

# **HISTORY AND THE PROBLEM OF PRESENTISM**

by

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B.A., Simon Fraser University, 1978

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Faculty

of

Education

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

August 1994

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## Abstract

This thesis critically examines the significance of the study of particular forms of history to a liberal education. It looks at the role of narrative in the reconfiguration of the temporal dimension into a meaningful unity. Related to this are two issues of educational importance that I will also discuss: historical empathy and presentism. When used incorrectly, historical empathy can lead to presentism: the imposition of present standards and norms on the past. This thesis argues that we come to understand the past when we create, through the narrative form, an authentic empathic response to it.

Due to the impact on education of Paul Hirst's work, Chapter Two presents a brief analysis of his 'forms of knowledge' in order to explicate the problem history creates for his theory. In Chapter Three I examine the nature of history through two of its most central questions: What is history? and Why is history important? As a result of this exercise I demonstrate some of the unique understandings that are derived from the study of history. Recent attempts to define history are discussed in Chapter Four. My analysis of the new history manifests itself in two ways: the influence of narrative understanding on history, and the necessity of the temporal perspective and

why only the study of history can provide students with it. In Chapter Five I discuss the importance of the study of history to the development in students of the ability to make reasonable, rational judgements. Finally I argue why the present Social Studies curriculum fails to provide the unique understandings that can be derived from the study of history.

## **DEDICATION**

**With love, to my wife Shirley and my children Matthew, Jessica and Elyse.**

**To the memory of my father, William James Wood (1927-1987).**

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The Party said that Oceania had never been in alliance with Eurasia. He, Winston Smith, knew that Oceania had been in alliance with Eurasia as short a time as four years ago. But where did that knowledge exist? Only in his own consciousness, which in any case must soon be annihilated. And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed - if all records told the same tale - then the lie passed into history and became truth. 'Who controls the past,' ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.' And yet the past, though of its nature alterable, never had been altered. Whatever was true now was true from everlasting to everlasting. It was quite simple. All that was needed was an unending series of victories over your own memory. 'Reality control', they called it: in Newspeak, 'doublethink.'

George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four

In the novel Nineteen Eighty-Four, Orwell's Winston Smith recognizes the importance of historical knowledge. His employment in the Ministry of

Truth reveals firsthand the importance that Big Brother places on controlling historical knowledge. As the party slogan indicates: "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past." While my reference is to a work of fiction, I believe the records of most repressive regimes demonstrate that without a clear understanding of history all societies are as susceptible to the manipulation of the truth as the people of Nineteen Eighty-Four.

My rationale for beginning with a brief discussion of how the society of Nineteen Eighty-Four was controlled through the distortion of history is twofold: first, to illustrate the importance that most governments place on historical knowledge (especially, but not exclusively, totalitarian states, as evidenced by, for example, the Soviet Union under Stalin and Nazi Germany under Hitler); and, second, to suggest that historical knowledge is held in high esteem by groups across the political spectrum because it is worthwhile knowledge.

At a fundamental level presentism is about the nature of historical knowledge; what constitutes knowledge and how does our contemporary knowledge differ from past knowledge? To clarify the relationship between presentism and historical knowledge I begin in Chapter Two with a brief analysis of Paul Hirst's work on the nature of knowledge, particularly his claims regarding the centrality of propositional knowledge. While there is a sense in his recent work of his having recanted this view, I believe certain aspects still

linger. Hirst confirms in his most recent work that he still holds that the "forms of theoretical knowledge can be distinguished in terms of the logical features and truth criteria of the propositions" (Hirst, 1993, p.196). Additionally, he distinguishes such forms as science, moral, religious and aesthetic (all of which he claims have propositional elements) but makes no mention of history. It seems as though Hirst is unable to move beyond the propositional criteria and consider the possibility of other ways of knowing and understanding. I will explore this question, as well as the problem history creates for his theory, in more detail at the conclusion of the chapter.

A discussion of presentism and the problems it engenders requires that we be clear about history, therefore, in Chapter Three I examine the nature of history through two of its most central questions: What is history? and Why is history important? I begin this discussion into the nature of history with an analysis of its dualistic nature: Is history the inquiry conducted by the professional historian? or Is history the past events and individuals inquired about? Next I look at the importance of the historian's mind to the creation of history for it seems that it is in the mind that all notions of time are created.

The next question I address deals with the difficulties historians face when examining information about the past. While it is clear that all information about the past can not be considered historical facts, less clear is how historical facts are established. Related to this is the role of facts in the

creation of history. Since facts, in and of themselves, are lifeless, history must be more than their sum. The importance of the relationship between the historian and the facts to the establishment of history was argued by R.G. Collingwood. The problem with his view, however, is that it can result in history being totally subjective and relativistic. As a solution, I propose a middle ground to the extreme relativism that can result from Collingwood's ideas which provides a tentative answer to the question: What is history?

The question "Why is history important?" raises issues about the nature of historical explanation. The controversy has been between those who have supported the 'covering law' theory and those who have argued for the uniqueness of historical events. As I try to show, if we can demonstrate the uniqueness of historical explanation then we have some justification for the study of history.

Does broadening the purview of history eliminate the problem of presentism or create new problems that must be acknowledge? Chapter Four looks at the new history--a term used to describe recent developments in the discipline. Characterized by its attempts to include other segments of society and to use other methodologies, the new history represents a shift from the mastery of factual information to the mastery of inquiry skills and problem solving. These changes may be grouped into three broad categories: challenges to the historical canon, challenges to the traditional viewpoints, and challenges

to the nature of the relationship between the past and present.

Challenges to the historical canon notes the shift from the belief that history was the study of the great men, key events and significant dates to the questioning of what from the past should be studied. Claims that students must analyze primary documents, weigh evidence, construct valid historical arguments and debate historical interpretations before they can understand the structure of history not only reflect the challenges being made to the traditional viewpoints but also to pedagogy. While the influence of methodologies from the social sciences has made possible history of the average or ordinary person, serious questions have been raised about the appropriateness of these non-narrative forms of history. The debate between narrative and structural historians continues to rage but I believe a compromise to be possible. Through the use of new literary forms, historians have been able to incorporate elements of structural history into their narratives. A consequence of these actions, however, has been the questioning of objective history's existence. Does historical knowledge exist or are all interpretations of the past valid?

In challenges to the nature of the relationship between the past and the present I examine the role of both teachers and students in the creation of historical knowledge. I also discuss the implications of curricular selection of history topics based on their present utility. This leads to the question: Why study history? I attempt to answer this challenge by briefly illustrating how the

study of history develops certain habits of mind which I believe are essential to an educated person.

In the last section of Chapter Four I consider the problem of presentism: the application of contemporary standards to the past. I argue that the incorrect study of the past can result in the refashioning of historical agents and events according to present standards. The concern is that if students (or anyone else for that matter) lack knowledge of prior standards we cannot expect them to escape the influence of presentism.

If the study of certain types of history develops habits of mind that provide an antidote to the influence of presentism, then I believe it is necessary that history be included in the curriculum. The question, though, is whether Social Studies, as it is often taught, adequately develops those habits of mind that the study of history will develop. In Chapter Five I give several brief examples from the British Columbia Social Studies Curriculum of the problems I identified in the previous chapter. Some of the questions I address are: Do students need to study history if we wish them to develop the ability to make reasonable and rational judgements? Is presentism a problem in the typical Social Studies course? Are alternative voices allowed to speak to the students? I conclude by arguing that if the present Social Social curriculum fails to provide students with opportunities to develop the unique understandings that the study of history would develop, then it must be changed.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE

At a fundamental level presentism is about the nature of historical knowledge; what constitutes knowledge and how does our contemporary knowledge differ from past knowledge? In this chapter I argue that if history is worthwhile knowledge then it is essential that it be included in any curriculum. I begin with Paul Hirst's theory of the forms of knowledge because it represents one of the most sustained attempts to identify the characteristics unique to a particular form. His claims regarding the nature of knowledge are still accepted by many people, consequently their impact upon the teaching of history cannot be ignored.

Hirst's forms of knowledge theory, which first appeared in the article "Liberal education and the nature of knowledge" (1965), has undergone modification and revision in his subsequent work. Later pronouncements on the theory are to be found in The Logic of Education (1970), "The forms of knowledge re-visited" (1965) and "Educational Theory" (1983).<sup>1</sup> While I shall

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<sup>1</sup> Hirst's (1993) most recent essay in Beyond Liberal Education came to my attention as I was in the later stages of completing my thesis consequently I deal with it in only a representative way. I do not believe, however, that his latest pronouncements address the issue that I raise. While he acknowledges the importance of practical knowledge I believe he fails to acknowledge the uniqueness of those practices that are derived from the study of history.

take the later works to represent his most mature thought on the theory, I will also make reference to his earlier writings to illustrate the evolution of his ideas. I begin with a discussion of Hirst's forms because I question the adequacy of his definition. First I demonstrate the deficiencies of his propositional criteria to a definition of knowledge and then I suggest other ways of knowing and demonstrate their validity.

### **Defining the Forms**

Hirst's argument that knowledge can be separated into a number of discrete forms evolved from his belief that the forms of knowledge are not "collections of information, but the complex ways of understanding experience which man has achieved" (Hirst, 1974, p.38). Central to Hirst's theory is the importance of the forms of knowledge to the development of the mind. Hirst suggests that it is only through the introduction to the forms of knowledge, as they are presented in a liberal education, that the proper development of the mind takes place.

In "The forms of knowledge re-visited", Hirst states that he regards the concept of a liberal education as being

concerned simply with the development of the pupil's knowledge and understanding, the diversity of its content being determined by the diversity of the forms that human knowledge and understanding in fact take. (Hirst, 1974, p.84)

He argues that "within the domain of knowledge a number of forms can be distinguished which are different in their logical structure" (p.84) and that each of these forms is irreducible:

the domain of human knowledge can be seen to be differentiated into a number of logically distinct 'forms', none of which is ultimately reducible in character to any of the others. (p.84)

For Hirst each domain or form of knowledge is logically distinct by virtue of the fact that each has its own true propositions or statements. However the problem is in determining what criteria are necessary in order to identify true propositions. Hirst claims that we must look at those qualities which are required of all true propositions--that is, their most basic features--in order to determine "whether or not within them there exist mutually irreducible categories" (p.85). It is through this method of examination that Hirst is able to identify three categories which he believes are distinct to each form of knowledge: the concepts, the logical structure propositions employ, and the criteria for truth in terms of which they are assessed (p.85). Using Hirst's criteria it is possible to identify a form of knowledge by the distinct concepts that it employs, the unique relationships or logical structures that exist between the concepts and, the distinctive truth criteria that enable it to be testable against experience.

## **Identifying the Forms**

Having offered the criteria required for the identification of a form of knowledge, Hirst demarcates human knowledge and experience. According to Hirst:

Detailed studies suggest that some seven areas can be distinguished, each of which necessarily involves the use of concepts of a particular kind and a distinctive type of test for its objective claims. (Hirst and Peters, 1970, p.63)

In the article "Liberal education and the nature of knowledge", Hirst identifies the seven areas or forms which he believes are logically distinct: mathematics, physical sciences, human sciences, history, religion, literature and the fine arts, and philosophy. The basis for these distinctions are the differences in concepts, logical structures and the criteria for truth. His uncertainty over the character of history and of the human or social sciences, however, has resulted in the modification of the terms used to label the forms. In his later work, Hirst states that he became unclear as to the status of history and the social sciences because they both seem to have a dualistic nature. Large areas of sociology and psychology and parts of history are like the physical sciences in that they are logically complex in character and often establish truths through empirical observation and experimentation. And even though some of the truths they establish are about the past, "or are singular rather than general in character" (Hirst, 1974, p.86), he does not believe this prohibits their use in distinguishing

different forms, for the same can be said of many of the statements of the physical sciences. Hirst's concerns over the status of history and the social sciences as distinct forms of knowledge arise from what he identifies as their involvement with inter-personal knowledge. Hirst believes that history and the social sciences are

not concerned simply with an understanding of observable phenomena in terms of physical causation, but with explanations of human behaviour in terms of intentions, will, hopes, beliefs, etc.  
(Hirst, 1974, p.86)

As a result of these distinctions Hirst assumes that the concepts, logical structure and truth criteria "of propositions of this latter kind are ... different from, and not reducible to, those of the former kind " (p.86). Therefore it is possible to identify the existence of two forms of knowledge within both history and the social sciences: one form of knowledge concerned with "truths of the physical world and another concerned with truths of a mental or personal kind" (p.86). Based on this analysis Hirst concludes that we can not regard history or the social sciences as distinct forms of knowledge because they are "concerned with truths of several different logical kinds" (p.87). Since they draw upon knowledge of the physical world as well as knowledge of self and others they are, more accurately, fields of study. Accordingly, Hirst subsequently identifies the seven distinct forms of knowledge as follows: logic and mathematics, physical sciences, our own and other people's minds, morals, aesthetics,

religion, and philosophy.

