

Editorial

The Value of the Absurd

Ana S. Moura/AMP Rodriguez

General Editor

There is a Latin expression, *reductio ad absurdum*, that finds a correct mathematical context of use on many occasions, namely when being used to sustain the falsehood or otherwise of a logical statement. The resource, which can be and has been used in other fields of knowledge, such as Philosophy, has other designations, where the proximity with the word ‘absurd’ is absent.

And that is a very interesting thing.

One has a methodological tool, tested over the centuries and within different disciplines, with a rather catchy name, in a renowned death language that is popular enough to have everyone comfortable with saying ‘carpe diem’ or ‘per se’ without a second thought, and its designation has other possibilities that you are not usually made aware of regarding the other catchy Latin expressions.

Though there are reasonable and pertinent reasons for that, the fact is that one can always find reasonable and pertinent things for most of the changes made around us, but that does not imply that those are the ‘sufficient’ reasons to abide by the change. Many reasonable and pertinent things fall mostly within the logical category of ‘necessary’, and as a brief acquaintance with formal logic will tell you, a ‘necessary’ condition does not implicate the outcome by itself, while a sufficient ‘condition’ will.

The absurd does not have a positive connotation. It is the offspring between imagination and

impossibility and that lineage already makes one uneasy when allocating any proximity with a research context. One, and rightly so, does not want impossibilities associated with one’s academic and scientific work, one does not want falsehood, and absurd is by nature false. And yet, falsehood has such an interesting way to present the ‘sufficient’ facts. And one finds that particular nature pervading all possible facets when looking at Alternative History (and not only simply Counterfactual History, though this also applies to it) as a possible research tool.

Alternative History is very linked with both storytelling and hypothetical pasts that could have happened if a specific key aspect had taken another turn. The value of this as an exercise is not new and has several prestigious names as occasional practitioners. But its systematic value, from an academic and scientific perspective, namely when approaching such fields as Medicine, still raises some eyebrows. One already has History and the facts themselves bring as much discussion as one could spend an entire lifetime probing them and still would not suffice. Nor for knowledge, and nor for individual closure. So, why address the facts that never were? And why adding storytelling to this matter? Aren’t stories, so associated with creative or artistic endeavors, a further de-meaning aspect to a subject one is intending to present as objective, scientific, or methodological?

So, let us be academic and orthodox and begin with that particular time when the formalization of these things started to become normative. Let us go probe the roots of what History, and Litera-

ture, and Philosophy, and most of all, knowledge, meant when Latin and Ancient Greek were not simple catchy phrases but everyday language.

Two names are inescapable when the advent of History as a formal branch of knowledge came to be, Herodotus and Thucydides. In very broad terms, the first represented a cut with the mythological nature of accounting human events, and the second provided the basis for source scrutiny as a research tool. Between them, History, as a discipline and field of expertise, became an umbrella science in Western culture. And within that umbrella, not only one can find the analysis and discussion of sources for the understanding and contextualization of past events but also the development of a historical narrative. And where you have a narrative, in one way or another, you have storytelling. The connexion was early perceived, as in Ancient Greece, one of the muses, Clio, was allocated to History. And one cannot muse without imagination.

If those that do not know History are doomed to repeat it, then those that do not discuss Alternative History are doomed to miss the early exit signs that precede the fall. By exploring counterfactual pasts, the distinct nature of past actions that led to the present and the likelihood of a future scenario is better perceived. In fact, is perceived if the past actions were a ‘necessary’ or a ‘sufficient’ cause for what we face and deal with. As the laughter, namely, irony, exposes the obvious that no one notices, Alternative History exposes the present for what it truly stands, re-sourcing to the absurd.

Hypothesis Historia Periodical assumes itself as a formal academic journal, with the approach that scientific and formal journals should have, from peer-review policy to editorial ethics. And also assumes that such intent can be done systematically and in every field of knowledge under the umbrella of Alternative History. That Alternative

History can be used as a research tool to identify, explore, propose, and discriminate sources, facts, and paradigms, not only in formal History but also in modern-day medical practices, or even when dealing with the interface between Law, Politics, and Science, particularly in a scenario such as the one of COVID-19 pandemic. That a hypothesis can be not only the departing point but also the path. And to achieve this, it is only needed to perspective hypotheses into a novel scientific and academic narrative.

I do not wish to repeat what anyone can find in the *Hypothesis Historia Periodical’s* site regarding its development, namely the transdisciplinary nature of its foundation, evidenced by the partnership of several research centers, from Natural Sciences to Arts. The technical and editorial details are there and can be read and calmly scrutinized. What I want to stress is what I departed with. That the ‘absurd’ that a hypothetical past carries in itself, also carries the ‘sufficient’ knowledge for what can elude otherwise. That ‘Historia’, in its catchy Latin designation, can be more scientifically inclusive than it is many times recognized by the general public. And that such things brought by in a consistent and periodic manner, can be a refresh editorial approach.