



The bearing of historical consciousness

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ABSTRACT: In 2015, the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* released a list of 94 Calls to Action as a framework for Canadian society to begin to address and take collective responsibility for the harm done to generations of Aboriginal children, families, and communities by the Indian Residential School system and related governmental policies. The Calls include several items specifically addressing education, including a call to all levels of government to make curriculum about the residential schools, treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' history mandatory for students from kindergarten to grade twelve. Obviously, within such a context, history education cannot be about the construction and transmission of a coherent national narrative and national identity; rather, it requires getting to grips with what Britzman calls "difficult knowledge" about Canada's past. My purpose in this paper is two-fold: in the first section I provide a brief introduction to the two main conceptions of historical consciousness informing Anglophone history education in Canada; and in the second section I take up recent discussions about the distinction between historical consciousness as the possession of historical knowledge and historical consciousness as a life-orienting, or life-bearing praxis. Taking the latter term quite literally, I explore three potential meanings of the phrase, "the bearing of historical consciousness": 1) as a burden or weight that one bears; 2) as a stance, comportment, or way of walking in the world in relation to the past; and 3) as a measure of the relevance and significance of the past for our lives today.

KEYWORDS: Historical Consciousness; Difficult Knowledge; Epistemic Humility; Ethical Indebtedness; Roger Simon; Peter Seixas.

Introduction

In 2015, the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (TRC) released a list of 94 Calls to Action as a framework for Canadian society to begin to address and take collective responsibility for the harm done to generations of Aboriginal¹ children, families, and communities by the Indian Residential School system and related governmental policies. The document includes several items specifically addressing education, including a call to all levels of government to make curriculum about the residential schools, treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' history mandatory for students from kindergarten to grade twelve (p. 7). Within such a context, traditional models of Canadian history education that focus on the transmission of a coherent narrative about Canada's past and the cultivation of a national identity will no longer suffice. This is not to say that the traditional "single story" approach to history and history education serves no purpose. In fact, it works very well for developing a collective consciousness and shared sense of national identity, but those benefits come at the cost of a fuller and more nuanced understanding of history that includes the perspectives of those whose experiences did not make it into the official record. However, the shift in Canadian history education in the early 2000s from the traditional approach to a multiple perspective approach was not welcomed by all. In his frequently cited, *Who killed Canadian history?* for instance, the historian J.L. Granatstein (1998) wrote:

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If Canada is to be worthy of its envied standing in the world, if it is to offer something to its own people and to humanity, it will have to forge a national spirit that can unite its increasingly diverse people. We cannot achieve this unanimity unless we teach our national history, celebrate our founders, establish new symbols, and strengthen the terms of our citizenship . . . We have a nation to save and a future to build. (pp. 148-149)

The popular narrative of Canada as a progressive, tolerant, and welcoming multicultural mosaic is indeed part of our story, but it is certainly not all of it; and taking up the TRC Calls to Action means that we must help students get to grips with the neglected and silenced stories, and the “difficult knowledge” (Britzman, 1998) that is also part of our past. More recently, the debate in Canadian history education has shifted to what role Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous historical consciousness (Marker, 2011)—which is based on Indigenous conceptions of knowledge, time, and relationships with the natural world—ought to play in history education (Anderson, 2017). While the focus of the debates has changed over the past 20 years, history education in Canada remains contested terrain, with educators, historians, and politicians all wanting a say in determining what historical knowledge is of most worth, and therefore what knowledge and narratives ought to be in the curriculum (see Seixas, 2004, pp. 3-20 for a fuller discussion of these debates).

My aim in this paper is two-fold: in the first section I provide a brief introduction to the two main conceptions of historical consciousness currently informing Anglophone history education in Canada;² and in the second section I take up recent discussions about the distinction between historical consciousness as the possession of historical knowledge and historical consciousness as a life-orienting, or life-bearing, praxis (Seixas, 2016; Körber, 2016; Zanzanian & Nordgren, 2017). Taking the latter term quite literally, I explore three potential meanings of the phrase, “the bearing of historical consciousness”: 1) as a burden or weight that one bears; 2) as a stance, comportment, or way of walking in the world in relation to the past; and 3) as a measure of the relevance and significance of the past for our lives today. In keeping with the primarily Canadian focus of the paper, I have not addressed the important body of European scholarship on historical consciousness that emerged in large part as an attempt to respond to, and get to grips with, the horrors of the Holocaust. Many scholars cite Hans-Georg Gadamer’s *Le problème de la conscience historique* (1963) as inaugurating the field of historical consciousness in Europe, followed and built on by Jörn Rüsen, Andreas Körber, Arie Wilschut, and others. Amongst the European scholars, it is Rüsen (2005; 2017), and, in particular, his work on narrative competence and memory, that has had the most impact on the field in Canada. Let us return then to the Canadian context.