The problem I have with this method of classifying the forms arises from Hirst's concept of inter-personal knowledge. He identifies a distinction that is not unique to history since the influence of intentions, will, hopes, beliefs, etc. occurs in all forms of knowledge. We see this occurring in science, the supposed paradigm of objectivity, when a scientist decides to study one thing and not another. The importance of this point shall be discussed later. At this point I believe it is illuminating to examine Hirst's article in Educational Theory and Its Foundation Disciplines for his most recent comments on the nature of knowledge. While his article "Educational Theory" attempts to illustrate the importance of "rationally defensible principles for educational practice", what I find quite enlightening is his discussion of the nature of knowledge which seems to provide an alternative to the above interpretation of the nature of history.

In his discussion of the relationship between rational action and educational theory, Hirst seems to move away from his earlier conception of knowledge as only that which is capable of being expressed in propositions. This shift is noted in the way that Hirst draws upon the distinction that Gilbert Ryle made between 'know how' and 'know that'. In The Concept of Mind, Ryle (1949/1984) notes that good cooking existed long before the relevant recipes and that valid deductive arguments preceded the formulation of their principles. Clearly, "Not all forms of intelligent 'know how' presupposes that

the person possesses the 'know that' of the relevant principles" (Hirst, 1983, p.10). In fact, rational principles are often the result of reflection on rational action. To develop this point, Hirst turns to Michael Oakeshott's claims that all activities involve two kinds of knowledge: technical and practical knowledge. According to Oakeshott, technical knowledge exists as propositions reflecting knowledge of rules, techniques and principles. Practical knowledge, on the other hand, exists only in use or practice; it is neither reflective nor capable of formulation into rules or propositions. The example given for this type of knowledge is the customary or traditional way of doing things (see Hirst, 1983, p.12). However, while Oakeshott believes that there are two kinds of knowledge, he does not believe that they are separable since both are a part of every activity. In Oakeshott's view it is incorrect to regard technical knowledge as telling us what to do while practical knowledge tells us how to do it. He believes that knowing what to do includes elements of both technical knowledge and practical knowledge. Echoing Ryle's position that rational action precedes the formulation of rational principles, Oakeshott states that practical knowledge is often required in order to formulate the propositions of technical knowledge. Hirst uses this insight to further buttress his argument that doing anything "depends on and exhibits knowing how to do it and only part of that knowledge can subsequently be reduced to propositional technical knowledge" (Hirst, 1983, p.11). While such a view seems to indicate the primacy of practical knowledge,

Hirst believes it would be incorrect to conclude that propositions derived from practical knowledge can either cause or regulate an activity. In his view the nature of practical knowledge precludes this possibility.

At this stage in my analysis of Hirst's thesis I believe it is useful to examine more closely his description of the nature of practical knowledge before discussing the importance of those elements that comprise it.

In Hirst's view the fundamental difference between practical knowledge and technical knowledge--and I would argue the reason why he initially affords the latter more prominence--is the ability to express technical knowledge in propositional statements. For Hirst, whose view of knowledge has been heavily influenced by the positivists' tradition, this is a critical distinction. He believes that when we analyze the abilities that comprise practical knowledge (i.e., being able to discern, judge, perform and so forth) we find elements dealing with understanding, beliefs, values and attitudes--elements which can not be expressed as propositions.

Practical knowledge consists of organized abilities to discern, judge and perform that are so rooted in understanding, beliefs, values and attitudes that any abstracted propositional statements of those elements or of rules and principles of practice must be inadequate and partial expressions of what is involved. (Hirst, 1983, pp.11-12)

As a consequence of this analysis Hirst concludes that practical knowledge is inferior to technical knowledge. Unfortunately, he fails to understand that he is

assessing practical knowledge according to the standards of technical knowledge. Simply because practical knowledge cannot be expressed in propositional statements should not preclude its candidacy for knowledge, only that it is not technical knowledge. To further enhance his position on the primacy of technical knowledge Hirst performs a rather curious action. In the above quotation on practical knowledge he seems to indicate that it is possible to separate knowledge from understanding and that the latter should be included with beliefs, values and attitudes--elements which Hirst believes are foundational to the abilities to discern, judge and perform. The problem with this view becomes evident when one considers the connection between knowledge and understanding. Typically, knowledge and understanding are considered to be inextricably bound because in order to truly have knowledge one must also have understanding--talk of knowledge without understanding seems contradictory. Yet Hirst seems to believe, at least in the case of practical knowledge, that understanding is somehow separable from knowledge. The rationale for this separation seems to arise from Hirst's belief that knowledge is only that which can be expressed in propositional statements. However while it is true that understandings--along with beliefs, values and attitudes--do not readily lend themselves to being stated as propositions, their importance to knowledge cannot be denied. To try and get clear about this point I now wish to examine the views of Michael Polanyi.

### Other Ways Of Knowing

Polanyi (1967) attempts to expand the definition of knowledge to include activities of understanding. He believes that all human understanding involves not only what we are attempting to understand but also what he calls the tacit elements--the fundamental understandings, values, beliefs, principles, attitudes, clues, judgements and so forth behind all knowledge. It is the relationship between what we are attempting to understand and what we must know in order to make the attempt that Polanyi wishes to clarify. In The Tacit Dimension, Polanyi argues that we always know more than we can ever tell (1967, p.4). To illustrate this point he cites several physiognomy examples (the recognition of a particular face in a crowd, the interpretation of moods based upon changing facial expressions and the descriptive sciences such as the diagnosing of diseases) where we know something (a person's face, a particular mood or a specific disease) without being able to completely describe what we know in words. Polanyi believes that when we perform an activity, like recognizing one face from a crowd, we attend from the features to the face--from the particulars to the whole--without being fully aware of what is going on. While this activity is mastered in infancy (e.g., the child's recognition of her mother's face) most adults are unable to articulate what features played a part in the recognition of a particular face. Therefore, it is not the features that we are attending to for we

only seem to be aware of them to the degree that they assist in the recognition of the face. To paraphrase Polanyi, we know the features only by relying on our awareness of them for attending to the recognition of a face (p.10). So in an act of tacit knowing "we attend from something for attending to something else" (p.10). Put simply, an activity of understanding is comprised of two things: what we are attending to (or what is before the mind) and what is implicitly known. "We attend from the tacit to the focal, the activity demanding an integration of these elements" (Hirst, 1983, p.13). However the tacit elements are not, as Hirst seems to believe, confined to practical knowledge; they are a part of all knowledge. Since it is people that do the knowing--and all human activities of both a mental and a physical kind involve intentions, will, hopes, beliefs, etc.--everything that people know must be, to varying degrees, influenced by the tacit elements. Therefore tacit knowing not only exists in the humanities but also in the sciences. For example, the intentions, beliefs, attitudes, understandings and so forth of a scientist play a part in shaping what he will examine, how he will examine it and how he will choose to interpret his results. Quantum mechanics goes even further than this with its claim that the observer, through the act of observing, affects the phenomenon being observed. Therefore not to recognize the importance of the tacit elements to all knowledge or to claim that their influence is restricted to practical knowledge is to misunderstand a fundamental quality of knowledge.

Based on the above observations, Hirst's conception of knowledge seems to be quite narrow and limiting, for he wishes to acknowledge the existence of the abilities to discern, judge, perform and so on only within the realm of practical knowledge. While Hirst recognizes that both practical and technical knowledge are involved in all understandings, it is an over simplification to claim that abilities to discern, judge and perform are derived solely from practical knowledge. I would find it rather odd to say that propositions of technical knowledge could reflect a knowledge of rules without the concomitant ability to make judgements appropriate to those rules, a knowledge of techniques without the concomitant ability to perform appropriate to those techniques, or a knowledge of principles without the concomitant ability to discern appropriate to those principles. Clearly when we are judging, performing or discerning we are always doing so with reference to something. Implicit in the statement 'I am making a judgement' is the notion 'about what?' One can not make a judgement unless there is something to be judged and there exists a standard against which one can judge. Since both performing and discerning require an object for their actions and a standard to measure them against, this observation also holds true for the abilities to perform and discern.

As defined by Hirst, it would seem that practical knowledge can only be acquired through interaction with others in a social situation. "Practical knowledge is acquired by living within the organised social world to which we

belong, structured as it is by institutions and traditions of great variety" (Hirst, 1983, p.12). By defining practical knowledge in this way, Hirst is really talking about socialization--the influence of society on the understandings, beliefs, values and attitudes of the individual. The significance of this point is that we come to understand an activity only through our engagement in it. However I should like to add the following caveat: while understanding an activity requires that we engage in it, this requirement raises an important problem, for all societies do not engage in a particular activity the same way. The customs, beliefs, laws, traditions and so forth of a particular society exert an influence--however subtle or overt--upon every aspect of life within that society. Therefore we must remember that the way in which a particular society perceives an activity, as well as how that society engages in it, are of importance to our understanding of the activity.

We come to understand the activity, its problems and their answers from engagement in the activity itself. We have to penetrate the idiom of the activity by practising it. Then, gradually, by a variety of means, we can improve and extend our knowledge of how to pursue it, analysis of the activity and reflection on its rules and principles having their part to play in that process. (Hirst, 1983, p.12)

While the above quotation refers to education, it also applies to history and I shall attempt to show this in the next chapter. For now I wish only to note that an understanding of history requires that we get inside it and come to know it in such a way that we understand what it means to do history and not something

else. Doing history involves learning how to determine the facts, what facts are relevant to a particular study, how to organize the relevant facts into some reasonable and coherent pattern and how to interpret the facts. And while the development of these abilities are important to doing history, there is something more fundamental about history than the discovery, selection, organization and interpretation of facts. To understand history requires the development of particular dispositions of mind. To do history not only requires the ability to discover facts but also the understanding that what are facts to one historian might not be so to another historian. Doing history also means understanding that the selection of the relevant facts is dependant upon the individual; what is relevant to one person may seem irrelevant to another. The same is true of the organization and interpretation of the facts. A historian must understand that there are many ways of organizing the facts and just as many ways of interpreting them. In other words, it is not enough simply to be faithful to the rules or principles of an activity; they are a necessary part of an activity, but they are not sufficient. If we hope to understand an activity, and be able to justify our engagement in it, we must be faithful to its spirit. Justification, Oakeshott notes, requires "faithfulness to the knowledge we have of how to conduct the specific activity we are engaged in [and not simply] faithfulness to the principles or rules or purposes ...of the activity" (Oakeshott, 1962, pp.101-102). It is this point that Hirst seems to have overlooked when he repudiated

history's status as a distinct form of knowledge. Reflecting on his most recent statements about the nature of knowledge underscores the seriousness of subsuming history under the new category 'our own and other people's minds'. If we recognize the technical and practical aspects of knowledge, that practical knowledge often informs technical knowledge, and that justification of a form of knowledge requires that we remain faithful to its spirit then Hirst's conclusions, with respect to history, are problematic. I do not believe he is being faithful to the knowledge that we have of how one does history when he subsumes history under the category 'our own and other people's minds'. But I shall deal with this point in the next chapter.

