

Introduction

I.1 The Purpose of This Book

What does History teach us? By History, with a capital “H,” I mean not our knowledge of what happened in the past, the record of past events, but rather History as a field of inquiry, a “discipline” in the academic sense. History with a capital H is a way of learning and thinking about the past. It employs a particular mode of inquiry, defined by specific assumptions about the nature of knowledge about the past. It is the collective project of “historians” – the many people (some academics, some not) who study history, with a lowercase h, which is what happened in the past.¹ What do we gain when we learn to ask the kinds of questions that historians ask, to adopt the procedures that historians use to investigate those questions, and to develop the kind of answers historians build? In short, what benefits do people get from taking courses or completing degrees in the academic discipline of History? Education researcher Gaea Leinhardt gave a pithy formulation of the questions this book seeks to address: “What are the essential

¹ Many others have made this distinction. Michel-Rolph Trouillot distinguished in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995) between “historicity 1” (my lowercase history) and “historicity 2,” “historical narratives” or “what is said to have happened” (my uppercase History) rather than what happened (pp. 29, 5). Keith Jenkins differentiates between “the past” (history) and “history” (History) in “Teaching History Theory: A Radical Introduction,” in *History in Higher Education: New Directions in Teaching and Learning*, ed. Alan Booth and Paul Hyland (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 75–95, here p. 76. Ross E. Dunn has distinguished between “history as account (Hac)” and “history as event (Hev)” in “Constructing World History in the Classroom,” in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, ed. Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 121–140, here p. 128, and Robert B. Bain, “‘They Thought the World Was Flat?’ Applying the Principles of *How People Learn* in Teaching High School History,” in *How Students Learn: History in the Classroom*, ed. M. Suzanne Donovan and John D. Bransford (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2005), pp. 179–213, here p. 186. Steve Harris uses the same nomenclature as I have here in “Reading and Understanding History: An Introduction to Critical Thinking,” (unpublished ms, 2022).

opportunities that teaching and learning in history provide? . . . What powerful and unique opportunity does the content and disposition of history provide the teacher and the learner?”²

The final chapter of this book will return to the question “what does history teach us?” – that is, what can we learn from what happened in the past, or what lessons can we draw from history (with a small h)? But that is a much less useful question than the one Leinhardt posed. The idea that we can learn specific practical lessons from history is an example of what I call operational thinking. Operational thinking asks, “how do I solve this problem?”³ Chapter 1 of this book will argue that the most fundamental postulate of History as a discipline, as a way of thinking, makes it difficult for historians to answer that kind of question. By its nature History asks instead two quite different questions, which are at the heart of what I call strategic thinking. Strategic thinking asks first: “What is the nature of this problem?” and second: “How did I come to have this problem?” – which can also be phrased as: “Why do I have this problem?” Operational questions lead to answers – to actionable knowledge that can guide decision-making. Strategic questions lead to more questions – to inquiry, which yields greater understanding. The relevant issue for operational thinking is: What is the practical usefulness of History as a form of intellectual endeavor? Strategic thinking focuses on a different issue: What is the logic of inquiry that is fundamental and unique to this form of intellectual endeavor? This book will argue that the answer to the second question is the most meaningful answer to the first question. History with a capital H is a unique and uniquely powerful mode of inquiry. The primary practical usefulness of studying History is that by doing so we learn that mode of inquiry. This is not to say that lessons and decisions are not important. It is just that they are not what History is best at. History is good at teaching us how to *inquire* in a unique and powerful way.

Leinhardt posed the questions this book addresses a quarter of a century ago, on the basis of a literature on history education that was at least

² Gaea Leinhardt, “Lessons on Teaching and Learning in History from Paul’s Pen,” in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, ed. Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 223–245, here p. 224.

³ For a recent example of a long list of lessons people believe they can draw from history, see “More about General Principles of Historical Knowledge,” <http://futurefocusedhistory.blog/more-about-general-principles-of-historical-knowledge>.

a quarter century old at that time. The contemporary discussion of history education is certainly immensely more sophisticated than it was in the 1970s, but it is still carried on in fundamentally the same terms. There is, therefore, by now a vast literature on the topic, and this book relies heavily on the ideas that can be found in that literature and the research findings that underpin it. It is useful to distinguish between two broad genres. On the one hand, a rich and sophisticated body of work draws on the results of rigorous study of methods and practices, generated by scholarship on teaching and learning as it applies specifically to History. On the other, an equally rich and thoughtful literature draws on reflections on the nature and purposes of the discipline itself, and on the experience of university History professors in translating that reflection into pedagogical practice. These literatures overlap substantially. A central agenda of the scholarship on teaching and learning has been to develop effective discipline-specific pedagogies, including for History. And History professors have been deeply influenced by the scholarship on teaching and learning as they have gone about translating evolving understandings of the fundamentals of the discipline into teaching practice. It will be most fruitful, therefore, to think of these as two distinctive approaches to the same project.

In fact, there is essentially consensus in the literature about the aims of History teaching, and there has been throughout the past half century.⁴ Of course any college or university course in History must impart information – what some call factual knowledge, others content, others still a coherent narrative. This is the first and indispensable aim of History education, because without that basic knowledge or narrative of what happened in the past, students have no foundation or framework for any sort of analytical approach to it. But the more important ultimate goal is to teach students a specific way of thinking, specific cognitive skills, that are uniquely important to the discipline – to train them, as Nikki Mandell and Bobbie Malone put it in 2008, in “thinking like an historian.”⁵ The research literature on teaching practice has found that the teaching methods individual History professors employ in the classroom constitute (as Alan Booth put it in 2003) “a long continuum extending from teacher-centered to student-centered approaches, and from content-delivery to the

⁴ For the historical background to the emergence of this consensus, see Linda Symcox and Arie Wilschut, “Introduction,” in *National History Standards: The Problem of the Canon and the Future of Teaching History*, ed. Linda Symcox and Arie Wilschut (Charlotte, NC: Information Age, 2009), pp. 1–11.

