

# The Idea of Historical Synthesis, Henri Berr and the relationship between History and Sociology in France at the beginning of the Twentieth Century

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## **Abstract**

The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed a shift in intellectual attitudes. The most important consequence of this change was the birth of a number of new social sciences, led in the first instance by the sociology of Emile Durkheim and his group. The Durkheimians were especially critical of current historical practice and the response of the leading academic historians, exemplified by Charles-Victor Langlois and Charles Seignobos' *Introduction aux études historiques*, did little to counter this accusation.

The most incisive response came from a figure outside the historical establishment, a young doctor of philosophy, Henri Berr. In his writings and through the pages of his journal, *Revue de synthèse historique*, Berr attempted to offer an alternative to the Durkheimian sociology by placing history at the heart of the social sciences. This paper seeks to evaluate both the contribution of Berr to the development of historiography and the consequences of his ideas for the relationship between history and sociology.

## **Introduction: An intellectual conjuncture**

This paper deals with a particular aspect of a wider intellectual revolution in the human sciences at the turn of the twentieth century. Throughout Europe and in France especially, a number of writers in different fields began to revise the prevailing intellectual orthodoxies. In time a number of commentators would come to label this shift as a "Crisis of Historicism,"<sup>1</sup> yet in certain critical aspects this term fails to do justice to the complexities of the movement it was supposed to designate. In fact, the leading theorists of the "Crisis" were not conventional historians, if they were historians at all.<sup>2</sup> Rather, they were a group of intellectuals and academics seeking answers to the philosophical and methodological questions raised by the emergence of a number of new "social" sciences.

Sociology was the chief of these new social disciplines emerging in France in the late nineteenth-century, led by its agitator-in-chief Emile Durkheim. Constrained by the traditionalist French education system Durkheim had been forced to undertake pre and postgraduate studies, somewhat ingloriously, in philosophy (Clark, 1973: 166-7).<sup>3</sup> However, if the constraints of the university examinations system had failed to provide him with an adequate forum for expression Durkheim wasted little time upon his appointment, in 1887, to a position at the University of Bordeaux in announcing his agenda. His lectures that year, as ostensibly *chargé de cours* in pedagogy, represented what Harry Alpert (1937) called 'France's first university course in sociology' (pp. 311-7). In it Durkheim turned his fire on the academic historians who dominated the administration of higher education in France at that time, charging them with having contributed little more than 'vile and arbitrary classifications, vain erudition, useless and dead compilations.' (Keylor, 1975: 113.)

The next decade witnessed the continued expansion of academic sociology in France and, as a corollary, the growing confidence of Durkheim and his disciples. Already by 1889 sociology was established as a separate academic discipline at Bordeaux and in 1893 René Worms founded its first professional journal, the *Revue internationale de sociologie* (Clark, 1973: 147-54).<sup>4</sup> In 1896 Durkheim was appointed to a chair in social science at Bordeaux and in collaboration with his most prominent followers launched *L'Année sociologique*, which quickly became the recognised organ of sociological study throughout Europe. By the end of the century the youthful sociology was beginning to live up to many of the ambitious claims of its founder and the previously omnipotent historians realised they were in danger of being relegated, in Durkheim's infamous formulation, to the role of 'laboratory technicians.' (Keylor, 1975: 114.)

The majority of responses from historians to the threat posed by the claims of sociology were reactionary. Nevertheless, perhaps the most comprehensive and comprehensible were provided by two professors of the Sorbonne, Charles-Victor Langlois and Charles Seignobos, whose chief aim was to establish the methodological basics of the burgeoning *méthode historique*. During the academic year 1896-7 they began the Sorbonne's first course in historiography, which aimed to teach students 'what historical studies are and what they should be.' (Langlois & Seignobos, 1898: xvi.) The philosophical consequences for historical studies of these lectures were brought into the public domain with two books by the Sorbonne methodologists: in 1898 they published a collaborative volume, *Introduction aux études historiques*, and in 1901 Seignobos' *La Méthode historique appliquée aux sciences sociales* was released. Although direct references to Durkheim and the sociologists were few and far between there can be little doubt that the attempt to defend the "scientific" credentials of *la méthode historique* stemmed from the growing criticism of social scientists in this regard.

