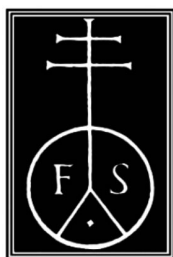


Storia della Storiografia  
Histoire de l'Historiographie  
History of Historiography  
Geschichte der Geschichtsschreibung

Rivista internazionale · Revue internationale  
International Review · Internationale Zeitschrift

85-86 · 1-2/2024



Fabrizio Serra · Editore · Pisa · Roma

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Autorizzazione del Tribunale di Milano n. 310 del 26/07/1982

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Stampato in Italia · Printed in Italy

ISSN 0392-8926 PRINT

E-ISSN 2281-1141

*Amministrazione e abbonamenti*

*Fabrizio Serra editore*<sup>®</sup>

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Historical Philosopher, Philosophical Historian:  
Estevão de Rezende Martins (1947-2025)  
*In memoriam*

Arthur Alfaix Assis

ESTEVÃO DE REZENDE MARTINS was a distinguished Brazilian intellectual whose thought and career traversed the domains of history and philosophy, with frequent excursions into pedagogy and international relations. His multifaceted intellectual skills and interests warrant his classification as a humanist in the truest sense. He stands as a pivotal figure in Brazilian theory, methodology, and philosophy of history, having decisively helped shape and institutionalize the field in the country. He was the founding president of the Brazilian Society for Theory and History of Historiography (SBTHH) and served as a bureau member of the International Commission for History and Theory of History from 2010 to 2022. Estevão's sudden death on January 14, 2025, at his home in Brasília at the age of 77, came as a shock to his family, his friends, students and readers. For many – including myself, a close friend and former student – it was felt as a great personal loss.

Mourning pushes us to pause, remember, reflect, and reassess the lives and works of those deceased, this time under a new light, a sorrowful and yet still valuable one, tinged by their very absence. This is a difficult light to bear or control, not least because it tends to project itself backwards into ourselves, prompting us to re-examine our own life paths and choices. Whoever ventures to face it runs the risk of putting themselves in a situation similar to that of the sorcerer's apprentice in Goethe's fa-

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[HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.19272/202411502009](https://doi.org/10.19272/202411502009) · *Storia della Storiografia*, 85-86 · 1-2/2024

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mous ballad (or in Walt Disney's even more famous movie *Fantasia*). I will take the risk and try to channel the light, assuming the added complication of trying to use magic to pay tribute to a master who will not be able to come back and set things right if the apprentice messes up.

To say it literally, I will, in the following, review essential bits of Estevão's career path and work, both of which are not well known to non-Portuguese readers. In doing so, I will revisit not only my own memories, but also two texts that I wrote/co-wrote on commemorative occasions: his 70th birthday (when André de Melo Araújo, Sérgio da Mata, and I organized a *Festschrift* in his honor), and the University of Brasília's conferral of the title of professor emeritus to him in 2018.<sup>1</sup> I will also elaborate on a shorter obituary that I wrote on behalf of the International Commission for History and Theory of Historiography, which was launched online shortly after his passing.<sup>2</sup> To supplement my own memories, I will occasionally resort to recollections by other friends, colleagues and former students, some of which appeared in a web page in memory of Estevão that I set up with the friendly aid of Marlon Salomon and Sérgio da Mata.<sup>3</sup> To check factual details and test some of my more speculative hypotheses I have also conducted unstructured interviews with two of Estevão's family members.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> André de Melo Araújo, Arthur Alfaix Assis and Sérgio da Mata, "Apresentação", *Entre Filosofia, História e Relações Internacionais. Escritos em homenagem a Estevão de Rezende Martins*, ed. by André de Melo Araújo, Arthur Alfaix Assis and Sérgio da Mata (São Paulo: LiberArs/Ed. SBTHH, 2017), 9-12; Arthur Alfaix Assis, "Estevão de Rezende Martins e a ciência da mediação", *Em Tempo de Histórias*, 34 (2019): 107-121.

<sup>2</sup> See [https://www.ichth.net/content\\_files/file/archive/36.pdf](https://www.ichth.net/content_files/file/archive/36.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> I will refer to this memorial page as ERM-MP to simplify references to it. Its web address is this: <https://www.remembr.com/estevao.martins>. As of February 2025, the page counts almost 90 contributions. Were it not for the technical difficulties of users posting texts or images directly to the site, I speculate that the number of contributions would be much higher.

<sup>4</sup> I owe special thanks to Martine Creusot de Rezende Martins for her thorough review and helpful comments on a draft of this text.

Estevão Chaves de Rezende Martins was born in 1947 in the city of Rio de Janeiro, to a high-middle class family who had ranked among the political and economic elites in nineteenth-century imperial Brazil. His parents were Lúcia Maria Chaves and José Maria de Rezende Martins, an architect. Estevão's ancestry includes his great-great-grandfather Estevão Ribeiro de Rezende (1777-1856), ennobled as the Marquis of Valença, landowner and politician; Baron Geraldo Ribeiro de Souza Rezende (1846-1907), great-grandfather, large-scale coffee producer; and Amélia de Rezende Martins (1877-1948), grandmother, Catholic intellectual and prolific author.<sup>5</sup>

Estevão was educated at St. Ignatius School, a prestigious Jesuit institution in his hometown, where he was among many talented students who would later distinguish themselves in various fields – including the law scholar Roberto Mangabeira Unger (1947), the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1951), or the novelist Paulo Coelho (1947). On his way to becoming a priest, Estevão began studying philosophy at a small Catholic college near São Paulo in 1967.<sup>6</sup> It was not a good time to enter adulthood, the clergy or academic life in Brazil, with the military dictatorship launched in 1964 heading towards its most nefarious phase of authoritarianism and repression. Estevão became close to Luciano Mendes de Almeida, a philosopher and theo-

