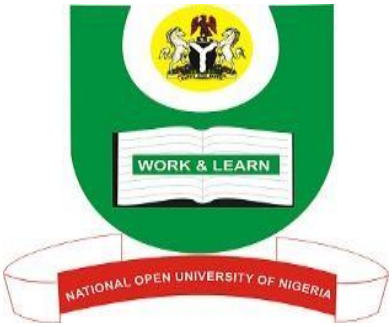


**Course Code**: PHL 415

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# COURSE GUIDE

# PHL 415: PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

**NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA**
**(NOUN)**

**2022**

## PHL 415: PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY
## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This course deals with philosophical problems concerning the historian's attempt to understand and explain history of not only humanity but all things that are of human concern in the world. It will examine various questions such as whether or history is a science. Other questions that will be given attention are: Is objectivity possible in history? What is the nature of historical explanations? What is the relationship between historiography and philosophy of history? Given that philosophy itself is a historical discipline, this course will also attempt to comprehend the view of the Anglo-American and Continental traditions of philosophy of philosophy of history. Other issues such as causation in history, methodological individualism and holism in history shall also be part of the contents that will be examined.

The study of history is a crucially important aspect of philosophy. This is mainly because it is a kind of reality that has a fundamental concern in human thought. As Daniel Little (2020) notes, through the history, humans are able to better understand themselves in the present through the forces, choices and interactions that shaped the same present. Usually this is about looking at the past in the present. On this note, the philosophers then comes into the picture to consider history itself and also the ways through which knowledge from history can be deemed as reliable, relevant and true.

In the Western tradition of thought, Herodotus (1996) is usually hailed as the father of history. Perhaps this is because he is the first historian. It is however important to also add that there are some other figures such as Thucyclides (1972), Voltaire (1824), Bossuet 1778), Toynbee (1954) Elton (1969), Carr (1961), Russell (1957), Evans (1999), Jenkins (1991), Danto (1965), Ricoeur (1988), Hegel (1988), Collingwood (1946), Nietzsche (1980) who have been able to inquire into the historical assumptions in their respective fields. Even when this course is going to acknowledge individual figures and their contributions in the writing and development of ways through which history can be questioned, it critically assesses their own methods too.

Following the discussion of the idea of history and what kind of things philosophy does to interrogate the idea of history, this course seeks to open students to the fact that history is not mere story. There are various dimensions toward history since it can evince traces of ideology, undermine or expose truth and even be used to paint a group of people as graceful or terrible. Following from this, it is not misplaced to therefore ask: what specifically, is the work or task of the philosophy in assessing history? Though not exhaustive, this is the fundamental question that will ring through each of the modules that are contained in this course.

## Course Objectives

In this course, the fundamental objective is to equip the students with the following:

- To examine the extent to which the methods of philosophy are applicable for the proper comprehension of history and historical processes;
- To show a deep understanding of the central issues and controversies present among philosophers engaged in philosophy of history;

- To develop the capacity to be able to see history beyond the codification of events that have happened in the past; and
- To have a commanding grasp of some key concepts such as: causality, possibility etc. and how they are related to the inquiry undertaken by philosophers over the meaning and nature of history.

## Working through this Course

For the successful understanding of this course, students are encouraged to possess a copy of the course guide which states what is expected of them. The main material can then be consulted side-by-side with the course guide as the students read through for the sake of coherence and logical flow which will then assist them to understand the fundamental ideas being expressed by each of the thematic considerations of some popular philosophers on history that are considered in the modules of this course. In addition to this, students are required to be actively involved in forum discussion and facilitation. In other words, attendance plus class participation are very important. There are interesting readings that are necessary, which will enhance your understanding of the course. Lecture notes are mere guidelines. In addition, it will be better if students are able develop novel thoughts and reflections over how the tools and method of philosophy have implications for a deeper understanding of history by consulting other relevant papers and publications beyond the course guide and notes given to them.

## Study Units

This course comprises of 14 study units that are divided into 4 modules. The 4 modules have 3-4 study units each. The entire contents of these units are expressed below:

**Module 1: An Introduction to the Subject Matter: Philosophy of History**
Unit 1: What business hath Philosophy with History?
Unit 2: Representation and Action in History
Unit 3: Social Identity, Memory and the Idea of Narratives
Unit 4: Selective and Temporal Prejudices in Historical Documentation

**Module 2: Methodologies and Approaches to the Study of History**
Unit 1: Methodological Individualism and Methodological Holism in History
Unit 2: Hermeneutical Dimension to the Study of History
Unit 3: Historiography and the Study of History

**Module 3: Dominant Traditions of Philosophy of History**
Unit 1: Continental Philosophy of History
Unit 2: Anglo-American Philosophy of History
Unit 3: The Linguistic Turn and the "New" Philosophy of History

**Module 4: Historiography and Philosophy of History in Contemporary Times**
Unit 1: Significance of Philosophy of History and Contemporary World Events
Unit 2: Scholars and Historiography in the 20$^{th}$ Century

Unit 3: History and the Mythological Basis of Identities
Unit 4: 20th Century African Identity Question and the Philosophy of History

## Presentation Schedule

This course has two presentations. There is one at the middle of the semester and the other towards the end of the semester. Before presentations, the facilitator would have taken the time to establish the rudimental of the course to the familiarity of the students. At the beginning of the semester, each student undertaking this course will be assigned a topic by the course facilitator, which will be made available in due time, for individual presentations during forum discussions. Each presenter has 15 minutes (10 minutes for presentation and 5 minutes for Question and Answer). On the other hand, students will be divided by the course facilitator into different groups. Each group is expected to come up with a topic to work on and to submit same topic to the facilitator via the recommended medium. Both attract 5% of total marks.

**Note:** Students are required to submit both papers via the recommended medium for further examination and grading. Both attract 5% of the total marks.

## Assessment

In addition to the discussion forum presentations, two other papers are required in this course. The paper should not exceed 2, 500 words (excluding references). It should be typewritten in 12 fonts, 1.5 spacing, and Times New Roman. The preferred reference is APA 6th edition (you can download a copy online). The topics will be made available in due time. Each carries 10% of the total marks.

To avoid plagiarism, students should use the followings links to test run their papers before submission:

- http://plagiarism.org
- http://www.library.arizona.edu/help/tutorials/plagiarism/index.html

If the student is unable to check, the course facilitator will do this after retrieving the electronic format from their student. Similarity index for submitted works by student must NOT EXCEED 35%. Finally, all students taking this course MUST take the final exam which attracts 70% of the total marks.

## How to Get the Most Out of this Course

For students to get the most out of this course, s/he must:

- Have 75% of attendance through active participations in both forum discussions and facilitation;
- Read each topic in the course materials before it is being treated in the class;
- Submit every assignment as at when due; as failure to do so will attract a penalty;
- Discuss and share ideas among his/her peers; this will help in understanding the course more;
- Download videos, podcasts and summary of group discussions for personal consumption;
- Attempt each self-assessment exercises in the main course material;

- Take the final exam; and
- Approach the course facilitator when having any challenge with the course.

## Facilitation

This course operates a learner-centred online facilitation. To support the student's learning process, the course facilitator will, one, introduce each topic under discussion; two, open floor for discussion. Each student is expected to read the course materials, as well as other related publications, and raise critical issues which s/he shall bring forth in the forum discussion for further dissection; three, summarizes forum discussion; four, upload materials, videos and podcasts to the forum; and five, disseminate information via email and SMS if need be.

## References/Further Readings/Web Sources


Bossuet, J.B. (1778). *A Universal History* (1681) London

Carr, E.H. (1961). *What is History?* New York.

Collingwood, R. (1946). *The Idea of History* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Danto, A. (1965). *Analytical Philosophy of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Elton, G. (1969). *The Practice of History*. London

Evans, R. (1999). *In Defense of History*. London

Hegel, G.W.F. (1988). *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (1837), translated by L. Rauch. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing

Herodotus (1996). *Histories* (c.450BCE-c.420BCE), translated by J. Marincola London.

Jenkins, K. (1991). *Re-Thinking History*. London

Jensen, K. (2022). "Philosophy of History." *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* https://iep.utm.edu/history/#:~:text=History%20is%20the%20study%20of,of%20religion%20%E2%80%93%20in%20two%20respects (Accessed May 17, 2022).

Little, D. (2020). "Philosophy of History." *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/history (Accessed May 19, 2022)

Nietzsche, F. (1980) *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* (1874), translated by P. Press Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.

Ricoeur, P. (1988). *Time and Narrative* (1983-5), 3 vols., translated by McLaughlin & Pellauer. Chicago: Chicago University Press

Russell, B. (1957).*Understanding History*. New York: Routledge

Thucydides, (1972). *History of the Peloponnesian War* (431BCE), translated by R. Warner. London

Toynbee, A. (1954). *A Study of History*, 10 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Voltaire, F.M.A. (1824). "Historiography" and "History" in his *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764), volume IV, translated by J. Morley London

In addition to the afore-stated works, the following online sites can also assist students to acquire additional publications:

- www.pdfdrive.net
- www.bookboon.com
- www.sparknotes.com
- http://ebookee.org
- https://scholar.google.com
- https://books.google.com

## Module 1: An Introduction to the Subject Matter: Philosophy of History
## Unit 1: What business hath Philosophy with History?



### 1.1 Introduction

This unit is poised to provide an interesting understanding to the ways through which philosophy intersects history. It examines what the tools of philosopher are as well as how they useful for the comprehension of history. In this unit, students will be able to re-immerse themselves in the tools of philosophy for which they had been taught. This unit will look at the nature of historical inquiry, paying attention to what kind of ways historians are motivated to write history.

### 1.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, it is expected that students would have been able to:

- Recognise the fundamental meaning of the course "philosophy of history";
- Possess a commendable knowledge of the nature of historical inquiry; and
- Be able to establish the relationship between the method of philosophical inquiry and their applications to history.

### 1.3 The Philosophical Method and What Philosophers "Do"

It has already been stated over and over again that the tools of philosophy are logical reasoning and analysis. This is what naturally comes to mind at the mere mention of the philosophical method. In its most common sense, philosophical methodology is the field of inquiry studying the methods used to do philosophy. But the term can also refer to the methods themselves. It may be understood in a wide sense as the general study of principles used for theory selection, or in a more narrow sense as the study of ways of conducting one's research and theorizing with the goal of acquiring philosophical knowledge. Philosophical methodology investigates both descriptive issues, such as which methods *actually* have been used by philosophers, and normative issues, such as which methods *should* be used or how to do *good* philosophy.

As a result of the fact that philosophers are mainly individuals that engage ideas critically with the mind set to seeing to their validity and reliability, the essence of what philosophers do can be located in terms of how they are able to make this task plausible. It is however important to disclose that there are arrays of methodological orientations such as phenomenological method,

pragmatic method, methodological scepticism etc. there is no doubt that the fundamental unity or background upon which they operate is based on critical reasoning, analysis and logic. There is no methodological orientation in philosophy that does not share this outlook.

In addition to the fact that the philosopher uses logic and critical analysis, it is also important to add that language is crucial for the methodology of the philosopher. The philosopher can only explore his tools within the context of language. This is why Ayer (1954) says that "a philosopher who cannot handle language is like a mathematician who cannot handle numerals." With this knowledge, we can then ask: what principally do philosophers "do"?

Aside the foregoing, another interesting to understand is that philosophers actually do nothing. In other words, the task of the philosopher is not located in what they do. The real essence of their contention however is located within the domain of what they say. This position has been affirmed by the Nigerian female philosopher Sophie Oluwole (2003: 423) who reasons that contrary to the focus of history and the social sciences, philosophy's primary endeavour is not with what people do but what they say, that is, verbal expressions by human beings. That is why we find that one of the most commonly used phrases in philosophy is "X said …." Hardly do we hear "Plato did" or "Russell did." Our references are always to what some people said….Given the undeniable fact that we have little or no written documents in which the actual sayings of our progenitors are passed down to us (Oluwole 2003: 423).

**Self-Assessment Exercise 1**

1. The tools of philosophy are_____
2. According to Alfred Jules Ayer, a philosopher that cannot handle _____ is likened to a _____ who cannot handle _____ (a) minerals/linguist/mathematics (b) dictionary/librarian/library (c) language/mathematician/numerals (d) algebra/mathematics/language
3. _____ investigates both descriptive issues, such as which methods *actually* have been used by philosophers, and normative issues, such as which methods *should* be used or how to do *good* philosophy (a) Ordinary Language Analysis (b) Ockham's Razor (c) Philosophical Methodology (d) Philosophical Anthropology

## 1.4 The Nature of Historical Inquiry

In this unit, the nature of historical inquiry will be discussed. Perhaps the starting point is to commence with the fundamental question: What are the intellectual tasks that define the historian's work? In a sense, this question is

best answered on the basis of a careful reading of some good historians. But it will be useful to offer several simple answers to this foundational question as a sort of conceptual map of the nature of historical knowing.

First, historians are interested in providing conceptualizations and factual descriptions of events and circumstances in the past (Little 2020). This effort is an answer to questions like these: "What happened? What was it like? What were some of the circumstances and happenings that took place during this period in the past?" Sometimes this means simply reconstructing a complicated story from scattered historical sources—for example, in constructing a narrative of the Spanish Civil War or attempting to sort out the series of events that culminated in the Detroit race riot / uprising of 1967 (Little 2020). But sometimes it means engaging in substantial conceptual work in order to arrive at a vocabulary in terms of which to characterize "what happened." Concerning the disorders of 1967 in Detroit: was this a riot or an uprising? How did participants and contemporaries think about it?

Second, historians often want to answer "why" questions: "Why did this event occur? What were the conditions and forces that brought it about?" What were the motivations of the participants? This body of questions invites the historian to provide an explanation of the event or pattern he or she describes: the rise of fascism in Spain, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the occurrence of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia in 1992 and later. And providing an explanation requires, most basically, an account of the causal mechanisms, background circumstances, and human choices that brought the outcome about. We explain an historical outcome when we identify the social causes, forces, events, and actions that brought it about, or made it more likely (Little 2020).

Third, and related to the previous point, historians are sometimes interested in answering a "how" question: "How did this outcome come to pass? What were the processes through which the outcome occurred?" How did the Prussian Army succeed in defeating the superior French Army in 1870? How did the Polish trade union Solidarity manage to bring about the end of Communist rule in Poland in 1989? Here the pragmatic interest of the historian's account derives from the antecedent unlikelihood of the event in question: how was this outcome possible? This too is an explanation; but it is an answer to a "how possible" question rather than a "why necessary" question (Little 2020).

Fourth, often historians are interested in piecing together the human meanings and intentions that underlie a given complex series of historical actions. They want to help the reader make sense of the historical events and actions, in terms of the thoughts, motives, and states of mind of the participants. For example: Why did Napoleon III carelessly provoke Prussia into war in 1870? Why did the parties of the far right in Germany gain popular support among German citizens in the 1990s? Why did northern cities in the United States develop such marked patterns of racial segregation after World War II? Answers to

questions like these require interpretation of actions, meanings, and intentions—of individual actors and of cultures that characterize whole populations. This aspect of historical thinking is "hermeneutic," interpretive, and ethnographic.

And, of course, the historian faces an even more basic intellectual task: that of discovering and making sense of the archival and historical information that exists about a given event or time in the past. Historical data do not speak for themselves; archives are incomplete, ambiguous, contradictory, and confusing. The historian needs to interpret individual pieces of evidence, and he or she needs to be able to somehow fit the mass of evidence into a coherent and truthful story (Little 2020). Complex events like the Spanish Civil War present the historian with an ocean of historical traces in repositories and archives all over the world; these collections sometimes reflect specific efforts at concealment by the powerful; and the historian's task is to find ways of using this body of evidence to discern some of the truth about the past.

In short, historians conceptualize, describe, contextualize, explain, and interpret events and circumstances of the past. They sketch out ways of representing the complex activities and events of the past; they explain and interpret significant outcomes; and they base their findings on evidence in the present that bears upon facts about the past. Their accounts need to be grounded on the evidence of the available historical record, and their explanations and interpretations require that the historian arrive at hypotheses about social causes and cultural meanings. Historians can turn to the best available theories in the social and behavioural sciences to arrive at theories about causal mechanisms and human behaviour; so historical statements depend ultimately upon factual inquiry and theoretical reasoning. Ultimately, the historian's task is to shed light on the what, why, and how of the past, based on inferences from the evidence of the present. If these are the main concerns of the historian, it is not misplaced to therefore ask: what is the business of the philosopher with history? This is the concern of the next section.

## Self-Assessment Exercise 2

1. Pick out the odd one: (a) "What happened?" (b) "What was it like?" (c) "Who was arrested?" (d) What were some of the circumstances and happenings that took place during this period in the past?"

2. _____ conceptualize, describe, contextualize, explain, and interpret events and circumstances of the past (a) Historians (b) Philosophers (c) Sociologists (d) Lexicographers

3. _____ present the historian with an ocean of historical traces in repositories and archives all over the world (a) Spanish Civil War (b) Edet lives in Calabar (c) Osinbajo is a professor (d) All of the above

## 1.5 The Philosophers' concern with History

According to David Little (2020), there are mainly three elements that endear the philosopher to history. The first is a set of issues having to do with the "ontology" of history, the kinds of entities, processes, and events that make up the historical past. This topic concerns the entities, forces, and structures that we postulate in describing the historical phenomena, whether the call for IPOB secession or Sovereign National Conference of 2014, and the theory we have of how these social entities depend upon the actions of the historical actors who embody them.

The second issue has to do with the problems of selectivity unavoidable for the historian of any period or epoch. Here we take up the question of how the unavoidable selectivity of historical inquiry in terms of theme, location, scope, and scale influences the nature of historical knowledge.

The third issue has to do with the complicated relationship that exists between history, narrative, and collective memory. This topic addresses the point that real human beings make history. And, as Marc Bloch insists (1953), we humans are historical beings, we tell stories about ourselves, and those stories sometimes themselves have major historical consequences. The collective memories and identities of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* were a historical fact in the 1900s. However identities as these, for Judt (2006) invite collective memories that refused to pay attention led to massive bloodshed, intra-ethnic cleansing, and murder during the violent confrontations in pre- and post-colonial Yoruba history.

Having briefly identified the three possible ways through which the philosopher's task intersects with data of the historian, the remainder of this module will now consider closely the ways through the concern of the philosopher intertwines with that of the historian's capture of history.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 3

1. _____ highlights three elements that endear the philosopher to history (a) G.W.F. Hegel (b) Luca Modric (c) Kevin Little (d) David Little

2. _____ focuses over the kinds of entities, processes, and events that make up the historical past.

3. _____ that refused to pay attention led to massive bloodshed, intra-ethnic cleansing, and murder during the violent confrontations in pre- and post-colonial (a) Abstract memories (b) Collective memories (d) Ancient Memories (d) Stored Memories

## 1.6 Summary

In this, we have been able to do three main things. In the first part, we consider the tools of philosopher. This was crucial in order to ascertain the extent to which the philosopher is able to probe the fundamental assumptions of other disciplines. In the second part, this unit explores the ways that the historian functions concerning the codification of events in the past. In other words, the contention here is to consider the manner through which history functions. In the last part of this unit, the ways through which the philosopher interrogates history was considered. Here, the role played by the methodological orientation of the philosopher in the evaluation of history was the preoccupation.

## 1.7 References/Further Readings/Web Sources


Ayer, A.J. (1954). *Language Truth and Logic.* New York: Dover Press

Bloc, M. (1953). *The Historian's Craft.* New York: Knopf

Judt, T. (2006). *Postwar: A history of Europe since 1945,* New York: Penguin Books

Little, D. (2020). "Philosophy of History." *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/history (Accessed May 19, 2022)

Obenga, T., (2004), "Egypt: Ancient History of African Philosophy" in K.Wiredu (ed.) *A Companion to African Philosophy,* New York: Blackwell.

Oluwole, S. A, (2003) "Democracy and Indigenous Governance: The Nigerian Experience" in J.O Oguejiofor, (ed.) *Philosophy, Democracy, and Responsible Governance in Africa,* Rome: LIT VERLAG Munster.


