. They have to analyze and systematize, that is, to bring facts to light and arrange them in a coherent explanatory pattern. Even when their attention is drawn to historical values by an implicit engagement with the values of their own time, they seldom pause to consider the bond between past and present. They do not make their involvement in the first history explicit. Historical science does not commemorate in the way of practical everyday life, where commemoration sometimes occurs on a daily basis, as in life in a cloister.¹⁵ Academic research is connected with values, with personal involvement. But this involvement is no more than an indirect and implicit relation, often unnoticed by others.

I know, in the theory of history there are also other views. Nowadays, one popular notion is just the opposite of the value-orientation here defended. Anamnestic effort, so it says, deepens the personal involvement of people with the meaning of things, but it is tied to a standpoint and therefore subjective. Academic history in contrast is free of standpoints. It offers — if I may use a term of Thomas Nagel's — a 'view from nowhere' (Nagel 1986). It is a technical matter, thus objective. Well, there is something to be said against such objectivism, not without reason also called "*naïve* realism." The establishing of real facts, as we saw, already requires a values perspective. Moreover, no one is helped by naked facts. Describing facts is also always at the same time explain-

¹⁴ From the historical diversity of cultural values, Rickert tried to deduce suprahistorical or universal values — a speculative affair since cultural values are never universal but always particular. There is an affinity between various cultural values, to be sure, as between Roman and Old German law. This affinity demonstrates that values are rooted in universal normative principles, but these principles have diverged into a multitude of particular ideals. There are only a limited number of normative principles, e.g. the principle of justice. Are these principles suprahistorical? They can only be surmised on the basis of their particular realizations; one can never deduce them (Klapwijk 1994).

¹⁵ In the ecclesiastical calendar the Sunday 'Reminiscere' is devoted explicitly to commemoration.

ing facts, i.e. seeking connections with other facts. Can there be a strictly “technical history,” as the British writer Herbert Butterfield suggested? It must be doubted, because the real historian — as is clear from the works of Butterfield himself — enters into conversation with the past. He seeks to understand the past in the light of the present. Despite whatever Butterfield may assert, historical science is based on a subjective interpretation.¹⁶

Historical science may have a subjective or interpretative side, but commemoration has an objective or factual side. Commemoration is based on personal involvement and is not free of bias, to be sure. One who commemorates is disposed to overstate the missteps of others and to embellish his own past. Yet commemoration is not a blind endeavor, it is dialogical: through dialogue commemoration seeks to penetrate to the truth of matters. Compare it with infatuation. People say that “love makes blind” but one can better say “love makes clairvoyant” because a lover sees in his beloved something that eludes third parties. In the same way, one who commemorates has an eye for something that escapes outsiders. Commemoration is at once subjective and objective. Consider a question like the following: What does the former behavior of the Netherlands as a colonial power in Indonesia mean to Dutch people today? The answer will always turn out to be somewhat subjective, because it comes from people who were involved in the colonial system. Yet in spite of that their intention nowadays is to get a clearer view of the trouble, conflict and pain of the past. It is not the neutral observer or the specialist in sources but the one who mourns who feels the massive burden of history when he cries out, “Never again!”

A historian *pur sang* also experiences involvement with his object but in a different manner. He respects the facts, and he desires to get beyond subjective intentions and expose incorrect representations. A renowned example is the historical critique presented in the fifteenth century by the Renaissance scholar Lorenzo Valla. With his philological fillet knife he exposed the inauthenticity of the so-called Donation of Constantine, the supposed transfer by the emperor Constantine (272-337) of secular authority over Rome to pope Sylvester I as thanks for his victory over Maxentius. Valla’s critique was a brilliant unraveling of a fraudulent representation of matters meant to legitimize the *Patrimonium Petri*, the Ecclesiastical State in Rome. Yet I persist, anamnestic criticism cuts deeper. Historical criticism is in principle noncommittal. Valla’s proof was based on sources that were at hand, but he avoided the questions concerning political consequences, moral implications and religious legitimacy. One who commemorates has moved past noncommitment