Historical consciousness and the Canadian educational scene

A review of the literature on historical consciousness reveals that the term itself means different things to different people. While the scholarly conversation has most often been collegial, there has also been some tension in the field, most evident, perhaps, in the 2001 dialogue between Roger Simon and Jörn Rüsen (with Peter Seixas, James Wertsch and others weighing in), transcribed in Seixas’s *Theorizing Historical Consciousness* (Simon, Rüsen, & Others, pp. 202-211). The disagreement that surfaced there was not over *whether* history education and cultivating the capacity for historical consciousness are important—all are committed to that view—but rather over what historical consciousness itself means and how we ought to be teaching students to engage with the past. Even though considerable time has passed since that dialogue, the divergence in perspectives remains.

In the Anglophone Canadian scholarship on historical consciousness, there are two main, contrasting approaches. I do not intend to argue that one is better than the other, since both work well, but for different educational ends. The first approach, spearheaded by Peter Seixas in his

Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness at the University of British Columbia, is based on an understanding of historical consciousness as a cognitive and epistemological project, and the Centre's major focus, the *Historical Thinking Project* (2006-2014), was designed to promote critical historical literacy.

Framing the *Historical Thinking Project* are six capacities that students need in order to think historically—specifically, the capacity to:

1. Establish historical significance
2. Use primary source evidence
3. Identify continuity and change
4. Analyze cause and consequence
5. Take historical perspectives, and
6. Understand the ethical dimension of historical interpretations.

(Available online: <http://historybenchmarks.ca/historical-thinking-concepts>)

Seixas's historical thinking approach is much more "hands-on" than the traditional, textbook-driven curriculum typical of Canadian history education up to that point. Historical thinking requires students to weigh competing narratives about the past and to ask critical questions concerning the authenticity of the primary source documents and the validity of the interpretations in secondary source analyses. For example, ... Who created the source? For what purpose was it created? What perspective is taken? How does this impact the interpretation? Whose perspectives are omitted? ... What kinds of evidence are used in each case?" and so on (Bryant and Clark, 2006, p. 1058). Students learn that it is not simply a matter of believing the most compelling story, but of weighing the evidence and learning to think like an historian.

But what we know about the past is not just an epistemological concern; it goes a long way to shaping our identities as individuals, communities, societies, and nations. Therefore, in addition to content knowledge, Seixas includes the cultivation of certain moral dispositions as essential to historical literacy. In particular, he emphasizes "historical empathy." As Bryant and Clark (2006) explain, historical empathy is not empathy in its purely emotive sense (i.e., feeling what another feels), but rather a cognitive capacity for perspective-taking that enables one to understand how and why certain decisions and actions may have been taken in the past and how those decisions and actions have impacted the way things are today (see concept 5 above; also Lee and Ashby, 2001). Seixas's conception of historical consciousness is not about judging the lives and actions of those who came before us through the lens of our 21st-century knowledge, beliefs, and values, but about learning from those past lives in order to work toward the kind of society we want now and in the future. Seixas's work has been taken up and expanded across Canada by Penney Clark, Kent den Heyer, Carla Peck, and many others, with the common thread being a commitment to cultivating historically literate citizens.

The second approach is Roger Simon's conception of historical consciousness as a fundamentally existential and ethical project. Simon's *Testimony and Historical Memory Project*, at the University of Toronto, is sometimes referred to as critical historical consciousness in order to distinguish it from the epistemological conception. For Simon, the past is not a set of artefacts, narratives, or documents that we can come to know and understand, but rather something that always exceeds our grasp, but which nonetheless makes ethical demands on us here and now. In contrast to Seixas's epistemological approach, Simon draws on continental philosophers Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas, as well as psychoanalytic theory, to develop a conception of historical consciousness as a recognition of our inescapable indebtedness to the past. Historical consciousness, as Simon (2005) describes it, is inherently

social; it is “not...an individual awareness and attitude but...a commitment to, and participation in, an organized practice of remembrance and learning” (p. 101).

