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hramirez1967@yahoo.com

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Rüsen, Jörn

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Forming Historical Consciousness – Towards a Humanistic History Didactics

Formando a Consciência Histórica – Por uma Didática Humanista da História

Jörn Rüsen¹

ABSTRACT



This paper presents some reflexions between History Didactics and a new concept of Humanism. It shows among other questions the challenges of nowadays historical culture, which come from the growth of the interculturality and communication in all dimensions of practical human life. To develop the argumentation it has been necessary to clarify some categories like History Didactics, Historical consciousness, Historical culture, Historical learning and Humanism. Moreover, to answer the challenges, one has developed the idea of a new humanism and its implications for historical learning. The paper also discusses how to learn Universal History means the understanding that the unity of historical time within the diversity of historical experience and how it could be a contribution for people to learn to be human.

Keyword: History Didactics. Historical consciousness. Historical culture.

¹ Universität Witten/Herdecke.

RESUMO



Este texto apresenta algumas reflexões entre Didática da História e um novo conceito de Humanismo. Mostra, entre outras reflexões, os desafios da cultura histórica hoje, os quais vêm do crescimento da interculturalidade e da comunicação em todas as dimensões da vida humana prática. Para desenvolver a argumentação foi necessário clarificar algumas categorias como Didática da História, Consciência Histórica, Cultura Histórica, Aprendizagem Histórica e Humanismo. Ademais, para responder aos desafios, desenvolveu-se a ideia do novo humanismo e suas implicações para a aprendizagem histórica. O texto também discute como aprender História Universal significa a compreensão de que a unidade do tempo histórica contém a diversidade da experiência histórica e como isso poderia ser uma contribuição para as pessoas aprenderem a ser humanas.

Palavras-chave: Didática da História. Consciência Histórica. Cultura Histórica.

Humanität ist der Charakter unseres Geschlechts; er ist uns aber nur in Anlagen angeboren und muß uns eigentlich angebildet werden.

Johann Gottfried Herder²

1 Challenges for Historical Culture of Today

The work of history didactics cannot be understood or pursued without an awareness of its role in the historical culture of its time. It has to notice and to answer the challenges of historical orientation in special respect to historical learning and its realization in different institutions, mainly in school.

Therefore I would like to start my paper with some provoking experiences, which move the historical culture of our countries and have to be picked up and worked through not only by didacticians, but in principle by all professional historians.

I would like to address four of such challenges, most of them stemming from the growing density of intercultural encounter and communication in all dimensions of human life including the everyday-life of so-called normal people and, of course, of the pupils and students in school: (a) an insecurity of historical identity, (b) a pressure of cultural diversity, and (c) an attack on Western traditions. Another very important challenge for historical culture will be omitted by time reasons, namely the overwhelming importance of the new media for historical culture in all

² [Humanity is the character of our species; it is only innate in us as a potential, and as such has to be cultivated in us.] Herder, Johann Gottfried. *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität*. Berlin, Weimar: 1971. 2 v., v. 1, p. 140.

its different fields.

a) The insecurity of historical identity

Identity is an answer to the question who somebody – a person or a social community – is. This answer has never been a simple one, but always was a matter of cultural practices. Nevertheless, there are times when established forms of identity come under strong doubt and have to undergo a critical revision. We live in such a time. National identity – in modern times one of the most successful concepts of belonging and being different, is losing its traditional form and strength – mainly in this part of the world, due to the unifying process of Europe and due to the growing multiplicity of ethnic origins by immigration into the European national states. Trans- and sub-national belongings are gaining more importance, and the exclusive character of nationality is changing into more inclusive relationships. Cultural and political dimensions of identity drift apart, and this is one of the reasons why identity is losing its unambiguity.

On the intellectual level even the idea of identity as a sharp distinction between self and otherness is put into radical doubt in favour of the opaque, vague and dimmed idea of hybridity. Even more so, our identity as humans has become a matter of controversy. Our difficulties with the natural conditions of our life have raised the radical new question of what it means to be a human being. Are we still creatures shaped by our culture reaching beyond nature, or do we have to come back to nature as the decisive order of our life?

All the narratives telling us who we are have to be retold, enlarged by a comprehensive dimension of the human species in nature and intensified by a new awareness of a burdening complexity and ambiguity of our relationship to ourselves and to the otherness of the others.

b) The pressures of cultural diversity

The everyday life of most, if not every student, is deeply conditioned by the experience of cultural diversity and the tensions between different traditions and cultures. This experience is not new, but its intensity is. It has left the dimension of otherness located hitherto outside one' s own world and has become an element within it, including, of course, the classrooms. Difference is no longer an issue of distance, but of closeness. This raises an urgent need to find one' s own place in the diversity of world views and life forms, to find stability of one' s own life perspective vis-à-vis an irritating multitude of possibilities. The question "who am I, who are my own people, and who are the others with whom I have to live together?" has acquired a new quality of urgency.

c) Attacks on Western traditions

This urgency is getting support by intellectual movements, which put the hitherto powerful cultural orientations of modern Western life into radical doubt. Postmodernism has

shaken each stability of basic concepts of history and identity. Historical experience is replaced by an imaginary sense-generation with a high degree of arbitrariness; and cultural relativism undermines the persuasiveness of established conceptual means of cultural orientation like methodical rationality, the universality of moral principles and basic assumptions of secular civil society. The bridges of intellectual life orientation between the generations have become friable.

