

# WILEY

## Wesleyan University

---

How to Overcome Ethnocentrism: Approaches to a Culture of Recognition by History in the Twenty-First Century

Author(s): Jörn Rüsen

Source: *History and Theory*, Vol. 43, No. 4, Theme Issue 43: Historians and Ethics (Dec., 2004), pp . 118-129

Published by: [Wiley](#) for [Wesleyan University](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3590639>

Accessed: 09-01-2016 10:59 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Wesleyan University and Wiley are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *History and Theory*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

HOW TO OVERCOME ETHNOCENTRISM:  
APPROACHES TO A CULTURE OF RECOGNITION  
BY HISTORY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY<sup>1</sup>

JÖRN RÜSEN

Die wahre Liberalität ist Anerkennung.  
Goethe<sup>2</sup>

ABSTRACT

Much international and intercultural discourse about historiography is influenced by a way of historical thinking deeply rooted in human historical consciousness and that works throughout all cultures and in all times: ethnocentrism. Ethnocentric history conceives of identity in terms of “master-narratives” that define togetherness and difference as essential for identity in a way that causes tension and struggle. These narratives conceive of history in terms of “clashes of civilizations,” and they reinforce the idea that international and intercultural relations are merely struggles for power.

The main elements of ethnocentrism are: asymmetrical evaluation, teleological continuity, and centralized perspective. This essay articulates possibilities for overcoming these three elements by replacing asymmetrical evaluation with normative equality; teleological continuity with reconstructive concepts of development that emphasize contingency and discontinuity; and centralized perspectives with multi-perspectivity and poly-centric approaches to historical experience. Adopting these possibilities would lead to a new mode of universal history rooted in a concept of humankind that can help solve the problem of ethnocentrism. This idea of humankind conceptualizes the unity of the human species as being manifest in a variety of cultures and historical developments. This is in fact the traditional concept of historicism, which can be further developed towards a historiography that responds to the challenges of globalization and cultural differences.

The essay outlines theoretical and methodological means in historical studies that bring this idea of humankind into the work of historians, thus enabling them to contribute to a new culture of recognition. The article is based on the assumption that the creation of such a culture is the most important task of scholarly work in the humanities in general, and historical studies in particular, at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

I. THE DANGER OF ETHNOCENTRISM IN HISTORICAL THINKING TODAY

We are living in a world of globalization, which brings different traditions and civilizations into closer and closer contact. This growing density in intercultural

1. A version of this paper was delivered at the conference “Chinese and Comparative Historical Thinking in the 21st Century,” April 8–10, 2004, Fudan University, Taiwan, organized by the Himalaya Foundation. Reprinted with permission from *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies* 1:1 (June 2004), published by the Centre for the Study of East Asian Civilisations, National Taiwan University.

2. “True liberality is recognition.” *Maximen und Reflexionen*, *Goethes Werke*, hrsg. im Auftrage der Großherzogin Sophie v. Sachsen, I. Abteilung, Band 42 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1904), 222.

communication challenges historical thinking. It is history where people formulate, present, and discuss their identity, their belonging to each other, their togetherness, and, at the same time, their differences from others. The globalization process confronts traditional historical identities with an accelerating change of life conditions, which highly problematizes the traditional distinction between the internal realm of the life of one's own people and the external realm of the lives of others. Both become intermixed, and universalistic elements of cultural life, such as the internet and important sectors of the culture industry, require a redefinition of what makes the difference between myself and others in another culture. Only in this way can I know what my identity is.

In order to strengthen one's own historical identity vis-à-vis the challenge of uniforming tendencies in cultural life, one has to sharpen the awareness of differences in the historical presentation of one's own collective identity. Doing so, the already-established and permanently-used cultural strategies of historical identity formation will be set into power again, and can be applied to the changing conditions of present-day life. However, this application of the traditional mode of presenting historical identity in the form of a so-called master narrative causes problems, since the logic of these master narratives is ethnocentric. It works with an unbalanced relationship between the image of oneself and the different image of others in such a way that the necessary self-esteem of a powerful historical identity is brought about at the cost of the otherness of others.