At the core of Simon’s approach is Levinas’s (1987) conception of the ethical responsibility we are called to in encounters with the past in which “I am thrown back toward what has never been my fault or my deed, toward what has never been in my power or freedom, toward what has never been my presence, and has never come into memory” (p. 111). An admittedly counterintuitive stance, Levinas insists that we are responsible to and for the past, whether or not we, or even anyone we know, played a part in it, and whether or not we can ever know what really happened. Simon’s historical consciousness and public memory project was developed in collaboration with his then graduate students Sharon Rosenberg, Claudia Eppert, Laura Beres, Mark Clamen, Mario Di Paolantonio, and others, and his work has been continued and expanded since Simon’s passing in 2012. Of particular note is Di Paolantonio’s work on the importance of forgetting as well as remembering (2011; 2018).

Put simply, the main difference between the two approaches is that Seixas emphasizes historical thinking as a way to develop *historically literate citizens* and Simon emphasizes public memory as a way to cultivate *historical witnesses*; and the key point of departure is in the role that knowledge is seen to play in the development of historical consciousness. In the dialogue I mentioned above, from the 2001 symposium, Simon claimed that he and Rösen (as well as Seixas and several of the other participants) were engaged in fundamentally different projects, albeit under the same name of historical consciousness. Speaking to Rösen, Simon said:

The way I understand your work, it’s about the way in which historical knowledge gets mediated into historical consciousness; historical knowledge not being the same as historical consciousness. Historical consciousness is how, as you put it, people mediate in a variety of complex ways how the past becomes meaningful to them. I am interested in . . . *spaces of remembering* that have the possibility for opening up . . . ways of engaging representations of the past, significations of the past, open[ing] up the possibilities for thinking about how we are to live our lives as human beings and what prospects for hope . . . might exist in the present. They [your concerns and mine] are complementary, but they are not the same . . . (Simon, Rösen, and Others, 2004, p. 206, ellipses and italics in original)

Seixas replied that he was puzzled by Simon’s insistence that the differences in emphasis constitute different projects, suggesting that it is more about “different sets of terms being brought to bear” on what is fundamentally the same project of how we ought to engage with the past (Seixas, 2004, p. 207), but Simon resisted Seixas’s characterization. I tend to think Simon is right on this point, that the projects are fundamentally different. For Simon, the epistemological strand’s focus on knowing about and understanding the past reflects a desire to master the past by bringing it into the realm of understanding (which he considers problematic), and he cites Sam Wineberg’s paper, which was part of the symposium but does not appear in the printed volume, as sharing some features with his own view. The crucial point for Simon is where Wineberg says:

[O]ur *inability* to perceive the experiences of others is a reason why the study of history is so crucial. Coming to know others, whether they live on the other side of the tracks or the others side of the millennium, requires the education of our sensibilities. This is what history when taught well gives us practice in doing. What allows us to come to know others is our distrust of our capacity to know them, our skepticism towards the extraordinary sense-making abilities that allow us to construct the world around us. (Cited in Simon, Rösen, and Others, 2004, p. 205, italics added)

For Simon, our inability to ever really know what went on in other times and places is not a weakness to be overcome, but rather a defining feature of historical consciousness that goes hand in hand with our relation to the past as one of indebtedness and ethical responsibility.

Obviously, there is much more that needs to be said about all this, and this brief sketch does not do justice to the complexities of either Seixas's or Simon's work, nor to the many curricular innovations their research has sparked. In my view, both Seixas's cognitive/epistemological conception of historical consciousness and Simon's existential/ethical conception are compatible with the description of historical consciousness as a life-orienting, or life-bearing praxis; but, beyond that, I would agree with Simon that he and Seixas are engaged in quite different projects. Perhaps not surprisingly, while both conceptions have been well theorized, it is Seixas's approach that has had the most traction in Canadian schools. One of the reasons, I suspect, is that, like Levinas's and Derrida's thought on which it stands, Simon's approach does not readily lend itself to application in classrooms; but, as we shall see below, this does not mean it has no relevance for education.

