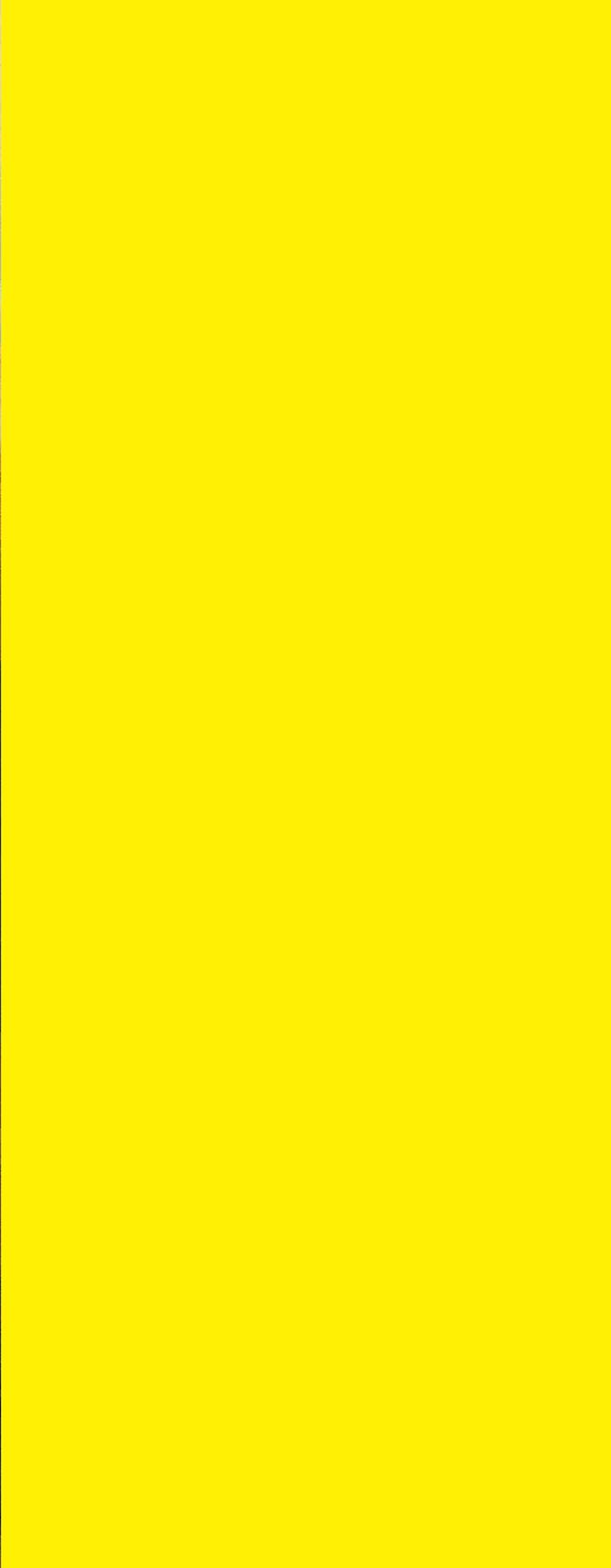


THE ODYSSEY OF HUMAN SPIRIT

Historiography of Philosophy
in the Post-Kantian Age

Fredrik Bjarkö

SÖDERTÖRN DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS



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in the Post-Kantian Age**

Fredrik Bjarkö

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Abstract

In the 1790s, many post-Kantian German philosophers attempted to lay a new foundation for the historiography of philosophy. Earlier works on the topic, they argued, made out mere aggregates of disconnected sources and allowed for no understanding of the overarching, rule-bound nature of reason's historical development. This error was to be amended by applying the insights of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which the post-Kantians believed to offer a universally valid and unbiased method for approaching the philosophical thought of the past.

I argue that this historiographic strain in post-Kantian thought is often misunderstood. It is frequently described from a presentist viewpoint that makes it appear as merely a tendentious apology for critical philosophy. In this dissertation, I approach post-Kantian historiography of philosophy in a different way, namely, by situating it in the historically specific situation in which it arose. First, I attempt to make sense of post-Kantian theories and practices of the history of philosophy by relating them to earlier traditions. Second, I trace the development of post-Kantian historiography during its most vigorous period until the time it started to be challenged by other, new historical methods and ideals around the middle of the 19th century.

A main result of my study is that the post-Kantians posited reason as such as the subject of the history of philosophy. This subject transcended both particular individual philosophers and particular schools of thought. To achieve this narrative of reason's historical development, the post-Kantians established what I refer to as a "depth model". The task of the historian was, in their view, to reach from the outer expression of historical philosophies to their rational essence, from their letter to their spirit. This ambition led to a number of new historiographical challenges. It forced the post-Kantians to reconsider the role of biographies in the history of philosophy, the geographical scope of this history, and the relation between history's temporality and reason's eternity. Throughout my examination, I account for all of these issues and how the post-Kantians attempted to resolve them. I claim that their approach in general can be described in terms of performative concept work, i.e., a use of concepts that was made possible by certain already-given frameworks of understanding, but that simultaneously transformed these frameworks and gave them a set of new meanings. Ultimately, I argue, the period led to a wholly new concept of "the history of philosophy" as such.

Keywords: history of philosophy, historiography of philosophy, Kantianism, German idealism, eclecticism, orientalism, Swedish philosophy, Fichte, Hegel, Kant, Reinhold, Schelling

Abstract (sv)

Under 1790-talet efterfrågade många postkantianska tyska filosofer en ny grund för filosofihistorieskrivningen. Tidigare verk på ämnet utgjorde enligt deras uppfattning aggregat av osammanhängande källor som inte möjliggjorde någon förståelse för den övergripande regelbundenheten i förnuftets historiska utveckling. Denna brist kunde, ansåg de, rättas till med utgångspunkt i Kants *Kritik av det rena förnuftet*, som enligt postkantianerna erbjöd en universellt giltig och opartisk metod för att närma sig det filosofiska tänkandets förflutna.

Jag hävdar att denna historiografiska tendens i det postkantianska tänkandet ofta misstolkats. Den beskrivs i regel ur ett presentistiskt perspektiv varigenom den framstår som en tendentiös apologi för den kritiska filosofin. I denna avhandling närmar jag mig den postkantianska filosofihistoriografien på ett annat sätt, nämligen genom att placera den i den historiskt specifika situation den uppstod. För det första eftersträvar jag att förstå postkantianernas filosofihistoriska teorier och praktiker genom att relatera dem till tidigare traditioner. För det andra spårar jag den postkantianska filosofihistoriografins utveckling genom dess mest intensiva period fram tills den började utmanas av andra, nya historiska metoder och ideal runt 1800-talets mitt.

Ett centralt resultat är att postkantianerna uppställde förnuftet självt som filosofihistoriens subjekt, och detta subjekt överskred såväl individuella filosofer som enskilda skolor. Med ambitionen att teckna denna förnuftets historiska utveckling etablerade postkantianerna vad jag kallar en djupmodell. Historikerns uppgift var enligt deras uppfattning att nå från de historiska filosofiernas yttre uttryck till deras förnuftiga väsen, från deras bokstav till deras ande. Denna ambition ledde till en rad nya historiografiska utmaningar. Den tvingade postkantianerna att ompröva biografiernas roll i filosofihistorien, filosofihistoriens geografiska omfång och relationen mellan förnuftets evighet och historiens tidsbundenhet. I min undersökning redogör jag för alla dessa frågor och hur postkantianerna sökte lösa dem. Jag hävdar att deras tillvägagångssätt i allmänhet kan beskrivas i termer av ett performativt begreppsarbete, det vill säga en användning av begrepp som möjliggjordes av vissa redan givna meningssammanhang, men som samtidigt omvandlade dessa sammanhang. Ytterst hävdar jag att perioden gav upphov till ett helt nytt begrepp om filosofihistorien som sådan.

Nyckelord: filosofins historia, filosofihistoriografi, kantianism, tysk idealism, eklekticism, orientalism, svensk filosofi, Fichte, Hegel, Kant, Reinhold, Schelling

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	11
Purpose and Research Questions.....	15
Previous Research	17
Methodological Considerations in Studying the Historiography of Philosophy	25
Delimitations	34
Structure	38
CHAPTER 1	
A Playground of Eternal Struggles: Historiography of Philosophy in the Wake of the <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>	41
Historiographical Dimensions of the First <i>Critique</i>	44
The <i>Preisfrage</i> of 1791.....	50
The Kantian Peace Treaty.....	54
The Progress of Philosophy.....	63
Summary and Conclusions.....	74
CHAPTER 2	
From the History of Philosophers to the History of Philosophy.....	79
Pierre Hadot on Philosophy as a Way of Life	81
Heumann and the Eclectic School.....	84
From Predicate to Substance: The Concept of Philosophy among the Post-Kantian Historians	92
Post-Kantian Histories of Philosophy.....	98
The Post-Kantian Concept of the Philosophical Life.....	106
Summary and Conclusions.....	116
CHAPTER 3	
Barbarians, Orientals, and Greeks: The Question of the Origin of Philosophy	119
Previous Research and Contributions of the Chapter	123
The Concept of Barbaric Philosophy and its History	128
Europe and the Orient.....	135

“The history begins among the Greeks, with Thales”	146
Against the Hellenocentrics.....	159
CHAPTER 4	
Grohmann’s Dilemma: The Conflict Between the System and the History of Philosophy.....	165
Grohmann’s Proposal.....	167
The Animosity between Philosophy and History.....	177
The Kantian Counterattacks: Tennemann and Carus	186
Summary and Conclusions.....	192
CHAPTER 5	
The Developing System: The Philosophical Historiography of the Idealists	195
Fichte’s Pragmatic History of Human Spirit.....	198
Schelling and Hegel: The Concept of the Developing System	208
The Reception of The Idealist Programme.....	220
Idealist Histories of Philosophy	224
Summary and Conclusions.....	230
CHAPTER 6	
The Origin of Mankind, the Origin of Philosophy: Orientalist Narratives and their Rivals in the 19 th Century.....	235
The Concept of the Orient.....	237
Romantic Orientalism	242
Idealist Hellenism.....	250
The Swedish Case.....	256
Summary and Conclusions: From Barbarians to Orientals	265
Results, Conclusions, and Outlook.....	271
Delimiting and Ordering	272
From Eclecticism to Post-Kantianism	275
New Perspectives on the Post-Kantian Era	278
Outlook: After Idealism.....	280
Final Remarks: The Challenges of the Historiography of Philosophy in the 21 st Century.....	282
Appendices.....	285
Note on Overlapping Publications	285
Appendix: Sources of Figure 1	285

Sammanfattning	297
Acknowledgements.....	305
Svenska	305
English	308
Sources and Literature.....	309
Sources.....	309
Index of Names.....	331
Södertörn Doctoral Dissertations	335

Introduction

In a 2019 article published in *Die Zeit*, Michael Hampe distinguishes between two kinds of history of philosophy: those written by historians and those written by philosophers. The latter, he claims, can often be suspected of lacking neutrality. Since their authors are themselves partisans in philosophical debates, they unavoidably view past philosophies “through the categories of [their] own thought”.¹ Typical examples of this approach are, in Hampe’s view, Kant and Hegel:

When Kant, in 1791, answered the Academy question about what progress metaphysics had made, he divided philosophy into schools: dogmatics and sceptics. They were hopelessly at battle. But then I, Kant, arrived with transcendental philosophy and brought order in the course of things. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel similarly lets World Spirit entangle itself in contradictions and tumble through crises from antiquity to 1800, until in 1806, I, Hegel, arrive, look back on it all as an agent of World Spirit, and bind it all together in absolute knowledge.²

The occasion that led Hampe to make these remarks was the publication of Jürgen Habermas’s *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie*. Hampe finds this work impressive: the amount of material treated in it is “enormous” and Habermas’s ability to synthesise it all into a connected whole is “awe inspiring”. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that it was written by “a society-oriented philosopher, not a historian”. To Hampe, Habermas therefore “finishes his work as Kant, Hegel, or Heidegger before him: through a history that leads to his own thought”.³

Hampe is not alone in questioning the historical credibility of the work. Josef Früchtl, a previous student of Habermas, also describes it as a somewhat hopeless project. Is it really possible, he ponders, that a single individual can reliably account for 2500 years of philosophical development? Does such a work not demand the effort of a great number of scholars who can offer more

¹ Michael Hampe, “Vom Mythos zur Moderne”, *Zeit*, 7 November 2019.

² Hampe, “Vom Mythos zur Moderne”.

³ Hampe, “Vom Mythos zur Moderne”.

specialised presentations of individual periods, schools, and thinkers? Perhaps this type of endeavour was once justifiable, but the time for it is now over:

The way in which the history of philosophy was still possible in the 19th century – the tradition of Hegel and school philosophy – that a single individual presents three volumes and describes the entire history of philosophy... At least in philosophy this is said to no longer be possible. It simply asks too much of a single person, as there are mountains of research literature that a single person cannot master in a single life.⁴

Früchtl thus takes this type of historical study to have been made possible only by a lack of empirical knowledge of the philosophies of the past, so that the extensive research of today renders it archaic. The juxtaposition between Habermas and Hegel would then imply that, in the 19th century, mastering vast amounts of specialised scholarship was not yet perceived as a problem. Only at some later point, we would have to presume, did this scholarship reach the critical mass when it was no longer penetrable by a single individual and when the narratives of earlier historians started appearing as tendentious oversimplifications.

It is interesting that both Früchtl and Hampe draw the comparison between Habermas and the historiography of philosophy as it was practiced in the Kantian and Hegelian traditions of the 18th and 19th centuries. Taken together, they illustrate a relatively widespread conception of this period. In fact, however, their descriptions do not fit the historical evidence about the post-Kantian historians of philosophy. For it is far from true that these historians were unaware of the historiographical challenges and difficulties raised by Früchtl and Hampe; on the contrary, they were among the first to highlight these difficulties and offer elaborate discussions of them.

