

Recension of “*Teorias da Contabilidade – Construção e Demarcação Epistemológica*”. José Joaquim Marques de Almeida e Bruno José Machado de Almeida. Escolar Editora, Lisboa, Portugal, October/2016

Carlos Ferraz
c_ferraz@outlook.pt
Associação Portuguesa de Técnicos de Contabilidade (APOTEC)
Portugal

1. THE BOOK, HISTORY, THEORIES AND ACCOUNTING

The book we are reviewing, written by father and son, both professors and both PhDs, was published in Portugal and in Portuguese in 2016. If it weren't for the country and the language, it would already be much more popular today. It is not a book on the History of Accounting, but neither is it an ordinary book on Accounting Theory. It synthesizes the main theories of Accounting over time and, thus and to that extent, it is a book on the History of Accounting. It is a university manual and, hence, its pedagogical aspect, with the objectives at the beginning of each chapter and, at the end of each one, the activities with which it is intended to evaluate the knowledge acquired.

The authors' conception of accounting (and that the editors underline in the book's back cover) is: *“accounting is essentially an activity of critical thinking. In fact, the specialist in the discipline is continually making judgments and making value judgments and, therefore, his problem should not be considered neutral, since it is influenced by the social ideology and the notion of wealth rooted in a given society, aspects that tend to influence social welfare.*

Consequently, the positioning of accounting as an impartial registry, a reflection of the exchange of historical values, in which the accountant is considered only as a mere financial historian, who independently and impartially collects data and subjective questions of value, either in terms of nominal costs or in terms of current costs, it is a vision that the interpretative or sociological current of accounting does not subscribe to: accounting is more than a set of notes. Accounting is too important to leave it only to the free management of accountants: accounting is philosophy, economic and social culture and an element of transformation of society”.

The book is dedicated to theories and, in particular, frames old doctrines/theories, since Pacioli. Allow us, therefore, to present here the evolution of this topic. The theory of knowledge was (and is) a branch of philosophy. By the way, theory comes from the Latin *theoria*, which even then meant "*philosophical investigation*". The question of the theory of science (remember the geocentric and heliocentric theories), although it has its roots in the pre-Renaissance and has given it its contribution, is, in its most modern version, something recent, from the second third of the 20th century (theory of relativity, for example).

A theory was defined by F. N. Kerlinger ("*Foundations of Behavioral Research*", 1994, cited in the book under analysis, p. 93), as: "*an interrelated set of constructions (concepts), definitions and propositions, which represent a systematic view of a phenomenon by specifying relationships between variables for the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomenon under study*". Richard Mattessich¹ said in 1972 ("*Methodological Preconditions and Problem of a General Theory*", apud op cit., p. 93) – and it remains true – that "*there is no general accounting axiomatization freely accepted by the international scientific community, but a set of partial and fragmented attempts called middle range theories, which, in the field of accounting, aim to explain and predict subsets and singularities of the accounting phenomenon*". In fact, there is no theory that encompasses "accounting" globally: financial, management, public, national, budget, banking, insurance, domestic,...

In 1914 Jean Dumarchey² published his "*Théorie positive de la Comptabilité*", in 1922 W. A. Patton published his work "*Accounting Theory*", and in 1953 the AAA published his "*Structure of Accounting Theory*" (A. C. Littleton) and this expression was accepted in the international and academic environment. Then, in 1966, the same AAA published "*Statements on Basic Accounting Theory*" (ASOBAT) and, in 1977, "*Statement on Accounting Theory and Theory Acceptance*" (SOATA or SATTA). This concludes: "*However, the crucial argument is that the theoretical consensus cannot be imposed either by this group or by that. Any influence that theory may have on policy making will result from confrontational argumentation, new theoretical developments, debate, not decree*".

However, in 1978, the FASB, in SFAC 1 (Statement of Accounting Financial Concepts) opted for the "*Conceptual Framework*", recognizing the divergence between academic doctrines (that is, with the frequent appearance of new ones) and professional practice.

¹ Richard Mattessich (Trieste, Italy 1922 – Canada, 2019) was perhaps the most complete Accounting teacher and author of all time, given his vast and varied work that ranges from practical application (pioneer in the application of the spreadsheet to accounting: "*Towards a General and Axiomatic Foundation of Accountancy – with an Introduction to the Matrix Formulation of Accounting Systems*", 1957, "*Simulation of the Firm Through a Budget Computer Program*", 1964) to Philosophy ("*Instrumental Reasoning and Systems Methodology : An Epistemology of the Applied and Social Science*", 1978, "*Critique of Accounting...*", 1995, "*Accounting and Philosophy...*", 2014) that he deepened to support his theory: CoNAM.

² We follow the article by Hernâni Olímpio Carqueja "*Teoria da Contabilidade (Uma interpretação)*" (*Revista Portuguesa de Contabilidade*, vol. I, no. 2, 2011, pp. 293-324), an article that will be an excellent read before the book discussed here.

Conceptual Framework which is, for Jorge Tua Pereda³ "an interpretation of the General Theory of Accounting, through which the theoretical foundations on which financial information is based are established through a logical deductive itinerary". In Portugal, the expression "Teoria da Contabilidade"⁴ was adopted in the 1949 Law (reorganization of the Lisbon Faculty of Economics and Management) and the Law did so again in 1953, in the *curricula* of the then established "Facultade de Economia do Porto". Evolution often takes place in a sinusoid. Also here.

2. THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF SCIENCES AND THAT OF ACCOUNTING IN PARTICULAR

Chapter 3 of the book we are written about, is dedicated to the subject, but here we allow ourselves to framed it in a more general way as an introduction and diffusion. The modern evolution of the philosophy of Science, with roots in the 19th century (Auguste Comte - 1798-1857 - Karl Marx - 1818-1883, Max Weber⁵ - 1864-1920), starts from the logical positivism of the "Vienna Circle" (1907-1938), its advances (logicism and formalism) with Rudolf Carnap (1881-1970) (pertinent op.: "The Continuum of Inductive Methods", 1952), evolves to the fallibilism of Karl Popper (1902-1994) (op. "The Logic of Scientific Discovery", 1934), to the paradigm of Thomas Khun (1922-1996) (op "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions", 1962) and, by the research programs of his student Imre Lakatos (1922-1974) (op "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programs", 1970), for structuralism and postmodernism: Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) (op. "L'Écriture et la différence", 1967) and his "déconstruction"; Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) (op. "Simulacres et Simulations"; Michel Foucault (1926-1984) (op. "Les Mots et les choses", 1966); Jürgen Habermas (Düsseldorf, Germany, 1929) (op. "Technology and Science as Ideology" 1968) and, among others, Richard Rorty (1931-2007) (op. "Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature", 1979), with his "linguistic turn" and for whom "ontology and epistemology are the same". Paul Feyerabend (1924-1994) (op. "Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge", 1975) was the anarchist in charge to contradict and rethink them all, but, after all, and with openness and freedom, confirming them.

The postmodernism of the late fifties and sixties of the twentieth century was characterized by skepticism, epistemological certainty, relativism, irreverence, irony, eclecticism, the rejection of universal truths, of the black against white, of hierarchies and cataloging. Every

³ "¿Necessitamos un Marco Conceptual?", "Atas das VI Jornadas de Contabilidade", ISCA Lisbon, pags. 323-360, apud Carqueja, op. cit.

⁴ According to the Houaiss ("Dicionário H. da Língua Portuguesa", Círculo de Leitores, 2002) the word appeared in Portuguese in 1789 (using the Moraes dictionary), in Spanish in 1780 (<https://iedra.es/palabras/?q=theory>) and in English in 1597 (<https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=theory&type=0> and "The Oxford Universal Dictionary Illustrated", Caxton Pub. Co, London, 1969).

⁵ R. John, "Max Weber's epistemology of social sciences: Presupposition of "Interpretative Sociology"", The Social Science Journal, 21 (3), 91-109.

action leads to a reaction. First the reaction of Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992) (*"The Use of Knowledge in Society"*, 1945; *"Individualism and Economic Order"*, 1948; *"The Counter-Revolution of Science"*, 1952; *"The Theory of Complex Phenomena"*, 1964). Hayek started out as a socialist, working with Ludwig von Mises, but rejected that theory and became an inspiration to liberals. He criticized what he called "*scientism*", that is, the attempt to apply the principles of the natural sciences (of physics, in particular) to the social sciences. For him, in complex phenomena it is only possible to predict the pattern or principle of operation of the phenomenon and never the specific characteristics with which it will be presented. Mario Bunge (1919-2020) has also been debated in his volumes of *"Epistemology and Methodology"*, 1983, for "*scientific realism*".

More recently, Ram Roy Bhaskar (1994-2014) has used the concepts of "*critical realism*", "*critical naturalism*", "*stratified ontology*", "*transformational model of social activity (TMSA)*", "*transcendental arguments*", maintaining a position pro-realist, albeit critical. Richard Rorty (1931-2007) (op *"Habermas and Lyotard on postmodernity"*, 1985) was a pragmatist, he was the "*anti-epistemologist*" who advocated an "*epistemologically centered philosophy*". "*If anything, philosophy was good for*" was the question of his life. Dewey, Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein were his references. Richard Mattesich, in the works already cited, also elaborates his theory: the "*OMR-Onion Model of Reality*" , looking at the layered approach to reality on which his "*CoNAM-Conditional-Normative Accounting Methodology*" is based, with which he intends to synthesize various accounting theories, he says: "*I would prefer to be the "prophet of the new synthesis" rather than the "godfather of CoNAM"*"⁶.

Mattesich speaks of the "*rich conceptual apparatus presented in Searle's (1995) social ontology (much of which I accept)*"⁷ (John Rogers Searle (Denver, USA, 1932) (*"The construction of Social Reality"*, 1995) is an American philosopher, of British training, which specialized in the "*philosophy of language*", with concepts such as "*speech acts*", "*rules, meanings and facts*", "*external realism*". He refutes Descartes and states his "*biological naturalism*". Then, Carqueja⁸ recalls that, in post-structuralist thinking, "*reality is not what is 'real', but the result of an interpretation by the observer*"⁹ .

The same cites Shyam Sunder¹⁰, who says "*Accounting and control are a key element in the solution to build, operate, transform and dissolve organizations*" and, Carqueja himself, considers that Accounting and accounting information are a "*social reality*" that he interprets as "*social construct*" ("*constructo social*"), that is, in his Preface to the book in

⁶ "*Accounting Schism or Synthesis? A Challenge for the Conditional-Normative Approach*" (CAP Vol. 1 No. 2 — PCC vol. 1, no 2 (2002) pages 185–216).

⁷ Mattesich, "*Reality and Accounting*", Routledge, 2014, p. 182.