Can we say with Cicero: *Historia vitae magister*? Is history the teacher of life? For one who commemorates, that is not a question. Commemoration is meaningful precisely because the past can or threatens to repeat itself. *L’histoire se répète*. We must draw lessons from the past in the service of the present. Historians see things differently. *L’histoire ne se répète jamais*. History never

¹⁶ Herbert Butterfield (1900-1979) was a Christian historian. He presented himself as the champion of a non-interpretative or ‘technical history’ as an antidote to the ideological propaganda of marxist and utilitarian historians. See Sewell (2005, ch. 8).

repeats itself. We can draw no lessons from history, whether by way of warning or of imitation, for a chasm looms between the past and the present. Events are accidental, facts unique, circumstances incomparable. In this train of thought generally an allusion follows to Blaise Pascal's remark in his *Pensées*: "If Cleopatra's nose had been shorter, the world would have turned out differently" (Pascal 1960, section 2.162). In short, there is nothing to be learned from history.¹⁷ Or is there after all? The famous Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt was more cautious. He said that history does not render judicious for the next time (*klug für ein andermal*) so much as it renders wise for all times (*weise für immer*). Burckhardt did not deny the singular, unique course of history but he also believed the historian should remain alert to characteristics in humans that always reappear, such as nationalist aspirations.

Then we have Nietzsche's radical position. Nietzsche detested the methodical reserve of historians. He saw a shortcoming of creativity in their intercourse with the past and pilloried their way of working. In *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Geschichte* he observes: "There is a degree of insomnia, of rumination, of historical meaning that damages and ultimately destroys what is alive." And also: "The speech of the past is always the speech of an oracle: only as a builder of the future, as one knowing the present, will you defeat it." From there his philippics against the supineness of historical criticism: "Nowhere is it carried through, it is always and again just a critique; and this critique again is not carried through, it just undergoes yet another critique" (Nietzsche 1963, section 2.6, 2.1, and 2.5). It is not the result of the historical method, say, the exposed contradictions between moral systems, that paralyzes life; no, the problem is implicit, as he sees it, in the scientific method itself. In his view, the obsessive preoccupation with objective facts leads to noncommitment. A critical elite want to puncture taboos and pillory moralism but will not lift a finger themselves.

Nietzsche goes too far in jeering at the independent and autonomous position of academic history. Yet the danger is not imaginary that a nation's official history and the anamnestic recollections of the people may drift far apart. This was the case in former East bloc countries. The main theme of socialist history was the worldwide comradeship of the workers' movement in the face of western capitalism. Nevertheless, the revival of virulent ultranationalism in the Balkans during the nineties showed with crystal clarity that a fire always continued to rage beneath the surface fed by subjective experiences, traumatic reminiscences of an unassimilated past. The real history of the Balkans was not focused on the international solidarity of socialist countries but on the cruel Ustashi regime in the Second World War (Jasenovac), the assassination of the archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria as the starting point of the First World War (Sarajevo, 1914), and the atrocities of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. It even went back to the medieval struggle of

¹⁷ See for example E. Jonker: "History is not a practical discipline, there are no lessons to be drawn from it" (1992-1993, 84).

the Byzantines and Bulgars against the Turks, a conflict that concentrates today on the controversial status of Kosovo.¹⁸

The discrepancy between official and anamnestic history lives on elsewhere as well, for example in the ubiquitously revived self-consciousness of Islam. By returning to the roots of their culture and religion, Islamic nations endeavor universally to reformulate their identity, which was repressed for a long time by a western, colonial perspective. In the women's movement too resistance to the official history has been the order of the day. It manifests itself in women's studies, which protest against a macho culture's male depiction of history, in which the independent female spirit is or was marginalized or stigmatized as witchcraft. A similar counterword was manifest in the protest of the Indians in Latin America against public commemoration of the European discovery of America five hundred years earlier. The Indians opted for nonparticipation because they regarded their history of suffering as irreconcilable with the official presentation in postcolumbian historiography.

