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ARTIGOS – ARTICLES

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**Historism – Partisanship – Racism**  
**On the Erosion of the Epistemic Foundations of Knowledge**

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**Abstract:** Often referred to as “historism”, historical-cultural relativism in its variant dating back to the 19th century has often been interpreted as an expression of a weak and insecure attitude, and has been opposed above all by the two great totalitarian movements of the 20th century. Against the more recent historism, postmodernism and its demands for tolerance, which are supposedly only of use to the ruling class, its opponents proclaim values, moral norms and cognitive criteria that are closely linked to the ethnicity and race of these critics. Even cognitive universality is mere ideology for them.

**Keywords:** Historism. Postmodernism. Value arbitrariness. Moral and epistemic partisanship. New Racism.

**Resumo:** Muitas vezes chamado de “historismo”, o relativismo histórico-cultural em sua variante que remonta ao século XIX século XIX, tem sido frequentemente interpretado como a expressão de uma atitude fraca e insegura, e tem sido e foi combatido principalmente pelos dois grandes movimentos totalitários do século XX. Contra o historismo mais contra o historismo mais recente, o pós-modernismo e suas exigências de tolerância, que supostamente são úteis apenas para a classe dominante, seus oponentes proclamam classe dominante, seus oponentes proclamam valores, normas morais e critérios

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cognitivos que estão intimamente ligados à etnia e à raça desses críticos. Até mesmo a universalidade cognitiva é mera ideologia para eles.

**Palavras-chave:** Historismo. Pós-modernismo. Arbitrariedade de valores. Partidarismo moral e epistêmico. Novo racismo.

## **Introduction**

That the increase and change of the content of our knowledge influences our lives is as certain as the fact that the change of our living conditions influences the acquisition of our knowledge and its utilization. But it is not only the change in the scope and quality of our knowledge that confronts us with the problem of the validity of norms and values in science, morality, and art; it is also and above all the change in our ways of thinking that determine what we consider to be real, true, and valid. The extent to which holding for-true was accompanied by arbitrariness in thought and action, for which theories of evidence and a pseudo-argumentative decisionism were supposed to provide an ideological justification, will be shown in the following; reference will be made both to certain forms of sociologism, political partisanship, ethnicism, and a racism linked to certain variants of recent identity politics.

### **I. On the Genesis and on Some Consequences of Historic Thought**

Like the change of theory in the field of theoretical knowledge, the change of values in the fields of ethics and aesthetics is closely connected with the idea of progress in modern times. Whereas Aristotle had characterized science as a theoretical contemplation committed to pure knowledge, for Francis Bacon it was no longer a disinterested contemplation of what existed, but rather it was put into service as an activity useful to the human race: science was conceived as an enterprise that, by means of the discoveries and inventions it makes, promotes the welfare of mankind. As a consequence, a progressive thinking developed that represented a foundation of science in the principles of pure "vérités de raison" (truths of reason) on the one hand, and

"vérités de fait" (truths of fact) on the other. In these spheres, distinguished in this way by Leibniz, different truth claims applied. Nevertheless, progress took place as an interaction between rationalism and empiricism that determined philosophy and the sciences since the 17th century. In connection with the Socratic idea that correct knowledge also leads to correct action, the opinion was still prevalent in the 18th and early 19th century that a parallel development between moral and scientific progress could be demonstrated; this conviction is exemplarily expressed in Nicolas de Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (1795).

(1.) The emergence of what is meant by historicism has to do, first of all, as already mentioned, with the radical change of the contents of experience. Since the end of the 17th century, in the radical phase of European colonialism and in the course of scientific progress, one comes to some new realizations: one is confronted with the diversity of customs and legal forms among different nations and peoples (Montesquieu); paleontology fundamentally revises the ideas of the age of the earth and thus also the conviction of the correctness of the biblical cosmology in the book of *Genesis* (Charles Lyell); finally, one even gets acquainted with the idea of the change of human nature (Rousseau). Human history in general shows itself to be a highly divergent event, and the theoretical management of this divergence is undertaken by the new discipline of the philosophy of history, to which Voltaire gave this name. In this field, it was primarily Hegel who strove to discover a law, or at least a principle, of historical development, and thus the order in its change. And in Hegel's philosophy, truth and history now not only enter into a new relationship to each other, but also truth comes to light in a new meaning.

Even in Johann Martin Chladenius' *Allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft* of 1752, the aim was to increase the attainability of certainty in the course of the analysis of historical facts by explicitly involving the "*Sehepunkt*" (point of view) of the historical observer in this analysis. Certainly, the reference to being bound to the place and circumstances of historical observation implied that what is considered "true" can only be asserted relative to the point of view. At the same time, however, this implies that the more one presents and analyzes the historical object under consideration from different perspectives, the closer one comes to the "truth".

For example, statements about a mountain become all the more "truth-like" the more closely the mountain is viewed from different perspectives. In the further course and under the influence of Kant's idea of a "thing in itself", "truth" is not only understood in the sense of the correspondence between a statement and the object, which appears to us in a certain particular view, as this is characteristic for the semantic concept of truth, but above all as ontological truth. This is understood as truth of the "thing itself", which thing appears to us, however, only in particular views. Not infrequently, therefore, a distinction was subsequently made between "correctness" and "truth" in the sense that the former is a property of statements, but the latter refers to the "total" of properties of the object present behind all its perspective views. This "total", so one thought, was only accessible to an evidential experience, which preceded every perspective (partial) cognition of the object.

(2.) In Hegel, starting from these basic assumptions of a specific theory of truth, there is a decisive extension of it. If for Chladenius "truth" (actually "the true") consisted in what becomes visible from a multiplicity of perspectival views obtained from different "points of view", Hegel dynamized this historical object together with the observer: he was concerned with historical processes, and his perspectivism was not only one oriented to geometry and thus to spatiality, but also one of temporality. The observer, it can be said, changes, and thus his (personal) "point of view" also changes; but what is considered by the changing observer also changes. To make the object of a historical observation visible only in a certain phase, but to consider this picture already for the whole of this object would mean not to do justice to it because of reification. Thus Hegel's word from the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is to be understood: "The true is the whole". The ontologically true of human history, however, is, according to him, freedom, which - similar to the sequence of bud, blossom and fruit mentioned by him - unfolds only in the whole of human history. Thus then, as is well known, for Hegel "world history [...] is progress in the consciousness of freedom", as he says in the introduction to his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*.