⁵ Nikki Mandell and Bobbie Malone, *Thinking Like a Historian: Rethinking History Instruction* (n.p.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2008).

facilitation of understanding.” Some seek to engage students more through the excitement of learning to think independently and critically, to develop their ability to generate their own analyses and interpretations. Others emphasize the excitement of the “story” of history, the encounter with the diverse and unique people of the past and with the dramatic and powerful stories that History can tell about them. Others still focus on what the past can tell us about the present, on the broad patterns that we can distinguish in the past and about its relationship to our own lives. Whatever the specific emphasis and method, however, the “prevailing disciplinary orthodoxy” (as Booth puts it) is that History should teach not just a narrative of events, but also and more importantly a way to think.⁶ History instruction should impart habits of inquiry, methods of analysis, and an historically sound conception of the nature of knowledge about the past. The aim, as John Tosh put it in 2008, is “equipping young people with a distinctive mode of thinking”; or in Robert Bain’s formulation in 2009, not transmitting a body of knowledge but creating a “cognitive apprenticeship”; or again, as a study of History teaching internationally put it in the same year, History should teach above all “a way of thinking and reasoning, a method of inquiry.”⁷ To put it another way: the aim of History education is to teach students *how* to think, not *what* to think.

This broad consensus has held and expanded, at least in the English-language literature, for the past half century. British historians Alaric K. Dickinson and Peter J. Lee argued already in 1978, for example, that students should learn about History as “a way of finding out about the past rather than a body of received information.”⁸ Twenty-three years later, Sam Wineburg’s *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts* offered

⁶ Alan Booth, *Teaching History at University: Enhancing Learning and Understanding* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 63, 52–57, 55.

⁷ John Tosh, *Why History Matters* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), p. ix; Robert B. Bain, “Into the Breach: Using Research and Theory to Shape History Instruction,” *Journal of Education* 1898 (2008/2009): 159–167, here p. 160; Symcox and Wilschut, “Introduction,” p. 3. This is a program that one can trace at least back to the 1920s and 1930s; see, for example, the discussions in Michael J. Douma, *Creative Historical Thinking* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 38–39; David Sylvester, “Change and Continuity in History Teaching 1900–1993,” in *Teaching History*, ed. Hillary Bourdillon (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 9–26 (on the UK, but equally valid for the USA). For a more developed statement and program, see M. Anne Britt, Charles A. Perfetti, Julie A. van Dyke, and Gareth Gabrys, “The Sourcer’s Apprentice: A Tool for Document-Supported History Instruction,” in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, ed. Peter Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 437–470.

⁸ Alaric K. Dickinson and Peter J. Lee, “Educational Objectives for the Study of History” Reconsidered,” in *History Teaching and Historical Understanding*, ed. Alaric K. Dickinson and Peter J. Lee (London: Heinemann, 1978), pp. 21–38, here p. 22.

what is probably the most influential statement of this goal: History teaching should impart the specific “forms of inquiry” characteristic of the discipline.⁹ Joel M. Sipress and David J. Voelker offered a very similar formulation in 2009, suggesting that History teachers should focus on imparting the “central assumptions, forms of inquiry, and cognitive habits” that shape the discipline of History. It is “*historical thinking* itself, rather than a particular body of historical knowledge, that should be the emphasis of history education.”¹⁰

Two issues, however, remain very much unresolved. One is that there is no agreement about how historians think, or at least should think. Instead, there is a very long history of bitter theoretical disagreement about that. This disagreement has persisted since the inception of the discipline some 200 years ago. Later chapters will address it in some detail; for now, it will suffice to say that some historians regard their discipline as a social science with aspirations to help achieve present aims, while others regard it as a discipline in the humanities, which aims to give its students a deeper understanding of what it means to be human. Iconic nineteenth-century figure Leopold von Ranke, who is often regarded as the founder of the modern discipline of History, explicitly addressed this issue already in the 1820s, when he dismissed theories about the meaning of history as “*meta-physics*” and rejected the idea that the job of history is “*instructing the present for the benefit of future ages*,” in favor of simply showing “*what actually happened*.”¹¹ As an undergraduate student in the 1980s I witnessed

⁹ Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001), p. 41. A somewhat more opaque statement is in Lendol Calder, “Uncoverage: Toward a Signature Pedagogy for the History Survey,” *Journal of American History* 92:4 (2006): 1358–1370: History education should focus on the “cognitive contours of history as an epistemological domain” (p. 1363).

¹⁰ Joel M. Sipress and David J. Voelker, “From Learning History to Doing History: Beyond the Coverage Model,” in *Exploring Signature Pedagogies: Approaches to Teaching Disciplinary Habits of Mind*, ed. Regan A. Gurung, Nancy L. Chick, and Aeron Haynie (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2009), pp. 19–35, here pp. 23, 24, 25. There is a good book-length discussion of the first decades of this discussion in Peter N. Stearns, *Meaning over Memory: Recasting the Teaching of Culture and History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), which argues for an approach that centers on “the habits of mind the humanities should be establishing rather than merely the subject matter” (p. ix). See also Andreas Körber, “German History Didactics: From Historical Consciousness to Historical Competencies – and Beyond?” in *Historicizing the Uses of the Past: Scandinavian Perspectives on History Culture, Historical Consciousness and Didactics of History Related to World War II*, ed. Hille Bjerg, Claudia Lenz, and Erik Thorstensen (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011), pp. 145–164, here p. 160; Inari Sakki, “Aims in Teaching History and Their Epistemic Correlates: A Study of History Teachers in Ten Countries,” *Pedagogy, Culture, & Society* 27 (2019): 65–85.

¹¹ Leopold von Ranke, *The Secret of World History: Selected Writings on the Art and Science of History*, ed. Roger Wines (New York: Fordham University Press, 1981), p. 21; Leopold von Ranke, “The Pitfalls of a Philosophy of History (Introduction to a Lecture on Universal History: A Manuscript of the 1840s),” in *The Theory and Practice of History*, ed. Georg G. Iggers and Konrad von Moltke, trans

the late stages of an intense debate over the place of social science theory and of political commitments in History. As a graduate student in the 1990s I lived through a bitter controversy over the relationship between history and postmodern theory – what some now call “the theory wars.”¹² In recent years the discipline has seen intense debates over the place within it of critical social theory – in particular postcolonial and decolonial theory, queer theory, and anti-racism. The latest episode in this ongoing debate occurred in the summer of 2022, when the president of the American Historical Association sparked a minor media firestorm by arguing that historians should steer clear of “presentism,” meaning the desire to bring scholarship to bear on current issues of social or political importance. Some more activist historians saw this admonition both as politically regressive and as an attack on their own professional integrity.¹³