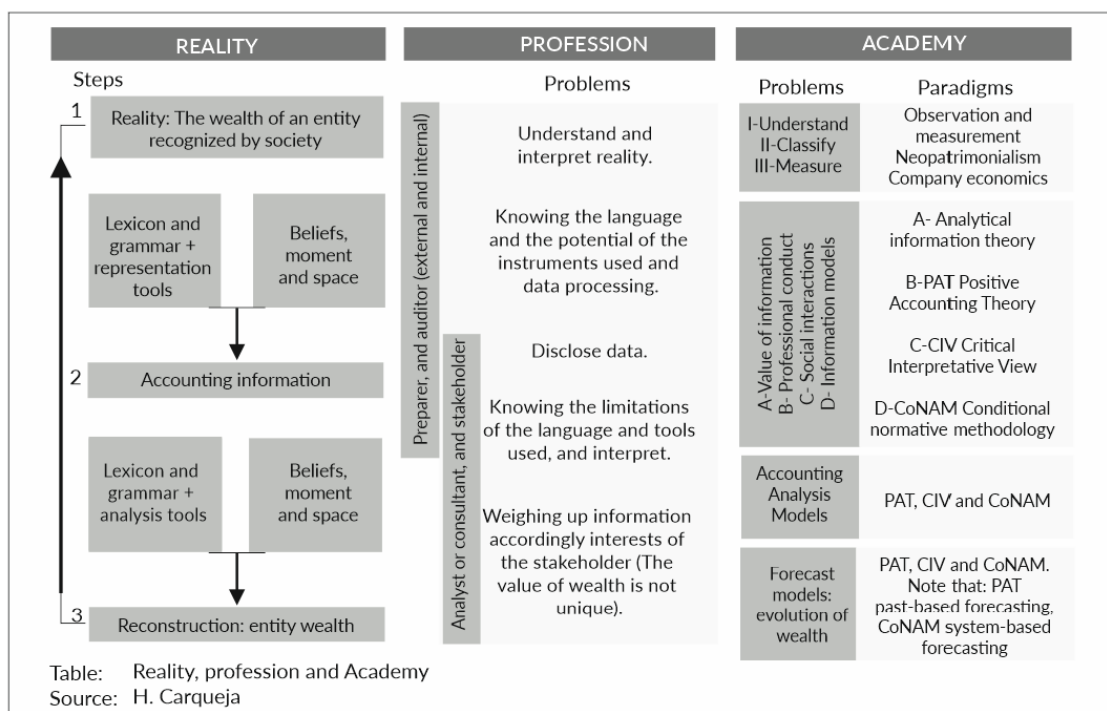
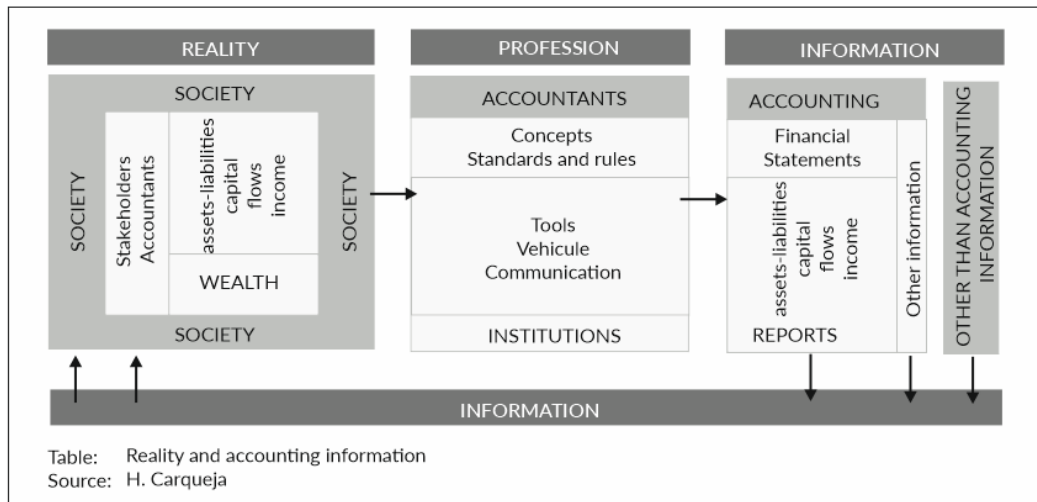
⁸ Researcher mentioned by Richard Mattesich in "*Two Hundred Years of Accounting Research*," Routledge, 2008, p. 296.

⁹ Remember Mattesich, "*Reality and Accounting...*", Routledge, 2014, which we will follow later

¹⁰ "*Theory of Accounting and Control*", South-Western College Publishing (International Thomson Publishing), Cincinnati, Ohio, p. 212, apud Carqueja in op. cit. back on note 2.

question (p. 30), he defines his “concept that can be taken as the basis of a theory” as follows:

“Accounting is a “social construct”, interpretable as an information system that analyzes, measures and represents the wealth of the entity to which it refers, to support management and social control”, a concept that clarifies with the following schemes illustrative:



3. THE HISTORY OF THE HISTORY

Let us integrate this evolution of "theories" and "epistemologies" in those of History in general and in that of the History of Accounting in particular, limiting ourselves to the so-called West, since in the East the evolution was different, although with globalization and the speed of communications has diluted borders in recent decades. Europeanism, rightly questioned, is opposed by those who see themselves as the "Middle Kingdom"; a global vision is being formed. The "History of History" has evolved faster and faster and here there is no "end of history" either, there is always evolution, sometimes mutations. Let us make a brief summary, without mentioning Father Thucydides, but evoking only the ancient times, those of the "main chronicler" of the kingdom who glorified his Lord, with greater or lesser attachment to reality (inventing, if necessary...).

Until the end of the 18th century, the beginning of the 19th, a history "woven of glorious deeds by the protagonists of power, for the teaching of their subjects"¹¹ prevailed. And, of course and as always, "history is written by the victors"¹². In the following century and with positivism (Comte invented the term "sociology" and, from there, the social sciences germinated...) went to archival sources and collected facts which, after, were written by "jurists, politicians, writers and intellectuals, journalists or simply "curious"¹³. The office of historian began to emerge, but then history was basically political and military.

