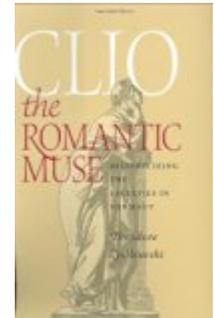




Theodore Ziolkowski. *Clio the Romantic Muse: Historicizing the Faculties in Germany.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004. 240 pp. \$35.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8014-4202-5.



Reviewed by Amir Marmor

Published on H-German (March, 2005)

It is widely accepted that history as a discipline and more importantly as a way of thinking was "invented" by nineteenth-century German-speaking scholars. Indeed it is quite impossible to consider the origins of a truly disciplinary engagement with the past without mentioning such names as Leopold von Ranke or B. G. Niebuhr, while Herder or Hegel are immediately thought of in any discussion concerning evolutionary philosophical systems. The narratives of historical thought mark this period (the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries) as a turning point in human consciousness, when a static, mechanistic worldview preoccupied with taxonomy and lists, gave place to a new understanding of man. Humanity's institutions, nature, and thought itself succumbed to the law of change and evolution. In many respects the aforementioned schools of thought were contradictory and many of their proponents felt themselves to be uncompromising rivals. (Ranke without a doubt considered his perception of history quite the opposite of Hegel's philosophical history.) Nonetheless, in *Clio the Romantic Muse* Theodore Ziolkowski is able to bring together convincingly such contradictory figures

as Hegel, Savigny, Schleiermacher, and Schlegel as representatives of the "new sense of history."

The account of a turning point in human thought toward an evolutionary scheme of the world is not new; neither is the affinity between this intellectual phenomenon to romanticism and conservatism. In this respect Ziolkowski continues a classical historiographical tradition. However, *Clio the Romantic Muse* encompasses a greater scope of disciplines affected by this "new sense of history." By applying the "new historical sense" to the university's traditional four faculties: theology, law, medicine, and philosophy, Ziolkowski is able to describe a true cultural paradigm shift while at the same time placing this historicist revolution in a specific historical and geographical space, thereby reconstructing a milieu that carried this cultural transformation.

The aforementioned historicist revolution began, according to Ziolkowski, as a result of Prussia's defeat in 1806 in Jena, at which time, metaphorically speaking, the Prussian kingdom was thrust back into history after a period of a transcendental "bliss" (1795-1806), a period when

Kant's philosophy reigned supreme. While the defeat at Jena and Humboldt's new university in Berlin provided the immediate impetus for the "new sense of history," it was what Ziolkowski calls the three revolutions--the French Revolution, the industrial revolution, and the epistemological revolution--that provided the true background in the light of which the "new sense of history" was shaped. The French Revolution brought with it a new appreciation of time and change. The attempt to recreate human political institutions according to a rational system led to a conservative reaction denouncing human hubris. It is no mere accident that the revolutionaries created a new calendar proclaiming that a new era had dawned while their opponents, Edmund Burke for instance, stressed the impossibility of breaking free from the chains of time and history. The industrial revolution brought in its wake an experience of change as man witnessed his environment, both social and physical, transformed. It created a dynamic society leading to a feeling of perpetual change; it also demanded a new appreciation of time as David Landes and E. P. Thompson have noted. The epistemological revolution challenged prevailing static philosophical certainties, demanding a new organizing principle for science. The empiricist David Hume shattered the belief in Cartesian rationality by denying metaphysical causality any place within a true "scientific" outlook. Reality was internalized; psychology replaced metaphysics, entailing a new dominance for a subjectivist point of view. Kant similarly subjectivized reality, making it dependent on human cognition--thus allowing for a concept of change in the world as well as in man himself, a concept of change dependent on education and brought about through thought. Thus politics, social organization, and philosophical certainties all were prone to transformation as a consequence of these revolutions. Reality became transient and called for a principle which would explain the process of past becoming present. The need to cling to a past being transformed, not to mention

the social interest in justifying a system of inequality, played a role in awakening the "new sense of history."