A simple example of an ethnocentric concept of historical identity is the distinction between civilization and barbarism. This distinction has been used all over the world: one's own people historically stand for civilization and its achievements, whereas the otherness of others is a deviation from these standards. (Sometimes we find a reversed evaluation. In this case the hopes of bettering one's own life-form are projected into the otherness of others. But this is of secondary importance, and in fact does not essentially change the inequality in the interrelationship between selfness and otherness, togetherness and being different.) This inequality inevitably causes a "clash of civilizations," since others follow the same logic and thus gain self-esteem at the cost of "other" others.

These tendencies are powerful even in the realm of historical studies. The clash of civilizations is an issue even in academic discourse, although most of the participants aren't aware of it. But if we look at the logical presuppositions of international and intercultural discussions on world civilizations, we can observe ethnocentric attitudes. These attitudes appear in different manifestations: in the traditional one in Western countries, the dominant issues of historical thinking generally are Western themes of history. Non-Western history normally plays a marginal role. History curricula in schools and universities give non-Western cultures little, if any, space. Non-Western history normally becomes a part of the curriculum in the context of Western colonialism and imperialism. The authenticity of non-Western traditions generally is no issue.

But this is only a surface observation. More important is the way cultural difference is thematized and approached in historical studies, and the hidden presuppositions of academic historical thinking when different cultures are at stake. The most obvious indication of this presupposition is the way cultural difference

is illustrated in presenting a historical argumentation about it. Most of the sketches presented by the speakers in academic discourse use the picture of separate circles, each circle representing one culture.



The symbols are clear: the interrelationship between different cultures essentially is an external one. Logically, cultures exclude each other. Belonging to a culture is an “either–or” proposition. Each culture is a universe in itself and has a clear borderline separating it from other cultures. This is only a picture, but there are elaborated typologies of cultural differences that exactly follow this way of thinking. The most prominent thinkers of this exclusiveness are Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee. A contemporary academic who conceptualizes his universal typology of cultural difference in the same way is Johan Galtung.<sup>3</sup>

(A revealing indication of this hidden ethnocentrism in academic life was the introduction to the major theme of “global history” in the world historians’ meeting at Oslo in 2000: The introduction presented the history of global historical thinking without any non-Western examples.<sup>4</sup> Other presentations followed the same one-sided historical perspective on global history.)

What is the problem with this way of conceptualizing cultures or civilizations and their interrelationship? It follows a traditional logic of identity-formation and related modes of historical thinking, in which separation is prior to integration and which does not have cultural elements going across differences. There is an epistemological difficulty in presenting this type of typology: where is the place of the academic who presents this typology? Is it possible to step out of one of the cultural types? Stepping out and looking at the totality of different cultures would give the academic a godlike position, an absolute standpoint, which is impossible to take vis-à-vis the different semantics of cultures.

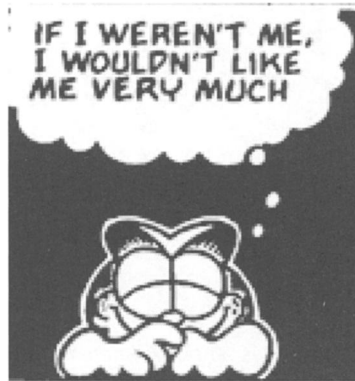
This might be of interest only to philosophers; but the conceptual separation of cultures implies a fundamental weakness in respect to the normative dimension of identity-formation in an intercultural context. Identity has always been an issue of values. A convincing concept of identity furnishes people with self-esteem. Since identity has always been grounded in a difference from the otherness of others, the positive evaluation of oneself logically leads to a negative view of the otherness of others. This is the problem of ethnocentrism—the deeply-rooted and universally-spread mode of filling the difference between self and others with positive and negative values. Since others follow the same logic of one’s own people, there is a mutual devaluation in intercultural relationship. By this logic of identity-formation a fundamental and universal clash of civilizations is constituted.