Langlois and Seignobos attempted to counter some of these criticisms by defending the autonomy and distinctiveness of the historical method. Seignobos

in particular criticised the academic school of history for its overbearing emphasis on document-based research and recognised the mediating role of the historian in the processes of selection and synthesis that make up the essential final stages in the construction of a work of history. Nonetheless, both (Langlois especially)<sup>5</sup> remained convinced of the serious achievements in French history during the last three decades of reform and were extremely wary of allowing the much discredited “philosophy of history” and its ‘puerile generalisations’ in via the back door.

However, there was a small group of historical thinkers more attuned to the generalising spirit of the social sciences and, to a lesser extent, the philosophy of history. In many cases they were not conventional academic historians; rather they were academics on the cusp of the institutional core of the French university system. As a result their place in the intellectual history of the era is less well defined, especially in the literature outside France. One of these thinkers, who is especially important to later developments, is Henri Berr. Although a marginal figure in English-language historiography, Berr, as we shall see, built a mini-empire outside the traditional administration. In so doing, he provided the foundation for the world-famous *Annales* school of history of Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch, both of whom collaborated closely with Berr during the early stages of their academic careers.

The centrepiece of Berr’s philosophy of history was what he called “historical synthesis.” Through a synthetic - both empirical and theoretical, but also ecumenical -approach to historical and social questions Berr hoped to offer an alternative both to the imperialistic aspirations of Durkheimian sociology and the anti-theoretical approach of *la méthode historique*. I will deal with the specifics in due course, but needless to say it is my contention that Berr’s idea of historical synthesis had revolutionary implications for the relationship between history and the numerous new social-scientific disciplines, particularly sociology, which Berr viewed with cautious respect. Although he undoubtedly viewed history and psychology as the two most central social sciences, he recognised the achievements of the Durkheimian school in challenging intellectual orthodoxies.<sup>6</sup>

### **Henri Berr: his life**

Before going on to discuss Berr’s contribution to French historiography it is essential to establish the key features of his biography. Born in 1863 at Lunéville in the Lorraine region of eastern France into an artisanal family of Jewish stock Berr completed a distinguished career at the local collège before moving to Paris and the lycée Charlemagne. At the lycée he gained his licence in rhetoric and was admitted to study at the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure, in 1881. At the Ecole Normale Berr was taught, most significantly and like Durkheim before him, by the historian Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges and the philosopher Émile Boutroux. In 1884, having graduating fourth in his year in the agrégation

Berr went on to teach at lycées in Tours, Douai and Sceaux before returning to Paris in 1889 to teach at the lycées Buffon, Louis-le-Grand and Henri-IV, a post he held from 1896 until his retirement from the conventional education system in 1925. Despite completing his doctorate with a traditional dual thesis in 1898 Berr never went on to teach within the newly formed *Université*. The theoretical half of his doctoral thesis, published under the title *L'Avenir de la philosophie* (Berr, 1899), was widely rejected within academic circles and his radical ideas about historical method alienated him from future employers (Bourel in Biard, et al., 1997: 9-19 and Candar & Pluet-Despatin, 1997: 9-15.)

Yet it seems this role as perennial outsider suited Berr and he quickly set about creating his own administrative system outside the traditional institutional frameworks. The first task was the establishment of a journal, the *Revue de synthèse historique*. In its first editorial (Berr, 1900) Berr was careful to point out that 'it is not necessary for the word *theory* to create unrest: it does not necessarily or absolutely call for vague or too general responses, formulations from thinkers with no practical experience of history. We would always like to have and count on obtaining articles on the methods of all the diverse historical sciences.' Indeed, he argued that theory could provide 'common ground' for historians of all types, both between themselves and also with philosophers, scientists and critics (pp. 1-2).