It was indeed common for Kantians and Hegelians to present overarching accounts of the past of their subject. Many of them authored detailed programmes for the history of philosophy with the ambition of understanding its entirety as harmonious with the philosophical system: as unitary and law bound. The task was to find in reason itself the foundational principles that, throughout history, had led philosophy to a strictly scientific and systematic form; to trace the chronological development of philosophy back to its *a priori* grounds. The history of philosophy was, simply put, a crucial *philosophical* problem.

⁴ *Sein und Streit* (Deutschlandfunk Kultur, 10 November 2019).

However, it is not true that this approach was made possible only by a limited body of specialised research. As early as the middle of the 18th century, it had already become common for German academics to lament the fact that knowledge production moved at a pace that overwhelmed the capabilities of any single individual: the publication frequency of learned journals was so high that one could not hope to read all that was published in a single year, or even a single month. Furthermore, the topics treated in these journals were becoming so narrow and specialised that they were incomprehensible to anyone other than an expert in the research field in question. It seemed as though soon only fragmentary insights into particular subfields of science would be possible and that more universal perspectives on mankind's knowledge as such would become unattainable.⁵

The historiography of philosophy was no exception to this situation. In the late 18th century, many scholars in this field noted that empirical research had recently made huge leaps forward. There was more knowledge than ever of the biographies, writings, and doctrines of ancient thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle – perhaps, some thought, the gathering of the historical sources was even nearing its full completion. The question was just how one should treat and organise this vast amount of knowledge. If it was simply left as immensely detailed accounts of particular thinkers and doctrines, it seemed as though it would not serve any real purpose of philosophical *Bildung*. Instead, it would appear as a mere aggregate of data, and trying to navigate this aggregate would lead to little more than confusion and disorientation. As a complement to these fruits of empirical research, the historians of philosophy turned to systematicity and organisation. This was precisely the ambition underlying post-Kantian and idealist historiography of philosophy. The idea that the history of philosophy could be systematic and unified was not the result of a lack of specialisation, but rather a reaction to its existence. Früchtl's account is thus somewhat misleading.

The same can be said of Hampe's description that the post-Kantians regarded the history of philosophy in terms of the categories of their own thought. They can certainly be accused of doing this, but they were far from ignorant of the risks inherent in such a method. They frequently criticised

⁵ This description is largely based on Chad Wellmon, *Organizing Enlightenment: Information Overload and the Invention of the Modern Research University* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), pp. 4, 10, 48–49. Some primary-source examples of 18th-century worries about the immeasurable field of knowledge production are Johann Georg Sulzer, *Kurzer Begriff aller Wissenschaften und anderer Theile der Gelehrsamkeit* (Frankfurt/Leipzig, 1772), p. 6; "Von der Journalsucht in Deutschland", *Hanauisches Magazin*, no. 6 (1783).

previous historians for being tendentious and failing to see the value of philosophical doctrines differing from those of the author. In light of this criticism, they heavily emphasised the need for a neutral and unbiased viewpoint from which the past of philosophy could be studied and comprehended. Their solution lay in the conception of this history as a teleologically developing system of reason. Only in such a narrative, they thought, could the undeniable value of each philosophical teaching be appropriately appreciated. The historian would then neither take sides in philosophical conflicts nor prematurely reject past thought through the narrow lens of the present; instead, he⁶ would be able to see them all as part of a necessary development. The teleological structure was not the fruit of a lack of interest in objectivity, but an attempt to achieve it.

The challenges that Früchtel and Hampe identify in contemporary historiography of philosophy are thus not as new as they may appear. In fact, these challenges in themselves possess an intellectual history stretching back to the very tradition that is often accused of being ignorant of them: post-Kantian philosophy and German idealism.

This is not to say that contemporary historians of philosophy ought to return to the solutions proposed by the post-Kantians. There are many good reasons to consider their systematic ideals as problematic guidelines for historical research. The point is rather that contemporary discussions of theory and method in the historiography of philosophy have, to a large extent, inherited the problem descriptions that were first elaborately put forward by the post-Kantians. On a more fundamental level, they have also inherited the very concepts with which these problems are articulated.

In relation to this, the post-Kantian conceptions of the systematic and teleological character of philosophy's history cannot simply be disregarded as naïve, outdated, or superfluous. Rather, it appears that 21st-century historians are faced with a more complicated *crisis* of these conceptions. They no longer appear as legitimate solutions to historiographical challenges, but they still shape the understanding of these challenges themselves. To some extent, we still understand the history of philosophy in line with the concepts

⁶ Throughout this study I use the pronoun "he" as a generic masculine since this was generally done by the post-Kantians themselves. To them, both the philosopher and the historian of philosophy were assumed to naturally be men. Changing this by using more gender-neutral terminology would make the post-Kantians appear to have a non-gendered conception of philosophy, historiography, and scholarly work in general. By adhering to their own gendered language, I intend to show that this was not the case and that their conception was in fact always gendered. For a classic discussion of this gendered character of early-modern and modern philosophy, see Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1993).

elaborated by the post-Kantians, but it is no longer obvious how we can justify these concepts and determine their relations with one another.

The aim of this study is not to propose a solution to the issues outlined above. Rather, I take them to indicate that the concept of the history of philosophy is itself starting to appear as an object in need of historical reflection. If the post-Kantian view of the historical development of philosophy appears questionable to contemporary historians, this implies that there is a historical distance separating us from the post-Kantian age. Understanding the issues and questions occupying the post-Kantian historians then requires that we examine them historically. This book is such an examination.

Purpose and Research Questions

A defining mark of post-Kantian historiography was the idea that the history of philosophy must be systematic and follow rational principles. This is in itself well known. Less known are the historical conditions that led the post-Kantians to this conception, the problems they sought to resolve through it, and the details of the historiographical practice they based on it. For this reason, their systematic ideals are often described in terms nearing caricature: the post-Kantians are judged from a presentist standpoint rather than examined on their own terms.

In this study, I approach post-Kantian historiography of philosophy in a different way, namely, by situating it in the historically specific situation in which it arose. First, I attempt to make sense of post-Kantian theories and practices of the history of philosophy by relating them to earlier traditions. Second, I trace the development of post-Kantian historiography during its most vigorous period until the time it started to be challenged by other, new historical methods and ideals around the middle of the 19th century.

In tracing this development, I focus on the philosophical and historiographical *problems* the post-Kantians sought to resolve as well as on the *aims* they wanted to achieve. My claim is that post-Kantian historiography marked a fundamental reconceptualisation of the history of philosophy as such. The problems they perceived, formulated, and discussed were thus to a large extent distinct from those of previous historians. The same can be said for their way of defining the criteria for a valid solution to these problems (i.e., their aims). The terms “problems” and “aims”, then, do not refer to eternal or transhistorical philosophical issues, but to philosophical issues arising within the framework of particular traditions *situated in* time. Put more

concretely, the post-Kantians were not just dissatisfied with earlier works on the history of philosophy; on a more fundamental level, they had a different conception of what the history of philosophy was to start with.

For this reason, the concept of the history of philosophy as such became a source of discord: the post-Kantians could accuse their predecessors of having misunderstood its nature. Some of them went so far as to claim that there were no previous histories of philosophy at all in the true sense of the word. But the conflict over the concept of the history of philosophy was not one between two well-defined, clearly delimited views. Rather, a defining feature of the post-Kantian age is that “history of philosophy” became an essentially contested concept.⁷ Reinterpretations, renegotiations, and modifications of it thus continuously shaped discussions and debates among post-Kantian historians.

This forms the background to the research questions that have guided my examination. Since the debates of the period concerned the very concept of the history of philosophy, they can be approached as a conceptual history. Since the concept in question was furthermore an essentially contested one, each use of it can be treated as a performative act through which it gained new meanings or was freed of meanings that had previously been associated with it. Taken as a whole, the debates therefore concerned the delimitations of the field of the history of philosophy. My *purpose* is to account for the conceptual transformations this field underwent during the period as exhaustively as possible. The *research questions* I intend to answer through the examination are the following: (1) How did the post-Kantians delimit the field of the history of philosophy? What did they consider to belong to this field, and what did they exclude from it? In which ways did their employment of the concept of the history of philosophy redraw its boundaries compared with earlier uses of it? (2) How did they structure the *contents* of this field? To what type of organisation did they propose that the history of philosophy must adhere, and how did this relate to their conceptions of the historian and his work?⁸

In the following chapters, I will approach the post-Kantian concept of the history of philosophy, its boundaries, and its inner organisation from

⁷ Cf. W.B. Gallie, “Essentially Contested Concepts”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, no. 56 (1956).

⁸ It may appear that the term “boundary” is particularly fruitful since the post-Kantians, as we shall see, frequently described the history of philosophy using spatial metaphors: as a field to be mapped out or as a landscape to traverse. It must be emphasised, however, that the wording of the research question does not presuppose this empirical result. Rather, I use the term as an analytical tool applicable to any concept whose definition is explicitly debated, as such a debate always concerns what belongs to the concept in question and what does not.

different perspectives. In chapters 1, 4, and 5, the focus lies on the concept of the history of philosophy in general and the motives that led the post-Kantians to define it in the way they did. In chapter 2, I examine a particular *exclusion* that distinguished them from earlier historians, namely, the lives and deeds of the philosophers. And in chapters 3 and 6, I examine the temporal and geographical boundaries of the history of philosophy with particular emphasis on the issue of whether this history began among the Greeks or the ancient Orientals.

Previous Research

In the course of the following chapters, this study will enter into dialogue with a number of different research fields within intellectual history. Chapter 2, for example, includes a discussion of the *persona* of the philosopher and philosophy as a way of life. And in chapters 3 and 6, I relate my sources to previous research on 19th-century Eurocentrism and European orientalism. But since these strains of research pertain only to particular parts of the study, they will be outlined more elaborately in the chapters where dialogue with them can be activated. The following overview of previous research instead focuses on the broader fields that are of relevance to the study as a whole. As such, it is divided into two sections: the first outlining the development of research into post-Kantian and idealist philosophy in general, and the second focusing on studies of the history of the history of philosophy.

Research on Post-Kantian Philosophy and German Idealism

Studies of post-Kantian and German idealist thought have traditionally followed a narrative that was, as we shall see, first established by the idealists themselves, namely, one of gradual progress towards the ultimate completion of the philosophical system. In line with this approach, idealism as a whole could be regarded as comprising the quartet of major thinkers Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel (in that particular order). Consequently, the systematic completion has traditionally been identified with Hegel's mature philosophy.⁹

⁹ Among the clearest examples of such an account is Richard Kroner's *Von Kant bis Hegel*, published in 1921. The title of the work itself is telling: Kroner intends to trace a history of development *from Kant to Hegel* – a development that he, in the words of Ulrich Schwabe, takes to constitute an “immanently necessary and systematically conditioned progress”. Richard Kroner, *Von Kant bis Hegel. Erster Band* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1921); Ulrich Schwabe, *Individuelles und Transindividuelles Ich: Die Selbstindividuation reiner Subjektivität in Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2007), p. 46.

In such a narrative of a progress culminating in Hegel, earlier idealist thinkers could only be ascribed the role of intermediates to be surpassed along the road of development. During the 20th century, this approach was challenged and increasingly rendered outdated. First, it has been objected that Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel did not replace each other in a linear chain, but were active overlappingly.¹⁰ Thus, Fichte continued developing his system in response to Schelling's break with it, just as Schelling did not stop philosophising in light of Hegel's rise to fame.¹¹ Already for this reason, it appears necessary to study these thinkers in their own right rather than as stations in a movement with a predetermined direction and goal.¹²

A second tendency has been the unearthing of important thinkers not belonging to the "great four". For example, Karl Leonhard Reinhold and Salomon Maimon have been the subject of increasing scholarly interest in recent decades, and the resulting studies have demonstrated that they were highly important actors in post-Kantian philosophy as a whole.¹³ A similar

¹⁰ See, e.g., Dieter Henrich, "Einleitung: Über Probleme der Methode bei der Erforschung der nachkantischen Philosophie", in *Konstellationen: Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789–1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991), p. 34.

¹¹ Some notable studies of Fichte's later system are *After Jena: New Essays on Fichte's Later Philosophy*, ed. by Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008); Wolfgang Janke, *Fichte: Sein und Reflexion – Grundlagen der kritischen Vernunft* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012); *Die Spätphilosophie J.G. Fichtes: Tagung der Internationalen J.G.-Fichte-Gesellschaft (15.–27. September 1997)*, ed. by Wolfgang H. Schrader (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000). Regarding Schelling's late philosophy, a classic work is Walter Schulz, *Die Vollendung des deutschen Idealismus in der Spätphilosophie Schellings* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1975). Other noteworthy examinations include *The Potencies of God(s): Schelling's Philosophy of Mythology*, ed. by Edward Allen Beach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Thomas Buchheim, *Eins von Allem: Die Selbstbescheidung des Idealismus in Schellings Spätphilosophie* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2022); Manfred Frank, *Der unendliche Mangel an Sein: Schellings Hegelkritik und die Anfänge der Marxschen Dialektik* (München: Fink, 1992).