3. Johan Galtung, “Six Cosmologies: An Impressionistic Presentation,” in idem, *Peace by Peaceful Means* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 211-222.

4. Patrick O’Brian, “Making Sense of Global History,” in *The 19th International Congress of the Historical Sciences, Oslo 2000, Commemorative Volume*, ed. Solvi Sogner (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2001), 3-18.

The history of all civilizations is full of this asymmetrical evaluation in the process of identity-formation. People ascribe positive values to themselves, and define the otherness of others by deviations or even contradictions of these values. The distinction between civilization and barbarism is one of the most prominent examples. In archaic civilizations even the quality of humanness was exclusively ascribed to one's own group.<sup>5</sup> Others were non-humans (and could be treated in a way that nobody would dare to treat the members of one's own group). This tension or clash does not vanish if the quality of being a human being is universalized, since this universalism does not dissolve the difference between selfness and otherness, which is constitutive for identity in principle. Vis-à-vis universalistic concepts of humankind, the specifics of one's own people's difference from other peoples is normally conceptualized as a realization of these universal values to a higher degree.

There is a fundamental self-relatedness in human life that constitutes the subjectivity of individuals and social units. This self-relatedness is the starting point for identity. For the purpose of mental survival it is necessary to fill this constitutive self with positive self-esteem as a mental condition for practical life. This basic logic of self-esteem is clearly presented by the following picture from a *Garfield* comic strip:



Social interrelationship is a permanent struggle for this positive self-esteem confirmed by others, and togetherness is constituted by a life-form in which this confirmation takes place.

The master narratives of a social unit are cultural manifestations of this confirmation. They tell people a story in which they find themselves belonging to one another on the basis of a shared life-form within which they find themselves accepted and confirmed. Belonging to this group, to this nation or civilization, gives them self-esteem, makes them proud of the achievements of their own people.

## II. THE LOGIC OF ETHNOCENTRISM IN HISTORICAL THINKING

How do master narratives tell people who they are and who the others are with whom they have to live together? There are three basic operations and qualities

5. Cf. *Menschenbilder früherer Gesellschaften: Ethnologische Studien zum Verhältnis von Mensch und Natur. Gedächtnisschrift für Hermann Baumann*, ed. Klaus E. Müller (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1983).

in bringing about convincing master narratives: (a) an asymmetrical distribution of positive and negative values into the different realms of oneself and into the otherness of others; (b) a teleological continuity of the identity-formation value system; and (c) a monocentric spatial organization for one's own life-form in its temporal perspectivity.

(a) Concerning its guiding value-system, ethnocentric historical thinking is based on an unbalanced relationship between good and evil. As I have already pointed out, positive values shape the historical image of oneself, and negative ones the image of others. A pointed example from the level of daily life comes from the context of the Irish–British struggle in Northern Ireland. It is the drawing of a pupil of eleven presenting his Protestant identity as being sharply distinguished from the Irish one.