This fundamental disagreement will never go away. As this book will show, it is rooted in the nature and history of the discipline. This is not a crisis of the discipline; it is what the discipline is like. As Mary Fulbrook wrote in 1995, “Historians have never agreed about the nature of their craft”; from its very beginnings History was a discipline “with a remarkable diversity of objects of inquiry, and notions of methods and goals”; ever since it has been characterized by a “rather startling state of indecision (or, to put it more strongly, fundamental disagreement in principle) about the nature of historical investigation.”¹⁴ In the same year Allan Megill stated what I believe to be the prevailing assumption among historians today: “That there is a single History cannot be maintained, either subjectively as an enterprise” with a single unitary method “or objectively as an actual grand narrative” of the past. Instead we should adopt what he calls “The Multiplicity Postulate: Never assume that there is a single authorized

Wilma A. Iggers and Konrad von Moltke (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973), pp. 47–50, here p. 47.

¹² There is a useful discussion in Lisa Duggan, “The Theory Wars, or, Who’s Afraid of Judith Butler?” *Journal of Women’s History* 10 (1998): 9–19.

¹³ James H. Sweet, “Is History History? Identity Politics and Teleologies of the Present,” *Perspectives on History*, August 17, 2022, www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/september-2022/is-history-history-identity-politics-and-teleologies-of-the-present. For the debate, see, for example, Kevin Gannon, “On Presentism and History; Or, We’re Doing This Again, Are We?” <https://thetattooedprof.com/2022/08/19/on-presentism-and-history-or-were-doing-this-again-are-we/>; Priya Satia, “The Presentist Trap,” www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/october-2022/responses-to-is-history-history; David Labaree, “Commentary on James Sweet’s Essay about Historical Presentism,” <https://davidlabaree.com/2022/08/29/james-sweet-is-history-history-identity-politics-and-teleologies-of-the-present>.

¹⁴ Mary Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 12, 14, 16.

historical method or subject matter.”¹⁵ A dozen years later Joanna Bourke observed that “there is no single discourse of history” (and, by implication, there never will be).¹⁶ Laura Doan, in 2013, reached the same conclusion: “History is not (and never has been) a unified and coherent discipline.”¹⁷ German historian Otto Gerhard Oexle adopted a more ironic tone: “History has been since its origins at the beginning of the modern age, and still is, a discipline in crisis.”¹⁸ An essay of 2004 on teaching History in higher education was more blunt: historians “are notorious for disagreeing with each other about nearly everything.”¹⁹

Second, in purely practical terms scholars of History education do not agree on the specific skills, habits of mind, and methods of inquiry that students of History should learn. Instead, the literature presents a wide variety of lists of such skills, habits, and methods. Lendol Calder, for example, suggested in 2006 that History survey courses should teach six specific “cognitive habits.” History students learn to pose fruitful questions; to make connections between disparate events and facts; to derive their reasoning from specific sources, the validity and reliability of which they examine carefully; to make inferences from fragmentary and limited evidence; to consider the multiple alternative perspectives that people in history display; and to recognize the limits of their own knowledge.²⁰ In 2007 Thomas Andres and Flannery Burke proposed “five Cs” of historical thought: Students in History learn to think about change; to think in complex ways about the context of events, texts, and people; about causality; about the role of contingency and chance in human history; and they learn to analyze complexity – because human societies, the subject of

¹⁵ Allan Megill, “‘Grand Narrative’ and the Discipline of History,” in *A New Philosophy of History*, ed. Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 151–173, here pp. 163, 168.

¹⁶ Joanna Bourke, “Foreword,” *Manifestos for History*, ed. Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan, and Alun Munslow (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. xi–xii, here p. xii. For a clear, brief discussion, see Zoltán Bolizsár Simon, “Historicism and Constructionism: Rival Ideas of Historical Change,” *History of European Ideas* 45 (2019): 1171–1190.

¹⁷ Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women’s Experience in Modern War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 41.

¹⁸ Otto Gerhard Oexle, “Im Archiv der Fiktionen,” in *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Wahrheit: Zum Grundlagenstreit in der Geschichtswissenschaft*, ed. Rainer Marie Kiesow and Dieter Simon (Frankfurt: Campus, 2000), pp. 87–103, here p. 87.

¹⁹ Valerie Grim, David Pace, and Leah Shopkow, “Learning to Use Evidence in the Study of History,” in *Decoding the Disciplines: Helping Students Learn Disciplinary Ways of Thinking* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), pp. 57–68, here p. 57.

²⁰ Calder, “Uncoverage.” For a list of these lists, see Sipress and Volker, “From Learning History to Doing History”; or Stéphane Lévesque, *Thinking Historically: Educating Students for the Twenty-First Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), pp. 33–37.

historical study, are so complex.²¹ Alan Booth argued in 2004 that students in History learn to “read and use texts . . . critically and empathetically”; to interpret “complex, ambiguous, and conflicting and often incomplete material”; to marshal arguments; to integrate information from many different sources, of different types, and often of fragmentary nature; and to examine alternative explanations.²²

Over the past two decades there have been influential efforts to generate authoritative statements of this agenda. Perhaps the most fruitful is the American Historical Association’s “Tuning Project,” launched in 2012. That project developed a broad roster of intellectual habits and academic skills History education should teach, and of the benefits learning those skills would bestow. In the United Kingdom another such list was generated as a Subject Benchmark Statement for History by the History Benchmarking Group, published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in 2000.²³ While these efforts focus more on university and college-level History teaching, moreover, numerous other projects less explicitly focused on higher education have generated still further definitions of the skill set History teaches.²⁴

²¹ Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, “What Does It Mean to Think Historically? *Perspectives* 45:1 (2007), www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2007/what-does-it-mean-to-think-historically.

²² Booth, *Teaching History at University*, pp. 24–25. See further Alan Booth and Paul Hyland, “Introduction: Developing Scholarship in History Teaching,” in *The Practice of University History Teaching*, ed. Alan Booth and Paul Hyland (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 1–17; “Introduction,” in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, ed. Peter Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg (New York: New York University Press, 2000); David Pace, “Beyond ‘Sorting’: Teaching Cognitive Skills in the History Survey,” *History Teacher* 26:2 (1993): 211–220, and “The Amateur in the Operating Room: History and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,” *American Historical Review* 109:4 (2004): 1171–1192; the websites of university-based projects, for example, at Virginia Technical University (www.historicalinquiry.com), George Mason University/Stanford University (<http://historicalthinkingmatters.org>), and the University of British Columbia (www.cshc.ubc.ca).