### **The Significance of Changing the Status of History**

The significance of these changes can only be appreciated in light of Hirst's comments on the importance of the forms of knowledge to the (further) development of the mind.

if education is understood as developing desirable states of mind characterized by knowledge and understanding, we must decide with which of the several fundamentally different types of knowledge and understanding we are concerned. (Hirst and Peters, 1970, p.66)

If Hirst is correct that education is the development of particular states of mind which are a consequence of different types of knowledge and understanding, then a complete education demands at least a basic introduction to all of the

forms of knowledge. As Hirst has argued, not to be introduced to all of the forms of knowledge would limit the further development of the mind in a fundamentally important way.

Not to try to introduce pupils to certain areas, ... is to accept that in these areas the individual shall, as far as the school is concerned, develop no further. (Hirst and Peters, 1970, p.66)

In view of what Hirst has said about the necessity of all of the forms to the further development of the mind, I now wish to examine his most recent modifications, specifically the subsuming of history under the category 'our own and other people's minds'.

## CHAPTER THREE

### HISTORY AS A DISTINCT FORM OF KNOWLEDGE

By repudiating history's status as a distinct form of knowledge I believe Hirst, unintentionally, limits the further development of the mind in this area. He assumes that his new category, 'our own and other people's minds', encompasses all of the experience or knowledge or understanding that can be derived from the study of history. One problem that can arise from collapsing history into this new category is presentism--the application of contemporary standards to the past. A discussion of presentism and the problems it engenders requires that we be clear about the nature of history. Two of the most central questions that must be addressed are: What is history? and Why is history important? It is to the first of these questions that we now turn.

#### **What is History?**

The question 'What is history?' is really an attempt to get clear about the nature of history. Because of our lack of clarity over its nature we often ask the same question in many different ways. The following examples illustrate this point: What does it mean to be engaged in history? What is history about? What

do we study when we study history? Is there a purpose or plan to history? What is the value of studying history? These questions, and others like them, are attempts to comprehend history's nature. Recognizing that there is no immediate answer to the question--because the question is actually asking many different things about a very complex area--does not mean the question is impossible to answer, only that one must first be clear about the nature of history before attempting to answer it. Perhaps one of the main sources of confusion over history's nature arises from the dual meanings that can be derived from the word. In ordinary language, history can mean either past human actions and experiences or our constructed record or account of those past human actions and experiences. As E.H. Carr (1961) points out, history is both "the inquiry conducted by the historian and the series of past events into which he inquires" (p.22). The double meanings that can be ascribed to the word reflect the existence of history's dualistic nature. Recognizing this dualistic nature makes it possible to identify two areas of study, one concerned with "the actual course of human events [and another with] the process of historical thinking, the means by which history in the second sense is arrived at" (Walsh, 1967, p.16). To recognize that human actions and experiences occurred in the past is one thing, how those actions and experiences can be illuminated, explained, and understood without being interpreted by people--the interaction of the historian with the past--is quite another. Knowledge of past human actions,

events and experiences does not exist independent of human minds. On this point I believe it is instructive to consider the meditations on time in the Confessions by St. Augustine (1961) and the elaborations on them made by Paul Ricoeur (1984) in Time and Narrative (Volume I).

St. Augustine comes to the realization that while the future is not yet, the past is no longer, and the present does not last, we talk of them as though they exist, as though they have being. The problem as St. Augustine sees it is 'Where does time exist?' He concludes that time is a mental construct for it is in the mind that it exists and it is in the mind that we measure it. This creates a new problem: When do you measure time? St. Augustine postulates an answer with his idea of the three-fold present--the mind performs in the present three functions, those of expectation, attention, and memory (St. Augustine, 1961, p.277). The present of the past is the memory, the present of the present is direct perception or attention, and the present of future things is expectation (Ricoeur, 1984, p.11). If it is only in memory that the past exists, then it can not be said to exist independent of the human mind. As a consequence, the breach between history and science is widened. For while the ability to replicate discoveries is foundational to science, the same can not be said of history: the historian can never replicate past human actions, events and experiences. The only avenue open is the history which the historian reconstructs through interaction with past human actions and events. Therefore it is with that history

which results from "the process of historical thinking" or "the inquiry conducted by the historian" that I shall be concerned.

### **Information about the Past and Historical Facts**

While I have stated how my examination of history shall be limited, I have not discussed what it is that historians work with when attempting to reconstruct the past. Simply stated, the question is: "What specifically does an historian examine when he studies past human actions, events and experiences?" The 'raw materials' for an historian are the traces and accounts of the past, the scaffolding upon which the narrative is hung. The historian's problem is determining what standard shall be employed to separate from the traces and accounts of the past the facts of history from information about the past. It would seem that historians are not primarily concerned with establishing the facts that relate the date, time and place of a particular event. While it is important for historians to know, for example, that Quebec and not Montreal was founded in 1608 or that the Battle of the Plains of Abraham was fought in 1759 and not 1758 these facts, and others like them, are not central to their work. Simply put, facts are a necessary condition of the work of historians but they are not sufficient.

To praise a historian for his accuracy is like praising an architect

for using well-seasoned timber or properly mixed concrete in his building. It is a necessary condition of his work, but not his essential function. (Carr, 1961, p.11)

The traces and accounts of the past which historians use are but the raw materials and not history itself. It is through the selection and evaluation of the traces and accounts of the past that historians fashion history (i.e., their recreation of certain aspects of the past). That being the case, it is fallacious to talk of historical facts as though they exist in some way independent of the interpretations that historians ascribe to them. It is the historian that establishes the historical facts.

The question that must now be considered is: What is required to transform traces and accounts of the past into significant historical facts? Is accuracy sufficient for the establishing of a significant historical fact? It would seem that a valid and significant interpretation of a past event, agent, or structure is needed before information about the past--or what might be called an insignificant historical fact--can be raised to the status of a significant historical fact. In other words, without the element of importance the accuracy of interpretations is insufficient for establishing significant historical facts. As an historian I may put forward a particular fact about the past as being required for an understanding of a past event. However, even if the fact is accurate (or true) this is not sufficient to transform it into a significant historical fact; it must also be important to the past event that I am attempting to explain. So it seems

that the "element of interpretation enters into every fact of history" (Carr, 1961, p.13).

This understanding of the role interpretation plays in the establishing of significant historical facts raises another question: How is it that out of all the information about the past that was once known, what we have today has "survived to become the facts of history?" (Carr, 1961, p.13). The problems faced by historians of the ancient and medieval periods illustrate this point since the records that we have of these times are often fragmentary. As a consequence, the limited information that we have from these periods have become facts of history. However, the cause of the problems experienced by ancient and medieval historians is not the traces and accounts of the past that have been lost but rather that the traces and accounts that have been recorded only reflect the interests of a small, and rather select, group--the chroniclers. As Carr points out in his example of ancient Greece:

Our picture of Greece in the fifth century B.C. is defective not primarily because so many of the bits have been accidentally lost, but because it is, by and large, the picture formed by a tiny group of people in the city of Athens. (Carr, 1961, p.13)

Therefore the documents and other records of the past that have survived reflect the author(s) of the documents as much as--and at times even more than--what happened.

Our picture has been preselected and predetermined for us, not so much by accident as by people who were consciously or

unconsciously imbued with a particular view and thought the facts which supported that view worth preserving. (Carr, 1961, p.13)

If it is the case that the facts of history have been filtered through the mind of the recorder, then how can we hope to write a valid and significant narrative of past human actions, events and experiences? One possible means of addressing this concern may be what R.G. Collingwood identified as the thought behind the act.

### **The Thought behind the Act**

Collingwood argued that since "all history is the history of thought" (1946, p.215) the historian's task was to get 'inside' and grasp the significance of past human actions, events and experiences through the imaginative reconstruction (or rethinking) of the thoughts of an historical agent. He believed the "historian must re-enact the past in his own mind" (p.282) in order to discover the thought behind the act. In Collingwood's view

He starts with the fact that critical history exists, and that all history is to some extent critical, since no historian copies out the statements of his authorities just as he finds them. 'Critical history', then, 'must have a criterion'; and it is clear that the criterion can only be the historian himself. The way in which he handles his authorities will and must depend on what he brings to the study of them. (p.137)

Collingwood realized that before being able to understand the thoughts of an historical agent it was first necessary to understand the historian whose task it had been to reconstruct, in her mind, both the historical agent's situation and

how he perceived that situation. This would mean that the task of an historian attempting to understand, say, Montcalm's reasons for meeting Wolfe on the Plains of Abraham must first reconstruct the situation in her mind (e.g., during the night, Wolfe gained the upper hand by scaling the heights, organizing his troops on the Plains, and then sending word to Montcalm who was within the fortress of Quebec). Next the historian must try to perceive the situation through Montcalm's eyes (e.g., could a nobleman and a man of honour ignore a direct challenge even when he knew he was facing certain defeat?). According to Collingwood, the necessary and complementary task of the reader is to gain some knowledge and understanding of the historian who wrote the work (e.g., what social and political views does she espouse? What are her biases? What else has she written on this subject? What historians have influenced her work?). As a result of this understanding, Collingwood concluded that to ignore the historian behind the history was to ignore a central feature of the historical process--the interaction between the historian and her facts.

the historian is a man with an experience of his own; he experiences the world in which he lives; and it is this experience which he brings with him to the interpretation of historical evidence. (Collingwood, 1946, p.137)

While Collingwood's view of history offers many insights, it also creates difficulties. Perhaps the most significant, in terms of my thesis, arises from his understanding of the role of the historian in the making of history. The danger

that results from a theory that stresses, to the degree that Collingwood did, the importance of the historian's role, is that in the end there is no objective history. If pushed, his theory results in history having a multiplicity of meanings, all of which are valid. Even though interpretation is a part of establishing historical facts and no interpretation is completely objective--as I tried to point out earlier--not all interpretations can be considered valid. Clearly the writing of history is more than the accuracy of the historian's facts or the interpretation he proposes: it is both the inclusion of all the facts relevant to the event or theme under study and the significance of the interpretation being proposed. The relationship of the historian to the facts is such that the historian is engaged in "a continuous process of moulding his facts to his interpretation and his interpretation to his facts" (Carr, 1961, p.29). This symbiotic relationship which exists between the historian and the facts emphasizes why we must study the historian when we study his/her history. As Carr concludes, history is "a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past" (p.30).

Having arrived at a tentative answer to the question 'What is history?' I now wish to address the second question 'Why is history important?'

### **Why is History Important?**

Being able to answer the question 'Why is history important?'

presupposes some knowledge of the unique nature of historical explanation. Many historians and philosophers of history have argued that historical and scientific explanations are fundamentally alike--they both use general laws. (C.G. Hempel and P. Gardiner are two major proponents of this view.) If this is the case than the argument for the recognition of history's status as a unique form of knowledge is severely undermined. I propose to begin my examination of the importance of history by analyzing the unique nature of historical explanation.

Some historians believe that their procedures should involve more than the weighing and balancing of evidence. They wish to establish history as a science and argue for the application of a more scientific method of doing history which entails the use of empirically validated laws. Proponents of this view are often referred to as 'covering law' theorists because of their desire to establish covering empirical laws of history. This theory maintains that "explanation is achieved, and only achieved, by subsuming what is to be explained under a general law" (Dray, 1957, p.1). This being the case, the only means of establishing scientific history is through the development of covering laws comparable to those developed by science. Gardiner argues

The contention that the subject-matter of history is *sui generis* on the grounds that history is concerned with special entities referred to by such words as 'revolution' and 'nation' is a mistaken notion based upon a misunderstanding of the function of historical concepts. (Gardiner, 1952, p.64)

He contends that what historians do is classify human actions, events and experiences into different types or kinds, as demonstrated by their use of concepts of a general nature like 'revolution' and 'nation'. It is Gardiner's belief that historians seek to explain an event by invoking a particular law.