This decomposition of intellectual guidelines is strengthened by a sharp criticism of Western domination over non-Western civilizations. Post-colonialism accuses the modes of cultural modernity as being just an ideological means of suppressing otherness, and it is driven not by claims for liberty and reason but by a sheer will of power. This attitude – the most influential fore-runner was Friedrich Nietzsche – has been internalized into the Western self-awareness on the level of its intellectual avant-garde.

d) The new threat of nature

The environmental crisis also acquired a new urgency of reorienting human self-understanding. Is the cultural nature of humanity in its difference from nature essentially destructive so that a general turn 'back to nature' in cultural orientation is necessary? Nature has not played an important role in traditional history teaching, following a general line in the humanities to ignore nature in human affairs. On the other hand a mainly naturalistic understanding of humanity, which has experienced an enormous impact on cultural orientation by the recent success of genetics and brain research, – fails to disclose the specific historical dimension of the relationship between man and nature. In any case: the factor that we share a common human nature beyond all cultural differences has gained new importance, since the destruction of the natural conditions of human survival matters everybody. Therefore we have to establish transculturally valid rules and to anchor them in the depth of our human identity. The question therefore has to be raised: what role does this common human nature play in developing historical identity in full awareness of the importance of cultural differences while identity is being formed?

All these challenges have to find an answer in all fields of historical culture. History didactics has to work out its specific answer, and it is the intention of this paper to draw on outline for this.

2 Some conceptual clarifications

Let me start with some clarifying definitions of the basic categories which have to be used in a specific didactical argumentation.³

a) History didactics

First of all: what is history didactics? It is a special academic discipline, the task of which is to bring about competence for teaching history. Its constitutive presupposition is the fact, that modern states have installed history as a discipline in school curricula with the main purpose to enable the young generation to enter the established historical culture. In order to fulfill this task, history didactics has to gain knowledge about what learning history is, and how it can be organized and influenced by special procedures and institutions of teaching.

b) Historical consciousness

The basic category for understanding historical learning is that of historical consciousness. Its widespread definition sounds as follows: a mental activity of interpreting the past for the sake of understanding the present and expecting the future. Thus it combines past, present and future along the line of an idea of what temporal change is about. It synthesizes the experiences of the past with the sense criteria which are effective in the practical life of today and its action-guiding outlooks into the future. In history didactics this future-orientation should play an important role since the students have to learn how to master their future lives as adult citizens according to the demands of the historical culture of their country.

c) Historical culture

Historical culture⁴ is the manifestation of historical consciousness in society in various forms and procedures. It includes the cognitive work of historical studies as well as everyday life attitudes towards an understanding of the past and the historically conceptualizing of one's own identity; and let's not forget the museums and the historical instruction in schools, neither the presentations of the past in the various media or in literature. It is always useful to reflect the complexity of historical culture. So let me distinguish there the different fundamental dimensions of historical culture: the aesthetic, the political and the cognitive one. They are defined by different principles of sense generation, which can't be reduced to each other, but are systematically interrelated. Their unity is defined by the integrating fundamental principle of

³ For a more detailed argumentation see Rüsen, Jörn: *Historisches Lernen. Grundlagen und Paradigmen*. 2nd ed. Schwalbach/Taunus: Wochenschau, 2008.

⁴ A detailed presentation of my concept of 'historical culture' can be found in: Rüsen, Jörn. *Historische Orientierung. Über die Arbeit des Geschichtsbewußtseins, sich in der Zeit zurechtzufinden*. 2. Aufl. Schwalbach/Taunus: Wochenschau 2008. p. 233-284; Rüsen, Jörn. *Berättande och förnunft*. Historieteoretiska texter. Göteborg: Daidalos 2004. p. 149-194; a modified version has been developed by Klas-Göran Karlsson: Karlsson, Klas-Göran; Zander, Ulf (Eds.): *Echoes of the Holocaust*. Historical cultures in contemporary Europe. Lund: Nordic Academic Press 2003; Karlsson, Klas-Göran; Zander, Ulf (Eds). *Holocaust Heritage*. Inquiries into European Historical Culture. Malmö: Sekel, 2004.

historical sense.

d) Historical learning

Historical learning⁵ is a mental process within which the competences were gained which are necessary to orient one's own life by historical consciousness in the pre-given historical culture of one's society. It consists of four different abilities which are systematically interrelated and interdependent: the ability of making historical experience, the ability of interpreting historical experience, the ability of using interpreted historical experience (historical knowledge) in orienting one's own life in the framework of an empirically corroborated idea of the course of time in human lives – this orientation includes a concept of historical identity –, and, finally, the ability of motivating one's own activities according to the idea of one's own place in the changes of time.

