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A Strained Relationship

Epistemology and Historiography in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Germany and Britain

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A Strained Relationship: Epistemology and Historiography in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Germany and Britain

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The concept of the nation and the epistemology of historical narrations

Writing national histories was presumably the most prominent issue for German and British historiography in the nineteenth century. Even though this statement might be a simplification, generally speaking, it is appropriate: that is, at least when we look only at academic historiography.[1] If, however, we turned our attention to so-called amateur history or the histories of academic outsiders, we would definitely find a more diverse result.[2] Bearing in mind the limitations of this approach, it still appears to me to be very promising indeed to examine the different concepts of the nation, and to look for invented national traditions that were legitimized by such histories. These questions normally accompany analyses of the professionalization of history as an academic discipline.

However, in this chapter, I shall address these problems from a somewhat different view. I shall scrutinize the relation between epistemology and writing national histories. My main question will be: How do varying epistemologies translate into different concepts of the nation?

My starting point is the observation that the concept of the nation had a two-fold function in German Historism:[3] On the one hand, it helped to strengthen

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[1] There are impressive exceptions such as Jakob Burkhardt or Karl Lamprecht. Even Leopold von Ranke did not write national histories in a narrow sense. I shall return to this later.

[2] Various recently published or forthcoming anthologies and monographs deal with different national traditions of amateur history in Europe and the United States. See, e.g., M. O'Dowd and I. Porciani (eds), 'History Women', *Storia della Storiografia* 46 (2004). S. Paletschek (ed.), *Popular Historiographies in the 19th and 20th Century* (Oxford, 2010).

[3] With this translation of the German word 'Historismus', I am following S. Berger who suggests that the notion 'Historism' should be used for the epoch of German historiography that was dominant from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, whilst 'Historicism'

the contested identity of the nation-state that had not yet come into being.[4] The mission of national historiography, and this also applies to British historiography, was mainly to invent a shared tradition and thus to legitimize nation building through history.[5] On the other hand, the term 'nation' also had a narrative (narratological) function; it made it easier for historians to identify their definite subject. The concept of the nation helped them to sort out which events were relevant to a certain nation's history and which events apparently had nothing to do with it. German and British historians of that time usually tended to deduce the nation's present identity from its history. In his popular 'History of England', Thomas Babington Macaulay judges foregone events in direct relation to his concept of the nation. Regarding the Magna Carta, for example, he wrote: 'Here commences the history of the English nation.'[6] T. B. Macaulay was no exception in that respect. His contemporary colleagues also applied their concept of the nation to their findings, and then composed a narration that supported this very concept. Did they not realize that this reasoning was circular? Did they not feel that the nation was a concept they had defined themselves? Did they really believe in the essentiality of their nations? Were they still naïve positivists?[7]

This short reflection leads us to a tricky theoretical problem: How does epistemology define the status of the nation? In the following pages, I shall take an empirical approach to this challenging question. To illustrate how the concept of the nation worked in nineteenth-century historiography, I shall first contrast it with its role in eighteenth-century histories in Germany and Britain. I shall do this by broaching the issue of different velocities of professionalization in

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should be reserved for Popper's philosophy. See S. Berger, *The Search for Normality: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Germany since 1800* (Oxford, 1997).

[4] A helpful survey of the rapidly expanding research in this field during the last decade is given in S. Weichlein, 'Nationalismus und Nationalstaat in Deutschland und Europa. Ein Forschungsüberblick', *Neue Politische Literatur* 51 (2006), 265–351. Older research on the subject is summarized in D. Langewische, 'Nation, Nationalismus, Nationalstaat: Forschungsstand und Forschungsperspektiven', in *Neue Politische Literatur* 40 (1995), 190–236.

[5] S. Berger, 'Geschichten von der Nation. Einige vergleichende Thesen zur deutschen, englischen, französischen und italienischen Nationalgeschichtsschreibung seit 1800', in C. Conrad and S. Conrad (eds), *Die Nation schreiben. Geschichtswissenschaft im internationalen Vergleich* (Göttingen, 2002), pp. 49–77.

[6] T. B. Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James II*, vol. 1 (London and Bombay, 1906 [1848]), p. 8. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1468/1468-8.txt (accessed 16 June 2009).

[7] Ranke was also very frequently interpreted as an empiricist or even a positivist. John Warren also pinpoints this danger in 'The Rankean tradition in British historiography, 1840–1950', in S. Berger, H. Feldner and K. Passmore (eds), *History, Theory, and Practice* (London, 2003), pp. 23–41, here p. 24.

the two countries. Then, I shall take a closer look at the 'Histories of England' written by David Hume and Catharine Macaulay, before comparing them with August Schlözer's and Johann Gatterer's concepts of history. The main focus of this section will be on the enlightened epistemology in Britain and Germany and its effects on the concept of the nation and the respective modes of narrating the past. Subsequently, I shall relate my findings to the Historists' epistemology, dealing mainly with Leopold von Ranke's understanding of the English nation as he developed it in his *History of England.* I shall conclude by asking whether there was a particular Historist point of view that could explain why they understood historiography as writing the history of the nation. To round off my central question, I shall also ask whether there was an Enlightenment way of writing history that implied a different understanding of the nation.

Various velocities in the shaping of German and British historiography

In 1864, Leopold von Ranke characterized David Hume's merits in the introduction of his lecture concerning the *Parlamentarische Geschichte von England in den beiden letzten Jahrhunderten* (*Parliamentary History of England over the Last Two Centuries*) as follows: 'A subtle, acute, educated thinker, who seems to have been even more important in things he initiated than in what he realized himself.'[8] Indeed, David Hume and some of his colleagues initiated something new in British historiography. Their predecessors, known as 'antiquarians', imparted knowledge in cumbersome texts that were difficult to read. The so-called 'literary historians'[9] like David Hume, Edward Gibbon or Catharine Macaulay, however, started to talk about history in an entertaining and amusing way. The change was so fundamental that one could speak of a 'narrative turn' in the British historiography of the Age of Enlightenment. The interest of the British public was tremendous. Publications focusing on British history alone soon accounted for more than a third of all literary publications.[10] This enthusiasm encouraged famous writers, such as Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding or Jonathan Swift to write historical narrations as well. For them, composing national history turned out to be a profitable way of making a living.

