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Fernand Braudel and the concept of the person

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This article offers an interpretation and analysis of the presuppositions of historical thought.[1] When the historian sets out to think about a past object certain conditions must be fulfilled for thinking to be at all possible. The aim of a presuppositional analysis is to arrive at a conceptualisation that articulates the conditions necessary for a particular body of thought. The point of entry into the analysis is this: observing the practices of a particular discipline one sees fairly soon that there are certain concepts and procedures that distinguish it from other disciplines. There is of course overlap between some disciplines, such as between philosophy and history. But between other disciplines there is no overlap that would yield an appropriate and consistent shared theory, such as is the case with history and mathematics for instance. Nevertheless, sometimes scholars transgress disciplinary boundaries. A prominent example is the French historian Fernand Braudel (1902–1985).

Analysis is a descriptive undertaking but because all descriptions contain non-descriptive elements analysis is necessarily normative as well. For this reason, the analysis is only acceptable by historians who share its main presupposition – namely, that the object of historical thought is the person.[2] I take the analysis to be justified and appropriate only given

1. Confessedly, my main areas of research lie in intellectual history and the philosophy of history. Consequently, my thought is primarily drawn from and directed towards those disciplines. However, I still believe that what I am about to propose holds true for other sub-disciplines in history as well.

2. In Swedish academic discourse words like "individ" and "aktör" are more akin to what I have in mind than "person". I do not quarrel over words, and only concern myself with the content given to them.

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the nature of the object, or concept, analysed. There is much confusion among historians concerning this kind of higher-order thinking about their discipline. Braudel is a good case in point. Therefore, in the following two sections I shall interpret Braudel's thought on the presuppositions of history. By so doing I will demonstrate two things. On the one hand, I will show by way of implication that Braudel postulates the person as the object of historical thought of any order, and that this might have been prompted by very personal experiences. With this interpretation I hope to contribute to re-directing our understanding of Braudel.[3] On the other hand, I will show that Braudel's presuppositions are wholly inappropriate given the nature of the person, and so if it can be shown that one of the most prominent structuralist historians strove to understand persons and not structures, then this strongly suggests not only that historians *should* do a person-oriented history, but that they usually *do*.[4] And from this derives the value of the analysis: to make explicit the commitments of this doing of ours. The analysis is undertaken in the last three sections.[5]

The object of historical thought: The person

We know that in the hands of Leopold von Ranke history became a body of thought that resounds subtly but firmly in contemporary historical scholarship.[6] Ranke identified the object of historical thought exclusively as political and diplomatic events at state and international level. The study of these events Ranke grounded in certain rules of source-criticism, which he had adopted and developed from classical philology. The innovative epistemic leap taken by Ranke lay in his privileging of certain kinds of past remnants as the only sound basis of evidence. The principle Ranke worked out can perhaps be formulated along these lines: for any event to be thought about, sufficient evidence for it must take the form of two, or

3. This interpretation has not been considered before. See e.g. Jaume Aurell, "Autobiographical texts as historiographical sources: rereading Fernand Braudel and Annie Krieger", *Biography* 29:3 (2006) p. 425–445.

4. I should wish the reader to bear in mind that Braudel's relationship to the philosophies of history of his time was recalcitrant. See Fernand Braudel, "En marge ou au cœur de l'histoire?", *Annales: histoire, sciences sociales* 4:3 (1949) p. 311–315.

5. I should like to add that both the interpretation and the analysis could easily be turned into book-long studies.

6. For a good philosophical discussion of Ranke's method see Aviezer Tucker, *Our knowledge of the past: a philosophy of historiography* (Cambridge 2004). Tuckers's understanding of Ranke is in some ways anachronistic and should therefore be complemented with Georg G. Iggers & James M. Powell (ed.), *Leopold von Ranke and the shaping of the historical discipline* (Syracuse 1990).

more, from each other independent documents, written by direct observers of the event in question. If they both state essentially the same state of affairs, then they can be used as evidence for the statement that such and such actually happened.

In Sweden it was the brothers Curt and Lauritz Weibull at Lund University who, during the first half of the twentieth century, brought about a change in favour of the Rankean critical approach to history.[7] In France, critical history was institutionalised not least by the Sorbonnes historians Charles-Victor Langlois and Charles Seignobos. *Les sorbonnistes*, as Braudel came to call them, had adopted and diffused the Rankean principles through their 1897 *Introduction aux études historiques*.[8] Braudel gained his Ph. D. at the Sorbonnes during a time in which the *sorbonnistes* still had firm control over the presuppositions of historical thought.[9]

Braudel's doctoral thesis, first published in 1949 and then in a revised form in 1966, has the title *La Méditerranée et le monde médititerranéen à l'epoque de Philippe II*. It is truly a monumental piece of historical scholarship and worth reading for many reasons. It began as an exercise in conventional political-diplomatic history. However, Braudel soon shifted his focus drastically. During his archival studies in Algeria,[10] Braudel received a letter from a certain Lucien Febvre, whom he had first met in Paris in 1937.[11] Febvre was a historian from Strasbourg who had studied at the prestigious École Normale Supérieure (ENS) in Paris. There he had come under the influence of the geographer Paul Vidal de la Blanche and his conception of human geography. Blanche held that history, as it was conceptualised in France, was misguided and failed to see the essential foundations of

7. Institutionally Lauritz secured Lund, Curt Gothenburg, and their student, the famous Erik Lönnroth, Uppsala. Birgitta Odén, "Det moderna historisk-kritiska genombrottet i svensk historisk forskning", *Scandia* 41:1 (1975) p. 5–29.

8. To my knowledge it is still a matter of debate about whether, or perhaps to what extent, Seignobos influenced the brothers Weibull. Rolf Torstendahl is convinced that this is the case. See Rolf Torstendahl, "Curt Weibull: en anteckning", *Scandia* 58:2 (1992) p. 151–156.

9. For Braudel's background see e.g. J. H. Hexter, "Fernand Braudel and the *Monde Braudelien...*", *Journal of modern history* 44:4 (1972) p. 480–539; Traian Stoianovich, *French historical method: the Annales paradigm: with a foreword by Fernand Braudel* (Ithaca & London 1976); Georg G. Iggers, *New directions in European historiography: revised edition* (Middletown 1984); and Fernand Braudel, "Personal testimony", *The journal of modern history* 44:4 (1972) p. 448–467.