e) Humanism

Humanism is not a well defined concept in the humanities.⁶ It has a manifold and varying meaning on a scale between a term for the humanities in early modern European history with their special relationship to classical antiquity on the one hand and every open-minded and liberal discourse on human affairs. In my argumentation I understand by humanism a fundamental recourse and reference to the cultural nature of humans in orienting human life and an alignment of this orientation with the principle of human dignity.⁷ Its empirical and its normative dimensions are both universal. It includes the unity of humankind as well as its manifestation in various and changing cultural life forms. It temporalizes humankind into a comprehensive concept of universal history within which every life form in its individuality is hermeneutically recognized. Politically it bases the legitimacy of domination and power on fundamental human and civil rights. It understands human subjectivity as a process of self cultivation, according to the inbuilt dignity of all human beings in space and time.

Therefore humanism always has a strong didactical impact.

Humanism was one of the main streams of intellectual and cultural life in the West. In early modern history it shaped an intellectual discourse beyond the strong rules of scholastic

⁵ See Rüsen: *Historisches Lernen* (fn. 2), p. 70-140.

⁶ See: Giustiniani, Vito R. *Homo, Humanus, and the Message of 'Humanism'*. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 46,2 (1985), S. 167-195; Burke, Peter. *The Spread of Italian Humanism*. In: Goodman, Anthony; Mackay, Angus (Eds): *The impact of humanism on Western Europe*. London: Longman, 1990. p- 1-20, esp. p. 1sq; Cancik, Hubert: *Humanismus*. In: Cancik, Hubert; Gladigow, Burkhard; Kohl, Karl-Heinz (Eds). *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*. Bd. III. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1993. p. 173-185.

⁷ See Rüsen, Jörn: *Traditionsprobleme eines zukunftsfähigen Humanismus*. In: Cancik, Hubert; Vöhler, Martin (Eds). *Humanismus und Antikerezeption im 18. Jahrhundert*, Bd. 1: *Genese und Profil des europäischen Humanismus*, Heidelberg: Winter 2009. p. 201-216; *Intercultural Humanism: How to Do the Humanities in the Age of Globalization*. *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies*, v. 6, n. 2 (Issue 12), p. 1-24, Dec. 2009.

argumentation thus opening a cultural space for liberty and elements of secularism. In a constitutive relationship to classical antiquity it vitalized its paradigmatic character for the understanding of the human world (besides or even within an unbroken validity of Christianity). At the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century humanism got a new and specifically modern feature in the formative period of the humanities, in new formations of higher education and in establishing human rights as fundamental rules for politics and social life.⁸

3 Answering the challenges: the idea of a new humanism

It is this combination of an empirical and normative universalism of humankind, its political form of basic rights, its general historization and individualization of human culture and its idea of a self cultivating humanity in all processes of education. So the tradition of this humanism should be enabled to an answer to challenges of cultural life, which I have mentioned in the beginning of my paper. I don't argue in favour of a simple reproduction of Western humanism at the brink of modernity, but for its further development vis-à-vis the historical experiences of the 19th and 20th century and the special demands for intercultural communication in and by the fundamental principles of cultural orientation today.⁹

a) Overcoming the shortcomings of traditional humanism

In order to transform the classical modern humanism into a promising future way of cultural orientation today one should first of all indicate those elements in it which are still valid. In contrast to a widespread criticism of modernity as a one-sided, mainly Western, form of understanding the human world, I see a promise for the future in its modern features, mainly in its universalistic elements. With its synthesis of an empirical and normative universalism, its individualizing historicism and its emphasis on self-cultivation it has opened up a suitable frame for discussing the issue of identity formation, of appreciating cultural diversity, of defending the achievements of modern civil society, and of addressing the role of nature in human culture. But nevertheless, this frame has to be reshaped in order to overcome the following shortcomings of modern humanism: its inability to face human inhumanity, its illusionary idea of the paradigmatic concept of humanity in classical antiquity, its Eurocentric elements in the idea of universal history, and its limits in integrating nature into the idea of humanity.

⁸ See: Cancik, Hubert; Vöhler, Martin (Eds). *Humanismus und Antikerezeption im 18. Jahrhundert* (Fn. 6); its French form is described by Todorov, Tzvetan: *Imperfect garden. The legacy of humanism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

⁹ Rüsen, Jörn; Laass, Henner (Eds). *Humanism in Intercultural Perspective. – Experiences and Expectations*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009.

An up-to-date humanism has to integrate the shadow of inhumanity into its idea of humankind based on the principle of human dignity.¹⁰ As an anthropological principle dignity has utopian elements and should be understood as a reaction to the ability of every human being to commit the most cruel and horrifying crimes against humanity. This fundamental ambivalence of humanity is a permanent stimulus for historical change – on the level of motivating human agency and on the level of historical understanding and cultural orientation. Furthermore, it can open the perspective of historical experience for the hitherto fundamentally ignored dimension of human suffering.