²³ The Tuning Project can be explored at www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning-the-history-discipline; *Subject Benchmark Statement: History* (Gloucester: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2022), www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/sbs/sbs-history-22.pdf?sfvrsn=beaede81_2. Another important milestone was the National Standards for History developed in 1996 by the National Center for History in the Schools in the United States; see National Center for History in the Schools, “History Standards,” available at the University of California at Los Angeles Public History Initiative, <https://phi.history.ucla.edu/nchs/history-standards>.

²⁴ See, for example, Michael J. Salevouris and Conal Furay, *The Methods and Skills of History: A Practical Guide* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015); Mandell and Malone, *Thinking Like a Historian*, who identify (esp. p. 8) five “categories of inquiry” in History (cause and effect, change and continuity, turning points, the perspective of people in the past, and what the past tells us about the present); the Stanford History Education Group website, <https://sheg.stanford.edu>; the Common Core standards developed by a broad consortium of state school systems, www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/11-12; the Historical Thinking Project in Canada, <http://historicalthinking.ca>; Chauncey Monte-Santo, “Beyond Reading Comprehension and Summary: Learning

The picture of History that all these lists of skills, habits of mind, and attitudes give us is not completely chaotic; there is some overlap between them. But they certainly give us no coherent sense of what the aim of teaching History is. They are essentially descriptive. Collectively they offer us a grab bag of tasks – of particular things to try to teach our students. They do not offer us a clear definition of what we are teaching when we teach not a collection of loosely related skills, but a *discipline*, History. They do not offer us a mission.

Teachers of History, then, face two very serious intellectual problems: unresolvable epistemological disagreements about the nature of historical knowledge and how to gain it, and an essentially descriptive definition of what historians do. It appears from the available research that these problems quite seriously hamper instruction in History in higher education. A good deal of college- and university-level History instruction still does a poor job of teaching students how to think like historians. One study of 2018, for example, found that a tiny proportion of students even in advanced college History classes examine historical sources critically – by checking the date of publication, by thinking about the context in which they were produced at that time, and by considering who the author was and what his or her motives might have been. This is the most basic starting point for inquiry in the discipline of History; but most students, it appears, are not getting that message.²⁵ There may be a curricular explanation for that. A study of 2009 found that some History departments have in recent decades introduced special courses on historical methods for History majors in which students are asked to think explicitly about how historians think. It also found, however, that most departments still use a “pyramidal” curricular structure in which introductory courses “survey” topics; more advanced courses focus on narrower geographies and may introduce students to more historiographical debate and complexity; and students only engage in actually thinking

to Read and Write in History by Focusing on Evidence, Perspective, and Interpretation,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 41 (2011): 212–249; American Historical Association, “Statement on Excellent Classroom Teaching of History” (updated 2017), www.historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development/statements-standards-and-guidelines-of-the-discipline/statement-on-excellent-classroom-teaching-of-history; Bradley Commission on History in the Schools, “Building a History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in Schools,” *History Teacher* 23:1 (1989): 14; National Council for History Education, “Building a World History Curriculum: A Guide to Using Themes and Selecting Content” (1997), <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED422238>; United Kingdom Schools Council History Project, *A New Look at History* (Edinburgh: Holmes MacDougall, 1976), www.schoolshistoryproject.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/NewLookAtHistory.pdf.

²⁵ Sam Wineburg, Mark Smith, and Joel Breakstone, “What Is Learned in College History Classes?” *Journal of American History* 104 (2018): 983–993.

like historians themselves, by undertaking open-ended research projects on topics of their own choosing, in advanced seminars.²⁶ Since most students who take History courses are not History majors, this means that a very high proportion never get much formal exposure to what has, for the past half century, been regarded as the most important aspect of study in the discipline. Finally, recent studies have shown that a relatively high proportion of students fail, withdraw from, or get poor (D) grades in History courses, and that this is particularly true of students from less socioeconomically privileged backgrounds, above all those who are members of underrepresented minorities.²⁷ It appears, in short, that History instructors have not yet developed methods for effectively teaching their increasingly diverse student body to think like historians. There are clearly some structural reasons for these failings, related to the challenges of mass higher education under severe resource constraints.²⁸ But I believe they are the product as well of the absence of a clear conception of what we are doing when we are teaching History.²⁹

In this book I want to offer a more coherent conception of what we are doing when we teach History, on the basis of fundamental intellectual postulates and characteristics that define the discipline. About midway through his 2018 book on teaching history in the digital age, *Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone)*, Sam Wineburg observed that a “teacher who hopes to teach historical thinking must be able to articulate what makes history a unique form of knowledge, with its own ways of knowing and its own habits of mind.”³⁰ That is the agenda of this book.

²⁶ Stephen D. Andrews, “Structuring the Past: Thinking about the History Curriculum,” *Journal of American History* 95 (2009): 1094–1101.

²⁷ See particularly Andrew K. Koch, “Many Thousands Failed: A Wakeup Call to History Educators,” *Perspectives on History* 55 (2017), www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2017/many-thousands-failed-a-wakeup-call-to-history-educators.

²⁸ For a good discussion of some of the structural reasons for these failings, specific to Canada but relevant for many other national contexts, see Ruth Sandwell, “On Historians and Their Audiences: An Argument for Teaching (and Not Just Writing) History,” in *Becoming A History Teacher: Sustaining Practices in Historical Thinking and Knowing*, ed. Ruth Sandwell and Amy von Heyking (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), pp. 61–90, esp. pp. 83–86.

²⁹ That lack of clarity also contributes to a general failure systematically to prepare graduate students in History for teaching roles. See, for example, the incisive comment in Jonathan Zimmerman, “In Search of ‘College-Level Teaching,’” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 14 (2015): 429–432; Arlene Diaz, Joan Middenford, David Pace, and Leah Shopkow, “The History Learning Project: A Department ‘Decodes’ Its Students,” *Journal of American History* 94 (2008): 1211–1224, here p. 1211.

