History and Moral Encounters

Part of the research project *History and Moral Encounters*, by Niklas Ammert (PI), Silvia Edling, Heather Sharp, and Jan Löfström

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Exploring the link between historical consciousness and moral consciousness: motivations, epistemological assumptions and moral themes

Silvia Edling

History and Moral Encounters (HiME)
In this paper we aim to conceptually deepen the understanding of the relationship between historical consciousness and moral consciousness by highlighting ideas of moral consciousness generated through theories of historical consciousness.

In relation to this overall aim the paper re-visits a) arguments for introducing historical consciousness as a concept during the 1970s and 1980s and the epistemological implications for moral consciousness that these arguments bring fore, and finally b) themes of moral consciousness and moral responsibilities generated within this epistemological perspective.
Three overall motivations for introducing historical consciousness:

- A) *harmful (for humans)*
- B) *abstract (since it is detached from human needs)*
- C) *illusion (since it overlooks the complexities of real life)*.

**History and Moral Encounters (HiME) PARADIGM SHIFT:**

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<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrow</td>
<td>broad</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dualistic</td>
<td>dialectic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Atomistic</td>
<td>relational</td>
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History is not neutral but value-loaded and influences people’s and groups of people’s life conditions.

History needs to reconnect to people’s experiences, practice, meaning-making and feeling.

History is not homogenous but heterogeneous (plural) and fragmented.

History is actively constructed by humans rather than merely existing passively.

History is linked to the present and future and is hence an important source for changing the world to the better (education holds a key position to promote change).
Themes linked to moral responsibility (1)

**Democratic endeavour**

- Focus of moral responsibility
- Description
  - Using past knowledge to create a present and future society together with others without repeating past ill-deeds

- Plurality of voice, expression, time, and senses
- Collective memory/the individual as part of a collective
- Creation of a society together with others
- Communication, language, and listening

Themes linked to moral responsibility (2)

Focus of moral responsibility

Emancipation

Description

Highlighting the conditions for groups of people in order to free them from oppression

History is not neutral but value laden

(Learning) history is a normative endeavour

History involves giving voice to/allow place for the silenced/invisible

History involves the use of power, hegemony, and ideology which influence the conditions for groups of people (abuse of history/history as war)

History implies an awareness how the present/future can be changed to avoid past oppression and violence

Linnért, Malmgren, & Thavenius 1983; Karlsson, 2017
Themes linked to moral responsibility (3)

Focus of moral responsibility

Identity/character formation

Description

Forging identities aware of others’ life conditions

Paying regard to and acknowledge certain moral and democratic values such as tolerance, everyone’s equal value, equality and respect

Exploring the relationship between “we” and “them”

Memory and/or oblivion for the sake of others

Feeling empathy and/or being sensitive to others life conditions/sufferings

Guilt, forgiveness, recognition, and reparation

Perception, interpretation, narrative, (hi)story

(Lozic, 2008; Karlsson, 2003; Rüsen, 1987)
Conclusion

- Consequently, whereas there are numerous publications about historical consciousness and about its moral significance there is no study conducted that gathers moral interpretations generated through theories about historical consciousness.

- The paper provides an orientation map for educational researchers and teachers as concerns the epistemological foundations of HiCo.

- The very motivation for broadening the scope of history (teaching and learning) is to avoid harming others, which renders the very heart of HiCo to be about stimulating an awareness of a moral consciousness.

- Central in HiCo and hence its focus on morality is the fact that it is broad, dialectical, relational, and pays regard to consequences of action.

- The democratic, emancipatory, and identity formational focus of moral responsibility in theories of HiCo enables a better understanding for educational researchers and (history) teachers regarding where the focus of history education lies.
Mapping the development of the concept of historical and moral consciousness in higher degree research theses.

Heather Sharp

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History and Moral Encounters (HiME)
Following the frequently named Anglo-Saxon or North American tradition of history teaching and learning, the term historical consciousness has not traditionally been part of the vocabulary used by history teachers and researchers in Australia.

With the increasing influence of international literature on research and teaching, however, this has changed quite significantly, especially post-2000 with the work of researchers such as Seixas, Rüsen, Gadamer, and Wineburg. Australian teachers, teacher-educators, and history education researchers often combine aspects of both the England and North American history curriculum and pedagogy (sometimes called methods) tradition with the German didaktik approach.

With the influence of this didaktik approach in mind, this paper reviewed PhD/Doctoral theses completed in Australia from 1980 to 2018 that included the term historical consciousness, moral consciousness, and/or historical and moral consciousness.