Nowadays, it is common knowledge that the emergence of a national literature deeply influences the writing of history. For the literacy of German historiography, this still took a long time to blossom. Even though David Hume

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[8] L. von Ranke, 'Parlamentarische Geschichte von England in den beiden letzten Jahrhunderten', 28.4.1864, in Ranke: *Aus Werk und Nachlass*, Bd. IV: *Vorlesungseinleitungen*, ed. V. Dotterweich and W. P. Fuchs (Munich and Vienna, 1975), p. 362.

[9] See D. Looser, *British Women Writers and the Writing of History, 1670–1820* (Baltimore, MD, and London, 2000), p. 12.

[10] Looser, *Women Writers*, p. 10.

was widely read during the European Enlightenment, it was only 50 years later, under the impact of the classical literature in Weimar, that Friedrich Schiller, Johann Gottfried Herder and others transferred the new literary style into historiography. Historism accomplished the literacy of German historiography during the 'long nineteenth century'.

This may explain why Leopold von Ranke still recommended David Hume's *History of England* for his students more than a hundred years after it had first been published. In respect of its style, the science of history in Germany certainly was a latecomer. In respect to the issue of professionalization, in contrast, it was definitely at the cutting edge.

Already during the German 'Aufklärungshistorie', which means the academic historiography of the Enlightenment, scholarly historians such as Johann Christoph Gatterer, August Ludwig von Schlözer and many others were developing a clear definition of an academic subject.[11] They shaped what historians of the late twentieth century called a 'disciplinary matrix'.[12] This early appearance of a strong professional identity had some important implications. It defined the essential curriculum vitae for a scholarly historian and excluded every deviance. Thus, since the eighteenth century, it was unthinkable for a literary writer in Germany to switch to writing scholarly historiography. This early professionalization also led to a strict exclusion of all female authors in German historiography. Women were admitted to neither scholarly training nor meetings in the private rooms of academics like Leopold von Ranke. In an impressive monograph and several essays, Bonnie Smith, and other scholars like Natalie Zemon Davis or Billie Melman, have pointed out how deeply gendered the making of the academic discipline was.[13] This gendered division

[11] Horst Walter Blanke and Dirk Fleischer list 69 universities in German-speaking countries (including Austria and Switzerland) with chairs of history in the eighteenth century – Church history not included! See Index of Chairs of History, in Blanke and Fleischer (eds), *Theoretiker der deutschen Aufklärungshistorie*, vol. 1. *Die theoretische Begründung der Geschichte als Fachwissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1990), pp. 103–23.

[12] Pim den Boer's opinion is that neither in Germany nor in France had there been an influential proto-professionalization before 1900, see 'Vergleichende Historiographiegeschichte – einige Beobachtungen insbesondere zur Professionalisierung in Frankreich und Deutschland', in M. Middell, G. Lingelbach and F. Hadler (eds), *Historische Institute im internationalen Vergleich* (Leipzig, 2001), pp. 135–48.

[13] B. Smith, 'Gender and the Practices of Scientific History: The Seminar and Archival Research in the Nineteenth Century', *American Historical Review* 100 (1995), 1150–76, and B. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, 1998); N. Z. Davis, 'Gender and Genre: Women As Historical Writers, 1400–1820', in P. H. Labalme (ed.), *Beyond their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past* (New York and London, 1984), pp. 153–82; B. Melman, 'Gender, History and Memory: The Invention of Women's Past in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', *History and Memory* 5 (1993), 5–41.

of academic and amateur history was simultaneously connected to specific patterns of narration.[14]

Narrativization and professionalization thus shaped German and British historiography in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with variable velocity. These developments coincided with another shift pointed out by many philosophers and historians. Michel Foucault was neither the first nor the last to mention this shift. However, his metaphorical wording became somehow paradigmatic for its occurrence, and it fits into the centre of my concern in this chapter: the new 'order of things', which emerged after the French classical age of the eighteenth century, was deeply structured by the centrality of the human being. Following Foucault, the historiography of the classical age was determined by common laws and constants. The World and Man together formed the body of history. Since the nineteenth century, Foucault continues, there has come a 'naked form of human historicity into being: the fact that the human as such is confronted with the event'.[15]

Epistemological break, narrativization and professionalization – how do these developments connect with one another? What do they mean to authors of historical narrations? And how can we distinguish different ways of historical thinking? How does narrativization connect to epistemology? In the following, I shall deal with these theoretical problems by analysing the question at issue in this volume: How does the concept of the nation work in historically and culturally, not to say nationally, different contexts? And how does epistemology shape the understanding of the nation at the same time?

By questioning the epistemology underlying both narrativization and professionalization, one can reveal a strained relationship between the 'order of things' and the mode of narration. A closer look at this relationship delivers an insight into the significant contradictions of historiography and epistemology in Germany and Britain during the long transition from early modern to modern times.

Hume, Macaulay and the unity of historical narration in the age of Enlightenment

When Hume published his three-volume study *A Treatise of Human Nature*,[16] it did not gain the attention he had hoped for. Even though he wrote a revision and continued his work with *An Enquiry Concerning Human*

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[14] A. Epple, 'Questioning the Canon: Popular Historiography by Women in Britain and Germany (1750–1850)', in Paletschek (ed.), *Popular Historiographies*. A. Epple, *Empfindsame Geschichtsschreibung. Eine Geschlechtergeschichte der Historiographie zwischen Aufklärung und Historismus* (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna, 2003).

[15] M. Foucault, *Die Ordnung der Dinge* (Frankfurt/M., 1974), p. 443.

[16] D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* ed. by. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1978 [1848]).