Classical antiquity has always delivered historical paradigms of a humanistic view on human life in the West. This historical image of its humane features in the reality of human life is an illusion. It has to be replaced by a realistic image of the cultural origins of the West in classical antiquity. It will remain an inspiring root for the spirit of political liberty, rational argumentation, and some basic ideas on human nature like equality, natural law and dignity. The illusionary features of humanity have to be criticized, but its essence should not be given up in favour of a disillusioned and skeptical realism. Instead it should be used as a normative element of utopian exuberance. It can also serve as an element of criticism in all attempts to understand what humans can do to humans.

Although classical modern humanism emphasizes cultural diversity, it is nevertheless not free from Eurocentric elements. Since every historical presentation has a perspective, its dependence upon standpoints and worldviews is inevitable. Ethnocentrism is only a specific form of this dependence. It is characterized by an unbalanced evaluation in the interrelationship between self and otherness. Generalizations of specific features of Western culture to anthropological universals have taken place here. Both elements can be found in modern humanism and has to be eliminated. On the other hand we also find a remedy in the very tradition namely the hermeneutical approaches of the humanistic historicism with its interest in difference and variety of human culture. They should not be overlooked, but brought into of the game of intercultural communication.

As to of the integration of nature into a humanistic idea of mankind one should not forget that the classical modern humanism did not exclude nature from its historical and educational anthropology.¹¹ But, nevertheless, the general modern attitude of dominating and exploiting nature was not identified as a danger of human self-destruction. Vis-a-vis the overwhelming environmental problems of today the natural conditions of human life have to be integrated into any plausible idea of humankind.

¹⁰ I tried a first attempt in respect to the Holocaust: Humanism in response to the Holocaust – destruction or innovation?, in: *Postcolonial Studies*, v. 11, n. 2, S. 191-200, June 2008.

¹¹ See Rüsen, Jörn. Humanism and Nature – Some Reflections on a Complex Relationship. *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, v. 2, no. 2, p. 265-276, Dec. 2006.

The humanistic achievement of human and civil rights as humanizing elements in politics and society have to be replenished by applying them to the interrelationship of humankind and nature. Humanism should furnish principles of legitimacy for dominating nature and using it for the sake of human survival.

b) New concepts: multiple modernities as a second axial time

All of these shortcomings can be overcome. But this cannot be achieved by following the anti-humanistic mainstream of intellectual life in the West during the 20th century.¹² Instead this can be reached by empowering and enhancing the traditional modern humanism, by integrating the historical experiences of the recent past into its ideas of humanity.

To be a human being and to furnish all concepts of humanity with the idea of individual dignity could be a plausible starting point for working out a cultural orientation in the process of globalization. This may realize the unity of humankind as a becoming reality in all dimensions of human life. But at the same time it is not exclusive since the diversity of traditions and life forms are powerful.

How to meet the necessity of synthesizing unity and difference of the universalizing tendencies concerning the value-laden idea of mankind in all traditions? I think it is necessary to reshape the humanistic idea of universal history, but here as well we are furnished by a helpful tradition: It is paradigmatically represented by the philosophy of history of Johann Gottfried Herder.¹³ Philosophy of history at the brink of modernity was an attempt to organize the accelerating knowledge of cultural diversity in space and time into a coherent idea of humankind as a temporal whole. This philosophical approach to universal history has to be picked up together with all attempts to pluralize universal history. Of course, the comprehensive idea of the unity of humankind is acting here within and by the diversity of cultures and civilizations in a permanent historical change. The most promising attempt of this kind is Karl Jaspers philosophy of history and its idea of axial times.¹⁴ This idea can be picked up and reconceptualized as a methodical tool of historical thinking today.¹⁵ Additionally, it has to be widened to an understanding of the worldwide process of multiple modernities¹⁶ and

¹² See Ferry, Luc; Renault, Alain: *Antihumanistisches Denken. Gegen die französischen Meisterphilosophen* [orig.: *La pensée 68. Essai sur l'anti-humanisme contemporain*, Paris: Gallimard, 1985], München: Hanser 1987.

¹³ Herder, Johann Gottfried. *Werke*, ed. Wolfgang Pross, Bd. III in 2 vols: *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2002; Herder, Johann Gottfried. *Reflexions on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, transl. F.E. Manuel London, 1986.

¹⁴ Jaspers, Karl. *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*. (at first Zürich 1949). München: Piper 1963; Jaspers, Karl: *The Origin and Goal of History*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976.

¹⁵ Eisenstadt, Shmuel Noah (Ed.): *The Origins and diversity of axial age civilizations*. Albany: State University of New York Press 1986; Arnason, Johann P.; Eisenstadt, S.N.; Wittrock, Björn (Eds.). *Axial Civilisations and World History*. Leiden: Brill, 2005.