¹² A seminal work of this kind is Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008). See also Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760–1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Some influential studies focusing on particular thinkers in the idealist tradition are Martial Gueroult, *L'évolution et la structure de la doctrine de la science chez Fichte* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1982); Reinhard Lauth, "J.G. Fichtes Gesamtidee der Philosophie", *Philosophisches Jahrbuch*, 71.2 (1964); Reinhard Lauth, *Transzendente Entwicklungslinien von Descartes bis zu Marx und Dostojewski* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2015); Ives Radrizzani, *Vers la fondation de l'intersubjectivité chez Fichte: Des Principes à la Nova methodo* (Paris: Vrin, 1993); Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2002); Manfred Frank, *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2016); *Schelling and the End of Idealism*, ed. by Dale E. Snow (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

¹³ Some important studies of Reinhold's philosophy are Martin Bondeli, *Das Anfangsproblem bei Karl Leonhard Reinhold: Eine systematische und entwicklungsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Philosophie Reinholds in der Zeit von 1789 bis 1803* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1995); *Philosophie ohne*

tendency can be identified in research on Jena romanticism. Previously considered merely the artistic offshoot of idealism, the romantics have increasingly been shown to constitute a philosophical movement in their own right.¹⁴ The detailed uncovering of the philosophies of, among others, Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel has further complicated the notion of the linear progress of idealism.¹⁵

A third tendency has been to approach post-Kantian philosophy not as made up of a number of independently acting individuals, but as a collective endeavour. Thus, if the second approach was characterised by increased attention to figures previously considered subordinate, the third one shifted its focus from the individuals to the groups and constellations they constituted, and to the common themes that they developed in unison and exchange with one another. Above all, Dieter Henrich has played a central role in developing this approach. In his *Konstellationen*, Henrich notes a tendency in earlier scholarship to focus on individual authors and treat these as Ptolemaic fixed points. In contrast to this, he proposes that the post-Kantian tradition constituted a complex “force field” where different authors stood in relations of reciprocal influence.¹⁶

The present study places itself within this third tradition. I do not wish to question the importance of Kant, Schelling, and Hegel in shaping the

Beynamen: System, Freiheit und Geschichte im Denken Karl Leonhard Reinholds, ed. by Martin Bondeli and Allesandro Lazzari (Basel: Schwabe, 2004); Daniel Breazeale, “Between Kant and Fichte: Karl Leonhard Reinhold’s ‘Elementary Philosophy’”, *Review of Metaphysics*, 35.4 (1982); Alfred Klemmt, *Karl Leonhard Reinholds Elementarphilosophie: Eine Studie über den Ursprung des spekulativen deutschen Idealismus* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1958); Karl Ameriks, *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Karl Ameriks, *Kant and the Historical Turn: Philosophy As Critical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). On Maimon, see, e.g., *Salomon Maimon: Rational Dogmatist, Empirical Skeptic: Critical Assessments*, ed. by Gideon Freudenthal (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003); Abraham P. Socher, *The Radical Enlightenment of Solomon Maimon: Judaism, Heresy, and Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Manfred Frank, “Unendliche Annäherung”: *Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997); Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004); Dalia Nassar, *Romantic Empiricism: Nature, Art, and Ecology from Herder to Humboldt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

¹⁵ A pioneer of this research tendency is Frederick C. Beiser, who has published detailed studies of the romantic tradition, Hamann, Jacobi, the anti-Kantian popular philosophers, Herbart, and the post-Hegelian idealists Trendelenburg and Lotze. See Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*; Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Frederick C. Beiser, *Late German Idealism: Trendelenburg and Lotze* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Frederick C. Beiser, *Johann Friedrich Herbart: Grandfather of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

¹⁶ Henrich, “Einleitung: Über Probleme”, p. 13.

historiography of philosophy of their age.¹⁷ What I would like to emphasise, however, is that these thinkers were part of a much wider landscape consisting also of many other actors. As such, it is possible to achieve a much more saturated and nuanced image of their concerns by placing them within this wider context. Thus, throughout my examination I will treat Kant, Schelling, and Hegel side by side with relatively unknown figures in the broad tradition of post-Kantian German thought (e.g., G.G. Fülleborn, J.C.A. Grohmann, L.A. Hülsen, and F.A. Carus).

A more important methodological stance relates to the way in which these sources are themselves approached, as I do not primarily intend to investigate the authors in question as individuals. Many of them were certainly original and are deserving of scholarly attention in their own right. But they are even more important figures when considered as a group acting in (and collectively creating) a joint framework of thought. They borrowed concepts from one another and made use of ideas that cannot sufficiently be considered as belonging to any one particular actor. This approach also pertains to my reading of Schelling and Hegel. To sufficiently grasp the problems they were concerned with in their works, it is necessary to place them within a broader tradition, i.e., to regard them as parts of what we with Ludwig Fleck could call a thought collective.¹⁸

Finally, the study contributes to the research on post-Kantian philosophy not only through the authors it examines, but above all through the topic itself: post-Kantian *historiography of philosophy*. As I intend to show throughout the following chapters, this was a topic that the philosophers of the period considered highly important and closely connected to the endeavours of system philosophy as such. This leads to the next section of this review of earlier research.

Historiography of Philosophy as a Research Field

The historiography of philosophy is a relatively young field of research. Of course, historians of philosophy have often commented on earlier works on the subject; this tradition is nearly as old as the genre “history of philosophy” itself. But historical research making literature on the history of philosophy

¹⁷ The importance of Kant in particular is already indicated by my reference to the period as a whole as “post-Kantian”. As the following chapters will show, many historians of the late 18th century indeed regarded Kant’s criticism as the only possible basis for examining the history of philosophy.

¹⁸ Ludwik Fleck, *Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache: Einführung in die Lehre vom Denkstil und Denkkollektiv*, ed. by Lothar Schäfer and Thomas Schnelle (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2021).

into an object in its own right did not start appearing until the late 1960s. In one of the first influential works of the field, Lutz Geldsetzer's *Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte*, the author summarises this situation succinctly. He notes that many academic philosophers take a great interest in the history of their subject, but that few have posed the "closely related and important question: *how has one previously thought about the relationship between philosophy and its history?*"¹⁹

The focus of Geldsetzer's own study is the historiographical debates during the post-Kantian age. In the first section of the book, he offers a detailed summary of a large number of German publications spanning from 1791 to the middle of the 19th century, and in the second section he systematically elaborates on the central problems occupying the authors of the era. As an effect of this structure, the initial survey offers relatively little in terms of analysis and theoretical perspectives. Ultimately, however, this is not the ambition; Geldsetzer rather aims to lay the foundation for further research by giving an overview of the relevant sources. "What could be more beneficial to the contemporary consciousness than a trustworthy overview of the already achieved, an overview on which one can build, to which one can refer, through which one can educate oneself?" he asks rhetorically.²⁰ As a rigid review of such a rich source material, his work has indeed gained this status. There are admittedly some oversights to consider: Geldsetzer misses a few important works (e.g., Maimon's and Hülsen's) and incorrectly speculates that Fichte may be the author of an anonymous article from 1795. Despite this, however, his research remains a valuable reference point.

A few years after Geldsetzer's *Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte*, two works with a wider scope appeared in French. In *L'histoire de l'histoire de la philosophie* (1973), Lucien Braun traces the development of the historiography of philosophy from antiquity to the present.²¹ Around the same time, Martial Gueroult's studies of philosophical historiography were posthumously published as *Dianoématique: L'histoire de l'histoire de la philo-*

¹⁹ Lutz Geldsetzer, *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert: Zur Wissenschaftstheorie der Philosophiegeschichtsschreibung und -betrachtung* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1968), p. 14. See also Lutz Geldsetzer, "Der Methodenstreit in Der Philosophiegeschichtsschreibung 1791–1820", *Société Française de Philosophie, Bulletin*, 56.3 (1966).

²⁰ Geldsetzer, *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte*, p. 14.

²¹ Lucien Braun, *Histoire de l'histoire de la philosophie* (Paris: Ophrys, 1973). Subsequent references to the work will refer to the German translation: Lucien Braun, *Geschichte der Philosophiegeschichte*, trans. by Franz Wimmer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990).

sophie (1979–1988).²² As in the case of Geldsetzer, these two works have become important points of reference for subsequent scholars.

However, the definitive reference work in this research field is undoubtedly *Storia delle storie generali della filosofia* (English: *Models of the History of Philosophy*), published in four volumes between 1981 and 2004.²³ This monumental, multiple-thousand-page study is the results of a research project at the University of Padua led by Giovanni Santinello, Gregorio Piaia, and Giuseppe Micheli. In the *Storia delle storie generali*, the researchers offer a near-exhaustive bibliography of all histories of philosophy published in Europe from the Renaissance to the Hegelian age with an emphasis on Germany, England, France, and Italy. The titles covered are presented with detailed summaries and author biographies, and each chapter begins with an in-depth introduction of the period under examination.²⁴ It should be mentioned, however, that the authors focus on “general histories of philosophy” rather than texts occupied solely with the theory of the subject.

In parallel with the publication of these large-scope works, recent decades have also seen an increased interest in the historiography of particular German philosophers. Two early examples are Yirmiahu Yovel’s *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (1980),²⁵ in which the historicity of reason in Kant is a central theme, and Jung-Min Kang’s dissertation *Philosophische Philosophiegeschichte* (1998),²⁶ which examines the relation between history and

²² Martial Gueroult, *Dianoématique. Livre 1, Histoire de l’histoire de la philosophie. 1, En Occident, des origines jusqu’à Condillac* (Paris: Aubier, 1983); Martial Gueroult, *Dianoématique. Livre 1, Histoire de l’histoire de la philosophie. 2, En Allemagne, de Leibniz à nos jours* (Paris: Aubier, 1988). For a detailed comparison between Braun and Gueroult, see Ulrich Johannes Schneider, “Theorie und Praxis der Philosophiegeschichte revidiert: Lucien Braun und Martial Gueroult im Gegensatz”, *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, 42.4 (1988), pp. 666–81.

²³ *Models of the History of Philosophy. Volume I: From Its Origins in the Renaissance to the “Historia Philosophica”*, ed. by Giovanni Santinello (Dordrecht/Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993); Gregorio Piaia and Giovanni Santinello, *Models of the History of Philosophy. Volume II: From the Cartesian Age to Brucker* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011); Gregorio Piaia and Giovanni Santinello, *Models of the History of Philosophy. Volume III: The Second Enlightenment and the Kantian Age* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011); Gregorio Piaia, Giuseppe Micheli, and Giovanni Santinello, *Models of the History of Philosophy. Volume IV: The Hegelian Age* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2022). See also Gregorio Piaia, *Il lavoro storico-filosofico: Questioni di metodo ed esiti didattici* (Padova: CLEUP, 2012).

²⁴ For a detailed review and summary of the work, see Francesca Greco, “A Look into the ‘Storia delle storie generali della filosofia’ and Its English Edition from a Global Perspective”, *East Asian Journal of Philosophy*, 2.1 (2022).

²⁵ Yirmiahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

²⁶ Jung-Min Kang, *Philosophische Philosophiegeschichte: Studien zur allgemeinen Methodologie der Philosophiegeschichte mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte* (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre, 1998).

philosophy in the thought of Kant and Hegel.²⁷ Apart from this, there are a number of recent anthologies on Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy,²⁸ on Kant's essay on the progress of metaphysics since Leibniz,²⁹ and on 19th-century German historiography of philosophy in general.³⁰

A work that differs in approach from the studies discussed above is Ulrich Johannes Schneider's *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*.³¹ Rather than focusing on individual authors, Schneider draws on a large number of sources to offer a broader picture of late 18th-century historiography of philosophy. Compared with other wide-scope studies, his analysis is driven by a more elaborate theoretical and methodological framework.

The subtitle of Schneider's study – *Eine Archäologie der Philosophiegeschichte* – bears witness to his Foucauldian influence. His study often focuses on practices, but these are in turn analysed as regulated by discourses and springing from particular types of “will to knowledge”.³²

An important finding of Schneider's is that late 18th-century historiography constituted a break with the earlier type of learned approach to the past known as *historia literaria*. Whereas *historia literaria* directed its endeavours towards the “representation” and “ordering” of the texts – as exemplified in the idea of the universal library – the later philosophical historiography was related to practices of hermeneutic interpretation, reconstruction, and rearticulation of the sources. To this was connected a new form of historical consciousness, a series of new ways of ordering the relationship between past and present.

²⁷ Some other examples of studies concerned with individual historians before and during the age of idealism are Ezequiel L. Posesorski, *Between Reinhold and Fichte: August Ludwig Hülsen's Contribution to the Emergence of German Idealism* (Karlsruhe: KIT Scientific Publishing, 2016); Jacob Brucker (1696–1770): *Philosoph und Historiker der europäischen Aufklärung*, ed. by Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann and Theo Stammen (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998); Leo Catana, *The Historiographical Concept 'System of Philosophy': Its Origin, Nature, Influence, and Legitimacy* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008).

²⁸ Klaus Düsing, *Hegel und die Geschichte der Philosophie: Ontologie und Dialektik in Antike und Neuzeit* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983); *Hegel und die Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. by Dietmar Hermann Heidemann and Christian Krijnen (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007); *Hegel's History of Philosophy: New Interpretations*, ed. by David A. Duquette (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

²⁹ *Über die Fortschritte der kritischen Metaphysik: Beiträge zu System und Architektonik der kantischen Philosophie*, ed. by Andree Hahmann and Bernd Ludwig (Hamburg: Meiner, 2017).

³⁰ *From Hegel to Windelband: Historiography of Philosophy in the 19th Century*, ed. by Gerald Hartung and Valentin Pluder (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015); Ulrich Johannes Schneider, “Teaching the History of Philosophy in 19th-Century Germany”, in *Teaching New Histories of Philosophy*, ed. by J.B. Schneewind (Princeton: University Center for Human Values, Princeton University, 2004), pp. 275–95.

³¹ Ulrich Johannes Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes: Eine Archäologie der Philosophiegeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990).

³² Cf. Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, pp. 321, 325, 329.