The bearing of historical consciousness

Taking up the idea of historical consciousness as a life-orienting praxis, but, more specifically, Zanazanian and Nordgren's (2017) term, 'life-bearing,' in this second section of the paper, I explore three potential meanings of the phrase, "the bearing of historical consciousness." I look at historical consciousness as: 1) a burden or weight that one bears; 2) a stance, comportment, or way of walking in the world in relation to the past; and 3) a measure of the relevance and significance of the past for our lives today. I will draw on both Seixas's and Simon's frameworks; however, because of my own background and ongoing interest in Levinasian ethics, I will rely more heavily on Simon in some parts. I will also ground the discussion in concrete educational examples, paying particular attention to the implications for Canadian history education in light of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action* for education (TRC, 2015, pp. 1-2, 7-8).

Historical consciousness as a burden or weight that one bears

In his recent book, *Not in My Family: German Memory and Responsibility after the Holocaust*, Roger Frie (2017) offers a deeply personal account of wrestling with the discovery that his grandfather had been a member of the Nazi Party. The book is in part an attempt to fill in the gaps in his own family narrative, and in part a more theoretical argument that we all bear an ethical responsibility to remember the past. A psychoanalyst and philosopher by training, Frie makes the case that, as individuals, and as communities and countries, there is no escaping our history. We are all indelibly shaped by the actions of those who came before us, whether we realize it or not.

In a section on the moral obligations of memory (pp. 158-161), Frie cites former West German president Richard von Weizsäcker's speech to the German Parliament in 1985, 40 years after the end of World War II. Von Weizäcker spoke not only about the guilt of the first generation (both those who had participated actively in the Holocaust and those who had played no active role but, by virtue of being German, bore a collective guilt); he also spoke of the responsibility of future generations to remember:

The vast majority of today's population were either children then or had not been born. They cannot profess a guilt of their own for crimes they did not commit. No discerning person can expect them to wear a penitential robe simply because they are Germans. But their forefathers have left a grave legacy. All of us, whether guilty or not, whether old or young, must accept the past. We are all affected by its consequences and liable for it. The young and old generations must and can help each other to understand why it is vital to keep alive the memories. (Frie, 2017, p. 159)

In so doing, Frie says, Weizäcker distinguished the *guilt* of the first generation from the *responsibility* of those who have come after.

Indeed, just as Canadians who played no active part in the Indian Residential School system are not personally guilty for causing harm, we all bear the burden of that difficult history—a history for which we are called to respond here and now. The burden subsequent generations carry is thus in part an epistemological burden that comes in the form of a responsibility to learn as much as we can about the past; but it is also, perhaps more importantly, a moral burden that we bear beyond any choice or decision to take it on (see also Blustein, 2008). In Frie's case, the actions of his grandfather, although hidden from the younger generations of his family, inevitably shaped them in unseen and unknowable ways. As Frie explains, drawing on Levinas, bearing the burden of responsibility to and for the past means recognizing that we all inherit an ethical debt to the past, a debt that no amount of knowledge can repay (2017, (pp. 156-157). In thinking this through, I find Geoffrey Bennington's conception of 'difficult inheritance' helpful. The very structure of inheritance, Bennington claims, "commits us to a view of the here and now as a moment when the past always still remains before us as an endless task" (2000, p. 140). Marianne Hirsch's (2008) work on "postmemory" addresses similar themes. She describes postmemory as "the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (p. 103), and the questions guiding her work resonate with both Frie's and Bennington's concerns. As Hirsch (2008) writes:

How, in our present, do we regard and recall what Susan Sontag (2003) has described as 'the pain of others'? What do we owe the victims? How can we best carry their stories forward without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to ourselves, and without, in turn, having our own stories displaced by them? How are we implicated in the crimes? Can the memory of genocide be transformed into action and resistance? (p. 104)

In Levinasian terms, the difficult inheritance of the past comes to us as an ethical debt we have done nothing to incur, but neither which can we refuse. What we *do* with that difficult inheritance, however, is both our moral burden and the possibility of hope.

