

Ankersmit's Theory of Historical Trauma

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How to cite this paper: Le, T. (2024). Ankersmit's Theory of Historical Trauma. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 14, 498-511. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2024.142032>

Received: May 2, 2024

Accepted: May 26, 2024

Published: May 29, 2024

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Abstract

Since the Second World War, an increasing number of scholars have begun to focus on research related to trauma. This article attempts to demonstrate the long-standing history of studying trauma issues. Ankersmit's theory of historical trauma innovatively approaches the topic from an aesthetic perspective, incorporating the concept of forgetting which has been overlooked by previous historians. This theory not only explains the origins of Western historical consciousness but also breaks through the previous simplistic linear attribution of trauma severity, providing a new direction for the study of trauma theory.

Keywords

Ankersmit, Historical Trauma, Forgetting

1. Introduction

Since the Second World War, research in academia on “trauma” has gradually emerged, initially laid down by Freudian psychoanalysis and then widely expanded into various fields such as history, philosophy, and literature. However, research on trauma has always been controversial. Scholars in different academic fields define trauma differently. The school of psychoanalysis defines trauma as a mental wound similar to a physical wound. Scholars in the cultural field, such as Alexander, regard trauma as a phenomenon of cultural development. As Bell Duncan pointed out, even in the earliest days of psychological research, scholars failed to reach a consensus on trauma's definition (Bell, 2006: 9). Currently, while academia emphasizes different aspects in defining “trauma”, most definitions include a series of historically atrocious events, primarily focusing on Holocaust. The enthusiasm for trauma research not only reflects academia's profound humanistic concern for events like Holocaust but also demonstrates a deep concern for the crisis of identity in contemporary society and a high level

of vigilance towards such events. Moreover, scholars attempt to grasp the essence of historical consciousness through traumatic events. Based on aesthetic experience theory, Ankersmit integrates trauma with the sublime, emphasizing the crucial role of trauma in contemporary historical philosophy. This is exactly the value of Ankersmit's historical experience.

2. The Emergence of Trauma Theory

The word "trauma" is not a modern invention. It refers to wounds on the human body as early as the ancient Greek period. In Freud's work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trauma began to be used to describe the psychological state of a person's consciousness when experiencing significant harm. According to Freud's theory, trauma means an individual receives a strong stimulus within a short time and is unable to return to a normal mental state.

With the increase in psychological disorders and social problems following the World Wars, trauma research is no longer limited to individual fields. Due to the complexity and diversity of causes leading to trauma, defining it has become more challenging. American scholar LaCapra provides a comprehensive definition of trauma. He categorizes trauma into two types: historical trauma, which typically refers to man-made historical events such as massacres, slavery, and racial segregation; and structural trauma, which includes experiences like separation from family and failure to fully integrate into a new group (LaCapra, 2014).

Furthermore, in historical circles, since the mid to late 20th century, there has been a surge in Western academia regarding the study of memory, reaching its peak in the mid-1990s. The upsurge in issues related to historical memory has also drawn attention to the issue of historical trauma. At that time, there were ongoing disputes among historians over how to write the history of the Third Reich. This scholarly dispute, along with media coverage of commemorative events related to the anti-fascist struggle, kept the issue of historical trauma in the spotlight.

What's more, in the field of philosophy, with the decline of analytic philosophy, many scholars have realized that the absolute dominance of Narrativism in historical philosophy has been shaken. In 2015, the journal "History and Theory" published a series of articles under the theme of "After Narrativism." In the introduction, Zoltán Boldizsár Simon and Jouni-Matti Kuunkanen proposed that the development of Narrativism has entered a bottleneck period, and the current historical philosophy has entered the post-narrative era. Topics that were previously overlooked by narrative philosophy, such as politics and moral issues, have begun to enter the research scope of historical philosophy, sparking widespread discussion (Simon & Kuunkanen, 2015: 153-161). Naturally, historical trauma, as an important topic in modern society, has also attracted attention.

The purpose of Ankersmit's historical trauma theory is, on the one hand, to provide more possibilities for the development of historical philosophy, and on

the other hand, it is also a response to the current society's concern about trauma issues. Through a new interpretation of the word trauma, he pointed out that Western historical consciousness is obviously caused by the strong stimulation of the trauma of certain historical events, and may even originate from this traumatic experience. Unlike previous scholars, Ankersmit's trauma theory has a distinct aesthetic color.