<sup>5</sup> On Estevão and especially Geraldo de Rezende, see Amélia de Rezende Martins, *Um idealista realizador: Barão Geraldo de Rezende* (Rio de Janeiro: Laemmert, 1939). On Amélia de Rezende Martins herself, see Amanda Haydn, *Uma liderança feminina no laicato católico: a trajetória política e intelectual de Amélia Rezende Martins na Ação Social Brasileira, 1918-1932* (MA Thesis, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> The now dissolved Faculdade de Filosofia Nossa Senhora Medianeira had recently been moved from Nova Friburgo, in the state of Rio de Janeiro, to an area along a highway about 25 kilometers northwest of the city of São Paulo. See: Cleide Andrade and Marília Sposito, "O aluno do curso superior noturno: um estudo de caso", *Cadernos de Pesquisa*, 57 (1986): 3-19, see 4. Since the 1980s, the Jesuits have centralized their institutions of higher education for the preparation of future members of the order in the Jesuit College of Philosophy and Theology, in Belo Horizonte.

logian recently returned from extensive studies in Europe, who would emerge as a prominent figure in the history of the Catholic Church in Brazil, in part because of his courageous championing of human rights and democracy.<sup>7</sup> The monograph on *Freedom and Technique* with which Estevão completed his degree was supervised by Mendes de Almeida.<sup>8</sup>

Estevão's academic, linguistic and spiritual virtues must have impressed his Jesuit teachers, because in 1971 he was sent abroad for further studies. He was admitted to the University of Innsbruck, Austria, to study theology and canon law.<sup>9</sup> After a year of teaching at a private university back in Rio, he went to Munich in 1973 on a DAAD scholarship to begin his doctoral studies in philosophy. By this point, his departure from theology and from the prospect of a career in the priesthood was definitively sealed. He moved to Bavaria with the firm but unspecific intention of studying the concept of freedom in the history of philosophy. Already in his first days there he met Nelson Gonçalves Gomes, a fellow Brazilian doctoral student, who referred him to the eminent his-

<sup>7</sup> João A. Mac Dowell, "Dom Luciano Mendes de Almeida, SJ – in memoriam", *Síntese. Revista de Filosofia*, 33/107 (2006): 109-314. In 2014, the Vatican issued a *nihil obstat* for the beatification of Dom Luciano, as he is known. However, the path to a possible canonization is still in the early stages.

<sup>8</sup> In terms of Estevão's future path, a noteworthy encounter he had during these formative years was with Michel de Certeau. Besides being a theorist of culture and historiography, de Certeau was also a Jesuit priest, who visited Brazil on different occasions at the turn to the 1970s, and contributed among other things to the international exposure of human rights violations by the military government. See François Dosse. *Michel de Certeau. Le marcheur blessé* (Paris: La Découverte, 2002), 172-188. I remember Estevão mentioning that he attended classes (more likely lectures) by de Certeau, although, curiously, the latter does not seem to have been much discussed in the former's classes and texts.

<sup>9</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, "Memorial do concurso pleno e universal para Professor Titular de História da Universidade de Brasília" (Unpublished Document, 2008). Quoted by José Flávio Sombra Saraiva, "Estevão Chaves de Rezende Martins: um intelectual polivalente", *Entre Filosofia, História e Relações Internacionais*, ed. by André de Melo Araújo, Arthur Alfaix Assis and Sérgio da Mata (São Paulo: LiberArs/Ed. SBTHH, 2017), 315-322, see 319.



torian of philosophy Wolfgang Röd.<sup>10</sup> Under Röd's supervision, Estevão narrowed his research focus to the notion of freedom in Kant's "pre-critical" texts, completing the dissertation in 1976.<sup>11</sup> In addition to his supervisor, Estevão credited at least two other documents then working at the University of Munich as key formative influences: the historian Thomas Nipperdey and the philosopher Hans-Michael Baumgartner.

Following the pattern of a classical history of ideas, Estevão's dissertation traces the dialogues and intellectual influences that shaped Kantian ethics.<sup>12</sup> In this work, and in a number of articles subsequently published in Portuguese, he examines the genealogy of the idea of freedom that underpins the ethical views of the late Kant.<sup>13</sup> Initially marked by a physicalism inherited from the scientific tradition and the metaphysics of Christian Wolff, Kant's pre-critical writings would gradually be enriched with moral concepts and content. On the eve of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, so to speak, Kant was thinking and talking about "freedom" in a robustly moral way that stood in sharp contrast to his own earlier approach. With this general thesis in place, Estevão proceeds to make sense of the internal change in Kantian thought, focusing on the receptions of Christian August Crusius' critique of Wolffian rationalism, of the (non-rationalist) theory of moral sentiments developed by the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment, as well as of the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

<sup>10</sup> Recollection by Nelson Gonçalves Gomes, in ERM-MP.

<sup>11</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, *Studien zu Kants Freiheitsauffassung in der vorkritischen Periode - 1747-1770* (Augsburg: Blasaditsch, 1976).

<sup>12</sup> Martins, *Studien zu Kants Freiheitsauffassung in der vorkritischen Periode*, iii.

<sup>13</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, "Autonomia e liberdade. A influência de Rousseau sobre a ética pré-crítica de Kant", *Revista Latinoamericana de Filosofia*, 4 (1978), 99-117; Estevão de Rezende Martins, "O caminho para a autonomia. Baumgarten e a concepção da liberdade no Kant pré-crítico", *Revista Latinoamericana de Filosofia*, 6/2 (1980): 99-117; Estevão de Rezende Martins, "O moralismo escocês do séc. XVIII e a concepção de liberdade no Kant pré-crítico", *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, 39/3 (1983): 294-311; Estevão de Rezende Martins, "Crusius e Kant. Crítica do racionalismo", *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, 50/1-3 (1994): 253-260.