## 1.8 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises

**Self-Assessment Exercise 1:** 1. Logic and critical analysis; 2. (c); 3. (c)

**Self-Assessment Exercise 2:** 1. (c); 2. (a); 3 (a)

**Self-Assessment Exercise 3:** 1. (d); 2. Ontology of history; 3. (b)

## Unit 2: Representation and Action in History



### 1.1 Introduction

In the preceding unit, an attempt has been made to introduce the core contention of the philosopher's focus over history with the methodological approach that girds such inquiry. In the present unit, attention will now shift toward the comprehension of some of critical assessment of some approaches or assumptions employed by the historian for writing about an event. As this unit will reveal, most of these assumptions are usually harmless on first showing but with the philosopher's presence, their implications are usually made clear. The ways actors in history are represented and the cause relations between events as detailed by the historian are the two crucial concerns of the present unit.

### 1.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, it is hoped that students would have been able to:

- How the historian perceives events;
- How historical personae are documented by historians and the implications of such; and
- The reliability of the causal inferences made by historians about events which they are documenting.

### 1.3 Actors and Representations in History

When talking about actors, we are talking about how personalities are viewed in history. Usually they are seen as historical entities, objects or personalities that soon metamorphose into some symbolic instruments. For instance, Jesus, the son of a carpenter soon metamorphosed in the Messiah, Adolf Hitler was seen by some pro-Nazi supporters as an instrument used for German domination. Representations and actors in history are not also limited to human entity alone. It is also possible to ascribe representations to group actors such as how groups such as *Al-Qaeda* being seen by some religious fundamentalist as enforcers of religious views even when in some quarters they have been labelled as terrorists and those who go against the principles of fundamental of human rights. So it is therefore pertinent to consider the ways through which the philosopher of history attempts to interrogate the events that have been documented by historian. This is an overriding issue for David Little (2020) who considers that an important problem for the philosophy of history is how to conceptualize "history" happenings. What are the "objects" of which history consists? Are there social structures or systems that play a role in history? Are

there causes at work in the historical process? Or is history simply a concatenation of the actions and mental frameworks of myriad individuals, high and low? If both structures and actors are crucial to understanding history, what is the relationship between them?

Marc Bloch (1953) provided a very simple and penetrating definition of history, by saying that "history is man in time." By this he meant that history is the product of human action, creativity, invention, conflict, and interaction (Little 2020). Bloch (1953) was sceptical about many other categories commonly used to analyse history—periods, epochs, civilizations, reigns, and centuries. Instead, he advocated for what can be called an "actor-centred" conception of history. If there are structures and systems in history, they depend upon the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individual actors. If there are causes in history, they likewise depend upon the actions and interactions of human actors within a setting of humanly created institutions and norms. The task of the historian is to reconstruct the meanings, beliefs, values, purposes, constraints, and actions that jointly explain the moments of history, from the meaning of an ancient stele to the causes (Little 2020).

This perspective does not diminish the ontological importance of structures, systems, and ideologies in history. It simply forces the historian, like the social scientist, to be attentive to the problem of articulating the relationship that exists between actors and structures. A system of norms, a property system, and a moral ideology of feudal loyalty can all be understood as being both objectively present at a time and place, and being ontologically dependent upon the mental frameworks, actions, and relationships of the individual actors who make up these systems. This problem has been thoroughly discussed in the philosophy of social science under the rubric of "ontological individualism" (Zahle and Collin 2014). Ontological individualism is also known in some quarters as methodological individualism and it will be given closer attention in a later module of this course. For the moment, it is important to realise that higher-level social entities are indeed causally powerful in the social world; and they depend entirely for their causal powers on the characteristics of the individual actors who constitute them. This is the requirement of micro-foundations: extended social structures and causes depend upon micro-foundations at the level of the individuals who constitute them (Little 2017). In particular, we need to have some idea about how individuals have been brought to think and act in the ways required by the structures and ideologies in which they function as adults. On this approach, history is the result of the actions and thoughts of vast numbers of actors, and institutions, structures, and norms are likewise embodied in the actions and mental frameworks of historically situated individuals. Such an approach helps to inoculate us against the error of reification of historical structures, periods, or forces, in favour of a more disaggregated conception of multiple actors and shifting conditions of action. This is the conception to which we are drawn when we understand history along the lines proposed by Bloch (1953).

This orientation brings along with it the importance of analysing closely the social and natural environment in which actors frame their choices. A historian's account of the flow of human action eventuating in historical change unavoidably needs to take into account the institutional and situational environment in which these actions take place. Part of the social environment of a period of historical change is the ensemble of institutions that exist more or less stably in the period: property relations, political institutions, family structures, educational practices, religious and moral values. So historical explanations need to be sophisticated in their treatment of institutions, cultures, and practices (Little 2020). It is an important fact that a given period in time possesses a fund of scientific and technical knowledge, a set of social relationships of power, and a level of material productivity. It is also an important fact that knowledge is limited; that coercion exists; and that resources for action are limited. Within these opportunities and limitations, individuals, from leaders to ordinary people, make out their lives and ambitions through action.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 1

1. According to Marc Bloch, "history is a _____ in _____."

2. The following are forms of representation in history except (a) Moses the Deliverer (b) Jesus the Messiah (c) Isaiah the Prophet (d) Al-Qaeda as Liberator

3. The task of the historian is to _____ the meanings, beliefs, values, purposes, constraints, and actions that jointly explain the moments of history, from the meaning of an ancient stele to the causes (a) Reconstruct (b) Revive (c) Redirect (d) Rewrite

## 1.4 Structures and Causal Elements in History

In the previous section, we have focused over how representations and historical actors are examined by the philosopher of history as well as some of the implications that are present in that approach. It is now time to discuss how the philosopher of history attempts to draw some causal connections in history. The central question here is: How does the philosopher of history discusses the idea of "causes in history"?

There are various ways through which the foregoing question can be addressed in support of the idea of "causes in history." Once established, it is reasonably straightforward to see how a social structure such as a property system or an ideology "causes" a historical outcome: by constraining the choices of actors and contributing to their motivations and values in the choices they make, a structure or an ideology influences historically important events like social movements, market crashes, or outbreaks of ethnic violence. Structures

influence individual actors, and individual actors collectively constitute structures. This approach gives a basis for judging that such-and-so circumstance "caused" a given historical change; but it also provides an understanding of the way in which this kind of historical cause is embodied and conveyed—through the actions and thoughts of individuals in response to given natural and social circumstances (Little 2020).

Are there large scale causes at work in historical processes? Historians often pose questions like these: "What were some of the causes of the fall of Rome?", "what were the causes of the rise of fascism?", or "what were the causes of the Industrial Revolution?" These kinds of questions presuppose that there were grand causes at work that had grand effects. However, it is more plausible to believe that the causes of some very large and significant historical events are themselves small, granular, gradual, and cumulative. If this is the case, then there is no satisfyingly simple and high-level answer to the question, why did Rome fall? Moreover, astute historians like Bloch and his contemporaries recognized that there is a very large amount of contingency and path dependency in historical change (Pierson, 2004). Historical outcomes are not determined by a few large scale causes; instead, multiple local, contingent, and conjectural processes and happening jointly come together in the production of the outcome of interest. It is possible, for example, that the collapse of the Roman Empire resulted from a myriad of very different contingencies and organizational features in different parts of the empire. A contingent account of the fall of Rome might refer to logistical difficulties in supplying armies in the German winter, particularly stubborn local resistance in Palestine, administrative decay in Roman Britain, population pressure in Egypt, and a particularly inept series of commanders in Gaul. Without drama, administrative and military collapse ensues. The best we can do sometimes is to identify a swarm of independent, small-scale processes and contingencies that eventually produced the large outcome of interest.

This approach might be called "actor-centred history": we explain a historical moment or event when we have an account of what people thought and believed; what they wanted; and what social, institutional, and environmental conditions framed their choices. It is a view of history that gives close attention to states of knowledge, ideology, and agency, as well as institutions, organizations, and structures, and examines the actions and practices of individuals as they lived their lives within these constraining and enabling circumstances (Little 2020). Further, it emphasizes the contingency and path-dependency of history, and it acknowledges the fact of heterogeneity of institutions, beliefs, and actions across time and place.

**Self-Assessment Exercise 2**

1. _____ influence individual actors, and individual actors collectively constitute structures (a) Structures (b) Facilities (c) Institutions (d) History
2. Causes in history are: (a) True (b) False (c) Undetermined (d) Probable
3. In a few words, how would you describe the actor-centred approach to historical evaluation?

## 1.5 Summary

It is clear that the philosopher of history is not drawn merely to consider the events of history per se. Efforts are given to the understanding of some other salient issues that are usually overlooked by historians. As this unit has been able to show, the use of symbolism and representations for actors and events is rife. More so, the ways through which connections are drawn between events and their causes have also been another crucial issue bordering the philosopher of history. Whereas we all know that the Oyo Empire fell, the philosopher of history intends to draw as much causal reasons for the fall before settling for the most plausible. The present unit has been able to focus on two main issues that concern the philosopher of history when evaluating historical events. It has been able to explore the idea of representations of historical actors as well as the role of causal connection between historical occurrences and what could have motivated them.

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## 1.7 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises

**Self-Assessment Exercise 1:** 1. Man/Time; 2. (c); 3. (a)

**Self-Assessment Exercise 2:** 1. (a); 2 (d); 3: In simple terms, through the actor-centred approach, one may be able to explain a historical moment or event when we have an account of what people thought and believed; what

they wanted; and what social, institutional, and environmental conditions framed their choices. It is a view of history that gives close attention to states of knowledge, ideology, and agency, as well as institutions, organizations, and structures, and examines the actions and practices of individuals as they lived their lives within these constraining and enabling circumstances.

## Unit 3: Social Identity, Memory and the Idea of Narratives



## 1.1 Introduction

In this unit, the aim is to uncover some of the ideas that are central to the study of events which the historian seeks to document. The meaning of narrative will be considered in the course of understanding the idea of this unit. More so, the meaning of collective memory and how it together with the doctrine of narrative, informs the notion of memory and social identity that historians even take for granted during the documentation of events.

## 1.2 Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, it is hoped that the student would have been able to:

1. Understand the idea of narratives within the context of philosophy of history;
2. The role that the concept of memory plays in historical documentations; and
3. How identity is built overtime among a people via shared history.

## 1.3 The Meaning of Narratives

When talking about the concept, narrative, it needs to be stated that it is in general terms, understood as "an account of how and why a situation or event came to be. A narrative is intended to provide an account of how a complex historical event unfolded and why. We want to understand the event in time" (Little 2020). What were the contextual features that were relevant to the outcome—the conditions at one or more points in time that played a role? What were the actions and choices that agents performed, and why did they take these actions rather than other possible choices? What causal processes—either social or natural—may have played a role in influencing the outcome? So a narrative seeks to provide hermeneutic understanding of the outcome—why did actors behave as they did in bringing about the outcome?—and causal explanation—what social and natural processes were acting behind the backs of the actors in bringing about the outcome? And different narratives represent different mixes of hermeneutic and causal factors.

A crucial and unavoidable feature of narrative history is the fact of selectivity. In the next unit, we shall be looking at the idea of selectivity in history. For the moment however, it is important emphasise that the narrative historian is forced to make choices and selections at every stage: between "significant" and "insignificant", between "sideshow" and "main event", and between levels of description (Little 2020). Does this mean that the idea of narrating an event has

some elements or tones attached to it which in some cases may not be open to the knowledge of the historian?

Whilst providing an avenue for the foregoing question, David Little (2020) announces that there are often multiple truthful, unbiased, and inconsistent narratives that can be told for a single complex event. Exactly because many things happened at once, actors' motives were ambiguous, and the causal connections among events are debatable, it is possible to construct inconsistent narratives that are equally well supported by the evidence. Further, the intellectual interest that different historians bring to the happening can lead to differences in the narrative.

One historian may be primarily interested in the role that different views of social justice played in the actions of the participants; another may be primarily interested in the role that social networks played; and a third may be especially interested in the role of charismatic personalities, with a consequent structuring to the narrative around the actions and speeches of the charismatic leader. Each of these may be truthful, objective, and unbiased—and inconsistent in important ways with the others. So narratives are underdetermined by the facts, and there is no such thing as an exhaustive and comprehensive telling of the story—only various tellings that emphasize one set of themes or another (Little 2020). Another way to properly understand the narrative aspect which is being discussed in this unit is to explore the idea of collective memory – the preoccupation of the next section.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 1

1. A crucial and unavoidable feature of narrative history is the _____ (a) Objectivity of Narratives (b) Fact of Selectivity (c) Fact of Objectivity (d) Problem of Subjectivity

2. "Often multiple truthful, unbiased, and inconsistent narratives that can be told for a single complex event." This statement is: (a) False (b) Certainly (c) Undetermined (d) Sometimes

3. "The intellectual interest that different historians bring to the happening can lead to differences in the narrative." This statement is: (a) False (b) Certainly (c) Undetermined (d) Sometimes

## 1.4 The Idea of Collective Memory and Social Identity

At this juncture, it is not misplaced to ask: What is the relation between history, memory, and narrative? We might put these concepts into a crude map by saying that "history" is an organized and evidence-based presentation of the processes, actions, and events that have occurred for a people over an extended period of time; "memory" is the personal recollections and representations of individuals who lived through a series of events and processes; and

"narratives," just as the preceding section have already indicated, are the stories that ordinary people and historians weave together to make sense of the events and happenings through which a people and a person have lived (Little 2020). It is at this juncture that the notion of collective memory comes into the picture.

When we are talking about collective memory, the basic idea concerns groups such as peoples of Niger Delta in south-south Nigeria, the *Arewa* of Northern Nigeria and the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* of south-West Nigeria that share the collective expression of a past that binds them together. This can be understood as a shared set of narratives and stories about the past events of the given group or community (Little 2020).

When we consider collective memory and social identity, we are also forced to recognize that powerful institutions attempt to shape the narrative of important events in ways that serve political interests. A group identity can be defined as a set of beliefs and stories about one's home, one's people, and one's past. These ideas often involve answers to questions like these: Where did we come from? How did we get here? And perhaps, who are my enemies? So an identity involves a narrative, a creation story, or perhaps a remembrance of a long chain of disasters and crimes (Little 2020).

Identity and collective memory are intertwined; monuments, songs, icons, and flags help to set the way points in the history of a people and the collective emotions that this group experiences. They have to do with the stories we tell each other about who we are; how our histories brought us to this place; and what large events shaped us as a "people." Governments, leaders, activists, and political parties all have an interest in shaping collective memory to their own ends. Collective memories and identities are interwoven with myths and folk histories. And, as Benedict Anderson (1983) demonstrated, these stories are more often than not fictions of various kinds, promulgated by individuals and groups who have an interest in shaping collective consciousness in one way or another. From this understanding and comprehension of how social identity, memory and narrative intertwines, it is important to highlight some of the focus that the philosopher of attention.

The philosophy of history must pay attention to the nexus of experience, memory, and history. There is no single "Civil Rights era" experience or "Great Depression" experience; instead, historians must consider a wide range of sources and evidence, including oral histories, first-person accounts, photographs, and other traces of the human experience of the time to allow them to discern both variation and some degree of thematicization of memory and identity in the periods they study (Little 2020). Second, attention to history and memory highlights the amount of human and individual agency involved in memory. Memories must be created; agents must find frameworks within which to understand their moments of historical experience. Museums and monuments curate historical memories — often with biases of their own. A

third and equally important point is the fact that memories become part of the political mobilization possibilities that exist for a group. Groups find their collective identities through shared understandings of the past; and these shared understandings provide a basis for future collective action.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 2

1. When we consider collective memory and social identity, we are also forced to recognize that powerful institutions attempt to shape the narrative of important events in ways that serve political interests (a) powerful (d) dominant (c) powerless (d) none of the above **Ans.: a**

2. _____ and _____ curate historical memories — often with biases of their own (a) houses and masons (b) museums and monuments (c) universities and libraries (d) bookshops and coffee houses

3. A _____ can be defined as a set of beliefs and stories about one's home, one's people, and one's past (a) personal identity (b) memory identity (c) past identity (d) group identity

4. In this study, it is argued that identity and collective memory are intertwined (a) False (b) True (c) Impossible (d) none of these

5. How do collective memory and identity intertwined in the task of the historian?

## 1.5 Summary

Thus far, it has been demonstrated that the idea of taking note of things in the past is not as easy as it seems. There are some ideological implications that undergird the function of the historian and the documentations of events. The concepts of identity, narrative, memory as briefly examined in the present unit has been able to endorse the position that it is nearly impossible to consider a flawless and ideologically-absent documentation of events. This unit has given attention to the ways that historians take to the idea of narratives and what motivates social identity of a people. Society can show that there are persons who occupy a particular territory. However, it is the historian that is able to go further to show that people do not just bind together suddenly but it is a process that builds up overtime.

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## 1.7 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

**Self-Assessment Exercise 1:** 1. (b); 2. (d); 3. (b)

**Self-Assessment Exercise 2:** 1. (a); 2. (b); 3. (d); 4. (b) 5: Identity and collective memory are intertwined; monuments, songs, icons, and flags help to set the way points in the history of a people and the collective emotions that this group experiences. They have to do with the stories we tell each other about who we are; how our histories brought us to this place; and what large events shaped us as a "people." Governments, leaders, activists, and political parties all have an interest in shaping collective memory to their own ends.

## Unit 4: Selective and Temporal Prejudices in Historical Documentation



### 1.1 Introduction

The focus of this unit is to discuss a salient aspect of philosophy of history as a subject matter which is the selective and temporal prejudices that makes an event worthy of the attention of the historian. The unit intends to discuss the extent to which the selection and temporal bias by the historian can ever be justified.

### 1.2 Learning Outcomes

In this unit, it is expected that the students would have been able to:

- Be familiar with the bias that informs the selection of an event in history over others; and
- Understand how some events are assessed from the perspective of micro and macro-histories within some time scale.

### 1.3 The Idea of Selectivity in History

Historical research unavoidably requires selectivity in deciding what particular phenomena to emphasize. As Max Weber (1949) notes, there is an infinite depth to historical reality, and therefore it is necessary to select a finite representation of the object of study if we want to approach a problem rigorously. Let us imagine, for example, that a historian is interested in cities and their development over time. This might be pursued as an economic question, a question of regional geography, a question about cultural change, a question about poverty and segregation, a question about municipal governance, or a question about civil disturbances, and so one, for indefinitely many aspects of urban life (Little 2020). One generation of historians may be especially interested in cultural topics, while another generation is preoccupied with the organization of the economy at various points in history.

The two orientations lead to very different historical representations of the past. Both inquiries lead to true depictions of the cities in question, but their findings and interpretations are very different. Likewise, the historian needs to make choices about location; is he or she interested in the cities of Britain, the cities of Europe, or all cities in the world? Further, the historian must consider whether to conduct a comparative history of cities, examining similarities and differences in the development of Paris and London; or instead restrict attention to a single case. Simply collecting “historical facts” about cities in the past is not a valid mode of historical inquiry. The question of how historians

select and identify their subjects for research is an important one for the philosophy of history, and it has great significance for how we think about "knowing the past".

Weber (1949) emphasizes the role that the scholar's values play in his or her selection of a subject matter and a conceptual framework. So it is always open to historians of later generations to re-evaluate prior interpretations of various aspects and periods of history. There is no general or comprehensive approach to defining the historical; there is only the possibility of a series of selective and value-guided approaches to defining specific aspects of history. We are always at liberty to bring forward new perspectives and new aspects of the problem, and to arrive at new insights about how the phenomena hang together when characterized in these new ways (Little 2020). This inherent selectivity of historical knowledge does not undermine the objectivity or veridicality of our knowledge; it merely entails that – like mathematics – history is inherently incomplete (Little 2020).

### Self-Assessment Exercise 1

1. _____ is one scholar who emphasizes the role that the scholar's values play in his or her selection of a subject matter and a conceptual framework (a) Durkheim (b) Weber (c) Marx (d) Spencer

2. One generation of historians may be especially interested in cultural topics, while another generation is preoccupied with the organization of the economy at various points in history. (a) True (b) Untrue (c) Undetermined (d) None of the above

3. Is the approach to selectivity in history a fixed and unchangeable one?

## 1.4 Scale in History

The previous section has focused on the idea of selectivity which hints at the ways through which a historian goes around to consider factors that will indicate the focus of history. In this section, the justification for focusing on one era or period but not another is the contention of the idea of timescale.

Suppose we are interested in Africa history. Are we concerned with Africa as a continent, including Algeria, South Africa, Ghana, and Mali, or the whole of Mali during the Songhai Empire, or Gao Province on the Niger River? Or if we define our interest in terms of a single important historical event like independence of Nigeria from Britain, are we concerned with the whole of the independence story, or the specific experience of a handful of factors such as the Aba Women Riot? Given the fundamental heterogeneity of social life, the choice of scale makes an important difference to the findings (Little 2020).