3. The Connotation of Trauma Theory

1) Forgetting and trauma

In Ankersmit's theory, forgetting and trauma are two closely linked concepts.

Ankersmit once told a story about how Kant dismissed his servant Lampe for theft and wrote "forget Lampe" on his desk to remind himself in his book "The Sublime Historical Experience". He describes this as "pathetic and naive". (Ankersmit, 2005: 317) He commented that for philosophers, there is no necessary connection between the "forget P" and the existence of P. However, in real life, "forgetting P" is an inevitable condition for the existence of P. Ankersmit summarized it with the words of Elster that the proposition of wanting to forget X itself represents the absence of X, so the proposition itself presupposes the existence of X. Therefore, we should know something before we forget it, and extend it to the understanding of human identity, "We then paradoxically are what we are no longer, in the sense that our identity is then defined by our having repudiated a previous identity". (Ankersmit, 2005: 318)

Ankersmit highly praises Nietzsche's views about forgetting, believing that Nietzsche unearthed the role of forgetting in the philosophy of history. Nietzsche argued that an excess of history is undoubtedly harmful; it becomes a heavy burden that impedes people from moving forward. By abandoning memory, one can attain the same joy as a child. However, this joy is fleeting, and only death can bring tranquility: "the 'open sesame' that lets in battle, suffering, and weariness on mankind and reminds them what their existence really is—an imperfect tense that never becomes a present. And when death brings at last the desired forgetfulness, it abolishes life and being together, and sets the seal on the knowledge that 'being' is merely a continual 'has been,' a thing that lives by denying and destroying and contradicting itself." (Friedrich, 1957: 5)

Without the ability to forget, from individuals to nations, and cultural systems, everything would only exist in the past. History would not be a source of self-identity but instead would jeopardize the values of existence in the present, becoming an irreparable deficiency.

Forgetting helps human beings break free from the constraints of language, sheds the entanglement of historical sensibilities, and upon entering the realm of the liberating Dionysian, know true themselves. "The individual, with all his limits and measure, became submerged here in the self-oblivion of the Dionysiac condition and forgot the statutes of Apollo." (Friedrich, 2007: 27)

Ankersmit thinks that Nietzsche first presupposes the existence of a

non-historical individual as a starting point, ultimately returning to dimensions of the non-historical (human essence) and the super-historical (eternal beauty). Compared with other historians, this way is more moderate. However, this reminder of the importance of forgetting did not attract much attention from scholars at the time.

Thus, Ankersmit revisits the concept of forgetting and supplements Nietzsche's analysis of forgetting with his theory. He divides forgetting into four types: a) Forgetting in daily life, which has no relation to our current or future identity, such as every day's mundane tasks. This type of forgetting corresponds to Nietzsche's notion of the "excess of history" that needs to be forgotten. b) The forgetting of details that seem insignificant affects our identity. For example, meeting someone on the street who will change our lives in the future. c) Forgetting due to experiences that are too painful or terrifying to be accepted by our collective consciousness, such as Holocaust in World War II. These experiences were catastrophes for human society and proudly miserable for anyone at the time. d) When a civilization experiences major historical events, such as the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and so on, and then, enters a new civilization, there will be a new identity. The reason for the emergence of new civilizational identities is the forgetting of the old civilization and previous social identities.

Among these four types of forgetting, the first two are unconscious behaviors, lacking purposes, while the latter two are our conscious behaviors. The third type of forgetting occurs because the painful experiences are too unbearable, so we welcome the forgetting. The fourth type of forgetting is beyond our control; the only thing we can do is accept these drastic changes passively. The old world has completely passed away and will not return. People can only face reality and force themselves to accept life in the new world, thus experiencing trauma.

2) The definition of Trauma

Ankersmit's trauma theory is mainly related to the latter two types of forgetting. He called the trauma corresponding to the third type of forgetting as Trauma I, and the trauma caused by the fourth type of forgetting as Trauma II. These two are essentially different.