Above all Berr was concerned that the historians, as a result of their 'preoccupation with a "bonne méthode"', had allowed the sociologists to appropriate a large part of the possible realm of historical science; indeed, he feared that they would, given the opportunity, 'absorb history entirely within sociology.' Although he conceded that the Durkheimians ought to be congratulated for recognising the importance of 'that which is social in history' and for developing a 'precise, experimental, comparative method' for the study of such phenomena, Berr remained convinced that history ought to play a central role in the development of this new trend: 'Historical synthesis does not confuse that which has already begun to be understood, but helps all the diverse groups to accomplish their proper tasks and to collaborate in conceiving the communal *oeuvre*.' (pp. 3-6.)

In its early stages the *Revue de synthèse historique* sought to establish, via a number of articles from leading European thinkers and young French academics alike, the basics of this new philosophy. In addition to Berr's editorial the first issue also carried an article from Berr's mentor at the Ecole Normale, Emile Boutroux, on 'Histoire et Synthèse' and a review of current German trends in historical method from Karl Lamprecht, in addition to the first contributions to a protracted debate in the pages of the journal between Berr's closest early collaborator Paul Lacombe and the Romanian historian André Xenopol.<sup>7</sup> Later issues included essays from Durkheim<sup>8</sup>, Fustel de Coulanges<sup>9</sup>, the German philosopher Heinrich Rickert<sup>10</sup> and the Italian philosopher of history Benedetto Croce<sup>11</sup>. The pick of the articles from the less well-known collaborators came

from a young Durkheimian economist called François Simiand and instigated a broader debate between a number of leading figures in the academic establishment.<sup>12</sup> (Reberieux in Carbonnel & Livet 1983: 219-30; Fugler in Biard, et al., 1997: 173-88.)

The journal successfully established Berr as a permanent fixture in the French academic establishment and provided a forum for the development of his radical philosophy. Recognition was finally demonstrated for his achievements when in 1903 Louis Liard, the higher education administrator and reformer, set in motion plans for a chair in historical method at the Collège de France and encouraged Berr to put his name forward. However, the process of selection within the Paris university system required each applicant to canvas support from within the intellectual community and although Berr endeavoured to meet the rigorous standards the post eventually went to one of the central coterie of academic historians, the editor of the traditionalist *Revue historique* Gabriel Monod (Keylor, 1975: 138; Siegel, 1970: 332-3).

In spite of this disappointment Berr remained committed to the task at hand and his enthusiastic approach began to reap rewards in a rather different manner, namely through the growing support for his project amongst the new generation of historians graduating from the universities. Lucien Febvre, who would become Berr's closest ally in the historical establishment and go on to found, with fellow Berr collaborator Marc Bloch, the world-famous *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, remembered in the pages of the *Revue* in 1925: 'We were a group of young historians at the *École normale* who were beginning to find our studies banal, and were just about to quit when in 1900, our interest in history was refired by the appearance of the *Revue de synthèse historique*.' (Quoted, Siegel, 1970: 328.) Febvre spoke for a generation of new historians, a fact perhaps best reflected by the great success his own interpretation of the Berr philosophy enjoyed. Henri Irenée Marrou, a leading philosopher of history in France after World War II, also credited Berr with great advances in his field, particularly for expanding awareness of the neo-Kantian critique of nineteenth-century "positivism".

As the number of Berr's collaborators increased, so it became possible for a greater amount of work in the realm of historical synthesis to be done. Already before the First World War Berr was planning a multi-volume history, a modern historical encyclopaedia, a "library of synthetic history" (quoted, Pluet-Despatin in Biard, et al., 1997: 242) to complement the theoretical work being done in the pages of the *Revue*. During 1912 and 1913 he began to write to fellow academics and prospective contributors and by 1914 a prospectus was ready for release. This prospectus, which would reappear in 1920 as the preface to the first volume proper in the series, explained how its aim would be a 'Universal History' taking its inspiration from the German project of *Weltgeschichte* but adding a distinctly French twist. 'Science and life', he wrote, 'this formula can express the ideal to which we wish to adhere.' Furthermore, Berr (1920) hoped

that the series would provide the perfect balance between 'science' and 'erudition'.