In 1929, the magazine "Annales d'histoire économique et sociale" began to be published in France, with the aim of incorporating the methods of the social sciences, which had been developed in the meantime, into history. It was founded by Lucien Febvre (1878-1956) and Marc Bloch (1886-1944, assassinated by the Gestapo). Thus was born the "École des Annales", which (with renewal) became dominant for decades, mainly in continental Europe and Latin America. With the expansion of the field of vision to the social and economic and with the new auxiliary sciences using statistical and quantitative methods¹⁴:

¹¹ José Mattoso, "A Escrita da História", Ed. "Temas e Debates", Lisbon, 2019, p.189. This book is a compilation of the author's reflections and interventions between 1985 and 1999 and will serve as our main guide. Mattoso (Leiria, Portugal, 1933) was a Benedictine monk in Singeverga, Portugal, and Leuven, Belgium, for 20 years, and a noted Portuguese medieval historian and university professor. PhD in Medieval History (Catholic University of Louvain), he was Professor at Univ. Nova de Lisboa, President of the "Instituto Português de Arquivos" and director of "Torre do Tombo" (the Portuguese National Archive). He received the Alfredo Pimenta Prize for Medieval History (1985), the prize "Ensaio do P.E.N. Clube Português" (1986), the important Pessoa Prize (1987), the Bohüs Szögyeny International Genealogy Prize (1991), the Latin Trophy (2007) and the Árvore da Vida Prize (2019). Author of thirty books on Portuguese Medieval History, he directed a prestigious "História de Portugal" (1993-1995) in 8 thick volumes.

¹² Georges Orwell, "As I Please, 1943-1945".

¹³ Torgal, Mendes and Catroga, "História da História em Portugal", Ed. "Temas e Debates", Lisbon, 1998, pág. 39.

¹⁴ Geoffrey Barraclough (1908-1984), "Main trends of research in the social and human sciences", pt. 2, v. 1: "Anthropological and historical sciences, aesthetics and the sciences of art", pp. 227-487, Mouton Ed./UNESCO, 1978 (<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000137480>). Barraclough was a university professor known for developing new methods for comparative history, looking for links between past and present and noticing discontinuities.

- The model of the past event was discredited and that “*put into question the possibility of discovering historical structures and laws*”. “*Today...they are not...the facts in themselves..., but their repetition; not individual action, but mass movements.*”
- The notion was acquired that organized systems of actions that maintain an appreciable degree of temporal continuity, which we call “*social structures*”, can be reconstituted in the past.
- Historians were also interested in “*observing the family, law, social classes, industrial structures, prices, etc.*” “*These structures do not remain unchanged, neither in their foundations and general mechanisms, nor in their details and variants.*”
- The space is no longer the national to become the regional, the transnational, the “*historical-geographical*” complex.
- Political factology is no longer the focus.

The *École des Annales* was not interested in political history¹⁵ and the history of nations. “*His fight was against the “évènement”, the “histoire-bataille”, the short time, the anecdotal and superficial data*”, but rather “*to study in depth the economic foundations, the social laws, the structures, the secular permanences*”¹⁶, being certain that the past is irreversible, but can be studied and interpreted and not, as in traditional history, in which “*the discourse is implicitly attributed to a kind of extraterrestrial observer, who told with certainty what he knew that It had happened on the surface of the globe*”¹⁷. “*The great objective... is to understand the life of man in society*”¹⁸. Understand the mentality of each era, based on social history.

From 1939 to 1941 the magazine was called “*Annales d'Histoire Sociale*”, from 1942 to 1944 “*Mélanges d'Histoire Sociale*” and between 1946 and 1993 “*Annales. Economie, Sociétés, Civilisations*”, known as “*Annales ESC*”. After the Second World War and the work of Fernand Braudel (1902-1985), a student of Febvre, “*La Méditerranée et le Monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*” (1946) defined the second period of the *Annales* and focused on in the great historical-geographical complexes, with a multidisciplinary approach, in a “*Total History*” perspective, already announced by Febvre. It was a great leap to understand the past and its perennial models. It was intended to reach a unique knowledge, formed by the accumulation of the many and varied contributions of other sciences and the multiple approaches to all aspects of human behavior, even exaggerating and reducing to residual detail.

¹⁵ “... political history... does not deserve the name of science, even if it is disguised with the epithet of “human” and, above all, social”, Jacques Julliard, “*La Politique*”, in “*Faire de l'histoire*”, Vol II “*Nouvelles Approches*”, Dir. Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora, Gallimard, 1974, apud Torgal, Mendes and Catroga, “*História da História em Portugal*”, pp. 40-41, *Temas & Debates*, Lisbon, 1998.

¹⁶ Mattoso, op. cit. p. 259.

¹⁷ Idem, pág. 150.

¹⁸ Idem, pág. 151.

The third generation was headed by Jacques Le Goff (1924-2014), a student of Febvre, Bloch and Braudel, for whom all human activity is considered history and, thus, the New History (NH) emerged. George Friedmann (1902-1977), philosopher and sociologist, Charles Morazé (1913-2003), followed as directors, and between 1994 and 2018 it became “*Annales. Histoire, Social Sciences*” (*Annales HSS*). Currently its director is Vincent Azoulay (1972-...), a specialist in the history of Classical Greece. Of course, there was criticism of NH, and it itself went into exaggeration and contradiction. NH cannot be an object of itself, it depends on the relationship it establishes between research on key issues and socioeconomic structures. Otherwise, it would be as old and anachronistic as the “old story”.

Religious, ideological, philosophical or aesthetic assumptions influence the collection, interpretation and coordination of data¹⁹ (remember that we are assessing an accounting book, that is, just as it happens with accounting). In this way, things are relativized and the predominance of any absolute system is disavowed. The great syntheses were abandoned and the notion of “epoch” and, even more so, that of “period” was questioned. The NH paved the way in an almost obsessive search for novelty, which led to the multiplication of research topics beyond what was reasonable. We turn to magic, dreams, myths, rituals, miracles, the different parts and actions of the body, the face, gesture, hygiene, sexualities, sexual organs, gastronomy, leisure, sports, Party,...