Understanding,[17] this did not advance his academic career. The publications attracted little attention among his colleagues.[18] Hume made the best of things, managing to get by as a secretary at the military embassies in Vienna and Turin. Eventually, he became the librarian of the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh. Hume's employment provided him with the resources to pursue his interest in history. At this time, he developed the plan of writing his highly successful six-volume *History of England*, which was published from 1754 to 1762.[19] Financial needs were not the decisive factor. In his short autobiography, Hume mentions some additional reasons:

> I thought that I was the only historian, that had at once neglected present power, interest, and authority, and the cry of popular prejudices; and as the subject was suited to every capacity, I expected proportional applause.[20]

Even though Hume had never written any historical works, he regarded himself as the only historian who was able to write an appropriate history of England. This self-appraisal underlines the fact that at that time, the people of Great Britain had no fixed scholarly training or given curriculum. Hume became a historian by writing history. The main concern of his *History of England* was to neglect 'present power' and the 'cry of popular prejudices'. If we follow Hume's argument that history writing should not depend on present power or political interests, we feel that he then had to present an alternative motivation for writing it. To comprehend his thoughts, it is helpful to take a closer look at what he says about narrations in general and, in particular, what he says about historical narrations.

Hume's starting point was the Aristotelian theory of the 'unity of action'. He was convinced that 'in all production, as well as in the epic and tragic, there was a certain unity required'.[21] The concept of unity in a narrative composition leads us to the very centre of Hume's concept of history and, actually, to the centre of today's theory of history.[22] What reasons can be given for the unity of a historical narration? Does the historian 'find' the unity in the historical events, or is it something the author of a historical narration has to add to historical events? And, last but not least, how do historical events connect to each other?

[17] D. Hume, 'An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding', in *The philosophical Works of David Hume*, vol. IV (Edinburgh, 1826).

[18] D. Hume, 'My own Life', in Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, vol. I (1789), p. v.

[19] Hume, 'My own Life', pp. vi–xii.

[20] Hume, 'My own Life', p. xi.

[21] Hume, *Enquiry*, p. 27.

[22] Think, for example, of Reinhart Koselleck or Paul Ricoeur who are deeply concerned with the concept of unity in history, especially with the unity of a historical narration.

Let us have a look at Hume's justification for the unity of his *History of England*. Where and how did he find it? In his autobiography, he gives a retrospective answer: 'I commenced with the accession of the House of Stuart, an epoch when, I thought, the misrepresentations of faction began chiefly to take place.'[23] Surprisingly, he argues along neither historical nor philosophical lines, but in terms of the works of his predecessors. He starts his narration at the point where their 'misrepresentations of faction' had begun.[24] According to his self-description, it was not a certain political conviction that provoked his *History of England*, but his wish to correct the misrepresentations of his older colleagues. His longing for historical objectivity thus appears to have been very strong.

The reactions to his first volume strongly disappointed him: 'I was assailed by one cry of reproach, disapprobation, and even detestation; English, Scotch, and Irish, Whig and Tory, churchman and secretary, freethinker and religionist, patriot and courtier, unite in their rage against the man who had presumed to shed a generous tear for the fate of Charles I [...].'[25] The second volume, Hume continues, 'happened to give less displeasure to the Whigs, and was better received'.[26] This point marked the beginning of the success story of Hume's *History of England*. Most important in this respect is, however, that Hume did not base the unity of his *History of England* on either the Aristotelian unity of action or on historical causality; he derived it from former histories of England.[27] As we shall see, this seems to have been a clever decision as it released him from having to give an explanation for his choice.

The significance of the decision on how and when to let a history of England begin becomes more lucid when we take another look at Hume's theoretical concept of history. Hume describes his own studies as being opposed to popular prejudices. Both the concept of unity of action and the concept of impartiality rely on his theory of causality. Hume, who, being a historian, never used

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[23] Hume, 'My own Life', p. ix.

[24] With his *History of England*, Hume turns on the so-called 'antiquarians'. They only compiled data. Hume, instead, knows about the importance of the presentation. The controversy between the scholars or antiquarians and literary historians like Hume is commonplace in the literature on the history of British historiography. (See, e.g., Looser, *Women Writers*, p. 12.)

[25] Hume, 'My own Life', pp. ix f.

[26] Hume, 'My own Life', p. xi.

[27] D. Hume, *History of England: From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, in eight volumes, new edn (Dublin, 1775). Here again, Hume limits his project to the material he found in the books of his colleagues: 'Neglecting the more early history of Britain, we shall only consider the state of the inhabitants, as it appeared to the Romans on their invasion of this country' (ibid., p. 4).

primary sources, tried to introduce some new claims into the writing of history; these were impartiality and causality.[28]

How does Hume define the subject of historiography? How does his concept of unity connect with causality? And what has causality to do with impartiality? Hume answered these questions in his philosophical *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. When he addresses historiography and other narrative compositions for the first time, he highlights not only the above-mentioned unity of action but also the importance of a plan and the existence of a primary objective. Only a plan and an objective can generate, according to Hume, the unity of a narration. But where does the plan and the objective come from?

Hume enumerates three principles of the association of ideas: '*Resemblance, Contiguity* in time and space, and *Cause* or *Effect*.'[29] For Hume, the most important connection is the association by cause or effect. Subsequently, Hume composes the programme that will influence the European Enlightenment the most. It is worth quoting the central passage at some length:

> But the most usual species of connexion among the different events, which enter into any narrative composition, is that of cause and effect; while the historian traces the series of actions according to their natural order, remounts to their secret springs and principles, and delineates their most remote consequences. He chooses for his subject a certain portion of that great chain of events, which compose the history of mankind: Each link in this chain he endeavours to touch in his narration: Sometimes unavoidable ignorance renders all his attempts fruitless: Sometimes he supplies by conjecture what is wanting in knowledge: And always, he is sensible that the more unbroken the chain is, which he presents to his readers, the more perfect is his production. He sees that the knowledge of causes is not only the most satisfactory, this relation or connexion being the strongest of all others, but also the most instructive; since it is by this knowledge alone we are enabled to control events and govern futurity.[30]

For a better understanding of the Enlightenment concept of History, we have to clarify the metaphors used here. Hume speaks of a 'great chain of events, which compose the history of mankind'. The historian has to trace the series of actions according to their 'natural order'. The quoted passage implies that the natural order itself relies on the principle of cause and effect. One may conclude

[28] Ranke's opinion was that Hume had had access to original documents in the Advocates' library, but that he did not know how to treat them well. See Ranke, *Parlamentarische Geschichte* 28:4 (1864). See also Looser, *Women Writers*, p. 14.