However, the definition of explanation that the covering law theorists employ is both narrow and technical. They limit the definition of explanation by "showing something to be deducible from a general law" (Dray, 1957, p.75). The relevance of this point shall be established after examining a contending theory.

William Dray's theory argues that the uniqueness of historical events makes the development of covering laws (or generalizations) impossible. He believes

historical events and conditions are often unique simply in the sense of being different from others with which it would be natural to group them under a classification term. (Dray, 1957, p.47)

As further evidence of the uniqueness of historical events Dray cites the use of the definite article when we refer to instances of revolution like 'the' French Revolution, 'the' English Revolution, 'the' American Revolution, 'the' Russian Revolution, 'the' Mexican Revolution and so on. He goes on to state that while we are able to identify a series of events as a revolution this does not blind us to the uniqueness of each instance of revolution.

It would seem that no two revolutions are ever alike; they are all different. If we compare the English Revolution and the French Revolution the most obvious differences are those in space, time and causality. As indicated by

their names, one occurred in England and the other in France. A little less obvious but of equal or perhaps greater importance is the fact that the English Revolution exploded in the middle of the 17th century while the bloody French Revolution was a product of the late 18th century. However, while these differences are important it is not until we move into the realm of causality that the differences become pronounced. A very superficial explanation of the English Revolution might state that one of the major causes of the conflict was the sharing of power between the king and Parliament; Charles I was attempting to recover the powers that Parliament had gained over the past two hundred years. In contrast, the French conflict was not about Louis XVI's attempt to regain power from the Estates General but rather the efforts of the Estates General to establish for itself a meaningful role in the governing of France. The differences between the principal historical agents are also significant. The uniqueness of Cromwell's personality and talents are unparalleled among the leaders of the French Revolution. The same can be said of Robespierre of whom we find no equivalent in the English Revolution. An interesting comparison can be made between revolutions and snowflakes which illuminates this point. Initially, all snowflakes look alike and it is because of this fact that we are able to identify them as snowflakes and not something else. However, after examination under a microscope, their distinctiveness becomes apparent. Just as no two snowflakes are alike the same can be said of revolutions. Upon

examination we find that revolutions are unique by virtue of their constituent parts. The importance of this distinction is

that the historian, when he sets out to explain the French Revolution is just not interested in explaining it as a Revolution...he is almost invariably concerned with it as different from other members of its class. (Dray, 1957, p.47)

Dray concludes that since each historical event is unique (and therefore each historical concept), talk of developing covering laws is nonsense.

According to Dray, historians are not solely concerned with the concepts that arise from events and situations of the past. The motives and purposes of historical agents are of equal concern to them. However this does not mean that historical explanations in terms of motives and purposes are appealing to psychological laws or generalizations. The historian examines an historical figure's speeches and writings, the comments of his contemporaries, and the like to discover what motivated the actions of that figure. The historian is concerned only with the specific motives and purposes of an historical figure which relate to a particular case or event, and not with the creation of generalizations or covering laws which can be applied to all historical figures or even with generalizations which can be applied throughout a particular historical figure's life. In other words, the factors that influence, motivate or drive an historical figure to act in a particular way cannot be generalized beyond the particular event under study. Dray argues that if we hope to appreciate a problem as the

historical figure saw it, it is both necessary and legitimate for the historian to attempt to understand the motives and intentions of the historical figure. Dray believes that in establishing historical judgements it is appropriate for the historian to develop an empathetic understanding of the historical figure's situation (Dray, 1957, pp.119-120). He sees this as a legitimate method because it is based upon evidence which clearly demonstrates the 'rationale' of the historical agent's actions.

The goal of such explanation is to show that what was done was the thing to have done for the reasons given, rather than merely the thing that is done on such occasions, perhaps in accordance with certain laws. (p.124)

Therefore the goal of the historian, when explaining the historical agent's actions, is to demonstrate in what way the actions were appropriate.

This method of explanation, which Dray believes is more pertinent than that of the covering law theorists, explains not only the concepts of history but also the actions of historical agents. As he points out, in ordinary language, explanation is not a technical term "found only in narrowly scientific discourse" (p.76). When we ask people to give an explanation for their actions we are not asking for the subsuming of their actions under a general law. We are asking for reasons which justify, clarify, simplify, illuminate, account for, rationalize, give details of, or make plain their actions. Clearly this definition of explanation, which reflects the way we use the word in ordinary language, is

more general and encompassing than the narrow, technical one stressed by the covering law theorists.

what covering law theorists have done is to seize on ...a necessary condition of (some kinds of) explanation which is so closely connected to the purpose of science--control--that it has been mistaken for a sufficient condition. 'Explanation', as covering law theorists use it, is a technical term; and, as such terms so often do, it abstracts from a term in ordinary use the aspect which is of most interest in the kind of inquiry for which it is redesigned. (pp.77-78)

In their attempt to make history scientific, covering law theorists seek to limit the meaning of explanation in history without providing detailed reasons why this limiting is required, how it will improve the study of history, or how this limiting affects related concepts. As Dray has demonstrated, when historians give an explanation of past human actions, events or experiences they are not interested in having those actions, events or experiences subsumed under a general law. One important task, in the minds of historians, is to explain in what way past human actions, events or experiences were in keeping with the understandings of historical agents. It would seem that the unique nature of historical explanation provides some justification for the study of history; only history is capable of developing certain dispositions of mind in which we can comprehend the motives, actions, thoughts, reasons, and beliefs of historical agents during particular past human events (e.g., revolutions, conquests, depressions, elections, strikes, wars, restorations).

The importance of history is not limited to the unique nature of historical

explanation; its importance lies also in the unique perspective that it gives us. One of the strongest arguments for the teaching of history is that it can, more than most subjects, help people to think for themselves about important issues. While the sciences and mathematics have enabled us to gain an understanding of, and in some cases control over, the natural world, they are usually taught in a social vacuum. The nature of history, however, requires that it deal with human concerns. History is about past events and individuals; it is about the thoughts, emotions, ideas etc. of historical agents on historical events. It is for this reason that the study of history can help people think critically and carefully about important issues. Additionally, we teach history because its study helps to develop certain worthwhile habits of mind such as respect for evidence and an understanding of the particularity of the past. The study of history not only enables us to have respect for evidence it also enables us to understand the nature of evidence. We come to understand that what we call evidence or facts has been discovered, selected, organized and interpreted by others. What must be remembered then is no two people discover, select, organize or interpret evidence the same. While many of the social sciences can also develop these abilities in people, for the purposes of teaching history has several advantages over them.

Properly taught, history has the potential to tell gripping and compelling stories about past events and individuals. Stories which reflect the interests that

students have with the exotic and the unique. These are qualities that are often not found in narratives from the social sciences. Another advantage history has over the social sciences is its synthesizing or integrating nature which allows it to combine elements from different disciplines in unique ways. This enables us to bring new ideas and perspectives to the important issues that we must face throughout life.

We teach history because it enables us to remember what has happened in our past as a society and as humans. History is the collective memory of all humans. Without history it might be possible for a repressive regime--or even a particular group--to deny the occurrence of a past atrocity. As an example, consider the attempts to deny the occurrence of the Jewish Holocaust. It is because of the collective memory that we gain through the study of history that we have, to date, been able to resist attempts to prove the Holocaust never happened.

As an individual's memory is necessary to the development of a sense of personal identity, our collective memory or history is necessary for the development of a societal or cultural identity. It seems to be a fundamental need of all people that they know who they are, thus making the study of history--both personal and cultural--essential. In extreme cases this can lead to the type of nationalism that is raging in certain parts of the world today--for example, the Yugoslav war and the problems that have arisen in some of the

former Soviet Republics. In view of the potential for abuse, perhaps what is required is that history be used to develop a sense of internationalism to act as a counter-balance to certain virulent types of nationalism. Collingwood's thoughts on the importance of history to the development of self-knowledge provide some useful insights. He believed the purpose of studying history was for human self-knowledge, but he did not mean simply an individual knowing the characteristics that distinguish him/her from others.

Knowing yourself means knowing, first, what it is to be a man; secondly, knowing what it is to be the kind of man you are; and thirdly, knowing what it is to be the man you are and nobody else is. (Collingwood, 1946, p.10)

Collingwood believed that we can only know ourselves if we know what we can do. The problem, however, is we never know what we can do until we try. Recognizing that it is often undesirable as well as impossible to try everything, Collingwood believed the only way we can ever know what we can do is by knowing what we have done: "The value of history, then, is that it teaches us what man has done and thus what man is" (p.10). It is through historical understanding that we come to know ourselves, what we are, where we are, and where we have been. Without knowledge of the past--for example knowledge of our society and culture--we are unable to make sense of the present. To say I know I have a past presupposes some knowledge of that past, for if someone made the self-contradictory statement, 'I know I have a past but I don't

remember it,' we would have to ask, 'How do you know?' As it seems illogical to claim knowledge of your past without having specific knowledge about that past it follows that a society or culture must have specific knowledge about its past, before it can be said to know its past. However it is not enough to simply know your own society or your own culture as this can lead to the xenophobic type of nationalism that I alluded to earlier. To guard against this excess we need to know the histories of the various sub-groups within our own society, and also the histories of other societies and cultures.

Not only does history help us to understand ourselves as a society, it also contributes to our understanding of our institutions (e.g., government, education, religion). This view, which is sometimes called historical-mindedness, holds that before we can understand, for example, an institution, a policy, a practice or an historical agent we must know something about its origins--that is, the attitudes, beliefs, and forces that helped to shape it. We can not ignore the past's influence upon the present; all human affairs have been, and will continue to be, influenced by the past. If we fail to recognize this influence any attempts to understand and/or change our social institutions are doomed to failure.

History's concern with human experiences, over time, provides us with another example of its importance. It affords us a unique opportunity to come to know not only past societies and cultures, but also past human actions, events and experiences.

The study of history provides the opportunity and the incentive to enrich our knowledge by imaginative participation in many modes of being. In so doing it enlarges our experience and extends our perspective. The experience of entering vicariously into another time with its different habits and different scales of value enhances the imagination and the understanding. (Fitzgerald, 1983, p.83)

The only way we can come to know, in any true sense of the word, a past society is through engagement with its history--to examine its culture, beliefs, traditions, institutions, religion and so forth in order to develop historical understanding. The difficulty one encounters when trying to do this is the inadequacy of traditional history to accommodate non-traditional viewpoints. In an attempt to overcome these problems, I now wish to examine some of the recent developments in history.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE NEW HISTORY

Recent developments in history seem to promise, among other things, an increase in our understanding of past cultures, sub-groups and institutions. However, does broadening the purview of history eliminate the problem of presentism or create new problems that must be acknowledged? It is to this question that I now turn.

During the past twenty-five years there has been a notable shift in the focus of historiography. Through the efforts of individuals sometimes referred to as the 'new historians', the scope of history has broadened to include many long neglected or poorly represented segments of society. This has been accomplished through changes to both the methodology and the rationale of history. Methods of research from the social sciences and criticism from literature have been combined with new arguments for the relevance of history to contemporary political and social issues. The fruit of this labour is often identified as the 'new history' a term. Since the scope of my thesis precludes the possibility of an in-depth analysis of all the salient developments of the new historians, I have limited my examination to those developments which are the most germane to my argument. These developments may be grouped into three

broad categories: challenges to the historical canon, challenges to the traditional viewpoints, and challenges to the nature of the relationship between the past and the present. After providing a brief sketch of the above categories I shall attempt, in a representative way, to discuss some of their central issues and controversies.