Historians differ greatly around the decisions they make about scale. It is possible to treat any historical subject at the micro-scale. This evidence in how William Hinton (1966) provides what is almost a month-to-month description of the Chinese Revolution in Fanshen village—a collection of a few hundred families. From another perspective, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (1979) offers a deep treatment of the villagers of Montaillou; once again, a single village and a limited time. A work such as the history of Idumota market in Lagos falls under this kind of sample. These histories are limited in time and space, and they can appropriately be called "micro-history." This is because they look at a minute aspect of historical occurrences within a small context.

Macro-level history is possible as well and there are instances of this in the writings of historians both in Nigeria and abroad. William McNeill (1976) provides a history of the world's diseases; Massimo Livi-Bacci (2007) offers a history of the world's population (Livi-Bacci 2007); Elizabeth Isichei (1983) provides a history of Nigeria and De Vries and Goudsblom (2002) provide an environmental history of the world. In each of these cases, the historian has chosen a scale that encompasses virtually the whole of the globe, over millennia of time (Little 2020). These histories can certainly be called "macro-history." One will notice that the priority or overriding concerns for these are large scale

Both micro- and macro-histories have important shortcomings. Micro-history leaves us with the question, "how does this particular village shed light on anything larger?" Macro-history leaves us with the question, "how do these large assertions about the nature of revolution or the importance of class conflict in mobilization apply in the context of Canada or Warsaw?" The first threatens to be particular as to lose all interest, whereas the second threatens to be so general as to lose all empirical relevance to real historical processes (Little 2020). Nevertheless, both point out the limitations that none of them is not without its faults or limitations. As a result, the idea of history is something that must be taken from the prejudice, bias or even specialisation of the historian.

## Self-Assessment Exercise 2

1. Macro-level history considers the scale of events in a minute scope (a) True (b) False (c) Probably (d) None of the above

2. A Historical work entitled *The History of Kontagora Market* falls under which historical scale? (a) Macro-level (b) Medium-level (c) Micro-level (d) Wide-level

3. Pick out the odd option: (a) Micro-level history (b) Iron-level History (d) Scale-level history (d) Multi-level history

## 1.5 Summary

It is clear that when the historian settles for a particular interest, topic or even that has occurred, it needs to be understood that there are some motivations. There are historians that may focus on the whole of Nigeria. There are some that will focus, for instance on the Lokoja Market in Kogi State. All of these and the motivations for why this topic was settled for and not that call for the concepts of selectivity and timescale in history. This unit has been able to consider the idea of selectivity and timescale in historical documentation. These terms consider the idea of what makes a historical event to be of concern for documentation but not another. Selectivity deals with the motivations that allows a historian to decide what s/he want to write about whereas scale considers the temporal bias for one event that makes the historian to not want to document another.

## 1.6 References/Further Readings/Web Sources


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Weber, M. (1949). *The Methodology of Social Sciences* Illinois: Free Press


## 1.7 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises

**Self-Assessment Exercise 1:** 1. (b); 2. (c); 3 (a)

**Self-Assessment Exercise 2:** 1. (b); 2. (a); 3: It is always open to historians of later generations to re-evaluate prior interpretations of various aspects and periods of history. There is no general or comprehensive approach to defining the historical; there is only the possibility of a series of selective and value-guided approaches to defining specific aspects of history. We are always at liberty to bring forward new perspectives and new aspects of the problem, and to arrive at new insights about how the phenomena hang together when characterized in these new ways.

## End of Module Questions

1. The philosopher uses _____ and _____
   **Ans. Logic and critical analysis**

2. Often historians are interested in piecing together the human meanings and intentions that underlie a given complex series of _____ (a) historical actions (b) imaginative actions (c) corresponding actions (d) historical reactions
   **Ans. (a)**

3. Pick the odd choice concerning identities and memories (a) Igbo (b) Egbe omo Oduduwa (c) Nigerian Medical Association (d) Arewa
   **Ans. (c)**

4. A crucial and unavoidable feature of narrative history is the _____ (a) Objectivity of Narratives (b) Fact of Selectivity (c) Fact of Objectivity (d) Problem of Subjectivity
   **Ans. (b)**

5. Is the approach to selectivity in history a fixed and unchangeable one?
   **Ans.: It is always open to historians of later generations to re-evaluate prior interpretations of various aspects and periods of history. There is no general or comprehensive approach to defining the historical; there is only the possibility of a series of selective and value-guided approaches to defining specific aspects of history. We are always at liberty to bring forward new perspectives and new aspects of the problem, and to arrive at new insights about how the phenomena hang together when characterized in these new ways.**

## Module 2: Methodologies and Approaches to the Study of History

## Unit 1: Methodological Individualism and Methodological Holism in History



### 1.1 Introduction

The essence of this unit is to consider two popular approaches or methods that are concerned with the idea of methodological individualism and methodological holism in history. Though an idea that is replete in the social sciences, it is important to point out that it has become relevant in history too.

### 1.2 Learning Outcomes

In this unit, the student will be exposed to:

- The meaning of methodological individualism and its application to history; and
- The meaning of methodological holism and its relevance to history.

### 1.3 What is Methodological Individualism?

According to Picavet (2001), methodological individualism refers to the explanatory and predictive strategies which give primacy to individual action in relation to social phenomena. Such strategies rely on a distinction between the choice problems of individual actors, on the one hand, and social institutions, regularities and norms on the other hand. It is thus possible to use general and stylized models of individual choice in order to account for aggregate social phenomena, as exemplified by the work of Weber, Pareto, and others. While the constitution of sociology as an autonomous discipline has involved the gradual recognition of a separate layer of social facts, methodological individualism is not alien to the sociological tradition. Models of individual action figure prominently in classical sociological theories, and methodological individualism does indeed presuppose the existence of social facts as an explanandum for social science (Picavet 2001). Methodological individualism usually involves an effort to exhibit the typical, relevant ‘reasons’ of actors, which make their observed behavior understandable. On this account, the emergence and stability of social regularities, norms and institutions should be explained in terms of underlying individual reasons. This creates an opportunity for the application of classical rational-choice models and elaborate theories of individual cognition.

A number of important normative criteria presuppose an individualistic description of social life. For example, the usual criteria associated with freedom and responsibility have no clear significance unless social life is understood with a view to the causal powers of persons, portrayed as autonomous units in decision-making tasks. These units must be thought of as capable of self-consciousness, evaluation, deliberative choice, and action. It thus appears that common normative views about social life or institutions implicitly rely on an individualistic kind of description and explanation with respect to social phenomena and personal capacities.

According to Picavet (2001), the social agent's freedom consists of choice among possible alternatives, insofar as autonomous deliberation takes place, in a way that testifies to rectitude and rightness. This statement sums up a family of interrelated arguments and theses that have often been put forward in the tradition of methodological individualism in sociology, with the general intention of making it clear that the transformative powers of the individual in social life are ultimately grounded in the individual's capacity for autonomous choice. The latter capacity is best expressed in freedom of choice as expressed in social settings which provide opportunities to give one's consent to collective, interpersonal, or impersonal constraints (Picavet 2001).

At a fundamental level, some kind of individualistic description of social life is involved in the formulation of many evaluative criteria. In most cases, equality or efficiency criteria can be applied only if we are able to ascertain that definite states of affairs are experienced by distinct individuals (Picavet 2001). Individualism, here, stands for an 'atomistic' understanding of social life that identifies the separate lives and experiences of the individuals (rather than collective entities) as the *loci* at which things of value are to be found (Picavet 2001).

## Self-Assessment Exercise 1

1. _____ emphasises that the personality overrides the whole (a) Compatibilism (b) Individualism (c) Aristocracy (d) Elitism

2. "The individualist view that explanation in social science must rely wholly and exhaustively on _____ is hotly contested and is not as uncontroversial or trivial as it appears

3. Freedom is essential for individualism (a) Undetermined (b) Completely False (d) True

## 1.4 What is Methodological Holism?

Methodological holism is an orientation in research and analysis where the aim is to understand the phenomenon under investigation in its totality as unique and apart from its component parts, rather than to seek to fragment it into known or familiar components. The doctrine of methodological holism holds that social wholes are more than the sum of individual attitudes, beliefs, and actions and that the whole can often determine the characteristics of individuals.

In Methodological Holism is the whole differs from the sum of the parts not only in quantity but in quality. Methodological Holism says that the individual element is inextricably tied to other individuals (Zahle 2016). Methodological Holism regards individuals or elements as reciprocally influencing each other. Methodological holism is often contrasted with Methodological Individualism. Methodological holism has been prominent in philosophy and social science since Hegel, and it has its roots in the writings of Plato. Methodological holism takes a number of forms across social science disciplines. There are three basic views concerning methodological holism and they are briefly highlighted below:

*Strong methodological holism*: Holist explanations alone should be offered within the social sciences; they are indispensable. Individualist explanations may, and should, be dispensed with (Zahle 2016).

*Moderate methodological holism*: In certain cases, holist explanations should be advanced; in other cases individualist explanations should be advanced; both holist and individualist explanations are indispensable within the social sciences.

*Methodological individualism*: Individualist explanations alone should be put forward within the social sciences; they are indispensable. Holist explanations may, and should, be dispensed with.

Among these positions, the thesis of strong methodological holism has enjoyed relatively little support and today it has few, if any, proponents. The vast majority of methodological holists are of the moderate variety. Accordingly, the debate has mainly played itself out between the moderate holist view and the individualist position. Because both parties agree that individualist explanations should be advanced, their efforts have first and foremost been directed toward the question of whether holist explanations are indispensable or not.

The three basic positions may be further characterized in three ways. First, each relies on a distinction between holist and individualist explanations. This raises the issue of exactly how to differentiate between these two categories of explanation. The answer to this question is a matter of dispute among

participants in the debate. One possible formulation of the distinction is that holist explanations appeal to social phenomena, whereas individualist explanations invoke individuals, their actions, beliefs, etc. To elaborate further on this suggestion, it may be specified that holist explanations contain social terms, descriptions, or predicates set apart by their reference to, and focus on, social phenomena (Zahle 2016). By contrast, individualist explanations contain individualist terms, descriptions, or predicates distinguished by their reference to, and focus on, individuals, their actions, beliefs, desires, etc.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 2

1. The doctrine of _____ holds that social wholes are more than the sum of individual attitudes, beliefs, and actions and that the whole can often determine the characteristics of individuals (a) methodological holism (b) methodological individualism (c) methodological anarchism (d) methodological hypothesis

2. _____ challenge this consensus by first arguing that caricatured formulations of holism that ignore human action must be set aside (a) Holists (b) Sinners (c) Personalists (d) Individualists

3. Discuss the three basic orientations in methodological holism

## 1.5 Methodological Holism and Individualism in History

Now that we have been able to have a clear understanding of what methodological individualism means, it is now important to consider the applications of the idea to history or how it reflects in the ways that historical events are rendered.

There are some personae methodological individualists such as Mill, Weber, Schumpeter, Popper, Hayek and Elster argue that all social facts must be explained wholly and exhaustively in terms of the actions, beliefs and desires of individuals (Bhargava 1998). On the other hand, methodological holists, such as Durkheim and Marx, tend in their explanations to bypass individual action. Within this debate, better arguments exist for the view that explanations of social phenomena without the beliefs and desires of agents are deficient. If this is so, individualists appear to have a distinct edge over their adversaries (Bhargava 1998). Indeed, a consensus exists among philosophers and social scientists that holism is implausible or false and individualism, when carefully formulated, is trivially true.

Holists challenge this consensus by first arguing that caricatured formulations of holism that ignore human action must be set aside. They then ask us to re-examine the nature of human action. Action is distinguished from mere behaviour by its intentional character. This much is uncontested between

individualists and holists. But against the individualist contention that intentions exist as only psychological states in the heads of individuals, the holist argues that they also lie directly embedded in irreducible social practices, and that the identification of any intention is impossible without examining the social context within which agents think and act. Holists find nothing wrong with the need to unravel the motivations of individuals, but they contend that these motivations cannot be individuated without appeal to the wider beliefs and practices of the community. For instance, the acquiescence of oppressed workers may take the form not of total submission but subtle negotiation that yields them sub-optimal benefits. Insensitivity to social context may blind us to this. Besides, it is not a matter of individual beliefs and preferences that this strategy is adopted (Bhargava 1998). That decisions are taken by subtle strategies of negotiation rather than by explicit bargaining, deployment of force or use of high moral principles is a matter of social practice irreducible to the conscious action of individuals.

Two conclusions follow if the holist claim is true. First, that a reference to a social entity is inescapable even when social facts are explained in terms of individual actions, because of the necessary presence of a social ingredient in all individual intentions and actions (Bhargava 1998). Second, a reference to individual actions is not even necessary when social facts are explained or understood in terms of social practices. Thus, the individualist view that explanation in social science must rely wholly and exhaustively on individual entities is hotly contested and is not as uncontroversial or trivial as it appears.

### Self-Assessment 3

1. The _____ view that explanation in social science must rely wholly and exhaustively on individual entities is hotly contested and is not as uncontroversial or trivial as it appears (a) Moderate (b) Holist (c) Historian (d) Individualist

2. Pick out the odd choice: as (a) Mill (b) Schumpeter (c) Popper (d) Hegel

## 1.5 Summary

From the discussion thus far, we can see that the idea of methodology in history as captured in the holism-individualism debate is an open-ended one. This is because of the glaring fact that there is no one-size fit for the ways through which history can be examined. The implication is that context matters. In this unit, we have been able to look at the meanings and natures of each of methodological individualism and holism as methodology in the social sciences and history. This unit has also been dedicated to the exposure of the underlying tussle between holism and individualism in the tussle for the most appropriate methodology for history.

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## 1.8 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises

**Self-Assessment Exercise 1:** 1. (b); 2. Individualism; 3 (d)

**Self-Assessment Exercise 2:** 1. (a); 2. (a); 3: *Strong methodological holism*: Holist explanations alone should be offered within the social sciences; they are indispensable. Individualist explanations may, and should, be dispensed with. *Moderate methodological holism*: In certain cases, holist explanations should be advanced; in other cases individualist explanations should be advanced; both holist and individualist explanations are indispensable within the social sciences. *Methodological individualism*: Individualist explanations alone should be put forward within the social sciences; they are indispensable. Holist explanations may, and should, be dispensed with.

**Self-Assessment Exercise 3:** 1. (d); 2. (d)

## Unit 2: Hermeneutical Dimension to the Study of History



## 1.1 Introduction

We have been able to look at how the debate over methodological holism and methodological individualism is instrumental or central as a methodological perspective to philosophy of history. This unit is a pursuant of the contention of the approaches to the comprehension of history, but this time, from the angle of hermeneutics. However, before discussing the idea of hermeneutics, it is first imperative to first of all understand what hermeneutics means. Once this has been established, the next task is to see how it interacts with philosophy of history. As a way of comprehending the deep-seated impact of hermeneutics in the philosophy of history, a brief illustration via the work of Robin G. Collingwood will be undertaken.

## 1.2 Learning Outcomes

In this unit, it is expected that the student should be able to:

- Understand the meaning of hermeneutics;
- Understand the idea of hermeneutical philosophy of history; and
- Possess a firm grasp of the idea of hermeneutical philosophy of history from the perspective of Robin G. Collingwood.

## 1.3 What is Hermeneutics?

According to *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Hermeneutics is the art or theory of interpretation, as well as a type of philosophy that starts with questions of interpretation. Originally concerned more narrowly with interpreting sacred texts, the term acquired a much broader significance in its historical development and finally became a philosophical position in twentieth-century German philosophy (Audi 1995: 377). Similarly, Anthony Kanu (2015) defines Hermeneutics as a word which became a common language in the 17$^{th}$ century. It is derived from the Greek word: *Hermeneuein*, which means to interpret (Kanu 2015: 31). From the African perspective, Hermeneutic Philosophy is the philosophical analysis of concepts in a given African language to help clarify meaning and logical implications (Oruka 1990).

Analysing in philosophy focuses on human language and our use of it in an attempt to clarify our understanding of problems and how they might be solved. In analysis, the philosopher scrutinizes the use of logic in an argument and

examines such words as “liberal,” “good,” “intelligence,” and “motivation” in an attempt to evaluate their meanings in varying contexts. Again, in analysis, the philosopher operates on the assumption that basic misunderstandings in regard to meanings might lie at the root of human problems (Knight 2006). Analysis in African Philosophy breaks down concepts and complexes into simple component. It unties and dissolves complexities into simplicity for clear understanding (Akinsanya 2015). Certain concepts which are hitherto muddled up are given clearer and refined meaning. As Moritz Schlick (1967), an early member of the analytic movement, put it, “Science should be defined as the ‘pursuit of truth’ and Philosophy as the ‘pursuit of meaning.’”

Speaking on the nature of this trend in African thought, Pantaleon Iroegbu (1994) hints that Hermeneutic or linguistic philosophy is a branch of African Philosophy that is advancing fast. It is basically the analysis of African languages and linguistic, terms, proverbs, aphorisms, sage sayings and formal cum institutional addresses to discover in them the underlying philosophical sense pre-supposed or expressed or aimed at. Thus, since there are so many concepts used in African Philosophy because of the various languages in the continent, the Hermeneutic Philosophy interprets the concepts, logically and systematically too for clarity.

Generally speaking, hermeneutic philosophy aims to know the valid and true message of a text (Ofuasia 2018). For Hans-George Gadamer (1976), the reader or interpreter cannot objectively grasp the specific intent of the author. Hence, he recommends a new meaning through dialogue with the text. In a related fashion, Jacques Derrida (1967) puts that “there is no such thing as outside-of-the-text.” In this guise, Tim Woods (1999:49) explains: “It is in the field of literary studies that the term ‘postmodernism’ has received the widest usage and provoked the most intense debate. There have been many attempts to theorise the consequences and manifestations of postmodernism for literature, all usually running into problems of historical and formal definition.”

We can see that there is a connection between hermeneutics and postmodernism. However, it is now important to ask: What is the connection between hermeneutics as a method of philosophising and philosophy of history?

## Self- Assessment Exercise 1

1. _____ aims to know the valid and true message of a text.

2. Discuss the core idea of the hermeneutical philosophy of history.

## 1.4 Hermeneutics and Philosophy of History

Whilst talking about hermeneutical philosophy of history, it is interesting to note that this approach focuses on the meaning of the actions and intentions of historical individuals rather than historical wholes (Little 2020). Meaning and language are central to any attempt to talk about the hermeneutical approach to philosophy of history. This tradition derives from the tradition of scholarly Biblical interpretation. Hermeneutic scholars emphasized the linguistic and symbolic core of human interactions and maintained that the techniques that had been developed for the purpose of interpreting texts could also be employed to interpret symbolic human actions and products. Wilhelm Dilthey (1910) maintained that the human sciences were inherently distinct from the natural sciences in that the former depend on the understanding of meaningful human actions, while the latter depend on causal explanation of non-intentional events. Human life is structured and carried out through meaningful action and symbolic expressions. Dilthey (1910) maintains that the intellectual tools of hermeneutics—the interpretation of meaningful texts—are suited to the interpretation of human action and history. The method of *verstehen* (understanding) makes a methodology of this approach; it invites the thinker to engage in an active construction of the meanings and intentions of the actors from their point of view (Outhwaite 1975). This line of interpretation of human history found expression in the twentieth-century philosophical writings of Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Foucault (Little 2020). This tradition approaches the philosophy of history from the perspective of meaning and language. It argues that historical knowledge depends upon interpretation of meaningful human actions and practices. Historians should probe historical events and actions in order to discover the interconnections of meaning and symbolic interaction that human actions have created (Sherratt 2006).

The hermeneutic tradition took an important new turn in the mid-twentieth century, as philosophers attempted to make sense of modern historical developments including war, racism, and the Holocaust. Narratives of progress were no longer compelling, following the terrible events of the first half of the twentieth century. The focus of this approach might be labeled “history as remembrance.” Contributors to this strand of thought emerged from twentieth-century European philosophy, including existentialism and Marxism, and were influenced by the search for meaning in the Holocaust. Paul Ricoeur (2000) draws out the parallels between personal memory, cultural memory, and history.