[29] Hume, *Enquiry*, p. 25.

[30] Hume, *Enquiry*, p. 27.

that the most urgent concern of the historian is to reveal the interaction of cause and effect. In doing so, he has, according to Hume, always to bear in mind that 'the more unbroken the chain is [...] the more perfect is his production.' The perfection of production thus depends on the intactness of the chain of historical events. This is a very interesting statement. It expresses Hume's notion that historical events are connected by the principle of causality. It also means that the historian has to point out this causality in his narration. The truth of a historical narration then lies in the coherence of the historian's argumentation. Causality thus guarantees the unity and coherence of historical events.[31]

This point of view should not be confused with a so-called 'narratological position': *avant la lettre*. Instead, this statement harbours the conviction that every historian can have the same view of causal interactions of historical events and reveal the same connectivity of the same causes and the same effects. Objectivity, in this worldview, is derived from the natural order of cause and effect. It is not affected at all by the subjectivity of the historian.

We now understand far better what characterizes, according to Hume, the unity of a historical narration: the historian chooses a 'certain portion' of the 'great chain' of history. The unity or coherence of this portion relies on the causal interaction of causes and effects. I would like to stress the point that the historian in this theory does *not* somehow create or invent the unity of his narration. Instead, Hume is convinced that the historian finds unity in the 'natural order' of historical events.

If we apply Hume's theoretical concept to his own historiography, we find some striking inconsistencies. Earlier, I pointed out that he omitted isolating the object of his *History of England*. Instead of a convincing explanation of its unity and causal coherence, he only refers to the works of his predecessors. This 'strained relationship' between Hume's theory of causality and his own practice of writing history reveals a widespread difficulty in European Enlightenment epistemology: If we understand nature as an order of causal interactions, then every event must be effected by another one. Even though this relation has a time index, as the cause antecedes the effect, it is more of a logical relation than a temporal one. It helps to explain a system rather than a diachrony. The apple falls off the tree due to gravity. This epistemology creates significant problems when we turn to history and to historical narration. If this epistemology structures history, something strange happens; it transforms diachronic changes into a synchronic order of causality. As to the systematic relation (synchrony),

[31] J. Gillingham shows some striking similarities between the medieval historian William of Malmesbury and David Hume in terms of their themes and approaches. William wrote, e.g., that he wanted 'to mend the broken chain of our history'. See Gillingham, 'Civilizing the English? The English histories of William of Malmesbury and David Hume', *Historical Research* 74:183 (2001), 17–43, 22. There are also striking differences, however. The most important is the challenge of causality.

it is not difficult to identify cause and effect. Nobody would suggest that gravity is the result of an apple dropping off a tree. When it comes to diachrony, however, things are far more challenging. I have already said that every effect relies on a former cause. How can the historian find the very first event of a 'certain portion'? If every event is to be the effect of a former cause, how could he legitimize his starting or his ending point? Hume's imperative was 'the more unbroken the chain is, [...] the more perfect is his production'. In his *History of England*, Hume solves the problem by taking the given unity from his colleagues' works. He avoids a situation in which he has to give a coherent answer to the challenging question. Although he found a convincing approach in practice, he failed to give us a causal explanation in accordance with his theory. What does this mean with respect to the relation between epistemology and writing national historiographies? My main argument is that enlightened epistemology cannot motivate an inner coherence (unity) of a historical narration. Thus, enlightened epistemology does not translate into a concept of the nation that is determined by this very unity. Of course, Hume and his colleagues used the notion 'nation'. However, he never wrote national historiography.[32] He did not use the concept of the nation in a way that helped him to arrange his history of England. This point becomes clearer when we take a look at Hume's colleagues.

Hume's epistemology was paradigmatic. At first sight, the difference between Hume and his most famous antagonist, Catharine Macaulay (1731–1791)[33] could not be more obvious. Macaulay attacked Hume very sharply, due to his misleading interpretations of the past.[34] She perceived Hume as politically fatuous – as did many of their contemporaries. In her *History of England*, she characterizes Hume's work, which had been published almost fifteen years earlier, as follows:

> That the government of the greater number of our princes, particularly that of Henry the Eighth, and even many parts of Elizabeth's administration, was directly contrary to Magna Charta, and to the rule of all free governments, cannot be disputed with Mr. Hume.[35]

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[32] Arnd Bauerkämper's opinion is that Hume wrote the first complete national history of Great Britain. See A. Bauerkämper, 'Geschichtsschreibung als Projektion. Die Revision der 'Whig Interpretation of History' und die Kritik am Paradigma vom 'deutschen Sonderweg' seit den 1970er Jahren', in S. Berger, P. Lambert and P. Schumann (eds), *Historikerdialoge. Geschichte, Mythos und Gedächtnis im deutsch-britischen kulturellen Austausch 1750–2000* (Göttingen, 2003), pp. 383–438, p. 389.

[33] R. Ludwig, *Rezeption der Englischen Revolution* (Leipzig, 2003), p. 53.

[34] C. Brock, *The Feminization of Fame*, 1750–1830 (New York, 2006), p. 52.

[35] C. Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James I to the Elevation of the House of Hanover*, vol. 6 (London, 1781), p. VIII.