Another important work of Schneider's on the topic is *Philosophie und Universität*, which examines how the history of philosophy was taught at German universities throughout the 19th century. Using detailed quantitative data, Schneider here shows that this topic became considerably more emphasised in curricula during the period.³³

Schneider's studies are also important as constituting an early examination of the geographical boundaries of the history of philosophy. In recent decades, a number of other scholars have posed this question, often in connection with modern orientalism, eurocentrism, and scientific racism.³⁴ It suffices to briefly mention this field here since it will be discussed in detail in chapter 3 below.

If in 1968 Geldsetzer could complain that so little had been written on the historiography of philosophy, there is less reason for lament today. This does not mean, however, that post-Kantian historiography of philosophy has been exhaustively examined. On the contrary, the foundational research conducted by Geldsetzer, Braun, Piaia, Santinello, and others open up the field for a larger number of theoretical approaches, methodological considerations, and specialised questions.

³³ Ulrich Johannes Schneider, *Philosophie und Universität: Historisierung der Vernunft im 19. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1999).

³⁴ Robert Bernasconi, "Philosophy's Paradoxical Parochialism", in *Cultural Readings of Imperialism: Edward Said and the Gravity of History*, ed. by Keith-Ansell Pearson, Benita Parry, and Judith Squires (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997); Robert Bernasconi, "Krimskrams: Hegel and the Current Controversy about the Beginnings of Philosophy", in Charles E. Scott and John Sallis, *Interrogating the Tradition: Hermeneutics and the History of Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000); Robert Bernasconi, "With What Must the History of Philosophy Begin? Hegel's Role in the Debate on the Place of India within the History of Philosophy", in *Hegel's History of Philosophy: New Interpretations*, ed. by David A. Duquette (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003); Peter K.J. Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780–1830* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013); *Philosophiegeschichte in globaler Perspektive*, ed. by Rolf Elberfeld (Hamburg: Meiner, 2017); *Histories of Philosophy in a Global Perspective: East Asian Journal of Philosophy*, ed. by Anke Graneß and Yoko Arisaka (2022), 2.1; Rolf Elberfeld and Anke Graneß, *Orders of Knowledge in Philosophy: Critical Assessments* (Hildesheim: Universitätsverlag Hildesheim, 2025); Rolf Elberfeld, "How Philosophy Became Exclusively European in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Germany and How it Opened up Again in the Twentieth Century: A Metaphilosophical Reflection", in *Orders of Knowledge in Philosophy: Critical Assessments*, ed. by Rolf Elberfeld and Anke Graneß (Hildesheim: Universitätsverlag Hildesheim, 2025); Anke Graneß, "The Struggle to Find the Origin of Philosophy: The Role of Ancient Egypt – Yesterday and Today", in *Orders of Knowledge in Philosophy: Critical Assessments*, ed. by Rolf Elberfeld and Anke Graneß (Hildesheim: Universitätsverlag Hildesheim, 2025); Constance Blackwell, "Thales Philosophus: The Beginning of Philosophy as a Discipline", in *History and the Disciplines: The Reclassification of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Donald R. Kelley (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1997); Michael Forster, "Does Western Philosophy Have Non-Western Roots?", in *From Hegel to Windelband: Historiography of Philosophy in the 19th Century* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015).

The works of these scholars bear the marks of a newly established area of research. They focus mainly on the collection and mapping of the source material and emphasise empirical exhaustiveness over theoretical analysis. For this reason, I have consulted them mainly as reference works. More recent scholarship on post-Kantian historiography of philosophy, on the other hand, tends to consist of close readings or comparative examinations of individual philosophers (above all Kant and Hegel). Here, my approach differs in relation to both theory and method, as the object of my study is not the historiography of philosophy of Kant, Hegel, or any other particular post-Kantian philosopher. Rather, I aim to contextualise and reconstruct an intellectual movement that I approach as a connected and continuous object of study. In other words, I am less interested in individual differences between particular thinkers and more interested in their common denominators, i.e., the problems, concepts, and discussions that characterised the period as a whole.

This places my study closer to the approach of Schneider, although here, too, there are considerable differences in methodology. Schneider approaches his sources above all on the level of discourses.³⁵ To this he ties examinations of what could be called discourse-regulated practices – for example, practices of reading, writing, and circulating. My study will touch upon some of these issues, and in those cases the relation to Schneider will be commented upon. But my own focus lies on another type of practice located at another level of language and expression: the practice of shaping the very concepts *of which* a discourse consists. I will often refer to this as performative concept work, i.e., the practice of creating conceptual meaning through the very employment of a concept in a particular context. The meaning of this will be elaborated on in the following methodological considerations.

Methodological Considerations in Studying the Historiography of Philosophy

In examining post-Kantian writings on the historiography of philosophy, we are faced with texts that appear both familiar and foreign. They are familiar since they discuss precisely the activity undertaken in reading them: the study of the history of philosophy. But they are also foreign because their understanding of this activity frequently differs considerably from contemporary historiographical practice. Sometimes, they raise questions that are rarely

³⁵ See, e.g., Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, p. 329.

discussed in 21st-century historical theory and whose purpose is difficult to discern from a contemporary perspective. Sometimes, the questions themselves are familiar, but the proposed answers are based on premises that differ radically from more recent discussions. This makes it necessary to reflect on the historical distance that separates us from the 18th- and 19th-century historians of philosophy. To grasp their concerns, ideals, and practices, we must reach an understanding of the historical situation in which they were active. Doing this requires a historical method.

In the following pages, I discuss three methodological concepts that have guided my examination of post-Kantian historiography of philosophy. The first of these, contextualisation, immediately relates to the issue of historical distance. Its function is to situate the sources historically and to thereby approach their meaning in relation to their contemporary issues, ambitions, and conceptions. The second one, reconstruction, moves from the overarching level of context to the level of individual texts and arguments. Here, what is at stake is the possibility of following a philosophical line of reasoning and thereby gaining an understanding of how its particular conclusions relate to its historically given premises. Finally, conceptual history is used as a method that traces the temporality of the concepts around which the texts are structured.

Contextualisation

Contextualisation is perhaps the most commonly employed method in intellectual history.³⁶ Its function is to move from a presentist perspective on a given source material to a perspective that treats the source in relation to its particular historical situation – i.e., its context. The term context, then, signifies all of those circumstances – historical, cultural, philosophical, etc. – that coincide with the source, situate it in its time, and thereby determine its possible meaning.

Such circumstances are of course rarely explicit in the source text itself. Rather, they must be gradually built up by the historian in his or her process of interpretation. This is done first and foremost by placing a particular source into an intertextual relationship with other sources. In this way, a wider context can be discerned by their mutual interaction.

³⁶ See, e.g., Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics. Volume 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Robert D. Hume, *Reconstructing Contexts: The Aims and Principles of Archaeo-Historicism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); David Boucher, *Texts in Context: Revisionist Methods for Studying the History of Ideas* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1985).

For example, when the 18th-century historian Christoph Meiners claims that the ancient Brahmins did not possess any philosophy, the statement is difficult to interpret by itself. By relating it to the period's debates on the historiography of philosophy, however, we discover that the existence of philosophy in India was a frequently discussed question at the time. Meiners's claim can then be understood as an intervention in an ongoing debate. Moving yet another step, we can connect this debate to a broader discussion of the relationship between Asian and European culture and, in turn, to the European worldview in the age of colonialism. At this point, the perspective on Meiners's utterance is significantly broader, and the possibilities of interpretation have multiplied.

Taken in this sense, contextualisation constitutes a type of hermeneutic circle: the understanding of the individual text is dependent on the understanding of the wider context, but the wider context in turn consists of individual sources.³⁷ The part and the whole are co-constitutive and constantly refer back to each other so that the historian must move between them in the interpretative process.

By making this claim, I simultaneously wish to account for the position that contexts occupy in the process of interpretation. At face value, it might appear that a context is something existing in the source material itself so that the historian must *discover* and *identify* it. Such an understanding is, for example, implied by Quentin Skinner when he describes the task of the historian as that of "recover[ing] a very precise context of presuppositions and other beliefs".³⁸ However, this view risks ascribing to the context an air of objectivity that is, in fact, difficult to substantiate. After all, the context is not something that simply lies bare in the text, but rather something that the historian gradually reaches in his or her own praxis of interpretation. This indicates that it belongs to the process of understanding rather than to the object of this process. Indeed, only in this way does it become a concept of methodological value: the contexts do not constitute that which is studied, but the *way* in which it is studied.

As I understand context, then, it is not already given in the sources, but rather constructed by the historian as part of the interpretative practice. It is

³⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 196. On hermeneutics in relation to the methodological concept of context, see also Boucher, *Texts in Context*, pp. 19–33.

³⁸ Skinner, *Visions of Politics. Volume 1*, p. 42. Collingwood implies a similar understanding when he describes the context of a historical thought as its "immediacy" that "cannot be re-enacted" by the historian. Therefore, he takes history to be possible only because a thought can, in certain respects, remain self-identical even when it is re-thought in a new context. See R.J. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 297.

not a *discovery*, but a *product* of the historical examination. And as a consequence, it does not belong to the *object* of examination, but to the *act* of examining.³⁹

A possible objection to this understanding of contextualisation is that it leads to a degree of arbitrariness. If contexts are not given in the historical sources, it may appear as though they are mere inventions whose legitimacy cannot be tested or thoroughly justified. This point is in itself an important one, but I believe that there is a sufficient response to it. Furthermore, I believe that it applies in an even more exacting way to the understanding of contexts as located in the sources themselves.

For any given source, there is an infinite number of possible contexts. Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy, for example, may simply be contextualised in relation to other contemporary treatments of this subject. But they may just as well be contextualised in relation to the format of the lecture and the norms of academic teaching, the political situation in 19th-century Prussia, philosophical conflicts between Hegel and other contemporaries, or late-Enlightenment ideas about history and progress. If the context is regarded as something to be discovered or recovered, the historian will face considerable difficulties justifying his or her focus on any one particular context over another.⁴⁰ If, on the other hand, the context is taken to be a product of the interpretative practice, then the choice of contextualisation is motivated by the research question that the historical examination strives to answer. This does not allow the historian to choose a context arbitrarily, as the empirical examination must still show the relevance of the context thematised in each case.⁴¹ It does, however, offer a substantial criterion through which a choice of context may be motivated.

I have stated above that my examination focuses on the commonalities between post-Kantian historians rather than on their individual differences. The usefulness of the contextualising method lies largely in that it allows for such an overarching perspective: it makes visible the circumstances that

³⁹ Cf. Hume, *Reconstructing Contexts*, p. 61: "Historical contexts as they are available to us are *our constructs*. To pretend otherwise is dangerous nonsense. [...] We decide that a context is needed, and we assemble it – unless we simply take it on trust from a predecessor".

⁴⁰ This is the type of contextualisation that Collingwood points out as impossible: it would imply that "to know any one thing, we must know its context, which implies knowing the whole universe" (Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 298). This also relates to the problem later posed by Derrida, i.e., that no utterance is exhaustively contained within a single context, so that "a context is never absolutely determinable, or rather [...] its determination is never certain or saturated". Jaques Derrida, "Signature Event Context", in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 310.

⁴¹ Cf. Collingwood's discussion of historical evidence, in Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, pp. 246, 281.

direct authors to particular issues and emphasises these circumstances over the authors' originality. As a consequence, I will not strive to determine which historian was the first to raise a particular problem or argue for a particular solution to it. Instead, what guides the examination is the reoccurrence of a set of problems in multiple texts. In this sense, my use of the contextualising method is also influenced by theoretical approaches such as thought collective, thought style, and *Konstellationsforschung*.⁴²

Reconstruction

While contextualisation is a useful point of departure for studies in intellectual history, it is also a method with a limited scope. This is particularly clear in the study of philosophical texts. For while the problems with which a given author is occupied can be discerned by contextualising them, the context cannot exhaustively explain the arguments and conclusions of that author.⁴³

For example, many 18th- and 19th-century historians of philosophy were greatly interested in the philosophical status of ancient Indian thought. Some of them wanted to afford India a place in the history of philosophy, and some even considered it the birthplace of philosophy as such. Others instead emphatically rejected the philosophical value of Indian intellectual traditions and considered these traditions superstitious and irrational. We may interpret this debate in relation to a wider context of orientalism and colonialism: clearly, the debate would not have been possible had Europeans not gained access to a large number of sources from Indian culture through their imperial projects in the area. We may also interpret it through the lens of the 19th-century conception of philosophy as a purely rational science that did not allow for mythological or symbolic modes of thought. This would then explain the occurrence of the issue as such. From these contexts, however, we are not able to deduce the arguments and conclusions used by individual authors. Rather, one can imagine any number of stances on the issue and any number of philosophical lines of argument used to support these stances. It is not given beforehand that Meiners opted for a particular stance while, for example, Friedrich Ast opted for another.

⁴² See Dieter Henrich, *Konstellationen: Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789–1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991), pp. 11–12; Dieter Henrich, *Grundlegung aus dem Ich: Untersuchungen zur Vorgeschichte des Idealismus, Tübingen – Jena (1790–1794)* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2022); Fleck, *Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache*.

⁴³ Cf. Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”, *History and Theory*, 8.1 (1969), pp. 39–48.

