

Historical interpretation comes in many forms from many schools of thought. This might be one of the closest facts tying history to philosophy. Of the many methods of recounting history, we encounter techniques that require us to remove ourselves and our interpretation from the facts, merely acting as reciters of occurrences, limited by previous facts and conclusions; however, there is a school of thought that requires the historian to take in necessary facts and process them in a way that considers both the past and present, through interpretation. The real question is, what is more critical, effectively delivering historical facts or interpretations of facts?

According to Carr, the empirical theory of knowledge was one such method of collecting facts with minimal interpretation. This affected the study of history by calling on the historians to remove themselves and their interpretation of the facts and offer them straightforwardly. Essentially, the facts “are independent of his consciousness.”¹ This affected history by neither fully accounting for a fact nor documenting perspective, merely a recital of information of a past occurrence, without further interpretation or investigation into what is contained within the fact. The issues of facts must be interpreted through the historian’s eyes as well as their consciousness paired with experience.

Carr also states that the facts are essential, but the historian doesn't need to know all of them. The historian relies heavily on “auxiliary sciences of history-archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics, chronology, and so forth.”² The historians also analyze and process facts by picking sources relating to their specific subject matter of study. Not all facts will be equal since what makes a fact a fact is the collaborative use of them and being addressed as such facts. When choosing facts that matter, a historian’s role is pivotal, as they define what facts they give stage to. By calling on specific facts, they provide them with attention in their work and bring

those facts to willing readers. Historians have an ocean of facts at their disposal, and they must choose the ones that support their theme but, in doing so, wield the power of influence.

Carr also cautions the historian against fetishizing facts and documents as “they do not by themselves constitute history.”³ The historian should play a more significant role than a subconscious observer, for he would be merely categorizing and reciting resources, but instead should take great care in making a conscious effort to analyze the necessary facts that have been gathered, often multiple times, and look for themes in the material being studied as the perspective of a document being investigated is an equally important piece of history to address.

Carr noted Collingwood’s approach as that of a mere skeptic. The danger of this approach is that Collingwood relies heavily on the author's interpretation of a given document or resource without offering further investigation by ruling out objective historical analysis, which is both a disservice to the historian studying facts and the potential readers. The historian “must seek to bring into the picture all known or knowable facts relevant, in one sense or another, to the theme on which he is engaged and to the interpretation proposed.”⁴

Ultimately, Carr argues that the facts and the interpretation are equally important and work together synergistically, “the historian is neither a humble slave nor tyrannical master of his facts. The relation between the historian and his facts is one of equality, of give-and-take.”⁵ A historian must be willing to continuously rework his piece based on new interpretations as they arise through facts perceived and remain willing to make further adjustments as facts come forth and interpretations change. The historian must take special note in grounding themselves in the present as an overserved of the past, remaining in an “unending dialogue between the present and the past.”⁶

¹ E.H. Carr, *What is History? The Historian and His Facts* (1961) P. 6

² E.H. Carr, *What is History? The Historian and His Facts* (1961) P. 8

³ E.H. Carr, *What is History? The Historian and His Facts* (1961) P. 20

⁴ E.H. Carr, *What is History? The Historian and His Facts* (1961) P. 32

⁵ E.H. Carr, *What is History? The Historian and His Facts* (1961) P. 34

⁶ E.H. Carr, *What is History? The Historian and His Facts* (1961) P. 35