### **Challenges to the Historical Canon**

The notion of a historical canon--the great names, key events and significant dates--has been under seige since the 1960s. This challenge is noted in the proliferation of historical sub-disciplines such as black history, native or first people's history, feminist history, ethnic history, labour history, and working class history to name a few examples. History's increasing fragmentation has caused many historians to attempt some sort of synthesis but to date their efforts have failed. The problem is not simply deciding on the significant names, dates and events for the new history challenges the very notion that individual people and particular events provide the significant material of history (Seixas, 1993, p.238). This shift in emphasis reflects the influence of the French Annales school which stresses the 'longue duree' rather than particular events or individual people. By placing less emphasis on narrative and the chronicle of events, and more on analysis and long term

structures and trends, the Annales school attempted to create a total history through the integration of economic, social, political and cultural history. More recently, there has been a great deal of debate over and criticism of the Annales' conception of total history. As Paul Ricoeur (1984) persuasively argued in Time and Narrative (Volume 1), even the least narrative of the structural histories associated with the Annales school (see, for example, Fernand Braudel's The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II) construct what he calls quasi-plots, quasi-characters and quasi-events because of their reliance upon narrative understanding (Ricoeur, 1984, pp.208-217, 230).

### **Challenges to the Traditional Viewpoints**

One of the more powerful challenges to history in schools in recent years has been the historical inquiry method. This method uses inquiry pedagogy to help students gain an understanding of the problems of historical interpretation. It is argued that if students are to understand the structure of the discipline they must have opportunities that enable them to analyze primary documents, weigh evidence, construct valid historical arguments, and debate historical interpretations (Seixas, 1993, pp.238-239). The pedagogy of this view of history, which is in sharp contrast to the traditional chronological, narrative

survey, is clearly reflected in the Schools Council Project "History 13-16" (for more details see, Shemilt, 1983, pp.1-18 or Goodson, 1978, pp.39-53). This British experiment in historical inquiry can be seen as an attempt to correct the negative attitudes and misconceptions about history shared by students and adults. By shifting the curriculum and teaching methods away from rote memorization and regurgitation of teacher notes and dates, the Schools Council Project sought to stimulate inquiry while remaining true to the nature of history.

In the United States, the debate over the organizing framework of the history curriculum tends to be between those who advocate student participation in in-depth analysis and those who favour the chronological narrative (see, for example, The Bradley Commission on History in Schools, 1989 and California State Board of Education, 1988, History-Social Science Framework, cited in Seixas, 1993). Given the nature of the conflict in both Britain and the United States, there is a need at the pedagogical level for a synthesis between the historical inquiry and the chronological narrative approaches. We cannot expect students to participate in, and ultimately conduct, in-depth meaningful analyses if they lack the ability and knowledge to place an event or an agent within an historical context. While epistemology indicates that before we can 'know that' we must first 'know how', this should not be construed as the triumph of process over content. From a pedagogical perspective, inquiry procedures alone

do not make history a worthwhile study or an area deserving of respect; the outcomes of its inquiries must also be worthwhile and significant and not merely trivialities.

The inquiry method not only presents a challenge to the chronological, narrative survey but also to the notion of historical interpretation. This raises a significant pedagogical problem that teachers must attempt to deal with. For students, the certainty and significance of history's facts and the hierarchy of their arrangement can dissolve as they face multiple historiographic viewpoints and conflicting evidence in their attempts to create historical interpretations. As a consequence, students may either come to believe that history is excessively subjective, or doubt the possibility of achieving any historical knowledge (Thompson, 1984, cited in Seixas, 1993, p.239).

Another serious challenge to the traditional viewpoints of history--seen in the structure of recent historical writing--has come from the influence of the social sciences. Through the use of methodologies borrowed from the social sciences (e.g., quantitative data analysis, construction of models and theories, use of hypotheses, content analysis, use of measurement, comparative method) the boundaries of history have been greatly expanded. (See, for example, Cochran's "The Social Sciences and the Problem of Historical Synthesis", Hofstadter's "History and the Social Sciences", and Namier's "History and Political Culture" in Stern, 1973, pp.347-386). Histories that seemed to tell no

story or were without mention of specific individuals began to appear. The use of social science methods seemed to herald the arrival of history of the average or ordinary individual rather than of the 'great men'. Through the use of quantitative analysis it now seemed possible to reconstruct, from the traces they left behind, the lives of anonymous individuals. Additionally, social science methods have made possible the reconstruction of past structures. It is worth noting, however, that the initial promise offered by these methods has recently come under question by both social scientists and philosophers of social science. They contend that the social sciences, which were modeled after the physical sciences, are unable to provide an adequate explanation of human existence for they neglect the importance of narrative to the creation of meaning and understanding. In the physical sciences it does not matter what the molecule means to the atom--if indeed they mean any thing to one another. However, in the social or human sciences it matters profoundly what the group or the society means to the individual (for a more detailed explanation see Chapter Three, "Why is History Important"). The subjective nature of the human sciences, social scientists argue, requires methods that incorporate the narrative since it is through the narrative that the temporal dimension is reconfigured into a meaningful unity (Polkinghorne, 1988). Ironically, the new historians were moving from a narrative to an analytical model at the same time as many social scientists were attempting the opposite. While the controversy continues to

rage, the impact of the social sciences on history must be acknowledged. The historiographical importance being that some structural and narrative historians began to re-examine one another's work.

Among structural historians there is a growing awareness of the significance of particular events. Occasionally, a 'creative event' has the power to destroy the traditional structures of a culture while at the same time creating new ones (Burke, 1992, p.234). Debate over the relationship between events and structures has raised some important points which I believe are relevant to my discussion of narrative. For example, structural historians have demonstrated the inadequacies of the narrative when dealing with economic and social frameworks or with the lives of ordinary people (Burke, 1992, p.235). Clearly the operation of the narrative in historiography is not a value neutral device. It selects and shapes those events and historical agents that are most conducive to a clear story line while failing to deal adequately with those factors beyond its control. Political and military histories, with their high degree of emphasis on leaders and leadership, illustrate this point. Concentrating on ordinary citizens in political history or ordinary soldiers in military history raises the problem of finding enough evidence--not only do political and military leaders, by the nature of their positions, create more evidence they also have more recorded. Additionally, an emphasis on ordinary citizens or soldiers fuels the problem of fragmentation since the experiences of many individuals usually

do not coalesce into a unified narrative. Structural historians also argue that the narrative form seems inappropriate for dealing with collective entities like countries, institutions, and societies. To overcome this problem narrative historians often use personification. However, the inherent limitations of this literary device which reduces the thoughts, and wishes of the many to a single point of view should preclude its use. Narrative historians counter these arguments with the claim that the analysis of structures is static and therefore unhistorical.

As the above summary of the arguments about the operation of narrative in historiography demonstrates, structural and narrative historians not only disagree over the things they consider significant in the past but also over the methods used for historical explanations. Narrative historians give explanations in terms of historical agents and their intentions, while structural historians give explanations in terms of problems and structures. Structuralists contend that it is impossible to know the intentions of an historical agent, while narrative historians argue that the mode of historical explanation employed by the structuralists is ultimately reductionist and deterministic. The analogous pedagogical problems that the debate over explanation raises must also be addressed by teachers. What is needed, then, is an end to the confrontation between the narrative historians and the structuralist historians. In historiography this might be achieved if we begin to realize that the distinctions

drawn between events and structures are not as clear and determinable as both sides would have us believe. While the term "event" can be used to refer to something of a short duration, like the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, it can also refer to something that lasted a number of years like the American Revolution. However, the American Revolution can also be subjected to structural analysis. This suggests an essential relationship between the terms that can be overlooked in an either/or situation. If the terms "event" and "structure" are opposite ends of a spectrum of possibilities, then as events of a related nature accrue, a point is reached where a definable structure may begin to appear. Therefore, we must also recognize the importance of the middle of the spectrum to historical explanations. An important question that reflects both historiography and pedagogy is how many events are required before we can begin to identify a structure? I believe the indeterminate nature of the concepts necessitates a broader view, one that encompasses the possibilities that exist along a continuum from event to structure. This broader view can only be achieved, however, through the development and use of new literary forms as the old ones are unable to accommodate the insights I have been discussing.

### **New Literary Forms of History**

As Hayden White (1966, 1973) and others have noted, the evolution of the literary form used by modern writers like James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence,

Marcel Proust and others has all but been ignored by modern historians. And while many narrative innovations are of little or no value to historians (for example, the use of stream of consciousness could seriously compromise claims of objectivity) some seem capable of accommodating the spectrum of possibilities found on the continuum between event and structure. More specifically, it would probably enhance our understanding of certain types of conflict (e.g., civil wars, general strikes, revolutions) if we were to adapt the literary device of multiple points of view to history. "Such a device would allow an interpretation of conflict in terms of a conflict of interpretations" (Burke, 1992, p.239). The analogous pedagogical implications also need to be considered. By writing a history that presents the many and varied voices of the past, readers/students will be forced to take a more active role as they come to understand the past. The use of multiple narratives illustrates an important aspect of the writing of history; historians do not reproduce what happened, they represent it from particular points of view (Burke, 1992, p.239). This understanding of history is inadequately conveyed in the more traditional narrative forms and becomes especially acute in school texts.

Samuel Wineburg argues texts are social interactions that have been set down on paper and can only be properly understood when we reconstruct the social context in which they occurred (1991, p.500). His research into the differences between the ways historians and students read texts illustrates this

point. Articles and books written by and for historians contain the author's intrusion into the text--the metadiscourse. Through the use of qualifiers and indicators (e.g., perhaps, maybe, probably, consider for a moment) we are informed of the tentative nature of history. In contrast to this, school textbooks, by assuming an authoritative tone, are almost devoid of metadiscourse and do not invite the reader to enter into a discussion with the text. Not surprisingly, historians rate the relative trustworthiness of school textbooks as low while students rate them as high. Typically, students will say textbooks are just reporting the facts as they happened. Without indicators to inform them of the author's intrusion into the text, most students accept, unquestioningly, the author's comments, labels, descriptions, and constructed causal relationships. The educational implications of these insights are enormous and must be used to inform teachers' pedagogy. Histories that fail to make their narrators visible in their narratives not only mislead students into believing the narrators are omniscient or impartial, they also blind students to the possibility of other interpretations. However the invisibility of the narrator is not the sole factor in shaping the student's and/or reader's interpretation, of equal importance is the way the history is emplotted.

Hayden White, in Metahistory (1973), claims historical narratives follow four basic plots: romance, tragedy, comedy, and satire. According to White the historian, in choosing to emplot narrative, for example, as romance would

follow a particular course and ultimately arrive at a resolution very different from a narrative emplotted as tragedy. As the reader's interpretation of a historical narrative is greatly influenced by the way it ends, it may prove worthwhile to provide alternative endings as, for example, does Simon Schama's Dead Certainties (1991) which, among other things, gives alternative endings to well known events. Alternative endings, however, are not simply a consequence of different interpretations; they can also be a result of where one chooses to conclude the narrative. For example, our understanding of the Red River Rebellion will differ if we ended the narrative in 1870 as opposed to extending it to include the North West Rebellions of 1885. By providing alternative endings historians would encourage readers to take a more active role in the recreation/reconstruction of the past. Analogous to these points of historiography are the pedagogical ones that the teacher must make explicit when teaching a unit on the Red River Rebellion.

Narratives may range from the sparse and the economical--like the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle--which are little more than a sequence of events, to the richly textured and multilayered--like Simon Schama's Citizens (1989)--which are capable of sustaining a degree of interpretation. It would seem that the richer and more complex the narrative the better it carries not only the events, but also the structures (e.g., institutions, modes of action, modes of thought, and ceremonies). Using a narrative technique from literature, it may be possible to

examine the major structural changes in a particular society by way of their impact upon a few historical agents. The problem, though, is finding the appropriate historical agents who reflect the structural changes.