Dominick LaCapra (1998) brings the tools of interpretation theory and critical theory to bear on his treatment of the representation of the trauma of the Holocaust. Others emphasize the role that folk histories play in the construction and interpretation of “our” past. This is a theme that has been taken up by contemporary historians, for example, by Elizabeth Isichei (1981) whilst writing about a history of Nigeria. Memory and the representation of the past play a key role in the formation of racial and national identities; numerous

twentieth-century philosophers have noted the degree of subjectivity and construction that are inherent in the national memories represented in a group's telling of its history (Little 2020).

With all the examples and scholars given above, it is clear that the emphasis of philosophy of history from the approach of hermeneutical philosophy is totally different from the one that had been explored before. Its aim is to focus on the historical text and assess them even if this means that the fundamental motivation of the historian may be different from that of the person reading. Perhaps one way to understand how this functions is to discuss the view of R.G. Collingwood's hermeneutic reflection over history – the focus of the next section.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 2

1. _____ and _____ of the past play a key role in the formation of racial and national identities; numerous twentieth-century philosophers have noted the degree of subjectivity and construction that are inherent in the national memories represented in a group's telling of its history

2. Hermeneutical approach to the philosophy of history gives emphasis to _____ and _____

3. Pick the odd one out: (a) Heidegger (b) Hegel (c) Gadamer (d) Ricoeur

## 1.5 Robin G. Collingwood's Hermeneutical Dimension to Philosophy of History

From Collingwood, one gets a deep comprehension of the idea of history. R. G. Collingwood's (1946) philosophy of history falls within the general framework of hermeneutic philosophy of history. Collingwood focuses on the question of how to specify the content of history. He argues that history is constituted by human actions. Actions are the result of intentional deliberation and choice; so historians are able to explain historical processes "from within" as a reconstruction of the thought processes of the agents who bring them about. He presents the idea of re-enactment as a solution to the problem of knowledge of the past from the point of view of the present. The past is accessible to historians in the present, because it is open to them to re-enact important historical moments through imaginative reconstruction of the actors' states of mind and intentions. He describes this activity of re-enactment in the context of the historical problem of understanding Plato's meanings as a philosopher or Caesar's intentions as a ruler:

> This re-enactment is only accomplished, in the case of Plato and Caesar respectively, so far as the historian

> brings to bear on the problem all the powers of his own mind and all his knowledge of philosophy and politics. It is not a passive surrender to the spell of another's mind; it is a labour of active and therefore critical thinking (Collingwood 1946: 215).

Using the understanding of Collingwood (1946) as guide, it is rendered clearer the ways through which hermeneutic philosophy of history operates. The focus is usually over human actions in the light of their momentary actions situated within the present, future and the past.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 3

1. _____ is the art or theory of interpretation, as well as a type of philosophy that starts with questions of interpretation.
2. _____ draws out the parallels between personal memory, cultural memory, and history.
3. For Collingwood, history is constituted by _____.

## 1.6 Summary

The arguments explored in this unit concerns the idea of hermeneutical philosophy of history. It has been shown that this approach to history pays attention to the individual and meaning is independent of what the historian intends but is shifted to the readers to deduce. It takes language seriously in the business of making meaning from history. In this unit, we have been able to define hermeneutics and its relationship to not just philosophy but African philosophy as well. Afterward, the unit considers how it intertwines with the notion of philosophy of history. As a way of grounding the discourse and make it more relatable, the last part of the unit focuses over the hermeneutical philosophy of history as it pertains to Robin G. Collingwood.

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## 1.8 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises

**Self-Assessment Exercise 1:** 1. Hermeneutical Philosophy; 2: This tradition approaches the philosophy of history from the perspective of meaning and language. It argues that historical knowledge depends upon interpretation of meaningful human actions and practices. Historians should probe historical events and actions in order to discover the interconnections of meaning and symbolic interaction that human actions have created.

**Self-Assessment Exercise 2:** 1: Memory and Representation; 2: Meaning and Language; 3. (b)

**Self-Assessment Exercise 3:** 1. Hermeneutics; 2. Paul Ricoeur; 3. Human Actions

## Unit 3: Historiography and the Study of History



## 1.1 Introduction

In this unit, attention will be given to the idea of historiography as a method that is commonly used among historians for the documentation of historical events. So, the first task is to consider what is meant by historiography. Afterwards, this unit also considers what makes it important for the study of history. Whilst discussing some of the advantages of historiography for history, this unity also makes the effort to provide a critical examination of the idea itself.

## 1.2 Learning Outcomes

This unit allows the student to:

- Develop an understanding concerning how historiography as a method works;
- Understand the relevance of historiography in the study of history;
- Notice the flaws and ideological problems of historiography as a method; and
- Be familiar with another methodology/approach for studying history.

## 1.3 Historiography as a Methodology in History

It has been discovered that when historians discuss methodological issues in their research they more commonly refer to "historiography" than to "philosophy of history." What is the relation between these bodies of thought about the writing of history? We should begin by asking the basic question: what is historiography? So, this unit is going to begin with an understanding of what is meant by historiography.

According to David Little (2020), "In its most general sense, the term refers to the study of historians' methods and practices. Any intellectual or creative practice is guided by a set of standards and heuristics about how to proceed, and "experts" evaluate the performances of practitioners based on their judgments of how well the practitioner meets the standards." So, for someone to have undertaken a view in philosophy of history, the central task is to see if these yardsticks are in place. This is true for theatre and literature, and it is true for writing history. Historiography is at least in part the effort to do this work for a particular body of historical writing (Paul 2015).

Historians normally make truth claims, and they ask us to accept those claims based on the reasoning they present. So a major aspect of the study of historiography has to do with defining the ideas of evidence, rigor, and standards of reasoning for historical inquiry (Little 2020). We presume that historians want to discover empirically supported truths about the past, and we presume that they want to offer inferences and interpretations that are somehow regulated by standards of scientific rationality (Schama 1991).

There are other standards through historiography that are governing a good historical work, and these criteria may change from culture to culture and epoch to epoch. Coming to terms with the historian's goals is crucial to deciding how well he or she succeeds. So discovering these stylistic and aesthetic standards that guide the historian's work is itself an important task for historiography. This means that the student of historiography will naturally be interested in the conventions of historical writing and rhetoric that are characteristic of a given period or school (Little 2020).

A full historiographic assessment of a given historian might include questions like these: What methods of discovery does he/she use? What rhetorical and persuasive goals does he/she pursue? What models of explanation? What paradigm of presentation? What standards of style and rhetoric? What interpretive assumptions? A historical school might be defined as a group of interrelated historians who share a significant number of specific assumptions about evidence, explanation, and narrative (Burguiere 2009). With the basic idea of historiography properly disclosed, the next task is to point out some instances of relevance attached to same.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 1

1. A major aspect of the study of _____ has to do with defining the ideas of evidence, rigor, and standards of reasoning for historical inquiry.

2. Historians normally make truth claims, and they ask us to accept those claims based on the _____ they present.

3. What are the core questions raised by the method of historiography?

## 1.4 Critical Appraisal of Historiography in the Study of History

There are several ways that those who take to historiography as their methodology maintains that it is relevant to their study of events. For instance, it has been deduced that the concept of historiography is more present-oriented and methodological. It involves the study and analysis of historical methods of research, inquiry, inference, and presentation used by more-or-less contemporary historians (Little 2020). How do contemporary historians go

about their tasks of understanding the past? Here we can reflect upon the historiographical challenges that confronted Elizabeth Isichei (1983) as she investigated the vastness of the Oyo Empire and its trade relations with neighbouring settlements prior colonisation?

An important question that arises in recent historiography is that of the status of the notion of "global history." One important reason for thinking globally as an historian is the fact that the history discipline—since the Greeks—has tended to be Eurocentric in its choice of topics, framing assumptions, and methods (Little 2020). Economic and political history, for example, often privileges the industrial revolution in England and the creation of the modern bureaucratic state in France, Britain, and Germany, as being exemplars of "modern" development in economics and politics. This has led to a tendency to look at other countries' development as non-standard or stunted (Little 2020). So global history is, in part, a framework within which the historian avoids privileging one regional center as primary and others as secondary or peripheral.

It is also important to add the related fact that when Western historical thinkers—for example, Hegel, Malthus, Montesquieu—have turned their attention to Asia, they have often engaged in a high degree of stereotyping without much factual historical knowledge (Little 2020). The ideas of Oriental despotism, Asian overpopulation, and African colonisation have encouraged a cartoonish replacement of the intricate and diverse processes of development of different parts of Asia by a single-dimensional and reductive set of simplifying frameworks of thought. This is one of the points of Edward Said's critique of orientalism (Said 1978). So doing "global" history means paying rigorous attention to the specificities of social, political, and cultural arrangements in other parts of the world besides Europe.

So, a historiography that takes global diversity seriously should be expected to be more agnostic about patterns of development, and more open to discovery of surprising patterns, twists, and variations in the experiences of India, China, Indochina, the Arab world, the Ottoman Empire, and Sub-Saharan Africa (Geertz 1980). Variation and complexity are what we should expect, not stereotyped simplicity. Clifford Geertz's historical reconstruction of the "theatre state" of Bali is a case in point—he uncovers a complex system of governance, symbol, value, and hierarchy that represents a substantially different structure of politics than the models derived from the emergence of bureaucratic states in early modern Europe (Geertz 1980). A global history needs to free itself from Eurocentrism (Little 2020).

This step away from Eurocentrism in outlook should also be accompanied by a broadening of the geographical range of what is historically interesting. So a global history ought to be global and trans-national in its selection of topics—even while recognizing the fact that all historical research is selective. A

globally oriented historian will recognize that the political systems of classical India are as interesting and complex as the organization of the Roman Republic (Little 2020). What this means is that historiography as relevant as it is, does not leave the gap for a honest discussion of the history of Africans for instance, given its Eurocentric leaning. In the next unit concerning Hegel, this will be considered closely.

A final way in which history needs to become global is to incorporate the perspectives and historical traditions of historians in non-western countries into the mainstream of discussion of major world developments. Indian and Chinese historians have their own intellectual traditions in conducting historical research and explanation; a global history is one that pays attention to the insights and arguments of these traditions. So global historiography has to do with a broadened definition of the arena of historical change to include Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas; a recognition of the complexity and sophistication of institutions and systems in many parts of the world; a recognition of the trans-national interrelatedness that has existed among continents for at least four centuries; and a recognition of the complexity and distinctiveness of different national traditions of historiography (Little 2020).

Dominic Sachsenmaier (2011) provides a significant recent discussion of some of these issues. Sachsenmaier (2011: 17) devotes much of his attention to the foregoing when he writes about "multiple global perspectives" point. He wants to take this idea seriously and try to discover some of the implications of different national traditions of academic historiography. For Sachsenmaier (2011: 17) "It will become quite clear that in European societies the question of historiographical traditions tended to be answered in ways that were profoundly different from most academic communities in other parts of the world."

## Self-Assessment Exercise 2

1. _____ in its outlook is that non-Europeans can legislate on knowledge (a) Biocentrism (b) Eurocentrism (c) Ecocentrism (d) Afrocentrism

2. A final way in which history needs to become global is to incorporate the perspectives and historical traditions of historians in non-western countries into the mainstream of discussion of major world developments (a) incorporate (b) eliminate (c) anticipate (d) retaliate

3. _____provides a significant recent discussion of some of these issues faced by historiography by propagating what he calls _____.

4. Doing _____ means paying rigorous attention to the specificities of social, political, and cultural arrangements in other parts of the world besides Europe.

## 1.5 Summary

The essence of this unit has been to consider the way that historiography works in such a way a historians are able to use it for the documentation of historical events. As the discussion in the foregoing section has revealed, historiography, in spite of his positive roles have been able to serve as an easy tool for Eurocentric and ideological presentation of the history of non-European peoples, such as Africans and Latin America. Three fundamental aims have been discussed in this unit. The first has been to document the idea of historiography and how it functions as a methodology for history. The relevance of the methodology of historiography was also discussed before focusing over the limitations or shortcomings of historiography.

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## 1.7 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises

**Self-Assessment Exercise 1:** 1: Historiography; 2: Reasoning; 3: In its most general sense, the term refers to the study of historians' methods and practices. A full historiographic assessment of a given historian might include questions like these: What methods of discovery does he/she use? What rhetorical and persuasive goals does he/she pursue? What models of explanation? What paradigm of presentation? What standards of style and rhetoric? What interpretive assumptions?

**Self-Assessment Exercise 2:** 1. (b); 2 (a); 3: Dominic Sachsenmaier/multiple global perspectives; 4: Global History

## End of Module Questions

1. _____ emphasises that the personality overrides the whole (a) Compatibilism (b) Individualism (c) Aristocracy (d) Elitism
**Ans.: (b)**

2. _____ challenge this consensus by first arguing that caricatured formulations of holism that ignore human action must be set aside (a) Holists (b) Sinners (c) Personalists (d) Individualists
**Ans.: (a)**

3. Discuss the core idea of the hermeneutical philosophy of history.
**Ans.: This tradition approaches the philosophy of history from the perspective of meaning and language. It argues that historical knowledge depends upon interpretation of meaningful human actions and practices. Historians should probe historical events and actions in order to discover the interconnections of meaning and symbolic interaction that human actions have created.**

4. Pick the odd one out: (a) Heidegger (b) Hegel (c) Gadamer (d) Ricoeur
**Ans. (a)**

5. _____ in its outlook is that non-Europeans can legislate on knowledge (a) Biocentrism (b) Eurocentrism (c) Ecocentrism (d) Afrocentrism
**Ans.: (b)**

## Module 3: Dominant Traditions of Philosophy of History
## Unit 1: Continental Philosophy of History



### 1.1 Introduction

In this module, the dominant traditions of philosophy of history will be the overriding contention. So, this first unit concerns with one of these traditions – the continental tradition. In this unit, the idea of human nature and its connection with human history from the purview of continental philosophy of history shall be discussed. The second part of this unit considers the issue of whether history has a direction or purpose for humanity. As a way of contextualising the discourse, the position of Hegel on history will be used as a paradigm for the continental tradition of philosophy of history.

### 1.2 Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student should be able to:

- Be familiar with the idea of continental philosophy of history;
- Understand the open-ended question concerning the direction and purpose of history; and
- Be familiar with Hegel's philosophy of history

### 1.3 Human Nature and Human History

The basis for discussion or contention in this study is related to the issue of whether through history human nature can be affected or not. There are various views and questions regarding this. In spite of the ambivalence which it generates, it is important to understand that human beings make history; but what is the fundamental nature of the human being? It is also important to demand: Is there one fundamental "human nature," or are the most basic features of humanity historically conditioned? Can the study of history shed light on this question? When we study different historical epochs, do we learn something about unchanging human beings—or do we learn about fundamental differences of motivation, reasoning, desire, and collectivity? Is humanity a historical product? These are some interesting questions that have bothered scholars such as Mandelbaum (1971) and Vico (2002).

Vico (2002) specifically offered an interpretation of history that turned on the idea of a universal human nature and a universal history (Little 2020). Vico's (2002) interpretation of the history of civilization offers the view that there is

an underlying uniformity in human nature across historical settings that permits explanation of historical actions and processes. The common features of human nature give rise to a fixed series of stages of development of civil society, law, commerce, and government: universal human beings, faced with recurring civilizational challenges, produce the same set of responses over time (Little 2020).

Two things are worth noting about this perspective on history: first, that it simplifies the task of interpreting and explaining history (because we can take it as given that we can understand the actors of the past based on our own experiences and nature); and second, it has an intellectual heir in twentieth-century social science theory in the form of rational choice theory as a basis for comprehensive social explanation (Little 2020).

Johann Gottfried Herder (1968) offers a strikingly different view about human nature and human ideas and motivations. Herder (1968) argues for the historical contextuality of human nature. He offers a historicized understanding of human nature, advocating the idea that human nature is itself a historical product and that human beings act differently in different periods of historical development (Herder 1968). Herder's views set the stage for the historicist philosophy of human nature later found in such nineteenth-century figures as Hegel and Nietzsche. His perspective too prefigures an important current of thought about the social world in the late twentieth century, the idea of the "social construction" of human nature and social identities (Foucault 1971).

What the foregoing means is that when one realises from the perspective of the continental tradition of history that societies and identities are human creations, does that not extend as well to the idea of history? This is a serious question. The point is that human nature and human history seem to have a correlation. Whether this proposal can be sustained will be further examined in the next section where the issue of the end of history is the focus.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 1

1. _____ specifically offered an interpretation of history that turned on the idea of a universal human nature and a universal history

2. Herder's views set the stage for the historicist philosophy of human nature later found in such nineteenth-century figures as _____and _____.

## 1.4 The Direction and Purpose of History

Does history have purpose? Does it have a particular direction or it is merely a situation where anything goes? In this section, we shall consider how

continental philosophy of history attempted to overcome this two important questions.

Philosophers have raised questions about the meaning and structure of the totality of human history. Some philosophers have sought to discover a large organizing theme, meaning, or direction in human history. This may take the form of an effort to demonstrate how history enacts a divine order, or reveals a large pattern (cyclical, teleological, progressive), or plays out an important theme (for example, Hegel's conception of history as the unfolding of human freedom discussed below). The ambition in each case is to demonstrate that the apparent contingency and arbitrariness of historical events can be related to a more fundamental underlying purpose or order (Little 2020).

This approach to history may be described as hermeneutic; but it is focused on interpretation of large historical features rather than the interpretation of individual meanings and actions. In effect, it treats the sweep of history as a complicated, tangled text, in which the interpreter assigns meanings to some elements of the story in order to fit these elements into the larger themes and motifs of the story [see Ranke (1973)].

A recurring current in this continental approach to the philosophy of history falls in the area of theodicy or eschatology: religiously inspired attempts to find meaning and structure in history by relating the past and present to some specific, divinely ordained plan. Theologians and religious thinkers have attempted to find meaning in historical events as expressions of divine will. One reason for theological interest in this question is the problem of evil; thus Leibniz's (1985) *Theodicy* attempts to provide a logical interpretation of history that makes the tragedies of history compatible with a benevolent God's will. In the twentieth century, theologians such as Maritain (1957), Rust (1947), and Dawson (1929) offered systematic efforts to provide Christian interpretations of history.

Enlightenment thinkers rejected the religious interpretation of history but brought in their own teleology, the idea of progress—the idea that humanity is moving in the direction of better and more perfect civilization, and that this progression can be witnessed through study of the history of civilization (Montesquieu 1989). Vico's (2002) philosophy of history seeks to identify a foundational series of stages of human civilization. Different civilizations go through the same stages, because human nature is constant across history (Pompa 1990). Rousseau (1762) and Kant (1784) brought some of these assumptions about rationality and progress into their political philosophies, and Adam Smith (1976) embodies some of this optimism about the progressive effects of rationality in his account of the unfolding of the modern European economic system. This effort to derive a fixed series of stages as a tool of interpretation of the history of civilization is repeated throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; it finds expression in Hegel's philosophy (discussed

below), as well as Marx's (2005) materialist theory of the development of economic modes of production (Marx and Engels 1974).

The effort to find directionality or stages in history found a new expression in the early twentieth century, in the hands of several "meta-historians" who sought to provide a macro-interpretation that brought order to world history: Spengler (1934), Toynbee (1934), Wittfogel (1935), and Lattimore (1932). These authors offered a reading of world history in terms of the rise and fall of civilizations, races, or cultures. Their writings were not primarily inspired by philosophical or theological theories, but they were also not works of primary historical scholarship. Spengler and Toynbee portrayed human history as a coherent process in which civilizations pass through specific stages of youth, maturity, and senescence. Wittfogel and Lattimore interpreted Asian civilizations in terms of large determining factors. Wittfogel contrasts China's history with that of Europe by characterizing China's civilization as one of "hydraulic despotism", with the attendant consequence that China's history was cyclical rather than directional. Lattimore applies the key of geographic and ecological determinism to the development of Asian civilization (Rowe 2007).

A legitimate criticism of many efforts to offer an interpretation of the sweep of history is the view that it looks for meaning where none can exist. Interpretation of individual actions and life histories is intelligible, because we can ground our attributions of meaning in a theory of the individual person as possessing and creating meanings. But there is no super-agent lying behind historical events—for example, the French Revolution—and so it is a metaphysical mistake to attempt to find the meaning of the features of the event (e.g., the Terror). The theological approach purports to evade this criticism by attributing agency to God as the author of history, but the assumption that there is a divine author of history takes the making of history out of the hands of humanity.