³⁰ Sam Wineburg, *Why Learn History (When Its Already on Your Phone)* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018), p. 121.

I.2 What Makes History Different?

Identifying what defines the discipline of History cannot, however, entail denying or resolving the divisions, disagreements, and conflicts within the discipline. As Chapters 1 and 2 will show, those divisions derive not only from the complex history of the discipline but also directly from intellectual postulates that play a defining role in it. We cannot resolve them. But more important, we should not resolve them. They are one of the most important characteristics that make History a unique, and a uniquely valuable, field of study. Precisely the lack of consensus about how historians do, can, or should think is itself perhaps the most beneficial characteristic of History as a field of study. One of the greatest cognitive and intellectual benefits of the study of History in higher education derives from the fact that there is not *one* valid way to think like an historian. Historians think in quite *different* ways. This offers students the opportunity to cultivate a form of intellectual rigor that is not common in academic disciplines. The deepest aim of any academic training is to teach methodological rigor – that is, skill in employing a particular mode of inquiry. This is how academic study enables people to arrive at their own conclusions, to generate new knowledge and new insight. History, however, teaches two quite different modes of inquiry. Approached frankly, this epistemic division – this disagreement on the nature of historical knowledge and how to generate it – can cultivate perhaps the highest form of methodological rigor: the understanding that methodological rigor comes at a price. The lesson is not that sloppy thinking is better; it is that rigorous application of two methods can help us to avoid the blind spots created by rigorous application of only one.³¹ Beyond that, approaching the acquisition of knowledge and of understanding in two different ways can allow us to see not only the limitations but also the specific benefits and potentials of each approach, and it can enable us to ask new questions to which neither alone would have led us. This is the rigor of intellectual flexibility. Developing it is one of the greatest potential benefits of the study of History.

³¹ Allan Megill offers a concise statement of this position in “‘Grand Narrative’ and the Discipline of History,” esp. pp. 166–167. Lutz Raphael has suggested that in practice most historians have now adopted a shared “epistemic culture” in which essentially empiricist assumptions are paired with an appreciation for the productivity of social science method in “The Implications of Empiricism for History,” *The Sage Handbook of Historical Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013), pp. 23–40, here p. 26. Other essays in the same collection, however, clearly do not conform to this model; see, for example, Michael Bentley, “The Turn toward ‘Science’: Historians Delivering Untheorized Truth,” pp. 10–22.

The divided and divisive character of History is, furthermore, a great pedagogical resource because it gives History a unique intellectual attraction. The epistemological landscape – that is, the range of ways of thinking – into which History instructors invite students is open; there is more than one way forward. We can tell our students that they have options, that they can make choices, that they will need to see for themselves where those options and choices take them. Indeed, practicing historians and students in History have very powerful intellectual incentives to think simultaneously in different and even contradictory ways about their work. Laura Doan summed up this point with admirable economy in 2013: The study of History asks us not to decide on one particular way of thinking about the past, but to discern what different ways of thinking about it have to offer, and to develop “attentiveness to use value.”³² This is intellectually exciting. In History, we do not apply a formula; we think about what the particular value of applying different formulas might be. We can try them out and see what they yield; we can play them off against each other; we can use one to compensate for the weaknesses of another.

Acknowledging and exploring the profound disagreements within the discipline is, then, one of the most valuable *specific* benefits and *specific* attractions of studying *History*. Methodologically, History as a discipline is a mess – much more so than many other academic disciplines. That is not a problem either for scholars or for teachers of History. It is perhaps the greatest virtue of History as a subject of study and instruction in higher education. Seeking to achieve epistemological coherence is therefore not only pointless (given how vehemently historians disagree on the nature of historical knowledge and inquiry); it would also be intellectually and pedagogically counterproductive.³³

I will offer here instead, therefore, an *ethical* definition of what it means to think like an historian, of what we are teaching when we teach History. The discipline of History asks us to adopt a particular ethical posture – a particular understanding of our relationship to other people. To think like an historian is to encounter people in the past as fully human and therefore as fully historical beings. And it is to do so as ourselves also fully human and fully historical beings. History asks us to engage with the people of the past in their full complexity, and with awareness of the full

³² Doan, *Disturbing Practices*, p. 9.

³³ This is not at all a new program: it was advanced in very abbreviated form more than half a century ago by the Social Science Research Council. See David S. Landes and Charles Tilly, eds., *History as Social Science* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 1; excerpts at <https://items.ssrc.org/from-our-archives/history-as-social-science>.

complexity of the historical context that shaped them as people – their ideas, their values, their actions. And it asks us to acknowledge our own fully human complexity, and to be aware of the full complexity of the historical context that has shaped us as people too.

This ethical stance does not derive from any philosophical origin; adopting it is not an ethical choice. It is determined instead by two intellectual postulates that are foundational to the discipline of History – that is to say, without them the discipline of History would not exist.

The first of these is that everything human is historically conditioned. This is called “historicism.” Historicism holds that we understand things (events, people, ideas, beliefs, institutions, practices, and so on) only when and to the extent that we understand the full historical context in which they came to be, the many different aspects of the historical situation in which we find them – including not only what was going on in the entirety of the society in which we find them, but also what had gone on before, what led that society to be what it was.

The second postulate derives logically from the first. It is that History is about everything. It does not try to isolate a particular aspect of the past and understand it through close analysis of factors we have predetermined to be defining of it, eliminating other variables, and according to principles that govern that particular aspect of human life – for example, the economy, religion, art, gender relations, warfare, class relations, environmental constraints, geographical influences, and so forth. Any historical situation consists of *all* these things; they are all interconnected, and there are no independent variables.

This is why History encounters people in the past as fully human and historical beings. It aims to understand their lives and behaviors, ideas and actions, their situation and choices, not in discrete fields (the economy, politics, culture, etc.) but as part of a social and historical whole. It engages with them in all their complexity, conscious both of their limitations and of their autonomy. Historians seek to understand people, as Joanna Bourke put it in the foreword to a volume titled *Manifestos for History* in 2007, as “unique, singular person[s] within specific times and geographical places.” And we do that conscious, as Hayden White put it in the afterword to the same volume, of the ways in which they were “both enabled and hamstrung” by that specific historical context.³⁴

³⁴ Hayden White, “Afterword,” in *Manifestos for History*, ed. Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan, and Alun Munslow (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 220–231, here p. 224. See also Bourke, “Foreword,” p. xii.