The usefulness of contextualisation thus only reaches as far as the historically situated *problem* guiding discussions of a given issue. To understand the strategies and arguments used to treat this problem, on the other hand, there is no other way than reading and interpreting the arguments themselves. This can be described as a *philosophical reconstruction*.⁴⁴

In a reconstructive reading, the text is approached as an *action* dependent on, but not reducible to, the contextual situation. It always does something to its own context and contains a performative power to create something that was not there beforehand.⁴⁵ This is a particularly important point when the source text is argumentative for, as noted by Quentin Skinner,

to argue is always to argue for or against a certain assumption or point of view or course of action. It follows that, if we wish to understand such utterances, we shall have to find some means of identifying the precise nature of the intervention constituted by the act of uttering them.⁴⁶

If contextualisation is largely an intertextual method, then reconstruction is primarily text immanent. It functions by identifying the problems posed in the text itself and then traces the steps taken in the treatment of it. This should not be confused with the method of argument analysis. The task of a reconstructive reading is not to test the validity of an argument according to logical rules and to determine whether or not it is coherent; instead, the reconstructive reading aims at grasping the premises posed in the text in their own terms, through the conditions and presuppositions given in the text itself. Such a reading becomes possible through a certain suspension of judgement; as such, it aims at hermeneutic understanding, not at the subjection of a line of argument to general logical criteria. Indeed, it presupposes that the text in question itself *creates* its own criteria as a performative act.

⁴⁴ The term “reconstruction” has been used with different meanings by different authors. Some prominent examples are Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 295; Imre Lakatos, “History of Science and Its Rational Reconstructions”, *Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association*, 1970. As the following section will illustrate, my own employment of the term is more inspired by J.L. Austin’s speech act theory and the historical method developed by Quentin Skinner, although my terminology differs from theirs.

⁴⁵ The concept of the performative utterance was introduced in J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965). For an overview of its history, see James Loxley, *Performativity* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁴⁶ Skinner, *Visions of Politics. Volume 1*, p. 115; cf. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, pp. 142, 144–45.

I have noted above that contextualisation can be understood as an instance of the hermeneutic circle. The same can be said of the relation between contextualisation and reconstruction. As J.L. Austin emphasises in his *How to Do Things with Words*, the nature of a speech act can only be grasped if one pays attention to “the total situation in which the utterance is issued – the total speech-act”.⁴⁷ Similarly, Skinner underlines that the meaning of any utterance depends on “the argumentative context of [its] occurrence”.⁴⁸ Given this understanding, then, the reconstruction of the argument takes place against the context as a background, while the context is developed through the reconstructive reading. It is possible, and indeed necessary, to move freely between these levels of analysis, and in practice they are often intertwined and difficult to separate from one another. Nonetheless, it is possible to distinguish them analytically, and doing this is important insofar as it clarifies the value and scope of each method. The context shows the conditions that make particular arguments and issues understandable. If, however, the context is taken to exhaustively explain the arguments of a given source, this would result in a deterministic interpretation that robs the text of its agency and considers it a product of the context. Reconstruction acts as a corrective to this view by emphasising that each text performatively co-constitutes the context. In this sense, the reading of each source also forces us to reconsider and reinterpret our contextualisation. Put in a slightly different way, it could be said that the reconstructive reading approaches the source as a particular intervention into the context, as a speech act or performative that is at once made possible by, co-constitutes, and recreates the context in relation to which it is approached.⁴⁹

In the course of the examination I will frequently point out this performative character of the sources. I do this in order to underline that the arguments encountered in the sources cannot, in my view, be sufficiently understood as merely descriptive or constative. In itself, however, the claim that a particular utterance has a performative dimension is a trivial one – for

⁴⁷ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 52.

⁴⁸ Skinner, *Visions of Politics. Volume 1*, p. 116.

⁴⁹ In her examinations of the performativity of gender, Judith Butler states that “the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time”; thus, she continues, “one might try to reconceive the gendered body as the legacy of sedimented acts rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence, or fact, whether natural, cultural, or linguistic” (Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory”, *Theatre Journal*, 40.4 (1988), p. 523). This notion of the repetition and sedimentation of acts is useful for historical purposes because it underlines the temporal dimension of performativity. Although Butler’s use of the term is not directly related to historical examination, I believe her observations to be applicable to my own method as well.

as argued by Austin, this is true of *every* utterance.⁵⁰ My ambition is not, then, to classify a given source as either performative or not, but rather to pay attention to the particular type of performative intervention each utterance constitutes and how it relates to such interventions by other sources. To return to the example above, both Meiners and Ast made use of the concept of the Orient, but they did so with different aims and thus reshaped the concepts at stake in their writings for their own particular purposes. In my examination, I will highlight precisely this type of performative concept work, i.e. the shaping and transformation of concepts in the employment of them. This ties the reconstructive method to that of conceptual history.

Conceptual History

As stated above, it is an overarching claim of this study that the concept of the history of philosophy was transformed in the post-Kantian age. Through contextualising the post-Kantian writings in their own contemporary situation, I aim to achieve an understanding of how the post-Kantians defined this concept and how it related to their historical circumstances. To account for the transformation itself, however, it is necessary to apply a method that ties this synchronic contextualisation together with a diachronic one. Put more concretely, the post-Kantian concept of the history of philosophy must be related to preceding understandings of this concept so that its historicity can be exposed.

Since the transformation in question takes place at the level of concepts, the contextualising examination of it can be considered conceptual-historical. This method has been developed most notably by the German historian Reinhart Koselleck.⁵¹ As the term makes clear, its focus lies on the historicity of concepts and the way they structure the thoughts, worldviews, and consciousness of a given time. Like the methodological concepts discussed above, it to a large extent builds upon hermeneutics,⁵² and it has also been compared to the historical employment of speech-act theory.⁵³ But in relation to the analysis of speech acts in general, it shifts the emphasis from

⁵⁰ Cf., e.g., Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, pp. 132–46.

⁵¹ Cf. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

⁵² See Reinhart Koselleck and Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutik und Historik* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1987).

⁵³ Cf. Kari Palonen, “The History of Concepts as a Style of Political Theorizing: Quentin Skinner’s and Reinhart Koselleck’s Subversion of Normative Political Theory”, *European Journal of Political Theory*, 1.1 (2002).

these acts as a whole to the concepts of which they consist and turns these into the main unit of examination.

Somewhat simplified, it could be said that such an examination depends on two presuppositions. First, it depends on the fact that concepts are subject to historical change. A given concept, for example, “history”, “philosophy”, or “progress”, does not denote a static set of meanings and connotations that subsist in different periods. Rather, they change in relation to historical circumstances so that their meanings and possible cases of use are always in transformation. Second, however, a concept simultaneously has characteristics that do persist. This is evident from the fact that a given word is rarely unique to a particular historical period, but rather tends to survive transformations of historical circumstances. The word “philosophy”, for example, has been used in many languages for thousands of years, and a continuous tradition of thought, literature, and learned institutions has been shaped around it. Thus, an 18th-century author could refer to ancient literature and enter into dialogue with it in his or her attempt to understand the meaning of philosophy. Even if the concept denoted different things to two authors separated by thousands of years, this separation is in turn related to the ways in which it bridges the temporal gap by its continuous use. A concept, then, gains its meaning from a dynamic relationship between continuity and transformation, in which both the synchronic and diachronic characteristics must be considered for a sufficient historical understanding of it. This relation between continuity and transformation lies at the heart of Koselleck’s historical research and thought.⁵⁴

My application of the conceptual-historical method, then, aims at determining the nature of this dynamic relation in the source material. This is done by a contextualisation and reconstructive reading whose starting point and endpoint are the concepts themselves. A concept, for example, the history of philosophy, is thus interpreted through the contexts in which it occurs with the analytic premise that the context determines its sphere of possible meaning. At the same time, however, each utterance also transforms this sphere by its particular way of delineating concepts from one another and ascribing to them particular predicates. In this sense, a concept is always employed as a performative act, the precise nature of which must be interpreted anew in each case.

⁵⁴ See, e.g., Reinhart Koselleck, “Begriffsgeschichte and Social History”, in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 83–84, 89–90.

Delimitations

The subject of this book is post-Kantian writings on the history of philosophy. By post-Kantianism, I refer to the tradition of thought that developed in the wake of Kant's critical philosophy. In this broad sense it includes both the works of philosophers who considered themselves thoroughly Kantian and the works of those who attempted to move beyond Kant's thought, for example, Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel.

There is no universally accepted name for this period as a whole. Some scholars prefer to refer to it as "classical German philosophy",⁵⁵ but I have found this to be insufficiently descriptive of the actual contents of the period. Another commonly employed term is "German idealism", but there are several issues with this term used in such a broad sense. First, it was not used as a self-description by 18th- and 19th-century philosophers. Typically, they instead called their philosophical projects Kantianism, critical philosophy, transcendental philosophy, or *Wissenschaftslehre*. Only later did it become common to label all of these philosophies "German idealism".⁵⁶ But even as this term was established, its boundaries have never been obvious and uncontroversial. The relationship between idealism and romanticism, for example, appears difficult to determine, such that romanticism is sometimes regarded as an idealist strain and sometimes as a reaction to idealist system philosophy.⁵⁷ Furthermore, there is no consensus as to the temporal scope of the term. According to a classic periodisation, the age of German idealism dates from 1781 to 1831, i.e., from the publication of Kant's first *Critique* to Hegel's death. But recently it has become more common to distinguish between Kantianism and idealism, with the latter tradition being dated from either Reinhold's *Elementarphilosophie* or Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*.⁵⁸

In this study, I have elected to employ the term "German idealism" only in this narrower sense, in which it denotes post-Kantian system philosophy from Fichte and onwards. Post-Kantianism is thus used to denote the period as a whole, whereas idealism denotes only its later part. I take post-Kantianism to be a more useful term since it is descriptive of the main

⁵⁵ E.g., Henrich, *Konstellationen*; Walter Jaeschke and Andreas Arndt, *Die klassische deutsche Philosophie nach Kant: Systeme der reinen Vernunft und ihre Kritik 1785–1845* (München: Beck, 2012).

⁵⁶ See the overview of the history of the term in *Handbuch Deutscher Idealismus*, ed. by Hans Jörg Sandkühler (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2005), pp. 2–3.

⁵⁷ See Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung*, p. 27; Elizabeth Millán, *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007).

⁵⁸ See, e.g., Gerhard Gamm, *Der deutsche Idealismus: Eine Einführung in die Philosophie von Fichte, Hegel und Schelling* (Ditzingen: Reclam, 2024), p. 10.

character of the period. As the following chapters will show, the debates on the historiography of philosophy were to a great extent characterised by constant references to and re-evaluations of Kant's criticism. Within this tendency, I identify a break occurring once historians of philosophy started basing their theoretical approaches more on Fichte's and Schelling's systems. Therefore, German idealism shows itself to be useful for denoting a specific part of the wider post-Kantian tradition.

For historical purposes, conceptual distinctions such as these are always heuristic and possible to challenge. Of course, there is no sharp cut-off point separating early post-Kantianism from German idealism in the senses outlined above. The legitimacy of my use of the terms can only be justified by the examination itself; I believe that the following chapters will indeed show it to be well grounded.

Geographical Delimitations

As the name makes clear, the movement of German idealism had its centre in German-speaking Europe. Previous studies of idealist historiography of philosophy have often limited their scope to this region. However, the post-Kantian and idealist concepts of the history of philosophy were highly influential in many neighbouring countries, in particular those bordering the Baltic Sea. In Sweden, the history of philosophy was dominated by idealist thinkers for nearly all of the 19th century; in fact, the dominance of idealism was even stronger and longer-lasting there than in Germany. The Swedish sources can therefore contribute significantly to our understanding of German idealist historiography of philosophy.

The same could be said of other countries in the region, for example, Denmark.⁵⁹ In this study, however, I have found the Swedish sources to be of particular importance. Even though the Swedish philosophers of the 19th century were greatly influenced by their German colleagues, they also developed the historiography of philosophy in an independent direction. This was the case above all concerning the temporal and geographical scope of this history: as I will show in chapter 6, the Swedish historians differed from the German ones in that they typically traced the origins of philosophy to the ancient Orient rather than to classical Greece. For this reason, I include Swedish sources in the study as a means to deepen the examination of this particular issue.

⁵⁹ Cf. Carl Henrik Koch, *Den danske idealisme: 1800–1880* (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 2004).

Despite the name, then, German idealism is not a uniquely German phenomenon, but rather a Baltic one. This international contextualisation also makes it necessary to reflect on the importance of linguistic, cultural, and political differences between the countries studied. Even though the philosophical ideas guiding the historians of philosophy in Germany and Sweden were closely related, many of the surrounding circumstances were not. Swedish philosophers generally had a good knowledge of German and kept themselves up to date on German learned literature. German scholars were less interested in Swedish philosophy, so that the influence was not always reciprocal. Furthermore, the academic structures were different in the two areas in ways that affected the teaching of the history of philosophy at their respective universities. Even though 19th-century philosophy in Sweden and Germany can be understood as part of a broader tradition, they cannot therefore simply be grouped together as a single, undifferentiated object of study. I have found it more useful to consider the examination a form of entangled history in which the dynamic relationship between similarity and difference, dependence and independence, is a defining characteristic of the area as such.⁶⁰

For this reason, the two groups of material are not treated in the same depth. Most of the chapters focus chiefly on the German context with only sporadic references to Swedish sources. There are many instances where I could have pointed out how Swedish philosophers followed in the footsteps of their German colleagues, but I do not regard such remarks as adding significantly to the examination. Instead, the Swedish context becomes particularly relevant only when it diverges from the German one; when this occurs, the Swedish material can be approached as a case study in its own right. This is the approach I have chosen in chapter 6 concerning the question of oriental philosophy.

Materials

From the 1790s and onwards, many post-Kantians wrote on the topic of the history of philosophy. Some of their texts were large historical overviews, others were shorter studies of particular thinkers, schools, or periods, and still others were theoretical or methodological treatises. The material is

⁶⁰ See Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity", *History and Theory*, 45.1 (2006). Since its inception, the method of entangled history has often been used in global-historical studies examining colonial and post-colonial relations. This is, of course, not the type of entanglement that existed between Sweden and Germany in the 18th century, but I believe that this does not render the entanglement approach inapplicable.

scattered in compendia, multi-volume histories, learned journals, and lecture manuscripts. Geographically speaking, it is also scattered in a number of different libraries and archives.