Efforts to discern large stages in history such as those of Vico, Spengler, or Toynbee are vulnerable to a different criticism based on their mono-causal interpretations of the full complexity of human history. These authors single out one factor that is thought to drive history: a universal human nature (Vico), or a common set of civilizational challenges (Spengler, Toynbee). But their hypotheses need to be evaluated on the basis of concrete historical evidence. More so, the evidence concerning the large features of historical change over the past three millennia offers little support for the idea of one fixed process of civilizational development. Instead, human history, at virtually every scale, appears to embody a large degree of contingency and multiple pathways of development. This is not to say that there are no credible "large historical" interpretations available for human history and society. For example, Michael Mann's (1986) sociology of early agrarian civilizations, De Vries and Goudsblom's (2002) efforts at global environmental history, and Jared Diamond's (1997) treatment of disease and warfare offer examples of scholars

who attempt to explain some large features of human history on the basis of a few common human circumstances: the efforts of states to collect revenues, the need of human communities to exploit resources, or the global transmission of disease (Little 2020). The challenge for macro-history is to preserve the discipline of empirical evaluation for the large hypotheses that are put forward.

The bottom-line from the discussion thus far is that human history is directional and purposeful depending on the approach that you employ for it. As this section has shown, there are some philosophers who believe that the direction of human history has no purpose. In some other instances, it has been tendered that it is cyclical and yet some other scholars believe that it is progressive toward some end. All of these attest to the fact that the idea of history concerning whether it is purposeful and directional is a continuous and perennial issue among continental philosophers of history. Following from this, the next section of this unit focuses over Hegel's ideas on the subject.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 2

1. Pick the odd one out: (a) cyclical (b) teleological (c) axiological (d) progressive
2. The challenge for _____ is to preserve the discipline of empirical evaluation for the large hypotheses that are put forward.
3. _____rejected the religious interpretation of history but brought in their own teleology, the idea of progress
4. Do you believe history is directional and purposeful?

## 1.5 The Eurocentric Influence of George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Philosophy of History

Hegel's philosophy of history is perhaps the most fully developed philosophical theory of history that attempts to discover meaning or direction in history (Hegel 1956). Hegel regards history as an intelligible process moving towards a specific condition—the realization of human freedom. In his words: "The question at issue is therefore the ultimate end of mankind, the end which the spirit sets itself in the world" (Hegel 1956: 63). The implication is that for Hegel, history has direction because it is guided by the absolute spirit as it is also teleological since this is also realiseable in the absolute spirit.

Hegel (1956) incorporates a deeper historicism into his philosophical theories than his predecessors or successors. He regards the relationship between "objective" history and the subjective development of the individual consciousness ("spirit") as an intimate one; this is a central thesis in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977). And he views it to be a central task for

philosophy to comprehend its place in the unfolding of history. “History is the process whereby the spirit discovers itself and its own concept” (1956: 62). Hegel constructs world history into a narrative of stages of human freedom, from the public freedom of the polis and the citizenship of the Roman Republic, to the individual freedom of the Protestant Reformation, to the civic freedom of the modern state. He attempts to incorporate the civilizations of India and China into his understanding of world history, though he regards those civilizations as static and therefore pre-historical (O’Brien 1975).

Hegel constructs specific moments as “world-historical” events that were in the process of bringing about the final, full stage of history and human freedom. For example, Napoleon’s conquest of much of Europe is portrayed as a world-historical event doing history’s work by establishing the terms of the rational bureaucratic state. Hegel finds reason in history; but it is a latent reason, and one that can only be comprehended when the fullness of history’s work is finished: “When philosophy paints its grey on grey, then has a shape of life grown old. … The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk” (Hegel 1956: 13).

In spite of his sweeping and grand presentation of history, Hegel is Eurocentric. The encounter between ‘black’ Africans with the West led to a deluge or torrent of scholarly verdicts that examined their dignity and worth. Africa is not among Hegel’s four cultures or civilizations. From Hegel’s (1956) perspective, Africa is said to be unhistorical; undeveloped spirit – still involved in the conditions of mere nature; devoid of morality, religions and political constitution. This is a position that has the capacity to pass people from the continent as inferior beings (Kuykendall 1993: 572). Hence he holds that there is a justification for Europe’s enslavement and colonization of Africa. For this reason, Hegel (1956) admits that slavery causes the increase of human feeling among the Negroes. In this connection, Theophile Obenga (2004: 32) muses: “As we know, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), who was not a historian, but a great philosopher, stated in his lectures delivered in the winter of 1830–1 on the philosophical history of the world: ‘‘Africa is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit. . . . Egypt . . . does not belong to the African Spirit’’ (1956: 99)”. In this connection about the denigration of the Negroes, Theophile Obenga (2004: 33) continues:

> This view of the Hegelian philosophy of history has become almost a common opinion and an academic paradigm in Western historiography. It has been regarded as canon that a great culture or civilization cannot be produced by African (Black) people. This also implies that Africans have never made any kind of contribution to world history.

The foregoing is not original to the implications of Hegel alone. Other scholars such as David Hume and Immanuel Kant have portrayed Africans in a negative light as well. In his essay "Of National Characters", David Hume exhibited his aversion and contempt for the black man. Because of his belief that a person's intellectual ability or otherwise is a function of his or her nativity or racial descent, Hume, held that the African (the black-man) is incapable of logical thinking and is therefore intellectually unproductive, among other inadequacies. David Hume has absolutely no respect for the peoples that are called Africans. He believes very strongly in the idea that Europe is the model of humanity, culture and is history itself. It is this type of belief; that led Hume, in the aforementioned essays to declare thus: "I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilised notion of that complexion; nor even any individual eminent in action or speculation…" (Hume 1985: 319).

Now that we have been able to provide a close assessment of the continental approach to history, one clear establishment is that it is Eurocentric and favours the Euro-American idea of history. In the next unit, the Anglo-American tradition with its analytic flair will be examined in the light of how they perceive history.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 3

1. One out of the following gave a negative history of ancient Africans (a) G.W.F. Hegel (b) A. Toynbee (c) M. Mann (d) O. Spengler

2. In spite of his sweeping and grand presentation of history, Hegel is _____.

3. For Hegel, history has _____because it is guided by the _____as it is also teleological since this is also realiseable in the absolute spirit.

4. "I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites." This proposition is attributed to _____

5. Hegel regards _____ as a/an _____ process moving towards a specific condition—the realization of human freedom.

## 1.6 Summary

In this unit, it has been shown that continental philosophy of history is Eurocentric mainly for seeing the direction and purpose of history from its perspective. This has been demonstrated with Hegel's philosophy of history which did not hesitate to excuse black Africans from those that can participate

as humans in his history. In the same vein, it has been shown that if a part of humanity is not human, then the idea of African history remains unknowable. However, since there is human history, Hegel's continental perspective to history is therefore flawed. This unit has been able to consider the primary contneiton of the continental approach to philosophy of history. The core contention as to whether or not history has purpose has been explored. The last part of this unit considers Hegel's philosophy of history as an instance of continental philosophy of history. The outcome is that Hegel system is Eurocentric in nature.

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## 1.8 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises

**Self-Assessment Exercise 1:** 1: Vico; 2. Hegel/Nietzsche

**Self-Assessment Exercise 2:** 1. (c); 2: Macro History; 3: Enlightenment thinkers; **4**: A straightforward answer to this question is almost impossible. The bottom-line however is that philosophers have raised questions about the meaning and structure of the totality of human history. Some philosophers have sought to discover a large organizing theme, meaning, or direction in human history. This may take the form of an effort to demonstrate how history enacts a divine order, or reveals a large pattern (cyclical, teleological, progressive), or plays out an important theme (for example, Hegel's conception of history as the unfolding of human freedom discussed below). The ambition in each case

is to demonstrate that the apparent contingency and arbitrariness of historical events can be related to a more fundamental underlying purpose or order.

**Self-Assessment Exercise 3:** 1. (a); 2: Eurocentric; 3: Direction/Absolute Spirit; 4: David Hume; 5: History/Intelligible

## Unit 2: Anglo-American Philosophy of History



## 1.1 Introduction

Since we have been able to consider the continental philosophy of history in the previous unit, the next task is now is to explore the Anglo-American approach to history. There are about three main issues bothering the Anglo-American tradition of history. This unit will consider the objectivity of history, causality and whether or not there are general laws that are available in history.

## 1.2 Learning Outcomes

In this unit, the student will learn:

- The basic contention of the Anglo-American tradition of philosophy of history;
- Understand the place of causation in history;
- Discover the extent to which historical documentation may deemed objective; and
- To be familiar with the discourse concerning laws guiding history.

## 1.3 Are there General Laws in History?

The consideration of general laws in history among Anglo-American philosophers is a carry-over from the nature of laws in scientific explanation. The philosopher of science Carl Hempel (1942) stimulated analytic philosophers' interest in historical knowledge in his essay, "The Function of General Laws in History." Hempel's (1942) general theory of scientific explanation held that all scientific explanations require subsumption under general laws. Hempel considered historical explanation as an apparent exception to the covering-law model and attempted to show the suitability of the covering-law model even to this special case. He argued that valid historical explanations too must invoke general laws. The covering-law approach to historical explanation was supported by other analytical philosophers of science, including Ernest Nagel (1961).

Hempel's essay provoked a prolonged controversy between supporters who cited generalizations about human behaviour as the relevant general laws, and critics who argued that historical explanations are more akin to explanations of individual behaviour, based on interpretation that makes the outcome comprehensible (Little 2020). Important discourses on the subject were offered by William Dray (1957), Michael Scriven (1962), and Alan Donagan (1966).

Donagan and others pointed out the difficulty that many social explanations depend on probabilistic regularities rather than universal laws. Others, including Scriven, pointed out the pragmatic features of explanation, suggesting that arguments that fall far short of deductive validity are nonetheless sufficient to "explain" a given historical event in a given context of belief. The most fundamental objections, however, are these: first, that there are virtually no good examples of universal laws in history, whether of human behaviour or of historical event succession (Donagan 1966: 143–45); and second, that there are other compelling schemata through which we can understand historical actions and outcomes that do not involve subsumption under general laws (Elster 1989). These include the processes of reasoning through which we understand individual actions—analogous to the methods of *verstehen* and the interpretation of rational behaviour mentioned above (Dray 1966: 131–37); and the processes through which we can trace out chains of causation and specific causal mechanisms without invoking universal laws.

A careful re-reading of these debates over the covering-law model in history suggests that the debate took place largely because of the erroneous assumption of the unity of science and the postulation of the regulative logical similarity of all areas of scientific reasoning to a few clear examples of explanation in a few natural sciences. This approach was a deeply impoverished one, and handicapped from the start in its ability to pose genuinely important questions about the nature of history and historical knowledge. Explanation of human actions and outcomes should not be understood along the lines of an explanation of why radiators burst when the temperature falls below zero degrees centigrade. As Donagan (1966: 157) concludes, "It is harmful to overlook the fundamental identity of the social sciences with history, and to mutilate research into human affairs by remodelling the social sciences into deformed likenesses of physics." The insistence on naturalistic models for social and historical research leads easily to a presumption in favour of the covering-law model of explanation, but this presumption is misleading.

## Self-Assessment Exercise 1

1. The convergence of _____ and _____ in historical processes is helpful (a) reason/causes (b) empiricism/effects (c) scepticism/causes (d) reason/scepticism

2. Hempel considered historical explanation as an apparent exception to the _____

3. One of the objections to the Covering-law model for historical explanation is _____

## 1.4 Can History be Objective?

Since attention has been adduced to the question of general laws in history, it is now time to consider another burning issue for the Anglo-American tradition of philosophy of history over the objectivity of history.

Is it possible for historical knowledge to objectively represent the past? Or are forms of bias, omission, selection, and interpretation such as to make all historical representations dependent on the perspective of the individual historian? Does the fact that human actions are value-laden make it impossible for the historian to provide a non-value-laden account of those actions?

This topic divides into several different problems, as noted by John Passmore (1966: 76). The most studied of these within the analytic tradition is that of the value-ladenness of social action. Second is the possibility that the historian's interpretations are themselves value-laden—raising the question of the capacity for objectivity or neutrality of the historian herself. Does the intellectual have the ability to investigate the world without regard to the biases that are built into her political or ethical beliefs, her ideology, or her commitments to a class or a social group? And third is the question of the objectivity of the historical circumstances themselves. Is there a fixed historical reality, independent from later representations of the facts? Or is history intrinsically "constructed," with no objective reality independent from the ways in which it is constructed?

There are solutions to each of these problems that are highly consonant with the philosophical assumptions of the analytic tradition. First, concerning values: There is no fundamental difficulty in reconciling the idea of a researcher with one set of religious values, who nonetheless carefully traces out the religious values of a historical actor possessing radically different values. This research can be done badly, of course; but there is no inherent epistemic barrier that makes it impossible for the researcher to examine the body of statements, behaviours, and contemporary cultural institutions corresponding to the other, and to come to a justified representation of the other.

This leads us to a resolution of the second issue as well—the possibility of neutrality on the part of the researcher. The set of epistemic values that we impart to scientists and historians include the value of intellectual discipline and a willingness to subject their hypotheses to the test of uncomfortable facts. Once again, review of the history of science and historical writing makes it apparent that this intellectual value has effect. There are plentiful examples of scientists and historians whose conclusions are guided by their interrogation of the evidence rather than their ideological presuppositions. Objectivity in pursuit of truth is itself a value, and one that can be followed (Little 2020).

Finally, on the question of the objectivity of the past: Is there a basis for saying that events or circumstances in the past have objective, fixed characteristics that are independent from our representation of those events? We can work our

way carefully through this issue, by recognizing a distinction between the objectivity of past events, actions and circumstances, the objectivity of the contemporary facts that resulted from these past events, and the objectivity and fixity of large historical entities (Little 2020). The past occurred in precisely the way that it did—agents acted, droughts occurred, armies were defeated, new technologies were invented. These occurrences left traces of varying degrees of information richness; and these traces give us a rational basis for arriving at beliefs about the occurrences of the past. So we can offer a non-controversial interpretation of the "objectivity of the past."

### Self-Assessment Exercise 2

1. _____ approach to philosophy of science is responsible for their view on philosophy of history.

2. A review of the history of science and historical writing makes it apparent that intellectual value has effect (a) False (b) Probable (c) True (d) None of the above

3. Based on the discourse on objectivity in this unit, it was argued that in pursuit of truth is not itself a value, and one that can be followed (a) Probable (b) True (c) False (d) Undetermined

## 1.5 Can Causality be discerned in History?

Another important set of issues that received attention from analytic philosophers concerned the role of causal ascriptions in historical explanations. What is involved in saying that "The Nigerian Civil War was caused by ethnic rivalry/tension between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Igbos of the south-east"? Does causal ascription require identifying an underlying causal regularity—for example, "periods of rapid inflation cause political instability"? Is causation established by discovering a set of necessary and sufficient conditions? Can we identify causal connections among historical events by tracing a series of causal mechanisms linking one to the next? This topic raises the related problem of determinism in history: are certain events inevitable in the circumstances? Was the fall of the Benin Empire inevitable, given the configuration of military and material circumstances prior to the crucial events?

Analytic philosophers of history most commonly approached these issues on the basis of a theory of causation drawn from positivist philosophy of science. This theory is ultimately grounded in Humean assumptions about causation: that causation is nothing but constant conjunction (Little 2020). So analytic philosophers were drawn to the covering-law model of explanation, because it appeared to provide a basis for asserting historical causation. As noted above, this approach to causal explanation is fatally flawed in the social sciences, because universal causal regularities among social phenomena are unavailable.

So it is necessary either to arrive at other interpretations of causality or to abandon the language of causality. A second approach was to define causes in terms of a set of causally relevant conditions for the occurrence of the event—for example, necessary and/or sufficient conditions, or a set of conditions that enhance or reduce the likelihood of the event. This approach found support in "ordinary language" philosophy and in analysis of the use of causal language in such contexts as the courtroom (Hart and Honoré 1959).

The convergence of reasons and causes in historical processes is helpful in this context, because historical causes are frequently the effect of deliberate human action (Davidson 1963). So specifying the reason for the action is simultaneously identifying a part of the cause of the consequences of the action. It is often justifiable to identify a concrete action as the cause of a particular event (a circumstance that was sufficient in the existing circumstances to bring about the outcome), and it is feasible to provide a convincing interpretation of the reasons that led the actor to carry out the action.

What analytic philosophers of the 1960s did not come to, but what is crucial for current understanding of historical causality, is the feasibility of tracing causal mechanisms through a complex series of events (causal realism). Historical narratives often take the form of an account of a series of events, each of which was a causal condition or trigger for later events. Subsequent research in the philosophy of the social sciences has provided substantial support for historical explanations that depend on tracing a series of causal mechanisms (Little 2018; Hedström and Swedberg 1998).

### Self-Assessment Exercise 3

1. _____ in terms of a set of causally relevant conditions for the occurrence of the event

2. Positive philosophy of science is ultimately grounded in Humean assumptions about causation (a) False (b) Probable (c) Undertermined (d) True

3. What is the foundation of the Anglo-American tradition of philosophy of history concerning the discourse on causation?

## 1.6 Summary

The essence of this unit has been to uncover the idea of history from the Ango-American analytic tradition of philosophy. From the discussion provided thus far, what can be seen is that there are some criteria based on logic and analysis by these scholars that makes attempts at providing causal and objectivity explanations in history to be questionable when compared with their

continental compatriots such as Hegel who maintains that history is not only directional but purposeful. In this unit, we have been able to look at three fundamental issues that analytic philosophers engage with over the idea of history. The issue of general laws in history, causality in history as well as the objectivity of historical documentation were central to the issues by the analytic scholars and these have been considered in this unit.

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## 1.8 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises

**Self-Assessment Exercise 1:** 1. (a); 2: Covering-law Model; 3: that there are virtually no good examples of universal laws in history

**Self-Assessment Exercise 2:** 1: Positivist; 2. (c); 3. (c)

**Self-Assessment Exercise 3:** 1: Causes; 2. (d); 3: Analytic philosophers of history most commonly approached these issues on the basis of a theory of causation drawn from positivist philosophy of science. This theory is ultimately grounded in Humean assumptions about causation: that causation is nothing but constant conjunction. So analytic philosophers were drawn to the covering-law

model of explanation, because it appeared to provide a basis for asserting historical causation.

## Unit 3: The Linguistic Turn and the "New" Philosophy of History



### 1.1 Introduction

The present unit looks at an important aspect of the Anglo-American tradition of philosophy of history concerning how language plays a big role in the way that historical events are commendable. So, this unit has two main contents – the non-reducibility of historical narratives to facts as well as the new philosophy of history as done by analytic philosophy of history.

### 1.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, the students would have been able to:

- Possess a deeper comprehension of the Anglo-American tradition of philosophy of history;
- Understand the idea of "new" philosophy of history in the Anglo-American tradition of philosophy of history; and
- Understand the idea of facts as it relates to historical events.

### 1.3 The Non-Reducibility of Historical Narratives to "Facts"

What do we mean when we talk about the non-reducibility of historical narratives to facts? Perhaps the starting point of the discourse of this section is the fact that English-speaking philosophy of history shifted significantly in the 1970s, beginning with the publication of Hayden White's (1973) *Metahistory* and Louis Mink's (1966) writings of the same period.

The so-called "linguistic turn" that marked many areas of philosophy and literature also influenced the philosophy of history. Whereas analytic philosophy of history had emphasized scientific analogies for historical knowledge and advanced the goals of verifiability and generalizability in historical knowledge, English-speaking philosophers in the 1970s and 1980s were increasingly influenced by hermeneutic philosophy, post-modernism, and French literary theory (Rorty 1979). These philosophers emphasized the rhetoric of historical writing, the non-reducibility of historical narrative to a sequence of "facts", and the degree of construction that is involved in historical representation (Little 2020). The main reason for this is because historical documentations are open to subjective analysis of individual historian and the audience. The motivation of the historian is another subjective affair that makes the narratives' tendency to be passed as fact unrealistic for the Anglo-American philosophers of history who take the linguistic turn seriously.

Affinities with literature and anthropology came to eclipse examples from the natural sciences as guides for representing historical knowledge and historical understanding. The richness and texture of the historical narrative came in for greater attention than the attempt to provide causal explanations of historical outcomes. From the foregoing discussion is not safe to say that the "linguistic turn" in the Anglo-American tradition of thought has had a direct impact in history?