Of course, such a task was not so easily accomplished so it is fortunate that Berr's missionary zeal was clear from the very first moment:

The enterprise will be like a vast experiment which will be realised bit by bit, before the eyes of the public, for the great profit of historical science, and where the ideas put forward for testing will be confirmed or rectified ... Each [volume] will be an individual *oeuvre*, carrying the mark of a personality ... each will have its own particular destiny. (p. vii.)

In order to achieve such a lofty goal Berr needed to find collaborators of the highest order, not to mention those sympathetic to his cause. It is a testament to the growth in interest in his ideas that, as Jacqueline Pluet-Despatin has shown, the overwhelming majority of the prospective contributors suggested by Berr in the prospectus of 1914 were traditional *universitaires*. (Pluet-Despatin in Biard, et al., 1997: 251-3.) Indeed, not only did he succeed in making the series one of the most popular historical collections of the twentieth century (it is still running today) but, as he had promised in the preface, several of the volumes became classics in their own right.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the increase in the amount of his time being undertaken with editorial duties for both this new collection and the *Revue de synthèse historique*<sup>14</sup> Berr continued to dedicate himself to the expansion of his empire. Undaunted by a second failure of candidature at the Collège de France in 1912 and merely slowed down by the intervention of war in 1914 he continued to plan the creation of a permanent home for the synthetic ideal. In 1925 the final part of the original master plan was realised with the inauguration of a Fondation "Pour la Science", the Centre International de Synthèse (CIS) at l'Hotel de Nevers in the centre of Paris. Berr was forced, as a result, to resign from his post at the lycée Henri-IV but, with his own administrative system now in place, he no longer needed to worry about that elusive lectureship at the University of Paris.

The CIS became the home to a number of activities: its principle meetings were published annually as the *Bulletins du Centre international de synthèse* and it hosted a number of Semaines de synthèse, which, as the name suggests, debated a variety of issues related to the synthetic project. (Neri in Biard, et al. 1997.)<sup>15</sup> In addition, Berr began work on a project for a *Vocabulaire historique*. (Platania, 1996.) With the foundation in 1929 by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre of the *Annales* the pressure of the guardianship of social scientific history was relieved from Berr's own review and in 1930 it altered its title to simply *Revue de synthèse* and began to focus on the broader issues of science emanating from the CIS.

By the beginning of the 1930s Berr was in charge of a largely autonomous institution, and with the mounting academic success of both his young disciples and their counterparts in other social scientific disciplines many of the more traditional pockets of resistance were beginning to crumble. Although he began to concentrate more energy on a new theme (the history of science<sup>16</sup>) Berr remained a close ally of Febvre and continued to be active in the historical field until his death on the 19<sup>th</sup> November 1954, thereby ensuring his influence on yet another generation of academics.<sup>17</sup>

### **Berr's idea of historical synthesis**

As has already been mentioned, the guiding philosophical principle of Henri Berr's *oeuvre* was the idea of synthesis. However, what will be less clear from the biographical detail already discussed is the nature of that theory of synthesis and its relevance to the human sciences. Indeed, it is my belief that Berr's philosophy represents a point of convergence for the two major themes in what I have called the Crisis of Historicism, namely social science and philosophy of history.

At the beginning of Berr's career the reputation of the philosophy of history was at an all-time low in French academic circles. It had been roundly dismissed by the *universitaires* of the Sorbonne and the *Revue historique* as a German canker or intellectual dilettantism capable of producing naught but speculative generalisations about the historical past. As we have seen, many of the academic historians feared that the growth of sociology might lead to the return of this discredited practice and Gabriel Monod, in his review of Berr's doctoral thesis, accused the young lycée professor of a similar crime and suggested historians might find little of interest in the theory of historical synthesis. (Siegel, 1970: 325.)