Frie's account of German memory and responsibility after the Holocaust is autobiographical, but there are also countless literary examples of characters who are destined to bear the weight of the past, either for things they themselves have done or left undone, or for the inherited burden of acts committed by others. A poignant fictional example can be found in Sebastian Faulk's novel, *Charlotte Gray*. Throughout the book, the title character, Charlotte, carries an unnamable, yet inescapable, pain from her past. This pain has shaped her life, her emotions, and her responses to others, and while she has no clear memory of the actual event, Charlotte is convinced that her pain comes from her father having sexually abused her in her childhood. Only towards the end of the novel does she find out that the trauma and suffering her father had inflicted on her was not sexual abuse, but rather a violent outpouring of memories of his own actions during the First World War: "Suddenly, he had been unable to contain his guilt any longer at permitting the murder of German prisoners and ordering his own men to certain death, and [in pouring out his pain] 'asked a child to bear the weight of those unspeakable things, a weight that drove men mad'" (Faulks, 1999, p. 483 in Middleton & Wood, 2000, p. 19).

I include this example because it serves not only to illustrate what it might mean to bear the weight of the past, but as a cautionary reminder to those of us who advocate historical consciousness as an educational aim: What, and how much, of the weight of the past should we ask children to bear? How much of a psychological burden is it pedagogically and ethically justifiable to place on children?

Michael Hand raises this question explicitly in his preface to David Aldridge's (2014) *How Ought War to be Remembered in Schools?*. Aldridge's paper (written for the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain's IMPACT series of papers intended to contribute to wider public and policy conversations) is a response to David Cameron's (2012) speech at the

Imperial War Museum, in which he announced plans for Britain's commemorations of the upcoming World War I centenary. With regard to the pedagogical aspects, Hand (in Aldridge, 2014) states:

In this centenary year of its outbreak, few would deny that the First World War should be remembered. But exactly why and how it should be remembered are vexed questions. Is there room for celebration as well as commemoration? Should we take pride in Britain's victory? Do we owe gratitude to those who fought and died? Is the purpose of remembrance to bind ourselves to the national community, to strengthen our commitment to British values, to fix our eyes on ideals of courage and self-sacrifice, to inspire in ourselves an abhorrence of war?

Most of us find it hard enough to answer these questions for ourselves; it is more difficult still to answer them on behalf of others. If...children are to be expected to participate in commemorative events and rituals, it is not enough for us to be clear about our personal reasons for remembering. We need a good justification for foisting remembrance on others. And we need to ensure that the commemorative events and rituals in which children are expected to participate are appropriate to that justification (p. 2).

Hand's preface anticipates the main, and contentious, point of Aldridge's (2014) argument that the only justifiable reason to involve schools in war remembrance is to teach students about the horror of war, not to cultivate a sense of gratitude to the fallen, or to use remembrance rituals as a way to encourage children to uphold a set of shared values, even those for which the country went to war in the first place (p. 7). Aldridge (2014) writes:

The only sentiment that ought to be commended or encouraged in relation to the war dead is horror. This encompasses all those who die and not just those who fell on 'our side'. Furthermore, while the media, charitable bodies and the political and public sphere will continue to reproduce the observance of the event of remembrance, educational institutions ought to be safe spaces in which critical questions can be raised about this event and dissenting views can be expressed with confidence. (pp. 37-38)

I agree with Aldridge that, "Whatever else war is, it is always horrific" (2014, p. 5). I also agree that there is no glory in war and we ought not to teach as if there were (see also <http://noglory.org/>). However, I have concerns about his suggestion that teachers ought to foster the sentiment of horror by replacing the usual associations of war, such as bright red flowers, pristine stone memorials, and elderly men wearing medals, with images of children whose lives have been cut short by war (p. 38). My concern with Aldridge's recommendation comes not from a belief that children ought to remain ignorant of the horror of war. Rather, I question the pedagogical value of using images and narratives of war violence perpetrated on children insofar as those images and narratives risk asking children to, in Faulks's (1999) words, "bear the weight of those unspeakable things, a weight that drove men mad" (p. 483).