### Self-Assessment Exercise 1

1. It was in the _____ that Anglo-American Philosophy of History shifted to the linguistic turn (a) 1907 (b) 1709 (c) 1970 (d) 1079

2. That historical events are irreducible to sequence of facts is a position held by the Anglo-American philosophy of history (a) False (b) True (c) Undetermined (d) Both true and Undetermined

3. The _____ and _____ of the historical narrative came in for greater attention than the attempt to provide causal explanations of historical outcomes. (a) paucity/softness (b) hardness/causes (c) richness/texture (d) texture/fitness

## 1.4 The "New" Philosophy of History in the Analytic Tradition

This "new" philosophy of history is distinguished from analytic philosophy of history in several important respects. It emphasizes historical narrative rather than historical causation. It is intellectually closer to the hermeneutic tradition than to the positivism that underlay the analytic philosophy of history of the 1960s. It highlights features of subjectivity and multiple interpretation over those of objectivity, truth, and correspondence to the facts. Another important strand in this approach to the philosophy of history is a clear theoretical preference for the historicist rather than the universalist position on the status of human nature. The prevalent perspective holds that human consciousness is itself a historical product, and that it is an important part of the historian's work to piece together the mentality and assumptions of actors in the past (Pompa 1990). Significantly, contemporary historians such as Robert Darnton (1984) have turned to the tools of ethnography to permit this sort of discovery.

Another important strand of thinking within analytic philosophy has focused attention on historical ontology (Hacking 2002). The topic of historical ontology is important, both for philosophers and for practicing historians. Ontology has to do with the question, what kinds of things do we need to postulate in a given realm? Historical ontology poses this question with regard to the realities of the past. Should large constructs like 'revolution', 'market society', 'fascism', or 'Protestant religious identity' be included in our ontology as real things? Or should we treat these ideas in a purely nominalistic

way, treating them as convenient ways of aggregating complex patterns of social action and knowledge by large numbers of social actors in a time and place? Further, how should we think about the relationship between instances and categories in the realm of history, for example, the relation between the French, Chinese, or Russian Revolutions and the general category of 'revolution'? Are there social kinds that recur in history, or is each historical formation unique in important ways? These are all questions of ontology, and the answers we give to them will have important consequences for how we conceptualize and explain the past.

### Self-Assessment 2

1. _____ emphasizes historical narrative rather than historical causation.

2. _____ concerns how to postulate about events in a given realm with regard to the realities of the past (a) Historical ontology (b) Historical cosmogony (c) Historical cosmology (d) Historical antecedents.

3. Pick out the odd choice: (a) French Revolution (b) Nigerian Revolution (c) Chinese Revolution (d) Russian Revolution

## 1.5 Summary

In this unit, we have been able to consider the two crucial aspects of Anglo-American philosophy of history that are central to the discussion of the way through which historical documentation can be deemed reliable. In the two sections considered thus far, we have been able to look at the role that the "linguistic turn" in the history of Anglo-American philosophical tradition played, not only in the philosophical and literary fields but in history as well. In the second unit, attention has been given to the idea of a "new" philosophy of history in Anglo-American tradition of thought which also gives emphasis to what is now called "historical ontology."

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## 1.7 Possible Answers to SAES

**Self-Assessment Exercise 1 Answers**
1. (c) 2. (b) 3. (c)

**Self-Assessment Exercise 2 Answers**
1. (The New Philosophy of History) 2. (a) 3. (b)

## End of Module Exercises

1. _____ specifically offered an interpretation of history that turned on the idea of a universal human nature and a universal history
**Ans.: Vico**

2. Do you believe history is directional and purposeful?
**Ans: A straightforward answer to this question is almost impossible. The bottom-line however is that philosophers have raised questions about the meaning and structure of the totality of human history. Some philosophers have sought to discover a large organizing theme, meaning, or direction in human history. This may take the form of an effort to demonstrate how history enacts a divine order, or reveals a large pattern (cyclical, teleological, progressive), or plays out an important theme (for example, Hegel's conception of history as the unfolding of human freedom discussed below). The ambition in each case is to demonstrate that the apparent contingency and arbitrariness of historical events can be related to a more fundamental underlying purpose or order.**

3. Hegel regards _____ as a/an _____ process moving towards a specific condition—the realization of human freedom.
**Ans.: History/Intelligible**

4. The convergence of _____ and _____ in historical processes is helpful (a) reason/causes (b) empiricism/effects (c) scepticism/causes (d) reason/scepticism
**Ans.: (a)**

5. A review of the history of science and historical writing makes it apparent that intellectual value has effect (a) False (b) Probable (c) True (d) None of the above
**Ans.: (c)**

6. The _____ and _____ of the historical narrative came in for greater attention than the attempt to provide causal explanations of historical outcomes. (a) paucity/softness (b) hardness/causes (c) richness/texture (d) texture/fitness
**Ans.: (c)**

## Module 4: Historiography and Philosophy of History in Contemporary Times

## Unit 1: Significance of Philosophy of History and Contemporary World Events



### 1.1 Introduction

In the previous modules, the theoretical aspect of this course has been the overriding concern. However, it is important to observe some of these theories in the light of how they have had direct impacts over the situations or events in the world. So, there are two main discussions in this unit. The first talks about the ways historiography looks at world events such as the Holocaust and other horrors of the Nazi regime. The second discussion focuses over how events in the 20th century constitute some challenges to the philosophers of history. Overall, issues such as what some historians call "bloodline" between the Germans and the Russians during WWII, why the Germans were exclusively targeting the Jews and other similar cases have had profound influences on 20th century historiography, to which we now turn to in this unit.

### 1.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, it is expected that the students would be able to:

- Possess a fair understanding of 20th century historical events;
- Understand the problems encountered by philosophers of history in recent times; and
- Realise the usefulness of the philosopher of history amidst these challenges.

### 1.3 Historiography and Contemporary World Events

Every period presents challenges for the historian, and every period raises problems for historiography and the philosophy of history. The twentieth century is exceptional, however, even by this standard. Events of truly global significance occurred from beginning to end (Little 2020). War, totalitarianism, genocide, mass starvation, ideologies of murder and extermination, and states that dominated their populations with unprecedented violence all transpired during the century. The Holocaust (Snyder 2015), the Holodomor (Applebaum 2017), the Gulag (Applebaum 2003), and the cultural and ideological premises of the Nazi regime (Rabinbach et al 2020) have all presented historians with major new challenges of research, framing, and understanding. As a result, it is not out of place to ask: How should historians seek to come to grips with these complex and horrifying circumstances?

The foregoing occurrences were highly complex and extended and often hidden: many thousands of active participants, many groups and populations, millions of victims, conflicting purposes and goals, new organizations and institutions, numerous ideologies. Moreover, through too many of these novelties is woven the theme of evil – deliberate destruction, degradation, and murder of masses of innocent human beings. The historian of virtually any aspect of the twentieth century is confronted with great problems of frame-setting, explanatory purpose, and moral reflection.

These facts about the twentieth century raise problems for the philosophy of history for several reasons. They challenge historians to consider the depth, detail, and human experience that the historian must convey of the events and experiences that war, genocide, and totalitarianism imposed on millions of people (Little 2020). The discovery and truthful documentation of the extent and lived experience of these crimes is a painful but crucial necessity. Second, historians are forced to reflect on the assumptions they bring to their research and interpretations – assumptions about geography, political causation, individual motivation, and behaviour resulting in these crimes. Third, historians must reconsider and sharpen their hypotheses about causation of these vast and extended crimes against humanity. Fourth, it appears inescapable that historians have a human responsibility to contribute to worldwide changes in culture, memory, and politics in ways that make genocide and totalitarian oppression less likely in the future. In the section that follows these four crucial points are going to be given closer attention.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 1

1. Pick out the odd one: (a) The Holocaust (b) The Holodomor (c) The Gulag (d) The Lassa Fever
2. According to the discussion, there are _____ number of challenges facing the 20th century historian (a) Six (b) Four (c) Fourteen (d) Three
3. Historians must reconsider and sharpen their _____ about _____ of these vast and extended crimes against humanity (a) Hypothesis/Causation (b) Hypothesis/Experimentation (c) Causation/Law (d) Experimentation/Hypothesis

## 1.4 20th Century Problems for Philosophy of History

The ways in which historians have sought to understand the Holocaust, for instance have undergone important historical realignment in the past twenty years (Little 2020). Raul Hilberg (1961) and Lucy Dawidowicz (1975) captured much of the postwar historical consensus about the Holocaust. However, recent historians have offered new ways of thinking about the Nazi

plan of extermination. Timothy Snyder (2010, 2015) argues that the Nazi war of extermination against the Jews has been importantly misunderstood—too centred on Germany, when the majority of genocide and murder occurred further east, in the lands that he calls the "bloodlands" of central Europe (Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, the Soviet Union); largely focused on extermination camps, whereas most killing of Jews occurred near the cities and villages where they lived, and most commonly by gunfire; insufficiently attentive to the relationship between extermination of people and destruction of the institutions of state in subject countries; and without sufficient attention to Hitler's own worldview, within which the Nazi war of extermination against Europe's Jews was framed (Little 2020).

Alexander Prusin (2010) conceptualizes the topic of mass murder in the period 1933–1945 in much the same geographical terms. Like Snyder, Prusin defines his subject matter as a region rather than a nation or collection of nations. The national borders that exist within the region are of less importance in his account than the facts of ethnic, religious, and community disparities that are evident across the region. Thus both historians argue that we need to understand the geography of the Holocaust differently. Snyder believes that these attempts at refocusing the way we understand the Holocaust lead to a new assessment: bad as we thought the Holocaust was, it was much, much worse.

Another strand of re-thinking that has occurred in the study of the Holocaust concerns a renewed focus on the motivations of the ordinary people who participated in the machinery of mass murder (Little 2020). A major field of research into ordinary behaviour during the Holocaust was made possible by the availability of investigative files concerning the actions of a Hamburg police unit that was assigned special duties as "Order Police" in Poland in 1940. These duties amounted to collecting and massacring large numbers of Jewish men, women, and children. Christopher Browning (1992) and Daniel Goldhagen (1996) made extensive use of investigatory files and testimonies of the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 (Little 2020). Both books came to shocking conclusions: very ordinary, middle-aged, apolitical men of the police unit picked up the work of murder and extermination with zeal and efficiency. They were not coerced, they were not indoctrinated, and they were not deranged; and yet they turned to the work of mass murder with enthusiasm. A small percentage of the men of the unit declined the shooting assignments, but the great majority did not.

Another important example of research on ordinary people committing mass murder is Jan Gross's (2001) case study of a single massacre of Jews in Jedwabne, a small Polish town during the Nazi occupation, but not ordered or directed by the German occupation. Instead, this was a local, indigenous action by non-Jewish residents in the town who gathered up their Jewish neighbour's and then murdered large numbers of them. Gross's account has stimulated

much debate, but Anna Bikont (2015) validates almost every detail of Gross's original narrative.

As a different example, consider now the history of the Gulag in the Soviet Union. Anne Applebaum (2003) provides a detailed and honest history of the Gulag and its role in maintaining Soviet dictatorship. Stalin's dictatorship depended on a leader, a party, and a set of institutions that worked to terrorize and repress the population of the USSR. The NKVD (the system of internal security police that enforced Stalin's repression), a justice system that was embodied in the Moscow Show Trials of 1936–38, and especially the system of forced labour and prison camps that came to be known as the Gulag constituted the machinery of repression through which a population of several hundred million people were controlled, imprisoned, and repressed. Further, like the Nazi regime, Stalin used the slave labour of the camps to contribute to the economic output of the Soviet economy. Applebaum estimates that roughly two million prisoners inhabited several thousand camps of the Gulag at a time in the 1940s, and that as many as 18 million people had passed through the camps by 1953 (Applebaum 2003: 13). The economic role of the Gulag was considerable; significant portions of Soviet-era mining, logging, and manufacturing took place within the forced labor camps of the Gulag (Applebaum 2003: 13).

Applebaum (2003) makes a crucial and important point about historical knowledge in her history of the Gulag: the inherent incompleteness of historical understanding and the mechanisms of overlooking and forgetting that get in the way of historical honesty. The public outside the USSR did not want to know about these realities. Applebaum (2003) notes that public knowledge of the camps in the West was available, but was de-dramatized and treated as a fairly minor part of the reality of the USSR. The reality—that the USSR embodied and depended upon a massive set of concentrations camps where millions of people were enslaved and sometimes killed—was never a major part of the Western conception of the USSR. She comments, "far more common, however, is a reaction of boredom or indifference to Stalinist terror" (Applebaum 2003: 18).

The twentieth century poses one additional challenge for the historian because it falls within the human memories of the living generation of historians grappling with its intricacies. When Tony Judt writes (2006) about the fall of Ceaușescu in Romania in 1989, or Timothy Snyder (2010) writes about the murderous actions of German order police in Ukraine in 1940, or Marc Bloch (1949) writes about the "strange defeat" of France in 1940, they are writing about events for which they themselves, or their parents, or Poles and Ukrainian Jews with whom they can interact, have direct lived experiences and memories. Timothy Snyder's style of historical writing suggests that the nearness in time of the killings in the bloodlands both supports and warrants an especially personal and individual approach; thus Snyder's use of many

individual stories of victims of the killings of peasants, Jews, and other human victims of the killing machines of Hitler and Stalin suggests that he believes it is important for the historian to make an effort to convey the individual meanings of these events affecting millions of people. How does this accessibility of the recent past affect the problems facing the historian? Does it influence the ways in which historians select events, causes, and actions as "crucial"? Does this experiential access through living memory provide a more secure form of historical evidence than other sources available to the historian? These topics in twentieth-century history create an important reminder for historians and for philosophers: a truthful understanding of inhuman atrocity is deeply important for humanity, and it is difficult to attain (Little 2020). Discovering and telling the truth about our past is the highest and most important moral imperative that history conveys.

### Self-Assessment 2

1. Concerning the Gulag, the world, save for the USSR does not want to know (a) True (b) False (c) Undetermined (d) None of the Above

2. The narratives concerning how the Germans treated the Jews are replete and historians have divergent views (a) True (b) False (c) Both a and c (d) Undetermined

3. Another problem posed to 20th century historiography by contemporary events is _____ (a) Storages (b) Memories (c) Capacities (d) Filing

## 1.5 Summary

What we have done thus far is to consider the role the challenges faced by historians play in the documentation of events or happenings in the 20th century, especially the ones pertaining to the World Wars and the atrocities of Nazi Germany. The ways concepts were used by historians to depict some realities have been shown to indicate themselves as problems for the historians. At the end of the day, the take-home from the content of this unit is nothing but the understanding that discovering and telling the truth about our past is the highest and most important moral imperative that history conveys.

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## 1.7 Possible Answers to the Self-Assessment Exercises

**Self-Assessment 1:** 1. (d); 2. (b); 3 (a)

**Self-Assessment 2:** 1. (a); 2. (a); 3 (b)

## Unit 2: Scholars and Historiography in the 20th Century



### 1.1 Introduction

The present unit is going to consider the argument that has been considered by some selected scholars concerning the extent to which their notions of historiography may be said to be helpful in comprehending how history is documented. Although in one of the preceding modules Robin George Collingwood had been discussed. In this until however, we are going to focus entire on some key notable scholars. The scholars that will be considered in the present unit are going to cut across both the Anglo-American and the Continental orientations of philosophy of history. Within the present context, the views of each of these prominent scholars on historiography will be of immense or uttermost concern.

### 1.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, it would be possible for learners to:

- Appreciate the divergent perspectives to the idea of historiography among scholars;
- Understand how both the Anglo-American and Continental orientations of philosophy of history each have scholars with divergent views on historiography; and
- Allow students to be able to start thinking critically and engaging the events that they encounter.

### 1.3 20th Century Scholarly Perceptions of Historiography

In the sub-sections that will be encountered, the ideas of some prominent scholars on historiography will be considered. Attention should be paid to the core argument on historiography that is peculiar to each of the scholars concerned. As a way of making it easy to follow, the sub-sections will focus on the main arguments of these important erudite.

### 1.3.1 Friedrich Nietzsche

In his work entitled, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* Nietzsche (1980) queried not just how we could obtain knowledge of the past, but whether and to what extent our attempt to know the past is itself a life-

enhancing or life-enervating activity (Jensen 2022). As human beings, we are unique in the animal world insofar as we are constantly burdened with our pasts as well as our futures, unable to forget those incidents which it would be otherwise preferable to bury on the one hand, and unable to ignore what must become of us on the other (Jensen 2022). History is not just something we study objectively, but an experience through which we must live and by which we seemingly without conscious control burden ourselves for a variety of psychological reasons. Does this not mean that an objectivity approach to history is not possible?

### 1.3.2 Martin Heidegger

The profundity of Martin Heidegger's attempts to give a comprehensive analysis to experience cannot be fully comprehended without first reading about Nietzsche's, hence the core aim of the previous sub-section. Perhaps the starting point of Heidegger's idea is that to state that his overarching project is to answer the question "what is Being?" But in doing so, he recognizes that the truth about Being, that is, our openness to the question of Being, has been gradually covered over in the history of philosophy (Jensen 2022). From the Pre-Socratics, when the question of the meaning of being was at its most open, to the nihilistic academic age of the 20th century, philosophical history becomes a history of the meaning of Being. The end of philosophy, wherein the specialized sciences have entirely preoccupied themselves with particular beings while summarily ignoring Being itself, beckons a new and intrinsically historical engagement. Accordingly, Heidegger's own historiography of philosophy is a working-back from this modern dead-end in the hopes of reopening the question of Being itself.

Heidegger's historiography is, however, more than just an academic recitation of what various other philosophers have said. Human beings, what Heidegger famously terms *Dasein*, are characterized above all by their 'being there' in the world, their 'thrown-ness' in existence, which entails as it did for Nietzsche their relation to Being itself in terms of both their pasts and their existential march toward the common future horizon: death. The self as *Dasein* is constantly engaged in the project of coming out of its past and moving into its future as the space of possibilities in which alone it can act. As such an inextricable part of the human person is its historical facticity (Heidegger 1991).

Later on, continental philosophy of history turned its attention to epistemological questions about historical narrative (Jensen 2022). Again Nietzsche's reflections on history are a crucial influence, especially his contention that truth is no straightforward or objective correspondence between the world and the proposition but a historically contingent outcome of the continuous struggle between the interests of interpreters (Heidegger 1991). As such, philosophy must concern itself with an historical investigation of how

these truth practices function within and against the backdrop of their historical facticities (Jensen 2022).

### 1.3.3 Michael Foucault

For Foucault characterized his own project as the historical investigation of the means of truth production. His earlier work is characterized by what he calls 'archeology' (Foucault 1972). He commences a series of works that denies a single fixed meaning for phenomena, but undertakes to show how meaning transmogrifies over time through a series of cultural practices.

Foucault discusses a description of the transitions between cultural discourses in a way that highlights their structural and contextual meaning while undermining any substantive notion of the author of those discourses (Jensen 2022). Foucault's later work, though he never repudiates his archaeological method, is characterized as a 'genealogy'. The effort, again roughly Nietzschean, is to understand the past in terms of the present, to show that the institutions we find today are neither the result of teleological providence nor an instantiation of rational decision making, but emerge from a power play of discourses carried over from the past (Jensen 2022). This does not mean that history should study the 'origins' of those practices; on the contrary it denies the notion of origin as an illegitimate abstraction from what is a continuous interaction of discourses. History should instead concern itself with those moments when the contingencies of the past emerge or descend out of the conflict of its discourses, with how the past reveals a series of disparities rather than progressive steps.

### 1.3.4 Carl Hempel

Following the several noticeable problems involved in the Anglo-American tradition of philosophy of history, Carl Hempel (1959) steps in to attempt an explanation from his philosophy of science background. Hitherto scholars held explanations to be justified insofar as they were able to render historical events predictable by means of discerning their particulars under a general law. The most well-known expression comes from (Jensen 2022). For him, "Historical explanation, too, aims at showing that the event in question was not a 'matter of chance', but was to be expected in view of certain antecedent or simultaneous conditions. The expectation referred to is not prophecy or divination, but rational scientific anticipation which rests on the assumption of general laws" (Hempel 1959, 348f). The main idea seems easy to understand in his words thus: "The explanation of the occurrence of an event of some specific kind *E* at a certain place and time consists, as it is usually expressed, in indicating the causes or determining factors of *E*" (Hempel 1959, 345).

In this respect, the logic of historical explanation is no different from the logic of scientific explanation. And while they may be more difficult to locate, once the laws of historical change have been discovered by psychology, anthropology, economics, or sociology, the predictive force of historiography

should theoretically rival that of the natural sciences (Jensen 2022). In spite of the explanation offered by Hempel concerning how history can receive a commending explanation in the way of science, his efforts have come under critical assessment.