As a result, Berr, like Durkheim before him, was forced to restrain some of the philosophical tendencies of his methodological ideas in order to make them palatable to an academic audience. Take for example this passage from the inaugural editorial of the *Revue de synthèse* (Berr, 1900):

Let no one fear a return to the philosophy of history, by which is meant – for the word itself is not intrinsically bad – a priori metaphysics, clouds in theory and, consequently, utopias in practice. It would be unfortunate to confuse generalizations [sic] born of fantasy or ratiocination with those based on acquired knowledge. It is a science that we wish to practice here, true science, science in its entirety. None may enter here who does not bring with him a sound method. (pp 7-8.)

On the other hand, the historians could not continue to reject the claims of the sociologists without serious consequences for the future of the historical method:

Perpetual repetition is ridiculous [Berr had written in 1899]; human energy must not be wasted at random or without any apparent result; historical research must ultimately come to an end. In order for that to happen, it must, without ceasing to be scientific, respond to the preoccupations that had caused the philosophy of history to be born. (Berr, 1899: 418-9; quoted, Keylor, 1975: 130.)

The nature of this balance between 'science' and 'philosophy' became clearer in Berr's book *La Synthèse en histoire* (1911). In that text he distinguished between 'two degrees of synthesis': 'erudite synthesis' and 'scientific synthesis' (p. 3). Erudite synthesis was encapsulated by the current 'fashion' for the word's use in recent historiography and exemplified by the definition provided by Langlois and Seignobos in their *Introduction aux études historiques*. Simply put, each individual work of history represented a synthesis of the available facts and a wider historical synthesis was made possible by the systematic process of revision and correction; the construction of truly scientific historical knowledge was considered to be a cumulative process (pp. 5-14.). This, in Berr's opinion, was the status of historical science at the turn of the twentieth century and he admitted that such a development was unsurprising. The possibilities for erudite historical synthesis were infinite; the available historical material insurmountable in its totality. In other words, the current state of affairs could carry on indefinitely.

In which case why is it possible for us to perceive a crisis in historical knowledge? For Berr the answer was simple, it is the consequence of a particular 'need ... inherent in our nature. Analysis and synthesis are logically inseparable. Usually, one or the other dominates.' (p. 19.)<sup>18</sup> However, Berr differed from others who had recognised this trend because he did not classify it as evidence of the pernicious consequences of the 'philosophy of history' but, on the contrary, understood it to be the logical maturation of 'true science'. 'Historical synthesis must be science, [he argued,] true and complete science. It is exactly that which is meant by the word synthesis; it implies that we begin with analysis and surpass it.' (p. 23.)

It was this careful balance between 'erudition' and 'synthesis' which Berr believed separated his epistemology from that of the Durkheimians and that not only made it more scientific but also better suited to the domain of history. Moreover, if Berr felt a particular affiliation to any of the social sciences it was more likely psychology than sociology. On the other hand, he did recognise that the greatest advances in this area had been achieved by sociologists and encouraged them to contribute similar work to the *Revue de synthèse historique*, as well as commissioning Edmond Goblots to provide summaries of recent work conducted in the pages of *L'Année sociologique*.<sup>19</sup> (Prochasson in Biard, et al., 1997: 70-4.) 'Indeed,' explains William Keylor (1975), '[Berr] contended that history could discover its *raison d'être* "only through sociology" while history alone could help sociology to "confirm its findings" and therefore "become efficacious." Neither is a true science in itself, [Berr] claimed, but the two are complementary aspects of a

*unified science of society* that is simultaneously speculative and practical, [and] which he hoped would revive and transform the old discredited philosophy of history.’ (p. 131: emphasis added.)

Berr (1911) developed a philosophical foundation for this ‘unified science of society’ by distinguishing three levels of ‘causality’ – ‘contingency’, ‘necessity’ and ‘logic’ – each relating to the unique contributions of the three disciplines we have discussed. History by its fastidious research into the actions of individuals, sociology through its knowledge of social institutions and philosophy’s innate understanding of the human intellect all combined to produce a holistic approach to the human sciences. It is through this combination that, as Berr himself put it, ‘synthesis will blossom into practical results. It will become the mistress of life ... Not only will it make clear to Man his role in society, but it will help him to become conscious of his role in the universe.’ (pp. 228-9.)

