

# Against citizenship. Defending the teaching of History as a disciplina

## Contra la ciudadanía. En defensa de la enseñanza de la Historia como disciplina

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**Antonio Fco. Canales Serrano**

*ORCID /0000-0002-7035-1194*

*Universidad Complutense de Madrid*

### **Abstract**

This article advocates the teaching of History from a disciplinary conception as opposed to the civic and memorialist dimension that is so often defended. To do so, it analyses the defining features of History as an academic discipline in order to defend a realistic and objectivist conception of this discipline. With this characterisation, it is defended a conception of History based on work about the rudiments of the historian's craft that addresses acquiring historical thinking in line with P. Seixas and others. Finally, the activities that can be included in the discipline are distinguished from those that belong to another domain, although it is outlined that many of the activities proposed from the perspective of historical memory are perfectly acceptable from a disciplinary conception of the subject. It is concluded that axiological contents related to civic education do not correspond mainly to the subject of History, but relate disciplinarily to Political Philosophy and educationally to the education community on the whole.

Keywords: History Education; Historical Memory; Objectivity; Citizenship Education; Politics and Education.

### **Resumen**

Este artículo defiende la enseñanza de la Historia desde una concepción disciplinar opuesta a la dimensión cívica y memorialista que comúnmente se defiende. Para ello realiza un análisis de los rasgos definitorios de la Historia como disciplina académica para defender una concepción de la disciplina realista y objetivista. Desde esta caracterización se defiende un tipo de enseñanza de la Historia basada en el trabajo sobre los rudimentos del oficio de historiador y dirigida a la adquisición del pensamiento histórico en la línea de P. Seixas y otros. Finalmente, se deslindan las actividades que caben en la asignatura y aquellas que pertenecen a otro ámbito y se defiende que muchas de las actividades que se proponen desde la memoria histórica son perfectamente asumibles desde una concepción disciplinar de la asignatura. La conclusión es que los contenidos axiológicos relativos a la educación cívica no corresponden primariamente a la asignatura de Historia, sino disciplinariamente a la Filosofía Política y educativamente al conjunto de la comunidad educativa.

Palabras claves: Enseñanza de la Historia; Memoria histórica; Objetividad; Educación cívica; Política y educación.

### **Introduction**

The teaching of History is a matter that has kept educators and professionals of the discipline busy in recent years. It seems clear that the various traditional justifications of the sense of teaching History face serious rationale problems. The vision of a legitimising History of the process of national construction being no longer valid is taken for granted; alternatively, believing a scientific law of historical development that marks the way towards humanity's emancipation has fallen apart. To make the situation worse,

the very notion of progress totters thanks to new postmodern perspectives. At this point, the question is, does it make sense to continue teaching our youths History?

In any educational forum, this question would be considered a provocation by History teachers, and they would feel indignant and would raise in unison to contend that History is still fundamental for critically understanding the present and for establishing democratic citizenship. This article aims to pose the second part of this response as a problem. The centrality of History for understanding the present is beyond all doubt, but why have we interiorised its role as the foundation of democratic citizenship as if it were an axiom? It is worth insisting on *why* because *how* is not hard to elucidate. From today's competences and skills hegemony, in which the survival of any knowledge is justified by its usefulness, both citizenship and concomitant memory seem to have been converted into a table of curricular salvation for History as a subject. Unlike subject matters like agonising Philosophy, we can challengingly answer the question of what History is for: to train citizens.

The perverse effect that has arisen from the success of this formulation is that we have ended up internalising as an unquestionable truth what should merely be a desperate conjunctural argument for curricular survival. Thus, most History teachers, and even historians, seem content to focus their work on restoring ignored collective memories and on building democratic citizenships; in other words, they are content with underlining the civic dimension of teaching our discipline, and sometimes of the discipline itself. This distinction made between the discipline and its teaching is no trivial matter, even though most of those participating in debate seem to sidestep it. Is the civic mission limited to teaching, or does it completely impregnate the discipline itself? In relation to this, does teaching a discipline have a different nature to the discipline itself other than level of difficulty? In other words, is teaching a discipline an initiation of its working rudiments (Miralles, Molina & Ortuño, 2011, p. 9) or merely a diffusion of its results? because both are certainly not equivalents. In our field, can we accept the externalisation of teaching History as uses of History? (Pérez, 2009, 41).

This article begins by taking a clear position with these questions. First, the historic discipline cannot be subordinated to present-day civic needs; second, teaching History means to initiate youths in the historian's gaze, and not to only diffuse its results in a more or less appealing manner. The didactic translation of these initial positions leads us to a consideration that is far-removed from today's more popular proposals.