Primarily, she reproaches Hume for his disdain of the Magna Carta. In the first volume, which was published in 1763, Macaulay defines the central duty and effect of historiography:

> From my early youth I have read with delight those histories which exhibit Liberty in its most exalted state, the annals of the Roman and the Greek republics. Studies like these excite that natural love of freedom which lies latent in the breast of every rational being, till it is nipped by the frost of prejudice, or blasted by the influence of vice.[36]

By telling us that she had read the annals of the Roman and Greek republics, Macaulay, of course, wants to qualify herself as an educated author. This strategy is even more common for a woman who wants to enter a 'male territory' than for male colleagues. In addition, she characterizes her own narrations as being modelled on ancient historiography. This can also be understood as a strategy to validate her professionalism. Moreover, she introduces a category she finds most important in history and in history writing: freedom. Macaulay attacks Hume for his real or assumed prejudices. And again, she points out that the truth of his historical writings has to be questioned due to Hume's misleading political opinion. Does this, then, imply that, following Macaulay, historical truth depends on the historian's subjectivity? Do Macaulay's thoughts emanate from different epistemological preconditions to those of Hume's philosophy? Does the controversy between the Tory-historian Hume and the Whig-historian Macaulay show that historical truth depends on political persuasion, or that historical objectivity is entangled with subjectivity? No, on the contrary, Macaulay and Hume share the same epistemology. By no means do they question that historical truth can be found directly in past events. Hume's concept of causal interaction has its equivalent in Macaulay's teleological concept of history. For her, historical events are causes for later effects on an already given path moving towards the growth of liberty. History and Liberty become cause and effect. Macaulay's concept of history has no space for any subjectivity.

In her essay on 'The two bodies of history', Natalie Zemon Davis mentions that Hume and Catherine Macaulay had a polite, but controversial exchange of letters. In this correspondence, Hume expressed his opinion that he and Catherine Macaulay were not having a dispute about facts but about interpretations.[37] This quote from Hume might lead to the impression that he distinguished between somewhat objective facts on the one side and somewhat subjective interpretations of these facts on the other. I have a different reading of this statement, however: It would fit far better into his philosophy to say

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[36] C. Macaulay, *The History of England*, p. VII.
[37] N. Z. Davies, 'History's Two Bodies', *American Historical Review* (*AHR*) 93 (1988), 1–13.

that he was convinced that Catharine Macaulay arranged the correct historical events in a wrong order. In this sense, he could say there was no difference regarding the facts, but there were tremendous differences as to interpretations. In other words, even if Hume spoke of interpretations, this had nothing to do with subjectivity. The correct order of the chain of historical events in his view of the world did not depend on subjectivity but on causal explanation.

As to professionalism, there were also visible differences between the two historians. In contrast to Hume, Macaulay underlined her professionalism with details of her qualifications and a 'historical apparatus' (footnotes) in her books. Whereas Hume never used primary sources; Macaulay studied original documents and correspondence at the British Museum. Only in the sixth volume of her *History of England* does Macaulay announce that she will limit footnotes for the sake of readability.[38]

As to epistemology, Hume and Macaulay shared the same 'order of the things'. Strictly speaking, justifying the unity of their historiography should have caused tremendous difficulties. In other words, neither Hume nor Macaulay had a clear concept of how they could sort out irrelevant historical events. Both historians succeeded, however, in dissolving the strained relationship between their epistemology and their narrations. Their German colleagues had more serious problems.[39]

The Göttingen School and the narrative breakdown

In the German Enlightenment, Hume's publications received a lot of close attention.[40] According to Hanns Peter Reill, only the historians of the Göttingen historical school had some resentment.[41] This is rather surprising because Schlözer's and Gatterer's definition of, what they called, 'pragmatic historiography' arose

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[38] Macaulay, *History of England*, vol. VI.

[39] It is fascinating to see how very clearly Schlözer analysed the (narrative) difficulties of the English *Universal History* of the 1730s. He missed what he called the 'Allgemeine Blick' (general view point) that transformed the aggregate into a system. Johan van der Zande argues that Schlözer's concept of the synoptic view displaced the mechanistic method the Universal History had applied to historical explanation. See J. Van der Zande, 'August Ludwig Schlözer and the English Universal History', in S. Berger, P. Lambert and P. Schumann (eds), *Historikerdialoge*, pp. 135–56, p. 143. Even though the synoptic view does not introduce a subjective perspective into history (as Johan van de Zande might imply), Schlözer still stuck to the mechanistic method but elevated the demands: universal history should not just add together the histories of different parts, instead, it should explain how the parts were connected to each other. This could only be done with a synoptic view.

[40] J. Osterhammel, 'Nation und Zivilisation in der britischen Historiographie von Hume bis Macaulay', *Historische Zeitschrift* 254 (1992), 281–340; G. Gawlick and L. Kriemendahl, *Hume in der deutschen Aufklärung. Umrisse einer Rezeptionsgeschichte* (Stuttgart and Bad Cannstatt, 1987).

[41] Osterhammel, *Britische Historiographie*; P. H. Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley, CA, and London 1975).

from the same epistemology. Their definition of pragmatism was very peculiar; thus Johann Christoph Gatterer argued:

> The *highest level of pragmatism* in history would be the perception of a universal connection of all things in the world (*Nexus rerum universalis*). [...] Everything is connected with one another, causes one another, generates one another, is caused, is generated and causes and generates again.[42]

The fact that Gatterer designates the general correlation of the world system as a '*nexus rerum universalis*' exaggerates this position even more and causes greater problems than Hume's theory of causality ever did. At first, his position sounds like a combination of Macaulay's and Hume's. Gatterer pointed out that different historians had different points of view; hence, for their history writing, they chose different events from the chain of history. Every historian, according to Gatterer, added another perspective. Even though Gatterer uses terms like 'point of view' and 'perspective', this does not imply that he combines historical objectivity with the subject of recognition, which would be, in this case, the historian. Yet, according to Gatterer, historical truth does depend on the perspective under which history is written. For him, it still remains an objective truth in the sense that every historian, by taking the same perspective, would see the very same past.