In Trauma I, memory exits the realm of consciousness, "The result was repression and the curious paradox that traumatic experience is both forgotten and remembered. It is forgotten in the sense that it can successfully be expelled from conscious memory; it is remembered in the sense that the subject of a traumatic experience will be seriously handicapped by it." (Ankersmit, 2005: 322) For the aim of self-protection, consciousness splits, placing the painful traumatic experiences into the field of the unconscious. Because of is stored in the unconscious, this form of forgetting is not true forgetting but rather an unconscious memory. In reality, it constantly reminds us of something we should forget something. It means that these things have the opportunity to be transformed into conscious memories one day. There is no essential difference between forgetting and memory, and in this situation, they can transform into

each other.

Since the unconscious is part of the subject's self-awareness, Trauma I shakes our cognition completely. Self-awareness is still a whole, so this kind of trauma is curable: "The tension between what is present consciously and unconsciously or between remembering and forgetting can always be resolved in the third type-albeit sometimes with the greatest difficulty. As soon as the traumatic experience can be narrativized (as paradigmatically will be the case in the psychoanalytical treatment of trauma), as soon as the traumatic experience can successfully be subsumed in the history of one's life, it will lose its threatening and specifically traumatic character. Or, to use the right terminology here, a reconciliation of experience and identity has then been achieved, a reconciliation respecting experience and identity, therefore, guaranteeing the continued existence of both." (Ankersmit, 2005: 323-324) Even if reconciliation between experience and identity cannot be achieved, the worst-case scenario is the coexistence of "two identities (the previous identity and the new identity from the traumatic experience)", where the previous identity dominates, and the new identity (after trauma) does not affect self-awareness, or create a new identity replace the old one. Therefore, traumatized people who receive appropriate psychological therapy, narrate their traumatic experiences, or take other measures to balance current and past identities can return to normal life. Trauma I discussed here is a relatively common concept in current academia, built on individual psychoanalysis, achieving healing by bridging different stages of personal cognition.

As for Trauma II, Ankersmit holds complex feelings about it. In Trauma II, the cause of this usually is intense and profound historical changes and social developments. "The historical transformations occasioning this variant of forgetfulness are always accompanied by feelings of a profound and irreparable loss, of cultural despair, and the hopeless disorientation. In this sense such historical experiences are undoubtedly traumatic too.....for here one really loses oneself, here a former identity is irrevocably lost forever and superseded by a new historical or cultural identity." (Ankersmit, 2005: 324) The past life has become an unreachable existence in the memory, the basis of reality will not be restored, so the identity of the past cannot be regained. Taking the French Revolution as an example, the sentiments of the counter-revolutionaries and the conservatives are different. Before the outbreak of the revolution, there wasn't much difference between the conservatives and the reactionaries (more accurately, they shouldn't be called reactionaries at this point, but for the sake of illustration). They were all traditionalists as described by Karl Mannheim, with a habitual reliance on stable traditional life. However, the sudden occurrence of the French Revolution changed everything, making everyone realize that their lives had undergone fundamental changes. They had been living in a traditional society without knowing it. It was the Revolution that changed people's view of the surrounding society and things. All faced being expelled from the pre-revolutionary, pre-industrial pastoral society and had to adapt to the post-revolutionary situation. The conservatives rea-

lized that regardless of how they denied the French Revolution, they couldn't change the fact that the world had entered a new stage. They would also continue to live in a new society with the latest identity. The existence of reactionaries is the rejection of the revolution, thus so-called pre-revolutionary reactionaries are meaningless. Faced with the French Revolution, the reactionaries experienced Trauma I, while the conservatives suffered Trauma II. "So for reactionaries, the prerevolutionary identity can be recaptured again, and their relationship to that past can, therefore, be denied in terms of being. The past is an object of the desire of being-they want to be(come) again what the past once was like. The conservatives, on the other hand, recognize that they are forever separated from the prerevolutionary past by the abyss between two different historical or cultural identities. Their desire of the past can therefore only be a desire to know." (Ankersmit, 2005: 327) The pain caused by the loss of identity is permanent and hopeless, like the destiny of Prometheus. In such a circumstance, all aspects of human consciousness are affected, even the subconscious mind is no exception. "Trauma implies a breakdown of both meaning and trust – in a world that has been shattered, overturned. It encompasses 'rapid, sudden, and radical' impacts on the 'body social'. Trauma occurs, then, 'when there is a break, a displacement, or disorganization in the orderly, taken-for-granted universe'." (Bell, 2006: 8)

