

What is History?: The Science of the Past in Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Some puzzles in human life are universal and cut across generations. That is why some of the very issues that boggled the minds of many people several centuries ago continue to baffle many people today. Such problems often attract the attention of scholars and generate debates among them. The meaning of the term 'history' and the nature of history in general are certainly some of the sensitive problems that have remained highly debatable among historians and allied scholars. In fact, the debate on "what is history?" has continued without resolution for several centuries. The term 'history' has been defined or explained differently by different people at different times and under different circumstances. Though these definitions or explanations have been accepted and used, the lack of unanimity on the part of historians on a common definition places students and teachers of history in a difficult situation concerning what exactly history is. We believe that in the contemporary setting, any definition or explanation given to history must be situated in a framework that is comprehensive enough to make the nature and philosophy of the discipline clear. Using both primary and secondary documents, and employing the multi-disciplinary approach, this paper examines some of the important definitions or explanations that have been given to history with the view to constructing a definition or an explanation that is appropriate for history today. In its survey, the study finds that several definitions have been formulated for history over the centuries. It observes, however, that some of the definitions or explanations are inappropriate and unacceptable today in view of their inability to reveal the true nature of history and clarify the philosophy behind the study of the past. In its evaluation and conclusion, the paper appreciates that history has both art and science dimensions, and is also a practice with an avowed philosophy. Taking all these into consideration, the paper then defines or explains history in a context that is comprehensive enough to depict history as a discipline that is concerned not only with the past, but also, and more especially, with the present and the future for the development of society and the various sciences or disciplines. As a result, the study draws attention to the need to promote the serious study of history in schools.

KEYWORDS: *concept, definition, description, discipline, explanation, history, interpretation, science, study, term, the future, the past, the present*

INTRODUCTION

... for some, history is literature; for others, facts; for some, delving in archives; for others, interpretations of the sources; for some, an art; for others, a science; for some, drudgery; for others, a romance; for some, an explanation of the present; [and] for others a revelation and a realization of the past (Lynn Thorndike, cited in Barzun and Graff, 1977:44).

It has been argued that history is primarily a study of what humans have made of their intellectual and geographical resources (Boahen with Ajayi and Tidy, 2004:1). The truth in this view reflects in the fact that at every stage of human civilisation or development, the primary concern of humans is how to use their enormous potentialities and talents to utilise the resources of nature to improve their living conditions (Ajaegbo, July, 2013:2). With the evolution of human societies, it became necessary for

human intellectual resources in relation to their knowledge of their world to be organised. Teaching and learning particularly emerged and produced modes of thought or academic disciplines as humans' desire to inquire, their efforts to achieve mastery of their environment and unlock the secrets of nature as well as their attempts to lead a better, ordered and progressive life made them to become conscious and curious learners. Thus, disciplines – including accounting, archaeology, art, astronomy, biology, botany, chemistry, classics, economics, grammar, history, law, linguistics, literature, mathematics, medicine, philosophy, physics, political science, sociology, theology, zoology, etc. – developed as intellectual pursuits. What is here implied is that each discipline evolved at a particular time when special needs for the acquisition and impartation of knowledge on specific aspects of the natural and cultural worlds became

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necessary. In essence, each discipline, with a specific objective, has a long and a significant history.

It may be assumed that the circumstances under which the disciplines evolved into special branches of knowledge and the objectives they sought, and still seek, to achieve should be enough for humans to have a uniform understanding of these subjects. However, the specific nature of each of these subjects has generated intellectual controversy and debates among several observers since their inception. They have been understood and interpreted differently by different observers. Thus, when we examine the term *history* critically, we observe that different historians and scholars at different places and times have offered different explanations and descriptions of the discipline, authenticating the fact that ideas are very much rooted in their times and places. In other words, history has been defined severally, depending upon the contexts in which it is placed and described or explained as well as on the use to which people put it. It must also be recognised that the nature of history itself has played an important role in the different meanings and interpretations which different users have given to it. Certainly, history is a complex and a misleading term. This is why Charles Firth (cited in Renier, 1950:34) has observed that history is not easy to define. Katsina ("Declining Interest in the Study of History in Nigerian Institutions", retrieved July 11, 2018) has also lamented that scholars have not provided a definite and most universally accepted definition for history. Aggarwal (2004:1) adds that there is no universally accepted definition of history. On his part, J.C.D. Clark (1988:51) has argued that history is not one thing, but many things. Indeed, history is one of the hardest fields of serious study and literary effort to be assigned a precise definition or interpretation. This has created a situation where each user defines history in accordance with the circumstances under which they use it. Usually, it is the historian, who, based on the subject matter or nature of his topic, motives, time, etc., formulates a definition, as he thinks fit, for history. In fact, in the scientific world, terms, words, concepts, etc. are usually explained in the particular contexts in which they are employed. This principle, which, in our view, could be described as *intellectual liberalism*, has brought into existence multiples of definitions, descriptions, explanations and interpretations of history.

To say this is to imply that there is a great heap of literature on the nature of history which tries to address the question of *what is history?* Indeed, the attempt to examine and answer this question has continued without resolution since Graeco-Roman times, when the question was mostly posed and answered by philosophers (Tosh with Lang, 2006:xi). In the seventeenth century, René Descartes (1596–1650) treated the question and denied to history any claim to be a serious study (Berlin, 1960:103). The eighteenth century also experienced similar attempts to address the question of what history is. In the nineteenth century, drastic changes occurred in the concept of history. In this century, Henry Johnson (cited in Aggarwal, 2004:6) intimates that historians reconstructed so much of the history which earlier historians had produced, extended so vastly the boundaries of historical knowledge, and changed so radically the general

conception of history that the nineteenth century came to be called the century of history. The debate on the question was taken to a far more serious and sensitive level particularly from the second half of the twentieth century following the publication, in 1961, of E.H. Carr's *What is History?* (Tosh with Lang, 2006:xi-xii). In 1984–1985, the magazine *History Today* decided to re-examine Carr's view of history being an unending dialogue between the past and present in the belief that this continuous dialogue had taken fundamentally new avenues, and in ways that, it was hoped, were in keeping with these new approaches (Gardiner, 1988:1). Since then, other scholars have taken up the topic and offered different interpretations. However, no major study has been undertaken with the sole objective of examining the different contexts in which history has been defined or explained. In other words, no major attention has been paid to the several interpretations of history with the view to measuring their appropriateness and acceptance in the twenty-first century. Again, the mere existence of the varied definitions, descriptions, explanations and interpretations of history is a problem inasmuch as it denies students, teachers and readers of history of a common definition which encapsulates the precise nature of history, especially in the contemporary period where people try to identify the essence of things in their meaning and value. Moreover, in the course of time, it is important for students and teachers of a science, as well as the practitioners of a profession, to examine, know and understand what they do. Socrates insists that the unexamined life is not worth living; and it could be argued that the *unexamined science* similarly is not worth studying and practising. Students, scientists and practitioners of history need some self-awareness, some understanding of what their discipline is, in the general sense. This necessitates a philosophical reflection on the current understanding of history and the contexts in which the term could be applied. As a result, the objective of this paper is to examine some of the important senses in which people have explained or defined history and, out of these, to attempt to construct a definition of history which, we believe, is comprehensive enough to capture the nature and essence of history, and which is appropriate for our understanding of the discipline in the twenty-first century.

Sources of Data and Research Methodology

This study draws on both the qualitative and quantitative methods of research and relied on both primary and secondary documents. The major secondary works consulted for data included John Tosh with Sean Lang, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (2006); J.C. Aggarwal, *Teaching of History: A Practical Approach* (2004); Beverley Southgate, *History: What and Why?: Ancient, Modern, and Postmodern Perspectives* (2003); Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Methodology of Historiography" (2003); Arthur Marwick, *The Nature of History* (1993); E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (1987); Juliet Gardiner, ed., *What is History Today ...?* (1988); Geoffrey Barraclough, "History" (1978); Gerald A. Press, "History and the Development of the Idea of History in Antiquity" (1977); Jacques Barzun and Henry E. Graff, *The Modern Researcher* (1977); Homer Carey Hockett, *The Critical Method in Historical Research and Writing* (1961); William Gorman, ed., *The Great Ideas: A Syntopicon of Great*

Books of the Western World, Vol. I (1952); and G.J. Renier, *History: Its Purpose and Method* (1950). We collected facts from other works to add to those obtained from these major studies. All these works were used because of their relevance to the topic. Truly, these secondary works provided us with a theoretical background which helped us to situate the work in its appropriate context.

We also collected facts from primary sources through interviews, both personal and telephone, and, especially, WhatsApp communications¹ with some people, not just to supplement the data obtained from the available literature but also to evaluate the practicality and the public or general acceptance of the views expressed in these works. The population included university undergraduate students (UUS) in and outside Ghana; students who had completed their programmes of study at the university and were awaiting graduation (SAG); postgraduate (M.Phil. and Ph.D.) history students in and outside Ghana (PGS); graduates who possessed M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees in history and were serving as research assistants, demonstrators and lecturers in universities – particularly University of Cape Coast (GWU); history graduate teachers (HGT); and graduates working in establishments other than in teaching institutions (GWE). Other respondents were non-history students and graduates (N-HSG), and people who were educated but whose highest level of education was either senior high school or colleges of education that offered diploma certificates (OP).² We considered it necessary to seek information from respondents outside the history discipline because of the fact that the definitions, descriptions, explanations and interpretations of history in the available secondary works have been given not only by historians but also by scholars and researchers in other scientific fields of study.

To all respondents, we posed the question, *Briefly define or explain the term "History" or answer the question "What is History?"*. 3 people answered this question through interviews (personal – 2; telephone – 1). We also sent the question via WhatsApp to 365 WhatsApp users or contacts. Out of this number, we received answers from 192 respondents, constituting 52.60% of the population sampled for the study. Thus, in all, 368 people were sampled for the study and 195 people (52.99%) answered the question. The number of respondents in the various categories who answered the question is as follows: UUS – 51; SAG – 43; PGS – 14; GWU – 21; HGT – 15; GWE – 22; N-HSG – 15; OP – 14 = 195. Because of the varieties of explanations and interpretations gathered from the existing literature and the volume of the answers obtained from respondents, coupled with the similarities we

identified in some of them, we applied the principle of selection, by which some interpretations and answers were selected for inclusion in the analysis and others ignored.³ The answers selected were added to the definitions collected from the literature consulted and put into appropriate categories. These categories are history interpreted as the past; what happened in the past; inquiry or research; a written record of what happened in the past; a general record of what happened in the past – collective memory and ideology; a scientific body of knowledge and a method of inquiry; and a means of understanding the present and forming a view of the future for purposes of development. The results of the discussion, therefore, are a synthesis of views collected from multiple sources, processed and analysed from different perspectives.

In accepting or rejecting some of the interpretations of history, we asked three main questions: first, are the selections sound and clear, as in being able to depict some view of history?; second, are the selections representative of a popular interpretation of history?; and, third, are these the best available definitions or explanations of history among the lot in the category under which they fall? We did this in order to ensure objectivity and to produce a work of historical quality. The fact that we made a selection means that the work has a limitation, as the facts established in the study represent only the interpretations of some authors and the views of some respondents. Also, every author has an agenda to achieve, and every selection reflects a personal point of view, meaning that our own disposition and objectives influenced the mode of selection. Partly in an attempt to reduce the gravity of this shortcoming, and partly with the view to presenting readers with a representative view of the various interpretations of history, we selected more views from the available literature and answers from the respondents as evidence to support the arguments and establish the facts under each category. Indeed, a glance at the *references* would reveal the volume of the selections we made and the extent we went to support the arguments and establish the facts. Due to the multiplicity of the explanations they offered in their works and the answers they provided to the research question, some authors and respondents respectively have been cited under different, or more, categories. In some cases, we have paraphrased the views and answers. In others, however, we have quoted them exactly as we found them in the literature or as they were provided by the respondents to emphasise the arguments made and facts established. In some cases, we have even italicised some words, phrases or whole statements in order to draw readers' attention to the emphasis we seek to give to some

¹From personal experience, we have observed that WhatsApp communication is one of the easiest and most convenient means of administering questionnaires and soliciting for information from respondents in the contemporary world.

²The acronyms used here should be interpreted as follows: UUS – University Undergraduate Students; SAG – Students Awaiting Graduation; PGS – Postgraduate Students; GWU – Graduate Workers in Universities; HGT – History Graduate Teachers; GWE – Graduates Working Elsewhere (Non-Teaching Establishments); N-HSG – Non-History Students and Graduates; OP – Other People.

³We acknowledge all respondents for their invaluable assistance. We are particularly grateful to those who made available to us the relevant secondary materials for the background knowledge. We do not want to mention specific names here; those people know themselves. However, we duly apologise to respondents whose views were not cited and their names not mentioned in the work, after having spent time and resources to answer the question and post their answers to us. They should, however, understand that this is the nature of all scientific research works.

arguments and facts. The gain here is that readers are presented with a variety of explanations of history and a view of the extent to which people subscribe to those definitions or interpretations of history. This, we believe, would enable readers to estimate the authenticity, popularity and strength of the various interpretations of history examined in this study.

Historical data, like those in all fields of study, suffer from several limitations, including distortions, exaggerations, inaccuracies, and others. Hence, in an attempt to present only the accurate and reliable facts, we have carefully analysed all the data collected from both the secondary and primary sources. In terms of referencing the sources, we have adopted the APA style of in-text citation. With regard to internet materials used, we have provided only the surnames of the authors (where available), the titles of the works and the dates on which we retrieved them. However, the website addresses are not added in the text; they are rather added to the references at the end of the study. Concerning both interviews and WhatsApp communications, we have provided the surnames of the respondents, the means by which we obtained their views, whether through personal or telephone interview, or through WhatsApp communications (chats), and the dates on which we either interviewed them or received their responses. In the case of interviews, we have added the places where we interviewed the respondents in the references. However, in cases where two or more respondents bear the same surnames, we have provided their full names in the text in order to help readers know which respondent gave which response, in order to help prevent a situation whereby readers would assume that it was one respondent who expressed all the views attributed to the same surname. The full details of all respondents have been presented in the references. In interpreting the refined facts, we have chosen to start with *history as the past* and ended with *history as a tool for understanding the present and forming a perspective of the future for development purposes*. This decision has been influenced by our determination to organise the interpretations in a context that would reflect an ascent from what we consider to be the *less appropriate* explanation to the *more appropriate* interpretation of the concept and discipline of history.