The development of research techniques (physics, biology, laboratory methods) has further broadened the range and what the facts and documents or monuments may talk (dating, climate, pollens, paints and pigments, fabrics...), joining the traditional paleography, numismatics and linguistics. Archival research catalogs and, subsequently, the digitization of archives and their public access, research software that goes even to the hidden word in a text, scientific repositories in books and, later, digital, facilitate work and allow new possibilities, even to who investigate in telecommuting. But researchs sometimes focuses on a detail of its object, they focus on the object itself and forget about History. The scientific method then becomes a game²⁰.

The same thing happens with very particular topics seen in such depth that the investigation is dedicated solely to the details. In order to preserve for History the status of a useful, credible and indispensable discipline to understand human life in society, Pomian establishes three conditions: (i) facts located in time; (ii) there is proof that the facts are true; and (iii) the evidence must be documentary in nature.

“*Modernism*” rejected tradition, but created its own tradition, and with that, it lost its force and was also questioned and passed into the era of postmodernism, with its

¹⁹Idem, p. 144, citing Krzysztof Pomian (Warsaw, Poland, 1934), Polish philosopher and university professor, scientific director of the Museum of Europe Brussels), “*directeur de recherche honoraire*” no CNRS (France) and author, in particular of “*L'Europe et ses nations*” (1990), “*Sur l'histoire*” (1999) and “*Le Musée, une histoire mondiale*” (2020). Knight of the *Légion d'honneur*, Commander, *Doctor honoris causa* and holder of 3 awards.

²⁰ Mattoso, op. cit. pp 141-142.

"deconstructivism", its freedom. "Postmodernism can broaden the fields of research, it can fragment knowledge, it can even encourage studies of ephemeral validity, but it does not authorize intellectual fraud"²¹. Quoting Karl Popper: "Those who are unwilling to expose their ideas in the event of refutation will not participate in the scientific game"²². Today there is already talk of *trans*, *pseudo* and *post-postmodernism*. However, it is also true that political history has returned, but it must be considered as "a dialectic of continuity and change, of structure and conjuncture. The product of previous structures is itself the producer of new structures"²³.

But there were other schools and other geographies. Mainly active in the former USSR, the Marxist school also had its representatives in the West, namely and, among others, the British Edward Palmer Thompson (1924 – 1993). British and a Marxist, he was also Edward Hallett "Ted" Carr (1892–1982) in his influential work "What Is History?" (1961), to which Sir Geoffrey Elton (1921-1994) responded with "The Practice of History" (1967). British historiography was noted for its focus on the World with Arnold J. Toynbee (1889-1975) and his ten-volume work "A Study of History" (1936-1954) in which he suggests that civilization as a whole is the suitable unit for the study of history. The pioneers in the area were the Englishman H. G. Wells (1866-1946) and his "The Outline of History" (1919-1920) and the Dutch-American Hendrik Willem van Loon (1882-1944) with "The Story of Mankind" (1921). This school is now grouped in the World History Association, domiciled in the United States. UNESCO itself published in 1963 the "History of Mankind" and has been publishing collective works of history that "instead of recounting the past of nations, aim to provide a better understanding of civilizations."

In the United States between 1910 and 1940, progressive historians were predominant and they focused on the class conflicts of American history, namely its Revolution and its Civil War. Charles A. Beard (1874-1948) was the exponent of this movement (Beardian School). Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. (1917-2007) was a popular and influential historian (and politician) since the publication of "The Age of Jackson" (1945), having analyzed various periods of American life based on its leaders. The "consensus history" current was dominant in the 1950s and 1960s, focusing on American values and downplaying conflict as superficial. Richard Hofstadter (1916-1970), the iconic historian of this generation, wrote in "The American Political Tradition: And the Men Who Made it" (1948), "Even if they disagree on specific issues, the major political traditions have shared a belief in property rights, the philosophy of economic individualism, the value of competition; They accepted the economic virtues of capitalist culture as necessary qualities of man".

But as a reaction came the stream of radical historians of the 1960s of the "New Left History", which emphasized class, race, gender, minorities, the disadvantaged, dissent. It was followed by "new social history", in the 1960s and 1970s, which preferred to study the

²¹ Idem, op. cit. p. 146.

²² Idem, op. cit. p. 148.

²³ Idem, op. cit. p. 265.

experiences of ordinary people in the past. After 1980, however, the "cultural turn" led the next generation to "New Political History" to the application of social history methods to politics, as the focus shifted from politicians and legislation to voters and elections, using the social sciences, computers, statistics, new data sources such as censuses. In 1976 he joined the "Social Science History Association" and the journal "Social Science History". Quantitative history was absorbed into other disciplines, notably economics (where it was called "cliometrics") and political science. In history, traditional narrative approaches returned to political and social history and quantification was limited to demographics.

In conclusion, History always has as its horizon the existence of man in his time and his ability to choose his destiny, of which he is always an essential protagonist, although not the only one (there are the determinants of climate and geography, fauna and flora that they serve as food, ideas, techniques, economy, ...). Consequently, whatever the event or set of events, they always have the Total History as their framework²⁴.

4. THE ACCOUNTING HISTORY AND ITS EVOLUTION

The Accounting History has also evolved. The wise, experienced, great researcher, promoter and popularizer Prof. Esteban Hernández Estebe made the respective point of view in 1998, in the Prologue of the book "An Invitation to Accounting History", by David A. R. Forrester (1928-2009)²⁵. Let us summarize it, in the main lines of research: (i) "research on recording methods and accounting information"; (ii) "studies on accounting as instrument for managing and controlling enterprise"; and (iii) "works on the theories, schools and accounting approaches of the more or less distant past". (This is the case of the book in question).