This metaphysics of history is replaced in the historical thinking of Germany in the 19th century: To know about the telos of history increasingly appeared as a presumption. The goal of historical analysis was now no longer

the discovery of the ontologically true as a characteristic encompassing all of history, but rather the depiction of certain guiding "ideas" and determining "forces" within historical development. In this sense, for example, Johann Gustav Droysen, in a theory of morality, seeks the moral ideas and forces, and history is conceived as the evolution of the intrinsically diverse "moral world." This is for him the historically true, from which he distinguishes the historically correct, the truth of historiography. This variant of historicism also contains those two concepts of truth already mentioned: the ontological truth, now as the culture perfecting itself in human history, and the semantic truth of historiography, committed to the theory of correspondence, which cannot do without methodically validated statements of fact. This second variant, distinct from Hegel's metaphysics of history, is by no means unmetaphysical; it is convinced in a culturally optimistic way of the development of the ideas and forces of the true, the good, and the beautiful in history. However, it replaces the universal-historical telos by partial teleologies - but in the end these always appear as ways of higher development.

(3.) With the third phase of historicist thought, its second idealist variant had already lost its persuasive power at the end of the 19th century. The great skeptics of history of the rank of Jacob Burckhardt - although themselves convinced of aesthetic and moral ideals - doubted the belief in the higher development of those ideas and forces mentioned above, especially those of the good and the beautiful, as well as their power of enforcement. The concept of truth was deontologized, and one concentrated in the humanities more and more only on what was historically correct (Ernst Bernheim). With the restriction of historical research to the collecting and securing of historical data, one gets, however, as Gunter Scholtz has shown,<sup>2</sup> to the conviction of the historically demonstrable heterogeneity of values as well as of the unjustifiability in principle of ultimate values in the spheres of morality and art. Any insight into the relativity of valuations, depending on the aspects of cultural significance, had to give way to a relativism of arbitrariness, since questions of evaluative priority and subordination of those ultimate values and the norms corresponding to them could no longer be meaningfully posed

<sup>2</sup> Gunter Scholtz: *Zwischen Wissenschaftsanspruch und Orientierungsbedürfnis. Zu Grundlage und Wandel der Geisteswissenschaften*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1991, pp. 130-157.

either within or between cultures. The representatives of this world view mostly saw themselves as truly tolerant.

## **II. Reactions to Relativistic Historism I: Evidence Assertion and Tradition Boundedness**

A revitalization of the philosophy of history in Hegel's sense was what Benedetto Croce's "*storicismo*" sought to accomplish, how he developed it in his book *La storia come pensiero e come azione*.<sup>3</sup> Every "true" story, Croce finds, links thoughts and percepts, philosophy and philology, and they illuminate the present. Stories are considered true insofar as they evidently shed light on contemporary life in a way that can serve the practice of today. As the present changes, so does the view of the past, because with the change in the meaning of the history that is happening, new aspects of the past history are discovered and rewritten. In this way also changes, which in an evidential way illuminates the present. With the unity of thoughts and percepts proclaimed by Croce, the correspondence theory in the sense of the semantic concept of truth recedes into the background, and the ontological conception of truth, updated in the succession of Hegel, is suddenly transformed into a theory of evidence.

Similar tendencies can be traced in other philosophers of the 20th century, some of them even before Croce. These can be found in particular among representatives of phenomenological thought. In Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, this way of thinking was associated with a dynamized form of ontological truth that would allow one to speak of the "historicity of truth". This concept of truth is fundamentally different from that of Franz Brentano and Edmund Husserl, the founders of modern phenomenology. But it also differs from that of Hegel, since "truth" no longer unfolds in a growing way as it does with the latter, but rather contingently arises and also disappears again. The claim to the verifiability of statements, as it is connected with the correspondence theory of truth, is thus given up - attunement, looking, listening to the "calling of Being" (Heidegger) take its place. The question about the criteria of correct "listening" as well as about the correctness of what

<sup>3</sup> Benedetto Croce: *La storia come pensiero e come azione*, Bari: Laterza 1938. [English transl.: *History as the Story of Liberty*, London: G. Allen and Unwin 1941.]

is heard in listening is considered inappropriate. That this thinking owes itself to a proximity to art is obvious, especially since the methodically practiced intersubjective examination is mostly replaced by what is intuitively grasped in subjective "looking" and "listening". Heidegger's and Gadamer's extensive references to visual art, music, and poetry speak for themselves.

In his investigation of the experience of art, which seemed to him to be relevant for hermeneutic thinking in the disciplines of the humanities, Gadamer was concerned to show that an autonomous experience of truth is possible for art. It is not exhausted in its designation function, i.e. in a relation of statement and meant facts in the sense of the semantic concept of truth. The "truth" of the work of art cannot be grasped by unambiguous statements and judgments, since the aspectual character of particular statements about the attributes and functions of the work of art always refers to that ultimately inexhaustible ontological substrate which can never be fully grasped by the partial views that those statements and judgments express. Moreover, Gadamer attributes to art the property of being an "instance of sovereignty over history".<sup>4</sup> Art reaches across times and peoples, as well as across individual artists and their personal biographies. Works of fine arts, music and poetry are surrounded by an enigmatic presence that is like an incontrovertible testimony. In his analysis of the interplay between the experience of art and the experience of truth, he assumes that works of art have inherent "simultaneity and temporal superiority," so that across "times and spaces, the visual and poetic work" can claim to be "present and truth". And therefore it seems to Gadamer that man cannot do without "seeing in art a standard of truth."<sup>5</sup>

When Gadamer expressed this view, postmodernism was *en vogue*. Practically all hierarchies of values in the field of art had fallen for it; even the age of the avant-gardes seemed to have passed irrevocably in the meantime. Thus, an unrestricted pluralism prevailed - and in some cases still prevails - that allows everyone to judge art entirely according to his or her preferences. The value of the work of art is left to the discretion of the consumer, but is thus determined by the whims of the market. Even at the time of the founding of large art history museums in Europe, especially since the early 19th century,

<sup>4</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Bildkunst und Wortkunst*. In: Gottfried Boehm (ed.), *Was ist ein Bild?*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink 1994. pp. 90-104, p. 91.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91 f.

when art was increasingly controlled by supply and demand, it seemed necessary to counter the forces of the market with a regulative and to acquire, preserve, and make accessible to the general public important works that were not exactly in the trend of commercializing art.

For Gadamer, certainly not everything that appeared under this name was already art - his thoroughly normative understanding of art, which was connected with his (ontological) conception of truth, did not permit this. The norms and values that in his view offered support did not exist for art outside of history. And yet, the distinction of a certain tradition seemed possible to him, namely that of which he believed that something like truth in perception and at the same time an illumination of one's own present is established in it across times and spaces. Against all pluralism and relativism, Gadamer showed himself already in his main work *Truth and Method* (1960) determined to hold on to the aesthetic traditions of antiquity with his theory of the classical as that which is binding in history.<sup>6</sup> Critics criticized early on that Gadamer's distinction of a particular tradition, following Wolfgang Iser, necessarily denied full recognition to other traditions. For even if their discussion is not neglected, their evaluation is nevertheless carried out in relation to a reference that is distinguished in advance by a normative commitment, i.e. a value decision. This is the starting point for Gadamer's aesthetic criteriology.