At least since Lorraine Daston's and Peter Galison's outstanding book on objectivity, we know about the historically and culturally changing meaning of objectivity. This term continues to generate controversial discussion on how to write history. These discussions tell us a lot about disciplinary power relations.[43] For me, it seems to be most interesting to investigate how a specific definition works. Of course, this causes semantic problems. Following Daston and Galison, the only semantic constant regarding objectivity over the last 500 years has been its dichotomous relation to the term 'subjectivity'. Immanuel Kant defined the term in a completely different way, as did philosophers following René Descartes. In the post-Kantian tradition, the definition basically changed again.[44] Nowadays, we are used to understanding 'objectivity' as a relative objectivity based on a competition between different interpretations. The difference between then and now becomes clearer when Gatterer continues: 'In spite of different perspectives, the

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[42] Johann Christoph Gatterer, 'Vom historischen Plan, und der darauf sich gründenden Zusammenfügung der Erzählungen' (1767), in H. W. Blanke and D. Fleischer (eds), *Theoretiker der deutschen Aufklärungshistorie*, 2 vols (Stuttgart, 1990) pp. 621–62, here p. 658.

[43] A. Epple and A. Schaser, 'Multiple Histories? Changing Perspectives on Modern Historiographies', in A. Epple and A. Schaser (eds), *Gendering Historiography: Beyond National Canons* (Frankfurt/M., 2009).

[44] L. Daston and P. Galison, *Objectivity* (New York, 2007), p. 34.

truth of history [...] mainly remains the same.'[45] Gatterer's concept of historical truth is what I would like to call an essential truth concept. The historian's point of view does not, according to Gatterer, influence his or her interpretation of the past. If Gatterer had accepted that historical truth depended on the subjective interpretation of the historian, he would have anticipated Kant's critical philosophy and the above-mentioned epistemological break. It was only as an outcome of Historism that this critical position became influential in historiography.

According to Gatterer, the historian can choose only the peculiarities he wants to narrate.[46] Every historian chooses other peculiarities and thus sheds a new light on history. Like Catharine Macaulay, Gatterer did not tie up the selection of historical events studied by the historian with the subjective issue of the historian himself. Instead, he was convinced that the historian only has to discover (not construct) historical truth in past events.

From there, one can conclude that, according to Gatterer, historical truth would be discovered completely, if only all findings of all historians were put together. This would be the highest level of pragmatism – the *nexus rerum universalis*. Therefore Gatterer repeats Hume's imperative: 'the more unbroken the chain is [...] the more perfect is his production'. The German Enlightenment historians also looked at nature, at history and at the world as permanent causal interaction; both nature and history were ruled by common laws.

Just like Macaulay and Hume, Schlözer and Gatterer also wrote books that worked very well as historical narrations. However, none of them lived up to the utopia of recognizing the *rerum nexus causalis*. Instead of putting together *all* the links of the chain of history, they restricted their narrations to 'special histories'. Thus, they denied the universal challenge of their theoretical writings. They also tried to find presentations that would more closely match the idea of a *rerum nexus universalis*. As a result, they displayed historical events throughout the world in tables. In light of their universal claim, tables were indeed more suitable. In contrast to a narration, tables allow the user to understand synchronic interactions immediately at first sight. This advantage has its price, however. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to reproduce diachronic cause-effect relations.

Lawrence Sterne, best known for his novel *Tristram Shandy*, illustrated the strained relationship between Enlightenment epistemology and narration in an entertaining and thoughtful way.[47] The story of his seven-volume fictitious autobiography is difficult to describe. Whereas the narrator (Tristram Shandy) starts with his own conception, we do not reach his birth until the third

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[45] J. C. Gatterer, 'Vom Standort und Gesichtspunct des Geschichtschreibers, 1768', in H. W. Blanke and D. Fleischer (eds), *Theoretiker der deutschen Aufklärungshistorie*, 2 vols (Stuttgart, 1990), p. 454.

[46] Gatterer, 'Vom Standort', in *Theoretiker der deutschen Aufklärungshistorie*, p. 453.

[47] L. Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (London, 1759–66).

volume. Tristram marks time in terms of action, because there is too much causality: He always fits in former causes of former effects, which lead him to former causes, and so on. In a certain sense, he realizes what Gatterer claimed. He tells what caused an event, how this event was generated, how it caused other events and how they were generated. What Sterne called 'progressive digression' eventually means that the story never comes to an end. In other words, the narration did not find its unity: a precondition of the theory of causality. Without its unity, a narration also loses its coherence. Consequently, Tristram Shandy was published as a fragment. It can be read as an ironical commentary on 'pragmatic historiography'. In contrast to the works of Gatterer and Schlözer, it was not only very influential, but also very entertaining. In this sense, German Enlightenment historiography was less successful.

Before continuing, I would like to summarize the merits of the Enlightenment historians. Notably Hume, but also Macaulay, Gatterer, Schlözer and others delivered important contributions to the professionalization of our discipline: they introduced the claim of explanation into historiography. They thought that every event relies on a former event, and thus integrated the causal explanation into history writing. Since then, the main question is 'why', or following discourse analysis: 'how did something happen?' and no longer 'what did happen?' At the same time, by using Catharine Macaulay as an example of the English Enlightenment historians, I have tried to prove that history for them was a chain of historical events. For some of them, such as Catharine Macaulay, this chain of historical events was based on teleology. They were convinced that history was marked by an inherent continuous improvement. For all of them, whether they were teleologists like Macaulay or sceptics like Hume, this chain was organized by a causal principle. It was the very causal principle that organized both nature and history. The study of original documents was central to their concept of historiography; in that respect, only Hume was an exception. Also, they did not reflect on the connection between the subject of recognition and the object of recognition, even though the vocabulary they used seemed to suggest this.[48] They still believed in an essential concept of historical truth.[49]

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[48] Johann Martin Chladenius outlined a theory of the 'point of view ('Sehepunkt'). It is often misunderstood as a critical theory of the condition of possibility of historical understanding. It is, however, nothing more (and nothing less) than a typical theory of the Enlightenment. Chladenius is convinced that four eyes see more than two do: the more eyes are looking, the 'more unbroken the chain' of recognition. See J. M. Chladenius, 'Allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft' (1752), in *Theoretiker der deutschen Aufklärungshistorie*, p. 226–74.

[49] There are some passages in Gatterer's texts that could be interpreted as small steps into a more constructive direction. See Gatterer, 'Abhandlung vom Standort und Gesichtspunkt des Geschichtschreibers oder der teutsche Livius', *Theoretiker der deutschen Aufklärungshistorie*, p. 452–66, esp. p. 468.