In 1976, Estevão married Martine Creusot, a French Germanist and translator, whom he had met at the Goethe Institute in Schwäbisch Hall. Living in France at the time, he approached Frédéric Mauro, a historian of Brazil and Portugal who held the country's first chair in Latin American history.<sup>14</sup> Estevão once told me that he even contemplated the possibility of writing a second doctoral thesis, this time in history. His penchant for the discipline dates back to his school days, when he recalled having a very inspiring history teacher. In hindsight, he even came to speak of his earlier disciplinary attachment to theology and philosophy as a “detour” from “the academic study of history”.<sup>15</sup> A doctorate in History under Mauro's supervision would have changed this story significantly. The plan was dropped at an early stage, but it left a telling trace: a text by Estevão on the trajectory of an interest group of coffee planters in Campinas in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, which appeared in a special issue of the *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer* edited by Mauro in 1979.<sup>16</sup> Incidentally, a leading character in this well-researched piece is Baron Geraldo Ribeiro de Rezende, Estevão's great-grandfather; and a key secondary source of the study is Geraldo's biography, written by Estevão's grandmother Amélia de Rezende Martins.<sup>17</sup>

After what turned out to be a short post-doctoral stay in France, Estevão returned to Brazil in 1977 and resettled in the new na-

<sup>14</sup> José Damião Rodrigues, “Frédéric Mauro”, *Dicionário de historiadores portugueses: da Academia Real das Ciências ao final do Estado Novo*, ed. by Sérgio Campos Matos (Lisbon: Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, n.d.), [https://dichp.bnportugal.gov.pt/historiadores/historiadores\\_frederic\\_mauro2.htm](https://dichp.bnportugal.gov.pt/historiadores/historiadores_frederic_mauro2.htm).

<sup>15</sup> Estevão Chaves de Rezende Martins, “Theory Is Not for Amateurs”, Interview conducted by Hugo Merlo, *One More Thing...* (blog), History and Theory (2023), <https://historyandtheory.org/merlo-martins>.

<sup>16</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, “Café et politique: groupes d'intérêt a Campinas (1880-1900)”, *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer*, 66/244-245 (1979): 421-433. Until at least 1984, Estevão was talking to Mauro about his research ideas related to Brazilian political history. See Frédéric Mauro, “Recent Works on the Political Economy of Brazil in the Portuguese Empire”, *Latin American Research Review*, 19/1 (1984), 87-105, see 98.

<sup>17</sup> Martins, *Um idealista realizador: Barão Geraldo de Rezende*.

tional capital, in the middle of the country. He was hired by the University of Brasília primarily to teach courses in theory and methodology in the then nascent History graduate program.<sup>18</sup> He would remain a member of this program for the next half century or so, even after his retirement in 2017 and subsequent conferral of the rare title of professor emeritus. In those early years, he also used to teach introductory classes on “scientific methodology”, which was a compulsory course for undergraduates in the humanities. He was initially affiliated to a unit that congregated geographers, historians, and a few philosophers. In the early 1970s, under pressure from the military authorities, the university had stopped admitting bachelor’s students in philosophy and adopted a policy of recruiting only the bare minimum of philosophers to its professorial ranks. With the regime coming to an end, in 1985, the bachelor in Philosophy was relaunched and a Philosophy department was created. Along with a few other colleagues, Estevão can be credited as an important promoter of these developments.<sup>19</sup>

In a recent statement, Estevão suggested that his way into “historical reflection” was not linear and that he tried different trails in his search for it.<sup>20</sup> As we saw, at the turn to the 1980s he was exploring a path that would lead him into political history and into a mode of inquiring that he perhaps felt was not in keeping with his strongly philosophical instincts. This, in any case, soon turned out to be a dead end. Shortly afterward, however, he began to try another path that would prove much more fruitful, that of historical theory. He stuck with it for a number of rea-

<sup>18</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, “A culpa é de Hobbes e de Hume!”, *Entrevista a Arthur Alfaix Assis e Ana Carolina Barbosa Pereira, Entre Filosofia, História e Relações Internacionais. Escritos em homenagem a Estevão de Rezende Martins*, ed. by André de Melo Araújo, Arthur Alfaix Assis and Sérgio da Mata (São Paulo: LiberArs/Ed. SBTHH, 2017), 323-336, see 328.

<sup>19</sup> Recollection by Agnaldo Portugal, in ERM-MP.

<sup>20</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, “Aprender e ensinar História: vocação nobre, missão social, tarefa instigante”, *Cartas à juventude historiadora*, ed. by Mauro Dillmann and Wilian Junior Bonete (São Paulo: Letra e voz, 2024), 23-36, see 24.

sons, one of which is the already mentioned circumstance that his main teaching obligation at the University of Brasília consisted of theoretical and methodological seminars for History MA candidates. Furthermore, the new engagement with historical theory aligned quite well with his previous academic background. After all, the doctoral thesis centered on Kant, as well as related shorter pieces, were *historical* studies about *theoretical* subjects. We may grasp this “turn” to historical theory, with its mixture of continuity and discontinuity, by thinking that from the 1980s, a new facet of Estevão’s relationship with Kantian philosophy emerged: rather than subjects of historical study themselves, Kant’s concepts then became key components of a theoretical framework for the analysis of historical knowledge. Accordingly, in a series of stimulating texts, Estevão explored the “use of categories” by historians, revisited the classical issue of the objectivity in the social sciences, and formulated pleas for a “transcendental theory of history” or for an “analytical philosophy of history”.<sup>21</sup>

One of the main inspirations for this move from the history of philosophy to the philosophy of history was certainly Baumgartner, who, after ending his career as a top-class football player, had managed to become perhaps the greatest Kantian philosopher of history of the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> In Baumgartner’s *Habilitationschrift, Continuity and History*, completed in 1971, one could find an early, detailed, and to a certain extent influential discussion of the issue of the narrativity of his-

<sup>21</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, “Sentido e compreensão em História. Por uma teoria transcendental da história”, *Leopoldianum*, 6/12 (1979): 25-36; Estevão de Rezende Martins, “O uso das categorias na ciência histórica”, *Leopoldianum*, 10/20 (1982): 5-24; Estevão de Rezende Martins, “O problema da objetividade nas ciências sociais”, *Revista Brasileira de Filosofia*, 34 (1984): 147-172; Estevão de Rezende Martins, “Filosofia analítica da história”, *Paradigmas filosóficos da atualidade*, ed. by Maria Cecília M. de Carvalho (Campinas: Papirus, 1989), 83-98.