My study of these sources would have been considerably more challenging – perhaps even impossible – had the material not to a large extent been digitalised. Luckily, however, nearly all relevant sources are available online through services such as Google Books and the Münchener Digitalisierungszentrum. This has allowed me to access a large textual corpus without the financial and logistical difficulties of travel.

The situation is less favourable for the Swedish sources employed in the study. To start with, the printed source material is in itself very limited: by 1850 there existed only two multi-volume textbooks on the history of philosophy written by Swedish philosophers. Apart from this, Swedish literature on the history of philosophy consisted of a few articles and translations of German works.

There is, however, a large body of handwritten manuscripts for lectures on the history of philosophy at Swedish universities, most of which are today kept at the university libraries at Uppsala and Lund. There are also auxiliary records such as lecture catalogues and lecture diaries that have allowed me to gain a detailed overview of how the history of philosophy was typically treated by Swedish philosophers in their academic teaching.⁶¹ Since none of these sources has previously been studied systematically, it has been necessary for me to seek them out, organise, and categorise them. In this way, my study offers the first-ever examination of a previously unmapped source material.⁶²

⁶¹ “Föreläsningsdiarier och studentförteckningar Uppsala universitet”, n.d., Riksarkivet, SE/RA/420124/F I; “Föreläsningsdiarier och studentförteckningar Lunds universitet”, n.d., Riksarkivet, SE/RA/420123/F 1; *Catalogus praelectionum, in Academia Regia Upsaliensi, publice et privatim, anno academico ... instituendarum* (Uppsala, 1770); *Conspectus praelectionum, quae [...] in Regia Universitate Carolina a die I Octobris ... ad idem tempus anni sequentis, publice et privatim, instituentur* (Lund: Lund University, 1770); *Uppsala universitets katalog* (Uppsala, 1853); *Föreläsningar och öfningar vid Carolinska universitetet i Lund* (Berlingska boktryckeriet, 1866).

⁶² There are numerous studies of 19th-century Swedish philosophy, but these studies have at most mentioned the historiography of philosophy in passing remarks. To my knowledge, there is only one more detailed treatment in existence: Andrus Ers, *Filosofihistorien och filosofins självbild: En uppsats om filosofihistoria på svenska från Höijer till Wedberg* (Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, 1970). On 19th-century Swedish philosophy in general, see Svante Nordin, *Den Boströmska skolan och den svenska idealismens fall* (Lund: Doxa, 1981); Svante Nordin, *Romantikens filosofi: Svensk idealism från Höijer till hegelianerna* (Lund: Doxa, 1987); Sven-Eric Liedman, *Att förändra världen – men med måtta* (A/Arbetarkultur: Värnamo, 1991); Carl-Göran Heidegren, *Johan Jakob Borelius: Den siste svenske hegelianen* (Stockholm/Stehag: Symposium, 1995); Henrik Lagerlund, *Den svenska filosofins historia* (Stockholm: Thales, 2020).

Editions and Translations

As most of the sources used in this study have not been published in modern, text-critical editions, I have used the digitalised versions of the respective original publications. When critical editions are available, for example, in the cases of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, I have instead used these.

All German and Swedish sources used in my study have been read in the original languages. When English translations are available, full references to both the standard German editions and the translations are given in the first footnote; in subsequent mentions the page number of the German edition is bracketed after the English reference. The quotations are in these cases from existing English translations. For sources that have not been published in English, the translations are my own.

A particular comment needs to be made about the critical editions of Hegel. Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy were first published by his student Karl Ludwig Michelet between 1831 and 1836.⁶³ Michelet's method consisted of combining a number of different manuscripts into a single, connected text. While the result is a highly readable rendition, it is obvious that many text-critical objections can be raised against it. I will therefore quote the critical editions and their English translations when available. Concerning the German edition, I have elected to use the version from Meiner's "Philosophische Bibliothek" since this offers a more comprehensive rendition of a number of different handwritten manuscripts.

Given the many different manuscripts from Hegel's lectures, similar sections can often be found in more than one place. I will occasionally point out such overlaps, but for the most part I refer only to one manuscript per footnote. This would perhaps have been insufficient in a study focusing only on Hegel, but since Hegel is only one of many authors examined here, a more detailed comparison of the sources would have been too time consuming a task.

Structure

As noted above, previous studies of the historiography of philosophy have generally aimed at empirical exhaustiveness. As a consequence, they have followed mainly chronological principles of organisation and are divided by

⁶³ This forms the basis of the Suhrkamp edition as well as the first English translation: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Werke 18: Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I*, ed. by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993); Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy. 1: Greek Philosophy to Plato*, trans. by E.S. Haldane (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

individual authors and books. My study is structured in a different way. While the chapters are organised in a partly chronological sequence, they are above all distinguished from one another by their respective thematic foci.

Chapter 1 is intended as a general introduction to the study as a whole. Its point of departure is the Berlin Academy's prize question of 1791 and the debates on the nature of the history of philosophy that ensued. In my examination of this debate, I focus mainly on the issue of how to account for the multiplicity of seemingly opposed philosophical doctrines throughout history. The conclusion is that the post-Kantians proposed a new yardstick according to which philosophical conflicts could be both explained and resolved. This yardstick was "reason itself", as its nature could be determined by critical philosophy. The post-Kantians thereby transformed the object of the history. They underlined that it must not be confused with the history of philosophical doctrines, of philosophers and their lives, or of philosophical literature. Instead, it became the history of pure reason, whereby it was given both a new transcendental unity and a new set of historiographical challenges.

In chapter 2, I build on these results by focusing on the relation between universal reason and the historical philosopher as an individual. I show that the eclectic historiographic tradition, which exerted a strong influence in Germany during the 18th century, was closely tied to the idea of the philosopher as an exemplary, virtuous individual. The post-Kantians to a large extent built their historiographical programme on a rejection of this view, emphasising instead the universality and supra-individuality of philosophy. However, this did not lead to a decreased interest in understanding the characteristics of the philosopher as an individual, but rather to a reconceptualisation of the philosophical life. The chapter thus culminates in an account of how the concept of "the philosopher" was transformed within the framework of this new philosophical historiography.

In chapter 3, I move on to the issue of the delimitations of the history of philosophy, and particularly its beginning. Before the 18th century, it was common for histories of philosophy to begin with divine creation. This narrative allowed the inclusion of a large number of geographical areas both inside and outside of Europe. Generally, both European and non-European philosophy predating the Greeks was termed "barbaric" (i.e., non-Greek) philosophy. In the post-Kantian age, however, a new view was becoming increasingly common: the view that philosophy started among the Greeks. I analyse the debate around this view through the context of orientalism and European identity. My central claim is that the idea of philosophy's Greek

origins was conditioned by a conceptual shift in which the older concept of “barbaric philosophy” was replaced with the concept of “oriental philosophy”. I also show that this conceptual displacement did not simply lead to the categorical exclusion of non-European philosophy, but that it was sometimes used to integrate the Orient in the narrative of philosophy’s historical development.

In chapter 4, I turn to the question of philosophical progress. The concept of progress was central to 18th-century historical thought in general, and philosophy was no exception. But there were some historians who believed that the approach to philosophy as something developing and changing was a mistake. Most prominent among these was J.C.A. Grohmann, who went as far as proposing a fully non-chronological history of philosophy. In this chapter, I examine Grohmann’s article and the ensuing debate. My central claim is that Grohmann identified a crucial tension in the modern concept of history as such.

In chapter 5, I follow the debate initiated by Grohmann as it developed in later idealist system philosophy. I show how the tension between history’s temporality and philosophy’s eternal character played a central role in the idealist movement in general and in the historiographical practices of this movement in particular. The chapter thus reveals an important but understudied background to the idealists and their philosophical aims.

Thematically connected to chapters 3 and 5, chapter 6 then constitutes an examination of how Hegelians, Schellingians, and romantics understood the question of philosophy’s origins. In the early 19th century, the debate between those placing the birth of philosophy in Greece and those who located it in the Far East intensified. By following these debates, I shed further light both on these narratives as such and on their relation to modern ideas about West and East.

A Playground of Eternal Struggles: Historiography of Philosophy in the Wake of the *Critique of Pure Reason*

The history of philosophy is full of conflict. Philosophers have quarrelled with one another since the earliest times; there are multitudes of philosophical schools that differ in their most fundamental principles, and often even in their understanding of the nature of philosophical inquiry as such.

Among those who have noted this state of affairs is the post-Kantian historian Friedrich August Carus. In the posthumously published *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie* (1809), Carus remarked that the past of philosophy “appears to present a playground of eternal struggles”.⁶⁴ This, he worried, threatened to turn students away from interest in academic philosophy – for what would be the point of devoting oneself to a science that contained nothing but discord? A history of philosophy presented in this way ran the risk of being “confusing, even depressing”,⁶⁵ and the student exposed to it could easily begin “to view its value as shaky” and “the study of it as folly”.⁶⁶

Carus was not alone in raising these concerns. Another post-Kantian historian, G.F.D. Goess, complained that interest in the history of philosophy was often met with “sneering laughter” from those who argued “that one could never unwind oneself from the clutter of contradictions that make [it] into an eternal battlefield”.⁶⁷ Decades later, Hegel raised the same issue:

With the spectacle of such varied opinions, of so many different philosophical systems, looms a difficulty that ought to give one pause; one sees with regard to the vast material to which people feel drawn and the knowledge of which

⁶⁴ Friedrich August Carus, *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie* (Leipzig: Barth, 1809), p. 4. Carus’s wording is an implicit reference to Kant; the source will be discussed below.

⁶⁵ Carus, *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 14.

⁶⁶ Carus, *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Georg Friedrich Daniel Goess, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie und über das System Thales. Zwei philosophische Abhandlungen* (Erlangen: Palm, 1794), p. 8.

philosophy seeks to impart, that the greatest minds have gone astray, for they have been contradicted by others. Since this has happened to such great minds, how then [should] *ego homuncio* [this little man] seek to reach a decision here?⁶⁸

The challenge was not just to convince students of the value of the history of philosophy. Equally, the German philosophers of the late 18th and early 19th centuries found it to be a difficult philosophical problem in its own right. Philosophy, they reasoned, was supposed to be the highest science of truth as such and of the fundamental principles of reality. But truth could not be contradictory; rather, it must be One, harmonious with itself and eternally self-identical.⁶⁹ Furthermore, philosophy was the product of reason. But the legitimacy of rational inquiry presupposed that reason rested upon universal, unassailable principles that every rational being must recognise.⁷⁰ So how, then, could one explain that neither the interpersonal conformity of reason nor the unity and harmony of truth was to be found in the history of philosophy? And if neither was to be found, what did this mean for the legitimacy of philosophy as such? Could it be taken to indicate that philosophy contained no truth at all, but merely a multitude of opinions?

The post-Kantians had good reason to be concerned about these questions. In previous centuries, a number of scholars had in fact regarded the history of philosophy as proving the futility of philosophical inquiry. Through its lack of agreement, they argued, the history of philosophy illustrated the narrow limits of reason. The only lesson to draw from it was that philosophy was a *cul-de-sac* and that the divine word alone could offer man a reliable and unquestionable truth according to which he could orient himself.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, trans. by Robert F. Brown and J. Michael Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), pp. 169–70; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* [GDP], ed. by Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Meiner, 1993), pp. 16–17. See also Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, pp. 138–39 [GDP: 110].

⁶⁹ Cf. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, p. 172 [GDP: 21].

⁷⁰ To Kant and his followers, reason was both a faculty transcending each individual human being and one found within each individual. Thus, Kant could refer to “the natural course taken by every human reason” and the idea of a universal legislation “found in every human reason”. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. A584/B612, A839/B867.

⁷¹ Perhaps the clearest example of this outlook can be found in the work of Johann Wilhelm Zierold, who explained all true wisdom throughout history as originating in divine revelation. Following this view, Zierold declared that “the wisest peoples, the Jews, Egyptians, Assyrians, Chinese, Persians, Greeks, Romans, etc., became fools through their carnal wisdom since they are in the world without Christ, and

To the post-Kantians, both this conclusion and its premise – the opposition between faith and reason – appeared unacceptable. They were just as worried about another relatively common stance that had also gained influence since the 17th century. This was the stance that philosophy must radically break away from its past in order to find a stable ground of true knowledge. If the history of philosophy consisted of nothing but conflict – so the argument went – one may do best to simply disregard it and make a fresh start. In the early modern period, views of this kind had been influentially argued by Descartes and his followers.⁷²

If the first of these conclusions mobilised the history of philosophy to reject the possibility of philosophical truth, the second instead sought to make room for philosophical truth by rejecting its history. To the post-Kantians, these stances were equally problematic. In place of them, they were eager to mobilise the history of philosophy to guarantee and safeguard the fruitfulness of philosophy. To do this, however, they deemed it necessary to formulate a more elaborate account of the multitude of philosophical systems and teachings.