The Past

There is a very common view that *history is the past*. Of course, there is a strong, though mistaken, view that the past is history, and everything that happened in the past is said to be history. For example, "History is the past" was the answer a respondent gave to the question we posed to her (Adjei Darko: personal interview, July 5, 2018). This view is particularly common with people who have had no training in history and, for that reason, lack knowledge of what history really is. However, there are even trained historians, scholars and teachers and students of history who also define history in similar senses. In saying that their purpose "... is to offer a global perspective on the past – a vision of history ..." and comparing or equating "... the entire human past? [to] The study of history ...", Bentley and Ziegler (2003:xxxi and xxxii), for instance, appear to use the past as a synonym for history. Underwood ("Defining History", retrieved September 17, 2017) also argues that a "... definition of history would be synonymous with a definition of the past" This makes

many people, particularly those outside the confines of the history profession, think that history is the same as, or equivalent to, the past. Though history deals basically with the past, it is not entirely the past. The past and history are different phenomena. Oakeshott (1936:74) insists that we should dismiss the notion that every past is an historical past. He argues that "There are, obviously, some pasts, or some ways of thinking about the past, which are distinct from the past in history. The remembered past, for example, is not as such, an historical past"

If the past and history are different phenomena, it may be asked, what then are they really, and how are they related, or not related, to each other? The past is the totality of all that has happened and gone. It comprises all actions, all thoughts, all products of all human beings who have ever lived (Marwick, 1993:7). In other words, the past consists of everything that happened in the past – the events, the people who lived, the thoughts they had, their actions and the consequences of these thoughts and deeds.⁴ Most of the past has vanished and could never be recovered by the means at our disposal. In fact, the past is so broad that history could not reconstruct the whole of it, even if all evidence of it were available. The sum total of the historical record, even if it were totally accurate, represents only a very small portion of what actually occurred in the past. Though we could do an exhaustive study of the historical record, our knowledge and understanding of the past would still be extremely limited. The implication, then, is that we could never know with certainty what the past was like. Actually, all human knowledge combined, past, present, and future, is nothing compared to what we would never know (Tsiolkovsky, cited in Szasz, "Historical Quotations", retrieved June 7, 2013). History, on the other hand, is what is *left* of the past and its interpretations. History deals with only those aspects of the past accepted to be of enduring significance, that is, what is remembered and, where possible, recorded and handed down. Thus, only a minute fraction of the whole of the past could ever be known. By virtue of this, history is, in the main, a subset of the past. It is a representation of the past in concepts (Mises, 1991:105). The magnitude of this subset could not, however, be adequately measured. If the definition of *history is the past* is inadequate and unacceptable, how, then, do we explain history to make it adequate and acceptable?

What Happened in the Past

The realisation that history and the past are not the same has made some people refine their view of history and reduce history to *what actually happened in the past*,⁵ that is, the events of the past themselves. For example, a respondent explained history as the "memorable events that occurred in the past" (Frimpong: WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018). To another respondent,

⁴Interestingly, Prof. G.R. Elton argues that "History is concerned with all those human sayings, thoughts, deeds and sufferings which occurred in the past and have left present deposits ..." (see Aggarwal, "What are the Important Definitions of History? – Answered", retrieved July 11, 2018).

⁵Marwick argues that 'the past' signifies the events, such as battles, assassinations, invasions, general elections, which actually happened (see Marwick, 1993:1).

“history simply refers to events of the past that contributed significantly to human existence (Osei-Agyekum: WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018). In Kodzitse’s view, history, apart from being a study, also refers to “... events which have had significant impact on a group of people and their way of life” (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018). Gyimah (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) asserted that history has to do with events which happened some years ago. To Somuah (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018), history refers to the important events that happened in the past. Nsowah (WhatsApp communication, July 8, 2018) observed that “history is past events connected with a person or a group of people or a thing which could be used to predict present and future events.” Other similar explanations of history obtained from some respondents include: “History is past happenings that are of relevance and could be studied to shape our lives...” (Scott: WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018); “History is past events that have positive or negative impact on human life” (Milsbao: WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018); “History is past events that relate to particular subject, place, organisation, etc. (Dankwa: WhatsApp communication, July 7, 2018); “History is any occurrence that happened a while ago and is worth remembering” (Fianke: WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018); “History is any past event that has a societal significance ...” (Gyan: WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018); “History are [sic] past events that are of importance to a nation or the world” (Asamoah: WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018); and “In a general perspective, the term history is used to mean any important event in the past” (Ocran: WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018).

Indeed, a group of scholars referred to as the *Empiricists*,⁶ otherwise known as the *modern school of historians*, holds the view that history is *what actually happened* (Spickard, Spickard and Cragg, 1998:xv) The empiricist historians regard their function as no more than to assemble and record the facts of their period with scrupulous accuracy and fairness (Carr, 1987:xviii–xix). In line with their view, they spend their time trying to find out, or ascertain, what happened. In this regard, history is often defined as a body of ascertainable facts, which are available in historical documents.⁷ In the context of this definition, a statement

⁶E.H. Carr defines *empiricism* in history and the social sciences as the ‘belief that all problems can be solved by the application of some scientific value-free method, i.e. that there is an objective right solution and way of reaching it, a transfer of the supposed assumptions of the natural sciences to the social sciences (see Carr, 1987:xviii–xix).

⁷Not long ago, sources for the study and reconstruction of history were usually grouped into documentary and non-documentary, where the documentary sources referred to written records and the non-documentary to non-written records. To say a *written document* would, thus, have been a tautology, and to say a *non-written document* would have been self-contradiction. Even at present, some historians of Western orientation still maintain the old distinction between documentary and non-documentary sources. In contemporary historical practice, however, the term *document* is used in a wider sense to mean *source*, and could be used as a synonym for *record* as well. Data

like: “By overthrowing Nkrumah, Ghana made history,” could be made. Similarly, we speak of the history of a people or a country, or of the great events and periods of history. In this sense, we mean the notable fact itself, what actually happened, and not the record or story of it. Caldwell (1965:ix), for instance, emphasises that in this sense, history may be said to encompass everything that has ever happened. When applied to humans, history consists of all the thoughts, deeds and beliefs that have contributed to the story of human achievements. Going by this definition, every event that ever happened on the face of the Earth, whether of social, cultural, religious, economic, political, or scientific and technological nature, falls under the domain of history. That is why Underwood (“Defining History”, retrieved September 17, 2017) explains the past, which he considers to be synonymous with history, as “... the sum total of all things that have ever happened” including “... physical events and occurrences.” Similarly, the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* maintains that “history in the wider sense is all that has happened, not merely all the phenomena of human life, but those of the natural world as well” (New World Encyclopedia, “History”, retrieved February 27, 2018).

It must be stated, however, that history, in the deeper sense, could never be what actually happened in the past, since the past could never be recreated exactly as it was.

gathered from ethnography could be spoken of as ethnographical documents or records of the past, just as archaeological artifacts could be described as archaeological documents or records of the past. In the same way, we could talk of numismatic documents or records of the past. It is also a common practice to hear people refer to voices or sounds on tape as records or recordings, while French ethnologists refer to oral tradition as *la documentation orale*. In short, all historical sources could be referred to as *historical documents* or *historical records* (find the details in McCall, 1969:5). It should equally be noted that today, the term *document* is used extensively and in several senses. Historians use the term *document* to refer, first, to a written testimony of historical information. Secondly, *document* is used to refer to only official or state records like treaties signed between nations, the laws of a country, grants and charters given to companies, minutes of cabinet meetings, and suchlike. In the third place, *document* could be used to mean artifacts, archaeological remains, such as pottery, coins, buildings and even paintings. In the fourth, and the most important fashion, many historians use the term *documents* in a comprehensive way to signify any process of proof based upon any kind of testimony, whether written or oral, archaeological or pictorial, if that testimony is regarded as a source of information. *Document*, therefore, could be used to refer to any material, whether written or non-written, official or unofficial, and objects such as arms, coins, buildings, stamps, pottery, sculpture and paintings, all of which serve as proofs of historical events (see *Ibid*). Thus, in contrast to the previous tradition, to say *written documents* is now an accepted phrase in historical practice, but to say *documentary sources* would rather be considered a tautology inasmuch as the term *document* is a synonym for *source*.

Like the past itself, past events also exist no longer. History, thus, is rather what is recorded of what took place. Lim and Smith (2003:xix), for example, have argued that equating *history* with events of the past is a common mistake, because history is not the events of the past themselves. Oakeshott (1936:74) has made it clear that as

For myself I should like to dismiss at once the notion that history is the past course of events itself separated from anybody's ideas about it, that history is what actually happened. I should like to dismiss this notion because I find it altogether meaningless. It depends upon the separation of "what has come to us" and "our interpretation of it" Of "what actually happened" we know and can know nothing at all; if history were that it would be at once nothing and unknowable. No event, no past is historical unless it has survived in record; and further, not even all recorded events are historical events. History is not "what actually happened"; it is "what the evidence obliges us to believe." And if history is "what the evidence obliges us to believe," then it is a way of thinking about the past, governed and controlled by rules of evidence, and is not the past itself separated from our knowledge of it.

As is obvious, history is not the events of the past themselves but rather our attempts to make sense of those events. This idea of history is what Boasinke (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) conveys when he stresses that "History is basically an attempt to understand what happened in the past in relation to the human race and how these past happenings or events affected society in the past" This notion of history refers to the product of the inquiry or research undertaken by historians into certain topics, such as the origins of peoples; the rise of nation-states; the origins, implementation and effects of Ghana's 1969 Aliens Compliance Order; the causes, conditions and consequences of the First World War; or any other event of significance to the historian, through a careful examination of the available historical documents. Brophy et al. (2009:xx) have argued that history is what we can say about the human past, from its origins to the most recent past. Tosh with Lang (2006:xix) also admits that the word *history* refers both to what actually happened in the past and to the representation of that past in the work of historians. In strengthening the argument, Katsina ("Declining Interest in the Study of History in Nigerian Institutions", retrieved July 11, 2018) observes that until the causes of events in the past are carefully examined, there is no history; past events are useless without historians to interpret them. History, thus, examines and interprets the records of the past. In this perspective, history makes the coherence of the major historical events comprehensible by reducing them to a dramatic pattern and seeing them in a simple form. This then takes us to the view that history is the record of the significant developments that happened in the past. The production of the record could, however, be possible only when the historian has accumulated enough evidence on the topics he seeks to examine, and this evidence could only be obtained through a rigorous and a vigorous inquiry. Hence, before the record is produced, an inquiry must first take place, and it is from this activity that the original meaning of history derives.

Historia: Inquiry or Research

Any attempt to understand what history is and formulate a definition, an explanation or an interpretation for it must include, if not start with, the *parent-word* of history, that is, the original term from which *history* is derived; for the meaning of that term should, no doubt, be taken as the first and original meaning assigned to history. The term *history*, as used in contemporary English vocabulary, originally derived from the Greek word *ἱστορία* – *historia*, which is also translated as *historia* in Latin (Press, 1977:283). The ancestor word of *ἱστορία* is *ἵστωρ*, which, in a legal sense, meant either *judge* or *witness*. It is believed that the Greek *ἱστορία* (*historia*) originated from the Proto-Indo-European word *wid-tor-*, from the root *weid-*, which means *to know* or *to see* (New World Encyclopedia, "History", retrieved February 27, 2018). This hypothetical root is also present in the English words *wit*, *wise*, *wisdom*, *vision*, and *idea*; in the Latin word *video*; in the Sanskrit word *veda*; in the Slavic words *videti* and *vedati*; and in the Welsh word *gwynn*; (*Ibid.*; "History – Scope and Definition", retrieved July 11, 2018). In any case, in its original Greek sense, *ἱστορία* translated as *inquiry*, *knowledge from inquiry* – *knowledge acquired by investigation*, or *judge*. In its deeper sense, *ἱστορία* meant any learning or knowing achieved through a vigorous and a critical inquiry designed to elicit truth, or the *inquiry* itself (Cohen and Nagel, 1934:323). In essence, it meant the acquisition of knowledge through inquiry or research, so that the phrase *natural history*, where *history* is recognised only as the English translation of *historia*, would mean 'learning or knowing nature through an inquiry' or the acquisition of knowledge about nature through inquiry or research. *Biological history* would also mean the acquisition of biological knowledge through research. So would *mathematical history*, *philosophical history*, *religious history*, *metallurgical history*, *sociological history*, *political history*, *economic history*, etc. mean the acquisition of knowledge in these disciplines through research.

It has been emphasised that as *historia* meant knowledge,⁸ the person in pursuit of knowledge through inquiry was referred to as *histor*, which meant *wise man*, *witness*, *judge*, *learned man*, or someone who was known for a capacity to see clearly which of two conflicting accounts of an emotionally charged matter was correct (Press, 1977:283; "History – Scope and Definition", retrieved July 11, 2018). Thus, the *histor* or *learned man* was able to pass judgement based on the facts as the result of an investigation. Early attestations of the *histor* are found in Homeric Hymns, Heraclitus, the Athenian ephebes' oath, and in Boiotic inscriptions (New World Encyclopedia, "History", retrieved February 27, 2018; "History – Scope and Definition", retrieved July 11, 2018). The verb, *historein*, which means *to inquire*, is believed to be an Ionic derivation, which spread first in Classical Greece and eventually over all of the Hellenistic civilisation. During the Hellenistic Age⁹ (ca. 323–31 B.C.E.), *historein* was used

⁸As we shall soon realise, the original meaning of *science* was also *knowledge*. This suggests that history and science are indistinguishable.

⁹From about the seventh century B.C.E., the Greeks called themselves Hellenes, and the lands in which they lived as Hellas, and scholars have referred to the period from 323

to indicate the activity characteristic of the histor, that is, finding out the correct account in a case where the matter concerned was both disputed and emotionally charged. After Herodotus (ca. 484–430/420 B.C.E.) had published his account of the Persian Wars under the title *Historia* (*History*), however, the term came to indicate the results of such inquiring, either written or not.

Marwick (1993:6) uses the term *history* in five senses and distinguishes history as an inquiry from history as an interpretation or interpretations produced by this activity. However, it is essential to note that what underlies the use of *historia*, *histor*, and *historein* in the senses pointed out here is an activity-idea: history as a search or an inquiry for accurate information about people, things, or events, the collection and interpretation of sources and the production of a body of knowledge. Arnold Toynbee, for example, has defined history as an investigation into human affairs on the move (Aggarwal, 2004:3). Indeed, Herodotus inquired into the past and present of the peoples and places he visited in his extensive travels in the mid-fifth century B.C.E. and composed a narrative account on his research. In this sense, order has been imposed on the facts collected, sequences have been organised, and the *significant* has been highlighted, and the *frivolous* left out. It is important to state that as soon as we think of history as an inquiry, we no longer consider history in the sense of the past or events of the past; we now progress from the stage of simply thinking about history as the past, to the level of asking questions about the past and, hence, seeking answers. At this level of understanding of history, we begin to think both about analysis, and how the various questions we might ask would determine the answers we could construct (“What is History”, retrieved March 2, 2018). In view of this, some scholars have defined history as the carrying out of inquiries into the past, the analysis of sources, and the production of interpretations of the past, which are contributions to the accumulating body of knowledge about the past, and which together permits aspects of the past and interrelationships of the past to be considered as coherent history (Marwick, 1993:6). The substance of all this is that there is no *real* past independent of the activities of historians. Consequently, history could only be a record of what happened through research. After all, *historia*, during the Hellenistic Age, came to mean the inquiry itself and the report resulting from that research. Note, however, that many people, particularly those trained in Western educational institutions, often mistakenly expect *the report* of any historical research to be in the form of a written document. There is, thus, a view of history as a written record of the past.