¹⁶ Eisenstadt, S.N.: *Multiple Modernities*. *Daedalus Winter*, v. 129, n. 1, p. 1-30, 2000.

globalization as a second axial time. I can't go into the details of this idea of axial times, but I can only mention one of its decisive elements: It is the second axial time, within which we all live. It has the task to refer to the ideas of humankind, which were conceived in the first axial time in different forms, which however excluded each other. It has to pick them up and turn the logic of exclusion in the interrelationship of different ideas of humankind into the logic of inclusion. In the framework of such logic each tradition of conceptualizing humankind can be understood as a contribution to an intercultural communication. A transculturally valid idea of humankind within and by mutual reflections of these different ideas in the mirror of otherness can thus be realized.

What does this mean for historical learning and the task of history didactics? On the level of principles the answer to this question is rather simple: What I have said about conceptualizing humanity by a synthesis of unity and diversity has to be applied, or even better, has to be translated into an idea of historical learning, of course. On the level of a detailed organization of historical learning and a strategy of teaching history the answer is anything but simple. It has to be carefully worked out. I can't outline a complete theory of learning and teaching history in the presented frame of a new humanism. I only can indicate essentials of such a theory and give some hints to practical issues.

4 Presuppositions and implications of historical learning

Every process of historical learning has to start with the situation of the pupils and students. What experiences of their everyday life have to be addressed and picked up in order to bring about the competences of historical thinking they need for their future lives?

a) Diversity and unity in the class room

The most stimulating experience, which can initiate basic features and elements of a humanistic idea of history, is the experience of cultural diversity in the live world of the students as it is present already in the variety of their cultural backgrounds and – most concretely for history teaching – in the classroom. The students live their lives in social contexts where cultural difference plays an enormous role and has not yet found its generally accepted proper form. They have to come to terms with it in the various dimensions of their lives. Their historical consciousness has to integrate this variety into a coherent temporal perspective, within which their historical identities acquire personal and social features. At the same time the otherness of the others can find a place where it is accepted.

History didactics, which has to thematize this time perspective as the main aim of historic teaching and learning, has to start with the insight into the very fact that every student is an incorporated history. In a humanistic view this pre-given history in the presence of the students has to be conceived and treated as an individualized history of humankind. This insight is owed

to the humanistic tradition again: It is the main thesis of one of the leading humanistic thinkers, Wilhelm von Humboldt, who held that every human being is a manifestation of humankind and has to live his or her personal life in the full awareness of this representation.¹⁷

This sounds very rhetoric and not meaningful for the real life of young people. But without a reference to a basic principle of individuality and social interrelationship the educational tasks of history teaching could not be sufficiently fulfilled. Historical learning has to be organized as an attempt to intervene into the process of individualization and socialization. This attempt has to be committed to the purpose of helping the students to find his or her personal identity within the pre-given social context. This finding should take place in such a way that he or she may find recognized his or her individuality, and at the same time is able to recognize the otherness of the others as well. To formulate this aim of education is not only specific for history. By framing the intended identity with a history, which presents its chances and difficulties, it becomes specifically historical.

Let me repeat the fact: The students already live in the social context of a civil society. This organizes the lives of its members according to some basic universal rules and values, which allow and guarantee individualism as a matter of being different. Historical instruction in school has to present this life form as a result of a long-lasting historical process. It can be characterized as a process of humanizing man. This process has its end in and opens its future perspective within the subjectivity of the citizens and here we think of the students, of course. Since the basic values of this life form are universalistic and potentially include all human beings into their validity and commitments, this history can only be the history of humankind. (By the way, I think that this history should be told as the best answer to attack on Western tradition, I mentioned in the beginning of my paper.)

b) Diversity and unity in historical learning

What means history of humankind? At first glance it sounds too abstract and unable to fill any feasible curriculum of historical learning and teaching. But this impression is deceitful. I don't advocate a completely new history; instead my plea is for only a new form and dimension of the old and familiar one.¹⁸ All those historical events which are relevant for understanding the life-form of a modern civil society have to be taken into account. However, their presentation in the learning processes should be given the "face of humanity". The mile-stones, which mark the path to the students' life world should be presented as to their impact of understanding what

¹⁷ Humboldt, Wilhelm von: *Über den Geist der Menschheit*. In: *Werke* (Ed.). *Andreas Flitner und Klaus Giel*. Bd. 1: *Schriften zur Anthropologie und Geschichte*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960, S. 506-518. (Gesammelte Schriften [Akademie-Ausgabe] II, pp. 324-334).

¹⁸ In this respect I substantially differ from the proposal for a new history curriculum dedicated to an overall valid universal history, as it has been made by Luigi Cajani. A World History Curriculum for the Italian School. *World History Bulletin*, Fall, v. XVIII, n.2, p.26-32, 2002, Cajani does not take systematically into account the necessity of cultural difference as an issue of historical identity.

it means to be a human being with the life processes, which are impregnated by this understanding. This significance includes, of course, the limits, handicaps, and preventions of the imagined humanity and its dangers: – if that realized inhumane practices in treating people who were not included into the idea of humanity might ensue.

To give an example of a rather conventional theme: the French Revolution. Here the democratic organization of political domination should be in the centre of presenting and discussing the essential events. The rules of human and civil rights and the corresponding idea of humanity (with its exclusive elements concerning women, slaves etc.) should be focused on. But the shadow of the revolution should be addressed as well: the genocidal murder of people who were seen as "enemies of humankind" like the peasants of the Vendee should be addressed as well as a potential general danger.