The solution they proposed was a creative one. Perhaps, they reasoned, the problem was not to be located in the nature of philosophy itself, but in the methods hitherto used to study its history. Perhaps the problem was that philosophy had not yet found an adequately skilled *historian*. Indeed, the post-Kantians were harsh in their judgement of their predecessors. In their

thus without God”, in Johann Wilhelm Zierold, *Einleitung zur gründlichen Kirchen-Historie mit der Historia philosophica verknüppft* (Leipzig/Stargardt, 1700), “An den Christlichen Leser” (unpaginated). On Zierold’s historiographical outlook, see Francesco Bottin and Mario Longo, “The History of Philosophy from Eclecticism to Pietism”, in *Models of the History of Philosophy. Volume II: From the Cartesian Age to Brucker*, ed. by Gregorio Piaia and Giovanni Santinello (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), pp. 307, 323–31; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 118–19. See also Christian Thomasius, *Historie der Weißheit und Thorheit. Erster Theil* (Halle, 1693), pp. 6–7; Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, “Jacob Bruckers philosophiegeschichtliches Konzept”, in *Jacob Brucker (1696–1770): Philosoph und Historiker der europäischen Aufklärung*, ed. by Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann and Theo Stammen (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998), p. 118. One of the post-Kantians who discussed and rejected this kind of anti-philosophical reading of philosophy’s history was G.G. Fülleborn. See Georg Gustav Fülleborn, “Philosophische Vorlesungen”, *Beyträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, no. 3 (1793), p. 127; Georg Gustav Fülleborn, “Einige Allgemeine Resultate aus der Geschichte der Philosophie”, *Beyträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, no. 4 (1794), p. 149.

⁷² René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*, ed. by John Cottingham and Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 15. On Cartesian historiography of philosophy, see Braun, *Geschichte der Philosophiegeschichte*, p. 65; Gregorio Piaia, “The Histories of Philosophy in France in the Age of Descartes”, in Gregorio Piaia and Giovanni Santinello, *Models of the History of Philosophy. Volume II: From the Cartesian Age to Brucker* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), pp. 3–4.

eyes, earlier histories constituted mere aggregates of disconnected opinions, collections of materials rather than systematic accounts. A break from this historiographical tradition was needed; the task was to write a history that could uncover a deeper rational unity in all philosophical systems throughout the ages. If this could be done, the historian would no longer add fuel to the fire of past conflicts. Instead, he would, in the words of J.C.A. Grohmann, propose a perpetual “peace treaty” to the struggling parties.⁷³ Or as Schelling put it, he would find the perspective “from which the chaos of different opinions, which from every other standpoint appears totally confused, expresses regularity and agreement”.⁷⁴

This chapter offers an overview of the post-Kantian programme for the history of philosophy. As I shall argue, this programme was to a large extent formed in reaction to the objections presented to Kant’s criticism, objections that were often of a historical nature and thus challenged Kant’s adherents to elaborate their own way of situating Kantianism historically. The debates thus constitute an important episode in the history of the reception of Kant’s critical philosophy. Furthermore, they also shed light on late-18th-century historical thought in a broader sense, and not least on one of the fundamental concepts in modern historiography: *progress*.

The chapter begins with an examination of the historiographical dimensions of Kant’s first *Critique*. It then recounts an important debate on philosophical progress that ensued following a prize question posed by the Berlin Academy in 1791. In examining this debate, I conclude that the post-Kantians understood the history of philosophy in terms of what I refer to as a “depth model”. This model served the purposes both of guaranteeing unity among philosophies throughout history and of tying all particular philosophies together in a scheme of rational development.

Historiographical Dimensions of the First *Critique*

What made the post-Kantians so convinced that they alone possessed the key to resolving the philosophical quarrels of the past? The short answer is that they identified this key with Kant’s critical philosophy itself. “[J]ust as Kant’s critical works necessarily caused a total revolution in philosophy”, wrote Karl Heinrich Heydenreich in 1791, “so they also make necessary a total trans-

⁷³ Johann Christian August Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Wittenberg: Kühneschen Buchhandlung, 1797), p. 103; cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. A751–52/B779–80.

⁷⁴ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, “Allgemeine Uebersicht der neuesten philosophischen Litteratur”, in *Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe: Werke 4*, ed. by Wilhelm G. Jacobs and Walter Schieche (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1976), p. 98.

formation of the method for treating philosophical history”.⁷⁵ Six years later, Grohmann remarked that the tools necessary for untangling the “strange Gordian knot” of philosophical history were only now finally available, “for the *Critique of Pure Reason* has been published”.⁷⁶ With the help of critical philosophy, it would finally be possible to make sense of the apparent chaos of the history of philosophy, to organise and order it according to rational principles, and to once and for all put an end to the struggles between the philosophical parties.

Indeed, Kant himself considered the problem of how to account for such struggles to be highly important. Already in the pre-critical *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, he had noted that opposed metaphysical systems often possessed the same level of evidence so that it was impossible to decide or negotiate between them. Metaphysical questions thus appeared as knots “which can be either untied or cut as one pleases”.⁷⁷ But the most elaborate way of posing the problem occurs in the preface to the second edition of the first *Critique*, this time through two intimately connected metaphors. First, Kant described metaphysics as a journey undertaken by reason – a journey on which, however, reason had never managed to make decisive progress. Instead, metaphysics was said to compel the philosophers “to retrace our path countless times, because we find that it does not lead where we want to go”.⁷⁸ Second, Kant described the field of metaphysics as a perpetual battle in which neither side managed to gain a decisive advantage. In this science, reason

is so far from reaching unanimity in the assertions of its adherents that it is rather a battlefield, and indeed one that appears to be especially determined for testing one’s powers in mock combat; on this battlefield no combatant has ever gained the least bit of ground, nor has any been able to base any lasting possession on his victory.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Karl Heinrich Heydenreich, “Einige Ideen über die Revolution in der Philosophie, bewirkt durch Immanuel Kant, und besonders über den Einfluß derselben auf die Behandlung der Geschichte der Philosophie”, in Agatapisto Cromaziano, *Kritische Geschichte der Revolutionen in der Philosophie in den drey letzten Jahrhunderten. Zweyter Theil* (Leipzig: Weygand, 1791), p. 229.

⁷⁶ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 99.

⁷⁷ Immanuel Kant, “Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics”, in *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770*, ed. by David Walford and Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 307; Immanuel Kant, *Akademie Textausgabe. Band 2: Vorkritische Schriften 2. 1757–1777* [AA2] (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), p. 319.

⁷⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. Bxiv–xv; cf. Kant’s statement that “one can and must regard as undone all attempts made until now to bring about a metaphysics *dogmatically*” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. B23).

⁷⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. Bxv. It is clear that this paragraph is the inspiration for Carus’s and Goess’s descriptions quoted above.

Formulations such as these could well be taken to indicate the futility of metaphysics. This conclusion was in fact not an uncommon one at the time. In 1778, Michael Hißmann had argued that this discipline consisted of nothing but “fruitless speculation”. “Follow me, budding lover of philosophy!” he exclaimed. “Regard calmly with me all unrests and wars of the metaphysical fighters without worrying about which side the victory will lean towards”.⁸⁰ But for Kant, metaphysics could not be rejected without rejecting rationality as such. For metaphysical questions were, he claimed, rooted in a fundamental need of reason – a need that reason could not dismiss without coming into conflict with its own nature. In fact, the first sentence of the first *Critique* had already made this clear. Metaphysics, Kant here claimed, was a sphere where human reason

has the peculiar fate [...] that it is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason.⁸¹

The state of eternal quarrels, of questions demanding answers that reason could not supply for itself, thus became an even more crucial issue. It was an issue that not only pointed to a fault of particular thinkers and their understanding of philosophy, but to a *rational* fault threatening to undermine reason as such.

For Kant, this unhappy circumstance led to the conclusion that metaphysics was in need of a radical reform; it was necessary to break with the tradition that made a truly scientific philosophy impossible to achieve. This might appear to place Kant in the camp that sought a secure foundation of philosophy only in a radical rejection of the *history* of philosophy. The eternal battles in this history showed, he seemed to imply, that it contained no satisfactory, truly scientific philosophy at all. This stance appears even more unambiguous as Kant, in the very final section of the book, concluded that all previous metaphysical edifices now appeared as ruins, and that “the *critical* path alone is still open”.⁸²

⁸⁰ Michael Hißmann, *Briefe über Gegenstände der Philosophie, an Leserinnen und Leser* (Gotha: Ettinger, 1778), p. 47.

⁸¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. Avii; cf. also Kant’s statement that the concepts of pure reason “are not arbitrarily invented, but given as problems by the nature of reason itself” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A327/B384).

⁸² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. A852/B880, A855/B883.

Such a position would be vulnerable to historical objections, however. Indeed, those adversaries of Kant who took him as rejecting the history of philosophy found this to be a weak point in his critical project as such. First, they could point to perceived similarities between Kant and historical predecessors, thus questioning the claim of originality upon which Kant seemed to base his whole endeavour.⁸³ Second, they could claim that even if Kant's philosophy *was* original, it was nothing more than a further addition to the eternal quarrels rather than a step beyond them. If the history of metaphysics was characterised by such a sorrowful state of conflict, they could ask, what would it help to add yet another party to the battlefield? Kant's criticism was, in other words, taken to be just another sect rather than a break with the fruitless sectarian conflicts of which the history of philosophy consisted.⁸⁴

To some extent, it is certainly true that Kant based his critical project on a rejection of all previous metaphysics, but this is only one side of the coin.⁸⁵ Kant was well aware that this rejection could easily be interpreted as adding a new party to the philosophical battlefield, but he had a strategy for averting this risk. The intention of the first *Critique* was not simply to ignore the metaphysical quarrels of the past; rather, Kant intended to resolve these quarrels and present the combatants with a peace treaty.⁸⁶ On the one hand, he underlined the need for a new principle that could break the deadlock of past metaphysical quarrels by leaving the turmoil behind. On the other hand, the usefulness of this principle was to be proven in the way in which it could be applied to other philosophies and clearly show the roots of their mutual disagreements. The point was then not to ignore the past of philosophy in

⁸³ For example, Garve's review compared Kant's criticism to the idealism of Berkeley, and Eberhard questioned its novelties compared with Leibniz. See Christian Garve, "Critik der reinen Vernunft. Von Imman. Kant" [Review], *Zugabe zu den Göttingischen Anzeigen gelehrten Sachen*, 1782; Immanuel Kant, *Der Streit mit Johann August Eberhard* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998). Cf. Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 251–52.

⁸⁴ This was, for example, one of the points raised by Schwab in an essay that will be discussed in greater detail below: Johann Christoph Schwab, "Ausführliche Erörterung der von der Königl. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin für das Jahr 1791 vorgelegten Frage: 'Welches sind die wirklichen Fortschritte, die die Metaphysik seit Leibnitzens und Wolffens Zeiten in Deutschland gemacht hat?'" in *Preisschriften über die Frage: Welche Fortschritte hat die Metaphysik seit Leibnitzens und Wolffs Zeiten in Deutschland gemacht?* (Berlin: Königl. Preuss. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1796), pp. 115–16. See also Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, p. 104.

⁸⁵ Cf. Pavel Reichl, "Making History Philosophical: Kant, Maimon, and the Evolution of the Historiography of Philosophy in the Critical Period", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 28.3 (2020); Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*.

⁸⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. A751–52/B779–80.

order to make room for future progress, but to progress in order to make sense of philosophy's past.

The solution proposed by Kant is famous. If metaphysics was to move forward, he suggested, it must direct its gaze not towards the external objects it claimed to know – i.e., the nature of the soul, God, and the world – but towards the faculty that examined these concepts: reason itself. The task at hand was, in other words, reason's self-examination. Before turning to the objects of classical metaphysics, reason must put its own capabilities and acts under scrutiny so as to determine what kind of knowledge it was able to possess and how it may come into possession of it.⁸⁷

This proposal had a historiographical value insofar as it offered a method for evaluating the philosophical conflicts of the past. Kant's reasoning was partly implicit but may be interpreted and summarised as follows: Even the most opposed philosophical doctrines were united in that they were based on the use of reason. If this was the case, then the quarrels between philosophical schools were ultimately nothing but quarrels of reason with itself.⁸⁸ When this had been realised, it was possible to return to the conflicts from a radically new perspective. They could now be traced back to the essence of reason and be shown to be rooted in its own principles, interests, and activities. Once they were revealed as originating from this common source, the examination of their mutual differences became precisely reason's self-examination. In this way, the history of philosophy was opened up as a crucial part of the critique of pure reason as such:

One can regard the critique of pure reason as the true court of justice for all controversies of pure reason; for the critique is not involved in these disputes, which pertain immediately to objects, but is rather set the task of determining and judging what is lawful in reason in general in accordance with the principles of its primary institution.⁸⁹

In the first *Critique*, Kant reached a number of conclusions that also lent themselves to such a reinterpretation of the past of metaphysics. It lay in the nature of reason, Kant claimed, to orient itself towards supersensible, transcendental *ideas*. He identified three such fundamental ideas of reason:

⁸⁷ See, for example, the famous formulation of the Copernican turn in Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. Bxvi–xvii; see also pp. Axi–xii, A11/B24.

⁸⁸ Kant refers, for example, to reason “in its internal conflict” in Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A377; see also p. A740/B768.

⁸⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A751/B779; see also p. A747/B775.

God, the soul, and the world.⁹⁰ All of these were of course the objects of classical metaphysics. Thus, past metaphysical doctrines were to a certain degree vindicated in that they were shown to flow from tasks assigned by reason to itself.⁹¹ But since these ideas could not be located within the sphere of empirical experience, Kant argued that the pursuit of *knowledge* of them necessarily led reason into irresolvable dilemmas.⁹² Reason itself could, in other words, propose mutually refuting solutions that appeared equally valid and end up seeing itself torn between them.⁹³ Metaphysical quarrels were thereby revealed to be quarrels of reason with itself,⁹⁴ and they could therefore be resolved only by reason's self-criticism.