The legitimacy of using "trauma" to describe the loss of cultural and historical identity is highly debated. Freud and his successors typically focus on the term "trauma" within the field of psychoanalysis, rather than addressing abstract cultural histories. Ankersmit expanded the semantics of this term, pointing out that the former research focuses on "changes in identity, rather than changes to identity." Freud's research presupposes the subject of "trauma" as human beings, but for historical cultures, trauma also plays an important role. As research on trauma deepens, an increasing number of scholars are beginning to recognize trauma as a richly meaningful term. Many scholars have noted the significant impact of trauma on social and cultural aspects. "As opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion." (Ron, 2001: 2) Since the cognitive and experiential ruptures in trauma II and near-death experiences are so similar, it is reasonable to classify them under trauma. In fact, according to Ankersmit, the sensations induced by trauma II are even much more intense than trauma I, surpassing individual experiences to the extent that trauma alone is insufficient to capture these sensations fully: "Our collective psychology knows catastrophes whose proportions exceed by far all that may happen in an individual's psychology—and we can only decide whether such catastrophes may still count as traumas since the orthodox meaning of the term is an uncertain guide here." (Ankersmit, 2005: 330)

4. The Sublime, Experience, and Trauma

In Ankersmit's theoretical system, trauma and the sublime are a pair of synonyms, serving as different manifestations of the same term across various domains. "In sum, trauma can be seen as the psychological counterpart of the sublime, and the sublime can be seen as the philosophical counterpart of trauma." (Ankersmit, 2005: 338)

Initially, the sublime, as an aesthetic term, was not associated with trauma. Burke, in his book—"A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful," defined the sublime as an idea subordinate to self-preservation, one of the strongest emotions in humans. Among many emotions, those that leave a profound impression on people generally stem from principles of self-preservation and social interaction, which are the basis for all human passions. In self-preservation, people's passions often arise from moments when they are threatened or when they experience extreme pain. The fear of losing life generates the most powerful emotion in individuals directly, and this is the origin of the sublime. The sublime always comes with fear, Burke writes, "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling." (Burke, 2015: 33-34) Hence, fear is the primary principle of the sublime. What's more, another source of the sublime is the infinite. Infinity can evoke a sense of "joyful fear". People always have special emotions for unfamiliar things. Once gradually familiarized, even the most astonishing things fail to evoke strong emotions. And eternity and infinity are alien existences in human life. Limited cognition cannot measure them and can only attribute them to beyond reason, thus arousing fear. This is the most essential characteristic of the sublime. When facing the sublime, people not only experience fear but also feel a sense of joy because their subconscious knows that despite being close to danger, they are safe. Fear and joy are thus linked together in the sublime.

Building upon Burke's research on the sublime, Schiller deepened and expanded the concept by understanding it as a conflict and confrontation of emotional experience. This not only highlights the richness of emotions but also emphasizes the complex relationship between reason and sensibility. He defined the sublime as distinct from the beautiful, labeling it as "stern beauty" or "turbulent beauty," indicating that when people encounter sublime objects, sensibility and reason cannot be harmonized, resulting in a contradiction and conflict. The sublime arises from the conflict between subject and object.

Kant's greatest contribution to the concept of the sublime lies in his recognition of it as a purely conceptual existence, emphasizing its presence in ideas rather than external objects. He pointed out that true sublimity is not based on any object's purpose but exists within pure ideas. Although this sublime cannot be presented in sensory form, it can be perceived by people's minds. Kant's view-

points reveal the significance of the emotional experience of the sublime, while also providing an important theoretical foundation for further exploration of the concept of the sublime in later generations.

Ankersmit's primary concern lies in the sublimity of historical experience. Before discussing its sublimity, we should clarify the meaning of "experience." What is "experience"? Ankersmit believes that there are two trends in contemporary philosophy: One is contemporary society's fascination with the "centripetality" of events (experience), and the other is the "centrifugality" of meaning in deconstructionism. Theory and meaning were considered equivalent in the past, but now they are gradually diverging. Meaning is becoming much closer to experience. Historical terms are shifting from "past", "history" to "memory", because "memory" shows the "dimension of experience" which lacking in the "past", "history". This is a manifestation of the transformation of historical consciousness. Experience guides us to know the world, consciousness manifests our situation in the experiential world, and language expresses this manifestation. Whether in philosophy or history, these new changes in the relationship between language and experience indicate a revival of empiricism. Ankersmit holds the idea that although the relationship between language and experience is close, experience and language are independent. Experience can exist without language, but language's representation of the world cannot be divorced from experience. Therefore, Ankersmit argues that the Narrativism philosophy of history, which only focuses on analyzing historical narratives, is incorrect. Historical experience should be the object of historical study.