The modern pioneers of accounting history had the same spirit of openness and innovation that preceded the birth of double entry and ushered in the Renaissance. Revival that Fra Luca Pacioli and his friends were agents. Thus, they extended the studies, in addition to "the evolution of bookkeeping techniques...to the concept of enterprise...management techniques and the means employed to control the work of factors at branches", "without... forgetting the study of the economic, social and political context..." However, Forrester never forgot the canons of historical research: (i) "use of primary sources"; (ii) "maximum possible objectivity in the description and analysis"; (iii) "insertion in relevant context"; (iv) "search for causal or collateral relations"; (v) "interpretation of the events...making a clear distinction between the event itself" and "our opinions and interpretations of the event, its causes and reasons"; and (vi) the awareness of "the impossibility of fully achieving these goals" and that there is always "an element of subjectivity in the very choice of events to be investigated".

²⁴ Mattoso, op. cit. p. 78.

²⁵ Publisher: Strach Convergencies. The book is a selection of the author's 37 works written in 30 years, from 1968 to 1998.

At the end of the 20th century, there was a great debate about epistemology and methodology in world historiography (as we reported earlier), shaking the classical concepts of objectivity, rationality, timelessness, and universality. It came to be regarded as a simple intellectual activity with locally and historically contingent results. That is, only valid for a certain moment and certain circumstances. There was great confusion in the historiographical environment, since it seemed that any new idea or new approach could be valid. With the new ideas there was an extraordinary progress in the History of Accounting. It was called "*New Accounting History*" (NAH), to distinguish it from the "*Traditional Accounting History*". But the NAH is not a new School or Doctrine, but rather a varied set of approaches and ways of understanding the discipline. Thus, for Garry D. Carnegie and Christopher J. Napier, if previously it "*was conceived as a way of fomenting and glorifying the practice of bookkeeping and the professional status of bookkeepers*", in the utilitarian approach contemplated that "*the past solutions that could be useful in resolving present problems*"²⁶.

In a more judicious approach, an attempt was made to understand the past of accounting from the point of view of social or political theories. Thus, the NAH was summarily distinguished by²⁷: (i) The field of research, methodologies, and approaches have been extended, "*with the appearance of new disciplines or new problems*"; (ii) The focus has decreased on historical facts and there is a "*different emphasis is given to relations, to logical patterns, ideologies and interpretations verified by means of facts*"; and (iii) "*Methodological innovations cover the whole range of influxes deriving from a national culture at each specific moment in history*". To Yannick Lemarchand and his disciples: (i) "*The loss of faith in the possibility of achieving objectivity in the study and description of historical events*"; and (ii) "*Accounting, like other human activities, is subject to a more or less linear process of continual progress, motivated by the needs to adapt to the requirements of the environment*".

The supporters of the NAH prefer, instead of studying the evolution, to focus on "*situations of breaking, of interruption, of retrocession*" and, instead of studying the adaptation of accounting to the environment, to focus on the influence of the former on it. That is, "*accounting should not simply be studied simply as a technique, but an element for shaping the social and organisational framework of a society*". For Peter Miller "*accounting is no longer be regarded as a neutral device that merely documents and reports the "facts" of economic activity*"²⁸, but interpretations must be formulated a priori that can be verified by the facts. Thus, theoretical reflection precedes research and the collection of facts. The

²⁶ In "*The Routledge Companion to Qualitative Accounting Research Methods*" (chapter 5) published by Zahirul Howue, Lee D. Parker, Mark Covalleski and Kathryn Haynes, 2017, this quote, like the others unspecified apud Prof. Hernández, quoted Prólogo citado, en traducción libre.

²⁷ Richard K. Fleischman, Lawrence P. Kalbers and Lee D. Parker, "*Expanding the Dialogue: Industrial Revolution Costing Historiography*", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 7(3) (1996): 315–337.

²⁸ "*Accounting as social and institucional practice: an introduction*" in "*Accounting as Social and Institucional Practice*", Ed. Anthony G. Hopwood and Peter Miller, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994, pág. 1.

barriers between the various historiographical disciplines are broken down, in favor of a multidisciplinary study.

Hernández welcomes the NAH “*in the sense of a complement to an enrichment of old patterns and not revolutionary approach*”. In fact, “*thanks to the new ideas, the field of accounting history research has become broader and the reportory of subjects to be dealt with, and the approaches to them, have increased notably*”. With the new approaches, a much greater contextualization was promoted, a deeper understanding of the events in the context in which they occurred, instead of being appreciated with current references. In this way, the History of Accounting is linked to that of Business and Finance and, more broadly, with economic and social history. So, Hernández believes in a more moderate attitude so as not to fall into risks and temptations, which he lists, without claiming to be exhaustive: (i) Originality; (ii) Exclusivity; (iii) Dogmatism; (iv) Utilitarianism; (v) Undervaluing the study and description of events; (vi) Bureaucratisation; (vii) Methodological, thematic, temporal and linguistic reductionisms.

These reflections are in the sense that the NAH “*will not be just a new trend, based on originality and fashion, which will be dethroned by a new Post-NAH*”. “*Accounting as Social and Institutional Practice*”²⁹, a collective work, published a few years before Forrester's, goes in the same direction, although in a more social and radical way. From the situation mentioned above and carried out by Hernández in 1998, things were expanded and completed, somewhat corresponding to the wishes that he formulated there. That is to say, there are many schools, many more subjects, many more studies, much more freedom to do them, as long as scientific rigor is respected. But “*the adoption of a common and broad definition of the study area*”³⁰ is desired.

“*The idea is not that of unanimity of opinions and ideas, but that of learning and the mutual exchange of knowledge*”³¹. These works did not point only to the Accounting History, but to the very concept of Accounting, which “*reflects not only the values and beliefs of society, but, by retransmission, is also a constituent of society itself*”³², and Garry D. Carnegie comes to propose, in 2022, a new definition: “*Accounting is a technical, social and moral practice concerned with the sustainable utilisation of resources and proper accountability*”

²⁹ Ed. Anthony G. Hopwood and Peter Miller, Press S. Univ. Cambridge, 1994

³⁰ Delfina Gomes y Lúcia Lima Rodrigues, “*Investigação em História da Contabilidade*” in “*Contabilidade e Controlo de Gestão. Teoria, Metodologia e Prática*”, Org. by Maria João Major e Rui Vieira, Escolar Editora, Lisbon, 2ª edição, 2017, alluding to T. Boyns e J. R. Edwards, “*Pluralistic approaches to knowing more: A comment on Hoskin and Macve*”, Accounting Historians Journal, 27 (1), p. 157.