In the following, it will be shown that the willingness to fight pluralism with normative decisions and thus to gain a foothold in a world that has become confusing and increasingly surrendered to subjective arbitrariness has by no means remained limited to the realm of aesthetics and the philosophy and humanities influenced by it.

### **III. Reactions to Relativistic Historism II: Sociological Relationism, Partisanship**

*1. Sociological relationism.* Directly linked to relativistic historism is the emergence of the sociology of knowledge. Karl Mannheim is considered one

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Wahrheit und Methode*, 2nd edn., Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr 1965, pp. 269 ff.



of its most authoritative representatives. "Historism," Karl Mannheim declared in 1924, "is [...] not a sudden idea, it is not a fashion,, it is not even an intellectual movement, it is the foundation from which we view social-cultural reality. It is not sophisticated, it is not a program, it is the ground that has become organic, the worldview itself, which emerged after the religiously bound worldview of the Middle Ages had disintegrated and after the worldview of the Enlightenment, secularized from it, had annulled itself with the basic idea of a supra-temporal reason."<sup>7</sup> This statement represents an initial finding, by no means something Mannheim simply wanted to resign himself to. His sociology of knowledge, which he developed primarily in his major work *Ideology and Utopia* (1929), represents as a "systematization of doubt" an answer to the question of the effects of the untenability of absolute truth claims. Often, his analyses of "*Seinsverbundenheit*" (being-connectedness) - the connection with all components of "being": mental, social, political, economic, and cultural circumstances - or of the boundedness of knowledge to the socially situated point of view of the observer, are accused of having contributed to the acceptance of a criterionless relativism. But Mannheim was not concerned with a justification of the arbitrary; rather, in his analyses of styles of thought and modes of interpretation, he sought the historical and positional conditions of models of thought and worldviews through explicating the boundedness of knowledge to the point of view of agents and observers, who are socially situated in a particular manner. He was concerned with relational considerations, not with an exercise in relativism.

The sociology of knowledge was associated, in Mannheim's case, with the hope of bringing regularity into the anarchy of values by correlating the variety of different artistic, ethical, and political-ideological orientations with the social situation and the social interests of the people who hold these views. However, the seductiveness in the writing of some sociologists of knowledge cannot be overlooked. It tempts us to think, for example, that we can infer a scientist's work unambiguously from that person's social position and related interests, which he or she shares with others belonging to his or her stratum. Yet scientists in the same discipline may be in the same social position and

<sup>7</sup> Karl Mannheim: Historismus. In: K. M., Wissenssoziologie. Auswahl aus dem Werk, eingel. u. hrsg. von Kurt H. Wolff, Berlin/Neuwied: Hermann Luchterhand 1964, pp. 246-307, p. 246 f. [First published in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 52 (1924), p. 1-60.]

under the same influence of a particular set of colleagues and a particular scientific tradition without their work taking the same shape. Analogous experiences are conveyed by research on voting behavior in socially homogeneous milieus.

According to experience, people change with the circumstances that act upon them - however, one time in this way, the other time differently. In this sense, Ernst Robert Curtius, for example, objected to representatives of a deterministic sociology of knowledge that the extent to which a person is determined by the conditions to which he is exposed depends on his physical and mental constitution as well as on the habitualities which have developed in interaction with the environment: "The fact of socialization, for example, will determine the individual to a very different degree according to the constitutional type to which he belongs. Those who, because of constitutional predisposition, are little susceptible to influence, or who tend to shut themselves off from their fellow world, will be less dependent on social factors than other people [...]. As Fichte already said: 'What kind of philosophy one has depends on what kind of person one is' -- the corresponding is also true for sociology."<sup>8</sup>

Sociologists certainly succeed in proving that the environment can change people and that they are likely to think, feel, and act in such and such a way under such and such circumstances. Circumstances make people inclined to react in a certain way, but they do not force them in the sense of strict determinism. With respect to social circumstances, the same is true as for the thinkers of Christian and Jewish faith who countered astral fatalism with the sentence: "Astra inclinant, non necessitant" - The stars make us inclined (to do something), but they do not force us (to do it). A sharp causalism also sometimes blinds sociologists to the ubiquity of "mere" probabilities, and thus to an adequate grasp of the indeterminacies and ambiguities in interpersonal relations. For some, even the fuzzy but cautious talk of "imprinting" and "shaping" tempts them to make rigid assumptions; at any rate, it offers them opportunities for such. But here the question arises: How continuous is this imprinting, and how deep is it?

<sup>8</sup> Ernst Robert Curtius: *Deutscher Geist in Gefahr*, Stuttgart/Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt 1932, p. 97.

Karl Mannheim had nothing in mind with rigidities of the kind mentioned, but he was convinced that members of privileged classes generally think differently than members of lower classes. Thus, according to Mannheim, in attitude analysis one is confronted with different value preferences, the genesis of which depends on social situation, social position, educational influences and generation-specific experiences. In view of this, i.e. against the background of different kinds of imprints and of inclinations caused by them in modern societies, the following question arises: Is it possible to develop a consciousness that overcomes the anarchy of worldviews, as Mannheim had in mind? Mannheim was not concerned with the production of "uniformity" in the sense of homomorphism, as certain egalitarians of his time had in mind; rather, he was more concerned with securing the uniformity of the foundations of our discursivity, which is what makes intersubjectivity possible. According to him, the efforts of worldview analysts, connected with the insight into the reciprocity of perspectives, should be directed toward developing "a formula of the convertibility and translatability of these different perspective views into one another"<sup>9</sup> and thereby formulating worldview-neutral, impartial insights.

Mannheim, it seems, was primarily concerned with securing at least certain argumentative foundations in a socially fractured society in which the elementary epistemic preconditions for an inter-class discussion of their social interests were themselves regarded as ideologically preformed. This was to contribute to the coexistence of world interpretations and orders of life, the occurrence of which Max Scheler, in his lecture on man in the "World Age of Equilibrium",<sup>10</sup> also delivered in 1929, had rashly proclaimed as a tendency of the times.

2. *Partisanship*. Another way of coping with the social fissures seemed to be the formation of a political partisanship that was both enemy-centered and future-oriented, as was characteristic of representatives of both the political Right and the political Left in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The goal

<sup>9</sup> Karl Mannheim: *Ideologie und Utopie*, Frankfurt a.M.: G. Schulte-Bulmke 1969, p. 258. [The first edition was published in Bonn 1929.]