To bridge the contradictions signaled here it is currently not unusual to make a distinction between *Forschungen* and *Darstellung*, that is, between analytically focused historical research and the more synthetically oriented historiography. By transferring historical phenomena out of argumentative and into narrative discourse, historical writing attains a freer elaboration of the facts. Indeed, in this way the historiographer can help his or her readers to take steps in the direction of commemoration. The need to commemorate is especially understandable when it comes to writing contemporary history. After all, the more clearly one's own times come into view, the more difficult it becomes, even for the writer of history, to remain faithful to the ideal of strict impartiality. The historical context begins to interfere with the historian's own living sphere of interest. If something like a complete "melting of horizons" (Gadamer) does not set in, then at any rate a need arises for dialogue and interruptions.

Some writers of contemporary history play emphatically on the anamnestic need. Their recounting of the facts is accompanied by expressions of agreement or of disapproval. They do not hesitate to present the facts in such a way that their relevance to life today is conspicuous. In the Netherlands a striking example of engaged historical writing was produced by Loe de Jong with his standard work *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (De Jong 1969-1991). To the judgment of others, among them the historian Hans Blom, the series was too emphatically conditioned by notions of on the "right" side or on the "wrong" side during the war (Blom 1983). A renowned example from the nineteenth century is the finely nuanced study *Über die Epochen der neueren Geschichte*, a series of lectures that Leopold von Ranke held in 1854 for King Maximilian II of Bavaria. Time and again they ended in discussions of historical

¹⁸ The conflict that reverberates even today between Serbs and ethnic Albanians about the status of Kosovo must be regarded against the background of the defeat suffered by count Lazar at the hands of the Moslems in the Battle on the Blackbird Field near Kosovo Polje on June 28, 1389, the subsequent murder of the Turkish sultan Murat I, and the regained freedom of the Serbs after that, legitimated in the Treaty of San Stefano (1878). This conflict grew for the Serbs into a mythical belief in their own folk, culture and religion, rooted in the sacred soil of Kosovo.

tendencies and their implications for the present (von Ranke 1959). I regard such an approach as not unacceptable as long as it is publicly acknowledged that in such cases academic history acquires the character of *applied science*, that is, of a science that is made serviceable to the practical and anamnestic orientation in life.

7. *The relation between anamnestic and academic history*

This brings me to my final question. How does anamnestic history relate to academic history? Must anamnesis first put itself in the service of academic history and its awesome constructions of historical reality? Or does the latter with all its critical and constructive efforts ultimately serve the anamnestic interest?

Many choose for the first option. Proceeding from the Cartesian separation of subject and object, the dichotomy between reason and (historical) reality, they cling to the autonomous status and strictly objective standards of historical science. Scientific theory establishes facts; let people decide afterwards for themselves whether and if so how to attach personal meanings.

I take the other path. I believe in the relative autonomy of historical science, but I also believe in the inherent bond of subject and object. And I set value on commemoration as the intimate dialogue that goes on between humans and their historical past. Earlier we saw that in everyday life people are “entangled” in histories. We also observed that there are fundamental reservations to make about the independent and value-free status of science. Finally, we discovered that historical science arose out of a need for practical orientation and that historiography chronically manifests tendencies to play up to anamnesis. These are some of the reasons why I espouse the notion of theoretical sciences in the service of practice. Thus the question arises: How should historical science be able to serve or guide people, who are enmeshed in history?