<sup>22</sup> See Armin G. Wildfeuer, “Der Philosoph des Fair play. Eine biographische Erinnerung an den Philosophen Hans Michael Baumgartner (5.4.1933-11.5.1999) aus Anlass seines 90. Geburtstags”, *Münsteraner Forum für Theologie und Kirche*, April 5, 2023, [https://www.theologie-und-kirche.de/wildfeuer-baumgartner\\_zum90ten.pdf](https://www.theologie-und-kirche.de/wildfeuer-baumgartner_zum90ten.pdf).

torical knowledge, based on then recent publications by Arthur Danto.<sup>23</sup> But Estevão also made new contacts in the German-speaking academic space that spurred his reflections on the theory and methodology of history, especially during his stay as a Humboldt fellow in 1982-83. Among these were the historians Jürgen Kocka and Reinhart Koselleck, as well as the philosopher and sociologist Karl Acham.<sup>24</sup> Acham, in particular, became a good friend of Estevão and developed an extensive collaboration with him over the years,<sup>25</sup> which featured guest lectures, Estevão's sabbatical stay in Graz in 1989-90, commissioned pieces by Estevão in books and journals, and translations of some of Acham's texts into Portuguese.<sup>26</sup>

Kocka, Koselleck, and, to an even greater extent, Acham participated in the *Theorie der Geschichte* study group, which, between 1973 and 1987 brought together experienced and rising academics from various fields. Sponsored by the Werner Reimers Stiftung,

<sup>23</sup> Hans Michael Baumgartner, *Kontinuität und Geschichte. Zur Kritik und Metakritik der historischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997, 1st ed. 1972), 269-294.

<sup>24</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, *Teoria e filosofia da história. Contribuições para o ensino de história* (Curitiba: W.A., 2017), 9.

<sup>25</sup> Recollection by Karl Acham, in ERM-MP. In a footnote Estevão once remarked: "We thank Prof. Acham (Graz, Austria) for the constant support and fraternal readiness for the exchange of ideas about this and other issues". Martins, "Filosofia analítica da história", 85.

<sup>26</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, "Lateinamerika - Eigenweg Oder Labyrinth?", *Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Graz), 14/1 (1995): 15-32; Estevão de Rezende Martins, "Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit in der brasilianischen Geschichte der Neuzeit", *Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Graz), 18/1 (1999): 3-12; Estevão de Rezende Martins, "Die europäische Leitkultur aus lateinamerikanischer Sicht", *Europa – wohin?*, ed. by Karl Acham (Viena: Passagen Verlag, 2002), 115-124; Karl Acham, "Concepções do progresso na teoria social e na teoria da história. Uma investigação de história das idéias", trans. by Estevão de Rezende Martins, *Leopoldianum*, 16/45 (1989), 23-42; Karl Acham, "Ciência social teórica e explicação histórica. Considerações metodológicas", trans. by Estevão de Rezende Martins, *Síntese. Nova Fase*, 19/57 (1992): 179-197; Karl Acham, "A compreensão histórica entre ceticismo e arbitrariedade: algumas considerações sobre as variantes recentes do relativismo histórico e cultural", trans. by Estevão de Rezende Martins. *História da Historiografia*, 7 (2011), 201-224.

the presentations and discussions held at these meetings were included in the multi-volume collection *Beiträge zur Historik*, published by Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag. Estevão reviewed the collection's first four volumes in 1984, reporting in his text that he had previously contacted several of the contributors in person.<sup>27</sup> This detail and actually the review as a whole provide good evidence that in the early 1980s Estevão was monitoring the latest developments in German historical theory, which at the time consisted largely of elaborate responses to the critical diagnosis of the "need for theory" in historical studies.<sup>28</sup> The diagnosis applied, *mutatis mutandis*, also to the Brazilian situation Estevão was most directly concerned with. In approaching, receiving, and elaborating upon those theoretical discussions Estevão's most general aim was, as he many times stated, to prepare himself to counter the traditional kind of anti-theoreticism with which he felt the majority of the historiographical field in Brazil was infected. Thereby, he was also taking a stance against academic parochialism and, of course, nationalism. Trained as a philosopher, he felt that his contribution to the field of academic history should revolve around "the theoretical and methodological foundations of historical knowledge", and this could hardly be done without a cosmopolitan attitude to bibliography, concepts and problems.<sup>29</sup>

Among the contributors to the *Beiträge zur Historik* the one with whom Estevão forged the strongest academic partnership

<sup>27</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, "Atualidade e relevância da teoria da história: um debate contemporâneo", *Revista da Sociedade Brasileira de Pesquisa Histórica*, 1 (1983): 49-58, see 50. The very first time I saw Estevão's name was by the way in the first page of this review article. See also Estevão de Rezende Martins, "Entrevista", in: Silmária Reis dos Santos. *A inserção dos trabalhos de Jörn Rüsen no Brasil e a interpretação da teoria da didática da história nas pesquisas brasileiras (2010-2017)* (MA Thesis: Universidade Federal da Bahia, 2020), 148-153.

<sup>28</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, "Über die Theoriebedürftigkeit der Geschichtswissenschaft" [1972], Reinhart Koselleck, *Zeitschichten: Studien zur Historik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), 298-316.