### **The History subject as civic education**

The didactic proposals that underline the civic dimension for teaching History in the present are based on opposing answers for the two above questions. On the one hand, they seem to move mostly towards the idea that History itself as a discipline is justified in the present; on the other hand, they are unanimous about the eminently diffusing conception of its teaching for civic purposes. This implies moving towards a History that prioritises projection towards the past of the problems that affect our co-existence in the present. Ultimately, this is about building a narrative that adapts to current balances and legitimises the multiplication of historic stakeholders, including the new groups that state their identity today. Evidently, the main problem with this History, which comes over as being progressive and inclusive, is none other than the most gross anachronism, the main conventional enemy of History. Such a much-trumpeted interrogation of the past from the present seems to reduce the former to mere decoration in which to stage our current vicissitudes. In fact, nothing is asked because we do not care about the answer; all we

want is the setting. This conception faces the pitfall of which, as the cultural turn has insistently reminded us for more than three decades, the experience and meaning of past oppression are very different from that of today and, therefore, the majority of the groups that we track from the present could scarcely conceive themselves during another period. Thus, it would seem that novel proposals rule themselves out. However, let's leave these historiographic contradictions and centre on what is merely didactic.

The didactic basis of these proposals is to put forward in past scenarios a series of activities so that students firmly place in their minds some principles that can be applied to present-day societies. This process involves assuming axiological propositions in which the past merely plays a motivating role for learning that does not derive from it, as it is not given any substance of its own. In this way, we enable students to internalise, for example, rejecting legal inequality without having understood anything of medieval society. Similarly, in the marvellous passage about Camus' school (2013, chapter 6A), in which the Nobel Prize winner pays tribute to the teacher who determinedly intervened in continuing his studies, our teacher training students, rather than a hero, they see a monster because he gave a slap in the face from time to time. Or they state that the main feature of Nazism was the lack of respect for diversity. One is astounded by the triviality of these approaches, and later rebels furiously against such banality, but students shoulder no responsibility in this particular perception. There is nothing in their attitudes to the study or in their knowledge other than ours, except for years of teaching History that addresses a far-removed object from developing any kind of historic gaze. At this point, the problem is no longer anachronism, but is a purely didactic matter. Obviously, the learning that derives from this conception of history is far from being significant learning because it does not arise from critical work about the past, but from assuming principles that are *illustrated* in the past and are totally independent of it. This conception reports a generalised deficiency of our intended civic education: critical thinking is neither developed nor is exercised, but is *memorised*; that is, the established conclusions *by us* are taken by the students without actually reaching them.

Another set of objections derives from the openly political dimension that this conception of the subject puts forward. We can talk about civic principles, but it does not escape anyone's notice that this is often a euphemism to make the dealing of openly ideological and political matters mellow. Obviously, nothing is neutral, everything is political..., but there are degrees. From a position that confers the discipline of History its own entity, we can set some possible frameworks of the interpretation of the past. Despite all the problems that are later examined, the range of what can be stated is not as wide as initially seen. Conversely in fact, some historiographic consensuses exist that limit the field and, thus, leave aside a lot of what circulates through other means. Nonetheless, from a conception that reduces discipline to politics, the criteria applied to settle present-day ideological conflicts that are projected towards the past are not easily outlined. Apparently, the common answer is to exalt procedural notions like democracy or pluralism that, to say the least in History, do not guarantee any certain outcome. As the French Catholic intellectual, who lived between the two last centuries, Charles Péguy (cited by Todorov, 2010, p. 37) put it, "as laid out in the Declaration of Rights of Man (...) war can be declared against the whole world while the world is the world". It is true that this problem generally affects the axiological dimension of education: how to transmit political principles and values without performing indoctrination? Yet then the matter is, why do we want to plunge into such boggy land when the discipline already has enough problems as it is?

Finally, the last criticism of the civic conception of teaching History has to do with its nature contradicting its own starting point. These proposals tend to begin with

devastating criticism of conventional History with a nationalist background and moral intentionality. Paradoxically however, they end up passionately embracing the notion of reducing the teaching of the discipline to *lessons of History*. Evidently not those that legitimise Bourgeois western patriarchal colonialist ethnocentrism, but those that result from rebuilding the discipline on “some people’s critical knowledge whose citizenship claims from them the freedom and plurality of identities” and contribute to “build democracy not based on vertical and solipsist identities, but on those that are plural, anti-dogmatic and anti-essentialist” (Pérez, 2009, pp. 54 and 55). Without a doubt, they are all praiseworthy objectives but are, in the end, *lessons*.