### **Conclusion: The fortunes of the relationship between history & sociology since Berr**

Unfortunately, despite such lofty ideals the relationship between historians and sociologists did not significantly improve until much later. As Peter Burke (1980) (himself a leading social historian) has observed, ‘each group tends to perceive the other in terms of a rather crude stereotype.’ Indeed, his reference to historians’ characterisation of sociologists as ‘people who state the obvious in a barbarous and abstract jargon’ and the sociologists’ respective view of historians ‘as amateurish myopic fact-collectors without a method,’ (pp. 13-4) although a caricature of sorts, harks back to the early debates between the two parties discussed in the introduction to this paper. The principle source of this ‘differentiation’ seems to have been the debate started during the 1880s in Germany by Wilhelm Dilthey, who rejected early sociology (as practiced by Comte and Spencer) and philosophy of history as ‘pseudo-scientific’ and ‘drew a famous distinction between the sciences, in which the aim is to explain from outside (*erklären*), and the humanities, including history, in which the aim is to understand from within (*verstehen*).’ This distinction between *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften* was then given its most famous formulation a decade later by Windelband, as “idiographic” human sciences and “nomothetic” natural ones. This philosophical approach was continued in the twentieth century by Berr collaborator Benedetto Croce and English philosopher R. G. Collingwood (p. 18).

A further blow to the academic collaboration of historians and their social scientific allies was dealt by an important methodological breakthrough in social anthropology, named by its first systematic practitioner, Bronislaw Malinowski, as “field work.” Burke describes this new method, developed during the 1920s and soon becoming the central focus of much new sociological research, as a direct response by social scientists to ‘practical’, ‘professional’ and ‘intellectual’ needs.

Sociologists were not only desperate for the 'raw material' on which to base their work, and which the historians had in large part been incapable of providing, but also for a method which reflected the specificity of their discipline. In addition, a new theoretical trend towards 'a functionalist approach', which dismissed 'Historical explanations ... as speculative and ... irrelevant.' (pp. 21-3.)

Ironically, at the same time as many social scientists were abandoning historical data for present-centred, functionalist modes of thought, historians, many of them French and collaborators of Henri Berr, were starting to elaborate a "new" social history. The two most important of these historians, Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, we have already encountered. Their journal, the *Annales*, was initially intended as an international project in the wake of the First World War, but foundered on the issue of collaborating with German historians, whose intellectual isolation had already begun in some earnest. In its national incarnation it published its first issue in 1929 and, despite remaining outside the academic establishment and relying on the contributions of Bloch, Febvre and their close colleagues at the University of Strasbourg and old friends from their time at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, quickly established itself as a home for an alternative historical approach. Its success was institutionalised after World War II as Febvre and his eventual successor Fernand Braudel set about providing it, just as Berr had done before them, with a series of professional organisations and using them to train a vast 'school' of future *Annalistes*. From its first issue the *Annales* had accepted contributions from social scientists and historians of all hues and it remains a beacon of innovative social theory right up until the present.<sup>20</sup>

However, despite the efforts made but such social-scientific histories as Braudel's *Mediterranean* they failed to produce a successful rapprochement between history and sociology.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, it was not until the 1960s that thorough-going historical sociology and sociological history was produced. What I mean by thorough-going has been explained by Philip Abrams in his book, *Historical Sociology*; that is, the recognition that, 'in terms of their fundamental preoccupations ['human agency' and 'social structuring'], history and sociology are and always have been the same thing.' Indeed, those 'boundary disputes' which have occurred in the past 'rest on a confusion between principle and practice, a failure to distinguish clearly between what history and sociology require historians and sociologists to do ..., a failure to separate the logic of explanation from the rhetoric of academic interests.' As a result, it takes time for this shared 'problematic' to become apparent to both sides. The historians' 'self-consciousness' about 'structuring,' perhaps a little surprisingly, came first, during the 1960s, exemplified in the work of Edward Thompson, Barrington Moore, Jr., Lipset, Charles Tilly and, a little later, Immanuel Wallerstein.<sup>22</sup> Then, during the 1970s, a number of sociologists began to recognise 'the relevance of time' to their work, notably E. A. Shils, John Barnes, Pierre Bourdieu and Norbert Elias, whose *The Civilising Process* had actually been published some forty years earlier but only received academic recognition after its publication in English in