<sup>10</sup> Max Scheler: *Der Mensch im Weltalter des Ausgleichs*. In: M. S., *Ausgleich als Aufgabe und Schicksal*, Berlin-Grunewald: Rothschild 1929, p. 31-63.

was to establish an ethnically homogeneous "*völkische*" (folkish) and a class-conscious unity respectively: on the one hand, that of the "*Volksgemeinschaft*" (folk community) and its collective "*Volksempfinden*" (folk sentiment), and, on the other, that of the "working masses" and their "class consciousness". To formulate ideologically neutral, impartial insights, as Mannheim had in mind, appeared to his ideology-critical contemporaries, who often openly professed to be intellectual partisans of those political views, only as an expression of ideological neutralism. The supposed play with intellectual reciprocities seemed especially absurd to those who regarded all intellectual events as manifestations of race or class. Connected with these declarations is the radical delegitimization not only of the ideas of the respective ideological-political opponent, but also of those who were interested in a non-partisan analysis of partisan behavior. Such an analysis stood in the way of the assertion, advocated by both Bolshevism and National Socialism, of privileged access to the only true knowledge. This was associated with the exclusion of those considered socially or racially inferior, which could be increased to the point of their physical annihilation.

What the self-righteous class struggle of Lenin's type meant is made clear by the statement of the Latvian-born head of the Cheka on the Eastern Civil War front in Russia after the October Revolution, Martin Ivanovich Latsis, which he published in the journal *Krasnyi terror* (Red Terror) in November 1918: "We are not waging war against individual persons. We are destroying the bourgeoisie as a class. During the investigation we do not look for individual proofs of guilt, whether the accused has acted in deeds or words against the Soviet power. The first questions that should be asked are: To what class does he belong? What is his class origin? [...] And it is these questions which should determine the fate of the accused. Therein lies the meaning and essence of the Red Terror."<sup>11</sup> As is well known, the same applied to the actions of the Nazi organs toward the Jews, whose achievements and moral reputation were considered irrelevant in view of the factuality of the ancestral passport.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Klaus-Georg Riegel: *Der Marxismus-Leninismus als „politische Religion“*. In: Gerhard Besier/Hermann Lübke (eds.), *Politische Religion und Religionspolitik. Zwischen Totalitarismus und Bürgerfreiheit*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2005, pp. 15–48, p. 28.

The assertion of an essential diversity in the thinking of classes and races, which was intended as a justification of those forms of class and race struggle, went far beyond the results of empirical research on sociogenesis or biogenesis of cognition; for the most part, these were completely ignored anyway. A claim to objective knowledge had to appear to Lenin and his followers as an unrealistic "objectivism", as far as it was in conflict with the desirability of politics. Quite biblically,<sup>12</sup> therefore the one, who in his striving for objectivity moved beyond proclaimed positions of partisanship, was found to be lukewarm, i.e. beyond warm or cold. In a similar vein, Ernst Bloch, one of the idolized mentors of the German student movement in the 1960s and after, proclaimed in an essay published in the East Berlin journal *Aufbau* in 1951 that thinking has always been and must always be partisan; it is only a matter of knowing which partisanship is the right one. From such presuppositions, he rejects the "so-called impartiality" of "objectivism".<sup>13</sup> This, he notes, "is not without ideological connection with the so-called truth for its own sake, as it is strained in the West. Starting from a pseudo-objectivity that has long since become transparent as a sham, Objectivism makes itself tepid, deliberative, penetratingly neutral."<sup>14</sup>

Objective science, on the other hand, also appeared to Carl Schmitt, the head of the German legal theorists in the first half of the 1930s, as the illusory point of view located between the positions of the "*Arteigenes*" (species-own) and the "*Artfremdes*" (species-alien): "It is an epistemological truth that only the one is able to see facts correctly, to hear statements correctly, to understand words correctly, and to evaluate impressions of people correctly who participates in the law-creating community in a species-determined way and belongs to it existentially. Down to the deepest, most unconscious emotions of the mind, but also down to the

<sup>12</sup> Vgl. Rev. 3, 15-16: »I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.«

<sup>13</sup> Quite similarly already Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's attacks against the "'impartial' social science" and the "fabricators of impartiality," in the paper „Drei Quellen und drei Bestandteile des Marxismus. *Prosweschtschenije 3'* (March 1913). In: V.I.L., Werke, vol. 19, Berlin/GDR: Dietz 1962, pp. 3–9.

<sup>14</sup> Ernst Bloch: Parteilichkeit in Wissenschaft und Welt. In: *Aufbau* 7 (1951), pp. 593–602, p. 597.

smallest brain fiber, man stands in the reality of this ethnic and racial affiliation. Objective is not everyone who wants to be, and who believes with a subjectively good conscience that he has exerted himself enough to be objective." And then follows - in a very similar way as one knows it from Lenin's invectives against the "shameful *party of the center*" beyond materialism and idealism<sup>15</sup> - a denunciation of the striving for objectivity as a way of thinking that misunderstands itself: "An alien to the species may act however critically and strive however astutely, may read books and write books, he thinks and understands differently because he is *of a different kind*, and remains in the existential conditions of his own kind in every decisive train of thought. This is the objective reality of 'objectivity'."<sup>16</sup>

These differences, which are expressed in thinking, feeling and willing, are irreversible because of their fateful-biological origin. This conviction marks a significant difference even to the principle of partisanship (*partijnost*) in the Marxist-Leninist version.<sup>17</sup> For as much as the latter stated that there was a close connection between class situation and class consciousness, it nevertheless permitted conversion from feudal or bourgeois to proletarian class consciousness under certain conditions. A biological conversion, on the other hand, was an impossibility.

#### **IV. New Forms of Political Partisanship as a Reaction to Postmodern Arbitrariness: Ethnocentrism, Racism**

The most important result of the discussions conducted by the representatives of postmodernism is probably to note the insight that the "cultural sciences" (in Max Weber's sense) of today - i.e. the humanities and the interpretive social sciences -, like the sociology of knowledge before them, cannot ignore the existential experience of historical relativity. The diversity of what is understood as "truth" in the semantic as well as in the ontological

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, section 4 of ch. VI of V.I. Lenin: *Materialismus und Empiriokritizismus. Kritische Bemerkungen über eine reaktionäre Philosophie*, 2nd edn. Berlin/GDR: Dietz 1952. [Russian original 1909.]

<sup>16</sup> Carl Schmitt: *Staat, Bewegung, Volk. Die Dreigliederung der politischen Einheit*, Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt 1933, p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Evert van der Zweerde: *Soviet Historiography of Philosophy. Istoriko-Filosofskaja Nauka*, Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers 1997, pp. 26-41.

sense, i.e. what is accepted and approved as correct or as "true" in an evaluative sense, is to be examined with regard to its genesis in order to make explicit the construction principles of one's own speaking and narrating. It is necessary to become aware of the fact that every historical reconstruction contains a constructivist moment. This research intention, however, is not to be confused with the will to dissolve all criteria of truth or even, as has happened on various occasions - especially in the US-American reception of French postmodernism - with a *carte blanche* for voluntaristically proclaimed assertions of truth.