A Written Record of What Happened in the Past

Gorman (1952:711) observes that history has two sides: objective and subjective. The *objective* represents *what has happened*, whereas the *subjective* stands for *the record of*

to 31 B.C.E. (between the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C.E. and the emergence of the Roman Empire as signified by the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C.E.) as the Hellenic Age because of the spread of Greek culture, *Hellenisation*, across Southwest Asia and the Mediterranean basin (see Caldwell, 1965:114; Fields, Barber and Riggs, 1998:187).

what has happened. He maintains that the union of the two sides or definitions is of a higher order since, in this sense, history refers to that which has happened as well as to the record of it. In view of this, he advises that we should consider historical records to have appeared simultaneously with historical deeds and events. However, in explaining the subjective part of *the higher definition*, Gorman states that it is a “book which gives a narrative account of these matters”, [that is, a book that examines] “the history of a people or a nation, or of the great events and epochs of history” (*Ibid*). In using *book* as a synonym for *record*, Gorman is using history in the sense of a written account. One of our respondents, Adams (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018), was also referring to history in a written form when he said that “I find history as a *documented* evidence of a person’s or a people’s intellectual evolution or process in time past.” Tosh with Lang (2006:xix) also uses history in the same sense when they state that history refers to the representation of that past in the work of historians.

Interestingly, Herodotus composed a written account of his researches which so much impressed the Greeks that in the following century, that is, the fourth century B.C.E., *historia* began to refer specifically to the written works of Herodotus. In other words, probably because of the authority which the works of Herodotus had already attained, *historia*, in the Hellenistic Age, came increasingly to refer to the results of critical investigations and, especially, as written accounts concerned with events, what Press (1977:283) has described as ‘*historia* as a literary genre’. In this sense, history acquired a new meaning – history as something that is only written, and no more referring to oral accounts. As a result, the verb form, *historein*, acquired the meaning “to record, report, or relate” some information. Evidently, the new meaning of *historein* derived from *historia* as a written account, and this newer meaning began to replace the older one. In addition, the noun, *historia*, was more frequently used than the verb, *historein*. Hence, even in uses of the verb, the product now came to dominate the activity, and a gap began to appear between the product itself, the facts or information, and the product in writing (*Ibid*). Essentially, during the Hellenistic Age, the Greek *historia* gained a meaning which differed from that of the preceding period; the dominant idea was that of the account in a written form, history as a literary variety with its rules and styles, canons of greatness, and political, professional, or moral utility.

Genuinely, it was later after the Greek term *historia* had gained the restricted or precise meaning of being a written story or account that it passed into Latin also as *historia*, meaning a narrative of past events, and then permeated the vocabulary of other peoples, including the English language in C.E. 1390 (“History – Scope and Definition”, retrieved July 11, 2018). In these societies also, the term was limited to accurate accounts about events, people, and things, but more especially about events and in writing. This new understanding of history gained currency for a very long time to the extent that even today, some people still think of history as a mere written story or account; that is, many people, especially Western writers, usually qualify history as a record or an account with writing. For example, in arguing “... that many of the societies which

social anthropologists have studied have no histories, in the sense of documented and verifiable accounts of the past, or at least they had none before the often very recent impact of Western culture”, Beattie (1977:23) is referring to history in the form of a written account. In 2009, it was argued that “History ... is the study of the human past, with special attention to the written record” (“History – Scope and Definition”, retrieved July 11, 2018). Hirst (“What is History? – A Collection of Definitions”, retrieved September 17, 2017) asserts that history is the study of the human past as it is described in the written documents left by human beings. Brophy et al. (2009:xx) also maintain that “Before the written word, there is no history in the strictest sense History begins with writing because that is when the documentation starts. ... history cannot exist without written documents.” Sankowsky and Hirshfield (1975:10) equally argue that history begins with the invention of writing. They state, “With the beginning of writing, which came about 5,000 years ago [in Egypt and Mesopotamia], the historic period began, for when scholars today read ancient writings, they can really discover the history of the people who wrote them.” Other scholars have also maintained that history refers to the period of time after writing was invented (Padmanabhan and Gafoor, “Methodology of History”, retrieved July 12, 2018).

Similarly, Fields, Barber and Riggs (1998:8) state that history studies the human past primarily through the interpretation of documents. They add that “In the broad sense, a document is any written message ... such ... as diaries, censuses, gravestone epitaphs, and notes written in the margins of books.” Hockett (1961:3) defines history as “the written record of past or current events.” He surprisingly distinguishes between the historian proper and experts who study the period before the development of writing, and strongly emphasises that writings on the period before the development of writing rest on materials quite different from those used by the historian. In reality, the sources of the historian’s knowledge are usually written documents, but the historian often supplements them by utilising various kinds of unwritten matter, such as structures, utensils, weapons, artifacts, drawings, fragments of bones, oral traditions, and other evidence of human life antedating the invention of writing. Hockett believes, however, that these other materials are properly the materials for writers who deal with the prehistoric period. To him, the historian is distinguished from those who use unwritten materials in their study and reconstruction of the past by calling them archaeologists, anthropologists, or ethnologists (*Ibid*).

In a deeper sense, the view of history as only a written account or report is highly flawed in the sense that history is as old as the human generation itself. The reason is that history began to be enacted with the appearance of the first humans on Earth. It is generally acknowledged that many ages elapsed before humans learned to develop the art of writing and to keep written records of their deeds. However, what happened before the appearance of writing is also important to historians. Meanwhile, the overemphasis on writing and written records has led to the invention of the terms *prehistory* and *history* in reference to the study of the pre-writing age and the post-writing era respectively. Hence, it is the study of the

period since the introduction of writing that historians actually refer to as history. Nonetheless, in their studies, historians do not confine themselves only to a reconstruction of the period after the invention of writing. Historians also study events that occurred during the long period preceding the development of writing. In their attempts to produce a holistic view of the human past, historians rely on evidence in the hands of other scholars and delve into the prehistoric times to recover from there what they could, and interpret them for human understanding. Again, whereas the *writing theory* lacks recognition for unwritten documents in the reconstruction of the past, critical historians pay the same reverence to all documents, whether written, oral, pictorial or archaeological. Moreover, to argue that history began with the invention of writing would seem to deprive some past societies, that is, those who developed the technique of recording their history in writing rather lately, any sense of history.

There is no doubt that written history does, indeed, provide us with the surest knowledge of the past because of the fact that oral history is sometimes fraught with distortions, exaggerations, inaccuracies, inconsistencies, imprecision, lack of sequence, and other similar limitations. However, while appreciating that written words are more precise and easier to work with, if less expressive, than spoken, it must equally be acknowledged that writing has not supplanted and rendered oral tradition and oral history useless. Actually, there are stresses and intonations which could be taught but not written. These are sometimes less clear and explicit, but they certainly have their independent value, and could sometimes interpret what survives in writing (Clark, 1967:xxviii). Oral history could also sometimes reinterpret and give new meaning to historical developments and, thus, provide us with a new and a truer image, and even a better understanding of the past than what exists in writing. Wilks (1996:10) reveals that in his study of Ghana in the mid-1950s, he met Isaka Dodu, the Chief Butcher of Wa, who gave him an oral account of events in the Wa region in the late nineteenth century that was quite authentic and different from anything he had read from the official and, therefore, distorted written reports in British and French archives. Moreover, to conceive of history as based on documentation in the form of written texts would mean that there could be no history if there were no written documents. Further, written records also suffer from virtually the same problems that confront oral history and other sources of history.

What makes the acceptance of writing as a trademark of history more problematic is the disagreement among scholars regarding precisely when writing appeared and, thus, when history actually begins. Some scholars believe that history began in 3500 B.C.E. (the thirty-fourth – 34th – century) with the invention of the cuneiform writing in Sumeria (“History – Scope and Definition”, Retrieved July 11, 2018; Caldwell, 1965:17 and 24). The cuneiform was adapted for the writing of the Akkadian, Elamite, Hittite (and Luwian), Hurrian (and Urartian) languages, and also inspired the Old Persian and Ugaritic national alphabets (“History – Scope and Definition”, Retrieved July 11, 2018). Other historians disagree with the Sumerian origins of writing and, instead, argue that writing

developed first in Egypt. But even here, there is a disagreement on the date of invention. For instance, while Gilbert and Reynolds (2008:66) assert that writing – the hieroglyphic system – developed first in Egypt around 3200 B.C.E., Asante (2007:31) posit “... that writing was invented around 3400 BCE in Kemet [that is, Egypt], about 300 years before we see a cuneiform system of writing on clay tablets in Mesopotamia, today’s Iraq”, and that immediately writing served the purpose of “recording of historical events.”

Here we are presented with conflicting accounts of the origin of the art of writing and the date of its development. In any case, if it is agreed that writing developed naturally out of the drawing of pictures (Caldwell, 1965:17), that Africa is the very source of human history, and that prehistoric peoples in Africa engaged in arts and crafts, then is it not only logical for us to accept that Africans were the original inventors of the process that culminated in the discovery of the art of writing? Nevertheless, this claim is not surprising; those who subscribe to it belong to the camp of those Eurocentric writers, such as Langlois and Seignobos, who hold the view that ‘no written documents, no history’ (see Adjepong, 2011:25–28). They argue that history begins with the invention of writing because their primary source for learning about the past depends principally on the written records that earlier societies created. In any case, this definition of history must be dismissed as inappropriate and unacceptable in the contemporary era, especially when we consider the fact that writing appeared at different times at different places, a factor that defeats any universalist notion of history. A good historical scientist should work with and be competent in interpreting primary documents; however, not all written records contain primary testimonies of past events. Again, they constitute only one, and a relatively insignificant percentage, of the sources for the historical reconstruction of the human past. Further, court historians in past African societies recounted the histories of their peoples orally. If written records alone could be depended upon to produce historical works for some people, then some historical studies could also be done by relying on documents other than written records of the past. The point being made here is that the historian should not neglect all other sources of history because they are not reduced to writing. For unwritten sources were, and still are, significant sources for the study of the past and are, thus, immensely influential in our knowledge and understanding of the past. In view of all this, to put it in a broader perspective, history could be accepted generally as a record of what happened in the past, and not only as a written record of what happened in the past. Shapin (1988:71) throws his weight behind this sense of history when he states that “We take history to be the record of human affairs and actions.”

A General Record of What Happened in the Past – Collective Memory and Ideology

The position of the empiricists, or basically all those who conceive of history as the past, or of what occurred in the past, has been described as naïve. Certainly, to define history as the past or what happened in the past is to obscure the reality of the concept and discipline, as it does not help reveal the true nature and substance of history. Moreover, due to the involvement of the historian and his

activities in the creation of our view of the past, history could hardly be accepted as the past or what actually happened in the past. In consequence, some of the protagonists of ‘history as the past’ or ‘history as what really happened in the past’ have modified their view. Virginia Woolf (cited in “History Quotes”, retrieved June 7, 2013) has stressed that “nothing has really happened until it has been recorded.” When we asked Agyapong (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) to define history, he answered that history is the study of the records of past human activities or events over a period of time. Victoria Agyare Appiah (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) also used the term history to refer to the “... records of events which took place some years ago.” Joshua Appiah (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) thought “history is a recorded event ...” Osei (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) expressed the view that history is the record of important events in the past. Kudiabor (WhatsApp communication) substituted *record* with *account* and interpreted history as an account of what happened in the past. Berlin (1960:2) also explains history as an account of what humans have done and what has happened to them. Other proponents of the same view have defined history as a description or recital of things as they are, or have been, in a continued orderly narration of the principal facts and circumstances thereof (Smellie, 1992:103). In John Jacob Anderson’s estimation, “History is a narration of the events which have happened among mankind, including an account of the rise and fall of nations, as well as of other great changes which have affected the political and social condition of the human race” (Hirst, “What is History? – A Collection of Definitions”, retrieved September 17, 2017). The renowned American historian, Will Durant, has defined history as the “narrative of what civilized men have thought or done in past time” (cited in University of Maiduguri, Centre for Distance Learning, “HIS 101: “Introduction to History (2 Units)”, retrieved July 11, 2018). From the above definitions one can easily assumed the nature and purpose of history. It is a narrative of past events which have molded the destiny of mankind or human beings. Razak (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) also opined that history is a narrative description of past events. Of course, the conclusion the modern logician has formed is that the main aim of history is the description of past events (Teggart, 1960:77).

It is on the basis of this argument, history as a ‘description of things’ and as an ‘account of facts’, that it has been maintained that history, with regard to its subject-matter, is divided into the *history of nature* and the *history of action* (Smellie, 1992:104). The term *natural history* is generally reserved for the description of plants, animals and minerals. For example, Aristotle regarded natural history as a systematic account of a set of natural phenomena, whether or not chronological ordering was a factor in the account (*Ibid*). In other words, natural history is the systematic account of natural phenomena. As a branch of history, natural history could be traced to antiquity where we find Theophrastus referring to his work in which he has treated of the nature and properties of plants as *History of Plants* and a treatise of Aristotle entitled *Περὶ τὰ Ζῷα Ἱστορίαι* (*Peri Tà Zôa Historíai*, which translates as *Historia Animalium* in Latin), meaning *Inquiries about Animals* or *History of Animals* (*Ibid*). It is

also in the same sense that it is employed in the English title given to Leo Africanus' work, *Geographical History of Africa*.¹⁰ It was still in this sense that Francis Bacon used the term in the late sixteenth century C.E., when he wrote about *Natural History*. To Bacon, *historia* meant "the knowledge of objects determined by space and time", that is, the sort of knowledge provided by memory, as distinct from science, whose knowledge was provided by reason, and poetry by fantasy ("History – Scope and Definition", retrieved July 11, 2018). As is clear, the term *natural history* is used strictly in the original Greek sense of *inquiry or knowledge acquired from inquiry*.