1978.<sup>23</sup> These were followed, in 1979, by what Abrams viewed as the watershed publications of Dawe's essay on 'Theories of Social Action'<sup>24</sup> and Anthony Giddens' *Central Problems in Social Theory*, both of which condemned the old 'problematic of action and structure' in favour of the more general 'problematic of structuring' (Abrams, 1982: ix-xvii; Burke, 1980: 28).

However, these studies were accompanied by more exploring the common ground of both history and sociology with a number of other social and human sciences, including economics, anthropology, demography, geography, philosophy, literature and psychology. Their analyses then began to form the background to a new theoretical 'problematic': postmodernism. Already by the time Abrams was writing a number of poststructuralist thinkers had started questioning, as their name suggests, the logic and value of structuring.<sup>25</sup> The principle consequence for historians, if not for all social and human scientists, seems to have been a shift in preoccupation from social to cultural questions concomitant with the obligatory methodological posturing. However, this has not necessarily meant abandonment of sociological modes of thought but rather their refraction through a cultural prism.<sup>26</sup> One can only hope that as the postmodern dust begins to settle these old interdisciplinary ties, created more than a century ago by men such as Henri Berr, will be taken up with renewed vigour.

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## Biography

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<sup>1</sup> The term came from German philosophy of history and, in particular, Karl Heussi's book *Der Krisis des Historismus* (Tübingen, 1932), although the first proper analysis was provided by Ernst Troeltsch in his book *Der Historismus und Seine Probleme* (Tübingen, 1922). More recent analysis has been provided by George Iggers in his *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover, NH, 1997) and in C. R. Bambach's *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, for example, was a philosopher; Emile Durkheim, as we shall see, was the founder of academic sociology; and Max Weber, although trained as an economic historian, is better known for his work as a theoretical social scientist and methodologist.

<sup>3</sup> He placed bottom but one in his year (1882) at the Ecole Normale in the agrégation. His teachers, however, were rather more complementary about his abilities.

<sup>4</sup> In the same year (aged just 24) Worms also set up the Institut Internationale de Sociologie and began a series entitled *Bibliothèque des Sciences Sociales*, which would become 'the leading sociological series in the world.' Two years later, with fellow collaborators from the RIS and the IIS, he created the *Société de Sociologie de Paris*.

<sup>5</sup> He was a graduate of the Ecole des Chartres, the training house of the "auxiliary sciences of history"; i.e. archaeology, palaeography, bibliography and philology.

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<sup>6</sup> See below, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Boutroux, 'Histoire et Synthèse', pp. 9-13; Lamprecht, 'La Méthode historique en Allemagne', pp. 21-7; Lacombe, 'La Science de l'histoire après M. Xenopol', pp. 28-51; Xenopol, 'Les Faits de répétition et les faits de succession', pp. 121-36.

<sup>8</sup> 'De la Méthode objective en sociologie', 2 (1901) pp. 3-17.

<sup>9</sup> 'Une Leçon d'ouverture et quelques fragments inédits', 2 (1901) pp. 241-63.

<sup>10</sup> 'Les Quatres modes de l'Universel en histoire', 2 (1901) pp. 121-40.

<sup>11</sup> 'Les Études relatives à la théorie de l'histoire, en Italie, durant les quinze dernières années', 5 (1902) pp. 257-69.

<sup>12</sup> 'Méthode historique et science sociale', 6 (1903) pp. 1-22 & 129-57.

<sup>13</sup> The most obvious is Bloch (1939-40) *La Société féodale* (2 vols, Paris). Other important contributions under Berr's editorship include Febvre (1942) *Le Problème de l'incroyance au XXe siècle : La religion de Rabelais* (Paris), Brehier (1937) *La Philosophie du Moyen Âge* (Paris), Halphen (1949) *Charlemagne et l'empire Carolingien* (Paris) and Vendryes (1921) *Introduction linguistique à l'histoire* (Paris).