10. Braudel was in Algeria because he was assigned his first teaching post there in 1923. See Paule Braudel, "Les origines intellectuelles de Fernand Braudel: un témoignage", *Annales: histoire, sciences sociales* 47:1 (1992) p. 237–244, 239.

11. Braudel (1992) p. 237.

the constitution of man (*homme*).[12] Febvre had come to be convinced that the person could only be understood through interdisciplinary work. This would mean combining efforts from human geography, history, ethnology, anthropology, sociology, economy, demography, linguistics, and psychology. All these sciences were "sciences de l'homme", sciences of man. It was to promote such interdisciplinary study that Febvre, along with his colleague March Bloch (whom Braudel only met three times between 1938 and 1939), had founded the journal *Annales* in 1929.

It was Febvre who convinced Braudel to shift his focus. He encouraged Braudel to take into account much more than mere political and diplomatic events. Braudel followed Febvre's exhortation. He retained the initial part on politics and diplomacy, but added two more. Moreover, Febvre had persuaded Braudel to reverse the order of importance of historical time. Instead of beginning with the shortest, the politics of and around Philipp II, he was to begin with the longest, which meant the Mediterranean *qua* human-geographic totality. In between he was to have the time of middle longevity. It was much, though not exclusively, based on this tripartite carving out of historical time that Braudel would come to work out his presuppositions of history. But Braudel seems to have made a clear picture in his mind of *La Méditerranée* quite late, perhaps as late as 1944.[13] And his systematic theoretical account is found for the first time in 1958.[14] As we will see shortly, these, are significant facts.

To put it bluntly: Braudel postulates the person as the object of historical thought. Not only Braudel, but upon closer scrutiny we find that the most important domains that the *Annales* historians in general have investigated are mentalities of people who had no means of saving information about themselves for posterity. Their studies are (almost) always about persons.[15] These studies view the person from certain assumptions about what the person is, and so these assumptions we must excavate and evaluate. Braudel's great incision into the fabric of historical thought was to see the

12. Though Henri Berr and Marc Bloch are two essential actors for the formation of the *Annales* School, Braudel always held Febvre closest to his heart. In Braudel (1972) he writes that Febvre came to be like a father to him and that he would never have managed to finish *La Méditerranée* without his support and help. Cf. Braudel (1992).

13. Braudel (1992) p. 243.

14. Fernand Braudel, "Histoire et sciences sociales: la longue durée", *Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations* 13:4 (1958) p. 725–753.

15. This is perhaps why the later generations of *Annales* historians affirmed their commitment to studying persons by turning to biography.

person in the *passive* mode. With his own words from his inauguration at the Collège de France in 1950: "'Man makes history'. No, history too makes men and fashions their destiny – the anonymous, profound, and even silent history [...]".[16] Even so, for Braudel historical thought always *begins* with the person, and it is to the person that it always *returns*. As the *doyen* himself writes, history is concerned with "[...] the social experience from which everything must begin, and to which everything must return".[17]

An interesting example of Braudel's postulation of person as the historical object of study is his recounting of his time as a German prisoner of war between 1940 and 1945. In these passages we see Braudel recognizing certain elements as being constitutive of the person, *his* person, but which run contrary to his other presuppositions. In fact, it was during this captivity that Braudel finished the first draft of *La Meditérranné*. At his disposal he had only his good memory, and pen and paper.[18] This was an arduous time for Braudel, one consisting of what he was to call "*évenéments*". Braudel argues, as we will see, that events belong to the most fleeing temporal dimension, hardly worthy of serious historical thought. Yet, such unimportant events had such a strong effect on Braudel that he sought to think beyond them:

> I have during the course of a rather morose imprisonment fought hard to escape the longevity of those difficult years (1940–1945). To refuse the events and the time of the events meant placing oneself on the margin, out of harms way, so as to see them from little more distance, judge them better, and believe in none of them too much.[19]

16. Fernand Braudel, "Les responsabilités de l'histoire", in Roselyn de Ayala & Paule Braudel (ed.), *Les écrits de Fernand Braudel: II: les ambitions de l'histoire* (Paris 1997) p. 97–117, 102. "'Les hommes font l'histoire'. Non, l'histoire fait aussi les hommes et façonne leur destin – l'histoire anonyme, profonde et souvent silencieuse [..]".

17. Braudel (1958) p. 746, "l'expérience sociale dont tout doit partir, où tout doit revenir". Consider what was written in the *Annales* in 1951, quoted and translated by Hexter (1972) p. 491: It is "[m]an living, complex, confused, as he is", that "*les sciences humaines* must seek to understand", this "[m]an whom all the social sciences must avoid slicing up, however skilful and artistic the carving".

18. This probably explains why there are no graphs or tables to be found in the first edition. The second one, in contrast, is full of them.

19. Braudel (1958) p. 748, "J'ai personnellement, au cours d'une captivité assez morose, beaucoup lutté pour échapper à la chronique de ces années difficiles (1940-1945). Refuser les événements et le temps des évenéments, c'était se mettre en marge, à l'abri, pour les regarder d'un peu plus loin, les mieux juger et n'y point trop croire". See also Braudel (1978) p. 453–454.

Here, I cautiously submit, Braudel is trying to understand himself. He does so by denying that such particular events have any significance for historical thought. In other words, there are strong indications of very personal, *phenomenal*,[20] motivations underwriting Braudel's thought and works. The support for this interpretation becomes stronger once we realise that it was not an uncommon sentiment Braudel voiced. Many Western academics who lived through the two world wars were profoundly affected by their experiences, and the effects were echoed in, indeed sometimes took over, their works. We can see this in the works of the historians Gaston Roupnel,[21] Reinhart Koselleck,[22] and Herbert Butterfield[23] for instance.