In the real sense, however, it is the authentic account of the principal transactions of humans, referred to as the *history of action*, since the beginning of the world, that chiefly merits the name *history*. The terms *authentic* and *principal* should be noted well here. Principal here means significant, and this implies that history records the most important events of the past and captures the essence of these events, whereas it glosses over the trivia. Authenticity points to the fact that history keeps and provides true accounts of the significant events it records (Okai, Mezieobi and Salawu, "EDU 760: History Methods", p. 5, retrieved July 14, 2018). Meanwhile, regarding the history of action, there is, first, the view that history is a story (Renier, 1950:13–39) or a mere story-telling subject (University of Maiduguri, Centre for Distance Learning, "HIS 101: "Introduction to History (2 Units)", retrieved July 11, 2018). This view is captured in Chapman's argument that history refers to stories about ancient events (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018). Oduro (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) also maintained that "History are [sic] stories about the events of the past." Wofesor (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) added to this view by interpreting history as the story of past human experiences. In fact, when *historia* entered the English language, it gained the precise meaning of *relation of incidents or story* in general ("History – Scope and Definition", retrieved July 11, 2018). In Middle English, *history* meant story in general (*Ibid*). It must be cautioned, however, that it would be "... out of ignorance or malice to define history as mere story-telling and of course the historian, a story-teller" (Ifammose, 2006:108), because an ordinary story, according to the *Oxford Advanced Dictionary*, could be "an account of imaginary events, a talk of ghosts, spirits, and such other issues that lack scientific proof." Randall (1947:1) also stresses that a story could "... be a yarn, an unfounded tradition, a tale, a bedtime romance, a legend, an innocent fib, a bold lie, a mystery, or a medley of true and false elements." The stories of past societies which historians reconstruct are, on the other hand, not just ordinary stories; they are significant stories about the human past which are worthy of recollection. As Brophy et al. (2009:xxi) stress, the stories historians deal with are nonfiction, at least in theory; the points of the stories in historical documents may often concern central issues in history. In view of this, history has been defined as the story of the experiences of humans living in societies (Renier, 1950:36). In support of this view, the *Dictionary of the French Academy* explains history as "the

story of things worthy of being remembered" (*Ibid.*, p. 259). Barzun and Graff (1977:40) also aver that history, at its simplest, is the story of past facts.

From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that history actually takes the form of a story. Genuinely, the term *story* shares the same etymology with *historia*. This has influenced some people's understanding of history. For example, in saying that in this work, "I shall attempt to tell *the story* of Nembe from its beginnings, or from about the middle of the fifteenth century and even earlier ... to the present ... the formal limit of [which] ... is conceived to be about 1936", Alagoa (1964:3) is implying that he seeks to recount the history of Nembe from its origins to about 1936. Also, in their *Mainstreams of World History*, Sankowsky and Hirshfield (1975:iv) state that "In writing this book, the authors have attempted to fill yet another vital need – that of telling *the story* of the non-Western world, including its many contributions to civilization." Obviously, Sankowsky and Hirshfield are referring to the history of the peoples of the non-Western world. Nevertheless, to define history as such leaves much to be desired. To correct this erroneous impression, there are scholars who avoid the use of the word *story* and prefer to use the term *account* or, more appropriately, *record*. Such scholars, as distinct from the empiricists, are commonly referred to as the *Constructivists*. They are more interested in how people construct their historical visions of the world (Spickard, Spickard and Cragg, 1988:xv). They believe that history could only be what has been recorded of what happened. Appadorai (2003:7) maintains that history is the record of past events and movements, their causes and interrelations, including a survey of economic, religious, intellectual and social developments as well as a study of states, their growth and organisation and their relations with one another. In this sense, the historian carries out a thorough inquiry into all aspects of the lives of past societies and generations and uses the knowledge acquired thereof as a tool to explain present and future developments.¹¹ It is, however, impossible for humans to reconstruct, accurately, the totality of the history of the world. A more realistic and specific definition would, thus, restrict history to the record of the known past. Therefore, as a record of the past, history consists only of those things which historians have been able to ascertain and recount: what was recorded and, therefore, kept in memory due to their relative significance. In this way, history becomes the study of the recorded memory of the significant human activities and events in the past.

Some scholars assert that history could be understood as the record of both the distant and contemporary past. They emphasise that in the ancient times, this view of history produced the recording of events against time-frames, that is, when they occurred. Aiken (1956:78), for example, maintains that history could mean a chronology of events following one upon the other in time, while McCall (1969:131) sees history as an account of human activities through time in a social and natural environment. In a similar manner, *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, edited by Safra and Yeshua (2003:574), define history as the discipline that studies the chronological

¹⁰This sense of history is very old, and it survives today really only in the obsolescent term "Natural History", which, of course, was Pliny's title (see Fage, 1981:26).

¹¹ This view expresses another, and a more holistic, definition of history. See below.

record of events, as affecting a nation or people, based on a critical examination of source materials and usually presenting an explanation of their causes. Smellie (1992:104) maintains that history, in general, signifies an account of some remarkable facts which have happened in the world, arranged in the true order in which they actually took place, together with the causes which generated them, and the different effects they have produced as far as could be discovered. These definitions attempt to put history in a time-frame, making it a dynamic continuum of events. Perhaps, Charles Firth's definition is broad enough to capture the significance of history as a record. To Firth (cited in Ifamose, 2006:109),

history is the record of the life of societies of men [and women], of the changes which those societies have gone through, of the ideas which have determined the actions of those societies and of the material conditions which have helped or hindered their development.

It is crucial to note that this sense of history refers to the total significant past of a people or society. In this sense, each people or society makes a selection of the important aspects of its past, preserves them and pass them on to its future generations. In this perspective, then, the history of each people or society becomes an embodiment of their collective past. For this reason, Radhakrishnan (cited in Aggarwal, 2004:3) has argued that history is the memory of a nation or a race. Enoch Powell (cited in Jay, 2007:316) has also maintained that history is nothing other than a nation's collective memory. T. Zeleza also intimates that history is the collective memory of society, the repository of a people's consciousness (Ajaegbo, July, 2013:14). Of course, the ancient Greeks expressed the fact that history is inescapably a part of consciousness by describing Clio, the muse of history, as the daughter of memory (Barzun, 1992:308). Memory refers to the processes by which people and other organisms encode, store, and retrieve information. Encoding refers to the initial perception and registration of information; storage is the retention of encoded information over time; and retrieval refers to the processes involved in using stored information. In the 1920s, the French sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs, began to study what he was one of the first to call *collective memory*. Halbwachs explored the ways in which present concerns determine what of the past we remember and how we remember it (Novick, 2001:3). In the main, collective memory unifies and simplifies; it sees events from a single, committed perspective. It is understood to express some eternal or essential truth about the group, and once established, it comes to define that eternal truth, and gives an eternal identity to the members of the society or group (*Ibid.*, p. 4). In view of this, such a memory, or recollection, as Adu-Boahen (2011:157) calls it, becomes a repository of all that the members of the society need to know about themselves, and how they should live as members of the society. In defining the society, this memory not only tells the people who they are, but also where they came from, what transpired in their past, where they are going, and outlines the boundaries of their world.

Acquah (personal interview, July 8, 2018) highlighted this view of history when he argued that "history is a device

which serves as the collective memory of a society, defines the purpose of the society, and provides the laws or norms that regulate the lives of its members." A critical anatomy of this conception of history shows unmistakably that history has an ideological feature. In fact, it has been argued that history, by its very nature, informs us not only about the past, but also argues for an ideology or a world view (Okai, Mezieobi and Salawu, "EDU 760: History Methods", p. 8, retrieved July 14, 2018). The concept of ideology has undergone dramatic changes since its invention in eighteenth-century France. Ideology refers Carver (2009:9) insists that it denotes an agenda to discuss, questions to ask, and a hypothesis to make. It also refers either to a set of ideas, which provide a theoretical and operational framework for thought or action by the people who follow it (Mohandas, Ramesh, Gopi and Binu, "Methodology of Humanities – B.A. English (I Semester (2011 Admission) III Semester (2012 Admission))", p. 10, retrieved July 12, 2018), or to a set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and preferences about how a society should be organised for a particular purpose. An indispensable function of ideology is to create organisational stability among like-minded people and thereby enhance enthusiastic commitment (Phillips, 1984:73). Ball and Dagger (2009:1) also state that ideologies help people to comprehend and cope with turbulent times and confusing circumstances in four main ways: they explain phenomena that would otherwise remain mysterious and puzzling; they provide their adherents with criteria and standard of evaluation; they orient their adherents, giving them a sense of who they are and where they belong – a social and cultural compass with which to define and affirm their individual and collective identity; and they supply their adherents with rudimentary programme.

In fact, it is believed that all history is ideological inasmuch as all history reflects the concerns of the individuals and societies which produce it. What is remembered, and, where possible, recorded is what is felt to be of enduring importance. Some scholars have emphasised the ideological and purposeful use of history in African societies. In pre-colonial Africa, history was used to relate the past to the present and future in all aspects of life. History, in its real sense, was not confined to records and interpretations of the past; it was also lived and felt. History served as a means of transmitting and preserving culture, an instrument for organising and interpreting collective and individual experiences in order to provide an understanding of the present and a guide for the future and means to provide political education and leadership elite (Kalu, 1993:168). History served as a means of promoting a wholesome understanding and respect for the institutions, norms, values and practices of the community. Feuer (1959:xx) insists that as a science of political leadership, the Marxist interpretation of history offered Asian intellectuals a new ideology for their role as administrators of society.

Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that the fact that history was not confined to records and interpretations of the past does not in any way eliminate the principle of interpretation from historical studies. Indeed, however the event under study occurred, there has to be a synthesis and an interpretation of all pertinent records, of whatever kind they may be, relating to the event. The stance of the

constructivists, thus, underscores the maxim that heroes and conquerors do not make history, but historians do. What is more significant here is the fact that whatever form the record or account takes, it must be based on evidence. In his study of the Peloponnesian Wars, Thucydides tried to do a systematic analysis of the relation between the causes and effects of those wars on the basis of evidence (Aggarwal, "What are the Important Definitions of History? – Answered!", retrieved July 11, 2018). Indeed, some of our respondents made the significance of evidence in historical research clear. According to Kumasenu (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018), "history, simply put, can be said to be the study of important past events in the light of the available *evidence*." Quarshie (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) also intimated that "history could be explained as a look into or study of past phenomena based on the available *evidence*." Ampem (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) made the same point when he said that "history is the study of past human experiences by using available *materials* as a point of reference to develop an accurate future projection for the betterment of the life of the human race."

Of course, in any scientific research, in the courts of law, in advancing arguments, and in making decisions concerning all sorts of practical issues, we are always required to choose from alternative considerations offered in support of various propositions that have been advanced. The fact that evidence provides support for statements or claims and helps to establish facts accentuates the significance of evidence in historical studies. In fact, history is an evidence-based discipline; historical research and writing – historiography – is also an evidence-based activity; hence, historians create, evaluate, and use historical statements on the basis of evidence. The importance of evidence to support the account takes history, at least in theory, out of the realm of fiction, of myth and of legend, and situates it in the realm of science ("What is History", retrieved March 2, 2018). This conception and the understanding of history as an inquiry have together led to a new definition which conceptualises history as a scientific body of knowledge and a method of inquiry which is vigorously studied and taught in academic institutions all over the world. This is probably the reason why one of our respondents maintained that "history is a branch of knowledge that studies and/or investigates the past" (Asalidiwo: WhatsApp communication, July 6, 2018). In this perspective, Marwick ("The Fundamentals of History", retrieved July 11, 2018) maintains that historians do not reconstruct the past but, rather, produce knowledge about the past, or produce contributions to knowledge about the past. In view of this, he insists that the best and most concise definition of history is "The bodies of knowledge about the past produced by historians, together with everything that is involved in the production, communication, and teaching about that knowledge." Situating it in a far more comprehensive perspective, Christopher C. Ifemeje has defined history as a body of knowledge about the past, especially the past acts of humans in the society, which consists of facts ascertained through honest inquiry, as well as inferences, interpretations and generalisations arrived at by the historian, and is an available true record on paper or in human memory (University of Maiduguri, Centre for Distance Learning, "HIS 101: Introduction to History (2

Units)", p. 11, retrieved July 11, 2018). The significance of this broad interpretation of history lies in the fact that it captures the content, processes and elements of history as a body of knowledge in the single definition.

A Scientific Body of Knowledge and a Scientific Method of Inquiry

Several scholars explain history as a study of relevant past events and activities of humans in society. For example, Brinton et al. (1960:3) have defined history as the study of past human activities and events and the resulting oral or written records of what happened in the past.¹² When we posed the question of what is history to Asiedu (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018), he answered that "history entails the study of events that took place in the past which greatly affected humanity or had something to do with humanity." In response to the same question, Mohammed (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) also said that "history is the study of significant past events, societies, cultures and civilisations." Our interest in the first view of history is not so much in its emphasis of significance – *greatly affected humanity* – and qualification for historical attention and treatment. Neither are we interested in the second interpretation because of its addition of societies, cultures and civilisations to events. We are rather interested in them because of their particular reference to the fact that history is *a study of* past events resulting from human activities. In fact, 176 out of the 192 responses we received defined history as *a study*. As soon as the issue of *study* comes into the discussion, attention is drawn to history as an academic discipline. Yayoh (WhatsApp communication, July 8, 2018), for instance, defined "history as an academic discipline that focuses on past human activities that were/are of significance to society." History is, therefore, not about inanimate things or objects; rather, it is about people as individuals, people as groups, and people as societies, and their ideas and development. Ajaegbo (July, 2013:10) is also of the same view and even goes further to show readers precisely when history evolved as a school subject. He maintains, "That history is a mode of knowledge is incontestable. It became an independent academic discipline – an intellectual pursuit – in the 19th century."

In our view, the theory that history is a study or an academic discipline, though generally recognised as standard, appears inadequate, in view of the *true* nature of history itself. For this reason, Spickard, Spickard and Cragg (1988:xv) have formulated a broader definition of history as the study, record, and interpretation of the human past. Herbst (1962:146) also asserts that history, as a school subject, comprises selected recorded data of past human events, their narration in the works of scholars, and their interpretation. Ajaegbo (July, 2013:10) argues, in relation to historical interpretation, that in general, the historian writes about events he did not witness and about ages and societies he was not a part of. Hence, when a historian sets out to discover and interpret past human actions and experiences, he employs critical thinking to produce

¹²Two outstanding ideas are contained in this definition: activities and events that happened in the past, generally *what* occurred in the past, and the records on them. This is an indication that as a study, history is concerned with both what happened and the memory of it.

scientific history or a historical work based on *objective empiricism*. The historian can critically verify and evaluate his facts and write history based on empirical evidence. Ajaegbo insists that “Empiricism is not the monopoly of [natural] scientists. Facts are not tested in laboratories alone; they can be investigated and cross-checked in the field as well.” He concludes that in the pursuit of his vocation, the historian draws from many primary sources, employs the knowledge of other disciplines and tries to be as scientific or empirical as possible in his quest to establish historical truth (p. 10).