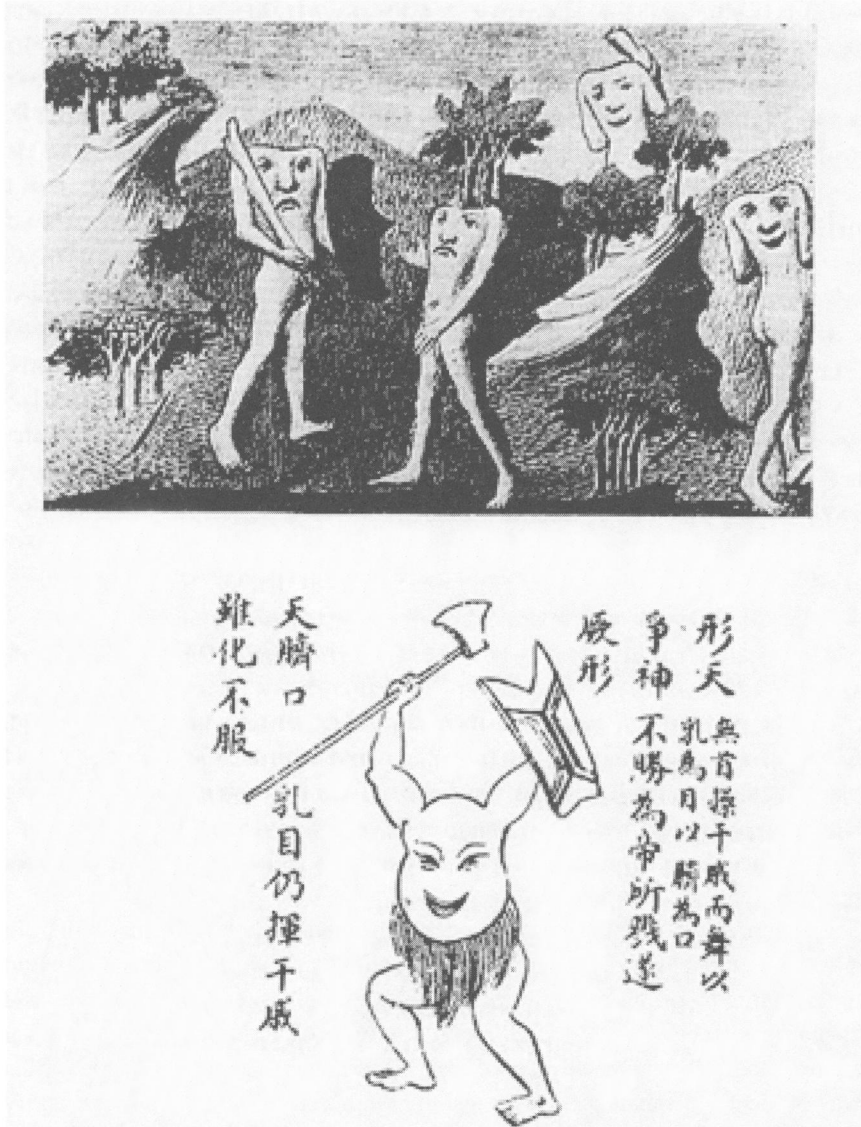
George's drawing, showing the separation of the British and Irish realms in Belfast, North Ireland (Ulster); left the Protestant side, right the Catholic one (each with the national flag)<sup>6</sup>

On the higher level of today's sophisticated historical discourse we can observe a new mode of ethnocentric argumentation, which seems to have given up its internal violence and aggression to others: it is the widespread strategy of self-victimization. Being a victim makes one innocent; and vis-à-vis the permanent suffering in historical experience, guilt and responsibility for this suffering is put into the concept of otherness.

(b) Teleological continuity is the dominant concept of time that rules the idea of history in master narratives. Traditionally, historical development from the origins of one's own life-form through the changes of time to the present-day situation and its outlook into the future is a temporally extended version of all those elements of this special life-form, which constitute the mental togetherness of the people. In the traditional way of master narratives, the identity-formation value system is repre-

6. Robert Coles, *The Political Life of Children* (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), figure 3. "In George's picture the Shankill is a place besieged by the dregs of society. Catholics are messy, scattered, ratlike. Protestants are stoic, clean, neatly arranged. Armageddon would appear to be the razed, rubble-strewn no-man's-land between any Protestant part of Belfast and its nearest Catholic center of population. A high red-brick wall should separate all such neighborhoods, the child insists—and does so with a red crayon" (Coles's description, p. 86).