As we will see shortly, Braudel denies particular events any determining force by displacing the constitutive logic of the person's thinking and living to temporal and spatial dimensions of a beyond-personal order. For now, consider what Braudel writes about how one person comes to know another. Echoing the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, he writes that "denying the other, that is to already know him".[24] What the foregoing discussion makes evident is that Braudel himself recognizes the constitutive power of such elements, although he denies them vehemently elsewhere. This creates a tension in his historical thought that Braudel never really manages to resolve.

The importance of personhood for Braudel far exceeds his personal experiences. It is to be found at the heart of his purported structuralism. For instance, consider how Braudel applies concepts that are appropriate to understanding humans to objects of wholly different kinds. Structures, ports, towns, without recourse to persons, are attributed *planning*, *intention*, *organising*, *agency*, *consciousness*, *unconsciousness*, and *courage*.

20. See the final section for an explication of this term.

21. See Gaston Roupnel, *Histoire et destin* (Paris 1943). Braudel in fact identified with Roupnel's experiences, as he makes evident in Braudel (1958) p. 748. Braudel had in fact reviewed Roupnel's *Histoire et destin*, a review with which Roupnel was most pleased. See Fernand Braudel, "Faillite de l'histoire, triomphe du destin?", *Mélanges d'histoire sociale* 6 (1944) p. 71–77. See also Roupnel's letter to Braudel, published in "Les morts de l'histoire vivante", *Annales: histoire, sciences sociales* 2:4 (1947) p. 479–481.

22. I dare not say how Koselleck's experience as a Soviet prisoner of war has influenced his work, as my knowledge on him is minimal. But I am fairly certain that it has, especially in his later writings.

23. See e.g. Herbert Butterfield, *The Englishman and his history* (Cambridge 1944).

24. Braudel (1958) p. 726, "nier autrui, c'est déjà le connaître". To my knowledge, Braudel and Lacan had some sort of a personal relationship. Certainly they both share a strong conceptual commitment to the thought of Lévi-Strauss.

This culminates in the Mediterranean herself being seen as a person (the quoted sentences in the long quote that follows are Braudel's own words translated into English):

> The *longue durée*, however, he populates with non-people persons – geographical entities, features of the terrain. Thus in the Mediterranean peninsulas 'are key actors [...] have played leading roles [...] They are almost persons ... who may or may not be conscious of themselves'. Towns are vested with intentions, Constantinople, for example, with 'the determination to impose settlement, organization and planning' on the Ottomans. It 'triumphed over and betrayed' them, luring them into the wrong wars with the wrong goals. The protagonist of this somewhat peculiarly cast historical drama, of course, is the Mediterranean itself, or rather herself. She has designs or purposes of her own, which she sometimes succeeds in fulfilling. She 'contributed [...] to preventing the unity of Europe, which she attracted toward her shores and then divided to her own advantage'. And in the sixteenth century through Genoa she 'long allocated the world's wealth'. Times, too, get personalized. 'The sixteenth century had neither the courage nor the strength' to eradicate the ancient evils of the great cities, and 'Modern Times ['*la Modernité*'] suddenly projected the territorial state to the center of the stage'.[25]

In short, Braudel does not believe that "the only actors making noise are the most authentic ones", because (notice again the silence of history) "there are others, silent ones; but who did not know that already"?[26] By way of concluding this section, I wish to point out that I share with Braudel the following: it is with the *concept* of the person that an analysis has to deal, and it is the understanding of *particular* persons that historical research should result in. Where we differ is that I explicitly follow through on such presuppositions, whereas Braudel goes on to construct presuppositions standing in contradiction to and even derision of them. Let us, then, take a closer look at these presuppositions of Braudel's.

25. Hexter (1972) p. 519.

26. Braudel (1958) p. 738, "les seuls acteurs qui font de bruit soient les plus authentiques"; "il en est d'autres et silencieux – mais qui ne le savait déjà?".

Braudel's presuppositions of historical thought

It is not unreasonable to see a connection between Braudel and the logical positivists.[27] The logical positivists saw the methods of all sciences as being reducible to a single one, that of the physical sciences. They believed that all the sciences shared a common logical language. Braudel too believes that all human sciences "speak the same language, or can speak it".[28] He believes in the possibility of a common method for all human sciences. His main influence, though, was not the language of the physicist, but rather that of the structuralist. Braudel lived in an intellectual setting that saw the rise of structuralism in the human sciences.[29] We can single out the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss as the most important structuralist influence on Braudel. The references to Lévi-Strauss are overwhelming in Braudel's work. And as a matter of fact the two knew each other personally, after having met at the University of São Paolo.

Braudel rejects the presuppositions of the *sorbonnistes* who only study persons as "quintessentialised heroes".[30] A person worthy of historical inquiry the *sorbonniste* takes to be a politically important, rational, and consciously acting man. The historian is to study the events that such a person brought to life. It should come as no surprise to the reader to find Braudel discarding the notion of the conscious and rationality as necessary for historical thought. Braudel's history is thus about "the unconscious forms of the social". This "social unconscious" is to be found in the unsaid or silent in the past. In Braudel's own words, it is a "semi-obscurity".[31] It is Lévi-Strauss' thought that sets the landscape for this word painting. In line with discarding these elements that contrive to make the person (the conscious, rationality, agency) Braudel goes on to reject the *meaning* of the spoken or written as a necessary element for historical thought as well. Language is indeed crucial for historical thought, Braudel contends, but

27. See Carl G. Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History", *Journal of Philosophy* 39:2 (1942) p. 35–48. It is worthwhile to notice that Hempel postulates the object of historical explanation to be either a specific personality, or something that is the result of human behaviour. He believes that such objects can be reduced to a certain type of event, which can be explained through the application of universally conditional hypotheses.