Shifting back to the Canadian context, *Project of Heart: Illuminating the Hidden History of Indian Residential Schools in BC*, a curriculum resource published by the British Columbia Teachers Federation, begins with the following from Marie Wilson, one of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissioners:

Imagine that you are five years old. A stranger comes to your home village and seizes you from your mother's arms. Imagine he takes you hundreds of miles away to a place where white people in black robes cut off your hair and take away your clothes, the ones your mother made especially for you.

They also take away your name—you get a number instead. They separate you from your brothers and sisters, and forbid you to speak to one another in your native language. Imagine being silenced with shouts.

Imagine toiling in field and kitchen yet going hungry all the time. Imagine being hit or strapped for breaking rules you don't know or understand. Imagine learning that your family traditions and culture are evil and barbaric, while the Christian God is the only true Creator, the God of love. Imagine a heavy hand on your shoulder pulling you away from the dormitory in the night.

Imagine you're sick, feverish, and alone. Other children also coughing, gasping. Some are dying and you know it, even though they try to cover it up.

Imagine running away from it all, desperate to be safe and loved back home. Imagine being hunted and caught, then returned to even harsher punishments. ... [This narrative is followed by a similar imaginative exercise from an Indigenous parent's perspective.]

'Think of that. *Bear that*. Imagine that' (BC Teachers' Federation, 2015, p. 2, emphasis added).

As the testimonies of survivors of the Indian Residential Schools have revealed, Wilson's depiction is a disturbingly common account of that experience (with some variations from school to school, and survivor to survivor), and the residential schools are an inescapable part of the difficult history all Canadians have inherited. In teaching about the history of Canada's relations with Indigenous peoples, some educators advocate engaging students in imaginative exercises along the lines of Wilson's words above, as a way to begin to cultivate historical empathy and an understanding of the past. But, in my view, this approach is not without risk. I have heard anecdotally from parents and colleagues that some elementary-aged children who are asked to engage in such activities come out of the experience not with a sense of responsibility to learn more about the past and a commitment to work toward righting historical wrongs and repairing relations, but instead become anxious, unable to sleep, and afraid of being separated from their own parents. Admittedly, their fears will most likely not come to fruition, and they pale alongside the actual horrors of the Indian Residential Schools; but, even though some degree of trauma may be inevitable in the kind of transformative learning that will be required to get to grips with Canada's historical and ongoing unjust relations with Indigenous people, teaching such difficult knowledge must be accompanied by careful attention to the pedagogical approaches employed.

Contrary to the imaginative exercise in the *Project of Heart* described above and Aldridge's recommendation that students be exposed to "stories of children their own age who have become casualties in war, or who have been mutilated by it" (2014, p. 38), I am not convinced that intentionally setting the conditions for a traumatic learning experience is the best way to cultivate historical consciousness (see also Erickson, 2004). Rather, I believe a more productive approach is for teachers to help students interrogate and critically deconstruct the dominant national narratives, paying particular attention to the ways in which those narratives have been constructed as historical knowledge, and to offer counter-narratives that disrupt or decenter the dominant stories about what went on in other times and places (see, for example, Anderson, 2017; Province of British Columbia, 2019). In a similar vein, but going beyond the intellectual domain, Alison Landsberg (2015) argues that we need to cultivate an embodied affective engagement with the past. She proposes encounters with contemporary visual media, such as films, television dramas, and virtual museum exhibits, as a way for students to develop a "felt connection to the past" that not only helps them to imaginatively go back in time to learn about the past in an intellectual way, but to be touched, moved, and provoked (p. 3). Such experiences of affective engagement with the past, she argues, "can and do produce new forms of historical knowledge" (p. 2). I will return to pedagogical and curricular questions below in looking the bearing of historical consciousness as a measure of the relevance and significance of the past for our lives today. For now, however, let us move on to the second potential meaning of the phrase.