5 How to learn Universal History

Thematizing humanity as the core issue of historical learning and teaching puts the whole discussion of the past and its impact for present and future into the frame of universal history. "Universal" does not mean to bring as many facts as possible into the stock of knowledge the students would have to acquire. Instead, it is a form of interpreting and understanding the highly selected historical events and developments the students have to become familiar with. Humanity should be brought into the learning processes as a dimension of human life, which is always present in its manifold manifestations and changes.

This humanistic dimensioning has to start from the very beginning of historical instruction, and to continue accompanying it to its very aim – the need for a new political and cultural humanism today. Early life forms of archaic societies, the life forms of the so called advanced civilizations and, finally, the life forms of modern societies have to be addressed with a special request for the understanding of what it means to be a human being as a person in its social context. When the structural change of human life-forms concerning the status of humans in relationship to non- and super-human dimensions of reality is addressed, the students will find elements of these different structures still effective in their own life experience. This makes the inclusion of cultural anthropology necessary when emphasizing basic forms of human life for history learning and teaching.

The structural differences of human life-forms should be brought into a temporal dimension of development. In this universal historical perspective humankind appears as a fundamental process of humanization, i. e., a process of enlarging and deepening the scope those values which define the humanity of human beings.

Such a universal historical perspective has to be made plausible for the students. It has to form the temporal frame of their historical consciousness. The dominating temporal structure of

the emerging historical consciousness of the students should be temporalized humankind, featured by the permanent struggle about the values system inscribed into the cultural nature of man.

Each specific historical theme and the way how to understand concrete processes of temporal change should be regularly reflected in respect to its relevance for the general perspective of humanizing humankind (and its related norms and values).

One of the most effective means to bring about such an idea is the presentation and reflection of longitudinal sections (Längsschnitte) as units of historical teaching. Here the main reference is to structures of fundamental anthropological importance and their long-lasting change towards the idea of humankind today. Their impact on basic rights for every human being and on the mutual recognition of different traditions, faiths and life-forms (under the meta-order of a secular civil society) should become obvious.

A simple example for such a longitudinal section is a universal history of the change and development of the media of human communication. Even young students can learn that in this respect history is an all-encompassing process of development from orality through scribality to the modern new electronic media.¹⁹ The pupils can learn the enormous impact of these different media for the organization of human life in general; they can learn what could be understood by "progress"; and they can learn that the basic elements of the older and essentially different life-forms have not been dissolved but kept in the later epochs. Only their status has changed. Similar structural processes can be brought into the curriculum f.e. the structural change of legitimating political domination (to give it a slogan: from the divine nature of the Pharaoh to a modern democratic constitution).

Similar universal developments can be identified in economy, environment, social life and all other dimensions of human life. They can be transferred into history instruction in school, but only under the condition that the complex phenomena become properly reduced by theoretical reflection so that ideal typological paradigms, which can be illustrated by concrete facts, are worked out.

a) The unity of historical time within the diversity of historical experiences

What leads the variety of historical experiences into the unity of an encompassing historical process? This question is a highly theoretical one and an issue of philosophy of history. But at the same time it has an enormous practical relevance for teaching and learning history. Here we have to deal with the question what – or better which agent – endows historical consciousness with a coherent mental structure, open for experiences, able for interpretation, orientation and motivation? Again the answer to this question requires a philosophy of history

¹⁹ D'Haenens, Albert. *Oralité, Scribalité, Electronalité. La scribalité occidentale depuis le moyen âge*. Louvain-la-Neuve, 1987.

which brings the temporal unity of universal history into the subjectivity of the students. The place of this time concept is their identity. By identity I understand a structural coherence of various identifications centered on the self-reference of an individual and his or her social community.²⁰ Identity integrates the manifold objectifications of the human self with its projections into the outer world so that the person concerned becomes aware of him- or herself as being the same, the one and only, in all changes of time and space.

Historical learning in a humanistic understanding is a process of individualizing humankind on the scene of historical experience. This process has to be presented in such a way that it meets and influences the self-reference or self awareness of the learners and their relationship to others, so that they will be able to historize their quality as a human being. This should be done by mirroring their self experience, their desires, hopes, expectations and fears in the historical experience of the variety of life forms and their various inbuilt ideas of humanity in the course of time.

b) The universality of fundamental criteria of historical thinking

The subjectivity of the learners and the variety and diversity of historical experiences are systematically interrelated by the sense-criteria of historical thinking. These sense-criteria are universal in their logic (covering the whole field of the experience of temporal change in making it 'historical'). The students should learn what the fundamental sense criteria are, how they operate in general and in one's own life orientation. By learning this – we can call it a theoretical or philosophical learning in and by history – the students acquire a competence of dealing with the universal dimension of history as a realm of experience and as a realm of interpretation and understanding.