28. Braudel (1958) p. 734, "parlent le même langage ou peuvent le parler".

29. For history, see e.g. François Dosse, *Histoire du structuralisme: le champ du signe, 1945–1966* (Paris 1991).

30. Braudel (1997) p. 102, "héros quintessenciés".

31. Braudel (1958) p. 740, "des forms inconscientes du social", "un inconscient social", "cette demi-obscurité".

it is the language of the phonemes, the smallest sound elements of language, which are wholly detached from meaning. He does not care much for cultural practices and subjective meanings as explanatory concepts. His preferred mode of explanation is the model. The model Braudel defines as a set of systematic and explicative hypotheses either in the form of the equation ("this is equivalent to this") or the function ("this determines this"). He even speaks of a *social mathematic* through which modelling can be conceptualized.[32] Models are of the highest value because they can be applied "across time and space".[33] But witness how Braudel immediately returns to the person when he says that models "vary infinitely all according to their users' temperament, calculation or goal".[34]

The *annaliste*, in opposition to the *sorbonniste*, argues that the person and event does not constitute the whole of social reality. For him the historical time which such persons are part of is of "the most capricious, the most treacherous of durations".[35] Such a time does not take into account other social kinds of man, especially those without writing and power. In Braudel's account, history should be about civilisations, which he defines vaguely. The content of a civilisation entails language, science, law, institutions, religions, beliefs, technologies, customs, and everyday life. Braudel speaks of the need to acknowledge "the most modest cultures", and therefore of the need for a "microhistory".[36] Indeed, Braudel wants to take into account *all* possible aspects of man in history. From this stems his notion of *l'histoire globale* or *l'histoire totale*. But to his credit, he was fully aware that it was an "impossible total science of man" that he sought to construct.[37] In my view, what makes it impossible is that it never gives any notable attention to persons and *their* time in life.[38] I agree with this

32. Braudel's father was a mathematician I note in passing, and, according to testimony, a very strict man. See Braudel (1992).

33. Braudel (1958) p. 740. "à travers de temps et espace".

34. Braudel (1958) p. 740. "varient à l'infini suivant le tempérament, le calcul ou le but des utilisateurs".

35. Braudel (1958) p. 728. "la plus capricieuse, la plus trompeuse des durées".

36. Fernand Braudel, "L'histoire des civilisations: le passé explique le présent", in Roselyn de Ayala & Paule Braudel (ed.), *Les écrits de Fernand Braudel: II: les ambitions de l'histoire* (Paris 1997) p. 197–243, 224.

This article was first published in 1959 in volume 20 of *L'Encyclopédie française*, edited by Febvre.

37. Braudel quoted in Stoianovich (1972) p. 121. "*impossible science globale de l'homme*".

38. Cf. Peter Burke, "History of events and the revival of narrative", in Peter Burke (ed.), *New perspectives on historical writing: second edition* (Cambridge 2001) p. 283–301, p. 287.

multi-dimensional approach to history, but not with the presuppositions that Braudel constructs for it.

Braudel's main suggestion for what historical thought should presuppose is the argument that three temporal dimensions determine persons' actions and thoughts during a certain time space. These dimensions Braudel calls structures or "structural durations" (*durées*). He compares them to (notice the choice of word) *prisons* when defining their constraining effects on mentalities.[39] Of the three, Braudel stresses "the exceptional value of the long durations", the *longues durées*.[40]

Stressing a particular duration in research will constitute a particular kind of history according to Braudel. So, the *histoire évenémentielle* is history that focuses on the shortest *durée*. This is the history of political events, which are explosive, fleeing and almost insignificant for historical thought. Braudel's lukewarm attitude towards this duration should be understood in relation to his personal anxieties and hardships. Next is the history of *les conjonctures*, a term borrowed from contemporary economical thought. Braudel expands the concept, and identifies three kinds of *conjonctures*. This kind of history studies social, economic, and mental structures. Finally, there is the history of *les longue durées*. This history seeks out the longest structural durations, which are "a reality thriftily spent by time, and carried for a long while".[41] Braudel refuses to specify for how long; it can be a matter of several centuries or a few decades. He even holds that a long duration can be short. It is difficult in principle, he says, to keep apart the different durations, and on one occasion he hyperbolically speaks of history as having a hundred faces.[42] Indeed, it is difficult to understand what Braudel wants to capture with these distinctions. They all seem to overlap in an inextricably entangled manner.

What I will be proposing in the next three sections can be considered as a reappraisal of the *histoire évenémentielle*, because I believe that, *if properly analysed*, it can be shown to lie at the heart of historical thought. In principle, I have no problem with the *histoire des conjonctures* either, because if one views such a history as a colligation or aggregate from more basic elements (persons), then certainly a more long-term view on human life is

39. Braudel (1958) p. 731, "les cadrex mentaux, aussi, sont prisons de la longue durée".
40. Braudel (1958) p. 727, "la valeur exceptionelle du temps long".
41. Braudel (1958) p. 731, "une réalité que le temps use mal et véhicule trés longuement".
42. Braudel (1958) p. 727, "l'histoire aux cents visages".

of great value. The only concept I dismiss *tout court*, then, is *la longue durée*, but then again so does Braudel. We can see this in the *content* that Braudel gives his long durations: it always boils down to particular persons. When Braudel thus exemplifies his long durations, e.g. the idea of the crusade and market capitalism, it always necessarily involves recourse to individual humans. In other words, time and again we see that Braudel is trying to understand persons. But, crucially, we constantly see him hopelessly trying to move beyond the time during which they lived. I say hopelessly for we repeatedly see how he ends up personalising these durations. This creates a conceptual tempest that is not without traces of personal tragedy.

Braudel's longest durations belong to the realm of demography and climate studies. It is important to note that Braudel does *not* believe that there is a correlation between climatic and demographic structures on the one hand, and, social and economic ones on the other.[43] In other words, by way of implication, the *longues durées* are nugatory in the activity of understanding persons. It is ironic, then, that the most disseminated of Braudel's concepts turns out to be ill defined and of little epistemic value! In consequence we should not give primacy to the concept of *longue durée* in attempts to properly understand Braudel's thought. Instead we should pay closer attention to the relation it has to his personal life.

What would the answer be if we approached Braudel's work with the question: "Do structures determine persons, or persons structures, or is there a dialectical relation between persons and structures"? Not a clear-cut one. Sometimes structures determine persons, sometimes structures are like persons, and sometimes persons stretch the rigour of structures. Surely, we need to go beyond Braudel in order to properly draw out the concepts appropriate to historical thought.