The bearing of historical consciousness as a stance, comportment, or way of walking in the world in relation to the past

If we think of someone's bearing as their physical stance, comportment, or way of walking in the world, the "bearing of historical consciousness" comes to signify a particular way of carrying oneself in relation to the past. The bearing of historical consciousness on this account

becomes, in Simon's words, a "question of what it could mean to live historically, to live within an upright attentiveness to traces of those who have inhabited times and places other than one's own... to live as though the lives of other people mattered" (Simon, Di Paolantonio, and Clamen, 2005, p. 133). Living historically, as Simon sees it, is not a matter of acquiring knowledge *about* the past, but about allowing ourselves to be "touched by the past" (p. 133; see also Landsberg, 2015). The affective experience of being touched by the past is about positioning ourselves in relation to the past, and asking ourselves, "Whose and what memories matter—not abstractly—but to me, to you? To what practices of memory am I obligated, what memories require my attention and vigilance, viscerally implicating me—touching me—so that I must respond, rethinking my present?" (p. 89). Being touched by the past in this way, I would argue, calls first and foremost for the virtue of epistemic humility.

In the broadest terms, epistemic humility is a disposition that requires us to acknowledge our inevitable partiality and fallibility as knowers; it is a disposition related to our ability to know anything with certainty. This conception of epistemic humility is based on Jonathan Adler's argument for open-mindedness as a "second-order (or 'meta') attitude toward one's beliefs *as believed*—it is about humility with regard to *one's capacity to know*" (2004, p. 130). Adler's conception complements the more common, content-focused understanding of open-mindedness as the disposition to regard the ideas or positions one holds as subject to revision in the light of critical reflection and/or further evidence (see, e.g., Hare, 1979).

Returning to the bearing of historical consciousness as a stance, or way of walking in the world in relation to the past, I find Adler's conception of second-order open-mindedness helpful because it does not put too much faith in what any of us can ever reliably know about the past (see also Wineburg, quoted in Seixas, 2004, p. 205). It acknowledges that whatever we claim to know today is inevitably partial and incomplete, and, in some cases, may turn out to be just plain wrong. But this does not mean that we should throw up our hands and abandon history and history education as impossible projects. Rather, the disposition of epistemic humility calls us to a different stance toward archival documents, narratives, and other artefacts—a stance characterized not by a desire to master the past, but by an acknowledgement of our inescapable indebtedness to that which we can never fully know or understand, but for which we are responsible nonetheless.

Connected to the disposition of epistemic humility, the bearing of historical consciousness as a way of walking with the past also requires a kind of vulnerability and passivity wherein, as Simon (2005) puts it, we receive the past as teacher, learning not just *about* the past, but *from* it. Positioning oneself as a student in relation to the past-as-teacher—which is different from the typical understanding of being a student of history—is thus not just about seeking the truth about what went on in other times and places; it means being open to questions we did not even know we had, and to learning not only what we seek to learn, but also that which might shatter our knowledge, our identities, and our very self-understanding as knowing subjects. When we receive the past as teacher we are no longer the masters of our own learning; we risk being changed—perhaps profoundly—by our engagement with ideas and people we might otherwise seek to avoid (Simon, 2005, p. 146). As Simon, Rosenberg, and Eppert (2000) write:

Such an endeavour engages us fundamentally in the difficult problems of hearing, understanding, and knowing... This means remembrance must find a way to initiate a continual unsettling and an interminable asking of pedagogical questions regarding what it means to be taught by the experience of others. Taking this unsettling seriously creates an ongoing problem of how to attend to and hold on to remembrance of the past without foreclosing the possibility that this attempt to remember will rupture the adequacy of the very terms on which a memory is being held. (p. 6)

In my view, this is precisely the situation we find ourselves in with much of the work to be done in Canadian education toward truth and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. How do we remember and take responsibility for a past we can never really know or understand? Rather

than starting from a position of the knowing subject who acquires knowledge about the past, learning *from* Canada's past puts us on the back foot, so to speak. As a way of walking in the world in relation to the past, historical consciousness—on both Seixas's and Simon's accounts—requires us to surrender many of the comforting national narratives we have inherited and to commit ourselves instead to taking responsibility, here and now, for the difficult inheritance that is Canada's past, so that the future may be one of hope and reconciliation. And this brings us to the third meaning of the bearing of historical consciousness.

The bearing of historical consciousness as a measure of the relevance and significance of the past for our lives today

Of the three meanings of the phrase, this last one—the relevance of the past for our lives today—has received the most attention in the literature on historical consciousness (see, for example, Körber, 2016; Rösen, 2005; Seixas, 2004, 2006; Zanazanian, 2015, 2016). In fact, it is a cornerstone of Körber's definition of historical consciousness as life-orienting, and one of the key reasons for promoting historical consciousness is a belief that a life lacking deep engagement with the past is a life that is diminished in significant ways.