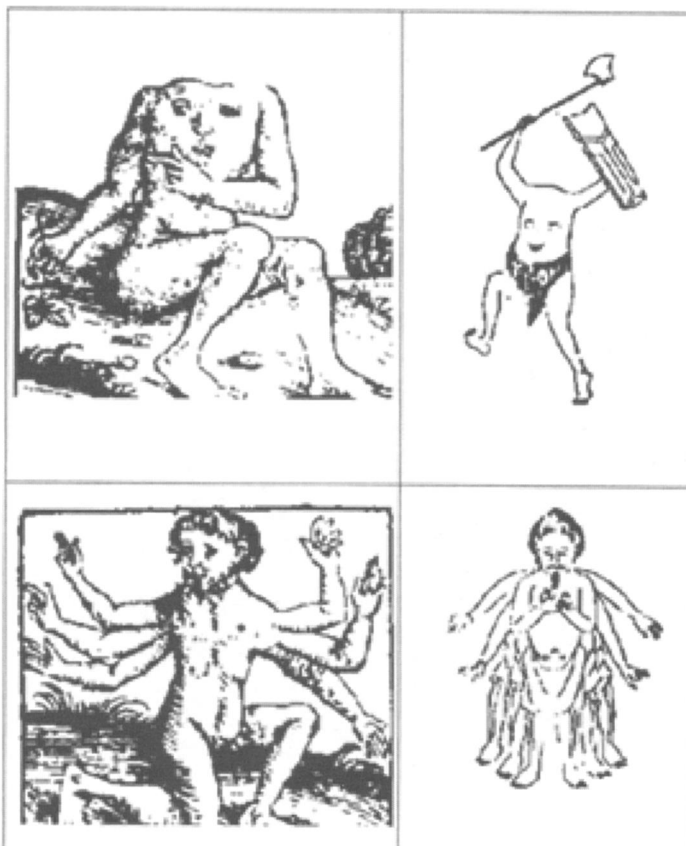
sented in the form of an archetypical origin.<sup>7</sup> History is committed to this origin, and its validity furnishes the past with historical meaning and sense. History has an aim, which is the moving force of its development from the very beginning. This origin is always a specific one; it is the origin of one's own people. Otherness is either related to different origins or to an aberration from the straight way of one's own development guided by the validity of the original life-form.



Above, the European idea of the Chinese in medieval times; below, the Chinese idea of the Europeans.<sup>8</sup>

7. For an interesting example of the importance of origins in academic historical writing, see Cristina Petrescu, "Who Was the First in Transylvania: On the Origins of the Romanian–Hungarian Controversy over Minority Rights," *Romanian Political Science Review* 3:4 (2003), 1119–1148.

8. Zdenek Vasizek, *L'Archéologie, L'Histoire, Le Passé. Chapitres sur la Présentation, L'Épistémologie et l'Ontologie du Temps Perdu* (Sceaux, France: Kronos, 1994), 116.



Hartmann Schedel: Weltchronik. 1493

Wu Jen-Ch'en: Shan-hai-ching kuang-chu. 1667

## European and Chinese Presentation of Otherness in Early Modern History

(c) The spatial equivalent to this temporal perspective is a monocentric world. One's own people live in the center of the world, and otherness is situated and placed at the margins. The longer the distance from the center, the more negative is the image of otherness. At the margins of one's own world live the monsters. That is done, for example, in astonishing similarity in both the West and China, probably in mutual ignorance.

I have presented the three main strategies of ethnocentric master narratives in a very schematic way. Their concrete realization is done in a broad variety and in a multitude of different historical cultures with their developments and changes. It is necessary to look through this variety and identify the underlying anthropologically universal rules of identity formation. Only if the logic of this way of identity-formation by historical thinking is stated clearly can we identify its power in many manifestations and efforts in today's historical culture, including the academic discourse of professional historians.