Ankersmit divides experience into two types: one is perceptual experience, just as its name implies, this kind of experience is obtained through the senses, which helps us understand the world. Modern science and technology can be seen as an extension of our human senses, so obtaining experience through them is also perceptual experience. Another is intellectual experience. Our minds are the organs that receive this type of experience, living in the potential and imperceptible world of intellectual experience. This intellectual experience is the object of the philosophy of history. In science, experience is a property of the world, but in history, experience is not only a property of the world but also a property of the subject.

Ankersmit regards the historical experience as a process of morphological transformation. When historical experience occurs, it takes us from the present moment, which has no time dimension, to a world that simultaneously contains the lost past and the current existence. In historical experience, we become aware of a certain distance between the reality of the past and the present, a moment that Ankersmit calls "the moment of loss." This moment of loss reflects our cognition and experience of the past. In historical experience, we feel the presence of the past, but at the same time realize that it has been lost and cannot return to reality. This awareness of the existence of the past and the moment of loss of reality constitutes the core of historical experience, allowing us to feel the

flow of time and historical changes. However, historical experience itself always has an impulse to cross the gap between past and present and return to the past. This is the “moment of desire or of love.” In this interaction process of discovering the loss of the past and the desire to restore the past, historical experience is born, and all historical writing is within the scope.

Therefore, historians should reconsider the relationship between experience and truth in traditional philosophy. In fact, in historical philosophy, the relationship between language and experience is irreconcilable, with no possibility of reconciliation. Historical philosophy needs to break free from the constraints of linguistic philosophy and move from rationalism to “romanticism,” returning to the study of sensibility because mood and feelings have attributes similar to experience, and the sublime is the key to achieving this transformation.

Based on absorbing the previous discussions about the sublime, Ankersmit absorbs the view that the sublime is a strong emotional experience that cannot be understood intellectually, combined it with the concept of trauma, and used their common characteristics to explain the unique aspects of the sublime historical experience, distinct from other forms of experience.

The sublime and trauma share many commonalities: firstly, both cannot be controlled by conventional cognitive methods. In Burke’s view, the sublime is the combination of extreme emotions of pleasure and fear, while in Kant’s view, the sublime is the result of the combination of rationality and freedom of imagination, exceeding the scope of comprehension, and so is trauma. “Adult Catastrophic Trauma is signaled by fear.....In this state, most normal narcissistic functions, self-preservation, self-regard, self-defense, self-respect and self-concern collapse and the person is ‘frozen’.” (Figley, 2006: 115-116) In this situation, traumatic experiences cannot be assimilated, nor can they be decomposed by experience; likewise, associative thinking loses its ability here. Secondly, when facing the sublime, although we experience great fear, we can appreciate the sublime itself from an aesthetic perspective because we are in a safe zone. The subject and object of experience are infinitely close and yet forever separated. In trauma, the subject of experience is placed in the subconscious. To restore normal narrative logic, the traumatized subject separates the content of the experience from the experience itself. They were isolated in different locations, and the danger “disappeared” for a short time. As a result, trauma and the sublime possess both direct and indirect attributes: about the directness, because when encountering the sublime or trauma, reason cannot act as an intermediary between the subjective and objective experiences, thus people are exposed to trauma or the sublime itself without protection or defense; about the indirectness, because they’re beyond the scope of cognition, so they cannot be brought into the scope of normal rational investigation. We always keep a close and separate relationship with them. In the end, this state forms what could be termed epistemologically as “a glass cheese cover.”