Hempel's position came under attack from those like Popper who thought that history could not offer absolute regularities and maintained that predictions were never inviolable but at best probable 'trends' (Jensen 2022). Attack also came from R.G. Collingwood, who denied the existence of covering laws in history and accordingly the applicability of scientific explanatory mechanisms. For him, as well as for Michael Oakeshott, history is a study of the uniqueness of the past and not its generalities, and always for the sake of understanding rather than proving or predicting. Using Aristotle as a framework, Oakeshott (1933: 154) believes, "the moment historical facts are regarded as instances of general laws, history is dismissed." It is the particular, especially the particular person, that history studies, and as such the attempt to predict their behaviour nomothetically is not only impossible but misunderstands the very reason for historical inquiry in the first place.

### 1.3.5 Isaiah Berlin

Isaiah Berlin is of the position that the problem of historiographical objectivity derives from the perspective of the objects written about rather than exclusively the writer. While the scientist has little emotional commitment to the chemicals or atoms under examination, historians often have strong feelings about the moral consequences of their subjects. The choice between historical designations like 'terrorist' and 'freedom fighter', 'sedition' and 'revolution', or 'ruler' and 'tyrant' are normatively connotative in a way that scientific descriptions can easily avoid (Jensen 2022). Yet to write about the holocaust or slavery in a purposefully detached way misses the intensely personal character of these events and thus fails to communicate their genuine meaning, even if doing so detracts from their status as objective records in a way scientific history would disallow. Historians justifiably maintain "that minimal degree of moral or psychological evaluation which is necessarily involved in viewing human beings as creatures with purposes and motives (and not merely as causal factors in the procession of events)" (Berlin 1954: 52). What precisely that minimal degree is, however, and how a working historian can navigate moral gray areas without falling back into inherited biases, remains difficult to account for (Jensen 2022). Could there be moral obligations owed by historians?

### Self-Assessment Exercise 1

1. From Hempel, it is the case that the logic of _____is no different from the logic of scientific explanation

2. _____ is of the position that the problem of historiographical objectivity derives from the perspective of the objects written about rather than exclusively the writer (a) Gadamer (b) Collingwood (c) Berlin (d) Nietzsche

3. The archaeological method is synonymous with _____ (a) Foucault (b) Derrida (c) Lyotard (d) Heidegger

## 1.4 Summary

Thus far, there are five scholars whose views on historiography had been discussed in the previous sub-sections. What needs to be added is that the choice of Nietzsche, even when he was a 19th century scholar was important because of how it assists in the comprehension of how other Continental scholars discussing historiography entered and continued the dialogue. What may be noticed once more in this unit is that just like in a previous unit, the methodologies and motivations for Anglo-American/Analytic and the Continental traditions of thought are divergent on historiography. Whereas the first three scholars attempted to use reason the others are motivated by the positive method in science.

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## 1.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises

**Self-Assessment Exercise:** 1. Historical explanation; 2. (c); 3. (a)

## Unit 3: History and the Mythological Basis of Identities



### 1.1 Introduction

In this unit, we are going to focus again over some practical realities where history is highly important. The connection between what some people claim to be (identity) and the myths that make this identity possible will be explored. The views of some scholars such as Chinua Achebe and Kwame Anthony Appiah will be used for the establishing the idea that there are political reasons why the myths in the histories of a people are used as a binding principle for some political ends. In the course of the unit, references will be made to what can now be referred to as the *Igbo, Ewe* and *Yoruba* identities and how they perceived themselves until some common political ends allowed them to see one another as possessing one identity.

### 1.3 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, it is expected that the learners would have been able to:

- Realise that there is a function of myth in everyday belief;
- Myths play an important role in the formation of ideas; and
- Identities have an underlying basis in myths embedded in a people's history

### 1.4 What is Mythology?

According to the study of Jonathan Z. Smith et al. (2020) myth is a symbolic narrative, usually of unknown origin and at least partly traditional, that ostensibly relates actual events and that is especially associated with religious belief. It is distinguished from symbolic behaviour (cult, ritual) and symbolic places or objects (temples, icons). Myths are specific accounts of gods or superhuman beings involved in extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is unspecified but which is understood as existing apart from ordinary human experience. The term *mythology* denotes both the study of myth and the body of myths belonging to a particular religious tradition. Myths are related to other narrative forms such as fables, fairy tales, folktales, sagas and epics, legends, parables and etiologic tales (Smith et al. 2020)

The word *myth* derives from the Greek *mythos,* which has a range of meanings from "word," through "saying" and "story," to "fiction"; the unquestioned validity of *mythos* can be contrasted with *logos,* the word whose validity or truth can be argued and demonstrated (Smith et al. 2020). This is because myths narrate fantastic events with no attempt at proof, it is sometimes

assumed that they are simply stories with no factual basis, and the word has become a synonym for falsehood or, at best, misconception.

As with all religious symbolism, there is no attempt to justify mythic narratives or even to render them plausible. Every myth presents itself as an authoritative, factual account, no matter how much the narrated events are at variance with natural law or ordinary experience. By extension from this primary religious meaning, the word *myth* may also be used more loosely to refer to an ideological belief when that belief is the object of a quasi-religious faith; an example would be the Marxist eschatological myth of the withering away of the state.

In Western culture there are a number of literary or narrative genres that scholars have related in different ways to myths. Examples are fables, fairy tales, folktales, sagas, epics, legends, and etiologic tales (which refer to causes or explain why a thing is the way it is). Another form of tale, the parable, differs from myth in its purpose and character. Even in the West, however, there is no agreed definition of any of these genres, and some scholars question whether multiplying categories of narrative is helpful at all, as opposed to working with a very general concept such as the traditional tale. Non-Western cultures apply classifications that are different both from the Western categories and from one another. Most, however, make a basic distinction between "true" and "fictitious" narratives, with "true" ones corresponding to what in the West would be called myths (Smith et al. 2020).

Myth has existed in every society. Indeed, it would seem to be a basic constituent of human culture. Because the variety is so great, it is difficult to generalize about the nature of myths. But it is clear that in their general characteristics and in their details a people's myths reflect, express, and explore the people's self-image. The study of myth is thus of central importance in the study both of individual societies and of human culture as a whole (Smith et al. 2020). Now that we have discussed the meaning of myths, what role does it play in the historical patterns of identities?

## Self-Assessment Exercise 1

1. "As with all religious symbolism, there is no attempt to justify mythic narratives or even to render them plausible" This statement is _____ (a) False (b) True (c) Undetermined (d) All of the above

2. Myth has existed in every _____ (a) Compartment (b) Nooks and Crannies (c) Institutions (d) Society

3. _____ are related to other narrative forms such as fables, fairy tales, folktales, sagas and epics, legends, parables and etiologic tales (a) Myths (b) History (c) Narratives (d) Tales

## 1.5 How Myths and History Combine to form Identities

In this unit, we are to consider the role that myths play in the ways that identities are created. Specifically, we are to consider the relationship between how these myths are entrenched in the peoples' history to form a unifying identity. Whilst speaking of Igbo of south-east Nigeria, Chinua Achebe notices:

> In my area, historically, they did not see themselves as Igbos. They saw themselves as people from this village or that village. In fact in some place "Igbo" was a word of abuse; they were the "other" people, down in the bush. And yet after the Biafran War, during a period of two years, it became a powerful consciousness. But it was *real* all the time. They all spoke the same language called "Igbo," even though they were not using that identity in any way. But the moment came when this identity became very very powerful…and over a very short period (Achebe, 1982).

The foregoing attests to the point that any discourse on African identity must begin from the premise that "race and history and metaphysics do not enforce an identity…" (Appiah, 1992: 176). It also shows among many other important factors that identity is actually overrated. In this study, the idea of identity among the *Yoruba* of south-West Nigeria will be used to express this outlook as its justification. The idea of identity that has been since primordial times that influence people over the need to be bonded, this research will argue, to be misplaced (Logan, 2011). If identity is primordial, how then does it inform contemporary changes and patterns of identity? Kwame Appiah seems to have an answer.

In places where these notions of identity seem to wield influence what persists are nothing but "invented histories, invented biologies, invented cultural affinities" with perhaps a fortuitous yet undisclosed agency "that has to be scripted, structured by conventions of narratives to which the world never quite manages to conform" (Appiah, 1992: 173). The inference is that identity, as it relates to culture, values and development of a people is persistently and relentlessly evolving. It is also striking that nearly all of the ethnic identities that constitute Africa *did* not perceive themselves as a people prior to colonialism. As Chinua Achebe renders, it was the Biafran War that initiated the idea of the Igbo as a consciousness – a consciousness that was hitherto otiose. Similarly, the *Lingala* and Swahili-speaking peoples of modern Zaire are, consequent of "spheres of political and economic interests were established before the Belgians took full control and continued to inform relations between regions under colonial rule" (Fabian, 1986: 42-3). It is according to Appiah (1992: 62) "a product of recent history, an outcome of worker stratification imposed by the Belgian administration." In Ghana, an Akan identity surfaced as an opposition to Ewe unity. In Nigeria, the idea of a Yoruba people did not

evolve until 1945 through the cultural nationalism captured by *Egbe Omo Oduduwa.*

From the foregoing brief exposition, this study is convinced that the notion of identity in African politics is a myth. It does not derive from heuristic evidence but based on sentiments of shared colonial oppression. There are instance in African history wherein groups that seem to share similar identities, where actually warring ethnic groups that were eventually brought together by the struggle for national liberation. The point being underlined here is that prior contact with Europe, the various sub-cultures in Africa did not perceive themselves as they do presently. To amplify, the idea of "Yoruba nation"; "Ijaw nation"; "Hausa nation" and other ethnic identities in Nigeria, as lauded by Kola Ogundowole (2013) is a [post]colonial creation, motivated largely by politics and economics. The motivating factors for initiating distinct identity in present times are not dissimilar from the pre-colonial periods. Three factors have been adduced by Kwame Appiah. *Firstly*, being a complex affair, identities improve and expand from a status quo of "economic, political, and cultural forces, always in opposition to other identities" (Appiah, 1992: 178). *Secondly,* identities are enmeshed but flourish in myths and lies especially as it concerns their origins. The *third* factor which follows from the first two, for Appiah accounts for "no large place in reason in the construction – as opposed to the study and management – of identities" (Appiah, 1992: 178).

In a staggering fashion, Appiah (1992: 175) accentuates the seemingly sacrilegious that "we would need to show that race and national history are falsehoods but they are useless falsehoods at best or – at worst – dangerous ones…" These are the words that ring through when one decides to take a historic-philosophical exploration of the trajectories of identities within the Africa.

According to a former professor of history, Elizabeth Isichei (1983: 131) "there is a sense in which all Yoruba history begins with Ife, as Igbo history begins at Nri, or Birom history at Riyom." Radiocarbon dating reveals Ife was "a settlement of substantntial size between the ninth and twelfth centuries" (Willet, 1971: 367). Bronze artworks showing an *Ooni* of Ife; and another one with his consort revealed thermoluminescence dates within the 14$^{th}$ and 15$^{th}$ centuries (Calvocoressi & David, 1979: 19). These attest that Ife was already a thriving culture at this era using the Gregorian Calendar. It is however interesting to note that aside Ife, there were other popular towns in South-West Nigeria that will later make up the original abode of those to be called the *Yoruba.* Oyo is another very important force to reckon with. Oyo has been radiocarbon dated to around 1100 A.D. (Calvocoressi & David, 1979: 19-20). Other popular kingdoms are the *Ijebu, Ondo, Owu, Ilorin, Ijesa, Egba, Ekiti, Ogbomosho, Iseyin,* and in some cases *Benin.* It needs to be stated however that *Oyo* Empire was so colossal that "in the reign of *Ojigi,* Dahomey was forced to pay *Oyo* tribute" (Isichei, 1983: 134). It has been as well that it was its

expansion that "bred weakness and division, and the state then stood on the brink of collapse" (Isichei, 1983: 134).

All the places mentioned in the foregoing paragraphs have evolved and refer to one another as *Yoruba* people – of one similar identity. This however was not the case historically-speaking. Take the case of *Owu,* an *Egba* province, as an instance. *Owu* is a southern Kingdom which owed allegiance to the *Oyo* Empire. In 1811/12, *Owu* sacked a number of *Ife* towns. During the campaign, they killed several *Ijebu* traders in *Ife.* As a reprisal, *Ijebu* and *Ife* "besieged *Owu,* which surrendered in 1816/17 after terrible sufferings from famine. The site was razed and rebuilding forbidden" (Isichei, 1983: 216). Other *Egba* towns were similarly affected: "*Ikija* was destroyed because of its support of *Owu,* and *Kesi* was destroyed by the fleeing *Owu* because of an altercation over yams" (Isichei, 1983: 216).

Around this time too enslavement of one group by the other was replete. For instance, the *Ibadan* leader, when asked to give up *Ekiti* as a subject in 1885 responded crisply: "the Ekiti were there wives, their slaves, the yams, their palm oil etc." (Awe, 1973: 68). Clearly, the matter of releasing them is not negotiable. As a matter of fact, kidnapping of members of one town by another were so rampant that "a special gag was invented for the mouth of human beings to prevent any stolen from crying out and being discovered…so bad were those days at Ibadan and so callous had the people become that if a woman or child was heard to cry out…O help me, I am taken, the usual answer from indoors was…you can go along with him" (Johnson, 1921: 245-6). It is at this era that slave-raiding now became a trade to many who would get rich speedily (Johnson, 1921).

The kingdom of *Ilesa* was drafted as part of the *Ibadan* Empire in the 1850s, even as it was an unwilling 'amalgamation.' *Ilesa* fought against *Ibadan* but fell in 1870 (Isichei, 1983: 219). The wars among the peoples that will soon coalesce to be *Yoruba* as a shared identity did not abate so effortlessly. In 1916, there was an *Iseyin-Okeiho* Rising (Atanda, 1979). These conflicts surface spontaneously even after political independence and the fostering of a *Yoruba* identity.

It has been relayed that strangers in *Ibadan* and other parts of modern day *Yoruba* land in the 19th century provide vivid accounts of towns and kingdoms ravaged by the aftermaths of conflicts: the nightly lamentations for the dead, the compounds falling into ruin [(Wood, 1885: 546); (Isichei, 1973: 221)]. Elsewhere, one gleans that "it is hardly possible to think of the sufferings which have been endured by the Ondos without a feeling of the deepest pity and sympathy…The sufferings of the Ijeshas have been greater than those of the Ondos, and still they continue. Town after town, in the Ijesha country is passed which has but the merest handful of a population, as compared with what it was formerly" (Wood, 1885: 851).

The point that has been established thus far is that all the small kingdoms and mighty empires that claim to share the *Yoruba* identity in contemporary times, were hitherto sworn enemies who hardly perceive things from a similar perspective. It is however interesting to note that it was during the colonial era and the press for political independence that informed the need to coalesce and create an identity from that which cuts across all of them to initiate a common denominator. This denominator was developed by the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo as *Egbe Omo Oduduwa,* which transliterates as "peoples or descendants of *Oduduwa.*" There is an element of truth in this assertion since "a number of Yoruba kingdoms and Benin have traditions that they were founded by sons or grandsons of Oduduwa" (Isichei, 1983: 132). It is also disclosed that the number of such polities range between six and sixteen in various accounts (Law, 1977: 27). Awolowo capitalized on the unverifiable stories and folklores of the peoples for economic and political purpose under the auspice of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa.*

It was in 1945 that the Nigerian political unit of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* entered the political fray of the country. This was when Chief Obafemi Awolowo and some other prominent "*Yoruba*" elites in London [(Sklar, 2004: 67); (Reed, 1982: 25)]. The position of Awolowo is a vindication of the perspective of Ekeh (1975: 100) that "educated Africans are members of the two publics…They work hard to promote their primordial public and less on their civic public. This loyalty to primordial public is crippling African politics." Robert Lino (2015) in a related development has endorsed "in his choice of words that that African politicians are bourgeoisie." The evolution of the Yoruba identity for the sake of cultural nationalism is an endorsement of this fact.

From the discussion explored thus far, it is very correct to maintain that myths that are enshrined in a people's history can be regarded as a cause for the identities that most people hold on to rationally in recent times.

## Self-Assessment Exercise 2

1. Pick the odd choice: (a) *Egbe omo Oduduwa* (b) *Arewa* (c) Ikoyi Club (d) *Igbo*

2. As _____ renders, it was the Biafran War that initiated the idea of the Igbo as a consciousness – a consciousness that was hitherto otiose (a) Kwame Appiah/Ewe War (b) Obafemi Awolowo/Nigerian Civil War (c) Chinua Achebe/Biafran War (d) Aminu Kano/Arewa War

3. Ijebu and Ife laid sieged over _____ (a) Owo (b) Owu (c) Ondo (d) Owa

4. Briefly discuss the three factors that inspire identities, according to Kwame Appiah

## 1.6 Summary

In this unit, attention has been given ton how myths function in the ways that they assist with the formation of identities. Ordinarily, these identities are usually lacking from the outset. This study has used the history of Yoruba identity to establish why it has been found that myths woven into a people's history serves as the reason for the possible of identity formation. The same can be said of the Igbo and Hausas who from the original outset are individual, small villages that overtime started to see themselves as one group following the need for political interest. Through this unit, we have been able to see how a close look at myths show that they are relevant in identity formation.

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## 1.8 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises

**Self-Assessment Exercises 1:** 1. (b); 2. (d); 3. (a)

**Self-Assessment Exercises 2:** 1. (c); 2. (c); 3. (b); 4: Three factors have been adduced by Kwame Appiah. Firstly, being a complex affair, identities improve and expand from a status quo of economic, political, and cultural forces, always in opposition to other identities. Secondly, identities are enmeshed but flourish in myths and lies especially as it concerns their origins. The third factor which follows from the first two, for Appiah accounts for no large place in reason in the construction – as opposed to the study and management – of identities.

## Unit 4: 20th Century African Identity Question and the Philosophy of History



## 1.1 Introduction

In the preceding units and modules, we have been able to look at or even consider some of the ways through which historians go about their business of documentation. The methodological and motives undergirding their initiatives have also been given consideration. In this last unit however, the focus will shift toward the history of the colours: "white" and "black" as well as how they have had some influences the identity of Africans. In this unit, we shall now look at the history of these colours and how they were ascribed to people. Second, the ways literature of the Modern English era and the Bible depicted these colours and lastly how scholars have used this for the racial segregation of humans will be discussed. Attention will be given foremost to the ways through which this history of colour has been able to inform the 20th century view of African identity based on skin colour – a central aspect of Hegel's 18th century conviction for why Africans are not part of history.

## 1.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, students must be able to:

- Understand the meaning and nature of the hsitroy of the colours: "white" and "black";
- How the idea of these colours are useful in the differentiation of people; and
- How the African identity is wrongly shaped in history by these colours.

## 1.3 The History of "Whiteness" and "Blackness" for Racial Categorisation

The contemporary scholar of the history of the colour "black" and "white" Kwesi Tsri (2016) contends that the concept, 'black' is a misleading nomenclature for Africa[n]. Since colours have symbolic connotations which may be complementary and in other cases derogatory, Tsri finds 'black' a derogatory depiction of the African. Historically, the colour has done this denigration.

With the established Eurocentric employment of the concept, 'black' from ancient times to refer to Africans, Tsri finds it insulting and racially loaded. Hence, he explores "…the genesis and evolution of the descriptions of Africans as black, the consequence of this practice, and how it contributes to the

denigration and dehumanization of Africans" (Tsri 2016b: 1). Tsri's reflections may be said to be highly illuminating and consciousness-raising, especially as he shows how myths which are usually taken for granted actually inform human prejudice.

From his perusal of ancient Greek myths and literatures, Tsri (2016b) finds that the colour 'white' has always been perceived as a signifier for sanctity, cleanliness, excellence, and even superiority whereas 'black' on the other hand portrays impurity, badness, evil, savage, and inferiority. To show how this works in Greek literature, Tsri turns to Price (1883) whose philological exploration of the term in Greek literature is commendable. Price (1883: 1), avers that the Greek word for 'black,' which is '*melas*' signifies negative concepts like sorrow, evil and even death. 'Black' also personifies '*Kip*', the goddess of death. Meanwhile, 'white' on the other hand, in Greek is '*leukos*', the concept which connotes all good and positive things. This usage was exported into ancient Rome as the notions – *'ater*' and '*niger'* for black refer to bad and negative things, '*albus'* which means white, signifies good and positive things.

