

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS – DEADLINE 15 MARCH 2024

The European Society for the History of the Human Sciences (ESHHS) invites submissions to its 43rd conference to be held from **25 to 28 June 2024**. The conference will be hosted by the [University of Essex](https://www.essex.ac.uk), at its Colchester campus in the UK, and will be held in person only.

We invite proposals for oral presentations, posters, symposia or workshops that deal with any aspect of the history of the human, behavioural and social sciences or with related historiographic or methodological issues. This year's conference particularly encourages submissions related to the theme of **inner life** (see below).

Guidelines for submission

Any submission should include the following: **name, email and institutional affiliation** of all authors. Please indicate clearly on the top of the page the **submission type**: oral presentation, poster, session or workshop.

- Proposals for **oral presentations** should contain a 500-600 word abstract in English plus a short bibliography. If the presentation itself will be given in another language, please indicate this in your proposal.
- Proposals for **posters** should contain a 300-word abstract in English and a short bibliography.
- Proposals for a **session, workshop or round table** should contain a 500-600 word rationale of the event, plus a short bibliography, as well as a short abstract for each individual contribution to the event.

Please send your proposal as an attachment in MSWord (.doc/.docx) to **eshhs2024@gmail.com**

Deadline for submissions is 15 March 2024.

Travel stipends

A limited number of travel stipends will be available for students, or scholars who otherwise might require economic support. Only those presenting a paper (including in an organised session) or poster are eligible. If you wish to apply for a travel stipend please indicate this clearly in your submission email and complete the online application form: <https://forms.gle/fXggbVRvsM3r7X7C9>

'Inner life' and its historiography: history, science and history of the human sciences

For many years, the historiography of 'inner life' has been guided by the notion that the early modern period provided people in Europe and North America with a new understanding of the human. In this view, the emergence of Protestant movements in the sixteenth century, with their emphasis on personal commitment, followed in the seventeenth century by philosophies that promoted new notions of individualistic selfhood, are considered early manifestations of modern inner life (Boeker, 2021). This historiography has also been dominated by the Foucauldian analysis that the modern self is the meeting point of all sorts of 'internalizations' of power and knowledge, as well as by notions from critical theory of the parallels between our 'inner' desires and the ways we function in capitalist society.

Other historians, however, have located the emergence of 'human interiority' as an organizing principle of subjectivity later on. For instance, historians of childhood (Shuttleworth, 2010; Steedman, 1995) have shown how the new medical, legal, and literary perceptions of childhood dating from the late eighteenth century were crucial in a new understanding of the 'self' as an inner entity that affected the entire life cycle. Others have shifted the historical timeline even further by claiming that the Freudian unconscious – born at the turn of the twentieth century – is the focal historical point in making 'inner life' properly part of the modern common sense and self-understanding (Zaretsky, 2004).

More recently, many scholars in the humanities and the social sciences have argued that we have now entered a different epoch, in which 'inner life' has become an empty metaphor. Neuroscientists and critical thinkers alike tell us not only that the distinction between inner life, emotions, and the body is anachronistic and needs to be dismissed (Ahmed, 2014; Massumi, 1995), but also that that portion of our subjectivity is believed to be inaccessible (and hence, 'inner') is reachable through new ways of studying our brain, our emotions, and our existence in the world.

In the public domain, and indeed in our everyday language, the language of 'interiority' remains ubiquitous, however, and many of us continue to assume that we have an 'inner life'. The language of the internal can be observed in the growing number of memoirs and autofictions in which authors negotiate their inner lives between themselves and their readers, or in the discourses of 'internalization' that can be found in movements like body-positivity and sex-positivity. What's more, the notion that our self-perception is socially constructed is now popular far beyond academic circles, and many assume that an individual's ideological positions are the outcome of internalizing social and cultural norms and representations – for instance, in debates over the 'influence' of social media, and in how we 'internalize' representations simply by using them. Thus, we recognize conflicting trends between researchers and the public: on the one hand, the idea that science provides us with the tools for making our inner life more visible (MRIs, genetics, facial profiling) and, on the other, constant invitation to preserve our individuality, our-'selves', to explore our 'inner life', and to celebrate who we 'really' are inside.

What can historians of the human sciences tell us about the notion of inner life? Is this indeed a concept that could only emerge under the framework of modern individualism? And, if not, what might be an alternative periodization? Should we turn back to the Greek '*psyche*', the Hebrew *Ruah*, or Indian *Ātman* (to mention only a few)? Are inner life or interiority specifically Western concepts or can we recognize similar ideas elsewhere? How has inner life been justified in different cultures, societies, and philosophies and under what social circumstances? What were the criticisms and oppositions to these notions of that invisible (emotional) life?

We invite scholars of all historical periods, geographical regions, and relevant disciplines to take part in this investigation into the history of inner life.