There is an important further ethical consequence to these two postulates. History does not engage with human beings in the past in order to master them. Obviously, people in the past are dead, so we cannot master, motivate, or manipulate them. Further: the people of the past were real people, not fictional characters; they have already done everything that they are going to do. Unlike novelists, therefore, historians cannot invent people in the past and then make them do the things we want them to do in order to get our own message across. Historical people exist outside of our time, irreducibly independent of us. For the discipline of History people in the past are not things that historians aim to control. Malcolm Foley made this point eloquently in an essay of 2022: “As historians, we are primarily concerned with people in all their complexity . . . we regard them not merely as subjects to be studied and experimented on with our hypotheses, but as people”; the historian enters into a relationship with people in the past “not to dominate and to exploit but to learn.”³⁵

Again, this is not the way History *should* be. This is the only way it *can* be. As Indrani Chatterjee put it in 2020, the “conceptual tools” of History “disrupt the ability of researchers to stand above and outside the very processes and things they seek to understand. They make mastery impossible.”³⁶ Historians do not study people as cogs in a generic mechanism – economic, psychological, cultural, political. They do not study human behavior under specifically defined and delimited conditions. They study human actions, choices, and lives in full social contexts. The distinctive breadth of the discipline, then, fundamentally conditions its ethical foundation.

A further consequence of the foundational postulates of History, however, is that in studying History we encounter ourselves as fully human beings as well. Historians are not exempt from the assumption that everything human is historically conditioned. Historians are not outside observers of History. As English Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm observed in 1994, “Historians do not and cannot stand outside their subject as objective observers . . . All of us are plunged into the assumptions of our times and places.”³⁷ Historians look at people in the past, but, in a sense, people in the past are also looking back. As we come to understand how

³⁵ Malcolm Foley, “History as Love,” *Perspectives on History*, September 7, 2022, www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/october-2022/responses-to-is-history-history.

³⁶ Indrani Chatterjee, “Whose History? What Theory? A Postcolonial Response,” *History of the Present* 10 (2020): 166–168, p. 168.

³⁷ “Identity History Is Not Enough,” in Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (New York: New Press, 1997), pp. 266–277, here p. 276.

they thought and why, under what constraints, how they acted, what their world was like, and how it influenced them, we begin to be able to some extent to see ourselves through their eyes – to identify also how *we* think, and why, what constraints *we* operate under, what *our* world is like, and how it influences us. We begin to understand how our historical context has conditioned us. This is what it means to say that we *encounter* the people of the past. In a sense, we do not “study” them, because while they are dead and therefore independent of us, we are *not* independent of them. We are not untouched by them. We do not just learn *about* them; we also learn *from* them.

This makes History a frightening and exciting discipline. Studying History can change us; it can change our understanding of ourselves and of our place in our own historical context in ways that we cannot predict or control. History is not just a process of asking questions and getting answers. We do not interrogate the people of the past to get from them the information we want. Encountering them as fully human beings means opening ourselves to what *their* questions were; it poses questions of *us*.

These are very abstract ideas. I would like to offer an example from my own life, not as an exercise in self-indulgence but to make the point a little more tangible. I grew up with no relationship to organized religion, but as part of a distinctive regional subculture. In the course of research for my dissertation I found that I needed a better understanding of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Protestant theology, in order to understand the motives, thinking, and actions of some of the people I was studying. Reading more deeply into key texts from the period, I came to understand that the subculture I identified with was a product of that theological tradition. I had been quite proud of what I thought was the uniqueness of the regional subculture I identified with, but I discovered that its fundamental assumptions, attitudes, and values were very largely a secular version of sectarian liberal Protestantism. Many years later, while writing another book about world history, I became interested in a particular early twentieth-century Indian immigrant to Great Britain. In order to understand his life better I read some of his published works; it became clear to me that many of my values are derived from the Islamic mystical tradition of Sufism (which he had helped bring to Europe). This is, in historical terms, not surprising; the intellectual life of the place and time in which I grew up, Northern California in the 1960s, was stirred and energized by its encounter with Sufism. As time has passed, I have come to understand more deeply how profoundly both these traditions have shaped my own commitments – social, intellectual, and even political. I continue

to find this unsettling. I am not the autonomous person that, in my youth, I thought I was. But it has also been invigorating and liberating to understand this. It has given me the opportunity to explore the traditions and ideas that made me what I am, to examine them critically, to make some choices as to what I want to retain from them and what I want to modify. Among other things, it has helped make me somewhat more intellectually flexible. As a young professional historian, I was very much persuaded by the ideas of Leopold von Ranke. Later, I came to understand that this was partly because he too was a sectarian Protestant. I think recognizing that has helped to broaden my intellectual horizons, to consider with a more open mind the ideas of people who are not so persuaded by the approach he advocated.

There is one further important ethical consequence of the central postulates of History. As teachers of History, we understand our students to be fully human beings too. We encounter our students in the same way that we encounter people in the past, and ourselves. This means that here too we cannot aim for mastery.

Three considerations are important here. First, in purely practical terms, university students do not take history courses to be told what to think. They take them to figure out what they think, for themselves. They come to our classes with their own questions, interests, and agendas, shaped by their own historical contexts. Indeed, because the discipline of History is extremely broad – because it is about everything – it attracts a diverse student population who are interested in a vast variety of historical topics and approach them from a very wide range of perspectives, shaped by historical contexts that are very often radically different from our own. In this situation, History instructors do not get to tell their students how to understand the history they teach. In purely practical terms that is not the pedagogical situation in university History classrooms. If History instructors try to determine the outcome of students' encounter with History, many students will conclude that their instructors are arrogant and "clueless" and avoid taking their classes. But trying to dictate to our students the outcome of their encounter with the past would also limit our own intellectual opportunities. We can learn from our encounter with our students, just as we can learn from our encounter with the people of the past. The questions they ask, the things they find important, the lessons they draw from history – all these can enrich our own intellectual life enormously, but only if we listen to them. Further, a directive approach would be pedagogically self-defeating. In any History classroom students can learn from each other in the same way that their instructors can learn

from them. That is an enormous pedagogical resource, and History instructors should not squander it by trying to dictate what everyone learns. What is more, attempting to tell our students what to think would be quite obviously self-contradictory. The fundamental assumption or postulate of the discipline of History is that everything human, including History instructors, is historically conditioned. The History instructor therefore, by simple logic, cannot step outside of history and tell other people what it means. That would not be modeling historical consciousness at all.