But this is precisely what has happened with the argumentative backing of Michel Foucault's writing. Now, once again, heterogeneous political-ideological positions stood abruptly side by side as equally possible attitudes - or rather: the assertion of their truth claims appeared to be merely a question of casual power relations. Hardly anyone would have thought just a few years ago that, as a consequence, the culturalist theory of the inevitable imprinting by the respective "*Volksgeist*" (folk spirit) would resurrect and give ethnocentrism a peculiar and deceptive gloss again; even less, however, that, via the critique of colonialism, racism would gain prestige and even be attributed a role constitutive for our cognition. History, it seems, teaches us nothing, because, as relativist historicism has pointed out, it offers examples of everything - including, it must be added, the return of what has already been recognized as erroneous or reprehensible.

Once again, what Edmund Husserl had already conjured up in his famous *Logos* essay, which developed the program of a "Philosophy as a Strict Science",<sup>18</sup> occurs today: the return of relativistic historicism, which he called "skeptical relativism". This philosopher, condemned to silence in the "Third Reich", in his Vienna lecture of 1935 on "*Die Krisis des europäischen Menschentums und die Philosophie*" (The Crisis of European Man and Philosophy), took up again almost verbatim the theme of that essay of 1911. In the meantime, certain consequences of the vision of "skeptical relativism" had already become evident.

Husserl's *Logos* essay, as Wilhelm E. Mühlmann has pointed out, is also an ideology-critical manifesto, much like Max Weber's 1917 essay "*Der*

<sup>18</sup> Edmund Husserl: Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft. In: *Logos* 1 (1911), pp. 289–341.

*Sinn der ‚Wertfreiheit‘ in den soziologischen und ökonomischen Wissenschaften*" (The Meaning of 'Value Freedom' in the Sociological and Economic Sciences). According to Weber and Husserl, historical facts can never release valid values from themselves, because only statements of fact can ever be derived from statements of fact in empirical disciplines such as historiography, psychology, or sociology. Whoever ignores this slides into historicism (which Husserl calls "Historizismus" [historicism]), psychologism, or sociologism. Sociologism as the most popular fashion of these three for a long time is characterized by the fact that its representatives, instead of staying - in the sense of Husserl's research program - with "the things themselves", reduce the statements referring to them to the social conditions of their emergence. Husserl turned against the "scientific semi-finished product", the "undivided mixture of worldview and theoretical cognition",<sup>19</sup> as which the products charged with moral-political evaluations turn out to be. Husserl feared, similar to Max Weber in his famous lecture "*Wissenschaft als Beruf*" (Science as a Vocation) from 1919, that the drive directed toward the political-ideological commitment would develop into the dominant one within the scientific community and could deceive even theoretical natures by its scientific form. The correctness of this hunch was already proven in the interwar period, but unfortunately also by events in the international research landscape of the recent past.

1. *Ethnocentrism*. Ethnological research set itself the goal of bringing to light the different interpretations of the self and the world by members of different ethnic groups, while at the same time making it possible for them to be mutually accurately informed about each other. The so-called decolonization discourse went beyond this. Some of its proponents regarded in particular the worldview of the colonizers as fundamentally different from the worldview of the colonized: the two were no longer to be complementary to each other in certain respects, but were regarded as incommensurable with each other.

Increasingly, in certain works of recent humanities and social science literature in the U.S., the U.K., and France, one strives to locate colonial or

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 338.



postcolonial modes of thought even where certain ethnicities and People of Color and their achievements are valued highly by people of other origins and skin color. In this context, the appropriation of non-autochthonous cultural property, for example, is currently increasingly coming under suspicion of unlawful usurpation. Thus, it is a subject of sometimes heated discussions who has the right to wear certain pieces of clothing or hairstyles that originate from a different cultural environment but are now allegedly robbed of their original context and become, as it were, a kind of late colonial looted property.

This way of looking at things, which fits organically into a whole series of postcolonial studies, goes back to Susan Scafidi's book entitled *Who owns culture?*,<sup>20</sup> published in 2005. The author discovered a blank space in property rights, the "cultural products", i.e. that group of cultural stocks which UNESCO has been designating for some years now as "intangible cultural heritage". In the case of cultural products, according to the author, the intangible good is the "*Volksgeist*" (folk spirit) - which she uses as a German loanword in the original - or the self-image of a particular ethno-cultural community. According to Scafidi, it is not the cultural good itself, but the value assigned to it by the community that is actually significant. Everything depended on this assignment of meaning and its integration into the folk spirit of the community of origin. For ultimately only the member of the community of origin should be able to grasp the "authentic" meaning of a cultural asset at all. In a highly dialectical way, the revitalization of ethnocentrism takes place here in the name of combating it

One of the consequences of this neo-Romantic folk spirit doctrine is to take any kind of costuming as an Indian as a mockery of the North American natives, and "blackfacing" as discrimination against black people. Thus, one recalls with great astonishment German Foreign Minister Baerbock's March 2021 apology for having worn an Indian costume as a little girl - and even that of an Indian chief. Much of the contemporary culture wars seem like a struggle for recognition of legitimate victim status for themselves by the descendants of victims of colonialism. Some of it can be interpreted as rhetorical self-stupefaction and verbal substitution, but some other words do take on a

<sup>20</sup> Susan Scafidi: *Who owns culture? Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 2005.

worrisome form. And these no longer sound merely like self-indulgent speech exercises, but rather like appeals and battle announcements.

Very clearly, for example, Rokhaya Diallo, an Afro-French journalist, author and filmmaker who has been a recurring activist for racial, gender and religious justice, has said of her current homeland: "White France no longer exists, and those who don't like the new France should leave."<sup>21</sup> What is present here is neo-colonial anti-colonialism, the negative stigmatization of an entire way of life put into words. It is in this spirit that the League for Black African Defense also proclaimed in 2020, "The world has changed. The France of Chlodio, Joan of Arc, Philippe Pétain and Charles de Gaulle no longer exists! Today, France belongs to the League for Black African Defense."<sup>22</sup> And in April 2019, Hafsa Askar, vice president of the National Union of Students UNEF Lille, the largest and oldest student union in France, was even more outspoken on the occasion of the burning of the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris: " I shit on your Notre Dame of Paris, because I don't care about the history of France. [...] People are crying over a few chunks of wood, wallah, you love the French identity, while we don't give a damn about it. This is the delusion of the little white people."<sup>23</sup> - One gets the impression that, from the point of view of certain Arabs and black Africans who have taken up residence in France, it is about time for the autochthonous French to contemplate their disappearance.