Ontological determination and epistemological underdetermination

I therefore bid farewell to Braudel's irksome ways of thinking about the business of history, and turn to what I believe is a more appropriate way. The ontological determination of past persons, or indeed any kind of past object, is the first presupposition I wish to establish as necessary for historical thought. It is my belief that I might be able to shed new light on a problem (or non-problem) that still haunts the historical discipline to a cer-

43. Stoianovich (1976) p. 82–83.

tain extent. I am speaking of the problem of the objectivity of propositions about some past object, their truth-value, or whatever one wants to call it. The presupposition is formulated thus: a person's particular thoughts and actions existed during a certain time in the past, and cannot be changed in any way by (conscious or unconscious) thought, (conscious) actions or (unconscious) behaviour in some subsequent temporal duration. Our language reveals to us that things do not exist *in* time, but rather *during a certain time*. For example, in order to be informative in a manner relevant to our needs and wants we usually speak in terms like "at t_1 X occurred", "between t_1 and t_2 Y occurred", "it all started at t_1" (implying that it is ongoing, finished, or will finish at some other time). Now, of course connections can be made to other temporal states in order for us to gain more relevant knowledge about X or Y, but, crucially, such connections do not seem to presuppose *all* past and present temporal states. No, knowledge about X or Y hinges on particular temporal states. Moreover, something analogous to this can be said of the notion of "context", "convention", or "tradition", that is, a thing is not understood *in* a context, but as *related to certain other things, but not to others*. The rest of the argument in this section aims to reveal that the use of our language about such temporal states implies a commitment to what I call ontological determination. The argument has the form of a thought experiment, and is easy to comprehend.

Suppose you are writing an article when someone comes up to you and says "I'm going to show you some facts which contradict your claim, and you're going to be ashamed when you see them". After the utterance he shows you some facts, perhaps in some document you have not read before. You go through these facts, and it turns out that they do not disprove your claim at all. You are of course not ashamed, and you rightfully dismiss him. But suppose that the same person returns the day after, with the same aim in mind as the day before. This time he actually has facts that will contradict your claim, and make you feel ashamed, maybe because they were there right in front of your eyes and yet you failed to see them. Let us finally assume that you have lost all memory of the day before. Our discloser of facts has no moral qualms; he wants to take advantage of this situation, that is, he wants to make you believe that he has never attempted and failed to show you contradicting facts before. What he *can* say then is "I just wanted to remind you of yesterday when I showed you some facts which contradicted your claims, and you were ashamed when you

saw them". He *cannot* say "I'm going to show you some facts contradicting your claim yesterday, and you'll be ashamed when you see them yesterday". The closest thing to such an expression he can come, and there is really no closeness here, is "Yesterday I showed you that you're contradicted, and you were ashamed of it". But this presupposes that he has already uttered "I'm going to show you some facts which contradict your claim, and you're going to be ashamed when you see them". In turn, this presupposes, expressed in the intentionality of the expression, that you have as a matter of conscious perception seen this fact and been ashamed. But for you to be able to say and believe "yes, I saw them, and I was ashamed", it is necessarily presupposed that your seeing and feeling ashamed was stored in your memory, and that the memory in a subsequent situation was brought to your consciousness essentially representing the content of the utterance that you see them and are ashamed of it.

Our discloser of facts is fully aware that your memory is gone, and is thereby committed to accepting the possibility that he either did not see you at all yesterday; or, that he saw you, presented the facts, but that they did not contradict your claim, nor made you feel ashamed, that is, he is committed to accepting that he cannot change, as he wants, what has once occurred. Consider what would *happen* if he was to think, act and speak consistently with the belief that he could do whatever his heart desired with objects ontologically determined. He would then say "I have no food today, but I had some yesterday, so I'll eat yesterday". Or, "I humiliated him two weeks ago, and he killed himself, but I'll not humiliate him two weeks ago, so he won't kill himself".

If our fact shower would be consistent in his thinking this way he would not be able to make himself understood to others, nor would he be able to live in a social community. To only nominally deny ontological determination is a paradox or self-contradiction; to deny it in actual use is a disaster.

However, even if some past person has actualized a particular number of possibilities of thought and action, it is nonetheless the case that our understanding of that person is epistemologically underdetermined, that is, we cannot give a complete description of some past person. It is a matter of presupposition that several logically incompatible descriptions of the same object can exist. But consider that even if this ontological determination is presupposed, if that object existed in the past. In order

to encourage a fruitful basis for reflection, I would say that what epistemological underdetermination commits us to is simply that we should be neither reductionists, nor compatibilists. There can be no ultimate view of the world, nor do all views cohere with each other.

That our thinking is underdetermined does not stop us from perceiving things, from understanding them, from living, from going on with our lives, from living with others. Even life forms like war or capitalism are *human* life forms, because you would not say that other species have a concept of war or capitalism, would you? And it is in our language that we find our life forms, the logic of social activity.[44]

Understanding the person: The cognitive aspect

So far the analysis has been negative. It has drawn certain logical boundaries that the historian should not transgress. In the remainder of the essay I will be concerned with working out the constitution of the logical space that falls within those boundaries.[45]

As a matter of presupposition the historian should attribute cognitive attitudes to his person of study.[46] First, the historian must attribute the attitude of *desire*. The logical form of a desire is that a person, X, wants, wishes, something, *Y (expressed in a linguistic sentence, y)*, to happen, occur, to be brought about or be possessed. In other words, a desire wants the world to mirror it. The second attitude to be attributed is that of *belief*. The logical form of belief is that a person, X, believes a proposition, *y*, to be true or false about some concrete object or event, *Y*. Third, we have the attitude of *judgement*, the form of which is that a person, X, values or appraises some object or event, *Y (expressed in a linguistic sentence, y)*. All three of these cognitive attitudes are intentional – they are all *about* or *directed toward* particular objects or events.[47] They are all capable of being

44. Language and logic too have their history, which of course overlaps. "Logic" is not just logic, but predicate logic, propositional logic, deontic logic, set theory, modal logic, meta-logic. All these certainly share family resemblances, but does one entail all the others? Does each one entail every other?

45. Bear in mind that the distinctions drawn in what follows are of a logical kind and do not purport to enounce anything about temporal priority and succession.