<sup>29</sup> Martins, "A culpa é de Hobbes e de Hume!", 332.

was undoubtedly Jörn Rüsen. From the mid-1980s on, all of Estevão's thoughts on history and historiography developed out of profound conversations with Rüsen and his texts. Estevão first heard about Rüsen's ideas during his doctoral years, in a seminar course by Baumgartner – who had collaborated with Rüsen on events and collective volumes in the early 1970s. In 2017, when Estevão finally published *Teoria e Filosofia da História. Contribuições para o Ensino de História*, an anthology of his own texts on historical theory, he stated in his self-reflective introductory remarks that “many of these reflections were developed in a constant, profitable, and challenging dialogue with the German historian Jörn Rüsen”.<sup>30</sup> “When it comes to the lively debate surrounding the epistemological question of the scientificity of history and the philosophical question of the historicity of contemporary reason” – remarked Estevão in 1992 in a review of Rüsen's *Lebendige Geschichte* [Living History] – “Rüsen's investigations and the results he obtained are fundamental and indispensable”. And he continued saying that of all the members of the *Theorie der Geschichte* study group “Rüsen is the only one to have presented a modern, comprehensive and, in my opinion, coherent system of historical theory”.<sup>31</sup>

These statements convey good clues as to the reasons underlying his attachment to Rüsen. If the latter's texts are so widely read today by Brazilian scholars in historical theory and history education, this is to a large extent due to Estevão's mediating influence. Estevão was involved with the translation and/or edition of many of Rüsen's books in Brazil,<sup>32</sup> and he accompanied

<sup>30</sup> Martins, *Teoria e filosofia da história*, 8. See also Martins, “A culpa é de Hobbes e de Hume!”, 332-333.

<sup>31</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, “Consciência histórica, práxis e cultura: a propósito da teoria da história de Jörn Rüsen”, *Síntese* (nova fase), 19/56 (1992): 59-73, see 62.

<sup>32</sup> Jörn Rüsen, *Razão histórica: os fundamentos da ciência histórica*, (Brasília: Ed. UnB, 2001); Jörn Rüsen, *Reconstrução do passado: os princípios da pesquisa histórica* (Brasília: Ed. UnB, 2007); Jörn Rüsen, *História viva: formas e funções do conhecimento histórico* (Brasília: Ed. UnB, 2007); Jörn Rüsen, *Jörn Rüsen e o ensino de*

the German historical theorist in a number of visits to the country. On these occasions, by the way, Estevão's sensational simultaneous translations of the lectures were almost as impressive as the lectures themselves. Estevão also proposed that the University of Brasília awarded Rüsen the title of Doctor honoris causa, which it did in 2015.<sup>33</sup>

On a personal note, I should say that I wrote my MA thesis under Estevão in Brasília and then proceeded to work on my PhD with Jörn in Witten and Essen. I have just realized how much my own academic trajectory is a subproduct of the great academic exchange between the two. There is no doubt that without Estevão's talks, texts, classes, mediation, and advice so many things would have turned out differently for me, both academically and personally. And by "differently" I actually mean worse, less meaningful, less fruitful, or less exciting. I know many people who would look back on their relationship with him and come to essentially the same conclusion.

During an interview commissioned by *História da Historiografia* and published in 2010, I asked Estevão whether he would still consider himself to be a Kantian thinker. He quickly responded "yes, yes", adding that, even though he had long since ceased to be a Kant scholar, he still regarded the philosopher from Königsberg as "indispensable for the justification of historical knowledge".<sup>34</sup> It makes sense to think that back in the 1980s he was

*história* (Curitiba: Ed. UFPR, 2010); Jörn Rüsen, *Teoria da história. Uma teoria da história como ciência* (Curitiba: Ed. UFPR, 2015); Jörn Rüsen, *Cultura Histórica, formação e identidade: sobre os fundamentos da didática da história* (Curitiba: WAS Edições, 2022).

<sup>33</sup> For a version of the speech I read at the ceremony, see: Arthur Alfaix Assis, "História, teoria e liberdade: saudação a Jörn Rüsen". *Revista de Teoria da História*, 20/2 (2018): 266-273. The original version of the speech, in English, is archived here: [https://www.academia.edu/16383608/Speech\\_in\\_honor\\_of\\_J%C3%B6rn\\_R%C3%BCsen\\_Delivered\\_at\\_the\\_Doctor\\_Honoris\\_Causa\\_Award\\_Ceremony\\_University\\_of\\_Brasilia\\_25\\_Sep\\_2015\\_](https://www.academia.edu/16383608/Speech_in_honor_of_J%C3%B6rn_R%C3%BCsen_Delivered_at_the_Doctor_Honoris_Causa_Award_Ceremony_University_of_Brasilia_25_Sep_2015_).

<sup>34</sup> Martins, "A culpa é de Hobbes e de Hume!", 324-325. First published as Estevão de Rezende Martins, "A culpa é de Hobbes e de Hume!: uma entrevista



attracted to the analysis of historiography by the intuition that historical knowledge reflects what is probably the most complex and interesting combination of pure and practical reason that can possibly obtain. This key Kantian motif echoes in almost all his more theoretical works from the 1990s onwards, which may be read as attempts to account for the tension between truth and use, facts and values, accuracy and identity, cognition and norm in historiography. How can “the methodical procedures of quality control” – as he liked to say – be reconciled with the practical functions that historical knowledge plays in extra-epistemic domains of social life? Developed from the dichotomy pure reason/practical reason, that is a problem accompanying Estevão in all his theoretical texts and speeches. In his quest to deal with it, he oscillated between epistemology, methodology, and didactics of history, in an intertwined approach that fermented very valuable reflections, such as those gathered in the already mentioned book *Teoria e filosofia da história*, a collection of theoretical texts originally published between 2002 and 2016.<sup>35</sup>

In one of the most expressive contributions republished in this volume, Estevão argues that historical knowledge has a fundamentally “relational character”, hinging on a “factorial network”, a bundle of temporal, geographical, social, cultural, and psychological circumstances that preclude an absolutely universal point of view in history writing. Here (as in many other of his texts), one finds major concessions to the thesis of the relativity of historical knowledge, combined with a strong emphasis on its pragmatic dimension. Yet Estevão also always makes a point of noting the importance of the methodical means of intersubjective control established by different traditions of historical scholarship, which he equates with the elements of a tacit “social contract of

com Estevão de Rezende Martins”, *História da Historiografia*, 4 (2010), 390-405. Estevão’s username on Instagram is by the way “kantisch”.