As History teachers, then, we do not get to determine outcomes. This is a very good thing, because students' aim of figuring out what they themselves think precisely aligns with the epistemology of History – the way that History understands what knowledge of the past is. Chapter 2 will address this issue. For now, suffice it to say that university-level instruction is very good at teaching students how to draw their own conclusions. We do not tell them what to think. Instead, we can show them *how* to think in a particular and distinctive way; we can create opportunities for them to explore the past and to encounter the people in it as fully human beings; we can offer them the techniques and methods of inquiry that historians have developed to do that; and we can offer them the understanding that they can only encounter the past as themselves fully human beings, from their own historically conditioned perspective. To quote from the introduction to a 1996 volume on teaching History in higher education: "Effective teaching is about facilitating student learning" by "guiding, advising and encouraging students" in the process of "constructing meaning for oneself on the basis of critical reflective practice rather than merely receiving and reproducing knowledge." The final essay in that volume concluded that "teaching might best be considered as the provision of a wide range of opportunities for learning" in this way.³⁸ I would add, however, that in doing this we are also creating opportunities to learn for ourselves – to expand our horizons, deepen our understanding, change our own minds. This should be self-evident. Educational theorists often speak of the need to create rich learning environments. Why would we, as instructors, learn less in a rich learning environment than our students do?

We can, then, understand teaching and learning History as a complex set of relationships founded on and characterized by reciprocity. I learn

³⁸ Booth and Hyland, "Introduction," pp. 8, 9; George Brown, "Assessing the Quality of Education in History Departments," in *History and Higher Education: New Directions in Teaching and Learning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 298–319, here p. 304.

from my students; they learn from me; they learn from each other; we all learn from the people of the past.

Again, this can be unsettling, it can be anxiety-inducing. Both the people of the past and our students can challenge us in ways that we are not prepared to be challenged, and do not want to be or enjoy being challenged. I want to offer a word of reassurance, however. We can have faith in the power of History as a way of thinking, because we can have faith in the productivity of encountering other people as fully human beings (both them and us). Again without meaning to be self-indulgent, I can say that I write this from long experience. Looking back on thirty years as an historian, I treasure those moments in which I was most challenged by my job. In one such moment an undergraduate in a course on world history steered my class into a deeper discussion of the history of race and violence in twentieth-century America, creating an opportunity that other students very much appreciated. In another a graduate student obliged me to take seriously a social science theory that I had thought irrelevant. In a third an insightful critical comment by a colleague forced me to revise a paper completely (thanks to her, Hilda Smith, I ultimately won an article prize for that paper). In a fourth a wise colleague (Geoff Hume-Cook) from the Communication Department at my university told me that it would be more intellectually fruitful for me to stop arguing and start conversing. And on many occasions engaging with the interests, preferences, and ideas of students in my undergraduate classes has led me to investigate topics – and sometimes to come to conclusions – that I would never have approached otherwise.

In short, to study and to teach History is to go on an adventure. We do not control the outcome of an encounter with another fully human being; we do not know where it will take us. What happens on that adventure happens whether we plan it or not, whether we intend it or not, whether we like it or not. As German philosopher of history Hans-Georg Gadamer wrote in 1960, on this adventure “the question is not what we do, not what we should do, but what happens to us beyond our own willing and doing.”³⁹ The aim of this book is not ultimately to provide a definite map, a fixed recipe for how to teach History or a list of skills it should teach students. Its aim instead is to reflect on how to make the adventure of studying and teaching History as exciting, as productive, and as unpredictable as we can.

³⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Methode und Wahrheit: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Morh, 1965), p. XIV.

I do want to acknowledge an important limitation of this approach at the outset, which is that this book is written primarily for teachers in higher education – at the college and university level. I do not have experience of teaching in the schools, and teachers there face quite different challenges and opportunities. Particularly with regard to the closing chapters of this book, which address teaching methods in concrete and practical terms, many of the techniques I have developed for inviting students to embark on the intellectual adventure of historical study will be most relevant for History instructors in higher education. There are multiple reasons for that. One is that the curriculum in the schools is defined and constrained by content standards established by the states. The standards for California, with which I am familiar, are from the standpoint of the discipline of History outstanding, and this approach is entirely appropriate for History education at the primary and secondary school levels. Among other things, it lays the knowledge foundation for young people to go on to study History at the college and university level. But it does limit teachers' freedom to shape their own classes by requiring attention to particular topics. Second, the demands on teachers' time and energy in the schools are extreme and make more difficult a more open-ended and improvisational approach responsive to learners' particular interests and agendas. Third, teachers in the schools are for the most part teaching young people who are required to take their classes and may not be as motivated by curiosity and enthusiasm for the subject as students in higher education History courses. Perhaps most challenging at present, finally, History instruction in schools all over the Western world faces mounting pressure either to develop curricula that acknowledge the history, experience, and interests of an increasingly diverse student population or to return to a curricular model focused on the cultivation of a sense of shared national history, values, and civic culture.⁴⁰ History teaching has become

⁴⁰ There are excellent discussions of the history of these struggles in *Beyond the Canon: History for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Maria Grever and Siep Stuurman (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007) and Symcox and Wilschut, *National History Standards*. For the longer-term historical context, see Arie H. J. Wilschut, "History at the Mercy of Politicians and Ideologies: Germany, England and the Netherlands in the 19th and 20th Centuries," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 42 (2010): 693–723. Useful assessments of recent developments in the USA are Megan Threlkeld, "Teaching the History Wars," *Perspectives on History*, April 18, 2023, www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/may-2023/teaching-the-history-wars, and James Grossman and Jeremy Young, "The Integrity of History Education: Bills Censoring K–12 Classrooms Censor Higher Education as Well," *Perspectives on History* February 8, 2023, www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/march-2023/the-integrity-of-history-education-bills-censoring-k%E2%80%999312-classrooms-censor-higher-education-as-well.

increasingly a political minefield, and teachers in some places must be careful if they do not want to be constantly at risk of losing their jobs.