The Enlightenment utopia was that the historian could reveal the *rerum nexus universalis*. They hoped that history in tables would both illustrate causal coherence in a universal perspective *and* make causal interaction recognizable at first sight. They transferred the synchronic interaction of cause and effect into the diachronic subsequence of historical events. The price was high; they lost the narrative power of historiography. Fortunately, Hume and Macaulay were less rigorous than their German colleagues. They stuck to writing history in an entertaining way and, as far as I know, never used tables.

Venture into a new understanding of historical truth: historism and the emergence of the subject

This view of the world was to change. Kant takes leave of a view of history supported by the historians of the Enlightenment in his treatise *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*. He doubts the fact that the unity of history relies on the concept that people acted in accordance to natural laws:

> Since men in their endeavours behave, on the whole, not just instinctively, like the brutes, nor yet like rational citizens of the world according to some agreed-on plan, no history of man conceived according to a plan seems to be possible, as it might be possible to have such a history of bees or beavers.[50]

Here we can see that Kant argues against the perception that the unity of history is only given if man acts to 'some agreed-on plan'. For him, humans are 'no rational world citizens'. If history does not follow an agreed-on plan, how can a historian or a philosopher then systematize history?

Until now, this has been the basic problem of the theory of history.[51] This problem includes both the systematization of historical events and the systematization of the narration of these events. If Kant denies a historical plan that could be understood by man, does he, then, also deny the unity of history? Far from it; the title of this treatise already mentions his main concern: *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*. As we know, Kant does not refute the existence of a natural plan in history. Hence, this plan remains secret.

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[50] I. Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose' (1784), in H. S. Reiss (ed.), *Kant – Political Writing*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1991), p. 41 f.

[51] Herbert Schnädelbach designates the problem of systematization as central problem of the philosophy of history. See H. Schnädelbach, *Geschichtsphilosophie nach Hegel. Die Probleme des Historismus* (Munich, 1974), p. 11.

In the last theses of his treatise, Kant speaks about the importance of this *Idea*, which, of course, is the idea of a human subject:

> It is strange and apparently silly to wish to write a history in accordance with an Idea of how the course of the world must be if it is to lead to certain rational ends. It seems that with such an Idea only a romance could be written. Nevertheless, if one may assume that Nature, even in the play of human freedom, works not without plan or purpose, this Idea could still be of use. Even if we are too blind to see the secret mechanism of its workings, this Idea may still serve as a guiding thread for presenting as a system, at least in broad outlines, what would otherwise be a plan-less conglomeration of human actions.[52]

For Kant, the *Idea* serves as a guiding thread that helps to present history as a system. I would like to call to mind the metaphor used by both Hume and the German enlightened historians: They spoke of a chain of history. Kant's 'Thread' and Hume's 'Chain' seem to evoke a similar perception. However, they designate quite different concepts of history and historiography. Whereas Hume and his colleagues believe that history itself could reveal the plan, Kant underlines that without the *Idea*, the historian cannot present anything but a 'plan-less conglomeration of human actions'.

Catharine Macaulay thought that the purpose of history was liberty. She tried to prove her conviction with her empirical study. Gatterer and Schlözer also tried to verify their utopia with their historiography. Kant, by contrast, is convinced that nobody can reasonably hope for a better future if he looks at the empirical facts. The solution, he suggests, is the presupposition of a (secret) natural plan.[53] The natural plan cannot be derived empirically. The purpose of nature is an objective purpose. It is not intelligible but, nonetheless, a condition of the possibility for historical understanding. The purpose is not somehow found in nature, but it is posited to make history intelligible. That is why Kant does not write about 'Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose' but about the *Idea for a Universal History*.

In this spirit, Ranke argues against the concept of a teleological progress as suggested by the historians of the Enlightenment. If there had been progress in history, then every past event would have been worth dealing with, thanks only to its effects. Every event then would have been only a preliminary stage of a better and later one. Neither Kant nor Ranke denied an objective purpose; Ranke found it in his understanding of God. The important differences compared to the Enlightenment are, first, that this objective purpose is not deducible by empiricism.

[52] Kant, 'Idea', *Ninth Thesis*.
[53] Kant, 'Idea', *Ninth Thesis*.

A part of the whole thing is worth addressing not because of its effects, but because of its own individuality. Second, objectivity is always combined with subjectivity. We can recognize only the individuality of a part if we have an *Idea* of the whole. The part interests us only because of its contribution to the whole; not just as a cause of effects. The part has its effects, either for better or for worse; however, this does not affect its significance, which lies in its independent individuality. Every epoch is immediate to God, says Ranke.[54]

I would like to emphasize here the simultaneity of developments in philosophy, poetics and the science of history. Schiller expressed this new understanding of historical development, and thus showed that his worldview was structured by a new epistemology. In his famous inaugural lecture, he underlines the causal relationships in history.[55] At first sight, this sounds like Hume's concept of history. Nonetheless, a closer reading of the lecture discloses the constructivist motive that Schiller posits between the historical movement and the narration of universal history. He is convinced that the historian (philosophical spirit) takes the harmony from himself and applies it to the order of things outside. There again, we could talk of a 'narrative turn' in historiography. The differences from Hume, however, could not be greater. Schiller finds the unity of the historical *narration* in the *subject* of the historian. Therefore historians no longer *repeat* past events, but *construct* historical narrations according to *human concepts*. The naïve objectivity of the Enlightenment was overcome, giving way to a new understanding of objectivity that was deeply based on subjectivity.

Historism after Kant defined the relation between the part and the whole in a new way. Since then, the part should refer only symbolically to the whole and thus help to understand it. That way, the part became very important and the very centre of our concern. The part itself became a relative whole, because since then, it could assert its intrinsic value. Since, then, the problem of the unity of history is solved; it is the relative whole of the part. It can be isolated thanks only to the *idea* of a universal history being a whole.