Certainly, without the historian’s interpretation of the records, the records themselves could not help us understand certain basic facts about the human past. Thus, though some people argue that the historian should only reconstruct the past without offering any explanations for the facts, modern historians do interpret their facts to make their works more intelligible and relevant for both practical and theoretical purposes. And these interpretations, as Ajaegbo emphasises, are done scientifically and, as a result, produce scientific results, which make history a science, both as a body of knowledge and a method of inquiry, and the historian a scientist. As shown above, in his study of the Peloponnesian Wars, Thucydides used evidence to establish connections between the causes and effects of the wars. In his historical method, he emphasised chronology, a neutral point of view, and that the human world was the consequences of the actions of humans. In so doing, Thucydides developed history on scientific lines and has, as a result, been described as *the Father of Scientific History* (Caldwell, 1965:252–253). In his *Muqaddimah* (C.E. 1377), Ibn Khaldun also criticised “idle superstition and uncritical acceptance of historical data.” In view of this, he also introduced a scientific method to the study of history, and often referred to it as his *new science* (“History – Scope and Definition”, retrieved July 11, 2018). Indeed, one respondent maintained that “History is the scientific study of past events” (Gabriel Appiah: WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018). Amegatse (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) also emphasised that “History is a scientific study of relevant events or happenings of the past in order to shape [the present and] the future.” Meanwhile, one could not claim that history is a scientific body of knowledge and a scientific method of inquiry, or a systematic method of research similar to the scientific method, without explaining what science actually is and the nature of the scientific method. In other words, to be able to show the extent to which history qualifies to be considered as a science and a method of inquiry, it is important to define or explain the term *science*, in order to help clarify the controversy surrounding the methodical and scientific nature of history.

The term *science*, according to *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase & Fable*, derives from the Latin term *scientia*, which, in turn, evolved from *scire*, meaning *to know*. In the literal sense, therefore, science means *knowledge* or, more explicitly, *knowledge acquired by study* (Teggart, 1960:155; Evans, 1993:969).¹³ In spite of its original meaning, science has no generally accepted definition because of its complex nature. Natural scientists,

philosophers of science, science educators, and researchers define the term from their various perspectives. For this reason, E.M.A. Ukoli (cited in Gabriel, Fagbenle and Jaja, 1998:2) has recognised the difficulty involved in providing a specific meaning for the concept of *science*. In line with its literal interpretation, however, science has been viewed primarily as a source of knowledge, producing new information about the empirical universe to the larger society (Storer, 1966:1). Teggart (1960:164) stresses that the sole function of science is to construct systematic schemes forming conceptual descriptions of actually observed processes. M.B. Ogunniyi maintains that science is an attempt by human beings to organise their experiences about nature into meaningful systems of explanations (Ajaegbo, July, 2013:4–5). Holding the same view, Harré (1972:62) defines science as “... a collection of well-attested theories which explain the patterns and regularities and irregularities among carefully studied phenomena.” Being more specific, *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Science and Technology* states that “*Speculative science* is that branch of science which suggests hypotheses and theories, and deduces critical tests whereby uncoordinated observations and properly ascertained facts may be brought into the body of science proper” (Walker, 1995:789).

Clearly, these definitions appear to make science synonymous with theory, and especially about nature. At any rate, theories are the vehicles of natural scientific knowledge – the foundations of their efficacy, and that is why a natural scientist like Krogh (1996:7) maintains that when science is conceived as a body of knowledge, it refers to a collection of unified insights, commonly referred to as *theories*, about nature, the evidence for which is an array of facts. In some quarters, however, science has been perceived rather as the systematic accumulation of knowledge about, or study of, natural or physical phenomena. The *Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary*, for example, defines science as “knowledge about the structure and behaviour of the natural and physical world, based on facts that you can prove, for example by experiments” (Hornby and Wehmeier, 2000). Gabriel, Fagbenle and Jaja (1998:2) show that science has been defined elsewhere as the study of nature and its physical environment, especially by using systematic and direct observation and experiment. J.H. Woodburn and E.S. Obourn have also defined science as that human endeavour that seeks to describe with ever-increasing accuracy the events and circumstances that occur or exist within our natural environment (Ajaegbo, July, 2013:4). Sir Alister Hardy (cited in Matson, 1975:114) has also asserted “that which is truly scientific will ultimately be explained in terms of physics and chemistry.” Obviously, these descriptions appreciate science as *the study of something* and as *a body of knowledge*. The problem here, however, is that these definitions create the impression that science itself, as well as the systematic acquisition of knowledge in general, is an exclusive preserve of the natural or physical sciences; but this is not true. Harrington (2005:3), for example, admits that *science* has close connections with the natural sciences and is often used synonymously with them, but argues that these sciences are not the only disciplines of human inquiry with a claim to the title of *science*. There are even some natural

¹³Compare with the meaning of history also as knowledge.

scientists who disapprove of restricting the term *science* to refer, for example, to “coloured liquid in a glass tube”, or to “the paraphernalia of the physics laboratory”, or “a terminology liberally interspersed with mathematical formula” (Kumekpor, 1999:5).

On such misleading interpretations of science, Lundberg (1949:1) remarks that the idea of *science as a particular method of study*, a definite set of rules of procedure and of logic applicable to any subject-matter has been neglected in our preoccupation with the amazing findings and achievements of the natural sciences. To him, the term *science* should be used to designate method, while occasionally applying it to any body of knowledge arrived at by this method. As a result, he defines science as a technique of deriving reliable knowledge about any type of phenomena in the universe and then applying this derived knowledge for purposes of prediction and control (*Ibid.*). Krogh (1996:7) also perceives science, in another sense, as a process, a way of learning, an activity that is the object of careful study or that is carried out according to a developed method or “... under certain loosely agreed-to rules.” To *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Science and Technology*, science is “... the ordered arrangement of ascertained knowledge, including the methods by which such knowledge is extended and the criteria by which its truth is tested” (Walker, 1995:789). Teggart (1960:225) even stresses that at present, science is a method of dealing with problems, and that the method of science has come to stand for branches of inquiring knowledge, characterised by specific aims and modes of procedure. And in Harrington’s (2005:3) view, to think scientifically is to apply a method or methods to the study of something and to follow these methods consistently and transparently. Evidently, science is now taken from the stage of being considered only as a body of knowledge to that of being considered also as a method by which this particular body of knowledge is ascertained and interpreted.

From the different definitions of science examined here, certain cardinal principles are obvious. We have, first, the literal meaning of science as *knowledge*, from which ‘science as a body of knowledge’ derives. This conception, in turn, produces another definition of science, as a systematic procedure or method for the acquisition of knowledge in order to address existing problems. Giner (1972:15) even emphasises that the original Latin notion of *scientia* has now come to mean objective and rational knowledge of reality or, more strictly, consistent effort towards the possession of such knowledge. All this suggests that science is an organised body, or a special field, of knowledge which, constructively and critically, employs an accepted standard procedure or method in analysing processes and problems – of academic, technical, vocational, etc. nature – with the view to producing scientific results or solutions to address problems. Generally, when we talk of science as a body of knowledge, we often mean individual or special branches of knowledge dedicated to the acquisition of knowledge about specific subject-matter. It follows, then, that any subject or discipline that employs scientific methods in the

pursuit of knowledge is a science.¹⁴ As Gabriel, Fagbenle and Jaja (1998:2) have rightly pointed out, “... the scientific method is not the exclusive preserve of the [natural] scientist because other disciplines and professionals like psychologists, historians, sociologists, detectives, and lawyers adopt this approach.” On his part, Harrington (2005:3–4) boldly states that in the real sense, astronomy, biology, chemistry or physics are not the only disciplines of inquiry with a claim to being sciences. “Other subjects of study, such as history, archaeology, or art criticism can also be sciences.” He justifies his claim by showing that in French, the subjects known in English as the *humanities* are called *les sciences humaines*, while in German they are known as the *Geisteswissenschaften*, meaning *science of the mind* or *sciences of the works of the human mind* (*Ibid.*), with *Geschichtswissenschaft* meaning the science or rigorous discipline of history (Tucker, 2009:2). In effect, every discipline is a science in its own right since each subject constitutes a separate and a special body of knowledge, and employs the scientific method in the pursuit of knowledge and the truth. In this case, each branch of knowledge constitutes a part or a subset of the whole body of science.

It is necessary to state that because there are different categories and levels of knowledge, each science or discipline is concerned with a specific area of emphasis or subject-matter, and this specific focus gives each science a unique identity among the sciences, as the specific concerns make each of them adopt certain unique or different sets of criteria, methods and features that fall outside or go far beyond the interest and methodological reach of other sciences. Harrington, for instance, stresses that a scientific way of proceeding in biochemistry is significantly different from a scientific way of proceeding in a subject like art criticism (*Ibid.*). It has rightly been asserted that the method employed in any discipline is determined by the particular object which the researcher has in view, and so there are as many types of the scientific method as there are scientific investigators (Teggart, 1960:3). Herein lies the differences between and among the sciences which allow nomenclature into subgroups. Generally, the sciences have been grouped into two kinds – those which study nature (the natural or physical sciences) and those which study humans and society (the cultural, human or social sciences), and are usually referred to as sciences of the mind.¹⁵ Each of the

¹⁴These arguments defeat the view that the degree to which a discipline is truly scientific depends on the degree to which it can be made mathematical (Palmer and Colton, 1964:264), or that the amount of science in any subject is equal to the amount of mathematics it contains (Teggart, 1960:157–158).

¹⁵Note, however, that some scholars divide the sciences into three categories, according to their methodologies and purposes. These are the analytical, normative and humanities (Gemtou, 2011:641). It is asserted that the analytical sciences aim at objective truth and an explanation of the world. They apply a nomological approach in order to include their results in a framework of laws and regularities. To the analytical sciences belong the natural (e.g. physics, chemistry, medicine) and social (e.g. economics, sociology) sciences, which have an empirical character, and also mathematics and logic,

natural sciences focuses on a part of the total natural environment, whereas each of the human sciences deals with an aspect of the entire social experience. Each sees phenomena from a particular perspective, but each, when well done, adds its own contribution to the total record of natural and social experience.

In view of this division of labour, it is improper to argue that any one particular science or group of sciences is inherently better than, and superior to, other sciences. Some are perhaps more generally useful, that is, more interesting to a wider segment of the public or readership, or more suggestive at a particular time and place than others, but the distinctions are like those between a miniature and a mural, a sonnet and an epic poem.¹⁶ As Giner (1972:10) has argued, the distinctions between the sciences are convenient but not really substantial, because the methods and results of each science are necessary to the others: there is a constant and natural osmosis between them. Even the so-called *specific areas of emphasis* are not really significant in the case of some sciences. Gorman (1952:89), for example, argues that astronomy has connections with biology, mathematics, physics and psychology. Moreover, because of the nature of some of their activities, some of the social sciences are sometimes given natural science status. Giner (1972:15) intimates that when sociology attempts to understand the meaning of social life in each instance studied, it is one of the human sciences, but when it attempts to disclose objective causal relations, correlations, and regularities, it is one of the natural sciences. J.S. Mills also categorises the sciences into *exact* and *inexact* (D'oro, 2009:143). The sciences of the mind (social or human sciences) are inexact sciences because the complexity of their subject-matter renders precise predictions hard to obtain, while the natural sciences tend to be exact sciences. Mills shows,

which provide formal tools. The normative sciences are those disciplines which research ways of regulating the world. They are said to apply a regulative-deontological approach and their methodology is based on principles that imply criteria of right or wrong. The most significant examples of the normative sciences are jurisprudence and ethics. The humanities are those sciences which aim at the interpretation and understanding of human actions and intellectual works by drawing their basic methodological tools from the hermeneutical tradition and rely on their central analytic category, which is *comprehension*, that seeks to ascribe meaning, in a kind of subjective transfer, to the spirit of these actions, or to works of art. The humanities are value-oriented, and to them belong such sciences as, among others, philology, art history and theatre studies (*Ibid.*). Note also that the distinction between the two groups of sciences as the sciences of nature and sciences of the mind, goes back to Immanuel Kant's distinction between theoretical and practical reason and was taken up by neo-Kantians such as W. Dilthey, W. Windelband, and H.J. Rickert to develop an argument against methodological unity between the two categories of the sciences (see D'oro, 2009:142).

¹⁶Hughes (2001:6) has argued that the distinction, first made by the ancient Greeks, between *nature* and *culture* is not an absolute one because in an important sense, culture is part of nature in the sense that culture is the product of a species of animal, the human species.

however, that there are a number of natural sciences, such as meteorology and tides, in which strict predictions cannot be attained either. On this score, Mills places such natural sciences in the same category as the sciences of the human mind and refers to all of them as inexact sciences (*Ibid.*).

It is interesting to note also that in terms of philosophical premise, there is, in point of fact, no difference between the sciences; for they were all born of a pathetic desire to help humans escape from the uncertainties of life, of a passionate longing to endow our contradictory world with meaning, and of a quest for certainty (Renier, 1950:145). That is why Magee (1973:17) posits that ideas originally worked out in the natural sciences have been extended to the social sciences, and that it is necessary to show how the two are parts of a single philosophy which embraces both the natural and the human worlds. Again, it is essential to note that the natural sciences equally have an *art*¹⁷ dimension in terms of non-experimentation. In the social or human sciences, laboratory experiments are not possible. In the natural sciences, too, it is not all aspects of each subject that could be subjected to laboratory experimentation. Every discipline has a history, but experiment cannot be applied to the historical content of any discipline, including the natural sciences. Again, natural scientists sometimes resort to subjective judgment where mere intuition, feelings and taste come to play (Gabriel, Fagbenle and Jaja (1998:3). Porter (1994:vii) has also posited that natural science is not always impersonal: a method, a system, a technique for generating knowledge; it is also highly personal because of the involvement of the individuals who have discovered its truths. Similarly, Albert Einstein (cited in Knight, 1996:xi) is reported to have described natural science as being a free creation of the human mind, while Knight (*Ibid.*) also asserts that natural science is a fully human activity.

Considering the definitions of science above, it is logical to maintain that history is a scientific body of knowledge. Of course, some scholars and schools of thought often apply the term *science* in a general sense to refer to any branch or department of systematised knowledge considered as a distinct field of investigation or object of study (Princeton University, 2006). In fact, if we go strictly by the view that science is a collection of well-attested theories which explain the patterns and regularities and irregularities among carefully studied phenomena, or a collection of theories, history could never be denied the status of a science. The reason is that theories are important elements in every research work, irrespective of the areas in which they are undertaken. In their interpretations, historians are guided by theoretical, or conceptual, frameworks or perspectives (Herbst, 1962:148). In view of this, history has been described as an attempt to establish and illustrate laws to explain the behaviour of society. With regard to theory, there are many models of the past,

¹⁷For instance, medicine is often perceived more as an art than a science, because of the wider scope of the relationship between the doctor and the patient, which is not consistent with strict scientific limitations. Moreover, medical practice is linked to moral evaluations, as doctors are required to provide services to all people regardless of social and other criteria (see Gemtou, 2011:640).

generally divided into the *how* and *why* theories: those which advance some form of evolutionary hypothesis, and those which classify and explain events in terms of recurrent situations respectively. By examining historical problems in theoretical frameworks, historians synthesise and impose order on their facts, as, for example, Boahen (2000; 1975) has done in the cases of Ghana and Africa, using the theory of *evolution and change*. Facchi ("The Meaning of History", retrieved September 17, 2017) maintains that the view that history is but a casual and meaningless succession of events, to which an order is given only by their occurrence or succession in the course of time is better. He argues that this theory is methodologically the best, and in the best accordance with the general course of modern science. In saying this, Facchi is giving history a scientific status and also drawing people's attention to the application of theoretical perspectives in historical interpretations.