<sup>35</sup> For a good review, see Sérgio da Mata, “Anti-anti-iluminismo: a teoria da história segundo Estevão de Rezende Martins”, *ArtCultura*, 21/38 (2019): 199-205.

historiographical quality”.<sup>36</sup> According to him, “being ‘relational’ – and therefore, in a sense, relative – does not render historical knowledge any less scientific or reliable. This risk would only exist if methodical and intersubjective controls were abandoned, or if epistemic quality were sacrificed in favor of uncompromising fictional arbitrariness”.<sup>37</sup> Estevão’s model for the analysis of historical knowledge avoids both relativism and constructivism, although it also goes beyond classical realism, towards a standpoint he used to call “mitigated realism”.<sup>38</sup> In this model, the relativity of the circumstances of production and reception of histories coexists dialectically with intersubjectively defined standards of epistemic quality. For Estevão, neither can the latter render the former absolute, nor must the former undermine the latter.

Another original theoretical resource developed by him is the strategy of making sense of historians’ practice within the framework of a general theory of rational action. It is only natural that past human action – in its embeddedness in structures and institutions, and with its expected and unintended effects – should be a privileged subject of historiographical attention. But, especially in his classes and oral interventions, Estevão kept reminding us that actions were not only there in the objective pole of historical knowledge, the one where we could locate its past-related contents. At the subjective pole of knowledge, the point in the present occupied by the historian who researches and writes about the past, what takes place is not different from an individual’s rational action of sorts. In other words, historians are also agents, and historiography forms a sphere of action – and at this level it is not much of a matter whether this kind of rational agent is openly engaged or claims to be apolitical or impartial in a strong

<sup>36</sup> Martins, *Teoria e filosofia da história*, 22.

<sup>37</sup> Martins, *Teoria e filosofia da história*, 36.

<sup>38</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, “História: conhecimento, verdade, argumento”, *Dimensões*, 24 (2010), 5-32, see 8-9; Estevão de Rezende Martins, “História, discurso e estrutura”, *Diálogos*, 12/1 (2008), 57-66, see 58-59; Martins, “A culpa é de Hobbes e de Hume!”, 325; Martins, *Teoria e filosofia da história*, 39-40.

sense. Estevão, therefore, presents the act of writing history as an action that is essentially governed by the very same logic characterizing the phenomena it takes as its subject matter.<sup>39</sup> Using this informal phenomenology of action in which the writing of history appears as a key subclass, he innovatively updates the classical hermeneutic premise that “an original, antecedent congruity between subject and object” is a necessary condition for historical understanding.<sup>40</sup>

We can only regret that Estevão did not come to give these and other great insights a more systematic treatment. In 2009 he mentioned that, because of his work situation in the 1980s and 90s, “the famous book of theory of history that I have in sketches, remained a sketch”.<sup>41</sup> I remember him mentioning later, and more than once, that he was preparing what I understood was a monographic book in historical theory. This is, unfortunately, a gift that he was not able to offer to his present and future readership.<sup>42</sup>

Whatever shape such a book would take, we could be certain that it would focus on academic historians, their epistemic standards, and their interactions with the wider realm of historical

<sup>39</sup> Martins, “Consciência histórica, práxis e cultura”, 60-64; Martins, *Teoria e filosofia da história*, 198-203; Estevão de Rezende Martins, *Relações internacionais: cultura e poder* (Brasília: IBRI, 2002), 45-52.

<sup>40</sup> Wilhelm von Humboldt. “On the Historian’s Task”, *History and Theory*, 6/1 (1967): 57-71, see 65.

<sup>41</sup> Martins, “A culpa é de Hobbes e de Hume!”, 333.

<sup>42</sup> It should be added that two important collective works edited by him were strongly influenced by his own way of thinking theoretically about historiography: *Teoria e Metodologia em la Historia de América Latina*, ed. by Estevão de Rezende Martins and Héctor Pérez Brignoli (Madri: Trotta, 2006) – UNESCO *Historia general de América Latina*, v. IX; *A história pensada: teoria e método da historiografia europeia do século XIX*, ed. by Estevão de Rezende Martins (São Paulo: Contexto, 2010). Unfortunately, Estevão did not live to see the publication of another volume co-edited by him to which he was intensely committed during his last years: *Handbuch der Historik*, ed. by Jörn Rüsen, Michele BarriCELLI, Nicola Brauch, Estevão Chaves de Rezende Martins, and Friedrich Jaeger (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2025).

cultures, especially through the mediation of history education.<sup>43</sup> Estevão, as we have been seeing, was much more a philosopher of historiography than a philosopher of history, to use Aviezer Tucker's good and easy distinction.<sup>44</sup> For the most part of his life, he actually shared the attitude of downplaying the importance of the so-called "speculative" (or in a less negative vein, "substantive" or "material") philosophy of history, in favor of a 'critical' one, focused on the analysis of historical knowledge. His chief metaphysical assumption is that history, as the content addressed in historiography, is a temporal notion that comprises the endeavors, sufferings and dealings of the "human rational agent". Though he assumes, perhaps too optimistically,<sup>45</sup> rational agency as the main source of historicity, he did not speak of history's rationality, nor of the meaning of history in maximalist terms. "The loss of meaning that comes with the end of a teleological philosophy of history is irreversible".<sup>46</sup> A very relevant source of this skepticism was Karl Popper, an author that Estevão discussed especially in his "scientific methodology" undergraduate courses.

In almost all his publications, Estevão subscribed to what could be qualified as a taboo against substantive philosophies of history, which largely prevailed among historians and theorists in the

<sup>43</sup> A central feature of Estevão's reflection on historical knowledge was his constant attention to the field of history didactics. See Maria Auxiliadora Schmidt, "História e educação histórica: um diálogo com Estevão de Rezende Martins", *Entre Filosofia, História e Relações Internacionais. Escritos em homenagem a Estevão de Rezende Martins*, ed. by André de Melo Araújo, Arthur Alfaix Assis and Sérgio da Mata (São Paulo: LiberArs/Ed. SBTHH, 2017), 207-220. Estevão's dialogue with history education theorists and practitioners was especially fostered by his affiliation with the History Education Research Center (LAPE-DUH) at the Federal University of Paraná in Curitiba, run by Maria Auxiliadora Schmidt. See her recollection in ERM-MP.