46. I of course take it for granted that historical understanding is not possible without evidence, linguistic or otherwise, which embodies past person's activities. I also take for granted that historians know how to go about finding relevant evidence and judging its worth for research.

47. Due to practical reasons I will say nothing of the grammatical and lexical form of these logically distinct attitudes.

held in higher-order and lower-order (sub-conscious) cognitive modes as well. For example, not only can I desire to write a book, I can also believe that my desire is unattainable. Or, I can be unaware that the tone of voice in me saying "I don't like your friend, what are you talking about" strongly implies that I do like her, but that I am for some reason not willing to admit it, even to myself.

"How can I make a distinction between thought and language", a critic might object. "Are not all linguistic expressions understood only by means of reference to other linguistic elements in a 'chain of signifiers'? We could never hope to break out of the prison house of language". So goes the charge. The answer to such an objection involves pointing out a distinction between three different kinds of meaning.[48] First, an expression has "linguistic meaning" (l-meaning), which is understood sufficiently by identifying its grammatical, syntactic, morphological, and conventional properties. Second, it has "semantic meaning" (s-meaning), which is sufficiently understood by means of its logical properties, e.g. its extension. Now, even though both of these are necessary for there to be "person meaning" (p-meaning), they do *not* sufficiently determine the content of an expression of p-meaning.

Let us take an example to show the upshot of these distinctions. Imagine two friends, Judith and Paul, walking down a street discussing the concept of intention. Both are philosophers. Judith is a post-structuralist (not so far removed from an *annaliste*, as in the case of the historian Arlette Farge) who argues that intentions are ungraspable, and Paul is a philosopher who believes that they are graspable. Judith says to Paul, "Barthes argues that language bars access to intentions". As she is saying it, they both notice a kid being caught by a security guard outside of a store. The kid calls the guard "pig". Paul says, "That's so stupid of him". Now, though we can get at the l-meaning and s-meaning of this expression without any recourse to what was p-meant, we cannot stop at that if we want to know what *Paul* meant. Certainly Judith would like to know what was p-meant. Nothing in the linguistic and semantic context will help us in finding out what Paul

48. Here I draw on R. G. Collingwood, *The idea of history: revised edition* (Oxford 1994); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical investigations* (Oxford 1968); H. P. Grice, "Utterer's meaning and intention", *The philosophical review* 40:2 (1969) p. 147–177; Mark Bevir, *The logic of the history of Ideas* (Cambridge 1999); and A. P. Martinich, "Four Senses of 'Meaning' in the history of ideas. Quentin Skinner's theory of historical interpretation", *Journal of the philosophy of history* 3:3 (2009) p. 225–245. The distinctions can be made finer, as is done by Martinich and Grice, but for my purposes the ones drawn will suffice.

p-meant, for nothing in such contexts has an individual viewpoint, and an ability to express and communicate that viewpoint. So when Judith, probably somewhat angrily, asks, "What do you mean by that", she is not inquiring into the conventional or morphological properties of Paul's expression, or what "that" refers to *of itself*. If she did, she would not need to ask Paul. No, she wants to know what Paul meant. And Paul can then say, "I meant that it's so stupid of that kid to shoplift", or even "I meant that it's a bad argument". *Broadly* speaking, in a way to be determined more specifically, it is with such p-meaning (so far identified in terms of cognitive attitudes) that historians should be interested in if they are interested in understanding persons.

It is fully possible to identify cognitive attitudes in a human who was not aware of them. What is of essence when the historian identifies such attitudes is that he must be aware that he is doing so, and his understanding of unconscious states must have a fairly rational form even if the identified unconscious attitudes are seen to exhibit irrationality. By irrationality I mean particular cognitive attitudes held by a particular person that are found to be logically incompatible with each other. By structure I mean a fairly systematic body of related cognitive attitudes, relations between such cognitive attitudes, and actions or behaviour brought about by them. This goes for all human forms of life, so what constitutes cultural, social, legal, etc, structures is underwritten by the same set of presuppositions. Such structures do not live on their own; they do not act, think, and feel. The closest thing a structure can come to living, if this can be called "closeness", is when persons behave in an unconscious way. Perhaps in that case it might be appropriate to postulate an unconscious defined as a semi-independent agency within the person. I trust the reader will notice the crucial differences between my concepts of the unconscious and structure, and Braudel's.

Now, a person's action or behaviour is understood by identifying the expressed *reasons* for it, which simply means the identification of relevant cognitive attitudes. Their form of explanation is a rational one, and it is not compatible with the form of the equation, function or logical deduction.[49]

49. In some cases however I believe that it might be appropriate to invoke the notion of mechanism to understand the behaviour produced, perhaps to the dismay of the anti-naturalists. I will not go into this aspect here. See my "Outline of a theory of the person for historical-biographical study", *The international journal of the humanities* 7:1 (2009) p. 59–70.

In addition to the three kinds of cognitive attitudes just discussed, I will add to the list one more that is akin to these three in that it too is intentional. I have in mind *speech acts*. A speech act, *Y*, is a linguistic expression, *y*, uttered or written by a person, X, which by *and only by* means of its expression brings about an action or fact. In other words, a speech act in a very real way *makes* the (social) world, for what it brings about is necessarily conditioned upon being expressed linguistically.[50] Examples include naming, marrying, and ordering. Of course Quentin Skinner must be mentioned in this context, because he was the first to construct a theory based on speech acts for intellectual history. I disagree with Skinner in that I do not see the invocation of speech-act theory as necessary even for Skinnerian intellectual history, for Skinnerian intellectual history is essentially about understanding *texts*. Asking, as Skinner does, "what was X doing *in* writing y", and answering something like "X was defending the monarchy in writing y", is surely logically different than asking something like, "What was X doing in saying 'Yes' to the question 'Do you take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife?'", the answer being "X was getting married". In the latter case, X *brings about* a marriage if and only if he says, "Yes". In the former it is not necessarily the case that X, by defending the monarchy in a text, manages to *bring about* an *actual* defense of the monarchy. This reveals that his success in the *writing* (or *saying*) of y does not necessarily bring about that which it wants to bring about.