Such learning is all the more necessary as there is more than one sense criterion effective in the work of historical consciousness. They are logically different and work in a very complex interrelationship. (But I can't deal with them here, but will only summarize them and their respective form of historical universality.)²¹

The sense criterion of traditional historical thinking constitutes the unity of history by rendering traditions effective in the social context of the individual. Historical learning means to become competent in knowing these traditions and their obligatory character and by applying them to changing situations of life. Identity is pre-given as a scheme for personal and social life, which has to be internalized. The dominant mode of learning is imitation (Mimesis). Otherness is

²⁰ See Straub, Jürgen (Ed.). *Narration, Identity, and Historical Consciousness. (Making Sense of History, v. 3)*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2005.

²¹ An explication in more detail can be found in: Rüsen, Jörn. Die vier Typen des historischen Erzählens. in: *Zeit und Sinn. Strategien historischen Denkens*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuchverlag 1990, p. 153-230; Rüsen, Jörn: *History. Narration – Interpretation – Orientation*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2005. p. 9-40; Rüsen, Jörn: *Historisches Lernen. (Fn. 2)*, p. 80-85.

defined by exclusion.

The sense criterion of exemplary historical thinking constitutes the unity of history by referring to super-temporally valid rules of human conduct. Historical learning means to generate general rules out of single (historical) events and applying these rules to other events. Identity is a result of gaining competence for these rules. Otherness is defined by a deviation from these rules.

The sense criterion of genetic historical thinking constitutes the unity of history by an idea of temporal change, the direction of which opens a solid perspective for future-directed activities. Historical learning means to gain the competence of organizing one's own cultural orientation along the line of this temporal direction in the changes of the human world. Otherness is defined by a place in a variety of different manifestations of the same temporal direction due to different circumstances under which it takes place.

The sense criterion of critical historical thinking constitutes the unity of history in a negative way, namely by the attempt to dissolve pre-given historical orientations by emphasizing diverging experiences of the past and related future perspectives.

All these criteria are interwoven with each other. All the more it is necessary to isolate their specific logic so that the student can know how they work in historical interpretation and understanding.

In the framework of this learning of theoretical reflexion might be explicated as a basic concept of historical thinking. It becomes focused to understanding difference in time and space of the human world. Understanding now gives the past the dignity of being different from the past (as Ranke formulated it: every epoch is immediately to God). At the same time it gives it a place in the temporal image of humankind. Humanism as hermeneutics gives history a human face.

6 Learning to be human

a) Historical experience

Historical learning starts with an input of historical experience into the pre-given historical consciousness of the students. Historical experience is the awareness that the past life-forms are different from those of today. This difference has to be recognized, and, at the same time, bridged by the idea of a temporal change. It is the change from strange to familiar life forms. The students should realize at the same time that people in the past had different concepts of what it means to be a human being. This should be made evident by pointing out the strikingly different ways of treating people according to the attributes ascribed to them by others. If you

believe you share a common quality of humanity with them, you will treat them in a different way as if they are negated this quality. There are numerous examples for this experience of attributing or denying human qualities to different groups of people (like free citizens or slaves). In this context the issue of gender should get high attendance. Here we have a speaking example of the ambivalence of humanity in history in the fact that in pre-modern times in the West intellectuals seriously discussed the question whether women were human or not.²²

The historical experience of inhumanity is a very important provocation for the students to realize the historicity of their deepest conviction about the value inherent in their being human. What they think of being evident turns out to be a result of a long historical development with no fixed guarantee for the future. It is very important to teach the students that the present-day-conviction that every member of the human race is 'human' is not self-evident in the specific sense that he or she has a certain value to be recognized by others. Historical learning has to stress this time-owned difference in order to become aware of the fact that the idea of humanity can only be understood in a temporal perspective. Learning this historicity of humanity might lead to a motivation for further development or at least for a defense of the achievements of modern humanism in political and social life. (This could be our answer to the attacks on the Western tradition of political culture today.)

b) historical interpretation

A humanistic interpretation of this historical experience has to bring about an empirically founded idea of history as a comprehensive process of humanizing man. In this context the issue of human rights should be addressed. The students should learn that they are the results of a historical process. (In order to understand the modern idea of basic human rights one has to go back to classical antiquity, Christianity, and the formation of political domination in different forms of institutionalized use of power.) It is essential for this learning that the inbuilt history of human and civil rights has not come to an end. The "end" of this history is the motivation of practical activities to defend and to development them furthermore.

(It is very important that this far and deep reaching historical perspective gets elements of multi-cultural diversity. In order to bring about this fundamental pluralism in universal history, the discussion about axial time developments of universalistic ideas on man (mostly in religious form) and the concept of multiple modernities has to be taken up in the curricula.)