Genuinely, following Thomas Kuhn, qualitative researchers have generally accepted the view that all observation is theory-laden, that our understanding of the world is inherently shaped by our prior ideas and assumptions about the world, and that there is no possibility of a purely objective or theory-neutral description independent of some particular perspective (Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2008:876). Thus, theory is a *natural* component of all research, whether or not it is explicitly acknowledged. Historical research is universally acknowledged to be a highly qualitative study. Consequently, some historians, philosophers, and other scholars argue that though events do not repeat themselves in exactly the same manner, there are basic relationships inherent in sets of historical events, or patterns in historical phenomena, which permit the construction of theories or make it flexible to formulate and apply them. They have maintained that both the *macroscopic* or *group* historical phenomena, like the rise and fall of civilisations, revolutions, wars, coups d'état, migration, social classes, etc.; and the *microscopic* actions of individual human beings may possibly exhibit principles of regularity and uniformity similar to those which Galileo, Bacon, Newton, Einstein and others have shown to pertain among events in physical nature (Dray, 1967:520). With this notion, and following Carl Hempel's argument that the description and explanation of historical events are subsumptive descriptions and explanations which share the same logical structure as descriptions and explanations in natural sciences (Dray, 1964:3; D'oro, 2009:143), some historians, including P.T. Bauer, Hans Meyerhoff, Morris R. Cohen and Ernest Nagel, J.C. Aggarwal, etc., have assumed that without a theoretical framework, history cannot be fully understood. The general conclusion that has been drawn is that there is nothing so useful to historical reconstruction and understanding as a good theory (see Adjepong, 2013:1-18, for more details). What these scholars mean is that when a historian observes, for instance, that in the past people migrated because poor economic conditions rendered survival difficult, he presupposes the general law that people would tend to migrate to regions which offer favourable economic conditions. As Ryle (1962:289) insists, a historian's account, or description, of the course of a battle is his theory of that particular conflict. Our view of history, as expressed in the *Evaluation and Conclusion*

section, embodies our theory of the nature of history. Historical explanations are, accordingly, theoretical facts and scientific. It has even been argued that the fact that natural scientists are concerned with predicting future events, whereas historians are concerned exclusively with understanding past ones, makes no difference to the logical structure of their respective explanations (D'oro, 2009:143).

Of course, the view that historical interpretations are scientific and the fact that historians interpret their facts within conceptual frameworks, trying to answer the *how* and *why* questions of historical events, implies that history is a science. But what is more important is the view that science is a body of knowledge. Indeed, if science is defined as a systematically organised body of knowledge about a particular subject, and as an activity that is the object of a careful study or that is carried out according to a developed method, then history, like any other discipline, is a science. In fact, many historians, and scholars in related fields, confirm the scientific nature of history by insisting that there is no clear-cut distinction between history and the natural or physical sciences, and, for that matter, history is a science. Kitson Clark (cited in Barraclough, 1978:232), for instance, contends that there can be no clear frontier between what can be called *historical* and what is *scientific*, and that scientific methods and techniques virtually extend into more and more fields of study. Rowse (1946:2-3) has argued that in the course of the nineteenth century, the methods of evolutionary science affected the study of history, but what is not so well grasped is that with the theory of evolution, history may be said to have permeated the whole conception of science. Sir Frederick Pollock (cited in Hayek, 1991:148) has also maintained that the doctrine of evolution is nothing else than the historical method applied to the facts of nature. Evolution is just the projection of the idea of human history upon the world of nature (Teggart, 1960:293). This explains why it is often assumed that the method of investigation developed by the early historians is the precursor of the scientific method (Gorman, 1952:712).

In fact, if we accept the views that science deals with objects, entities, things and their relations, and that the focus of scientific investigations is the study of change in objects, entities and things, then we should appreciate that history is also a science in view of the similarities in the scientific evolutionary method and the historical method. The reason is that the scientific method is both deductive and inductive in nature, and this is the same with the historical method. In both natural science and history, the deductive approach is usually adopted to handle questions of consistency – to treat issues of simple generalisations. In dealing with questions of evolution, however, the deductive method helps much less towards answering, and so scientists often resort to the inductive method. W. Arthur Lewis (1965:14-15) maintains that in studying how things emerge and why they change, or to understand how or why something happens, we look at the facts themselves, and that is to say that we apply the inductive method to historical data. Essentially, the historical method, which shares the spirit of the scientific method, is the procedure adopted in history to explain or elucidate a given present by stating its antecedents in time, or to

describe how the present came to be what it is. This method involves the recognition of three things: an existent present; a point of departure or beginning; and a series of occurrences connecting the origin with the present (Teggart, 1960:83). Evidently, history is a science because, although it concerns itself with events, it also studies evolution and change in events in society and, conceived as such, leads to scientific investigations (*Ibid.*, pp. 77 and 81; Boahen, 2000:xi). In any case, Berlin (p. 2) posits that it is not difficult to see why there has been a strong desire to regard history as a natural science, because history is an account of what humans have done and of what has happened to them, and humans are largely, or wholly, a three-dimensional object in space and time, subject to natural laws: his bodily wants can be studied empirically as those of other animals. Berlin adds that basic human needs, such as food or shelter or procreation, and their other biological or physiological requirements, do not seem to have altered greatly through the millennia, and the laws of the interplay of these needs with one another and with the human environment could all in principle be studied by the methods of the biological and, perhaps, psychological sciences.

It is generally believed that the modern step-by-step scientific method was invented in ancient Greece, with the development of logic and metaphysics. During the ancient civilisations of Egypt, India, China and Greece, humans applied the prevailing scientific knowledge to agriculture, medicine, industry, construction and in the explanation of nature and natural phenomena (Ajaegbo, July, 2013:3). However, it was not until during the scientific revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe that modern science developed, characterised by a new method of inquiry called the *scientific method*. This method has never enjoyed a status of stability in its historical development. There have been variations in the areas of emphasis from one generation to another. Caws (1967:340) has identified three main tendencies associated with three significant periods of philosophical activity in the field. During the era of ancient philosophy, the scientific method consisted of principles laid down as regulative for the acquisition of knowledge of the world in general; in the era of early modern philosophy, it consisted in the principles laid down as regulative for the acquisition of the special kind of natural knowledge known as scientific; while in the last two centuries it has embodied the principles abstracted from the practice of persons successfully engaged in the acquisition of scientific knowledge. In the contemporary era, some scholars maintain that the scientific method essentially involves a careful observation and controlled experimentation and rational interpretation of results, preferably by use of mathematics (Ajaegbo, July, 2013:3). In the general sense, however, the scientific method denotes the attempt to understand and explain logically and objectively a specific area of reality. F.C.S. Schiller holds the view that the application of the scientific method is universal (Renier, 1950:149). Caws (1967:339) also emphasises the pervasiveness of the scientific method when he argues that

The term "scientific method," if applied to scientific investigation in general or to something allegedly embodied in the practice of every branch of science, can only refer to the lowest common denominator of a

range of methods devised to cope with problems as diverse as classifying stars and curing diseases. If such a common denominator exists – that is, if some recognizable characteristics are shared by the extremes of the continuum of methods plausibly called "scientific" – it can amount to little more than fidelity to empirical evidence and simplicity of formulation, fidelity to evidence taking precedence in cases of conflict. However, these two overriding requirements for scientific activity do not constitute a specification of steps to be taken by scientists, and even the primary requirement (fidelity of empirical evidence) must be given up if mathematics is to be regarded as a science.

This argument appears to synthesise the different conceptions of the scientific method, as it, obviously, makes it clear that the scientific method is the method all scientists use in their examination of phenomena. To apply a *method* or *methods* is to use some particular technique or techniques in the pursuit or study of something (Harrington, 2005:4). Actually, the term *method* comes from the Greek terms *μέτα*, meaning *along*, and *όδός*, meaning *way*, and, strictly speaking, implies *following a way* (Caws, 1967:339). Giner (1972:33) shows that *method* is the process of research which the mind must follow in order to increase its knowledge about something, while Caws (1967:339) understands it to mean the specification of steps which must be taken, in a given order, to achieve a given end. From both, we gather that method implies the logical and orderly following of a laid down or standard procedure to help realise an end and increase our knowledge about that end. The steps outlined by the scientific method entails the formulation and definition of the problem to be studied or statement of the problem; statement of the objectives or purpose of the study; review of the relevant existing literature; formulation of working hypothesis; observation: measurement and recording of facts related to the study; methodology: classification of recorded facts – data processing, data analysis and interpretation; establishment of relationships aimed at formulating generalisations; and presentation of results or report writing. If these procedures are what constitute the method of science, then history is a science because of its strict adherence to these systematic procedures of research. At the same time, history is a method of finding out what humans did in the past, how they did it and the consequences of their past actions. Historians commonly study the actions of humans who lived in an ages or societies different from their own. The process of inquiry into the past experiences of humans is called the historical method. Like the scientific method, the method of historical inquiry is systematic, organised and also follows virtually the same step-by-step approach.

Interestingly, the argument that history is a science is not a recent invention. In the seventeenth century C.E., the Muslim scholar, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sa' di, characterised history as science (Wilks, 1970:15). The Patrician historians, who emerged in the eighteenth century to contribute to the development of American historiography, considered history as science, as a result of the impact on them of the writings of Sir Isaac Newton, who applied rational mathematical methods to arrive at some truths and natural laws concerning the natural

world (Ifammose, 2006:10). With the growth and spread of *positivism*, which extolled the values of science and reason, in the nineteenth century, historians began to attempt to apply the scientific method in their studies of the past in order to better understand the human past. Henceforth, leading European historians began to assert the scientific status of their discipline. Positivist historians, for example, went as far as equating history with the natural sciences, which have certain general laws. They contended that if natural scientists could discover *new truths* or make inventions using the inductive reasoning, then historians could also use the inductive view of the historical method to reconstruct the human past more objectively or accurately from the available facts derived from historical sources (Ajaegbo, July, 2013:3). German idealists also defined history as a scientific reconstruction of what happened, a task performed with intense archival research (Renier, 1950:167). The twentieth century also produced many scholars who held the same view. In his 1903 Cambridge inaugural lecture, John Bagnell Bury (1861–1927), also declared that “History is a science, no less and no more” (Rowse, 1946:86). What Bury meant was that history could be regarded as a science just like physics, chemistry or biology, not in terms of subject-matter but in nature. As if he were supporting Bury, Barraclough (1978:269) has also posited that history “is as scientific as any other of the ‘sciences’: neither more nor less.” In Fustel de Coulanges’ view (cited in Hirst, “What is History – A Collection of Definitions”, retrieved September 17, 2017), “History is and should be science. ... History is not the accumulation of data of events of every kind which happened in the past. It is the science of human societies.”

The insistence that history is a science, with rigorous scientific methods, was a particularly dominant theme in many European universities in the twentieth century and produced some results. It led, for example, to greater care and caution in ascertaining and stating the truth, to a watchful emphasis upon exact accuracy at every point, in examining evidence and arriving at conclusions from it (Rowse, 1946:86). This ensured a constant awareness of the dangers of bias and attempts on every side to counteract it. Historians of today also share the spirit of the scientist and use scientific procedures in collecting data for their historical studies, just as many other disciplines that employ the scientific method also do. Thucydides established the tradition of the *critical method* in historical analysis, and other scientists and practitioners, following the inventor, have sought to adapt the methods of science to their special problems of study. Kalu (1993:167) shows, however, that this view was flawed not only because it assumed that all historical facts existed in written records but because it pretended that all historical facts could be accessible to the historian. The fact that this perspective of history was, to some degree, flawed is beyond repute, but rejecting it on the basis that “... historical facts are fragmentary” is what appears not convincing enough. In fact, history is not the only science that is pursued under difficulties. As Hockett (1961:4) rightly points out, all human knowledge is fragmentary and it is inconceivable that it can ever be complete.

Indeed, the views expressed by some respondents depict history as a method of inquiry. For example, Acquah

(personal interview, July 8, 2018) interpreted history as a *means* of unveiling past human activities for the purpose of using them as an active tool of correction for those living in the present in order to shape their future for a better living. Gyamea (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) also emphasised that history is the *process* of learning from the past to help in the betterment of the present and future. Nevertheless, it has been maintained that the scientific status of any endeavor is determined by its method of investigation, not what it studies, or when the research was done, and certainly not by who did the investigation. All sciences use the empirical method (“Unit 1: The Definition and History of Psychology”, retrieved October 20, 2017). In fact, as indicated above, the original meaning of history is research or any learning or knowing achieved through a vigorous and a critical inquiry, and implies the act of judging the evidence in order to separate fact from fiction. In the acquisition of historical information, historians employ techniques which are generally referred to as the critical or historical method. The historical method is scientific in the sense that its rules are subject to verification. By this method, professional historians employ techniques that allow them to carefully sift, test, collate and evaluate historical documents, in addition to the use of the most vigorous methods in judging the objectivity, impartiality, and accuracy of historical works, in order to arrive at accurate conclusions. The trained historian is, thus, no less systematic, exact and critical in his research than the chemist or the biologist. For instance, the anthropologist, E.E. Evans-Pritchard (cited in Marwick, 1993:156), sounding as if disturbed, has queried:

When will people get it into their heads that the conscientious historian ... is no less systematic, exacting and critical in his research than a chemist or biologist, that it is not in method that ... [historical] science differs from physical science but in the nature of the phenomena they study.

Renier (1950:245) has also maintained that there is no difference between the natural scientist and the historian in terms of the application of the scientific method in the sense that

... history ... is a discipline which approaches its subject-matter in the same scientific spirit as [the natural] science[s]. It has the same way of looking upon the gradual acquisition of accurate knowledge; like [physical] science, it seeks knowledge for the sake of action, and tests the value of its knowledge in the process of acting.

The American diplomatic historian, Schmitt (1960:23), has added that if science is defined as a

... ‘systematised, organised, formulated knowledge’, ... [then] history, the original meaning of which is investigation, is ... a science if it is pursued with the sole aim of ascertaining the truth, if all relevant facts are diligently searched for, if presuppositions and prejudices are eliminated, if the constants and the variables are noted and plotted with the same care that is the rule in the natural sciences.