14 PhD theses in total—contained these terms.
- Only one thesis, completed in 2017, included the term historical and moral consciousness in a closed keyword search.
“Given postgraduate researchers are the largest group involved in educational research within Australia (Holbrook et al. 2000), the research they produce is significant in its formation of the research field. O’Connor and Yates (2010) agree that the dissertation literature is important because it often provides a ‘significant linkage’ between the academy and the field, given that many postgraduate researchers in education continue to work as teachers, and are therefore ‘well placed to be the sources of new ideas and developments’ (p. 130).” (Parkes, 2018, p. 78)
Context: Higher Degree Research in Australia

- Domestic HDR students supported by universities and the Australian government (highly competitive) scholarships, fee-waivers, funded research opportunities, and other funded mechanisms to complete their research.

- World Economic Forum: 8400 PhDs were awarded in Australia in 2014 (10% of PhDs awarded worldwide).

- Approximately 6.5-7.5% are awarded in the study field of education (stats from the 1990s and the 2000s).
### Data: Key terms in Australian Theses

#### Discipline

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Discipline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>History Education/School of Education</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences, including Archaeology, Anthropology and Sociology</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English (Literature)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Studies</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data: Researchers Included

Researchers Included More Than Once

Researcher
Seixas
5
4
3
2
1
0

Nora: sites of memory
Rüsen with H&M C
Gadamar
Wineburg
Rüsen

History and Moral Encounters (HME)
Case Study: AI2017 Thesis

- Two theses mentioned moral consciousness and both cited Rüsen while linking the concept with historical consciousness.

- AI2017 was the only researcher who significantly engaged with the concept of moral consciousness, as related to notions of citizenship. In this study, Rüsen’s (2004) assertion of historical consciousness as also encompassing moral and temporal consciousness was challenged in a discussion of the research findings where participants demonstrated moral consciousness, but not a sense of temporal consciousness.

- AI2017 focused on history education and the potential for the development of historical and moral consciousness as connected to development of identity (Rüsen), and the notion of a cosmopolitan historical consciousness as suggested by Seixas.

- AI2017 (as did three others) also draws on the second understanding of the self and historical consciousness as the concept of the historicised self.
  - The work of Rüsen in this area was common to three of the theses, specifically in recognising the historicity of the self as the historical interpreter.
Two theses made an acknowledgement of temporality in historical consciousness, incorporating the self and the relationship between past and present.

Distinctively, AI2017 focused on the notions of moral and temporal consciousness as elements of historical consciousness in the analysis, but stated in the discussion of results:

“All the participants in this study demonstrated a moral consciousness, evidenced in their understanding that human beings can act in ways that can be considered immoral, and that should not be repeated. However, this was not matched with a temporal consciousness consistent with the definition of historical consciousness [previously defined]” (AI2017, p. 196).

Temporality
Some Preliminary Thoughts

- The relatively scarce use of the terms historical consciousness and moral consciousness (and only once as a combined concept) could be attributed to a number of factors, such as:
  - Recency in the Australian history education sphere
  - Difficult to form part of empirical research currently as there is further need to define the concept and to work through its theoretical underpinnings to concretise its use or to apply it to an actual situation
  - On the fringe of research projects
    - Mainly frames the research project, in the literature review
    - Mentions because it is new and interesting, but it does not form part of the empirical research
  - Not clean cut in the way other research approaches or concepts are
    - It is a messy process, and for PhD students perhaps a risk they are not willing to take
    - Concern about going to confirmation committees and research ethics committees that are risk-adverse
    - It is not easy to define or keep bounded
  - While it is difficult, it is an important concept as it is a heuristic concept; gives rise to new questions, ideas, and problems to investigate.
In search for intersections of historical empathy and moral sensitivity: Swedish and Finnish lower secondary school students on a historical moral dilemma

Jan Löfström
Central concepts

- Historical empathy: ability to place oneself in the position of historical actors and understand their thoughts and affects in a particular social and cultural situation.
- Empathy: social-perspective taking that involves affective element. Empathy ability is central when people interpret moral aspects of a situation before proceeding to moral reasoning.
- Moral sensitivity: ability to perceive moral dimensions of a situation, understand what morally meaningful choices of action a person has and what consequences they may have (a cognitive and an affective component).
How congruent are levels of historical empathy and moral sensitivity, ‘level’ here understood as varying complexity of perspectives that a person gives expression to?

Student is requested to ponder a historically situated moral dilemma, the response is analysed using scales of historical empathy and moral sensitivity. What congruence between levels of historical empathy and moral sensitivity do students’ responses show?

Development of historical empathy and moral sensitivity in the sense of increased complexity (refinement) can be argued to have positive value as educational aim. How does the development of students’ abilities in historical empathy and moral sensitivity support each other, and what pedagogical solutions could enhance that dynamic?
Historical empathy and moral sensitivity scales

For example, Lee & Ashby 1987 (no distinct affective component):
- I – The ‘divi’ past
- II – The stereotyped past
- III – Every day understandings
- IV – Restricted historical understanding
- V – Contextualised historical understanding

For example, Jagger 2011:
- 1: Low level identification of ethical issues: issues relate to self-interest, unscrutinised rule following, personal risk, fear of punishment or lack of care.
- 2: Some basic recognition of ethical issues: issues reflect a questioning of whether there are other factors such as duties to others, principles or significant concern for others, but no clear identification of what these duties or principles might entail.
- 3: Some detailed recognition of ethical issues: specific reference to concepts such as justice, fairness, the greater good, rights, duties and conscience, but not clearly, or one-sidedly.
- 4: In-depth and detailed appreciation of ethical issues, articulated with an appreciation of different viewpoints, bearing in mind consequences to third parties and a broader picture with regard to society, the importance of duty, care and respect.
Conducting the Research

- An electronic set of activities, focused on a historical case involving moral dilemmas, based on from Christopher Browning’s *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (1992).