Ziolkowski starts his narration of the story of "the new sense of history" quite understandably with philosophy. He gives an account of the new dominance philosophy achieved within the academic hierarchy (in contrast to its former subservience to theology). Here yet another important feature of Ziolkowski's narration is found, namely in the manner that he links the intellectual paradigm shift, the "new sense of history" to academic practice and institutional change. Accordingly he devotes the second half of the first chapter to the reformation of the academic world which was definitely felt much more in Germany than elsewhere in Europe, and which took place when the traditionally sanctioned hierarchy was undermined by the new philosophical mood and the anti-metaphysical tendencies of the late enlightenment. A romantic perception of science, knowledge, and the university replaced the rationalistic and absolutist standpoint and brought with it to every faculty "the sense of history." The ideal romantic university was established in Berlin under Humboldt's supervision, where the study of philosophy was every student's basic duty and the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of knowledge replaced the yearning for practical advancement.

B. G. Niebuhr's disciplinary approach to history and the application of "the sense of history" to the study of the past receives some attention in this context (this topic is treated in a somewhat artificial manner, since it has little in common with the rest of the first chapter). Ziolkowski introduces Niebuhr and his popularity in Berlin to demonstrate the wide acceptance with which "the new sense of history" was welcomed by the larger public in Berlin. He then continues to describe how each of the classical four faculties was affected by the "new sense of history." The narrative which begins with Kant and post-Kantians whose

distaste for historical contemplation left philosophy transcendental, promotes anticipation in the reader who finds himself waiting for Hegel to appear and historicize philosophical thought. Hegel's philosophy is depicted rather simplistically with an emphasis both on its evolutionary framework and its theological undertones. The third chapter concerning theology deals to a large extent with Schleiermacher, who is known for the role he played in the development of Hermeneutics; he made a pivotal impact on Dilthey's philosophy of history in the late-nineteenth century. Herder's historical outlook forms the first part of this chapter, and indeed throughout the discussion about Schleiermacher's similarities with Herder are highlighted. The fourth chapter deals with the incorporation of historical considerations in juristic thought and specifically with Carl von Savigny's objection to the codification of Prussian law on the grounds of the evolutionary nature of law. Surprisingly Justus Moser, who voiced similar objections to the annulment of local legal systems in favor of a unified code, is not mentioned in this analysis. Lastly, Ziolkowski treats the effects of the historical sense on the development of biology within the faculty of medicine. Again, a static classification of living beings is portrayed as being replaced by a perception of life as a cycle of growth and decay; here, Herder's organic framework which originally was applied to social phenomena is applied to the animal world as well.

Written primarily in a biographical mode that lends it an enjoyable narrative quality, *Clio the Romantic Muse* deals with the birth of a new way of thinking, one which thenceforth permeated every aspect of human thought. Ziolkowski's contribution lies indeed in outlining the scope of the "new sense of history" and its effect on all academic faculties. By exemplifying the manner in which all aspects of knowledge were reformed and cast into a new mold characterized by an evolutionary model, Ziolkowski brings to light a paradigmatic shift of tremendous importance.

This shift is cleverly tied to the academic reformation heralded by Humboldt's university and the romantic ideals that influenced this new institution.

Despite these strengths, however, readers must keep in mind that although Ziolkowski treats the historical sense as a generational characteristic, he describes mostly intellectuals working at the Humboldt University. Germany is not Prussia, but Ziolkowski offers no examples from other parts of the German scholarly world. Moreover, the emphasis on biography unfortunately comes at the expense of an in-depth analytical discussion. Thus neither Romanticism nor Historicism are sufficiently defined and questions about their relationship with one another remain unanswered: are all historically minded thinkers romantics? Are Ranke or Niebuhr? In addition, complex philosophical systems like those of Hegel or Savigny are reduced to mere thought patterns, to slogans such as a "sense of history," in order to facilitate the grouping together of these diverse thinkers. Consequently, important distinctions between the members of Ziolkowski's group are effaced, resulting in an occasionally simplistic, unitary portrayal of historical and historicist thought.

Finally, the explanation proposed by Ziolkowski for the appearance of his "new sense of history" is confusing, particularly in terms of the role causality plays in the explanations. As he himself admits, Germany was not yet in the process of an industrial revolution; one must ask then how it could have been responsible for such a cultural upheaval or how its impacts on other regions of Europe were transmitted to German realms. Additionally one of the main heroes in the appearance of Ziolkowski's new sense of history is Herder; however, his contribution predates the French Revolution, so the reader wonders how that revolution can be made responsible. We are left only with the epistemological revolution as a cause to which the effect of the historical sense relates.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Amir Marmor. Review of Ziolkowski, Theodore. *Clio the Romantic Muse: Historicizing the Faculties in Germany*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. March, 2005.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=10297>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.