All these arguments are proofs of the scientific nature of history. As a science, history has been defined as the interpretation of what are considered to be significant human activities in the past and the processes by which these activities are selected, investigated and analysed (Government of Ireland, 1999:12). Put differently, in his attempt to offer a knowledge of the past, the historian selects and reads diverse sources, assesses the value and relevance of the disparate and often conflicting evidence, engages with other historians and interpretations, and then puts together an understanding, an explanation and, ultimately, an interpretation of past societies and events ("Thinking History", retrieved July 2, 2018). At any rate, every science has a philosophy which specifies the subject-matter and the specific purpose of the science and justifies its practice on the basis of society's need of it or its contributions to the development and survival of society. History insists that in spite of the changes in the traffic from the past to the present, and from the present to the future, there are still continuities, which establish connections between the three dimensions of time: the past or yesterday; the present or today; and the future or tomorrow (see Adjepong, 2018(a)). History, thus, places premium on the study of the past in the belief that a good understanding of the present and the ability to plan to meet the future require a comprehensive knowledge and an in-depth understanding of the past.

A respondent maintained that "history is the scientific study of past events with the view to understanding current events" (Kubi: WhatsApp communication, July 6, 2018), while another stated that "history is the scientific study and critical analysis of [hu]mankind's socio-cultural, political and economic past and how the events of the past have impacted on the present and the future" (Bronnie: WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018). Avoryi (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) maintained that history is the science that studies past events, civilisations, institutions and their effects on a society or a group of people, causing either a partial or a total change in the society in question. Facchi ("The Meaning of History", retrieved September 17, 2017) has also argued that the study of history is an endeavour to find in the past some light to clear and render easier our uncertain walking towards the future. In Ajaegbo's (July, 2013:6) candid opinion, history is the investigation, interpretation, record and study of all those aspects of the past of humankind, available either in memory or on material, which have meaning and significance to the present and future of society. Charles Austin Beard is reported to have argued in 1933 that a science of history, like the science of celestial mechanics, should be able to make possible the calculable prediction of the future in history, and bring about the totality of historical occurrences within a single field and reveal the unfolding future to its last (Hirst, "What is History", retrieved September 17, 2017). Adu-Boahen (2011:155-157) sums up all these views; for he maintains that history is a tool of enlightenment which enables students to appreciate their past and shows them the importance of history as being inseparable from the present and significant to the future. Thucydides, Polybius and Livy all shared this view, for they held that what is particularly beneficial and profitable in the study of history are the lessons applicable to present and future actions to be derived from it (Gay and Cavanaugh, 1972:157).

A Means of Understanding the Present and Forming a View of the Future for Development Purposes

... some ... historians ... see history ... in terms of the inexorable march across time of great forces, human or even divine, which explain both how we got to where we are and where we might be heading Historians explain the past in response to present-day concerns and questions. ... history tells us most of what we need to know about the future. Our destiny is disclosed in the grand trajectory of human history, which reveals the world today as it really is, and the future course of events (Tosh with Lang, 2006:28-29).

The above extract, like what we saw under *General Record of What Happened – Collective Memory and Ideology*, puts history in a chronological framework or in the context of time. This proves that history is concerned not only with the past, but also with the present and the future.¹⁸ Of course, there are many historians, such as Arnold J. Toynbee and Francis Fukuyama, and schools of thought, including Marxists and postmodernists, who apply the term *history* to some great process whereby the past unfolds in a series of stages into the present and on into the future (Marwick, "The Fundamentals of History", retrieved July 11, 2018). Carr (1987:3 and 62) defines history as an unending dialogue between the past and the present, with the function of the historian being to master and understand the past as a key to the understanding of the present. He insists that the function of history is to promote a profounder understanding of both the past and the present through the interrelationship between them. Burston (1962:1-2) also states that history is the study of the origins and evolution or development of the present, with the view to understanding how the most important things in the past directly contributed to the shape of the present. Beattie (1977:23-24) considers history as an account of past events leading up to and explaining the present. M.I. Finley has remarked that all interest in the past is a dialogue in the present, about the present (Isichei, 1997:25). It is clear from Finley's statement that the dialogue between the past and the present is, mainly, for the benefit of the present; going into the past to help understand the present. This conception of history indicates that the study of history is basically an analysis of the past in order that we may understand the present and guide our conduct into the future. In view of this definition, history is a continuous attempt by historians to extend human knowledge and understanding of what happened in the past, in order to understand the present and know how to build the future.

It is undeniable that only events already gone by could disclose the prevailing state of things. It is only through studying history that we could grasp how things came to be what they are, and it is only through history that we could begin to understand the factors behind the present state of affairs. Being conscious of this, one respondent

¹⁸Katsina ("Declining Interest in the Study of History in Nigerian Institutions", retrieved July 11, 2018) intimates that in the early twentieth century, some American historians argued that there was the need for a *new history*. What they meant was that the study of the past should be conducted in such a way as to illuminate the present and even guide humans' actions for the future.

maintained simply that history is the study of relevant past events and their relations with the present (Kuba: WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018). Tossah (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) also emphasised that history is the reconstruction or the study of past events so as to create a better understanding of present-day happenings. Baah (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) asserted that history is the study of relevant past events which enables us to understand present circumstances and tends to inform our decisions in the present. In Nyarko's view (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) history, as an academic discipline, is the study that seeks to interrogate the past in order to understand or form conclusions for the present. Thus, in tracing the steam-engine always back to the tea-kettle, the former British Prime Minister Robert Peel was only emphasising that current realities could not be understood without knowing how they came to be what they are now (Jay, 2007:120). Comparing what *was* with what *now is* helps us to gain a deeper understanding of the past and its meaning for the present. In other words, a knowledge of the past gives us a perspective on our societies today (Stearns et al., 2004:xxv). That is why in his introductory remarks to his presentation on the theme, "Post-War Regime Changes in Ghana and Understanding the Records", Osahene Boakye Djan (2011, October 19) advised that "We have to take history seriously, because if you do not know your history, you cannot understand your present." Obviously, since most current events have a past history, it is generally necessary for us to acquaint ourselves with this history if we desire to know and appreciate their real significance. The study of history certainly gives us the keys to unlock hitherto tightly sealed doors of the present, which then enables us to enter the doors to the future.

Some historians maintain that because every historical event is unique and unrepeatable, one could not generalise from history to formulate laws or patterns which could be used to predict future occurrences (Okonkwo, 1988:499). While appreciating this wisdom, it must equally admitted, as pointed out above, that a critical evaluation of the past helps us to read into the future. It is in appreciation of this fact that Miles (1989:16) has maintained that in finding the way to the future, our understanding of the past has a crucial part to play. In the preface to his first book, Leopold von Ranke asserts that his intention is not to show how the past is related to the present and the future. However, his admission that "History has had assigned to it the task of judging the past, of instructing the present for the benefit of the ages to come" (Tosh with Lang, 2006:7-8) suggests a connection between the past, the present and the future. This is, of course, a hard historical fact. History is not just about the past. It is also about the present and future because it most usefully illuminates the present and suggests the shape of the future (Moss, 2005:xiv). Indeed, it has rightly been stated that historical inquiry starts with the past, makes the present its sheet anchor and points to the future ("Chapter II: Methodology", retrieved July 11, 2018). It is probably in line with this view that the former Canadian Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker remarked that "There can be no dedication to Canada's future without a knowledge of its past" (Jay, 2007:118). Actually, historians place premium on the scientific reconstruction of the past in

their belief that life could only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards. In the context of this view, our search of the records of the past and what we discover therein should prepare or empower us for the future.

Zinn (1970:26) has argued that historical writing is most *true* when it is appropriate simultaneously to what was in the past, to the conditions of the present, and to what should be done in the future. A respondent also observed that the term history refers to the study of the lives and activities of the people of the past in an attempt to understand the present and make projections into the future (Ackah: WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018). Takyi (WhatsApp communication, July 5, 2018) opined that history is the account or record of past human activities which provides a better understanding of present human activities as well as shape the future. Mensah (WhatsApp communication, July 5, 2018) posited that history is a critical study of development in society over time, an examination of how past human actions and events affect the present and shape the future. In Tetteh's view (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018), history, is well depicted by the phrase "looking back, moving forward", and, thus, defined history as the study of the relevant past which seeks to chart courses in the present to enable one understand the future. On his part, Oklikah (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) interpreted history in two senses. He stated, "In my own understanding, history is a study of past human activities in order to understand present and future situations. Also", he continued, "history is a comparison of the past and the present in order to understand [contemporary] society better and have a better future."

In summing up, historical reconstruction, as the arguments have stressed, interprets and gives meaning to past phenomena. Accordingly, it provides a better understanding of the past. This understanding of the past, in turn, helps in our better comprehension of the present, owing to the rootedness of present structural and cultural arrangements in past practices – trajectories, turning-points, ramifying causal chains, etc. It is also a fact that although human behaviour is often unpredictable, a better understanding of the world through the study of history could provide valuable insights into our future. The fact remains that the more we know about the past, the more cautious we are in our present situation, and the more ready we would be towards the future. Regarding this explanation of history, Oakeshott (1936:76) has emphasised that

... there is what may be called a practical past Here the past is thought of as merely that which preceded the present, that from which the present has grown or developed, and the significance of the past is taken to lie in the fact that it has been influential in deciding the present or future fortunes of men. The past, that is to say, is thought of in terms of the present and as explanatory of the present: it becomes a storehouse of political wisdom, an authority for religious belief, the raw material for literature, or even a way of expressing a philosophical system.

It should be noted that this definition takes account of the fact that the past affects the present, and the effects of the

past, added to those of present occurrences, impact on the future by means of inheritance. The objective here is to satisfy the nature of human life, which is never simply lived in the present alone but rather in three worlds of one, that is, one that was and one that will be. As Breisach (1994:2) emphasises, we know these three worlds as separate concepts in theory, but we experience them as inextricably linked and as influencing each other in many ways. At any rate, it is crucial to note that a particularly important idea inherent in this interpretation of history is the notion of development. Teggart (1960:224) has asked the extent to which the study of history contributes to the well-being of our fellow humans and to society. In response to this question, we wish to emphasise that although the contributions of historical inquiries have so far not, and at present do not, and may never in the future come close to those of natural science and technology, the view that historical inquiries provide an understanding of the present and insight into the future implies that historical studies possess enormous value, in terms of development, in the contemporary times. Katsina ("Declining Interest in the Study of History in Nigerian Institutions", retrieved July 11, 2018) emphasises that history provides solutions to problems compounded by series of events and also, and particularly, serves as a formula for determining the extent to which society develops or remain stagnant. In saying that "History not used is nothing, for all intellectual life is action, like practical life, and if you don't use the stuff well, it might as well be dead", Arnold J. Toynbee (Hirst, "What is History? – A Collection of Definitions", retrieved September 17, 2017) is highlighting the point that historical studies have practical uses, or development-oriented qualities.

The Ministry of Education (Ghana) (September, 2010:ii) defines history as the study the past to help us understand our present situation so that we can build a better future. The Ministry insists that history has "... relevance for the development of the Nation" (*Ibid.*). Indeed, some of our respondents appreciated the development potentials of history. For instance, after defining history as the scientific study of important events or happenings in the past that helps us to understand the present and to shape the future, Gideon Yeboah (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) confidently argued that this definition, in his view, encompasses and exposes the importance of the study of history for purposes of development. Also, in throwing more light on his interpretation of history, Ayiza (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) stated that history is a discipline that teaches societies the factors (human actions) that contribute towards the development of society and enables the people of today to make use of the past (yesterday) to understand the present (today) so as to achieve a better future (tomorrow). He added that history is a catalyst for development; for it teaches the present generation to know the strengths and weaknesses of their foundation (their yesterday or their past) and enables them to speed up their efforts towards the development of their future (tomorrow). Kumadoh's definition of history was the study of events of the past, including the economic, social and political lifestyles of several cultural societies and their impacts on the development of the world (WhatsApp Communication, July 4, 2018). Gideon Asante Yeboah's definition of history clearly emboldens and concretises the *development* argument. In Yeboah's view,

History is an embodiment of the past that seeks to inculcate in the existing generation the social, political, cultural, intellectual, emotional and psychological heritage that are basic necessities for the development of the present and the future of a society. Thus, history is the architect of the progress of a society ... allowing the present to learn from the important decisions and actions of the past and to take steps in the right direction to develop, both as individuals and as societies (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018).

As is clear, these views substantiate the fact that historical science contributes significantly towards national development (see Adjepong and Kwarteng, 2017). Undoubtedly, *development* is not an easy concept to define. Scholars emphasise different aspects of it and continue to struggle for a precise focus and meaning. The reason is that there are so many parameters and indices one would have to consider before being able to define *development*, due mainly to the fact that the phenomenon of development permeates the economic, political and social dimensions of life. In spite of this, it is often acknowledged that the concept of development entails ideas of *change* and *progress*. In relation to societies, therefore, development implies a process of change to what is a more *advanced* state.¹⁹ Hence, the major concern of development theories is to examine and understand how this process takes place. Although development is often used simply as a synonym for economic progress, attempts are made in today's world to expand the confines or broaden the scope of the concept by introducing other elements besides economic progress. There are attempts to substitute for the term development other symbols representing what is good and desirable in the realisation of the human potential, both personal and collective.

Among the new voices in the development discourse is the definition of development as the achievement of the necessary conditions that lead to good life as defined by a local community. Thus, in general, development denotes both the qualitative and quantitative increase in the well-being of the people in a country or area. In other words, development implies improvement in all the various facets of a people's culture, particularly in the areas of quality education, health, nutrition, portable water, good roads, good governance and democracy, among others. To make this point clearer, Duncan, Jancar-Webster and Switky (2004:484) have designed an analytical framework, composed of five components, to define development. These components are economic, the health of the population, literacy, environmental sustainability and civil rights, particularly gender rights. This shows that there is no one particular strategy of development but rather several models.

¹⁹The term *development* is often used interchangeably with *modernisation*. Like development, modernisation also defies a simple definition. Hence, different scholars use the term in different senses. In general terms, however, modernisation implies a transformation from a backward state to a more developed or advanced state so that improvements are witnessed in all aspects of a society's culture or in all sectors of society.

At this point, it is essential to state that there are scholars who insist that development could be better understood from a historical perspective because of the development inclinations of historical studies. In fact, at the end of the Cold War, a group of historians and social scientists set out to examine development as *history*, in order to understand and offer solutions to the prolonged crisis of development that African, Asia and Latin American countries experienced (Phillips, 1984:112). These scholars proposed to use history as the methodology for understanding development, rather than constructivist development theories to explain history and model for the future. The idea of studying development as history, or adopting history as a method for the study of development, points to the fact that the historical study of any society, community, association, institution, process, event, individual, etc. implies a study of the development of such entities from a historical perspective – historical studies are, both general and specific, development studies. This is what is commonly referred to as the *historical perspective on development* which is usually the focus of literature on development history (Nunn, 2014:347–402).