From this, Ankersmit clarifies historical experience into three types: objective historical experience, subjective historical experience, and sublime historical experience. Objective historical experience is the primary form of historical experience.

rience, which mainly refers to the way people experience the world. Corresponding to it is the history of mentality and the history of daily life in historical writing. Subjective historical experience occurs when historians face the past directly and become the subject of historical experience, in this moment, the distinction and separation between the past and the present are merged. The sublime historical experience, however, differs obviously from the formers. Although it is a radical version of subjective historical experience, in this case, the boundaries between the past and the historical subject completely disappear, creating an experience without a subject. The subject and object become one, and all categories, languages, and other schemas are out of action, so historical experience fully demonstrates its authenticity. "Since the sublime, as defined by Kant, transcends the experience of reality as conditioned and processed by the categories of the understanding and thus presents us with reality in its quasi-noumenal quality and, therefore, with a reality that has still retained all of its radical alienness. The trauma is the sublime and vice versa and at the bottom of both is an experience of reality which shatters to pieces all our certainties, beliefs, categories and expectations." (Ankersmit, 2022: 74-75) Because the sublime cannot be explained by conventional cognition and cannot be tamed by the subject, historians, upon entering a completely new environment, lose their identity of the past. This prompts an understanding of the existence of the past but at the same time, they realize a complete separation from the past, which becomes the "most tragic moment" in life. The pain of the lost idyllic past and the fear of the unfamiliar environment constitute an unavoidable anguish. However, the entirely unfamiliar environment also stimulates the historian's strong historical consciousness. Historians, in the face of such intense impact, are eager to write about their experiences of the past and thereby achieve the greatest victory of their lives. Historical experience thus attains sublimity.

5. The Features of the Historical Trauma

1) Promote the emergence of Western historical consciousness

Through the analysis of sublime historical experience, it can be seen that the world was originally in a state where the past and the present had not yet been distinguished. However, at a certain moment, the past and present suddenly separated, repelled each other and yet existed simultaneously in one tense. Through the analysis of sublime historical experience, it can be understood that the world was originally in a state where past and present were not yet distinguished. However, at some point, the past and present suddenly separated, repelled each other, and existed simultaneously in one tense. It is this separation that causes people to experience trauma, realizing the loss of their past identity. It is the sublime historical experience that divides the present into past, present, and future, giving meaning to human time. History thus emerges; otherwise, people's lives would be like the herds written by Nietzsche, who only know to graze: "They know not meaning of yesterday or today; they graze and ruminate,

move or rest, from morning to night, from day to day, taken up with their little loves and hates and the mercy of the moment, feeling neither melancholy nor satiety.....The beast lives unhistorically.” (Friedrich, 1957: 5) The presence of historical consciousness allows people to distinguish between the past and the present. In normal narratives, standardized cognitive patterns incorporate all historical events, and all experiences are tamed by language. Historians’ attempts to approach the essence of history through narration are futile. However, in trauma, historians feel the changes in time and identity. Since trauma is the source of historical consciousness that prompts historians to describe their own experiences, history is the result of collective trauma consciousness. Historical reality itself is born out of suffering, especially the most significant manifestation of trauma, such as the holocausts of this century. In contrast, fragments of happiness and victory are far less valuable in shaping identity than the trauma they bring, as Ankersmit says, “shared traumatic pain provides the collectivity with a common basis in a far deeper layer of reality than happiness and joy could ever be capable of.” (Ankersmit, 2022: 75)

2) Beyond quantity-based linear attribution

Traditional trauma theory often assumes a positive correlation between the severity of trauma and the number of casualties affected in a disaster; the greater the number of casualties, the deeper the trauma inflicted on human society. However, Ankersmit thinks that there is no necessary relationship between the two. The basis for assessing the severity of trauma should be the degree of stimulation of historical consciousness by historical events. Throughout both Western and Eastern history, numerous events with high casualty counts have occurred, but most of them are merely “ripples on the surface of history,” such as the dissolution of Rome in 1494. Only events capable of stimulating human historical consciousness will enter Ankersmit’s field of view. “This susceptibility to collective trauma should not be explained by considering the quantity of ‘collective pain’ that was inflicted on a civilization, nor even by the intensity of this pain, for even outright unendurable collective pain only rarely results in the creation of historical consciousness.” (Ankersmit, 2022: 76) Just as the typical characteristic of trauma is the awareness of pain during this process, leading to dissociation from the trauma itself, diseases such as the Black Death, although they brought terrifying and agonizing memories to human civilization, evidently did not evoke the continuous and intense reflection on the past seen in scholars like Machiavelli, Guicciardini, and so on. Therefore, the key to the formation of trauma lies in stimulating the emergence of historical consciousness.