What is impressively demonstrated in the contemporary culture wars - especially in the USA, Great Britain and France - is the effectiveness of the sometimes unconscious, sometimes soberly calculated use of morality as a means of psychological warfare. This is an artifice practiced in different historical contexts, which, as Ernst Topitsch has repeatedly pointed out, consists in "suggesting to people a consciousness of guilt in order to break their self-esteem and thus make them compliant. [...] Yes, the victims of such strategies might even perceive their penitent submission as a sign of their true moral sensibility and thus as a way to a new moral self-esteem that elevates

<sup>21</sup> Rokhaya Diallo: *À nous la France!*, Paris 2017, S. 30. – Quoted in Pascal Bruckner: *Ein nahezu perfekter Täter. Die Konstruktion des weißen Sündenbocks*. Translated from the French by Marc Feldon, Berlin: Edition Tiamat 2021, p. 195.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Pascal Bruckner, *ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted *ibid.*, p. 248. – "Wallah" is an Arabic oath formula, often used as an interjection, meaning "by God." When fully vocalized, it reads "wa-llāhi".

them far above the 'hardened sinners'. Here, no doubt, lies also one of the roots of 'Pharisaism.'"<sup>24</sup> Undoubtedly, this is a form of the "use of 'ethics' as a means of 'being right'" already criticized by Max Weber.<sup>25</sup> At present, the struggle for maximum victim status is still underway among the various groups, each of which claims specific victim characteristics for itself. As soon as the influx of the "humiliated and insulted" from the poor quarters of the Third and Fourth Worlds to the prosperous parts of the North has reached a corresponding scale and the remaining distance between the groups fearing for their respective singularity has been overcome, it could be that they will form together into a powerful social movement.

Related to the protest, which has to do with historical justice, are also tendencies that are currently playing a role in academic realms. For example, a cultural war over teaching content and the limits of academic freedom of speech is raging at some Western universities, led in part by advocates of anti-racism and decolonization, but also by representatives of feminist and LGBTQIA-oriented groups. The United Kingdom and France are the main sites of these battles in Europe. Philip Plickert listed distinctive British events in this context in April 2021, including the following:<sup>26</sup>

- In Oxford, some professors of musicology complained that their curriculum was dominated by "white music from the slaveholding era", thereby "solidifying white supremacy."
- At some universities, activists have been calling for years, such as students at London's School for Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), for lectures to discuss less white philosophers such as Plato, Descartes, and Kant; at least half the reading list would have to be African or Asian philosophers.
- The former David Hume Tower on the University of Edinburgh campus was renamed because the namesake expressed views about the natural superiority of whites in a footnote to his 1753 essay "Of National Characters."

<sup>24</sup> Ernst Topitsch: Macht und Moral. In: E.T., Studien zur Weltanschauungsanalyse, Vienna: Turia + Kant n.d. [1996], pp. 279-294, p. 290.

<sup>25</sup> Max Weber: Politik als Beruf. In: M.W., Gesammelte politische Schriften, 4th edn., Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr 1980, p. 549.

<sup>26</sup> Philip Plickert: „Cancel Culture“ bedroht Wissenschaftsfreiheit. In: Wiener Zeitung, 15 April 2021; URL: <<https://www.wienerzeitung.at/meinung/gastkommentare/2100553-Cancel-Culture-bedroht-Wissenschaftsfreiheit.html>>.

Similar to Hume in Britain, the philosophers Kant and Hegel were met with accusations of racism in Germany. These accusations require philological scrutiny and, while in some cases they prove to be valid, in others they prove to be a dispute over words and nominal definitions, or, as in the case of certain attacks on Adam Smith, misjudgments.

Of greater significance, however, is another recent occurrence: the penetration of "Critical Race Theory" (CRT)<sup>27</sup> and certain one-sided interpretations of it, originating in the USA and drastically strengthened in its effectiveness above all by the "Black Lives Matter" movement, in almost all fields of science.

2. *Racism.* Stigmatization by so-called racial characteristics such as skin color is counteracted today by various language-norming initiatives: on the one hand, by eliminating the so-called N-words and N-word compounds - in Canada even by renaming the "blackboards" - , but on the other hand, by eliminating the word "race". As in the Anglophone and German-speaking countries, in France, too, it is said that there are no longer any races, with regard to which people have mostly been sorted according to external characteristics. In 2013, the French parliament therefore proposed to ban the word "race" from official usage,<sup>28</sup> as numerous misanthropic ideas and actions have been associated with it throughout history. Moreover, it is said, it was not race that generated racism, but racism that first generated the concept of race.

When the word "racism" emerged in the 1920s, the concept was understood in terms of favoring or disfavoring a person on the basis of race, that is, of ancestral characteristics, such as skin color, which racists believed to correspond with positive or negative intellectual and moral traits of character. A peculiarity challenging the conceptual logic is now that the concept of racism no longer has an object or scope of meaning if, in accordance with the view just mentioned, it is to hold that races do not exist, and neither does the word "race" in the future. The R-word, to which only a derived pseudo-existence is attested, is thus tabooed, while racism is rejected as a special world evil and

<sup>27</sup> The founding text of this theory is considered to be the book by Richard Delgado/Jean Stefancic: *Critical Race Theory. An Introduction*, New York/London: New York University Press 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Pascal Bruckner (fn. 20), pp. 136-144.

anti-racism is declared to be the core content of every popular pedagogy. There is, as it seems, verbal magic at work, which leads to the fact that there are racism commissioners everywhere, who are supposed to put a stop to a racism without races. Thus, once again, it is about race, but in the mode of negation and a moral prohibition combined with it.

Yet, paradoxically, certain varieties of contemporary anti-racism are not so much about eventually arriving at a non-racist state in which race, ethnicity, and skin color no longer play a role with regard to the attribution of intellectual and moral qualities; instead, it is about an anti-racism on a racist basis. And therefore the will to include the formerly excluded in the circle of a humanity understood as egalitarian meets with resistance from some of the now rather newly included. Thus, as Pascal Bruckner shows, the representatives of the Afro-collective Mwasi refuse the "inclusive feminism" practiced by representatives of "white feminism" and regard them as their "political enemy." So just being a feminist is not enough. It corresponds to this that black police officers in the USA, but also in France, are insulted by black protesters for being on the wrong side, and that they are even called "race traitors".<sup>29</sup> Just being black is not enough either.