As opposed to this civic-political drift, the conception that the present article defends is that teaching History at schools must not be based on the *memorising* of civic lessons, not even on their significant construction, but on progressive training in using instruments for making a critical analysis of the past, on initiating in the historian’s gaze. This is not based on any fundamental pre-established objective other than acquiring skills from the historiographic analysis and a set of epistemic values derived from it, which differs considerably from reciting substantive statements that *we* have decided are critical. In this way, the intention is to base the subject of History on the way of knowing the past that has been marked out *historically and historiographically* from other approaches, such as epic poetry or literature, to propose, from university departments, a certain way to approach the past that now seems to succumb to a renewed offensive of ideology, politics, emotions and feelings. Ultimately, it is a matter of teaching the discipline, even though it is necessary to previously define what we understand by it.

### **On objectivity and neutrality again**

The positions that prioritise the axiological dimension tend to start from the premise of denying the possibility of objectivity in History (Berger, 2019). They persist with the notion that any aspiration of objectivity is not only impossible, but also *bad faith*; that is, the will to hide the *objectivist’s* own ideology. Faced with such manipulation, the historian’s civic engagement tends to be conceited (Rüsen, 2019) and, in turn, tends to arouse unanimous applause. Such passion for the political dimension raises the question about what reasons led many to enter this disciplinary community. This ideological predilection may even lead us to think about a kind of epistemic transmutation from the deterministic objectivism of the Laws of History to activist subjectivism as a last resource to reach the same end.

From the ideologically opposite field, the very denial of objectivity tends to be based on a much more extreme epistemic approach: questioning reality itself, and much more historic reality, which is so hard to access. From this perspective, the presence of ideology (after all, human emancipation is not devoid of certain rhetoric charm) is not as important as the inexistence of something external to discourse on which some rule of correspondence applies. Ultimately, historic reality would be no more than a preferentially linguistic construct that results from historians’ attempts to access it. For post-modernity, all we are left with is texts about texts on which to build numerous narrations with aspirations of rhetoric effectiveness.

To conclude, the discipline as it has been outlined for two centuries is submitted to crossfire aimed at undermining its main foundation, which is none other than the aspiration of rational knowledge from the past based on some kind of correspondence with traces of the reality from this time. This is what distinguishes it from other forms of approaching the past, such as epic, hagiography, literature or simple moralising. The demarcation criterion of History as a discipline is purely procedural: source criticism. We

may think that this was Ranke's foundational contribution to the craft in the second quarter of the nineteenth century (Canales, 2021, p.44); a golden rule that, except for critical cases of structural ultra-theorising, is that we have all respected beyond our theoretical differences. In fact, the overwhelming and merciless criticisms made of Ranke did not derive so much from his ideal of source criticism, but from his denial of drawing up general laws from the outcomes of such a process. This was what he was being reproached for when he was accused of being a positivist who clung to facts: not rules about producing the datum, but him denying the pursuit of the process of knowledge proper to any social science. It is understood, then, that we can take as a starting point that the production of *relevant empirical evidences* (Longino, 1990, p. 43) of the past, according to some rules, has been the basis of the historian's craft.

We historians may be possibly going through a phase of disbelief of our profession's epistemic values. Indeed, the matter of the complex relation with the past is a topic of the discipline, almost an exemplar in Kuhnian terms. The past is interrogated from the present, and from the particular concerns of a *situated* historian, is insisted on. We have all written essays on this as an initiatory exercise during our training process as historians. Later we have begun our classes by relentlessly attacking the idea of a past *Truth*, with a capital T, that History reproduces. Personally, I am increasingly surprised by the zeal with which rigorous colleagues apply themselves to delegitimising their work, because, if objectiveness is not possible, why do we bother spending hours on something so tedious like emptying a census? Why do we not prioritise rhetoric elegance by *adjusting* the results? Likewise, finding teachers who so passionately work to undo the laying of the foundations of their own subject to start with seems difficult in teaching. It is simply unimaginable that a Physics teacher will start a course with 14-year olds by insisting that the complex mathematical formulae that they must learn to apply are merely some contingent formalisations that result from the data *built* by the machinery of scientists and their own theories and, ultimately, an atom is merely a metaphysical construct. Looked at from a perspective, our insistence on the problems of objectivity in History seems to derive from an honourable anti-positivist reaction, exercised by few disciplines, to dismiss simplistic and trivial conceptions, and to establish some cautions as an epistemic value in historical thinking. Nowadays however, the novelty lies in some of these considerations no longer being noble concomitant learnings to the profession, but a malicious torpedo against its waterline either because reality itself is inexistent, as previously indicated, or any attempt to access it is inevitably polluted by our axiological presumptions.