<sup>44</sup> Aviezer Tucker, "Introduction", *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, ed. by Aviezer Tucker (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), 1-6.

<sup>45</sup> Mata, "Anti-anti-historicism", 201.

<sup>46</sup> Martins, *Teoria e filosofia da história*, 117.

second half of the twentieth century.<sup>47</sup> Very significantly, however, one of his last published texts is a long reflection on “the philosophical dignity of the problem of history”. Under the title “Outside History there is no Salvation?”, this essay proceeds on the assumption that the problem of history has such an existential density that it cannot be entirely solved by historical research or specialized historians. In doing so, he seems to be arguing that something like a substantive philosophy of history is not simply tolerable, but perhaps also necessary.<sup>48</sup> Estevão here goes back to Kant once again and draws from Kantian philosophy an essential building block: the assumption that the human is defined by freedom. In his view, history and freedom stand in a complex, ambiguous relationship to one another, since the former comprises both what enables and what constrains the latter. With these reflections, which verge on the terrain of a historical anthropology, Estevão’s point is not to pave the way back to an inflated, teleological, progressivist concept of history. He is looking actually for a “non-totalized all”, a sense of historical totality which is non-empirical, and therefore speculative, but on the other hand, open enough and conciliable with research results and disconnected from teleologisms. In other words, Estevão, I guess, was realizing that not all substantive philosophy of history needs to rely on the postulate of an utmost meaning or end of the historical process.

A third major line of work in Estevão’s career, alongside the history of philosophy and the philosophy of history, encompass-

<sup>47</sup> See Real Fillion, “Philosophy of History: Speculative Approaches”, *Bloomsbury History: Theory and Method*, ed. by Stefan Berger (London: Bloomsbury, 2021); Zoltán Boldizsár Simon, “The Transformation of Historical Time: Processual and Evental Temporalities”, *Rethinking Historical Time: New Approaches to Presentism*, ed. by Marek Tamm and Laurent Olivier (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 71-84, see 75-78; Peter Munz, *The Shapes of Time. A New Look at the Philosophy of History* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1977), 4-7.

<sup>48</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, “Fora da história não há salvação? Filosofia da história no início do século 21”, *Intelligere. Revista de História Intelectual*, 15 (2023): 175-207.

es international relations and parliamentary history. It grew out of his option to become a consultant to the Brazilian Federal Senate, a regular and well-paid job that consumed most of his work energies between 1985 and 1998.<sup>49</sup> Estevão chose it basically for financial reasons. The 1980s was one of those “lost decades” in Brazilian economic history, and this reflected in a particularly bad way on the large system of public universities financed by the federal government. After becoming a legislative consultant, Estevão had much less time available for academic activities, including research and writing, but in the long run he found a way to extract academic profit from his new work situation. He experienced the operation of a major parliamentary body from the inside, working intensively, for instance, during the long debates that preceded the new constitution of 1988; or, in 1992, in the impeachment process that led to the ousting of Fernando Collor de Mello, a right-wing opportunist who had managed to win the first presidential election since the restoration of democracy. Estevão also had experience in the executive branch of government, as head of two offices at the Ministry of Justice (1990-1993), and director for international cooperation at CAPES (2003), an agency attached to the Ministry of Education.

Building on this non-academic work background, in the 1990s Estevão began to research and write more systematically on institutional politics and international relations. In 1995, he left the Philosophy for the History department, to work more closely with a group of colleagues that is sometimes referred as the “School of Brasília” in International Relations.<sup>50</sup> He also became a member of the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions, on whose board he would serve for more than two decades as secretary-general and vice-president.<sup>51</sup> The book *International Relations: Culture*

<sup>49</sup> Martins, “A culpa é de Hobbes e de Hume!”, 333.

<sup>50</sup> Saraiva, “Estevão Chaves de Rezende Martins: um intelectual polivalente”, 101-107.

<sup>51</sup> Recollection by Joseba Agirreazkuenaga, in ERM-MP.

*and Power*, first published in 2002, embodies the consolidation of this research agenda. Here Estevão combines philosophical tools and historical sensibility to show how, since the last decades of the twentieth century, cultural elements began to enter decisively into power dynamics that were once considered to be purely political. The resulting new logic of political action is the focus of very penetrating reflections that explore the interplay between power and identity. The main aim of the book is to reassert the centrality of ideas both as the driving force behind human action and the basis of everything cultural, including political cultures.<sup>52</sup>

Another work that stands for this orientation towards political history and theory is the book *Desired Partnerships: Foreign Policy, Security, Defense, and History in Europe*, published in 2012. After tracing the process of institutional development that, beginning in 1945, led to the European Economic Community and then to the European Union, Estevão surprises the reader in the second half of the book by going back to the onset of the nineteenth century, to re-examine the process of European integration within a wider historical horizon. As a result, the book can be read not only as an analysis of key contexts of European foreign policy, but also as a synthesis of the contemporary political history of (Western) Europe. It is, in any case, a testimony to Estevão's ability to, in addition to thinking theoretically about historiography, put on the clothes of a historian and produce relevant interpretations of substantive past and present issues. In line with the premises that underpin his theoretical thinking, this is an interpretation embedded in the circumstances of his own present and driven by ideals of future, which concern both the European and the Latin American (and especially the Brazilian) spaces. Structured from an avowedly Eurooptimist perspective, the book aims, among other things, to emphasize the experience of the economic and

<sup>52</sup> Martins, *Relações internacionais: cultura e poder*. Second edition as Estevão de Rezende Martins, *Cultura e poder* (São Paulo: Saraiva, 2007).

political union of European countries as an element of orientation and inspiration for the similar movement of South American integration.<sup>53</sup>