Oddly enough, especially in certain circles of anti-racist argumentation, the use of the word "race" or at least the mention of skin color still retains its old distinctive function. It cannot be overlooked, it is said, that racism continues to be practiced. And this, naturally and almost inevitably, by whites, according to Afro-feminist activist Maboula Soumahoro. For in her view, a white man cannot embody anti-racism because "he can never be in the right with respect to a black woman or an Arab."<sup>30</sup> As Bruckner notes, "The curse of impurity, like in the good old days of colonialism: the same play is reversed and restaged with new actors."<sup>31</sup>

The extent to which the insistence on a black identity has become almost dogmatically entrenched among certain Afro-activists in the meantime is evidenced by the peculiar story surrounding the translation of the poem "The Hill We Climb," which 23-year-old poet Amanda Gorman recited at the inauguration of U.S. President Joe Biden in January 2021. The Dutch writer

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 206 f.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted *ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137 f.

Marieke Lucas Rijneveld was accused by black activist Janice Deul - as others later accused Catalan Victor Obiols - of not having the profile that was assumed for the person translating the poem, namely being young and black in a powerfully authentic way. Gorman himself, however, had originally been pleased with Rijneveld's involvement. The public controversy that followed the two publishing decisions gives the impression that the competence of translators has now become a matter of epidermis. What is peculiar is the assertion, heard again and again in such contexts, that whites ultimately cannot understand how blacks feel - tacitly assuming that the person asserting this certainly has the ability to empathize with both. Originally, this was a view held by certain ethnologists of the colonial period, who were convinced that they represented a higher level of consciousness than the colonial peoples and were therefore able to comprehend the worldview of the "primitives" very well, while the reverse was supposedly not possible.

Thus, this assertion literally takes over the central categories of racist colonialism, but with it the division of a population into cognitively, emotionally and morally differently disposed whites and blacks. Today, anyone who opposes the racist two-worlds doctrine as a white person sometimes runs the risk of being labeled a universalist who denies the distinctiveness of people of color. If, however, he still claims the existence of a difference in the sense just mentioned, as was mostly the case in former times, he is accused of being a racist. Whatever the white man does, he always puts himself in the wrong - in the eyes of radical black identity politicians, his moral and intellectual flaw ultimately lies in his very existence.

According to the old prejudice originating from Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the black skin color goes back to the Chamites - degraded to slaves by a biblical curse - who, according to the Holy Scriptures, owned Africa. Slaves, it was thought, could be identified by their "black" skin, and this was perceived as a biblically guaranteed, guilt-ridden stigma, a fact that was used for popular Christian justification of the enslavement of Africans. This prejudice has its counterpart in the glorification of *négritude*, blackness, and Afrocentrism as a way of living and thinking radically different from "whiteness". This results in nothing other than a reciprocal racism: "One associates the genetic heritage of an individual with certain moral and

intellectual qualities, distributing attributes of inferiority and superiority as in colonial times."<sup>32</sup> One feels transported back to times when, supported by the doctrines of a supposedly scientifically underpinned racism, it seemed possible to speak of a "German" or "Aryan" and a "Jewish physics," as did, for example, the two Nobel Prize winners in physics, Philipp Lenard and Johannes Stark.

Anti-racism, which had reached a peak in the USA with the civil movement of the 1960s, has today, although in a changed form and in conjunction with postcolonial studies, fully taken hold of the universities of several Western countries. For example, an article published in 2021 in the Internet journal *Educational Philosophy and Theory* begins: "UK Higher Education is characterized by structural and institutional forms of whiteness. As scholars and activists are increasingly speaking out to testify, whiteness has wide-ranging implications that affect curricula, pedagogy, knowledge production, university policies, campus climate, and the experiences of students and faculty of color. Unsurprisingly then, calls to decolonize the university abound. In this article, we draw upon the Critical Race Theory method of counter-storytelling."<sup>33</sup> Such research orientations have become quite widespread, and it would not be appropriate to draw particular attention to the University of Sheffield if it did not also have, since 2021, a handbook for teachers and students of biology, the aim of which is to encourage reflection on "whiteness" by presenting eleven scientists and their views, which are described as problematic. The focus is on their sometimes only implicit view of white supremacy, which assumption was not incorrect, at least with regard to the scientific-technical achievements at their time. The list includes, among others, the following well-known names: the creator of modern botanical and zoological taxonomy Carl von Linné, the founder of evolutionary theory Charles Darwin, the mathematician Karl Pearson, the biologist Thomas Henry Huxley, the geneticist J.B.S. Haldane, and the molecular biologist James Watson, who together with Francis Crick discovered the molecular structure of DNA. Meanwhile, at the University of Sheffield's Faculty of Engineering, Isaac

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>33</sup> Doharty, N., Madriaga, M., Joseph-Salisbury, R.: The university went to 'decolonise' and all they brought back was lousy diversity double-speak! Critical race counter-stories from faculty of colour in 'decolonial' times. In: *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 53 (2021); URL: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00131857.2020.1769601>>.

Newton is also suspected of colonialism because of "long-standing conscious or unconscious bias"; students are discouraged from calling him a "founding father" and a "genius."

In the United States, which is always a pioneer in the field of identity politics as well, attacks are increasingly directed even at the alleged racist implications of the formal sciences. It is said that the cause of the achievement gap between African American as well as Hispanic students on the one hand, and white youth on the other, is that the subject of mathematics is based on scientific values and principles that express and help secure "white supremacy" in education. Therefore, in 2020, the Oregon State Department of Education required its teachers to undergo a course in "ethnomathematics" to become aware of this fact and to promote the dismantling of racism in curricular content and teaching methods.

Certain forms of dealing with the question of race on the part of outstanding scientific publication organs after the violent death of George Floyd also fit in with this: In the editorial of the journal *Science* published on June 8, 2020, H. Holden Thorp, its main editor, writes self-critically of "white supremacy"; on May 19, 2021, the journal *Nature* publishes an unnamed editorial entitled "Tackling systemic racism requires the system of science to change"; an article by Eileen A. Yam and others in the journal *The Lancet* on April 1, 2021, turns to the "systemic racism" allegedly existing in the biosciences and demands, as it says in the title, to take Critical Race Theory seriously. It is unclear what the compatibility of this theory is with the biomedical sciences, for which *The Lancet* is arguably one of the most important journals in the world. Because according to Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, his wife and co-founder of Critical Race Theory, the rejection, to a certain extent, of the Enlightenment principles of egalitarianism and scientific neutrality is characteristic of this theory. For the basis of every scientific analysis should not be the principle of rationality, which is a construct developed in particular cultural contexts, but the racial background of the scientist, which shapes his or her subjective experiences, which in turn determine the selection and perspective of the object of research and the research method to be used. Ultimately, all groups, including scientists, were



subdivided in conflict situations along racial distinctions and incorporated into certain power relations.