A particular human does not hold one or some particular desires, speech acts, aims and judgements that are the reasons for her actions and behaviour. No, she lives by very many, and changing, ones. The historian cannot understand any one of them without connecting them to an extensive amount of others. Even seemingly simple actions require this procedure in order to be understood. The historian, however, typically deals with complex cases, such where the larger contexts are so much richer and at times even foreign to her. Still, the form of understanding is the same in trivial as in non-trivial cases. In principle, the more the person to be understood acted and behaved in ways for which we cannot see any reasons, the more research is needed to identify those cognitive attitudes that will prove to be consistent with them. A good historian does just this; she makes the

50. See the collection of his philosophical pieces in *Visions of politics: volume I: regarding method* (Cambridge 2002). I review Skinner in my "Post-analytic philosophy of history", *Journal of the philosophy of history* 3:3 (2009) p. 308–333, 309–314.

seemingly unintelligible turn out to be intelligible. A presupposition that is implied in all of this, which I now make explicit, is that the person is a *holistic* entity, and for our understanding to be possible at all, it too must be of a holistic character. If Braudel and the other *annalistes* did much to promote holism, it is a holism of the wrong kind – so much should be evident. If sometimes the historian does not find reasons, or if sometimes there are no reasons to be found, then what? Well, this is just all part of being a human, and no theory can adequately deal with it, if at all.

We must take into consideration the social situation when we understand others. I analyse the concept of social situation as a limited space-time in which two or more persons, act, re-act, and communicate with each other in accordance with certain types of *norms* and *rules*. Norms and rules are fairly systematic principles whose role is to regulate what can and cannot, or should and should not, be done and said in a certain social situation. Social structures simply consist of norms and rules. Cognitive attitudes are *constitutive* of such structures, so to that in order to understand them the historian must necessarily see the cognitive attitudes lying behind them. It is certainly a presupposition that some actions or behaviour have unintended or unwanted consequences. It is also true that a certain person can misunderstand certain norms and rules, so even if the person thinks he has complied with them, he has as a matter of fact not. But what is presupposed in misunderstanding, misapplication, unintended consequences, and the like, is the necessary possibility of proper understanding and compliance.

It is safe to say that what interests the historian most is how certain structures are *upheld* and *changed*. To give an analysis of this requires the invocation of *self-consciousness* and *self-reflectiveness*. This is the dimension where the person in question is aware that it is she who has thoughts, and that it is she who has acted within the constraints of some rules. From this highest order of consciousness the person can go on to evaluate past and present cognitive attitudes and actions, whether her own or those of others. She can plan for the future, and fairly rationally commit to fulfilling those plans, e.g. make a promise to someone and keep it. Such actions and commitments cannot be understood if there was no presupposition of self-consciousness and self-reflectiveness. Nobody is constantly in this state, or any other state for that matter.

For a social structure to be upheld for a longer period of time, it is necessary that the persons in that situation follow its rules or norms, whether

consciously or unconsciously. But if these persons are self-aware and self-reflective about these norms, their own beliefs, and so on, then they have the power not to follow the rule, they have the power to deliberate about its justification, and they in some cases even have the power to go on and change the rule. In principle, rules or norms are not sufficient determinants of a person's thought and behaviour.[51] In order to understand how and why particular social structures are constituted, upheld and changed the historian must necessarily relate them to particular persons in particular situations. Such an understanding involves indentifying the relevant actions, behaviour and the behind them lying cognitive attitudes, whether conscious or unconscious. And again, the way I propose historians should view the social world is drastically different from what Braudel's proposed.

Understanding the person: The phenomenal aspect

Understanding a person as analysed in the previous section is about *attributing* cognitive mental states based on evidence in linguistic or other form. Surely we must presuppose that the person we study held beliefs, desires, and the like. We cannot, however, assume that he drew the same connections between his cognitive attitudes, as the historian will come to draw. What is more, he might not have been aware of some of them, and yet expressed them somehow. Then again, he might have withheld some actual convictions and values, which he took pains to never express. All this is to say that nothing in my analysis (of cognition) ensures us that we will come to understand a particular person as he understood himself. The logical consequence of this analysis is that in this attributing of ours we will undoubtedly lay a particular emphasis, accent if you will, on certain aspects of a person's being. In other words, the cognitive dimension is a matter of third-person understanding, which implies that it is in some crucial ways cut off from the way a person understood herself. This kind of understanding is a rather cold endeavour, if the metaphor is apt. Put differently, we might be making the unintelligible intelligible only *for us*. I submit that our very humanity, personhood, hinges on having both cognitive and phenomenal capacities.

I have in a (rather poor) previous essay sketched out some necessary meta-theoretical principles for history much in the same vein as I am

51. I am sidestepping the important issue of power, but the main implications of my analysis concerning power should be somewhat clear by way of implication.

proceeding here. Understanding is, I proposed there, a cognitive-phenomenal activity.[52] If it was only a question of cognition, then we would be unable to understand such deeply human aspects as love, trust, revenge, personality, irony, and style of writing. How trite history would be if this was so! Of course these characteristics are not homologous but, crucially, none of them can be properly understood only by means of attribution of cognitive attitudes.[53] To be sure, in history understanding phenomenally is necessarily *related* to grasping p-meaning; nevertheless, and crucially, it is a different dimension of understanding than the one discussed so far.