Historians, unlike novelists, have neither the luxury of being able to invent their characters nor the liberty to create words and thoughts for them. Without the pre-existence of the necessary historical agents of whom we have the requisite amount of knowledge, it is impossible to write history using this technique. Further to this, an examination of the 'non-fiction novel' or 'faction'-see, for example, Truman Capote's In Cold Blood (1966), Norman Mailer's The Armies of the Night (1968) and The Executioner's Song (1979), or Thomas Keneally's Schindler's List (1982)--reveals an inability of this technique to deal with the problems of structures. A few recent works of history that have attempted to grapple with these problems have produced promising results. One example, similar to microhistory, has been described as micronarrative "the telling of a story about ordinary people in their local setting" (Burke, 1992, p. 241). Social historians like Christopher Moore in Louisbourg Portraits (1982), Louise Collis in Memoirs of a Medieval Woman (1983) or Eugene Genovese in Roll, Jordan, Roll (1976) have employed this technique with a great deal of success. By reducing the scale of the narrative, they have been able to shine a penetrating light upon structures.

Moore's examination of the lives of five individuals presents fascinating

insights into life in an 18th century garrison in North America. Through an examination of the life and times of Margery Kempe, Collis is able to illuminate certain aspects (e.g., sin, sex, diet and dress) of a Medieval woman's life. In Roll, Jordan, Roll, Genovese reconstructs, as carefully and accurately as possible, both the world the slaves experienced and the world they made in response to that experience. In each of the above examples of micronarrative there is an attempt--similar to that made by microhistory--to reconstruct the experience of life in the past through the study of entities as small as a community or an individual. This approach enables us to see that history is more than the actions of politicians, monarchs, and generals, and it makes it possible to recreate worlds long thought lost to us. Like all approaches, however, it is not without its drawbacks.

One potential problem with micronarratives arises when we attempt to apply our knowledge of a community or an individual, by extrapolation, to understand the larger society. While useful insights and understandings may be gained from such an exercise, it must always be remembered that one community or one individual does not make a society. Initially, this appears to be a historiography problem, but upon closer examination there is an analogous pedagogical problem that teachers must keep in mind. From a historiography perspective, another problem with this approach is that the emphasis on the close, the immediate and the particular tends to obscure the structures of a

society. Attempting to address these problems, historians have developed a number of new approaches several of which I shall now examine.

To expand our understanding and create a more representative view of past events, individuals and societies, some historians now employ multiple viewpoints (or multivocality) in their narratives. By carefully juxtaposing a number of viewpoints, the historian attempts to clarify the world in which the historical agents lived. Simon Schama's Dead Certainties, Lt. Gen. Herald G. Moore and Joseph Galloway in We Were Soldiers Once...And Young (1993), Guido Ruggiero's Binding Passions (1993), Christopher Hibbert's Cavaliers and Roundheads (1993), and Carlin A. Barton's The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans (1992) are a few of the more recent examples of historians using, to varying degrees, multiple viewpoints. To demonstrate some of the possibilities of this technique I shall briefly discuss several of the above titles.

By examining the death of General James Wolfe through the creation of three interwoven narratives, Schama smashes the heroic image that has come to represent the man. He achieves this end first by contrasting the event as depicted by a common soldier with the deification of Wolfe as portrayed by Benjamin West in his famous painting, and then by demonstrating how the historian Francis Parkman collapsed his own identity into Wolfe's. In We Were Soldiers Once...And Young the authors analyze one battle--Ia Drang--to demonstrate their contention that that battle changed the war in Vietnam. In

contrast to most books of this type, the authors have attempted to achieve a more balanced perspective by including interviews from several of the North Vietnamese participants. The scope of their work is further broadened by the inclusion of interviews with the wives, children and parents of those who fought in the battle. In the end the authors are able to demonstrate in a way more powerful than a simple narrative could how the battle of Ia Drang changed the lives of those that it touched.

Day One (1985), an account of the development and eventual use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima by Peter Wyden, is an example of another way that multiple viewpoints can be employed in the writing of history. The author includes not only the perspectives of the American participants but also those of the citizens of Hiroshima. Using techniques found in film, the author cuts from one individual to another in an attempt to recreate the horror that was Hiroshima. This approach to history shifts back and forth between the public time of events--the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima--and the private time of individuals--the experiences of individuals before and after the bomb. Through the intersection of public events with the lives of private individuals, the author evokes, in a vivid and emotional way, a sense of what was experienced by the survivors of the blast.

The final approach to narrative history that I shall discuss arose from the work of social anthropologists. In attempting to analyze the relationship

between the structures and the events of a particular culture, social anthropologists have developed an approach which holds great promise for historians. The clearest examples of this approach are found in studies that examine encounters between cultures. A recent work in this field is Ronald Wright's Stolen Continents (1993). Wright contends that

most history, when it has been digested by a people, becomes myth. Myth is an arrangement of the past, whether real or imagined, in patterns that resonate with a culture's deepest values and aspirations. (Wright, 1993, p.5)

It is because of this tendency towards myth, claims Wright, that the history about the discovery of North and South America is really little more than Western myths. He is quick to point out, however, that this is not a feature unique to western society; the Native peoples' history of their first contacts with Europeans is also mythic. Wright's purpose, though, is not simply to point out this obvious similarity of form, he also wishes to draw our attention to the function of each myth in their respective cultures: "while Western myths are triumphalist, those of the 'losers' have to explain and overcome catastrophe" (Wright, 1993, p.5). Through the use of recently re-discovered post-Columbian native documents (such as the Florentine Codex) Wright attempts to balance the record by expanding our knowledge of what happened when the Old World collided with the New. With the words of those that lived through the invasion of the Americas, he is able to evoke a world that has been turned upside down.

And while he acknowledges the problem of cultural bias, he points out that "these records, like all records, are slanted by secrecy, advocacy, and social attitudes" (p.9).

Through the use of records like the Florentine Codex--a history of the Aztec conquest written by the Aztecs for Friar Sahagun in the 1550s--Wright demonstrates how the interplay between the structures of a culture and events ultimately led to its downfall. In Aztec legend, Quetzalcoatl--the Feathered Serpent--had promised to return in a year called Ce Acatl, One Reed, to reclaim the Mexican throne. By coincidence, the arrival of Cortes occurred in a year One Reed; a point that did not go unnoticed by the Aztec Emperor Moctezuma. Believing Cortes to be the returning god Quetzalcoatl, Moctezuma initially adopted a policy of appeasement in the hope that he might turn back. However, upon Cortes' arrival in Mexico City, Moctezuma treated him like the returning god. This action ultimately led to Moctezuma's downfall. The above example demonstrates how the structures of a particular culture shaped the way its members perceived and interpreted an event. While the event can be studied in order to discover the structures of the culture, this reading of the relationship between event and structure seems far too narrow and limited. The Aztec interpretation of the invasion event reveals certain structures of their culture. However, in the act of interpretation they have reordered their culture. A more comprehensive view results if we acknowledge the dialectical relationship

between events and structures. The structures of a culture attempting to incorporate an event, like the invasion of the Aztecs by Cortes, are fundamentally altered by the activity. While the structures of a culture shape events, the events have the power to reshape or even destroy the structures. This concept must be understood by both structural and narrative historians before meaningful change can occur. The structuralists need to recognize the power of events and the narrative historians need to examine the interactions among particular events and the culture in which they occur. From a pedagogical perspective, teachers must also recognize and make explicit the relationship between events and structures.

The involvement of the new historians in revisionist history has raised many questions about the nature of historical debate. Is it possible to have more than one interpretation about the past? Why do historians have different interpretations of the past? Does objective history exist or is it always subject to the convictions and ideologies of the historian? These are but a few of the historiography questions that come to mind regarding this issue. The simple explanation for this problem would be to claim that the radically different interpretations of the past made by successive generations of historians are but a consequence of new information. The alternative, advanced by the new historians, is that different interpretations are a consequence of new ways of thinking about the past and history. Given the seeming impossibility of

achieving objective truth about the past, one must ponder the possibility of the very existence of historical knowledge.

The existence of genuine historical knowledge is postulated by Kloppenber (1989) who "argues for a 'pragmatic hermeneutics' which corresponds to the way historians actually work: historians strive towards answering the questions they pose for themselves within a 'community of inquiry'" (Kloppenber, 1989, p.1026). The achievement of absolute truth about the past is not the goal of the historian, indeed it is perhaps impossible to achieve given that the past is constructed from the fragmentary, incomplete traces and traditions of a culture. While it may not be the historian's objective to write a definitive account of the past, it is the intent of the historian to contribute, within a community of inquiry, to what Carr called the continuously evolving "dialogue between the present and the past" (1961, p.30). The implication of this view is that historical knowledge is the creation of historians and not the consequence of correctly applied general or covering laws. Historical knowledge results from the exercise of the historian's craft--the shaping of the traces of the past into stories.

Paul Ricoeur's thesis on the centrality of narrative to historical knowledge and historical understanding illuminates a pedagogical point in need of a little elaboration. He argues that the significance of an historical narrative is not derived from its epistemological status (i.e., is the story a true representation of

an objective reality). For Ricoeur, narratives do not reveal the past to human beings they reveal the nature of the relationship that exists between human beings and the past. Therefore a richer understanding of the nature of historical knowledge can only be achieved if students and teachers are a part of a community of inquiry that is engaged in the construction of meaningful narratives about the past.

### **Challenges to the Relationship Between the Past and the Present**

To claim that the development of historical knowledge is a consequence of our construction of meaningful narratives about the past signifies a change in the relationship between the present and the past. From an educational perspective there is a need to explore this change in some detail. Curricular decisions about what history topics students should study that have been determined by present issues--and by implication are addressing students' needs--reflect the belief that the value of the past is a function of its present utility. This approach to history stems from the Progressive movement of the early twentieth century. In response to the waves of poor immigrants that were arriving on American shores, Progressives attempted to reform education so that it might meet the needs and problems of contemporary life. The Progressives' commitment to social reform was mirrored in the type of curriculum they advocated. They believed the traditional, academic curriculum, composed of the

seven liberal arts, was inappropriate for the majority of children who were in reality bound for the work force and not university. Progressive educators, according to Diane Ravitch (1985), began "asserting that the work of the schools must meet the test of social efficiency. In education, social efficiency meant that every subject, every program, every study must be judged by whether it was socially useful. Did it meet the needs of society?" (p.15). (See also Eisner, The Educational Imagination, 1979, pp.62-67.) The problem with this view, however, originates from a misunderstanding of the concept 'need'. Dearden (1975) in his perspicacious article "'Needs' in education" noted certain criteria that must be met before we can classify something as a need. First, there must exist a norm or a standard; second, the norm or standard is not being achieved; and, finally, the thing said to be needed must be capable of achieving the norm or standard. If we relate this conception of need to the history curriculum, then the belief that the study of the past is only of value if it meets the needs of our present society becomes problematical. Ultimately, placing a criterion of present utility on the study of the past negates its intrinsic value; the sole reason for studying the past is to inform the present. The pedagogical question is what to study, for can we ever know with even some degree of certainty what from the past we will need in order to inform the present?

The findings and recommendations of the Bradley Commission on History in Schools (1989) are in many ways a reaction to the utilitarian attitude

towards the past that I attempted to explicate in the previous paragraph. The Commission found that history developed in students certain 'habits of the mind' which included "historical empathy as opposed to present-mindedness an understanding of the complexity of historical causation, respect [for] particularity, and avoid[ance] of excessively abstract generalizations" (cited in Seixas, 1993, p.242). Among the habits of the mind which form a rationale for studying history is one of the more contentious issues confronting the new history: what is historical empathy and is its achievement possible?

In this next section I wish to examine two interconnected concepts-- historical empathy and presentism--the controversy they have engendered and then suggest a possible solution to the controversy. Perhaps the source of the controversy that surrounds historical empathy emanates from the inability of both historians and educators to arrive at a common definition for the concept.