Teachers in higher education are in a very different position. There is no set curriculum for History in higher education, and at that level professors have virtually complete autonomy in deciding what to address in their classrooms. As long as tenured professors run academic departments, no party in the various “culture wars” or “History Wars” (as the struggle to control History education has been called in Australia) that are playing out around the world will have significant leverage on what is taught in History courses in higher education.⁴¹ And in higher education today most students in history classes are there because they want to be, not because they are required to be. A good deal of what I have to suggest in concrete terms regarding how to approach teaching history assumes that context.

Nevertheless, I do hope that the fundamental ethical orientation I advocate in this book will ring true for teachers of History at all levels, and that at least some of the practical techniques for “operationalizing” it – for building it into pedagogical practice – will be helpful for teachers in the schools. The intellectual benefits that can come from engaging with a divided and diverse discipline, from learning to ask strategic rather than operational questions, from abandoning the goal of mastery or control in favor of widening and deepening inquiry, from adopting an historicist approach to understanding the human condition – all these are as relevant for learners in primary and secondary schools as they are for students in higher education. I believe that in many or even most cases teachers in the schools have other concerns that, for concrete practical reasons (including sometimes job security), must take priority on a day-to-day basis over the kind of reflection about the nature and benefits of historical study this book offers. I hope that this book can be of use to them, though, when they do have time to think about the broader intellectual purposes of teaching in our discipline.

I.3 The Structure of This Book

In the chapters that follow, I will expand on what I have laid out in this Introduction in six successive steps. The first four of those steps are loosely

⁴¹ Tenure is of course under vehement assault in some states in the USA; it has been severely eroded in the United Kingdom and parts of the Commonwealth since the 1980s; and tenure systems in the European Union generally secure the jobs of far fewer staff than in the Anglophone world. So far, however, there is little sign that History teachers in higher education will be subjected to explicitly political pressures, as schoolteachers in some places have been and continue to be.

related to the chronology of the development of History as a discipline – for of course History too is historically conditioned; it has become what it is through a complex historical process.⁴²

Chapters 1 and 2 will address very basic characteristics of the discipline – its subject matter, how it understands the essential qualities of that subject matter, and the kinds of questions it asks. What does History ask *about*? How does it seek to *understand* what it asks about? And what is a good historical question – that is, a fruitful historical question, one that can lead us to meaningful answers, and is therefore worth asking, by the specific standards of History? Chapter 1 will focus on fundamental postulates that were central to the formation of the modern discipline of History at its inception, and that historians broadly agree on still. Chapter 2 will explore the profound division or divergence between the *different* ways historians think, which has always been evident but has become increasingly clear and explicit in the course of the development of the discipline in the twentieth century.

Chapters 3 and 4 will examine in greater depth some of the conceptual nuts and bolts of what historians do. How do practitioners of History build answers from the evidence their inquiry explores? What standards do they apply when trying to decide whether our conclusions are warranted by the evidence? What kinds of problems of evidence do historians face? How do they solve those problems? What do we mean when we say that we want to explore *why* something happened? What *forms* of explanation, what models of causation, do practitioners of History rely on? What kinds of conceptual tools do practitioners of History use? And how exactly can they be used productively, to create specifically *historical* understanding? Chapter 3 will focus on some questions and debates about historical knowledge and methods of historical inquiry that arose quite early in the history of the discipline, but became increasingly focused as a consequence of History's intensified engagement with the social sciences. Chapter 4 will discuss epistemological controversies that became particularly urgent in the course of History's encounter with postmodern theory.

⁴² The literature on the history of History is gigantic. I have found useful, in recent years, Daniel Woolf, *A Concise History of History: Global Historiography from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay, *Historiography in the Modern World: Western and Indian Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Norman J. Wilson, *History in Crisis? Recent Directions in Historiography* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005); and – drastically outdated but still interesting partly for that reason – Norman F. Cantor and Richard I. Schneider, *How to Study History* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1967).

The questions, debates, and controversies addressed in these two chapters can be organized into three broad categories. First, there were debates over whether History should adopt the methods of the social sciences or of the humanities. This is a debate that has focused on the relative importance of theory (hypotheses and the testing of hypotheses through research) and empiricism (open-ended research) in History. Second, again, there has been controversy about epistemological questions, questions about the nature of historical knowledge, about how we know what we think we know – or more accurately *why* we think we know what we think we know. This controversy has often focused on the issue of whether the facts that historians use to build the stories and arguments they present are found or constructed by historians – in other words, whether History is more a scientific or more a literary discipline. This is a very old question in History, but it has been of particular interest more recently to postmodernist theoreticians. Finally, there have been closely related arguments over the question of objectivity – whether or to what extent historical inquiry and historical knowledge can be value-free. Again, the argument of each of these chapters will be that debates and controversies of this sort constitute an enormous intellectual and pedagogical resource and benefit for historians and for the students they teach.

On the basis of the understanding of the discipline of History laid out in the first four chapters, Chapter 5 considers the question of what study in this discipline, uniquely among subjects of study in higher education, can teach our students. In this chapter I will also suggest that what History can teach our students is uniquely and urgently important today, as never before, for very good historical reasons. This chapter will discuss as well – again on the basis of the understanding of the nature of the discipline developed in the foregoing four chapters – the relationship between History education and civic education, specifically in democratic societies. Finally, it will argue that while History as a discipline is not good at answering operational questions and delivering actionable lessons, it does – uniquely among all academic disciplines – teach us the single most valuable lesson anyone can learn about the human condition.

Finally, Chapter 6 will define an approach to teaching History built around the findings of the foregoing four chapters. It will offer concrete methods for teaching in ways that address the specific and distinctive nature and strengths of History – including the strengths derived from its essentially divided character. And it will define approaches to those methods that are conformant with the ethical stance inherent in its fundamental postulates. The aim of this final chapter will not be to define

a narrow program for how to teach History. Again, History is a big, diverse, and intensely divided discipline that gives the History instructor many pedagogical options. The aim is to offer a definition of fundamental pedagogical principles derived from the shared ethical foundation of the discipline and then to consider some specific approaches, methods, and techniques for teaching that seek to draw on its breadth, diversity, divisions, and internal contradictions.