Tsri (2016b, 28) perceives the ascription of 'black' and its negative connotations to Africans as calculated efforts to dehumanize Africans. For Tsri (2016a. 148) "available historical evidence shows that the ancient Greeks used both terms for Ethiopians and black interchangeably for Africans." Works of prominent scholars such as Snowden (1971), Thompson (1989) and even Hannaford (1996) attest that the concept 'Ethiopian' which in the literal sense refers to 'burnt-face' or 'sun-burnt-face' was first used to depict Africans in the literatures of the Greek poet, Homer. At this juncture, a critic may interject: Granted that in ancient Greece, the concept, 'black' both symbolizes evil and refers to Ethiopians (or Africans) as Tsri portrays, but did this in anyway initiate any racial and political resentment against them by the Greeks? A straight answer to this question is elusive.

However, historian, Frank Snowden discloses that before the sixth century A.D., although there was an "association of blackness with ill-omens, demons, devil, and sin, there is in the extant no stereotyped image of Ethiopians as the personification of demons or the devil" (Snowden 1983, 107). It has also been disclosed that in ancient Greece and Rome, "the major divisions between people were more clearly understood as being between civic and barbarous, between the political citizen and those outside of the *polis,* and not between bloodlines and skin colour" (Hannaford 1996, 14). These approaches may lead to the affirmation that in the ancient world "no concept truly equivalent to that of 'race' can be detected in the thought of the Greeks, Romans, and early Christians" (Fredrickson 2002, 17). However, with the history of colour undertaken by Tsri in 2016, this will be shown to not be the case.

Regardless of the foregoing ambivalence, ancient Greek and Roman employment of the term 'black' assumed the negative denotations and connotations in the Bible where "the term black is extensively used in this religious context as a symbol to denote both negative and socially undesirable qualities, including sin, evil, curse and malevolence" (Tsri 2016b: 173). It is not only the Bible that is guilty of this misconception as William Shakespeare too is. In the next sub-section, we shall look at how this idea of blackness and whiteness reflect in literary works.

### 1.3.1 Biblical and Literary Perspectives to History of "Blackness" and Identity

***The Bible*** has been adduced as God's revelation unto humankind to serve as a torch which shines back and forth. Specifically, it was perceived by Apostle Paul as the inspiration of God for teaching and instruction. In his letter to Apostle Timothy (2nd Tim 2: 16), Apostle Paul did not mince words: "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." The logical implication is that the Bible was inspired by God for the good of human kind. As kind and straightforward as these words sound to the ears, little has been said concerning some of the passages that were 'inspired' to connote or depict black Africans as lesser humans.

In the Old Testament portion of the Bible, a reference is made regarding the skin of an Ethiopian African through the divine inspiration of Prophet Jeremiah thus: "can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Neither can you do good, who are accustomed to doing evil" (Jer. 13: 23). In this sense, Ethiopian's skin is calculated to be a symbol of sin – a naturally sinful nature it seems – and such a nature it seems, unchangeable!

Centuries before Prophet Jeremiah was inspired, another passage detests the marriage of Ethiopians. In Numbers (12: 1): "Mariam and Aaron began to speak against Moses because of his Ethiopian wife, for he had married an Ethiopian." An African Christian who seeks to emerge from the inferiority complex, discrimination and stigmatization s/he suffers from non-Africans both within the continent and without may discern that biblical passages (such as this), attest to the long tradition of such denigration of the African progenitors. To reinforce the extent of these instances from Church fathers and Church traditions can be useful at this juncture.

The use of the term 'black' to signify Satan is well documented in the *Epistle of Barnabas* where Satan is referred to as the Black One. It no longer requires critical reflection why all things negative, dehumanising, Satanic and Devilish have become synonymous with black Africans. In another early Christian text titled *Life of Melanie the Young,* as reported by Kwesi Tsri, the Devil transformed into a "young black man and was misleading Christian women." This early Church text and some other texts and traditions seem to establish the understanding that to have a black skin is to lead a sinful nature incorrigibly.

Validating this locus, Father Origen had once proclaimed: "At one time we were *Ethiopians (Aethiopes)* in our vices and sins. How so? Because our sins had *blackened* us." Father Jerome who was also a Christian exegete refers to black African peoples as "black and cloaked in filth of sin."

All these illustrations have led the Ghanaian scholar Kwesi Tsri to infer that "the available evidence from the early Christian literature shows that the early Christian exegetes did not only describe and categorise Africans as black, but they also found it appropriate to present them as black in a symbolic sense. They considered the colour black and the term 'Ethiopian' as synonyms, and used both as religious terms for demons, evil, sin and carnal lust."

From this history of white and black it can be argued that the image and the likeness of God is disputable since being black is to be evil, grimy and Devilish when being white is to be good, pure and Godly. This colour distinction is reinforced by the location of Devil as black and God with His angels as white. If humans are made in the image and likeness of God, then this excludes black humans, for they are modeled after the Devil obviously. Is this line of reasoning defensible at all?

Tsri (2016b) brings this assessment in his reflection on Bibles African language translations of the Bible. Tsri (2016b) explains that the adventure of Christian missionaries in Africa led to the translation of the Bible into local African languages. Specifically referencing the *Ewe* version of the English King James Version of the Bible, he discloses that "…through colonialism/Christian mission, the racist use of the term black was exported back to Africa so that today, many Africans describe and categorise themselves with racially denigrating and dehumanizing terms" (Chimakonam 2018: 3).

The use of the history of colour in ways that does not favour Africans can also be found in ***literary works*** as well.

The description of Africans in classical antiquity and the Middle Ages soon infiltrated early modern fiction. In William Shakespeare's play, *Othello,* Tsri (2016b) finds that Shakespeare expresses the bias of his time toward the concept 'black.' In his words: "…the depiction of Othello as black results in other characters establishing an essential link between his humanity and moral and religious evils" (Tsri 2016a, 149). Tsri (2016a, 150) furthers that "…Shakespeare writes in a language in which the use of 'black' to both symbolise evil and to categorise people constitutes a deep conceptual structure that pre-exists any purpose he might use it for." Hence, while "…Othello was presented in the play as evil, demonic, barbarous, savage and all that is negative due to the colour of his skin, Desdemona was presented as good, heavenly, civilised and all that is positive due to the colour of her skin" (Chimakonam 2018, 3). This negative profiling of Othello based on his skin is rendered clearer in Iago's proclamation to Brabantio in Act 1 Scene 1 of the

work thus: “Even now, now, very now, an old black ram is tupping your white ewe. Arise, arise, Awake the snorting citizens with the bell Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you. Arise I say.” To have a black skin amounts to being a devil, obviously!

Tsri (2016b) argues that from the foregoing analysis, “black” as a synonym for Africans was not a self-acclaimed term but an imposition by Europeans. Africans have their original names that identify them with their geography and cultural statuses (Lake 2003, 1). This outlook is also shared by Cheikh Anta Diop (1987, 13) who relays that the “in antiquity, the Ethiopians call themselves *autochthon,* those who had sprung from the ground.”

### Self-Assessment Exercise 1

1. Black and white have a history in human categorisation (a) True (b) False (c) Undetermined (d) None of these

2. _____ is the drama where blackness is portrayed negatively (a) Merchant of Venice (b) Othello (c) The Rivals (d) The Native Son

3. _____ believes that Africans have a name for themselves before contact with Europe and European history (a) Diop (b) Diouf (c) Shakespeare (d) None of these

## 1.4 Scholarly Discourse on the History of “Blackness” and African Identity

The discrimination of the Middle Ages in European history seems to have injected some forms of bias into European scholarship and then unleashed upon traditional Africans. For instance, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1975, 177) submits that the African “is an example of animal in all his savagery and lawlessness.” Similarly, Lucien Levy-Bruhl (1995, 43) describes Africans as “Primitive, barbaric, irrational, uncivilised and most importantly people without capacity for critical and rational thinking- qualities that are natural to doing philosophy.” Perhaps this prejudice informs Immanuel Kant’s outburst regarding an African: “This fellow was quite black from head to toe, a clear proof that what he said was stupid” (Quoted in Chimakonam 2019a, 189). David Hume whose intellectual stirrings roused and inspired Kant submits that Negroes and other races are low-grade vis-à-vis Europeans (Popkin 1978, 215). These comments which are mostly founded on fictions and prejudice lack proper scientific bases. How do these affect the African?

The African continues to be dehumanised both in person, fiction and scientific works. In other words, the categorisation of the African as a lesser human being is mostly based on skin colour usually informed by fictions. So then in what ways have the theories of race reinforced this perspective? Perhaps the starting point is to revisit the discourse on race.

The term ‘race’ before 1800 was used generally as a synonym for ‘lineage’ (Biddiss 1979, 11). Elsewhere, one gleans that much as the term had been in use before the 18th century, usually to refer to domesticated animals, “It was introduced into the sciences by the French naturalist Louis LeClerc Comte de Buffon in 1749. Buffon saw clearly demarcated distinctions between the human races that were caused by varying climates” (YUDELL 2011, 15). From a Popperian perspective and in the context of the history of the idea of race, this indicates how myths and fictions were developed to become testable propositions. The history of scientific theories of race and the discrimination along colour lines must honour Buffon as a patron saint. What role does Buffon play in this connection?

To Buffon, the natural state of humanity was derived from Europeans. According to Yudell (2011, 14), Buffon believes that Europe “produced the most handsome and beautiful men” and represented the “genuine colour of mankind” – which of course is white. The idea that the genuine colour of humanity is white has no biological or genetic backing at this time in history. It is a proposition that was engendered by the assumptions and prejudices sponsored by the fictions that Tsri (2016b) articulates as key culprit in the race discourse. The testable proposition: “Europeans have the genuine colour of mankind,” initiated by Buffon, was further refined as a scientific proposition by Swedish biologist Carolus Linnaeus (1758).

In his “Natural System,” Linnaeus (1758) divided humanity into four groups: *Americanus, Asiaticus, Africanus, and Europeaeus.* Since “facts are theory-laden,” and “…motives also influence methodology” (Harris 1988, 13), Linnaeus invokes human physical and behavioural features and thus became the first to reduce this prejudice to a testable hypothesis. Regarding *Africanus,* he says they are “black, phlegmatic…hair black, frizzled…nose flat; lips tumid; women are without shame, they lactate profusely; crafty, indolent, negligent…governed by caprice” (Smedley 1999, 164). *Americanus* and *Asiaticus* were not so poorly described. On the other extreme, *Europeaeus,* are “white, sanguine, muscular…eyes blue, gentle…inventive…governed by laws (Smedley 1999, 164).

Toward the end of the 18th century, the assumptions and prejudices initiated by myths were developed further. The German scientist Johann Blumenbach [1999 (orig. 1795)], continued Linnaeus’ efforts by proposing five types of race: Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay. Of these five, Blumenbach posits that the Caucasian is the paragon or ideal race (Gould 1996, 408).

What may be observed thus far unveils the transition of ideas informed by myths into prejudices and opinions. It was not until the beginning of the 19th century that these propositions (accrued via fictions), were taken into scientific

laboratories where "…motives also influence methodology" (Harris 1988, 13). What happened around this time?

A scientist like Morton "offers a variety of explanations for the nature of white racial superiority…to address the nature and intellectual difference between races, the "natural" positions of racial groups in American society, and the capacity for citizenship of non-whites" (Yudell 2011, 16). With the scientific method of observation and experimentation in full swing around this time, Morton collected hundreds of skulls from all over the planet to measure their volumes. His experiments led him to postulate that "the Caucasian and Mongolian races had the highest cranial capacity and thus the highest level of intelligence, while Africans had the lowest cranial capacity and thus, the lowest level of intelligence. This work became the basis for more than a century of work studying intelligence and race" (Yudell 2011: 16).

Morton's efforts were however, misleading if not false. Stephen Jay Gould, who, more than a century after Morton's death used the same experimental materials and methods, could not replicate the previous conclusions. This led Gould (1996: 70) to conclude that Morton's 'subjective ideas' (or shall we say prejudice?) about race influenced his methods and conclusions, leading to the omission of contradictory data and to the conscious or unconscious stuffing or under-filling of certain skulls to match his pre-ordained conclusions (Faust 1981: 14). Between Morton and Gould, it can be discerned how the epistemology of race keeps evolving and how the prejudices from myths keep fuelling this evolution.

In the 19th century, Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man,* substantiates the white supremacy outlook since he considers every population that is not white and European to be savage. In his words the savages have "low morality, insufficient powers of reasoning and weak power of self-command" (Darwin 1871, 97). Darwin applies his principle of natural selection to justify white supremacy, the extermination and replacement of non-white humans, whom he considers as the evolutionary link between Caucasians, the civilised race and animals. Darwin insists that the gap between civilised man, (whites) and his closest evolutionary ancestors (i.e. non-whites) will widen. The gap will eventually be between civilized man "…and some ape as low as a baboon, instead of as at present between the negro or Australian and the gorilla (Darwin 1871, 201).

Owing to this, Michael Yudell (2011, 16) concedes: "If racial science is science employed for the purpose of degrading a people both intellectually and physically, then beginning in the 19th century…scientists played an increasingly active role in its development, all the while shaping the race concept." At the turn of the 19th century, there was a new dimension to explaining humanity's diversity as the discourse soon migrated fully into the

field of biology, precisely genetics. What is the role of the history of science of genetics over race and how does it have an effect on African identity?

Genetics quickly came to be used as the formative language for modern racism as ideas about human differences and variations became grounded in biology. This is what has been termed as the 'geneticisation of race.' This perspective stresses that racial diversities in appearance and complex social behaviours may be understood as genetic distinctions between the racial groups. This outlook was shaped in large parts by eugenics (YUDELL 2011, 16-7).

In the first three decades of the 20th century, eugenics was generally proposing "the belief that human races differed hereditarily by important mental as well as physical traits, and that crosses between widely different races were biologically harmful" (PROVINE 1986, 857). The movement, according to Francis Galton, the founder, is to create a status quo which allows "the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing over the less suitable" (GALTON 1892, 25). Through eugenics some racial groups deemed fitting, will be allowed to procreate while some others, less fitting will be denied "either through sterilization as was the case in the United States, or through genocide, as was the case in Nazi Germany" (YUDELL 2011, 17). Eugenics is credited with the sterilization of at least 30, 000 humans in the United States and was a powerful ideological force in Nazi Germany (CONDIT 1999, 27).

The prejudice ignited by myths albeit innocently in ancient Greek and Roman literatures have continued to endure in an era of sophistication in knowledge and scientific breakthroughs. The prejudices of the myths continue to guide and even inform scientific theories of race. The early 20th century witnessed the height of scientific racism, backed by fictional assumptions from antiquity and 19th century science. It was in this era that efforts were made to contest the derogatory conclusions of scientific racism. Afro-American scholars had to come out to falsify scientific racism since they could no longer withstand the onslaught and dehumanizing implications of the theories of race.

In 1909, Kelly Miller (1909, 4) writes: Since civilisation is not an attribute of colour of skin, or curl of hair, or curve of lip, there is no necessity for changing such physical peculiarities". It is the position of W.E.B Du Bois that biological theories on race cannot stand as a basis for human diversity. For him, race is a social construct. Du Bois is correct since fictions and myths too are social constructs concocted to explain the phenomena. Du Bois may have observed how such constructs affect scientific theories of race, but there was nothing he could do other than raise awareness that "the human species so shade and mingle with each other that it is impossible to draw a colour line between blacks and other races" (Du Bois 1968, 16).

By the late 20th century, Richard Lewontin showed that human populations were even more diverse than initially thought. Through molecular genetic techniques in gel electrophoresis, Lewontin (1972, 381) discovered that race had "virtually no genetic…significance." His finding reveals that since genetic diversity persists even more, within a racial group than between or among them, then racial categorisation on genetic differences will be defective. At this point, a little elaboration is needed. What exactly does the results of Lewontin (1972) portend for the history of colour and African identity?

The result of Lewontin (1972) suggests genetic differences manifest more *among*, say black Africans than *between* black Africans and Caucasians, or Red Indians, for that matter. Impliedly, the variation gap is not as wide as previously alluded. Lewontin (1982) thus concludes: "The use of racial categories must take its justifications from some other source than biology. The remarkable feature of human evolution and history has been the very small degree of divergence between geographical populations as compared with the genetic variations among individuals." By the end of the 20th century, geneticist Luca Cavalli-Sforza et al (1997) affirmed Lewontin's findings via contemporary DNA techniques.

For Cavali-Sforza (1997, 5419): "the subdivision of the human population into smaller number of clearly distinct, racial or continental groups…is not supported by the present analysis of DNA." The implication is that race cannot derive its theoretical background from biology. What this means is that 'race' as a concept is not applicable as a classificatory paradigm. In the face of this report incipient laboratory research, there is still lack of consensus as Arthur Jensen and Nobel laureate William Shockley still embrace the biological account of racial diversity. However, the 21st century dispels the thrust of these erudite scholars.

In the 21st century, Francis Collins and Craig Venter, after extensive and rigorous laboratory efforts, concluded that human genetic diversity cannot be captured by the concept of race. They further aver that all humans have genome sequence that are 99.9% identical (YUDELL 2011, 22). For Venter, "the concept of race *has no genetic or scientific basis*" (WIESS & GILLIS 2001, A1). In a related fashion, Collins and Mansoura (2001, S224) declare that: "those who wish to draw precise racial boundaries around certain groups will not be able to use science as a legitimate justification." On the other hand, is it plausible to use non-scientific narratives and myths to draw racial boundaries?

If after all these years and centuries of subjecting Africans especially to countless series of dehumanization, scientific and non-fictional narratives lacks the capacity to explain racial diversity, does it matter that we turn to Tsri's insistence on myths? The position of this unity is that this is pertinent since no one but Tsri (2016a; 2016b) reminds us of the urgency to return to the origin of racial distinction in works of fiction (via the symbolic meaning of 'black' for

Africans), as they continue to impress and influence albeit subtly, non-scientific and non-fictional prejudices and assumptions of some people against their fellow human beings.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 2

1 Pick the odd scientist on the history of race: (a) Popper (b) Morton (c) Gould (d) Linnaeus

2 In the first three decades of the 20th century, _____ was generally proposing the belief that human races differed hereditarily by important mental as well as physical traits, and that crosses between widely different races were biologically harmful (a) Genetics (b) Eugenics (c) DNA (d) Ancestry

3 Darwin insists that the gap between civilised man, (whites) and his closest evolutionary ancestors (i.e. non-whites) will widen (a) Dawkins (b) Dennett (c) Darwin (d) Douglas

## 1.5 Summary

This unit has been able to engage in a history of race and gives attention to how the colours: "white" and "black" have been used as tools for dehumanising Africans. It has shown that the ideas that are taken for granted both in religious text and from scientists are usually involved by the mythological understanding of the colours that eventually serve as a means for reducing the African worth

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## 1.7 Possible Answers to SAEs

**Self-Assessment Exercise 1**: 1. (a); 2. (b); 3. (a)
**Self-Assessment Exercise 2**: 1. (a); 2. (b); 3. (c)

## End of Module Exercises

1. Pick out the odd one: (a) The Holocaust (b) The Holodomor (c) The Gulag (d) The Lassa Fever
**Ans.: (d)**

2. Historians must reconsider and sharpen their _____ about _____ of these vast and extended crimes against humanity (a) Hypothesis/Causation (b) Hypothesis/Experimentation (c) Causation/Law (d) Experimentation/Hypothesis
**Ans.: (b)**

3. Another problem posed to 20th century historiography by contemporary events is _____ (a) Storages (b) Memories (c) Capacities (d) Filing
**Ans.: (b)**

4. _____ is of the position that the problem of historiographical objectivity derives from the perspective of the objects written about rather than exclusively the writer (a) Gadamer (b) Collingwood (c) Berlin (d) Nietzsche
**Ans.: (c)**

5. Briefly discuss the three factors that inspire identities, according to Kwame Appiah
**Ans.: Three factors have been adduced by Kwame Appiah. Firstly, being a complex affair, identities improve and expand from a status quo of economic, political, and cultural forces, always in opposition to other identities. Secondly, identities are enmeshed but flourish in myths and lies especially as it concerns their origins. The third factor which follows from the first two, for Appiah accounts for no large place in reason in the construction – as opposed to the study and management – of identities.**

6. _____ is the drama where blackness is portrayed negatively (a) Merchant of Venice (b) Othello (c) The Rivals (d) The Native Son
**Ans.: (a)**