³¹ Idem, idem, this time apud R.K. Fleischmann e V. S. Radcliffe, “*Divergent streams of accounting history: A review and call for confluence*”, in “*Doing Accounting History: Contributions to the Development of Accounting Thought*”, de R. K. Fleischman, V. S. Radcliffe and P.A. Shoemaker, Ed., Elsevier Science, Amsterdam, 2003.

³² Marc Bollecker, Agnès Mazars-Chapelon and Gérald Naro, “*Conter, compter, ou dompter le monde ? La comptabilité au prisme des discours et des auteurs*”, in « *Comptabilités et Société* », Coord. de Chapellier, Gillet-Monjarret, Naro, Dupuy, Mazars-Chapelon and Nègre, Ed. EMS, Caen, França, 2018, p. 332.

to stakeholders to enable the flourishing of organisations, people and nature”³³, a definition that seems laudable but insufficient.

Comparing with the previous point, it is concluded that the debate in the Accounting History was not essentially different from that of History in general, only a little more out of date. Thus, many works with different approaches appeared, such as, for example, "*L'émergence de la fonction comptable*", by Pierre Labardin (PUR, 2010) or with a much broader scope (already outside the NAH?), and, at the same time more restrictive, such as "*Classer, dire, compter - Discipline du chiffre et fabrique d'une norme comptable à la fin du Moyen Âge*"³⁴, the result of a Colloquium held in 2012. It has even emerged in the 1940s/1950s a new science/approach: *Codicology*, as a study of the physical structure of the codex/book. Everything matters: the method of construction, the previous owners, the place of origin, the reconstruction of its original appearance, the purposes and dissemination of the text, the different stages of production, from the manufacture of the writing supports (parchment, palimpsest, papyrus, paper and in what format and what raw material, its origin, typography, watermarks,...), its printing, its binding (cover, back cover, guards, tails, brooches or other reliefs, spine, plates,...) to the texts contained therein (for example, in accounting books, the opening and closing terms; language and words used, type of speech, calligraphy, inks,...), to the passage of time and the history of the institutions that led to its destruction or preservation. Whatever the approach, let us reproduce the testimony of someone who was always far from the world of Accounting: Josephine Tey/Gordon Daviot, alias Elizabeth Mackintosh (1896-1952), a Scottish writer who used such pseudonyms: "*The truth is not in the history books: it is in the accounting books*"³⁵

5. FINALLY THE BOOK

Its eight hundred pages include a preface, a prologue, an introduction and 14 chapters. In the ten-page preface, Prof. Almiro Oliveira mentions, namely, that it is "...a true *Manual of Accounting Theories*, which came to fill (not only in Portuguese), a space that was not yet filled... This Book constitutes and will constitute a relevant milestone in the field of Scientific Study of Accounting Theories". In the eight masterful pages of the Prologue, Prof. Hernâni Carqueja affirms that "*the acceptance of accounting within the social sciences is still recent, at the end of the 20th century, in the 1970s and 1980s.*" It raises specific questions, but with deep implications (the representation of reality, the information system, value and fair value, accountability, behavior, ...) to conclude that, "*just this two problems, related to the purpose of the accounting activity and the research method to know, lead to different problems and*

³³ "*Accounting as Technical, Moral and Social Practice: The Monetary Valuation of Public Cultural, Heritage and Scientific Collections in Financial Reports*", de Garry D. Carnegie, Paolo Ferri, Lee D. Parker, Shannon I. L. Sidaway and Eva E. Tsahuridu, *Australian Accounting Review*, 2022, N.º 0, Vol O, 1-13.

³⁴ Dir. Olivier Mattéoni and Patrice Beck, *IGPDE-Comité pour l'Histoire Économique et Financière de la France*, 2015.

³⁵ After finishing this text, I read the 21st (and last) chapter of the work "*Sociologia*" by Anthony Giddens, in the 2007 Portuguese edition of the Fundação C. Gulbenkian (from the 2001 original in English), "*Pensamento teórico em sociologia*" and I was impressed by the similarity of the essence of the problems of this other social science.

method to answer them. And there are many problems to be solved, and each one implies options in terms of finding answers”.

He pays tribute to Richard Mattessich and says that *"I understand that in the immediate future the only comprehensive explanation that accommodates the different areas of research is the conditional normative theory, a view that is also shared by the authors of this book."* He ends by saying that *"the book... deserves the interest of readers, professionals and academics; I take advantage of the time I spent reading it for the better."* Chapter 1 highlights the interest of Accounting and its social dimension, since it affects the economic environment and human behavior. In Chapter 2, the concept of accounting theory is discussed and its delimitation is carried out through different classification criteria (schools, personalities, influences). Finally, the epistemological ruptures in Accounting are presented, from Pacioli to Hopwood, and the theories are classified into five categories.

In the dense and philosophical chapter 3, in the accounting field, the epistemological bases of the General Theories of Knowledge are tested. Such perspectives are given from Nicolas de Cues (1439) to Kuhn, Lakatos, Feyerabend, Marcuse, Habermas. He highlights the contributions of Patton and Mattessich, but *"accounting is a construction in motion"*, subject *"to pressures and demands that have their origin in the social context"*. Chapter 4 deals with the *"evolution of accounting records from Antiquity to the mid-fifteenth century"*, that is, until the appearance of the *"Theory"* embodied by Pacioli in his book. Although in a summarized way, the economic substratum is addressed from the primitive economies, passing to Eastern Antiquity, Greece, Rome, the Middle Ages and, in this, the interactions with philosophy, religion and economy. Interesting are the various chronological tables inserted in the text with the documents or events that were milestones in the evolution of Accounting. His choice is always debatable. However, such landmarks, placed in a graphic sequence, allow us to better think about causes and effects. The chapter ends with a description of the classical system (also illustrated with a graph) and a reference to Pacioli.