Estevão left us less than a week before Donald Trump took office for his second term in the United States and began his fast, furious and chaotic attempt to implode the post-1945 international order. Back then, just under two months ago, the United States was still the main sponsor of globalization and free trade, as well as Europe's main security ally; Vladimir Putin was regarded as an enemy by the White House; and the idea of Canada or Greenland becoming part of US territory belonged to a dysfunctional political imagination no one needed to take seriously. Estevão was deeply committed to the liberal and democratic values that frame the world order now under heavy threat, as his writings on international relations and parliamentary history most notably attest. He lived, though, through the first Trump and the Bolsonaro presidencies, Brexit, the rise in popularity of far-right parties and movements. And he was deeply concerned about the existential risks facing liberal democracies, which came not so much from without as from within, namely from the electoral successes of populist politicians in recent years. Their anti-political rhetoric and anti-liberal actions, he felt, threatened to lead to an irreversible rift between the ideal of the rule of law and the democratic notion of popular sovereignty.<sup>54</sup>

There is much more to be said about Estevão's ideas concerning international relations, historical theory or the history of eighteenth-century philosophy, the three major axes along which the bulk of his writings could be clustered. It would also be interesting to examine the texts that do not fit neatly into this threefold classification, such as those on the modern concept of revolution

<sup>53</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, *Parcerias almejadas: política externa, segurança, defesa e história na Europa* (Belo Horizonte: Fino Traço, 2012).

<sup>54</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, "Democracy and the Threat of Populism", *Estudos do Século XX*, 17 (2017): 91-111.



and its impact on Brazil,<sup>55</sup> social democracy,<sup>56</sup> Brazilian federalism,<sup>57</sup> Nicholas of Cusa,<sup>58</sup> or Jean-Paul Sartre.<sup>59</sup> The three axes, together with the pieces that do not quite fall into them, are unmistakable evidence of the breadth of Estevão's intellectual interests and erudition. Constantly straddling the boundaries between philosophy, history, pedagogy and international relations, he was able to find original ways of successfully exercising a virtue that is always much easier to proclaim than to practice: that of interdisciplinarity. The incessant quest to situate his analytical perspectives outside the comfort zones of the disciplines is certainly one of the most distinctive features of his work.

Estevão will be missed by his wife, son, grandsons, and brothers. He is also survived by numerous relatives, friends, colleagues, and former students who were deeply touched by his sudden passing.<sup>60</sup> He has been mourned across the country, in

<sup>55</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, "Quem fez a Revolução Francesa?", *Humanidades*, 7 (1991): 168-179; Estevão de Rezende Martins, "La Révolution au Brésil: l'idée du nouveau et du définitif", *Cahiers des Amériques Latines*, 10 (1990): 81-89; Estevão de Rezende Martins, "La revolución como concepto", *Cuadernos Americanos. Nueva Época*, 3/18 (1989): 41-54.

<sup>56</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, *A propósito da social-democracia* (Brasília: Instituto Teotônio Vilela, 1997).

<sup>57</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, "Föderalismus und föderative Institutionen in Brasilien nach der Bundesverfassung 1988", *Rechtstransfer in der Geschichte*, ed. by Gábor Hamza, Milan Hlavačka and Kazuhiro Takii (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019), 277-303.

<sup>58</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, "O caráter conjectural do conhecimento segundo Nicolau de Cusa", *Leopoldianum*, 13/38 (1986): 148-161; Estevão de Rezende Martins, "Nicolás de Cusa (1401-1464): política y poder en 'La Concordancia Católica'. *Doctrinas y relaciones de poder en el Cisma de Occidente y en la época conciliar (1378-1449)*, ed. by José Antônio de C. R. de Souza and Bernardo Bayona Aznar (Zaragoza: Prensas de la Universidad Zaragoza, 2013), 337-366; Estevão de Rezende Martins, "História e política no pensamento de Nicolau de Cusa", *A Cidade dos Homens e a Cidade de Deus*, ed. Ernildo Stein (Porto Alegre: EST, 2007), 214-230.

<sup>59</sup> Estevão de Rezende Martins, "O argumento ontológico na introdução a 'O ser e o nada' de Jean-Paul Sartre", *Convivium*, 14 (1975): 238-254.

<sup>60</sup> In addition to the more literary achievements that have been highlighted, I should register that Estevão also supervised more than 70 master's and doc-

official statements published by different universities and organizations, as well as in hundreds of posts on social media. Like me, his friends around the globe are now going through the difficult process of reconfiguring their own worlds without Estevão's generous, learned, and witty presence.

Since the main point of the overview above was to illustrate the intensity of Estevão's engagement with the field of the history and theory of historiography, let me conclude with a quote from one his last published texts: a piece written for an interesting book consisting of letters from experienced historical scholars to imaginary younger ones. Estevão's whole letter, dated on November 15, 2023, now reads like a kind of academic testament. Among other issues, it takes up the old Kantian theme of the relationship between knowledge and emancipation, arguing that historiography contributes to human freedom insofar as it serves as a critical tool for the denaturalization of the world in which we live. In this context, Estevão says: "the past is not a long-term prison; it only imprisons those who do not know it well enough to identify its potentials".<sup>61</sup>

The epistemic, political, and moral values that give meaning to this illuminating and yet somewhat truistic statement are today being contested with a force not seen since at least the days of Hitler. Those who dismiss them, one might say, are resorting not to the power of argument, but simply to brute force. May Estevão's historical and philosophical humanism continue to be a steady point of reference for us, especially now that we are sailing through such troubled waters.

toral students, served on dozens of hiring committees throughout the country, reviewed hundreds of grant and scholarship applications to various funding bodies, and directed the University of Brasília's Institute of Human Sciences from 2007 to 2010.

<sup>61</sup> Martins, "Aprender e ensinar História", 28.

EDITING BY FABRIZIO SERRA AND LUCIA CORSI.  
SET IN SERRA DANTE BY  
FABRIZIO SERRA EDITORE, PISA · ROMA.  
PRINTED AND BOUND BY  
TIPOGRAFIA DI AGNANO, AGNANO PISANO (PISA).

★

September 2025

(CZ2 · FG13)



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