<sup>14</sup> Berr's archive at the Institut Memoire des Éditions Contemporaines (IMEC), in addition to a number of the archives of his collaborators, contain a vast correspondence relating to the management of both projects.

<sup>15</sup> Neri explains that initially each *Semaine* had two 'themes', one relating to the natural sciences and the other to the human sciences, but that, from 1933 onwards they 'were unified under a single issue of communal interest.' pp. 209 n. 18.

<sup>16</sup> See, in particular, the foundation of another journal, *Science: L'Encyclopédie annuelle*. The first issue was published on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 1936 hoping to "excite a curiosity of spirit in a large part of the public". (Quoted, Candar & Pluet-Despatin, 1997: 21.)

<sup>17</sup> As proved in the commemorative collection published for the centenary of Berr's birth in the *Revue de synthèse*: Various (1964).

<sup>18</sup> There is a similar passage in the first editorial of the *Revue de synthèse historique* (Berr, 1900: 7). For discussion, Keylor (1975: 133-4).

<sup>19</sup> E. Goblot, 'Notes Critiques sur L'Année sociologique', *Revue de synthèse historique*, 1 (1900) pp. 265-70 and 6 (1903) pp. 60-8. For Berr's assessment of Durkheim: Berr, 1911: 126.

<sup>20</sup> On the early history of the *Annales* journal see Dosse (1994); Stuart Hughes (1968); Carbonel & Livet (1983). For later developments try Burke (1990) and Stoianovich (1976).

<sup>21</sup> *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. S. Reynolds (2 vols, 2<sup>nd</sup> Rev. Ed., London, 1972-3). Braudel's division of the text into three distinct time patterns - structure (geographical), conjuncture (socio-economic) and event - was too mechanical to be considered through-going historical sociology. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *The Peasants of Languedoc*, trans. J. Day (London, 1974) was perhaps a more successful, if regionally limited, *Annaliste* synthesis.

<sup>22</sup> Thompson (1963) *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, Gollancz); Moore, Jr. (1966) *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston, Mass., Beacon Press); Lipset & Rokkan (1967) *Party Systems and Voter Alignments* (London, Collier-Macmillan); Tilly (1964) *The Vendée* (London, Edward Arnold); Wallerstein (1974) *The Modern World System. 1: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy* (London, Academic Press).

<sup>23</sup> Shils (1975) *Center and Periphery* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press); Barnes (1971) 'Time Flies Like an Arrow', *Man*, vi, pp. 537-52; Bourdieu (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press); Elias (1978-82) *The Civilising Process* (2 vols, Oxford, Blackwell).

<sup>24</sup> In Bottomore & Nisbet (eds.) (1974) *A History of Sociological Analysis* (London, Heinemann) pp. 362-417.

<sup>25</sup> The most important names are invariably French and by now so famous as to be hardly worth listing. In sociology, Bourdieu and Baudrillard; in history, Hayden White; in philosophy, Foucault and Derrida; in psychology, Lacan; in literary criticism, Barthes. A concise but comprehensive introduction to poststructuralism is offered by Belsey (2002) *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

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<sup>26</sup> The 'new cultural history' was given its name by the collection of essays edited by Lynn Hunt (1989) *The New Cultural History* (London, University of California Press). Its first major text was probably Keith Thomas (1971) *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson), although Philippe Ariès (1962) *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. R. Baldick (London, Jonathan Cape) would claim the accolade were it so easily defined. Ariès' work has close ties to the Annaliste history of mentalities, a field in fact started by Bloch and Febvre at the beginning of the twentieth century. The more recent *grand homme* of the field, recognised by all 'new' cultural historians, is Roger Chartier: (1988) *Cultural History*, trans. L. Cochrane (Cambridge, Polity) and (1995) *Forms and Meanings*, trans. L. Cochrane (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press).