In whatever way development is understood, there is no doubt that history is significant in the process. In terms of policy formulation, decision making, leadership, etc., the lessons of history could hardly be ignored (Adjepong and Kwarteng, 2017). It should also be noted that in the contemporary era where so much emphasis has been placed on education, the school system, which searches for and imparts knowledge of all forms, is one of the best means, if not the most important vehicle, through which development is achieved. And to the extent that the study of history provides models, deriving from past experiences, for application today and tomorrow, history contributes towards realising the progress contemporary society so much desires. In any case, Tarikh Daudi has reminded us that history is not simply information regarding the affairs of dead rulers but is a science which expands the intellect and furnishes the wise with examples (cited in Aggarwal, 2004:3). It was probably this conception that informed Danful's argument that history seeks to explain the past to help improve upon the present and the future, and that the quality of every society's present and future life is dependent on its past experiences (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018).

Evaluation and Conclusion

This study has examined some of the popular definitions or major interpretations of history. The relevance of this undertaking lies in the fact that until this study was undertaken, there was no major study which had examined some of the major definitions, descriptions, explanations and interpretations of history. In its survey, the study found that history has, in some quarters, been interpreted as the past; as what happened in the past; as inquiry or research; as a written record of what happened in the past; as a general record of what happened in the past, representing the collective memory of society and used for ideological purposes; as a scientific body of knowledge and a method of inquiry; and as a means of understanding the present and forming a view of the future as well as a tool for developmental purposes. Some of these definitions of history are popular with some people and have been used in different contexts. However,

we observe that in the contemporary world, some of them are highly inappropriate for our proper understanding of history and are, therefore, unacceptable. This is not to deny the fact that history has some important features which influence those who formulate these definitions. In our view, however, the lack of consensus on the part of historians and allied scholars on what actually history is, the fact that scholars have not united under any higher principles to endorse a common interpretation of history, poses a big challenge to history teachers, students and ordinary readers of history. Meanwhile, it is clear from all indications that from the numerous interpretations, a careful observation could be made of the nature of history, based on which a new definition that captures the important elements of history could be constructed for our contemporary understanding of the concept and discipline of history, and application in teaching and research.

There is no doubt that history is principally concerned with the past. However, the philosophy behind this concern is to interpret and give meaning to the past in order to understand the present and gain insight into the future. In essence, the ultimate goal of historical studies is to acquire knowledge on the past and make a judicious application of that knowledge for present and future purposes. In its reconstruction of the past, history employs the historical or critical method, which is a systematically organised approach in historical research. In view of these, Iasilli ("Towards a Political and Introspective Historiography" (February 9, 2019), retrieved November 11, 2019) insists that while many people may consider history as a study of analysing the past, or as a way to predict the future, history should be understood more as a method aimed at keeping human consciousness of the past enduring through the present and future. It has also been acknowledged that history is a systematically organised body of learning, just as physics or chemistry or any other body of knowledge is. Taking all these features into consideration, the conclusion that could obviously be drawn is that history is a scientific discipline and, as such, a good definition of history must incorporate the scientific nature of the discipline. At the same time, history, like many other sciences, has an *art* dimension.²⁰ The historian's own disposition and objectives often influence the way he interprets history (see Adjepong, 2015 for

²⁰It is essential to note that even the natural sciences have an art dimension, because natural scientists sometimes resort to subjective judgment where mere intuition, feelings and taste come to play (Gabriel, Fagbenle and Jaja, 1998:3). Porter (1994:vii) has also posited that natural science is not always impersonal: a method, a system, a technique for generating knowledge; it is also highly personal because of the involvement of the individuals who have discovered its truths. Similarly, Albert Einstein (cited in Knight, 1996:xi) is reported to have described natural science as being a free creation of the human mind, while Knight (*Ibid.*) also asserts that natural science is a fully human activity. Medicine is often perceived more as an art than a science, because of the wider scope of the relationship between the doctor and the patient, which is not consistent with strict scientific limitations. Moreover, medical practice is linked to moral evaluations, as doctors are required to provide services to all people regardless of social and other criteria (see Gemtou, 2011:640).

more details). This is the reason why Herbst (1962:148) has emphasised that the framework the historian employs in his analysis of the past does not arise automatically from the facts but is superimposed on them by the historian himself. In addition, good historians, according to Wilhelm von Humboldt (cited in Richards, 2017:6) and Robert J. Richards (2017:21), often compose their accounts so as to move their readers' emotions in ways similar to reality itself. Accordingly, any definition of history must equally expose the *art* aspect of the discipline. Indeed, both Johann Gustav Droysen and Ernest Renan have maintained that history is the only discipline which enjoys the ambiguous fortune of being both a science and an art at the same time ("Historical Quotes", retrieved July 29, 2012). Von Humboldt and Thomas Babington Macaulay maintain that the historian is both a scientist and an artist (Richards, 2017:6 and 21). Indome (WhatsApp communication, July 4, 2018) has also posited that history is the art and science of unearthing relevant past records because of their relevance to the present.

It is now clear that however history is defined, the discipline has both *art* and *science* dimensions, not forgetting the fact that history is also a trade or a profession that is practised by professional historians. Eshun (telephone interview, July 8, 2018) helped to clarify this point by stating categorically that history is a course of study from which one could earn a living. In view of all these considerations, we opine that it is only appropriate to define history as *the science, art and practice of studying, interpreting and giving meaning to significant past human activities and events, through the application of the critical or historical (scientific) method of inquiry, with the view to understanding the present and having a perspective of the future*. This definition underscores the principle or concept of *historical connections* which indicates that although the subject-matter of history belongs mostly to the past, in reality and for practical purposes, the focus of history is on the present and the future, meaning that history is concerned with the three divisions of time: the past – yesterday, the present – today, and the future – tomorrow (see Adjepong, 2018(a)). This means that a good reconstruction of the past affords a comprehension of the present and a view of the future. This is the basis of the view of history as being all about activities of humans in time perspective – what was done, what is being done and what would be done. In its broadest ideological context, however, history may be defined as the philosophical study and reconstruction of the past to find solution to the greatest problem of where humans originated from, where we are now, and where we are going to or our likely destination. In this perspective, we could also define history as the scientific examination of human society, where *society* is taken to mean the timeless continuity of generations which connects together those of the community now dead with the living and the still unborn generations. Defined this way, historical studies may appear ambiguous to those whose impression about history is that it is solely concerned with the past. Again, this definition may be clear only to those seasoned minds which have observed the inseparable connection between the past, the present and the future.

At this point, we wish to emphasise our *scientific obligation* to acknowledge the fact that no historical work

is ever absolutely authoritative, ever completely definitive. Basically, every scientific work is no more than a temporary framework, fated to be superseded sooner or later by the works of other scholars (Ajayi, 2003:3). Generally, the results of all scientific researches are characteristically mutable; no discipline, whether belonging to the natural or social sciences, offers total knowledge. Indeed, real scientists explain their work and their problems in less assured tones. Each science changes its interpretations every few years, and on its frontiers hypotheses conflict. No science regards its findings at any time as conclusive; every assertion regarding the natural or social world is subject to challenge and revision. No idea is too sacred, no law too certain to be immune from questioning or attack whenever there is adequate evidence. Thus, by the arguments put forward in this study, we do not, under any circumstance, claim to have brought the debate on *what is history?* to a close. After all, the debate, as stated above, is a ceaseless one. As a result, we trust that some readers may probably not agree with our interpretation of history. Others may not necessarily disagree with our arguments and conclusions, but rather find it uneasy to immediately adapt to the perspective of history we espouse, having been so much familiar, for a long time, with some of the interpretations examined above. As Teggart (1960:163) emphasises, "... what is first learned imposes constraint upon the movement of thought. What one has been taught becomes in some sort a standard, and new ideas tend to present themselves as violations of an established order." An African adage also says, *one cannot learn to be left-handed in old age*. The only important thing we seek from readers is that however they define history, they should appreciate that chronology, or time sequence, is the framework of history (Caldwell, 1965:x), and, consequently, give due recognition to history's consciousness of, and concern with the three strands of time – the past, the present, and the future. Our proposition stems from our belief that it is in such a *continuum context* that the progressive, forward-looking, development penchants of history could be appropriately comprehended and vigorously exploited.

In fact, history has been described as one of the most vital activities in the social and cultural life of any nation and the stake that supports the human world and its development and progress. History, unlike technology, does not manufacture tools for immediate use; but like technology, it produces scientific knowledge that could be applied to practical human problems and ultimately effect a change. Thus, historical knowledge innovates and improves human life. To bring about change is to bring about development because change implies a process of gradual development, while development also usually implies a purposeful change over time in a specific direction, such as societies evolving and developing to higher levels. Even if we do not subscribe to this interpretation, and projection, of history, we should be humble and discerning enough to acknowledge that history, at least, is very crucial for the survival of all sciences, as each particular discipline has its particular history which it studies, thereby producing such disciplines as the history of accounting, of anthropology, of astronomy, of biology, of chemistry, of economics, of geology, of legal studies, of mathematics, of medicine, of philosophy, of sociology, of zoology, etc. This fact naturally

demands a compulsory study and reconstruction of the history of each discipline by the scientists who practise it in order to appreciate the context in which it evolved and developed, so as to understand its present circumstances and have a perspective of its future (see Adjepong, 2018(b) for more details). With regard to the social sciences, Foucault (1970:405) reminds us that

History constitutes ... for the human sciences, a favourable environment To each of the sciences of man it offers a background, which establishes it and provides it with a fixed ground and, as it were, a homeland; it determines the cultural area – the chronological and geographical boundaries – in which that branch of knowledge can be recognized as having validity Even when they avoid all reference to history, the human sciences ... never do anything but relate one cultural episode to another (that to which they apply themselves as their object, and that in which their existence, their mode of being, their methods, and their concepts have their roots); and though they apply themselves to their own synchronology, they relate the cultural episode from which they emerged to itself.

And in connection with medicine, this is what van Urk (1992:6) says:

So why should I – a pragmatic surgeon – wish to look over my shoulder at the history of medicine, or take time to nod to the innovators of former ages? The simple answer is that history is important, and that when I gulp for air to escape the deluge of up-to-the-minute information, it is the air of historical perspective that I seek. In fact, this is indispensable if we want to try to understand the present and anticipate trends for the future In my view, the stories of such battles, of the frustrations of researchers, the perseverance of individual physicians and the victories and defeats of the whole medical profession, should be told – and taught – again and again. But what I find most attractive about this book [A History of Medicine: From Prehistory to the Year 2020] is that it ... gives the facts to those of us in medicine who are looking for historical perspective

On this score, we would conclude that there is every justification for society as a whole and educational institutions in particular to promote the serious study of history in order to sustain the development of the various disciplines, so that society could continue to benefit from their invaluable individual and collective contributions to the development of contemporary society and bequeath a usable heritage to future generations.

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- [132] Adams, Frank Abeku. Aged 35 years, Business Development Consultant and Final Year Post-First Degree LLB Student, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, July 4, 2018.
- [133] Adjei Darko, Perpetual. Aged 30 years, Nurse at University of Cape Coast Hospital, Cape Coast, July 5, 2018.
- [134] Agyapong, Kingsley. Aged 28 years, Postgraduate (M.Phil.–History) Student, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, July 4, 2018.
- [135] Amegatse, Alex. Aged 25 years, B.A. (Arts) Linguistics and (History) Candidate Awaiting Graduation, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, July 4, 2018.
- [136] Ampem, Isaac. Aged 26 years, Final Year (Level 400) B.Ed. (Arts) (Religion and Human Values, and History) Student, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, July 4, 2018.
- [137] Appiah, Gabriel. Aged 36 years. Adjunct Lecturer in African and General Studies, Methodist University College, Dansoman, Accra, July 4, 2018.
- [138] Appiah, Joshua. Aged 24 years, B.A. (Arts) (History) Candidate Awaiting Graduation, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, July 4, 2018.
- [139] Appiah, Victoria Agyare. Aged 41 years, Principal Research Assistant, Department of Religion and Human Values, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, July 4, 2018.
- [140] Asalidiwo, Sulemana Salifu. Aged 37 years, Immigration Officer, Takoradi, July 6, 2018.
- [141] Asamoah, Gloria Asiedua. Aged 34 years, Administrator, Ghana Forestry Commission, Winneba, July 4, 2018.
- [142] Asiedu, Samuel Ofori. Aged 26 years, Graduated in 2016 with B.A. (Arts) (History and Philosophy), University of Cape Coast, July 4, 2018.
- [143] Avoryi, Gifty. Aged 24 years, B.A. (Arts) (History and Classics) Candidate Awaiting Graduation, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, July 4, 2018.
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- [145] Baah, John Kwabena. Aged 32 years, History Graduate and Civil Servant at Ministry of Defence, Burma Camp, Accra, July 4, 2018.
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- [147] Bronnie, Frederick Akoto. Aged 26 years, History Graduate and Assistant Supervisor of a Hotel, Kumasi, July 4, 2018.
- [148] Chapman, Regina Boatemaa. Aged 22 years, Third Year (Level 300) B.Ed. (Accounting) Student, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, July 4, 2018.
- [149] Danful, Gloria. Aged 37 years, History and Social Studies Tutor, Prampram Senior High School, Greater Accra Region, July 4, 2018.
- [150] Dankwa, Anastasia Adu. Aged 31 years, Principal Administrative Assistant, Directorate of Internal Audit, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, July 7, 2018.
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- [152] Fianke, Sena Awo. Aged 36 years, History and English Tutor (Community Service), Ashongman, Accra, July 4, 2018.
- [153] Frimpong, Eric. Aged 22 years. Third Year (Level 300) B.Com. (Accounting) Student, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, July 4, 2018.
- [154] Gyamea, Portia Nana. Aged 26 years, Graduated from University of Education, Winneba, in 2015 and now Businesswoman, Accra, July 4, 2018.
- [155] Gyan, Isaac. Aged 28 years, English Language Tutor, Odupong Community Senior High School, Kasoa, July 4, 2018.
- [156] Gyimah, Godwin. Aged 26 years, History Tutor, Sankofa Senior High School, Nkawkaw, July 4, 2018.
- [157] Indome, Isaac. Aged 29 years, Postgraduate (M.Phil.–History) Student, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, July 4, 2018.
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- [160] Kubi, Benjamin. Aged 37 years, Lecturer in the Department of Ghanaian Languages and Linguistics, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, July 6, 2018.
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- [166] Mohammed, Rafiatu. Aged 24 years, B.A. (Arts) (History and English) Candidate Awaiting Graduation, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, July 4, 2018.
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