While it almost goes without saying that who we are today, both individually and collectively, is shaped in large part by those who came before us, there are times we all wish we could leave the past behind and simply get on with our lives. This sentiment is captured well in Blustein's recollection of questions put to him by a friend one afternoon as they were walking through the Jewish quarter in Prague. "What good does all this remembering do, anyway?" his friend asked. "Shouldn't we stop dwelling on the past? What is done is done, what's past is past. Why keep exposing oneself, in this masochistic fashion, to what can only be intensely painful memories? To what end?" (2008, p. xii).

One obvious answer is that, since we are largely products of the ideas, values, beliefs and actions of those who came before us, if we are ever going to know anything about ourselves, we have to engage with and learn about our past. In a similar vein, popular arguments for the importance of history education often cite George Santayana's (1905) claim that, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (p. 284). Santayana's claim is not merely descriptive; it is a moral imperative: we *must* remember and learn from the past so that we never allow the wrongs of the past to happen again.

For Seixas and others working in the epistemological strand of historical consciousness, the more we know about what went on in the past, the better equipped we will be to make decisions about the kind of society we want, and our own role as citizens, now and in the future. So, in addition to learning about historical wrongs such as slavery, the Holocaust, Indian Residential Schools, Apartheid, Jim Crow, and so on, an implicit aim of educating for historical consciousness is to create in students a desire to become better people than those who committed those past wrongs. Conversely, in working with artefacts and narratives of moral exemplars, such as civil rights activists and rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust, students are exposed to the kind of positive moral commitment we hope will guide their own lives.

In the Canadian context, in addition to the moral and relational repair that needs to happen between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, a significant part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's forward-looking project is a call to create a different narrative of Canada and a new Canadian identity. In rendering his final report in June 2015, Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the TRC emphasized the important work to come:

'Reconciliation is achieved only through acting different,' said Sinclair. 'Each of you in this room, and each of you in this country [has] a role to play.'

Sinclair said personal, political and cultural action was necessary to continue the path of reconciliation so its true rewards would be reaped by the country's children.

'I challenge all of you who are here. While we may not share a past, we certainly share a future. We are bound to each other'. (APTN National News, 2015)

Acknowledging the significance of the past for our lives today and for the future means that, as citizens and educators, we need find a way to direct our energies toward both remembrance and responsibility. We need to focus on remembrance by learning about and from the past, acknowledging the ethical claim the past has on us here and now, and we need to focus on responsibility by asking ourselves, "What decisions and actions will I, as an individual—and what will we, collectively—undertake so that we might move toward a future as Canadians where the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and communities is no longer characterized by the unequal distribution of harms and benefits, and where all children have a genuine chance at the best life possible?"

Concluding comments

Teaching for the bearing of historical consciousness is no easy task. In Canadian classrooms where Indian students sit next to Pakistani students, Palestinians next to Israelis, Bosnians next to Serbs, and Indigenous students next to non-Indigenous students, history education cannot be about the pursuit of a shared story about what went on in the past. Rather, it is about learning to live together in the tension of the differences that often divide us, acknowledging the "difficult inheritance" of the past (Bennington, 2000). Teachers thus need to make space in classrooms for dissent, contestation, and critical engagement with the historical narratives students receive in the official curriculum, popular media, and around their dinner tables. When taken up in classrooms that do not seek to gloss over national, cultural, and religious differences, the hope of historical consciousness is that we might come to recognize the ethical significance of our relationship to the past as, in Derrida's (1996) words, "a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow" (p. 36).

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Endnotes

¹ In Canada, 'Indigenous' is the currently preferred term for referring to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples as a collective. 'Aboriginal' is also acceptable. 'Indian' is an outdated term referring to a particular political status granted by earlier acts of government. In this paper, I will use 'Indigenous' except when citing documents that use other terms.

² There is also a considerable body of Francophone Canadian scholarship on history education and historical consciousness. See, for example, the work of Catherine Duquette, Jocelyn Létourneau, and Stéphane Lévesque.

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