As these premises stand, the drawn conclusion can be none other than the denial of historiographic knowledge as a differentiated instance of values, ideologies, confessions, feelings and emotions. Anything goes in its radical version; anything about the past can be stated because its acceptance is based on possessing enough rhetoric resources to convince, or on the power to impose it (let's not forget this much more frequent pragmatic derivation). In its more restrained version, it is not a matter of anything goes, but that the rules of validating a historiographic statement no longer lie in any adjustment mechanism to relevant empirical evidences from the past, but in them operating in another domain. Which one? This question is not explained to us, but is deduced to lie in the ethical or the political domain, whether in its version of recurrent dialogue to reach the consensus or in the open cultural war, but also in the aesthetic and the emotional domains. All in all, it no longer lies in the traditional rules of the craft.

Let's be realistic; there is not much to argue against the postmodern position. To each their own with the rhetoric chosen in face of cancer. However, it is worth considering some specifications to those who conclude the impossibility of the objectivity from the

historian's political engagement. It is actually paradoxical that most of these modern arguments stem from a rancid nineteenth century conception of objectivity as adjustment to an existing essential Truth that had been previously overcome much earlier than the postmodern challenge. The evolution of the objectivity notion in the twentieth century philosophy of science has most certainly been radical, and has gone from its classic characterisation by neopositivism from the idea that science had no subject and was devised from *nowhere* (and was, thus, absolutely objective and neutral) to positions that denied the possibility of any type or degree of objectivity (post-modernity, a part of sociology and the history of science). Yet despite the appeal of these radical positions, the main body of the philosophy of sciences that has developed from Kuhn is channelled in the effort to theorise acceptable forms of objectivity with notions such as "degrees of objectivity", "intersubjectivity", among others (Gómez, 2003, pp. 299-305). This theorising is generated within the new realism framework, the new empiricism (including feminist empiricism) or the new experimentalism, currents in which we can find such important philosophers as H. Longino (1990), P. Kitcher (1993), I. Hacking (1983), among others.

Generally speaking, these philosophers stress the social and intersubjective dimension, and even the conventional one, of research. Nonetheless, they provide a central place for research outcome; that is, data acquired from manipulating the facts being investigated. In this context, objectivity lies in using methods, procedures and techniques that have been intersubjectively tested and accepted (agreed on) in scientific communities, in obtaining these outcomes during different experiments or investigations, in the intersubjective knowledge of the obtained data, and even in the convergence towards the truth. As E. Agazzi states (1996, p. 31), "what is observed using certain instruments, applying the correct rules of uses, is what scientific community accepts without objection". Thus, instruments and procedures are conventional, but what can be done with them and the results obtained are not.

This kind of objectivity is that which should rule historical research. In line with Longino's perspective, the first stage of objectivity in History would depend on historians' capacity to provide an effective explanation of their operational criteria of objectivation; in other words, clearly exposing operations that allow to establish what a datum is, if it has been verified, and if it has become a candidate for *relevant empirical evidence*. As indicated above, we are in this stage practically since Ranke's time and, ultimately, most of us in the craft are still doing, despite the postmodern challenge and the popularity of new approaches to the past. From this perspective, objectivity is no longer a matter of gaining access to the Truth, with a capital T, to become an intersubjective agreement about the rules that control the way to produce and handle historical sources; that is, about the rules of the craft.

Evidently this distinction does not do away with the problem of the historian's valuative and ideological implication in historiographic practice itself. The incidence of the social scientist's values, interests, ideology and prejudices in research is a classic in the reflection about social sciences that, far from being solved, has extended to natural sciences, particularly by feminist female philosophers of science. Longino claims that any scientific activity implies background axiological assumptions that the scientific method is incapable of eliminating in research and, therefore, in its outcomes. For this author, the only way to confront this type of elements present in any scientific task would be to make them objective by specifying them; that is, submitting them to public consideration in the scientific communities that can critically deal with them (Gómez, 2004, p. 161).

Such a reinforced leading role of the scientific community in the agreement about rules and in discussion about researchers' *background* would, for some, sound like a

definite victory of relativism and politics, but is, in fact, something much more prosaic. What is at stake here is not the main visions about justice or human emancipation, but simply the type of operations that are acceptable to support our statements. Could they be others in our case? Doubtlessly they could, but would not then be those of the discipline that we have known as History for more than one century.