The treatment of religion as a cultural power in history belongs into this context. The students have to learn that for a long time in world history the idea of what it means to be human was developed in religious terms or (in respect to Confucianism) at least in a relationship

²² See Gössmann, Elisabeth (Ed.). *Ob die Weiber Menschen seyn, oder nicht?* München: Iudicium, 1988.

to the idea of a metaphysical or divine order of the world. Only against such a background it is possible to understand the importance of secularism in modernity. The students have to learn that the emergence of a modern secular civil society is of the highest importance to come to terms with religious differences in a peaceful way. The character of the secular culture of civil society is a meta-order to rule the pluralisms of world-views and religious beliefs. This can easily be shown by the role of religious wars for the European subconscious. Thus the history of the emergence of modern civil society and of the secular legitimacy for political power and domination out of a bloody religious civil war in Europe gets a place in the historical consciousness of the young people of today. Here is the historical place for their various religious or secular convictions about what makes sense for their personal lives; here they find a historical answer to the question how they can and should refer to the different convictions of the others which whom they have to live together. It is history which makes clear that the secular order of modern civil society is not a possibility within a plurality of different orders, but a necessary meta-order for a peaceful life in an open pluralism of cultural orientations.

Additionally, a comparative view on other traditions than the Western ones can motivate the students to transgress a potential onesidedness in the history of political humanism. (A highly motivating push to this transgression could be the criticism of Western individualism by non-Western intellectuals as a lack of social commitment. This criticism has become a standard argument in intercultural communication, and it is worthwhile to take it seriously.)

c) Historical orientation and motivation

With this application of historical understanding of the variety of ideas of humanity and their change in time to the students' world experience the step from interpretation to orientation and motivation has already been taken. The pre-given life-form of a civil society with its basic secular value-system of human dignity and political civility (including Democratic attitudes) can only become a moving alignment in the mentality of the students if they have put it into the mental dynamics of their identity-formation. By historical learning the cultural achievements of humanity in an institutionalized peaceful relationship between different traditions and life-guiding convictions have to turn from a pre-given external context into an internal factor of the mentality. By history the idea of humankind can achieve a concrete plausibility and at the same time dynamics in human life as a moving force in universal history.

7 Outlook: Towards an new intercultural concept of history didactics

My considerations tried to enlarge the scope of history didactics as a discourse on historical learning. There is clear relationship of historical learning to topical cultural problems of orientation with a special emphasis on the important role of the life-form of modern civil society

with its basic secular value-system. In many respects the concept of a humanistic history didactics is not new. It integrates the results of the analysis of historical consciousness for the last 30 years. It tries to reshape the features of this analysis in favour of a clear principle of historical sense generation, namely that of humanism.

From its very beginning humanism was a concept of education. I believe that its modern form of education since the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century still has an unfulfilled potential for further development. I have focused my argumentation on one field of education, namely that of teaching and learning history. It is high time for an input of intercultural dimensions into the main purposes and strategies of history didactics. How can non-Western traditions and world views get their place in teaching history in schools so that pupils and students with non-Western cultural backgrounds are recognized in their difference and at the same time get a solid historical footing ground under their feet (in their historical consciousness) which they can share with their comrades in the classroom and with all citizens of their new homeland?

In order to solve this task it is necessary to refer to common elements of cultural orientation across the differences. I don't see any alternative for commonality but a common ground of being a human being.²³ This includes the fundamental claim for being recognized in his or her personal and social individuality. A historical thinking which historicizes this humanity in this way will bring the variety of its manifestation in space and time and the dynamics of its temporal change into this commonality of humanity. Here lies the possibility for history didactics to give an answer to the challenges of our time brought about by the growing density of intercultural communication in the globalizing process. But this is only true as long as history didactics is committed to the humanistic idea of human dignity, has a chance.

But there is still a lack in this humanistic argumentation. The humanistic tradition in the West has an open flank and a weak spot, namely its relationship to nature. Till now humanism has not yet developed an effective criterion to regulate the human relationship to nature. The inbuilt nature in human culture has not yet sufficiently been reflected in respect to the basic values of humanism. What does dignity of man mean in the human instrumentalization of nature for the purpose of physical survival?

There are only two possibilities in conceptualizing a concept for meeting the new challenges of nature in human life: one alternative is an idea of nature which can serve as a source for all the regulations the human relationship to nature needs in order to come to terms with it. The other alternative is an idea of humanity which enlarges the fundamental value-system combined with the cultural nature of humankind in general so that it covers their natural

²³ Antweiler, Christoph. *Menschliche Universalien. Kultur, Kulturen und die Einheit der Menschheit*. Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft 2007. Antweiler, Christoph. *Mensch und Weltkultu. Für einen realistischen Kosmopolitismus im Zeitalter der Globalisierung*. Bielefeld: Transcript 2010.

side of human life as well.

The first alternative would dissolve the tradition of humanism into a new naturalism the feature of which is totally unclear (except a lot of romantic returns to pre-modern cosmologies). The other alternative means that we have to continue the tradition of humanism. In this case it is necessary to deepen and enlarge our understanding of what it means to be a human being. Against the seduction of naturalizing human culture with a strong reference to the innovations of biology and brain research, the normative elements of human culture, centered around the principle of dignity, should be applied to the human relationship to its natural environment. History didactics is not the place for solving this problem. But it has to keep the place open in history teaching and learning where nature is an essential.