The following examples elucidate this point:

The ability to understand other people's problems or attitudes from the inside (historians call it empathy). (Shemilt, 1980, cited in Stockley, 1983, p.53)

Empathy in history is an achievement: it is where we get to when we have successfully reconstructed other peoples' beliefs, values, goals, and attendant feelings. To say that a pupil has 'empathized' ...is to say that he or she is in a position to entertain a set of beliefs and values which are not necessarily his or her own. (Ashby and Lee, 1987, p.63)

The role of empathy in understanding the ideas of the past is to project ourselves imaginatively into the historical situation and to use 'our mind's eye' to bring into play the standards of intuitive observation and

judgment which we have developed in every day life. (Portal, 1987, p.90)

...empathy is to do with feeling, specifically 'feeling into'...the spirit, or in a historical context, outlook, or milieu or a past historical period. (Low-Beer, 1989, p.8)

[Empathy] is more than just a reaction or an identification; we are trying to comprehend the goals and intentions of historical personages, the situations within which they acted and the reasons for their actions. (Cairns, 1989, p.13)

...the claim that one has to get into an informed appreciation of the predicaments and viewpoints of people in the past in order to gain real historical understanding (to see the past from its point of view). (Jenkins, 1991, p.39)

P.J. Lee (1984, cited in Cairns, 1989), notes that empathy can be viewed as a power, as an achievement, as a process, and as a disposition or a propensity. Empathy as a power refers to the ability to distinguish the thoughts, beliefs and feelings of others. Talk of it as an achievement means knowing and understanding someone's thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. As a process, evidence is used in order to ascertain someone's beliefs, thoughts, and feelings. Finally, empathy as a disposition is an attitude or a frame of mind that allows someone to entertain other points of view. Clearly historical empathy encompasses Lee's four aspects and while some of the examples that I cited contained one or two of the aspects there seems to be more to historical empathy than we find in these accounts. Since historical empathy involves the human mind, in all of its complexities, attempting to understand the equally complex mind of an historical agent encompasses more than a power, an achievement, a process and a

disposition. In attempting to understand the mind of an historical agent, to see a situation as it was perceived by an historical personage, we need to embrace the tacit elements: the fundamental understandings, values, beliefs, attitudes, judgements, principles and so forth behind all knowledge. By recognizing the importance of the tacit elements to historical empathy we will be able to come to richer understanding of the meanings that certain situations, events, ceremonies, concepts, and so on had for an historical agent. To reach this understanding not only requires knowledge of what we are attending to, but also what is implicitly known. This, however, is not simply a historiography issue for its implication clearly impact, in an analogous way, upon pedagogy.

The view of history implicit in historical empathy is that history must be studied for its own sake; that an understanding of historical agents and events requires knowing their minds and how they perceived the events. The pedagogical implications being students must be given opportunities to study historical events and how historical agents perceived those events if we wish them to understand historical events and agents. In sharp relief to this view are the presentist goals of history often found in the new social studies of the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Banks, 1977, chapters 7, 14; Fenton, 1966, chapter 6). For presentists, the rationale for studying the past is to create generalizations that inform present concerns. This conception of history challenges the possibility of achieving an empathic understanding of the people of the past. Discussions of

this problem are found in Jenkins (1991), Jenkins and Brickley (1989) and Low-Beer (1989). Representative of the argument are Jenkins and Brickley who claim in "Reflections On The Empathy Debate", that historical empathy is an epistemological impossibility. According to their reading of the empathy debate, claims that empathic understanding can be achieved are based upon the erroneous assumption "of the existence of a human nature universally ever present and known to us all by virtue of common sense" (Jenkins and Brickley, 1990, p.27). One problem with their argument is their connecting the development of empathy to John Stuart Mill's idea of freedom. They claim that the rise of liberalism was assisted by Mill's idea that an individual has the freedom to do what he/she wants provided the actions did not infringe upon the freedoms of others. As Jenkins and Brickley note, to determine if the freedom of others would be curtailed by our actions we must do the calculation in our head: we must attempt to see things from their viewpoint, in other words we must attempt to empathize. They argue that this approach, of being rational and seeing other people's views, is time bound and that we are wrong when we use it to try to understand the thoughts and actions of people who did not know of liberalism (1989, p.20). I find this to be a spurious argument. Just as knowing liberalism does not guarantee that one acts in that way, not knowing liberalism does not automatically mean that one could not act in that way. Surely the concept existed in the minds of others long before it was articulated by Mill.

Additionally they argue that putting ourselves into the minds of people of the past for the purpose of empathy requires that they were rational. This argument is equally problematical. To put ourselves into the minds of people of the past and see things as they saw them does not mean that we see them or their actions as rational. To understand them we must see their actions as the thing to do given their understanding of the situation; there is no requirement that we make them or their action conform to our standards of rationality. Jenkins and Brickley also claim that it is impossible to read history on its own terms; history can only be read in light of the individual or society that is doing the reading. If we assume similarities between ourselves and historical agents, for the purpose of empathizing with them, we are guilty of the unwarranted imposition of our values and understandings on the past. This position is not only extreme--how else can we make sense of something if we do not try to make it fit with what we know--it is also unfair since it singles out history for this type of criticism when the concern occurs in all of the disciplines. (See Chapter Two for a more detailed explanation.) It seems patently false to claim that the people of the past were so completely different from ourselves that we can never come to understand them. Do we not share many important similarities with historical agents (e.g., biological, psychological, emotional, physiological) that can enable us to understand, to some degree, what they believed, valued, were concerned about and so forth? Perhaps the real contention in this debate is over the degree

to which we can come to know historical agents. But is this a fair criticism? Does anyone know an acquaintance to the same degree as a friend, or a friend to a good friend, or one of your students to your own child? These examples illustrate the varying degrees to which we can say we know someone. Why is it that some historians would disallow all claims of knowing an historical agent? One reason for this denial may emanate from their confusing or equating a temporal difference with an intellectual difference. Certainly there is a difference in the relative positions in time between ourselves and the people of the past. We are their future and they are our past. While they may not have the foresight to know us, we can, through the use of hindsight, come to know them. But that knowledge should not be seen as proof of our superior intellectual abilities, like the people of the past we too lack the foresight to know the people of the future. This raises pedagogical issues that are reflected in statements that students often make about the people of the past: "They were all stupid." "What was the matter with them?" "Couldn't they see...?" "How could they think (believe) that?" Properly taught, empathy has the potential to lead students beyond these misunderstandings to a richer, fuller understanding of the past. This, however, raises the question of what happens when historical empathy is improperly taught and/or incorrectly used.

The incorrect exercise of historical empathy can result in presentism--the applying of contemporary standards to the past. So used, present perspectives

have the power to distort our understandings of the past. To illustrate this point, consider the recent changes that have occurred to the reputations of historical agents such as Christopher Columbus, Louis Reil, John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, William Lyon Mackenzie King and Thomas Jefferson. While there is little doubt that the reputations of all of the above were in need of correction, there is an inherent danger in refashioning historical agents in modern guise; in making their actions, motives, and beliefs appear contemporary. Whether intentional or unintentional, ultimately this activity is self-serving. In making the past conform to our present we are either forgetting or ignoring a central feature of the past--its independence--which must be acknowledged and respected. By refashioning the past in our own image we display a temporalcentric (or chronocentric) attitude--a belief that the present is superior to the past. Douglas Wilson (1992) enunciates in "Thomas Jefferson and the Character Issue" what he regards as the essence of the relationship between the past and the present: "Yesterday has meanings of its own that are prior to and necessarily independent of Today's" (p.57).

The pervasiveness of presentism has developed in many an inability to judge historical agents, events, and institutions according to standards which are appropriate to the time being studied. Implicit in this attitude is the almost total disregard for the temporal dimension: the people of the past are seen as version of ourselves that just happen to have lived a long time ago. Perhaps this

attitude is a necessary corrective to the uncritical, Euro-centric and often nationalistic form of history that prevailed until the 1960s. Now we no longer talk of the European 'discovery' of the New World but of the 'first contact' between Europeans and the Indigenous Peoples of North and South America (although even the use of these terms can be said to display this particular attitude). Where we once glorified the accomplishments and exploits of the early explorers we now shamefully acknowledge the mistreatment and exploitation of the people of the First Nations at the hands of the Europeans. In an attempt to redress the wrongs perpetrated by the Europeans, it seems at times like the pendulum may be swinging too far in the other direction--recall, for example, what happened to the Columbus Quincentenary. In assessing the actions of historical agents like Columbus or Cartier we must not allow our own attitudes, values, knowledge, or understandings to dominate. The people of the past lived lives in times that were different from our own so why should we be shocked or surprised when they act or think differently than ourselves? To attempt to make their thoughts and actions conform to contemporary standards and sensibilities is to misunderstand one of the primary reasons why we study the past; the people of the past were not identical to us therefore we must study them, and their time, if we hope to achieve some understanding of them.

One example of the influence of presentism that has educational implications is illustrated in the way we ask questions about historical agents.

Douglas Wilson (1992) argues that because of the effect of presentism we often ask the questions backwards. He cites as an example the controversy that has arisen over Thomas Jefferson's ownership of slaves. Present day attitudes regarding racial equality and knowledge of Jefferson's authorship of the Declaration of Independence make his accommodation of slavery seem incomprehensible. The question most often asked is "How could the man who wrote 'all men are created equal' have owned slaves?" According to Wilson, framing the question in this fashion implies hypocrisy on Jefferson's part for surely the practice of slavery requires one to believe in basic inequality among humans. For Wilson a fairer, less biased way of asking the question is to frame it within its historical context:

How did a man who was born into a slaveholding society, whose family and admired friends owned slaves, who inherited a fortune that was dependent on slaves and slave labor, decide at an early age that slavery was morally wrong and forcefully declare that it ought to be abolished?  
(p.66)

When considered within the historical circumstances of his time, the significance of Jefferson's words become clearer. Jefferson's denunciation of slavery and his call for its abolition put him at odds with his society and his own self-interests. When compared with the initial question this seems a much richer way of examining the conflict between Jefferson's words and his actions. The role of teachers, is to ensure their pedagogy provides opportunities for students to develop this understanding.

Another example of the importance of how one frames the historical question is seen in the controversy surrounding Montcalm's decision to leave the fortress of Quebec and attack Wolfe on the Plains of Abraham. As discussed in Chapter Three, the question most often asked is "Why did Montcalm meet Wolfe on the Plains of Abraham when he knew, at least a month before, that such an action meant certain defeat?" So framed, it implies Montcalm's actions were unwise or his reasoning was defective. If, however, we reframe the question within its historical context it is transformed: "Could Montcalm, an honourable man of noble birth, refuse a direct challenge even when he knew it meant certain defeat?" The implications regarding Montcalm's lack of wisdom and faulty reasoning are removed when viewed in this light. We are now able to address the question of influence that a culture or society exerts upon an individual.

The issue of presentism also arises during discussions of history's objectivity. For historians, the question of the purpose of historical research is inseparable from the question of its objectivity. Many believe that conducting historical research for the purpose of advocacy in current issues seriously compromises claims of objectivity in history. Current thought on this question, however, is that it is impossible to separate completely the object of study from the individual conducting the study. The researcher's point of view will to some degree come to bear upon the object of study. The question, then, is not

whether historical research should be influenced by current issues and problems--for clearly it is--but rather to what degree should historical research be influenced by current issues and problems. The increasing power of the new historians over the past twenty years has only underscored this problem. The political concerns of these historians--as demonstrated in the growth of black history, labour history, working class history, women's history, etc.--reflect their view of the purpose of history. History's engagement should enhance one's ability to affect meaningful change to present concerns while at the same time remaining faithful to the past by respecting its independence from the present.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

If the study of certain types of history develops habits of mind that provide an antidote to the influence of presentism, then I believe it is necessary that history be included in the curriculum. The question, though, is whether Social Studies, as it is often taught, adequately develops those habits of mind that the study of history will develop.

Throughout this thesis I have argued the educational significance of narrative history. The study of history develops worthwhile dispositions such as historical empathy, and respect for evidence, and an understanding of the complexity of historical causation. These habits of mind justify history's inclusion in the secondary curriculum. I now propose to flesh out this justification by providing brief examples from B.C. Social Studies textbooks that illustrate what I discussed in the previous chapters. My intention is to sketch-out, in a very rudimentary way, several units that develop worthwhile habits of mind through the study of history, and then discuss the educational implications of my recommendations.