3) Expand the interpretation perspective of identity recognition

At present, with the rapid development of modern science and technology, human society has entered an era of rapid development. Under this background, it has brought great challenges to the identity of human groups. It is precisely in this constantly changing environment that, people’s desire to explore the past is growing now.

Ankersmit’s trauma theory resurrected the concept of myth and provided a

new perspective for people to explore the origin of identity. His concept of myth is mainly influenced by the theory of anthropologist Victor Turner, who believes that myth is the product of collective historical experience. As a liminal phenomenon, myth distinguishes the world of prehistoric times from the changing world we live in now, which means that human beings have gained a new identity after entering civilized society. In this way, myth has become an important landmark in people's identity recognition. What causes changes in people's identity and perspective in myths are often some historical traumatic events, such as the world-destroying flood in the Bible, the death of the gods in Norse mythology, and ancient Greek mythology. The changes of human beings' era from the Golden Age, Silver Age, Bronze Age, Heroic Age to the Iron Age, and so on. In the prehistoric period when there was no concept of time, human beings had no pain, no disease, no worries, and had been living a peaceful and beautiful Eden-like life, living in a perfect and stable world. When civilization was born, human society experienced birth, old age, sickness, death, and war. Pain began to become an inescapable part of human life. Civilization brought us from pastoral to the incomplete and cold historical time and cruel world. For individuals, this is undoubtedly a birth trauma. In this painful separation, people forget the mythical pre-history of the past, but the strong desire for existence urges us to constantly explore our own identity and question the meaning of our existence, so myths are born. Myths tell us about the original identities of people who were completely forgotten and left behind. They tell us about stories before the birth of time. They tell us about everything before historical narrative.

6. A Brief Conclusion

From the moment when ancient Greek philosophy was born, philosophy has been attempting to answer the three questions: "Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going?" In traditional views, an individual's self-identity comes from the information provided by their past experiences and backgrounds. History, as a discipline that emphasizes the past, plays an indispensable role in this process. People believe that through the continuous development of science and technology, they can deepen their understanding of the entire world gradually and thereby confirm their position. Science and technology have become powerful tools for people to perceive the world and define themselves. However, in his philosophy of history, Ankersmit presents a different perspective: Science and technology bring natural scientific knowledge, rather than direct experiences. Through technology, people learn means to tame nature, to make nature more aligned with human purposes and interests. Remarkably, historical knowledge is empirical. Thus, the pursuit of historical knowledge cannot solely rely on empiricism but should return to the path of experience. Hence, Ankersmit endeavors to steer historical philosophy back to the path of experience. There is only one way to gain historical experiences: to perceive them directly.

Additionally, in academic circles, there have been some new changes in the field of historical philosophy. After entering the 20th century, Western historical

philosophy, which had previously been heavily influenced by linguistic philosophy, entered a bottleneck period. Since Hayden White's "Metahistory," the analysis of historical philosophy has developed for half a century, and historical philosophy itself has been awaiting the emergence of new development models. This situation became more prominent after the occurrence of genocide events. Many scholars have participated in the study of these horrific historical events, which has brought a series of new challenges to historical philosophy: Can historical events like genocide find the right narrative method? What is the meaning of trauma in history? And so on. Ankersmit's theory of historical trauma not only provides a new development perspective for the advancement of historical philosophy but also serves as a response to the issue of holocaust in reality.

Of course, Ankersmit's theory of trauma also has some points worth discussing. For example, when Ankersmit discusses the moment of experiencing trauma, he openly states that this moment of perceiving historical experience as sublime is only grasped by some outstanding figures such as Ranke, Burckhardt, Huizinga, Machiavelli, and so on. What's more, the arrival of this moment is irregular and beyond one's control, akin to Plato's "mania" moment. At this moment, the subject and object merge into one, ultimately gaining knowledge about the essence of history, which undoubtedly carries a sense of mysticism. In addition, Ankersmit emphasizes in his theory that trauma is the source of Western historical consciousness. However, whether this change in historical thinking is universal and whether it can have an impact on the historical cultures of all humanity is worth deeper consideration. Sadly, he does not engage in further detailed discussion on this matter. Nevertheless, Ankersmit's research on the issue of historical trauma remains one of the valuable explorations for the current development of historical philosophy.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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