## III. A NON-ETHNOCENTRIC WAY OF HISTORICAL SENSE-GENERATION

How can the logic of ethnocentric historical identity-formation be overcome and how can its built-in clash of civilization be avoided? On the level of the logical principles of historical thinking, the answer is rather simple:

(a) In respect to unequal evaluation, the identity-forming value system must include *the principle of equality* going across the difference between self and others. Then the difference itself loses its normatively dividing force. But equality is an abstraction going beyond the essential issue of identity: differences of engraved historical experiences and obligatory value systems. If one applies the principle of equality to identity-formation and, at the same time, keeps up the necessity of establishing difference, the logical result will be *the principle of the mutual recognition of differences*. Mutuality realizes equality, and in this form equality gets the form of a balanced interrelationship. If we attribute to this interrelationship a normative quality (which is necessary, since the issue of identity is a matter of constituting values) it becomes the principle of recognition.

In order to introduce this principle it is necessary to break the power of self-esteem and its shadow of devaluing the otherness of others. This demands another strategy of historical thinking: The necessity of *integrating negative historical experiences into the master narrative of one's own group*. Thus the self-image of the people becomes ambivalent, and this enables people to recognize otherness. A short look at the topical historical culture in Europe will provide many examples. The catastrophic events of the twentieth century are a challenge to raise this ambivalence in the historical self-awareness of Europeans.

Such an integration of negative, even disastrous and deeply hurtful, experiences into one's own identity causes a new awareness of the elements of loss and trauma in historical thinking.<sup>9</sup> New modes of dealing with these experiences, of working them through, become necessary. Mourning<sup>10</sup> and forgiving<sup>11</sup> could be such cultural strategies in overcoming ethnocentrism.

(b) In respect to the principles of teleological continuation, the alternative is an idea of historical development that is now conceptualized as a reconstruction

9. Cf. F. R. Ankersmit, "The Sublime Dissociation of the Past: Or How to Be(come) What One Is No Longer," *History and Theory* 40 (2001), 295-323; Jörn Rüsen, "Crisis, Trauma, and Identity" (Chinese: Weiji, chuangshang yu rentong), *Zhongguo xueshu* [China Scholarship] 3:1 (2002), 15-38; Saul Friedländer, "Trauma, Memory, and Transference," in *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 252-263; Bernhard Giesen, "National Identity as Trauma: The German Case," in *Myth and Memory in the Construction of Community: Historical Patterns in Europe and Beyond*, ed. Bo Strath (Brussels: Lang, 2000), 227-247; Dominick LaCapra, *History, Theory, Trauma: Representing the Holocaust* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994); Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Michael S. Roth, *The Ironist's Cage: Memory, Trauma, and the Construction of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

10. Cf. *Trauer und Geschichte (Beiträge zur Geschichtskultur*, Bd. 22), ed. Burkhard Liebsch and Jörn Rüsen (Cologne: Böhlau, 2001); Jörn Rüsen, "Historical Thinking as *Trauerarbeit*: Burckhardt's Answer to the Question of Our Time," forthcoming in *Begegnungen mit Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897)*. (*Beiträge zu Jacob Burckhardt*, Bd. 4), ed. Andreas Cesana and Lionel Gossman (Basel: Schwabe, 2004), 337-355; Dominick LaCapra, "Revisiting the Historians' Debate: Mourning and Genocide," in *Passing into History: Nazism and the Holocaust beyond Memory: In honor of Saul Friedländer on his 65th Birthday*, ed. Ne'Emanarad Gulie, *History and Memory* 9:1-2 (Fall 1997), 80-112; Jay Winter, *Sights of Memory, Sights of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

11. Eva Mozes Kor, "Echoes from Auschwitz: My Journey to Healing," *Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut Jahrbuch 2002-2003* (Essen: Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut, 2003), 262-270; Paul Ricoeur, *Das Rätsel der Vergangenheit: Erinnern—Vergessen—Verzeihen* (Essener Kulturwissenschaftliche Vorträge, Bd. 2) (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1998).

of a temporal chain of conditions of possibility. This kind of historical thinking is a gain in historicity: one definitely looks *back* into the past and not forward from an archaic origin to the present. Instead, the present life-situation and its future perspective are turned back to the past in order to gain knowledge about the preconditions for this present-day life situation and its intended change into the future. Such a way of historical thinking strengthens elements of contingency, rupture, and discontinuity in historical experience. Thus the ambivalence and ambiguity of the identity-forming value system in the realm of historical experience can be met.