The devil is in the details, however. Historism's epistemology emphasizes the individuality of *every* part. Ranke expressed this very persuasively by saying '*every* part is immediate to God'.[56] A closer look at Historism's practice of

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[54] L. von Ranke, *Über die Epochen der neueren Geschichte* (Darmstadt, 1970), p. 7. This summary of Ranke's argument is dramatically condensed. Ranke believes that a divine idea is no precondition for the distillation of singular epochs or singular nations as objects of analysis out of the past. This provokes a severe inconsistency in its philosophy of history. See, for a more profound discussion on this subject, Schnädelbach, *Geschichtsphilosophie*, pp. 34–48.

[55] F. von Schiller, 'Was heißt uns zu welchem Ende studiert man Universalgeschichte?' (1789), in *Nationalausgabe* (NA), vol. 17, pp. 359–76.

[56] Schnädelbach, too, is convinced that Ranke argues implicitly against the ethnocentrism of the philosophers of historical progress (especially Hegel). Ranke believed in the intrinsic value of all individualities. See Schnädelbach, *Geschichtsphilosophie*, p. 46.

historiography, however, shows the narrow limits of their project. Its practitioners recognized only some selective parts as individual parts. Their criterion for exclusion was the historicity of things. Everything they defined as not being able to have a history was excluded from historiography. A part that, according to their understanding of historical development, had no history could not symbolize the universal history as a whole. They limited themselves to the history of states and nations.[57] Foreign or so-called 'traditional' cultures and nearly all women were denied a history. They were excluded from Historism's history and became a field of study in a new academic discipline: ethnology.

In the epistemology of the Enlightenment, the importance of a part depended on its effects. Theoretically, the historian could choose any 'portion of the chain'[58] of historical events for his narration. The part's dependency on its effects caused the problem of the unity of history. The part had no intrinsic value. After Kant's philosophy, a new understanding of the relation between the part and the whole came into being. In another context, Louis Althusser accurately referred to that relationship as a *'pars totalis'*.[59] The whole could no longer be deduced empirically, but was specified by the *Idea*. Thus, a subjective element (the *Idea* was something the historian had in his mind) in historiography became more important for the first time. It would still be a long time before historians would become aware of the fact that historical objectivity is entangled with subjectivity, however. At the end of the nineteenth century, the historians of German Historism dealt with the nation as the only historically relevant entity. This once again created a strained relationship between the practice of writing history and Historism's epistemology that only came to be solved a hundred years later.

Conclusion

The epistemology of the Enlightenment can be deduced paradigmatically from David Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Historical objectivity and causal explanations of historical events are at the very centre of his thought. Even Hume's harshest contemporary critic, Catharine Macaulay,

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[57] T. Mergel, 'Überlegungen zu einer Kulturgeschichte der Politik', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft (GG)* 28 (2002), 574–606, 578.

[58] Hume, *Enquiry*.

[59] Althusser summarizes Cassirer's 'Philosophy of the Enlightenment' (1932) in relation to Montesquieu's concept of history. According to Cassirer, Montesquieu had a dialectical concept of history in which every part would also be the whole. Althusser designates this concept very strikingly as *pars totalis*. Althusser continues, however, that Cassirer's understanding was too modern, and that Montesquieu was more interested in the principles that dominated everything else. See L. Althusser, 'Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Rousseau', in *Schriften*, vol. 2, ed. Peter Schöttler (Berlin, 1987), p. 72.

adhered to the same rules of thinking. Both their historical narrations were a great success – something that was only enabled by the 'strained relationship' to the pre-critical epistemology of the Enlightenment. Both Hume and Macaulay introduced literary elements into history, and, at the same time, accepted a logical inconsistency. As a result, they had problems in explaining the unity (inner coherence) of their histories. The difficulties in motivating the beginning of their histories were a consequence of the problem of unity. At first glance, Hume found a convincing way out: he started his first history of England at that point in time at which the misrepresentations of his predecessors had begun. On second thoughts, however, this was only a pragmatic solution and not a logical one. Even though this problem of how to begin seemed to be less prominent for Catherine Macaulay, she too had no convincing remedy that would give her a logical explanation of how to begin her *History of England*. She also lacked a concept that allowed her to see an inner coherence in her story.

Gatterer and Schlözer were more consistent with the Enlightenment epistemology of cause and effect. Their search for the *rerum nexus causalis* in history was more rigid. As an inevitable consequence, they suffered from a narrative collapse. The Enlightenment understanding of history can be expressed appropriately by the image they themselves favoured most: the chain of events. Every link of the chain becomes a cause of the following one. History thus becomes aligned teleologically.

What about the question I started out with; that is, 'How were epistemology and the concept of the nation connected?' As a result of my readings, I would like to add that if there is no concept which the historian applies to history, he or she has no effective instrument to sort out historical events. As long as a narration sticks to the concept of cause and effect, there will always be an open end. Every historical event asks for a former cause. Thus, enlightened epistemology does not translate into national historiography. It cannot solve the central problem of a nation's limits and of its intrinsic value. In other words, only an invented concept, the nation, for instance, can help to overcome the problems of Enlightened historiography.

Thanks to the epistemological break and the reception of Kant's philosophy, Historist historians, like Ranke and others, developed a new concept of history that was deeply influenced by Weimar's classical epoch. Most important was the conceptual change regarding the relationship between the parts of history and the whole of history. Since then, the whole is understood as a set idea to which the parts can be related. The idea of the whole allows the historian to estimate the individuality of the part. The part then implies the unity of the historical narration. On the other hand, it is the part through which the historian can recognize the whole. This new epistemology allowed historians to apply a concept to their histories which helped to sort out relevant from

irrelevant historical events. This concept was not determined theoretically. However, the concept applied to the practice of nineteenth-century British and German historiography was the nation, and almost always nothing but the nation.

German national historiography, following Ranke, undermined Historism's epistemology with its historical writings. It was focused more and more on only one of, theoretically, countless parts: the nation. It started to deal with the privileged part as a somehow natural entity and as an effect of an inevitable historical development. Thus, teleology returned. This failing should not hide the fact that historians have to understand the whole as a set idea and the part as an invented unity in order to study the universal in the part and the part in the universal.