To answer these questions, I want to emphasize four points that also recapitulate the quintessence of my analysis thus far: historical science informs, explains, criticizes and evaluates for the benefit of anamnestic practice.

a. Historical science informs. People have limited insight and short memories, and their recollections fade or are repressed. Supporting pillars of tradition — narratives, hymns, symbols, and rituals — sustain recollection but also effect one-sided image formation. It is historians who nourish our recollections with books, articles, narratives, commemorative speeches, jubilee anthologies, historical expositions, documentaries and ever so much more. “Lest we forget.”¹⁹ In this way they channel and rectify our connectedness with the past with reliable information.

b. Historical science explains. It exposes intentional and causal relations that are ignored by anamnesis. It relates historical developments not only to human intentions and deliberations but also to climatological, economic and social

¹⁹ Thus the title of the book by Delleman (1949) about the resistance of the churches in the Netherlands to the German occupier during World War II.

circumstances. Thus research concerning France during the *ancien régime* has been able to establish causal connections between economic dislocations (failed harvests), social turbulence, demographic shifts and the political ideas that led to the great revolution of 1789. It is true that the emphasis on causal connections can get out of hand and make a caricature of the past, as happens all too often, to my mind, in quantitative history writing.²⁰ Nevertheless, in general causal explanations enrich our judgment of complex historical phenomena.

c. Historical science criticizes. Anamnetic reflection is often constrained by personal interest, short-sightedness, or superstition. The historical tale is embellished. Kings become the sons of gods, warriors heroes, believers saints, opponents morph into cowards, brutes and villains. Historical criticism explodes legend formation and clears the air for commemoration. Historians have proven, for example, that during World War II it was not the Germans but the Russians who murdered more than a thousand Polish officers in the forests of Katyn. Historians have established that Lyndon Johnson did not speak the truth when on August 4, 1964, in order to justify the attack on North Vietnam, he declared that American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin had “returned fire” on North Vietnamese patrol boats. Historians have shown that the centuries long conflict between Jews and Christians did not have a biblical origin let alone justify Christian anti-Semitism; it set in after the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.).

d. Historical science evaluates. Unlike commemoration, the academic approach to history is not explicitly involved with values. The researcher gauges the pattern of values inherent in the culture under study; yet in doing so he cannot free himself from present-day interests, such as environmental values. Thus from an ecological perspective scientists have uncovered why after 900 B.C., long before the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors, the Mayan Indians abandoned their cities in Yucatan in a very short time without leaving any traces of violence: a catastrophe occurred connected with soil exhaustion and failed water management. All in all, it is no wonder that every generation rewrites its history. We experience older studies as superseded and no longer relevant. Books about royal, political, military or diplomatic history we now tend to leave aside, because we have other concerns than the honor of the king, nation, flag or fatherland. Social engagement leads us to inquire into the circumstances in which the lower classes lived during the period of the French Revolution. Feminist interest focuses our attention on the historically marginalized position of women in earlier centuries. Respect for human rights draws us to historical studies about the Inquisition, health care, the dispensation of justice, and so forth.

²⁰ Quantitative history seeks to explain the past in a strictly causal manner. Yet dates, weather records, almanacs, market reports, demographic charts, economic models and counterfactual calculations as produced in the cliometric studies of the *New Economic History* (R. W. Fogel, A. Fishlow) and the *Histoire quantitative* (J. Marczewski, J.-C. Toutain, et al.), only acquire scientific value within a hermeneutical horizon of understanding (Klapwijk 1974).

I come to my final observation. There is a not insignificant difference between the anamnestic and the academic interest, between lived history and constructed history. Lived history precedes constructed history, not only in time but also in rank. Life is not for science, science is for life. Commemorating, we bear our recollections with us, but not as the loose pieces of a jigsaw puzzle needed to complete a detached picture of reality designed by historians. No, let the historians construct their picture of the past *for us* while taking into account their own calibrated methodical limitations, so that we, enmeshed in history as we are, may be better furnished to consider who we are, whence we came, and whither we desire to go.

Can this desire deepen, in Walter Benjamin's words, into a Messianic expectation? Perhaps! It is said that there are people, especially amongst the victims of history, who commemorate the past so intensely that they experience every moment of the future as a straight gate through which the Messiah could return.

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