The following chapters are devoted to the description and analysis of accounting theories over time, namely: (i) Descriptive theories; (ii) Norm ones; (iii) Positive ones; (iv) Normative-conditional ones; and (v) Historical and sociological ones. Therefore, chapter 5 focuses on descriptive theories, intertwining medieval scholastic ideas with business and accounting practices. It raises the question of fair pricing in a time span as vast as Saint Thomas Aquinas to Chambers's COCOA (*Continuously Contemporary Theory*) and religious ideas on economic issues reflected in accounting. Well-prepared tables are presented, of which the chronology of economic and accounting thoughts highlights the connections between the two, namely with respect to the question of value. It confronts the various accounts movement theories and the various balance sheet presentations and ends with the differences in approach in Europe and the US, here based on the classification process, in the form of major postulates.

Chapter 6 describes the normative theories that refute existing practices and that are constituted from the deductive methodology, exposing their foundations and their aspects:

ethical, economic, institutional and eclectic. The issues of "true and fair view", historical cost/nominal currency, conceptual schemes, PBAS (*Principles Based Accounting Standards*) versus RBAS (*Rules Based Accounting Standards*) approaches, accounting plans and accounting modeling (exploration of the concept of information). Chapter 7 is dedicated to the PAT (*Positive Accounting Theory*), born and developed for environments where stock markets play an important role, such as in the US. This theory is radically anti-normative, considering that the norms embody judgments of worth. The PAT is based on the idea of validating the hypothesis of usefulness of accounting information for decision making, within the framework of the conceptual schemes of financial information. It questions the institutional role of financial information and marks an epistemological rupture. It tries to model the behavior of the agents included in the accountability process and conceives a set of hypotheses, influenced by the Agency Theory. His empirical validation methodology is likely to be criticized both for the methodological approach, the axiomatic framework used, and for the empirical validation methods. Despite well-founded criticism, it has generated important contributions.

Chapter 8 focuses on normative-conditional theories, in particular the work of Mattessich. This theory pretends to be the bisector of the logical and teleological research programs in accounting. It evokes a general theory of accounting to look for and the users and their needs. It raises the question of the ends and means of accounting and the only truth is not an end to be achieved. You have to determine the ends and, once the objectives have been found, choose the appropriate means. The tables included here soften the abstract description, namely the eight that illustrate the ends/means relationship for different objectives. In this line, accounting is seen as an applied science, with a scientific methodology based on hypotheses, models, theories, propositions and axioms.

Chapter 9 is dedicated to the historical and sociological theories of accounting, which have different concerns and foundations than the previous ones and are linked to economic and philosophical currents. The former focus on the need to introduce the role of History in the evolution of accounting and discuss its relationship with capitalism. The latter argue that accounting standards are mere constraints, supposedly neutral, but hidden, they are socially and politically important in the distribution of wealth.

Chapter 10 presents ten lines of research based on the utility paradigm and one on the abstract-formal paradigm. For each line of research, its conceptualization is described (with the most important authors and dates), the fundamental characteristics, difficulties or limitations. It covers a vast temporal and geographical arc. Chapter 11 is unusual and is entitled "*Metaphors in Accounting Epistemology*." Metaphors are assumed to be a first attempt at theorizing, citing various examples (value/energy, equilibrium, dynamics, classification of accounts and balances, etc.). Illustrated with one hundred phrases of accounting substitution/comparison metaphors. It is said that "*accounting as art*" is a "*metaphor without content*", taking Jansen's concept of art. Basil S. Yamey (1919-2020) excelled in his search for artworks illustrating accounting themes (books, utensils, devices,

portraits, etc.). From him, the authors quote the statement that the inclusion of such subjects is the only point of connection between art and accounting.

Chapter 12 also has a curious approach. 29 classical authors, from different countries and schools and from a long period of time (from Pacioli to the present) were selected and their theories were synthesized in tables, each with the same 17 types of characteristics. The conclusions show that in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, Germany and Italy had a great influence on accounting, but currently authors (and their theories) from Anglo-Saxon countries dominate, which have generated important epistemological ruptures. Chapter 13 is entitled "*Future Perspectives*" and recalls the 1960s and the North American influence, at that time based on user-oriented normativism and conceived as an information system. However, in the following decade, the PAT (*Positive Accounting Theory*) emerged, rejecting value judgments and other normative considerations. Are these thoughts compatible? The authors resort to Mattessich's conditional-normative methodology as the ideal compromise between these currents of thought in the search for a general accounting theory, which is assumed to be an applied science, a soft science. Pedagogically, the book ends with chapter 14, in which, chapter by chapter, the conclusions are summarized.

Each chapter has its own bibliography and, at the end of the book, there is a "*Consolidated Table of References*", which occupies 26 pages (with works from 1494 – Pacioli – to 2015). The work is extensive and dense. It synthesizes the History of Accounting up to Pacioli and, subsequently, classifying, describing and criticizing, exposes the numerous past theories throughout the centuries, up to the present. Without claiming to be a book on the History of Accounting, it is also, although elevated, at the level of theories. It's another approach, which makes the book in an unprecedented way. Accounting was born from practice and it is this line that is usually developed in accounting history books. But, to finish, let us quote again (with our absolute agreement, after the lived experience) Prof. Carqueja: "*he deserves the interest of readers, professionals and academics*". Too bad there is only the Portuguese version, which limits its diffusion.