In short, History as a discipline is a discourse about the past, among many others; but not all these discourses about the past are History, simply because they do not comply with a set of rules and operations that define the craft. In other terms, History is not the only discourse about the past, but is the only one that is History. At this point, History, as an academic discipline, is understood to be a differentiated knowledge supported on some premises which define the constituent consensus of the community. First of all, the aspiration to objectivity is situated. As P. Zagorin claims (1999, p. 2), objectivity “was not a chimera, but an intrinsic aspect of historical reason which could not be abandoned as an aim or standard without also abandoning history itself as one of the foremost of the human and social sciences”. Or as H. Paul has acknowledged (2015, p. 140) after numerous and tiresome circumlocutions, it is not a matter of renouncing other relations with the past, but of privileging “the epistemic relation over the others”, which means aspiring to objectivity. We simply cannot conceive History as a discipline without this horizon. Secondly, some kind of realism, even the conventional kind, without which such a pretension would make no sense: something beyond our discourse must compulsorily exist to which to *objectively* adjust it. Finally, certain procedures and operations to obtain and to submit to criticism the sources, and to produce *relevant empirical evidences*. Certainly it is not too much, but suffices to clear the wilderness of proposals that we have before us.

This conception of History as a craft leaves out many facets that are now fascinating and which we intend to introduce into the subject at school. To begin with, it poses a distinction between History and public uses of the past that goes much further than teaching and diffusion. We cannot deny the intrinsic relation between one and the other, but identifying both spheres does not seem possible. Before resorting to the obsolescence of distinguishing between any science and its application, we must bear in mind that, in our case, the fundamental debate is not between History and its public uses, but one about public uses of discourses on the past in general that, in accordance with that previously set out, might be History or not.

At this point we have no choice but to face the elephant in the living room: memory. In Spain at least, memory is in fashion. In fact, the terms memory and history are used as synonyms and books that are clearly about History are entitled *memory*, even when they respond to the most rancid positivist approach. Ultimately however, memory and History are still contradictory terms if we take into account the claim to objectivity set out above, even though the questioning such a distinction serves as a *topos* of the most modern historiographic reflections (Pérez, 2012, p. 252, Díez, 2020, p. 122). Memory is completely subjective and rules for it do not even exist. Nobody makes us submit our present reconstruction of the past to any type of procedure, and certainly not to avoid the coarsest narcissist masking, while some rules exist for what can be considered to be History. If only for this asymmetry of requirements, the expression *historical memory* is actually an oxymoron. In fact, Halbwachs himself (1980), whose quotation is chained by the champions of memory, established a radical opposition between collective memory and History by pointing out that History’s advance destroys collective memory precisely for its objectivity (Huici, 2007, p. 32). Whatever the case may be, the so-called *historical memory* requires a tale of the past with clear political intentionality in the present that can legitimately distort, and fake, this past; History simply cannot, and whoever does so

should not form part of the craft. It is not a matter of discrediting, but of simply separating spheres. History and memory are different things, just as ethics and politics are, and confusing them is malicious, and even dangerous (Muguerza, 1986, p. 30).

So, is the existence of engaged historians harmful? No, not at all. In fact, one author who is normally cited by critics of objectivity such as Rösen (2019) distinguishes between objectivity, which he does not renounce, and neutrality, whose impossibility he defends. In a similar vein, Haskell (1998, p. 150) challengingly states: "I see nothing to admire in neutrality. My conception of objectivity (which I believe is widely, if tacitly, shared by historians today) is compatible with strong political commitment". Objectivity and neutrality would not, therefore, be equivalents. Unlike the classic position that separates the researcher and the citizen, and claims that domains are not mixed, acknowledging that social and political engagement play a relevant role in the development of any social discipline seems more plausible. Indeed, there is no doubt that attention paid to certain themes emerges from such commitment. This is obvious in the labour movement, and even more so with women or subordinated minorities as ethnic groups, gay people and queers. Nobody can seriously postulate that these themes have been put on the table and would have played their present role if it had not been for the commitment of some History professionals. Indeed, the post-materialist thesis of epistemic superiority from dominated groups' viewpoint reinforces this idea (Gómez, 2019, pp. 85-7). However, it is not necessary to resort to these groups in which the ideological dimension is so explicit. Such apparently technical or internal matters like hunger undoubtedly stem from some kind of engagement when dealt with from a political dimension rather than as a *natural* result of food shortage (Zwarte and Arco, 2025).