- Participants c. 250 ninth-grade students in Finland and Sweden.

- Open questions relating to the text and the place of moral reflection in history as a field knowledge.

- For example, Question 4: “Imagine you would have been in the battalion. What would you have thought and felt when you realised that you were given a different task than some of your comrades?”

  - In a village some Battalion units were ordered to escort male inhabitants to a labour camp whereas others were ordered to sort the villagers or to shoot women and children.
Some student responses to question 4

- Question 4: I would have been wondering why I got a different task than others. (107)
- Question 4: It would have been an honor but at the same I really wouldn't want to have the task because it would make me distressed: being one of the few who are asked to carry out the task, there would be a lot of pressure to do it right. (119)
- Question 4: If I would get a sorting or escorting task I would be happy I won't have to shoot anyone. On the other hand, I wouldn't want to be involved in any of the tasks but shooting people would be much worse anyway. I would surely feel bad for my comrades, especially if they would be close friends or I would otherwise know them well. (70)
- I don't really know what I would have thought. If I would have been alone sorting people, for example, I would have been the awful guy sorting people according to gender, age and ability to work. I would have been noticeable, and I wouldn't want that kind of reputation. If I would have been within a bunch of people, none would have spotted me. Still the task would have been really terrible and I couldn't have coped with it. (134)
- It depends. Had I got a more human task, I would have been thankful and kept quiet. But if I would have got a worse task, I would have resisted. Still, if I would have been a Nazi soldier I hardly would have ever thought killing Jews is wrong. It would all depend on what I would have been brought to believe in. But the present-day me would probably have killed oneself rather than be involved in operation like this. (154)
Identifying aspects of temporal orientation in students’ moral reflections: Preliminary results (indications) from the first empirical study

Niklas Ammert

History and Moral Encounters (HiME)
This study aims to identify and analyse 15-year old students’ expressions of temporal orientation by studying their reasoning on inter-relations between interpretations of the past, understandings of the present, and perspectives on a possible future. Their reasoning is based on an excerpt from a book describing a situation during World War II.

We will present an analysis of how one central element of historical consciousness – temporal orientation – can be conceptualised and operationalised, and the preliminary results, using a tool based on theoretical models by Jörn Rüsen and Ann Chinnery.
“History clothes values in temporal experience. Historical consciousness transforms moral values into temporal wholes”

(Rüsen, 2004, p. 67-68)

Previous research indicates theoretically that moral values and moral issues are crucial for developing a historical consciousness


A touchable past:
“[…] plastic, strong and moving images of the past […]”

(Kölbl 2009, p. 89)

Why in relation to moral reflection?
“No, I don’t think so. Nowhere in the world you will allow Nazis to run a country.”

(Student no 56, Question 3)

“It all depends on who gets the power in today's society, but actually I don't think so. Everyone who lives today in Europe and is more than 10 years old is basically aware of World War II and knows how horrible people could be. There are so many who have told their stories from labor camps, etc. and the stories are completely miserable and unimaginable, so I do not think that people could let it go that far.”

(Student no 90, Question 3)
“In this case, I think that the moral for me today would be the few people who opposed and refused the task of participating in the event. I think it gave me that you should not lose yourself but stick to what you think is right and what feels good in your stomach.”

(Student no 63, Question 2)

“Yes in Russia. Putin wants to take back what was Russia's (imperial Russia). The Soviet Union did the same to people but in worse ways, such as letting people starve. I think Russia will at least be the reason why it will be such a disaster in Europe if it now happens because they are the country that wants their "land" back, at any cost.”

(Student 130, Question 3)
Conclusions

- The analytical tools seem to work, separately but also combined in the matrix.
- It provides a distinct categorization of answers.
- Traditional type and genetic type ("Do you think a similar situation...")
- Exemplary type ("Is there a message to you...")
- Some indications/results are expected, e.g., genetic type reasoning on if a similar situation could occur today or in the future.
- Strong exemplary and existential profile of combined temporal orientation and moral approach.
- Some results are unexpected, a high degree of factual-based reasoning on the moral issues. BUT! Existential arguments implicit.
- Students who express an existential approach do not neglect factual knowledge.
- Students have the ability to inter-relate temporal dimensions (if they are asked).
Questions and Concluding Remarks

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