That the political sphere has been about reciprocal racism for some time was clear early on. Not, however, that large parts of science and scientific journalism already concede race and ethnicity the status of a worldview guiding all our actions and thoughts. How different, by contrast, are some of the observations of Kwame Anthony Appiah, a professor of philosophy and law at New York University. He, a man of color, wonders: If European thinkers should not be included on reading lists simply because they are European, should non-European thinkers be included simply because they are non-European and only to increase diversity? Appiah is skeptical. He teaches global ethics, and in this course he draws on European, Chinese, Arab and Indian thinkers. The key question for Appiah, however, is not, "Is the curriculum diverse enough?" but, "Is it worth studying a particular thinker?" "Whiteness," Appiah finds, "is not a useful category when it comes to philosophy [...]. When people talk, they are talking about ideas, not identity. The truth value of what one says does not depend on one's identity. If one makes a bad argument, it is a bad argument. It's not bad because of the identity of the person making it."<sup>34</sup>

Not everyone sees the situation that way. Because of security concerns, congresses and conferences are cancelled, lectures and speeches are cancelled, and books not published because of alleged ethnocentric or racist content - and this in the home of freedom of expression: the West, which sees itself as its stronghold. In France, Great Britain and Germany, for example, numerous academics have recently been prevented from speaking by so-called "activists". Their claims to truth are considered sacrosanct by these activists, and in the face of fearful university administrations, they know how to make good use of the intimidation effect - the London political scientist Eric Kaufman of Birkbeck College speaks of a "chilling effect."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> The quote from K.A. Appiah is taken from the article by Kenan Malik "Decolonizing our minds?" that appeared in *The Observer* on February 19, 2017 and is also relevant to what follows here; URL: <https://kenanmalik.com/2017/02/19/decolonizing-our-minds/>

<sup>35</sup> Eric Kaufman: The Threat to Academic Freedom: From Anecdotes to Data. In: Quillette, 12 March 2021; URL: <https://quillette.com/2021/03/12/the-threat-to-academic-freedom-from-anecdotes-to-data/>.

## Concluding remarks

The scope of what can be said has narrowed drastically in some places in academia in recent years. The concomitant impoverishment of intellectual discourse in the sciences is closely related to an epistemological deficit in the deconstructionist thought that informs postcolonial and antiracist identity politics, which has its origins in French poststructuralism, the central component of postmodern philosophy. According to this school of thought, there is not one truth, but many truths that try to assert themselves in a power play. Among radical representatives of those disciplines in which decolonization and racism are addressed - similarly for a number of gender issues - universal values and methods are seen as concepts imposed by the patriarchy of the "white man". That the latter uses science in his effort to dominate seems obvious to the representative of postmodern thinking in the wake of Michel Foucault, since power relations find their manifest expression not only in the applied sciences but also in the interpretive sciences; even their methodological foundations: objectivity and intersubjectivity, are only masked forms of a subliminally acting will to power.

In his essay "Insiders and Outsiders" from 1972, but also in the book *On Social Structure and Science*, published in 1996,<sup>36</sup> Robert K. Merton demonstrated the radical relativism associated with such strategies of thought and carried it to its aporetic conclusion. Merton is concerned with presenting the implications of that mode of thinking which regards a certain kind of experience as constitutive of acts of understanding and of the knowledge which in turn relates to them. If one generalizes such a claim, then, according to Merton, it must logically hold that only black scholars can understand blacks, and only white scholars can understand whites. If from there one integrated not only races but also nations, social classes and communities of scholars into this kind of doctrine of understanding, then the members of certain nations could be understood only by their compatriots, women only by

<sup>36</sup> Robert K. Merton: *Insiders and Outsiders*. A Chapter in the *Sociology of Knowledge* [1972]. In: Werner Sollors (ed.), *Theories of Ethnicity. A Classical Reader*, New York: New York University Press 1996, pp. 325-369; *On Social Structure and Science*. Edited and with an introduction by Piotr Sztompka, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press 1996.

women, and men only by men, furthermore Catholics only by Catholics, and Jews only by Jews, and so also sociologists only by sociologists.<sup>37</sup> Now, as experience shows, we do not belong to only one particular social circle, but to several social circles. Individuals are thus plural subjects. This means, however, that the fiction of a community of insiders can only be maintained at the price of ignoring other characteristics of the individual belonging to the community. Thus, according to Merton, an insider paradox results. Namely, if only white scholars can understand whites, and only black scholars can understand blacks, and if further, men can be understood only by men, and women only by women, then the bizarre situation arises that both premises strictly limit each other: "for it then turns out, by implication, that some insiders are excluded from understanding other insiders with white women being condemned not to understand white men, and black men, not to understand black women, and so through the various combinations of status-subsets."<sup>38</sup>

In all these applications of a hermeneutic principle of heterogeneity of in-groups and out-groups, and - more generally - of inclusion and exclusion, a kind of faith standpoint emerges. Respectability as a scientist supposedly cannot be gained - or at least not solely - through any achievements, because this ability is acquired either by birth or by belonging to a certain community. The members of these communities have an insider status in the manner of a faith community, while the outsiders are characterized by a structural inability to understand groups, classes, societies and cultures that are foreign to them. The outsiders may see some things "correctly", but they are not able to come to "true" knowledge - better: to the knowledge of the "true".

This assumption or "theory" could also well be seen as the ideological basis of tribal conflicts. For, as it is said, conflicts of knowledge between the groups that mutually regard each other as insiders and outsiders cannot be resolved by the means of reason. Today, the woke activists of radical identity politics<sup>39</sup> are confronting themselves with the outsiders who allegedly

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Robert K. Merton: On Social Structure and Science (fn. 35), pp. 245 f.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>39</sup> On the origins, content, and forms of contemporary identity politics, see Helen Pluckrose/James Lindsay: *Zynische Theorien. Wie aktivistische Wissenschaft Race, Gender und Identität über alles stellt - und warum das niemandem nützt*. Translated from the English by Sabine Reinhardus and Helmut Dierlamm, Munich: C.H. Beck 2022. - Unfortunately, I only became aware of this book, which is very significant for the topic discussed here, after the manuscript was completed.

incriminate them and whom they regard as intellectually handicapped. The cognitive foundations of their own arguments, some of them believe, differ from those of the outsiders in significant respects. This calls into question the possibility of rational argumentation bridging the different group opinions, but ultimately also undermines intersubjective judgment formation. The epistemic foundations of discursivity appear only as elements of the domination knowledge of certain groups in the struggle for power and prestige.

One need not already be an enemy of the new and a reactionary in order, for obvious reasons, not to want to live in a society dominated by such ideas. For in such a society the possibility of interpersonal understanding is at stake. For the hermeneutics of this new kind is in the beginning not the word, but an act which can no longer be restrained by words and arguments and which at best only uses them to legitimize itself.