Nonetheless, it is all a matter of time and degree. Do we really think that the best candidates to make the history of today's gay people are still gay activists? Evidently, this has not been the case of labour. Without openly questioning the contributions of trade unionists themselves, it is true that, for a long time now, the history of the labour movement is being developed by professional historians. Likewise, the feminist perspective in History has moved away from activism to become a serious theoretical relaying of the foundations of the craft, and other more recent commitments are expected to follow the same development. Or, for the sake of argument, has not criticism of the History of the Church being in ecclesiastics' hands been commonplace? Ultimately, what lies behind these misgivings and suspicions of militant or committed History? Well, some kind of notion of objectivity, a requirement to place at a distance the researcher from the study object that ensures unprejudiced study from which it is hard for those of us who have attended a faculty of History to shed. In line with this, H. Paul (2015, p. 78) notably dilutes the historian's political dimension by establishing that it acts in a very broad and generic sense and, moreover, constitutes a secondary effect of his/her work, but not of his/her main purpose. Doubtlessly this last situation emphatically marks the difference.

What can we say about the committed intellectual? Are we going to expect hours of dusty archives from the intellectual before something is said about the past? Of course not. In any case, the true matter is if the question still makes sense. The figure of the engaged intellectual seems to still lie in past times. Toni Judt (1992, p. 296) draws attention to the shift from the philosopher intellectual to the university specialist intellectual in the 1960s. Certainly, those who talk with aspirations of impacting society knowing what they are talking about do not seem to be a worrisome requirement. Actually instead, what we have today is no other than a caricature of the committed intellectual, an impostor who adapts to mainstream and renounces fulfilling the main task performed by the classic intellectual, which was no other than making society feel uncomfortable by questioning its more unshakable convictions. This, the intellectual's critical mission,



touches a raw nerve in debate about the alleged critical character with established Power of engaged History. Let's stop for a moment to think about what the discourses of Power are in our Western democratic societies. Can we really rigorously maintain that environmentalism, feminism or queer theory are presently<sup>1</sup> subordinated discourses alternative to Power after being assumed by most of our governments, the mass media and Academia itself? At least not in Spain and, we should add, this is fortunately so.

Let's leave aside historians' troubles to reconcile their ideological commitments and their public projection with their craft, and return to school and to the object of the present work: what History should be taught?

### **Back to school**

After the above considerations, I believe that we can much more accurately reformulate the question of what kind of discourse about the past we should work on in the History subject. What History do we want at our primary and secondary schools? An echo chamber of discourses about the past that address cultural change or a tool to critically analyse this past?

Tragically for us, we cannot aspire to both objectives. For a few decades it was possible to still be excited about the disciplinary critical analysis of the past being, at the same time, discourse of emancipation. Trust was placed in an analysis of the past that made criticism of the present possible within the framework of a project for the future (Fontana, 1982). After the harsh criticisms of military and nationalist History, the hegemony of Social History allowed beliefs that work was done at the same time *for* social change and *in* discipline, but these happy times came to an end. Nowadays, we have no main scientific theory of History that leads to emancipation. We are shipwrecked in a sea of values, ideology, feelings and emotions. With things as they are, we must opt between an ideological, public and engaged tale of the past and a disciplinary History that, at least, maintains objectivity as a horizon.

What this article proposes is History must be taught as the development of the understanding of the world that underlines it: the historian's gaze and the historical thinking on which it is based. To start with, this entails opposing the notion of teaching History as if it were a public use of History or as popularization. It involves, in turn, rejecting the centrality of memorising substantive contents, regardless of them coming from either old data or modern civic lessons. On the contrary, our proposal is basically procedural and prioritises that young people begin with the rudiments of the craft.

*How* to carry out such a proposal goes beyond the scope of this article, which has focused closely on arguing about *what* to teach. Nevertheless, an extremely appealing line of work exists. It is defended by Peck and Seixas (2008), and also by other authors like Wineburg (1991), and Lee and Ashby (2000), and has been set out in several works by specialists in the Didactics of History (Chávez, 2024). This perspective falls within the current that defends the need to teach to *make* History (Pla, 2005, p. 17). Carrasco and Pérez (2017, p. 282) characterise the proposal of the first cited authors as a conception of teaching History that centres on "understanding history as a method, as a way to investigate from this knowledge area and to, therefore, learn to think and reflect with history". S. Plá (2005, p. 39) stresses the back to academia nature of Wineburg's proposal and the rupture it implies compared to the prevailing cognitive approach from the beginning of the 1990s. As Carrasco and Pérez put it (2017, p. 285), "the expression

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<sup>1</sup> This article was written before Trump's victory, which is a worrying challenge to these hegemonic discourses..