Under the guidance of such a concept of history the past loses its quality of inevitability. Things could have been different, and there has been no necessity in the actual development. If one implies this logic to European historical identity, a remarkable change will take place: one has to give up the idea that present-day Europe and the topical process of unification are an inevitable consequence from the very beginning in antiquity. Instead, Europe has not only changed its spatial dimensions, but its cultural definition as well. Its history becomes more open to alternatives; and this kind of historical awareness opens up a broader future perspective and gives space for a higher degree of freedom in the interrelationship between future and past.

(c) In respect to spatial monoperspectivity, the non-ethnocentric alternative is *multiperspectivity and polycentrism*.

In the case of Europe this multiperspectivity and polycentrism is evident: each nation and even many regions have their own perspective in representing the past; and Europe has many capitals. Instead of one single center, Europe has a network of communicating places.

But multiperspectivity and the multitude of voices raise a problem: What about the unity of history? Is there only variety, diversity, and multitude, and nothing comprehensive? The traditional master narratives of all civilizations contain a universalistic perspective; and for a long time the West has been committed to such a comprehensive "universal history" as well. Do we have to give up this historical universalism in favor of a diverse multiculturalism? Many post-modernist historians and philosophers are convinced that this is inevitable. But such a multiculturalism is only plausible if comprehensive truth claims are given up such that the consequence would be a general relativism. But this relativism would open the door for an unrestricted "clash of civilizations." If there is no possibility of integration and agreement upon a comprehensive perspective that may mediate and synthesize cultural differences, the last word concerning the relationship between the different perspectives is pluralism and competition. Under certain conditions this would lead to struggle and mental war.

Since it is impossible to step out of one's own cultural context and to gain a standpoint beyond the diversity of cultural traditions, what can be done about these multitudes? We have to find principles that may mediate and even synthesize the different perspectives. In academic discourse such universalistic elements are truth claims of historical cognition, which stem from the methodological rationality of historical thinking and which are valid across cultural differ-

ences. (This is at least true for source-critique; but even for the higher level of historical interpretation one can find universalistic principles that every historian is committed to: logical coherence, relatedness to experience, openness to argumentation, and so on.)

But these principles are not sufficient to solve the problem of multiperspectivity and multiculturalism. I think that the solution will be a *principle of humankind* that includes the value of equality and that can lead to the general rule of mutual recognition of differences. Every culture and tradition has to be checked as to whether and how it has contributed to the validity of this rule, and whether it can serve as a potential of tradition to inspire the topical discourses of professional historians in intercultural communication.

#### IV. APPLICATIONS

How can this non-ethnocentric way of historical sense-generation be applied to the topical discourses of historical studies? The first application is a reflection on the mode or logic of historical sense-generation in historical studies. We need a growing awareness of the presupposed or underlying sense criteria of historical thinking. Philosophy of history or theory of history should become an integral part of the work of historians. Only if this is the case is it possible to consider the power of ethnocentric thinking and the effectiveness of some of its principles. This reflection should lead to a fundamental criticism on the level of the logic of historical thinking. Using a concept of culture or civilization should always be accompanied by a reflection on whether this concept stems from the tradition of Spengler and Toynbee and therefore defines its subject matter in an exclusive way. Such a higher level of reflexivity will enable historians to observe themselves as to whether they directly or indirectly thematize otherness while presenting the history of their own people. Within such a new awareness one has to check the extent of recognition, or at least the willingness to give others a voice of their own.