We must therefore distinguish between cognitive understanding and phenomenal understanding, because in some cases grasping what a person p-meant is not enough for grasping his action or what the content of his linguistic expression is. Let me illustrate what I mean. Imagine a white middle-aged American man X, a successful businessman, walking down a street in New York with an expensive iPhone in his hand. First imagine another American middle-aged white man, Y, who does not know X. Y, who is wearing an expensive suit, runs up to X and asks "excuse me Sir, can I borrow your phone, it's really important". Now imagine an alternate situation where a young American black man, Z, comes up to X. The two men do not know each other. Z, dressed in some baggy clothes and a backward hat, asks the same question, but his *tone* of voice is different, and he might even phrase himself *slightly* differently, like "hey man, can I use your phone, it's important". The p-meaning is the same in both questions – namely, that both Y and Z want to use X's phone because they say it's important that they do so. But in some cases X will tend to trust Y and lend him the phone, but he will feel distrust towards Z, and at least be suspicious as to the sincerity of his motives, and so will be reluctant to give him the phone. Now, of course cognitive attitudes are at work here, e.g. X's belief that young black males dressed in a certain way are to be suspected of criminal behaviour. We could go on to identify relevant cognitive attitudes that would help us understand say X's refusal to give Z the phone. But it is evident that we miss something crucial if we leave it at that. For X *feels* something, he does not reason and conceptualise, and it is the feeling that

52. See Skodo (2009).

53. The phenomenal dimension of understanding has become an eminently defendable set of theses in the philosophy of mind, and the cognitive- and neurosciences. For philosophy, see e.g. Peter Goldie, *On personality* (London & New York 2004), who also reviews findings in the cognitive- and neurosciences.

prompts his behaviour in a way different than a reason does. His attitude is more direct, closer to perception and emotion than it is to reflection. Cognitively we "take a step back" when we understand. Phenomenally "we leap forward", attuned to the way we feel and perceive. Indeed, intuition, sympathy, imagination, and the like – these should be part and parcels of the historian's mind.

Is this really important for the historian's practice? During the last fifty years or so historians and philosophers of history have dismissed this dimension as something belonging to a bygone age; the *annalistes* and their emphasis on social, sometimes beyond-personal, forms had a considerable part to play in this dismissal. But I urge the reader to recall some of the seminars, lectures, and meetings with colleagues he or she has attended. And I ask: do you doubt that at times there were feelings, moods, and personalities expressed which were crucial to your understanding of what the person you were listening or talking to was saying? Did you not have feelings of your own? Think of this now: how easy is it to sidestep this phenomenal aspect when we conduct a historical inquiry! We neglect it both in ourselves and in the person we are studying.[54]

As a way of rounding up this essay I wish to put forward an example that illustrates the importance of the phenomenal dimension for historical studies.[55] It is that of Michel Foucault.[56] Foucault studied at the ultra-prestigious ENS in the 1940s. During this time it is known that Foucault had severe bouts of depression during which he hurt himself physically and even attempted suicide. It is reported that he spent time in the sanatorium of the ENS, and went to therapy and psychoanalysis.[57] Why was Foucault depressed? This question we can answer fairly easily, as it is "widely accepted" that it was due to the inner conflict Foucault was struggling with in coming to terms with his homosexuality.[58] Thus, we can perhaps invoke

54. For this reason, although he goes too far, I have sympathy with Ankersmit's *Sublime historical experience* (Stanford 2005), because he acknowledges it.

55. I could give many many more, but alas, the space does not allow it.

56. I would have chosen Braudel, but unfortunately I did not have the time to dig deeper into the connections between his personal life and his work.

57. Depression is (and I do not mean to sound opinioned in saying this) a condition that we find abounds among great thinkers and artists. Another example is William James, who in a lecture drew on his depression to formulate a philosophical question – namely, how to convince someone who wants to kill himself that he should go on living. Indeed, I too ask myself that. The lecture is published in *On a certain blindness in human beings* (London 2009).

58. David Macey, *Michel Foucault* (London 2004) p. 29–30.

the strong desire to be with men; the belief that this desire was not an accepted norm in Vichy France; the belief that he was worth less than most people, and that he was abnormal because of his desire. Finally, because these desires and beliefs were inconsistent and yet all held by Foucault, he could not cope with them, and therefore felt that killing himself would resolve his negative condition. Certainly this helps us to understand Foucault cognitively, but surely the reader will agree that we are missing something fundamental in this kind of understanding, in this kind of case. For, in one of Foucault's depressions, surely his *body* felt different than when he thought about a philosophical issue; surely he *saw* things differently and even *reflected* on them differently; surely he *felt intensely*. Might there not be something crucial to take into consideration here when we try to understand Foucault's preoccupations with the history of madness, sexuality, and the very presuppositions of subjectivity?

Let the final question be my concluding remark. No, let it be an expressed experience that bids the historian and philosopher alike to ponder its nature and place in our life, whether past or present.

Fernand Braudel och personbegreppet

I denna artikel analyseras Fernand Braudels (1902–1985) teorier om historievetenskapens förutsättningar. En grundläggande tes är att Braudel (implicit) postulerar den mänskliga individen som historievetenskapens främsta studieobjekt. Detta kan tyckas stå i motsättning till Braudels strukturalistiska vetenskapssyn, men i artikeln hävdas att detta kan förklaras utifrån Braudels erfarenheter som tysk krigsfånge under andra världskriget. Efter en inledande presentation och tolkning av Braudels uppfattning om historievetenskapens förutsättningar följer en kritisk granskning som visar att Braudels metatänkande om historikerns objekt, influerat av den strukturalistiska antropologin, begreppsligt inte hänger samman. Denna kritik utgör grunden för den följande diskussionen där artikelförfattaren försöker urskilja nödvändiga, om än inte tillräckliga, villkor för det historievetenskapliga tänkandet och historieforskningen. Den övergripande tesen är att historisk forskning bör ägna sig åt att förstå enskilda personer. För att en historiker ska kunna förstå en given person måste följande villkor uppfyllas: historikern måste genom ett urval av relevanta källor identifiera de kognitiva attityder som frambringade personens handlingar och beteenden, så som dessa gestaltade sig inom de strukturella

ramar som var rådande vid den aktuella tidpunkten. Genom analysen blir det möjligt att förklara hur givna strukturer konstitueras, upprätthålls och förändras. I artikeln framhålls att det är personer som konstituerar, upprätthåller och förändrar dessa strukturer. Historikern bör dessutom försöka urskilja den så kallade fenomenala aspekten hos en given person. Denna aspekt inbegriper känsla och personlighet och är logiskt distinkt från den kognitiva aspekten. Ett annat viktigt resultat av analysen visar att det ur denna dimension framkommer handlingar och beteenden som inte kan förstås enbart genom tillgripandet av kognitiva attityder. Historikern bör därför även beakta de så kallade fenomenala aspekterna hos enskilda personer.

Keywords: Fernand Braudel, the person, presuppositional analysis, understanding, historical thought