‘thinking historically’ highlights the acquisition of cognitive or thinking skills specific to the discipline, which are necessary to suitably understand the data and pieces of information about the past’; in other words, about the rules of the craft.

By taking this approach, the subject of History becomes an area from which all discourses of the past are subjected to contextualised criticism. Complex didactic designs are not necessary so that this way of critically thinking ends by being extended to the present, which seems to be the universally accepted objective of education. It is in this leap to the present where this disciplinary conception of teaching History clashes with the memory conceptions of civic education since it also subjects its postulates to a critical and defunding discourse. Most of the trivial procedural conceptions of our civic education do not withstand an attack of historical thinking. Yet the key is that this is not a problem of History, but a problem of education in general and one that all of us must solve. However, this article is not about education and its purposes, but about teaching History. Evidently it is not a mission of this subject to offer convenient solutions to present dilemmas. History teachers have quite enough with offering instruments to draw back veils that mask human exploitation.

In everyday life in schools, this merciless critical dimension of the historian’s gaze blurs in practice the boundary that from a theoretical point of view stands between the disciplinary and civic conceptions of the subject because most of the activities proposed from the latter fit in the former. To start with, and by particularly paying attention to the Spanish concern, the conception herein defended includes a large part of what is known as *historical memory*, which is no more than pure, plain History. It seems a hard thing to defend that Franco’s repression is not History without also expelling the Holocaust from this field. From my point of view, the combative insistence on calling these traumatic and awkward events of the past “memory” is no other than questioning their presence in the curriculum through basic reasoning that any student (without forgetting interested political spokespersons) can easily develop. If they are not History, they are politics, and if they are politics, everything can be discussed, since it is not in vain that pluralism is the basis of our democracy. There is no other conclusion than democratically legitimising denialism. Thus, we arrive to the reduction to the absurdity of claiming penal punishment for those who develop to its ultimate consequences the attack against objectivity that the denouncers themselves have triggered. The paradox here is obvious, as well as depressing for the craft: any kind of historiographic objectivity is furiously fought to embrace the judicial Truth.

Strictly speaking, the historical memory problem at Spanish schools is none other than transferring to the curriculum the consensuses reached in the discipline. Conversely to what it might appear at first glance, it is no easy management in practice, but the fact that weaken the discipline right from the beginning scarcely helps. A simple example illustrates this assertion. We find two clashing historical propositions: one is the statement that the Franco Regime came about from a violent military coup against a democratic regime; the second is the descriptor of the syllabus of Higher Secondary Education year 2 of the Madrid Region: “The Popular Front. Public disorder. Violence and social conflicts” (Decree 64/2022, p. 218). The question to clear up is if both deserve the same consideration in the subject. Definitely not from the position herein defended. The first proposition is History because it forms part of the historiographic consensus, and the second is clearly tendentious and partisan. To be included in History, it would have to be reformulated within the framework of difficulties to consolidate the interwar democratic republican regimes of Europe, such as the Weimar Republic or the First Austrian Republic. Nevertheless, catching a glimpse of how it can be ruled out from civic conception is not seen because it is still strongly emotional historical memory, albeit that

of the inheritors of Spanish Civil War winners. It is no easy task to justify refusal to dialogue with them at school because they *feel* and *remember* and wish to transfer their felt memory to the civic level. Of course, it does not seem acceptable to prescribe to people what they must feel... or it does, but, at any rate, why do we want to get soiled in such a bog? If we persevere in taking this way, we open the door that may end with dialogue in science classes with terraplanners, antivaccinationists and ufologists. Do we really want this?

It is, therefore, understood that an academic conception of teaching History certainly does not exclude works about the traumatic and awkward past that openly claims us today. It is not in vain that “the historian is for whom the problem of the present is more their own”, according to M. Cruz (2006, p.150). However, dealing with it must be done from History, which imposes certain requirements: firstly, the obligation to restrict ourselves to transfer historical research outcomes to the subject; secondly, to avoid mystifications and to prioritise conceptual clarity. During the Spanish Civil War, the banal procedural resource of the use of violence does not apply because everyone killed. The same occurs with democratic anachronous fundamentalism because even moderate socialists have been hesitant about the value of democracy for years, and it certainly seems hard to conceptualise Stalinism from the 1930s as a democratic force no matter how much the Spanish Democratic Memory Law seems to expect it. It goes against the rules of the craft and draws us dangerously closer to the aforementioned tendentiousness. At this point, I understand that there is no need to specify that this is a disciplinary matter that derives from rigour in using concepts, not from judging value on the revolutionaries of the 1930s. At this level, Francoist return to Empire does not withstand the contrast with communist human emancipation.