This consequently leads to a new critical attempt in the history of historiography. Since every historiographical work is committed to a tradition, it is necessary to check this tradition in respect to those elements within which historians can achieve recognition of otherness. In this respect the hermeneutic tradition of understanding is very important. To what degree do the established methods of historical interpretation allow for the idea of a multitude of cultures and their crossing over the strong division between selfness and otherness?

There is one interpretive practice of historical thinking that comes close to the achievement of recognition. Historians should explicate and reflect their own historical perspectives and concepts of interpretation. They should confront them in a systematic way with the perspectives and concepts of interpretation that are a part of those traditions and cultures with which they are dealing. This mutual checking is more than a comparison: it introduces elements of methodologically rationalized empathy into the work of the historian, and empathy is a necessary condition for recognition.

One of the most important fields of applying a non-ethnocentric way of historical thinking to historical studies is intercultural comparison. Here cultural dif-

ference as a logical impact of every concept of historical identity is at stake. In order to pursue a non-ethnocentric treatment of cultural difference it is necessary to explicate and reflect the parameters of comparison before everything else. Very often the topical settings of one's own culture serve as such parameters, and this is already an ethnocentric approach to otherness. Therefore it is necessary to start from anthropological universals valid in all cultures and to proceed by constructing ideal types on a rather abstract level into which these universals can be concretized. Cultural peculiarity should be interpreted with the help of these ideal types. They can make it plausible that cultural difference is not rooted in specific essentials unique only for one culture, but that cultural particularity is an issue of a composition of different elements each or at least most of which can be found in other cultures as well. Thus the specifics of cultures are brought about by different constellations of the same elements.

The theoretical approach to cultural difference that is guided by this idea of cultural specifics does not fall into the trap of ethnocentrism. On the contrary, it presents the otherness of different cultures as a mirror that enables us to get a better self-understanding. It does not exclude otherness constituting the peculiarity of the cultural features of oneself, but includes it. Cultural specifics bring about an interrelationship of cultures that enables people to come to terms with differences by providing them with the cultural power of recognition and acknowledgement.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to these theoretical and methodological strategies for overcoming ethnocentrism, we need a practical one as well. Professional historians are able to discuss their issues across cultural differences. But as soon as these issues touch their own identity, academic discourse acquires a new quality and requires a sharpened awareness and a highly developed sensitivity to the entanglement of historical studies in the politics of identity, in the struggle for recognition among peoples, nations, and civilizations or cultures.

The so-called scientific character of academic discourse is characterized by a distance from issues of practical life. This distance enables professional historians to produce solid knowledge with inbuilt criteria of plausibility. At the very moment when identity issues enter the academic discourse this distance becomes problematic.<sup>13</sup> Nobody can be neutral when one's own identity is in question. Identity is commitment. But this commitment can be pursued in different ways. There is one way that establishes an equivalent to distance and to truth claims: the way of arguing. Bringing the issue of identity into an argumentative discourse will open up the fundamental involvement of historians in their historical identity. It may allow the awareness that others are related to their own historical identity as well, and that there is a chance of mutual recognition.

12. Cf. Jörn Rüsen, "Some Theoretical Approaches to Intercultural Comparison of Historiography," *History and Theory*, Theme Issue 35: *Chinese Historiography in Comparative Perspective* (1996), 5-22 (in Chinese: "Kua wenhua bijiaoshixue de yixie lilum zonxiang," in *Zhongguo shi xue shi yan tao hui: cong bi jiao guan dian chu fa lun wen ji*, ed. S. Weigelin-Schwiedrzik and Axel Schneider [Taipei: Taotian chubanshe, 1999], 151-176).

13. Cf. Jörn Rüsen, Introduction: "Historical Thinking as Intercultural Discourse," in *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate*, ed. Jörn Rüsen (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 1-14.

In order to realize this recognition we need a pragmatics of intercultural communication, in which the mode and the rules of such an argumentation about identities are reflected, explicated, discussed, and applied to the ongoing communicative process. This is what we all should do; in doing so we will enrich our own historical identity by recognizing others.

*Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut  
Essen, Germany*