If Social Studies is to develop certain worthwhile habits of mind we must

not only be concerned with the content but also with the methods by which the subject is taught. Additionally, if students are to come to understand some of the central concepts of Social Studies then we must provide them with opportunities to work with these concepts. We cannot expect students to develop the ability to make reasonable judgements about, for example, the actions of historical agents if we do not ask this of them when they study the past. Given the present curriculum--and the textbooks that are intended to assist students develop the key understandings--it is often not clear how students are, for example, to gain a respect for the particularity of the past, develop a sense of personal autonomy or come to respect the independence of the past from the present. I begin with an examination of Confederation, a central topic in grade ten Social Studies, to illustrate the contradiction between a topic and the way it is often taught.

Typically in B.C., the teacher prepares a talk to introduce the topic and then assigns related readings from the authorized textbook Our Land: Building The West, (Bowers & Garrod, 1987). This might be followed by questions, discussions and a culminating assignment on perhaps the contributions of one of the Fathers of Confederation. Not only does this method commonly fail to engage students, it also fails to honour some of the central ideas and concepts one should be teaching in a unit on Confederation (e.g., the importance of co-operation and compromise, the experience of negotiations, and the workings of a

parliamentary democracy). An alternative way of studying Confederation is to turn over to the students more responsibility for their own learning. (N.B. This unit would follow one that developed students' understandings of such things as the particularity of the past, historical empathy and the problem of presentism.) A teacher might begin by asking students four simple questions: What were the causes or reasons for Confederation? What were the roles of the major players in Confederation? What was the average person's opinion of Confederation? What were the results of Confederation? Next, the teacher might discuss with students possible methods and ways of answering the questions (e.g., Where to look for information? What is a cause? What is a valid reason? What is meant by results?). Together, teacher and students could determine the format(s) to be used for the assignment. Possible choices include video, play, board game, documentary, newscast, report, and newspaper. While the format is a matter of student choice, the information and knowledge presented must be historically accurate and conform with the standards of the discipline. In attempting to answer the four questions related to Confederation and Canada in the 1860s--as well as the many others that will arise during the course of their investigations--students will have opportunities to co-operate, compromise and negotiate as they come to understand Canada's particular form of parliamentary democracy.

This method is more likely to engage students than would the more traditional method. Also, it is more likely to develop their abilities to make

inquiries, analyze data, make reasonable judgements, recognize the influence of presentism and think critically and carefully about important issues. I also believe this assignment would likely enhance students' confidence. Students will probably be surprised by their own knowledge about the central concepts of the unit and the imaginativeness of their presentations.

I now wish to examine the treatment of slavery in texts commonly used in Social Studies at the secondary level for examples of both the influence of presentism and the problems that arise when texts fail to make their narrators visible. The issue of slavery appears to a very limited extent in grades eight, nine and ten. The horrors of the slave trade are given only a cursory examination in the standard texts for grade eight--Patterns of Civilization Volume 1 (Beers, 1984)--and grade nine--Patterns of Civilization Volume 2 (Beers, 1985). In grade ten, Our Land: Building The West (Bowers & Garrod, 1987) only makes passing reference to slavery in the context of discussing the American Civil War. As presented, slavery is a faceless, almost emotionless activity. Students are given no sense of the debates that raged, the pain that was inflicted or the indignities that were experienced. They are simply told a few "facts" (e.g., the potter Josiah Wedgwood "campaigned vigorously against the slave trade" and produced thousands of anti-slavery medallions. Beers, 1985, p.4), but are not invited into the discussion by the text. (Ironically, students are told more about Wedgwood, the potter, than they are about his involvement in

the early days of the abolition movement.) As presented in both the curriculum guide and the grade nine text, the connection between the issue of slavery and the Enlightenment thinkers is rather nebulous and unless the teacher is careful, the influence of presentism will prevail. The ideas of the Enlightenment thinkers and the reforms which followed are presented as a logical and inevitable progression. There is no sense of the "dead ends" that were travelled down, the difficulties that were experienced or the choices that were made at critical junctures. In the text, everything is presented in such a way that it seems as though the people of the 17th and 18th centuries were using 20th century democracy to guide their writings. From this perspective--presentism--the significance of the Enlightenment thinkers and their works is diminished in the minds of most students. However, the corrective to this problem is not simply allowing students to work with primary sources. When students are given the opportunity to explore the slavery issue through contemporary writings, once again the ensuing problem is usually presentism.

An example of the influence of presentism occurs when students read statements by Abraham Lincoln on slavery and racial equality. Most students fail to understand how it was possible for Lincoln to be against slavery and yet not recognize the equality of the races. Lacking an understanding of 19th century attitudes on slavery and racial equality, most students assume a contemporary attitude which treats anti-slavery and equality as something

approaching synonymous. The root of the problem, however, is the inability of the texts to enable students to move beyond a superficial understanding of slavery. Rather than simply listing some of the hardships, the cruelties, and the degradations experienced by the slaves, the texts should be concerned with the more fundamental and profound questions that will develop in students an understanding of the slavery issue as it was perceived in the 18th and 19th centuries. Some examples are: What makes it possible for one group of people to enslave another? What attitudes, beliefs, and understandings did the people of the past have that allowed them to justify slavery? Why did some people begin to deplore slavery? What does it mean to be a person? With the requisite primary sources and the opportunity to explore attitudes appropriate to the time under study, most students will develop a richer understanding of the slavery issue than the one provided by the textbook.

For my final example, I turn to the portrayal of medieval society in Patterns of Civilization Volume 1 (Beers, 1984). Once again we find the subtle influence of presentism on the presentation of the past. The images students are left with after studying this unit are the standard ones of castles, knights, lords, kings, and the Church--what might be summed up as land, loyalty and faith. This, however, reflects modern attitudes towards the hierarchical arrangement of society during the Middle Ages. Absent (or perhaps I should say silent) are the voices of other members of society: women and peasants. In the 37 pages

devoted to this unit (pp.39-75), approximately 50 lines (about one half of one page) mention women. Even then, students are provided with male attitudes, opinions, observations and conclusions about what it was like to be a woman during the Middle Ages. After studying this unit, students could rightly conclude that women made no contributions to art, literature, music, science or medicine since only men are mentioned during the discussion of medieval culture. Recognizing that this inadequate picture of medieval women is a consequence of the incomplete, fragmentary and biased information that we have about the past is an important understanding about the nature of historical knowledge that students are rarely given the opportunity to develop. Instead, students are provided with little more than a list of things that women could and (more often) could not do. As an alternative to the received knowledge from the authors of the text, there should be opportunities for students, together with their teacher, to develop historical knowledge in a community of inquiry.

Like the study of the role of women in medieval society, the tentative nature of our understandings about the past is inadequately conveyed in the material on peasant life. The brief comments on the peasants (approximately 125 lines), and the phantom like quality of their appearances in the text--reflections of presentism--ultimately reduces the importance of the peasants in students' minds. The conclusions of the author are presented as absolutes, pronouncements beyond question and without the occasion for challenge from

students. Students should be given opportunities, through the appropriate material, to inquire into the reasons why our knowledge of this time is incomplete and, therefore, why our understandings are necessarily tentative. Instead, the influence of presentism is unchecked and students are left with the impression that by contemporary standards the life of the ordinary peasant was very uneventful: they did not do much and the few things that they did were pretty dull.

### **Conclusion**

As I argued earlier, the study of history develops worthwhile habits of mind. These habits of mind can help to combat the influence of presentism. My concern, however, is not whether Social Studies is capable of developing these habits of mind. The record of Social Studies clearly demonstrates that it has, and I believe it will continue to develop them. My point, rather, is to raise the question as to whether Social Studies--as it is commonly taught--is the best or the most effective way of ensuring students have opportunities to develop these worthwhile habits of mind. The few problems noted in the last section illustrate the failure of the Social Studies textbooks to promote the unique understandings that a study faithful to the nature of history could provide. These problems arise, in part, because Social Studies lacks the conceptual clarity that most other subjects enjoy because it is an amalgam of three traditions: citizenship transmission, the social sciences, and reflective inquiry (Barth and

Shermas, 1970). Even Social Studies courses that have a strong history component might not be immune to this problem. The aim of history as a discipline is to understand the past in its own terms, to understand the uniqueness of the past for its intrinsic value. The study of history seeks, for example, to develop in students a respect for the independence of the past from the present. Under the sway of Social Studies, however, this aim could be transformed. A brief examination of the origins of Social Studies illustrates this claim.

Social Studies first appeared in the United States at the beginning of this century. It was created to both reflect the Progressives' ideas about education, and to respond to the massive social and economic changes that were occurring in the United States (e.g., the shift from an agrarian to an industrial society and the high rate of immigration from non-English speaking countries). At its genesis, the expressed goal of Social Studies was socialization, to make people into "good citizens" (e.g., obedient to law and authority, have faith in American institutions, and fit into society). Educationally this means it is not enough that students learn about particular past events and people, they must also approve of those past events and people. Under the rubric Social Studies, the aim of history tends to become socialization. This orientation to the past places an overriding importance on present social conditions when determining what from the past is of value and, therefore, worth studying. Under this orientation, the

present not only determines what will be studied, but also how it will be studied. Past events are offered in such a way that they are seen as leading towards an inevitable present. The present's influence on the past is inexorable. That which does not contribute to the present is seen as irrelevant. In the end, socialization can be seen as working hand-in-hand with presentism. If we make socialization the aim of history, we are not enabling students to critically analyze the present. So conceived, history promotes a blind acceptance of, and at times almost a reverence for, present conditions and institutions. Social Studies units, like the typical treatments of Confederation and slavery examined earlier, might lead students to believe in the inevitability of our present democratic system. This is socialization and not history. My criticisms should not be construed, however, as negating the importance of certain aspects of socialization or as a call for the removal of units of study on democracy and our present democratic system. In fact I am advocating quite the opposite. The study of our present democratic system must be a part of the curriculum but it must be in a manner that recognizes and honours some of the central principles of democracy. Students must come to understand the open ended, evolutionary nature of the concept--including the ever changing role of the people in a democratic society. These understandings are perhaps best achieved through the study of history--which seeks to understand the past in its own terms--rather than Social Studies which has a tendency to be driven by socialization aim.

The lack of conceptual clarity discussed in the last two paragraphs creates confusion for students and often results in their disinterest in the subject matter. As I argued in the first four chapters, before we can teach or learn a subject we first must be clear about the nature of the subject. Social Studies in its present form can make this difficult. Once again, I am not arguing that it is impossible for the study of Social Studies to develop in students worthwhile habits of mind or that the study of history guarantees that students will develop these habits. Clearly Social Studies courses that honour the objectives of history will develop in students a sense of historical mindedness, an understanding of historical empathy, respect for evidence, and so forth. My concern is that Social Studies has a tendency to be driven by its socialization objectives so there is a need, on the part of educators, to be vigilant. The unique and worthwhile understandings that can be derived from the study of history are not necessarily the outcomes of the study of Social Studies. The study of history enables us to put the present in perspective; it provides us with an understanding of how things change over time. Through the study of the past we come to see that the world is not static; everything has a history and that history is about change. Acknowledging this point enables us to recognize change, to identify how things have changed and to understand why things have changed into the things we now have and not something else. Without this understanding, students will not only have difficulty identifying presentism, but also withstanding its influence. By

understanding the dynamic of history we have an "idea of where things come from, the direction in which they are headed, and at what speed" (Fitzgerald, 1983, p.89). A clear understanding of this will enable students to both identify and make reasonable judgements about the significant issues and problems they will face during the course of their lives. Additionally, the study of history is "necessary to combat the chauvinistic dogmatism, the unimaginatively narrow and exclusive conceptions, of so many people, and hence to increase tolerance and sympathetic understanding" (Barrow, 1990, pp. 103-104). Without the focus that the study of history provides, the representative problems outlined in the preceding paragraphs may continue to be the norm in the Social Studies classrooms of British Columbia.

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