Along another line, but one related to conceptual rigour, we are not authorised to speak about memory if there are no subjects who remember and, besides, in which case we should talk about memories in the plural. According to common sense, memory of either the Spanish Civil War or post-war repression does not fit in with schools today as a didactic resource because there is nobody there alive who remembers them. However, we can perfectly resort to the memories of the victims of the terrible violations of human rights in the Southern Cone or, in the Spanish case, of anti-Franco fighters. Resorting to memory in History classes is not only legitimate, but can be classified as *good* History to the point that paying attention to people experience has acted as a spearhead of historiographic renovation ever since the happy times of the hegemony of Social History. The fact that some have not understood something so obvious, namely that the objective study of the subjective is possible, and derive from their limitation all kinds of apocalyptic and apodictic admonitions about knowledge (Eley & Nield, 1995, p. 356) do not call the great potential of this didactic resource in the subject into question. The learning that every teacher can achieve from something so simple and mundane as a tale (or a picture) of the gruelling daily trip made by a recently immigrated female peasant from a shack of a home in the 1960s to clean in the centre of Barcelona or Madrid depends solely on their quality as a historian or an educator. In this case, there is no doubt that we are working on History from memory; in the former, we employ the past (and the legitimacy of the discipline) as the basis for a political tale. Teaching History can contribute to public policies of memory, but in no case can it be subordinated to them without denying the discipline.

We have acknowledged the many relations there are between History and historical memory, but the priority of this article is to clearly back the theoretical separation between both these spheres. Obviously every country needs a tale about its past, but it is no less obvious that a large part of this historical memory is mystification,

distortion, if not open historical manipulation. We can also add: fortunately, provided that it is clear that historical memory is not History and its validity does not, therefore, derive from any rule that corresponds to available empirical evidences from the past, but from its capacity to encourage fair co-existence about the common rejection of certain atrocities. So, if referring to a resistant France helps to somewhat conjure up today's pitiful situation, then let its exaltation at schools be welcomed, but, having said that, not in the History subject. Please let's not take the frame of mind of teaching in the History classes something that is historically false, something that clashes with the results of applying rules of the craft and, worse still, us making these rules explode because, with things as they are, we might regret it, and very much so. It is paradoxical that part of the left being convinced that, once the moorings of objectivity are untied, they will steer the boat in this sea of subjectivities, values, emotions and feelings in which it intends to convert History, when it is evident that barbarians have come over as being much more skilful in handling this.

Perhaps the main source of confusion in this debate about the sense of teaching History lies in confusing disciplinary teaching and education. Despite the moral and political importance of any historiographic approach in the present, historical memory and civic education are not tasks of the subject of History, but a mission of education. Schematically, they are not a disciplinary objective, but a cross-sectional educational one, which, therefore, involve the whole education community. Nobody denies the importance of values and politics in education; the matter is *how* and *from where* to work them. Regarding *from where*, it is more than paradoxical so much insistence in the civic nature of education while pitilessly reducing the importance of the subject whose disciplinary objective is to precisely fulfil this mission: agonising Philosophy. It is worth asking the civic curricula makers what has Political Philosophy been doing for centuries if it has not been of these questions. From my point of view, Political Philosophy should set up the axis on which all other disciplinary contributions would cross-sectionally rotate, but certainly not History.

Regarding History, we should temper our enthusiasm and restrict ourselves to our craft that, on the other hand, already presents a great potential for criticism of the present without having to unfold flags and hold up placards. Along the lines of applying this minimum of *ascetic self-discipline* that T.L. Haskell recommends (1998, p. 148), it would be worthwhile for History teachers to bear in mind the warning that Ferrer i Guardia, the libertarian pedagogue who was dreadfully shot in 1909 by the most uncouth Spanish right wing, made against impatient voices in his own field:

However, the Modern School works on children whom it prepares to be men through education and instruction and do not anticipate either love or hate, adhesions or rebelliousness, which are adults' obligations and feelings; in other words, it does not wish to collect fruit without having previously produced it from crops; nor does it wish to attribute a responsibility without endowed the conscience with the conditions that have to build its basis. Let the children learn to become men, and when they are, let them declare themselves to be in rebellion in good time (Ferrer, 1912, p. 61)

Let us have much more confidence in the complex intelligence of our students and in their ability to solve contradictions between reasoning and ideology during their formative process.

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**Contact address:** Antonio Francisco Canales Serrano. Facultad de Educación, UCM, C. Rector Royo Villanova, sn. 28040 Madrid, Spain. E-mail: antcanal@ucm.es