The historical application of these results was sketched out in a more explicit manner in the last section of the first *Critique*, entitled "The History of Pure Reason".⁹⁵ Kant here presented what he took to be the only possible philosophical positions on the object of rational knowledge (sensualism and intellectualism), the origins of this knowledge (empiricism and neologism), and method (dogmatism, scepticism, and criticism). The section was not a

⁹⁰ The "ideas of reason" are first introduced on p. A311/B368. The three ideas God, the soul, and the world, as well as the metaphysical disciplines of rational psychology, cosmology, and theology, are first presented on pp. A334–35/B391–92. At other points, Kant presents three other essential supersensible objects to which reason tends: God, freedom, and immortality. See, e.g., Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A750/B778; Immanuel Kant, "Verkündigung des nahen Abschlusses eines Traktats zum ewigen Frieden in der Philosophie", in *Akademie-Textausgabe Band 8: Abhandlungen nach 1781* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), p. 416.

⁹¹ Kant characterised the apparent objective reality of transcendental concepts as "an unavoidable illusion" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A339/B397). Cf. Eckart Förster, *Die 25 Jahre der Philosophie: Eine systematische Rekonstruktion* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2018), p. 44; Michael Rohlf, "The Ideas of Pure Reason", in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. by Paul Guyer (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁹² Kant argued that "these transcendental concepts lack a suitable use *in concreto* and have no other utility than to point the understanding in the right direction" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A323/B380; see also p. A339–40/B397–98). There is a large body of literature on the transcendental dialectic and the chapter on the antinomy of pure reason. See, e.g., Allen W. Wood, "The Antinomies of Pure Reason", in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. by Paul Guyer (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Jannis Pissis, *Kants transzendente Dialektik: zu ihrer systematischen Bedeutung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012); Marcus Willaschek, *Kant on the Sources of Metaphysics: The Dialectic of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Martin Bunte, "Determining and Grounding: The Twofold Function of the Transcendental Dialectic", *Open Philosophy*, 5.1 (2022).

⁹³ I refer here mainly to the antinomies chapter (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A405/B432), since this section pertains most clearly to the issue of metaphysical quarrels, but see also the "Paralogisms of Pure Reason" (from p. A341/B399; see in particular p. A395) and "The Ideal of Pure Reason" (from p. A567/B595).

⁹⁴ See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A377.

⁹⁵ On this section, see Kang, *Philosophische Philosophiegeschichte*, p. 99; Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, pp. 247–48; Zeyad El Nabolsy, "Why Did Kant Conclude the Critique of Pure Reason with 'the History of Pure Reason'?", *Kant Studies Online*, 1 (2016).

history in the common sense of the word, as it did not follow a chronological structure; rather, it appeared as a sort of taxonomy of philosophical systems encountered throughout history. We will return to this structure later on. At the present, it suffices to note that Kant clearly considered his critical philosophy to have an application to past philosophies, and this application was useful precisely because it allowed for a new approach to the problem of metaphysical quarrels.

Kant took this aspect to be one of the most significant merits of his critical philosophy as such, but he was also well aware that his “History of Pure Reason” was in no way fully developed. “This title”, he wrote, “stands here only to designate a place that is left open in the system and must be filled in the future”.⁹⁶ Both Kant himself and his followers would soon get an opportunity to attempt to fill this gap, an opportunity that presented itself in the form of a *Preisfrage* posed by the Berlin Academy.

The *Preisfrage* of 1791

For 18th-century German intellectuals, the announcement of the yearly prize question by the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences was always an eagerly awaited event. First inaugurated in 1744, these essay competitions had the aim of directing prominent scholars towards a scientific issue considered of particular topical importance. The questions could concern any scientific discipline, but philosophy was among the most frequently represented subjects.⁹⁷ The philosophical questions were also met with particularly great interest and excitement by the learned public, often starting debates that continued long after the prize had been awarded.⁹⁸

This was also the case in 1791, when the Academy posed a question striking right at the nerve of contemporary philosophical disputes: “What are the real progresses of metaphysics in Germany since the time of Leibniz and Wolff?”⁹⁹ As we have seen, Kant had complained about the lack of meta-

⁹⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A852/B880.

⁹⁷ According to Adolf Harnack, 25 of the first 40 prize questions were of a philosophical or philologic-literary nature. Adolf Harnack, *Geschichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. Erster Band* (Berlin: Reichsdruckerei, 1900), pp. 399, 402.

⁹⁸ Among these are the question about the legitimacy of optimism – that is, the proposition that we live in the best of possible worlds – and the question about the origin of language. For an account of these two questions, see Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, pp. 30, 135–45.

⁹⁹ A detailed account of the prize question and the ensuing debate can be found in Stephen Howard and Pavel Reichl, “On Progress in Metaphysics: Responses to the Berlin Academy’s 1792/1795 Prize Essay Question”, in *Debates, Controversies, and Prizes: Philosophy in the German Enlightenment*, ed. by Tinca Prunea-Bretonnet and Christian Leduc (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024). See also Harnack,

physical progress in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* published just four years earlier. The use of the word “progresses” in the prize question therefore already made it obvious that a sufficient answer could not just discuss the explicitly mentioned Leibniz-Wolffian school; what the Academy sought was really an account of this school in relation to the unnamed Kant.

The implicit reference to Kant became even clearer in light of a recent philosophical controversy. When the *Critique of Pure Reason* was first published in 1781, it was met with a near-total silence in the learned journals. By the end of the decade, however, the Wolffians had begun to regard Kant as a considerable philosophical threat, and a number of publications started appearing devoted specifically to rejecting his philosophy.¹⁰⁰ The most influential criticism came from Johann August Eberhard, whose main argument focused precisely on the question of progress.¹⁰¹ In fact, Eberhard argued, the premises of Kant’s philosophy were already present in Leibniz’s system, and Kant had thus not taken any substantial steps beyond Leibnizian philosophy.¹⁰² To the extent that Kant was correct, his philosophy marked no progress at all, but only a recapitulation of Leibnizian insights. To the extent that Leibniz and Kant differed in their conclusions, on the other hand, Eberhard consistently argued in favour of Leibniz. If anything, it was *Kant* who had gone astray on the winding path of metaphysics and *Leibniz* who should be regarded as the only reliable guide for venturing forward on this path.¹⁰³

The prize question further fuelled the conflict between Eberhard and Kant; it could not fail to mobilise the most prominent representatives of either camp. Kant himself intended to enter an essay into the competition,

Geschichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. Erster Band, p. 611; Braun, *Geschichte der Philosophiegeschichte*, pp. 240–42.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Moses Mendelssohn’s famous reference to “the all-quashing Kant”: Moses Mendelssohn, *Morning Hours: Lectures on God’s Existence*, trans. by Daniel O. Dahlstrom and Corey Dyck (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), p. xix; Moses Mendelssohn, *Metaphysische Schriften*, ed. by Wolfgang Vogt (Hamburg: Meiner, 2008), p. 91.

¹⁰¹ Eberhard’s articles against Kant in the *Philosophisches Magazin*, as well as Kant’s reply (“Über eine Entdeckung nach der alle neue Kritik der reinen Vernunft durch eine ältere entbehrlich gemacht werden soll”), are collected in Kant, *Der Streit mit Johann August Eberhard*. Eberhard’s journal was published from 1788 to 1792; Kant’s response in 1790.

¹⁰² Johann August Eberhard, “Über die Schranken der menschlichen Erkenntnis”, in Immanuel Kant, *Der Streit mit Johann August Eberhard* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998), p. 11 [22–23]; Johann August Eberhard, “Über das Gebiet des reinen Verstandes”, in Immanuel Kant, *Der Streit mit Johann August Eberhard* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998), pp. 56–59 [284–89].

¹⁰³ Cf. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, p. 220.

but ultimately left it unfinished.¹⁰⁴ Other critical philosophers were there to argue his case however, among them Karl Leonhard Reinhold. On the side of the Leibnizians, Johann Christoph Schwab wrote a contribution concluding, as did Eberhard, that Kant's critical system must be regarded as no metaphysical progress at all.

When the winners of the competition were finally announced in 1796,¹⁰⁵ the Academy seemed to have deemed the result a draw. The prize sum was shared among three authors, with Schwab receiving one half and Reinhold and Abicht sharing a fourth each.¹⁰⁶ If this had been the end of the matter, the philosophical importance of the event would be limited. It appeared, in the end, that the arguments of either side were already exhausted so that little could be done other than repeating already-familiar standpoints. Indeed, both sides were well aware of this circumstance, expressing doubt about the possibility of winning over anyone other than the already convinced to their side. Schwab, for example, opened his essay with an illustrative parallel to ancient Greece. If one had asked the Greeks about the progress of metaphysics since Socrates, he wrote, one could expect radically different answers from each sect.¹⁰⁷ In the same way, Schwab implied, one could now expect Leibnizians and Kantians to give irreconcilable responses to the Academy's prize question.

Reinhold went even further in this direction. Rather than speaking in his own voice, he made his whole essay into a polyphony in which idealists, materialists, pantheists, and sceptics gave their own accounts that all clearly stood in conflict with one another. "The possible answers to the question", he summarised, "are precisely as many and as different as there are actual and

¹⁰⁴ Pavel Reichl suggests that this decision could be connected to the controversy following the publication of Kant's *Religion within the bounds of Mere Reason*: "[I]n 1794, Kant was rebuked for some of the ideas expressed in his writings on religion and signed a promise to Frederick William II that he would cease publishing on the topic. As the intended response to the prize question was to contain a significant theological component, Kant probably considered it subject to the ban" (Reichl, "Making History Philosophical", p. 470.) Another explanation is proposed by Andreas Brandt, "Epochen und Stadien der Metaphysik: Der doppelte Fortschrittsbegriff in Kants Entwürfen der späten Preisschrift", in *Über die Fortschritte der kritischen Metaphysik: Beiträge zu System und Architektonik der kantischen Philosophie*, ed. by Andree Hahmann and Bernd Ludwig (Hamburg: Meiner, 2017), p. 198.

¹⁰⁵ On the delayed declaration of the winning essays, see Braun, *Geschichte der Philosophiegeschichte*, p. 237 (note 43).

¹⁰⁶ Harnack, *Geschichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. Erster Band*, p. 611; Howard and Reichl, "On Progress in Metaphysics: Responses to the Berlin Academy's 1792/1795 Prize Essay Question", p. 114.

¹⁰⁷ Schwab, "Ausführliche Erörterung", p. 5.

thinkable parties".¹⁰⁸ Only a few pages at the end were devoted to Reinhold's own position as an allegedly neutral observer. Finally, Schelling, in a commentary on the winning essays, passed the following judgement:

The interest of the question is as illuminating as the difficulties in answering it. Already beforehand, one could have easily expected that a *Leibnizian* would return to his Wolffian *catechism* at the end of his examinations while a *Kantian* would depict [Kant's] own works as the crown of hitherto philosophy.¹⁰⁹

The significance of the prize question, then, does not mainly lie in the locked debate between Leibnizians and Kantians. Rather, it lies in the fact that both sides clearly identified the standstill and perceived a need to redefine the very *terms* of the discussion. The possibility of moving beyond the chaos of conflicting opinions presupposed, they thought, some *neutral* point of view, some perspective from which all philosophies could be examined, compared, and unprejudicially structured into a developing whole.¹¹⁰

This ambition soon led the participants in the progress debate to move their examinations one step further: to the notion of progress itself.¹¹¹ If the task was to be solved, they reasoned, it was essential to determine what philosophical progress could denote in the first place and what yardstick could be applied to measure it. It was essential, in other words, to examine the very nature of the history of philosophy.

Such an examination appeared particularly pressing for the Kantians, who saw it as an opportunity to defend the historical value of critical philosophy. But it would be a mistake to reduce their interest in the issue to such apologetic aims; just as much, it was perceived as an urgent philosophical matter in its own right. Only if the relation between philosophy and its history could be cleared up, the Kantians believed, could one gain insight into the true nature and task of philosophical inquiry.

¹⁰⁸ Karl Leonhard Reinhold, "Versuch einer Beantwortung der von der erlauchten Königl. Ak. der Wissensch. zu Berlin aufgestellten Frage: 'Was hat die Metaphysik seit Wolff und Leibniz gewonnen?'" in *Preisschriften über die Frage: Welche Fortschritte hat die Metaphysik seit Leibnitzens und Wolffs Zeiten in Deutschland gemacht?* (Berlin: Königl. Preuss. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1796), p. 177.

¹⁰⁹ Schelling, "Allgemeine Uebersicht", p. 94.

¹¹⁰ Both Reinhold and Schwab claimed to approach the question from such a neutral perspective, although one may certainly question the credibility of their impartiality. See Reinhold, "Versuch einer Beantwortung", p. 178; Schwab, "Ausführliche Erörterung", p. 5.

¹¹¹ The post-Kantian treatments of this concept will be discussed in greater detail below. Schwab serves as an example of a Leibniz-Wolffian elaboration: he opened his prize essay with an account of the ways in which a science could move towards greater completion (Schwab, "Ausführliche Erörterung", pp. 1–14).

In the decade following the prize question, the German literary world was virtually flooded with articles, essays, and entire journals attempting to formulate such a new foundation for the history of philosophy. The definition, nature, and usefulness of this subject had become one of the most pressing philosophical problems of the day. The debates on the topic would fundamentally reshape the very concept of the history of philosophy.

The Kantian Peace Treaty

There were multiple overlapping ambitions in the Kantians' treatments of the prize question. First, they were eager to use it as an opportunity to offer a more thorough historical legitimisation of Kant's critical philosophy; second, answering the question called for the neutral position of a disinterested arbiter. These two ambitions could not easily be combined: the defence of the critical system seemed to disqualify the Kantians from claims to neutrality.

But the Kantians had a method for resolving this. The sought-after neutral standpoint was, they argued, precisely what Kant had offered through his critical philosophy. By tracing metaphysical quarrels back to the fundamental needs of reason, he had shown that all philosophies were in fact in agreement regarding their ultimate source. Thus, if the historian could identify these universal needs of reason from which all philosophies sprang, he would also be able to relate them to one another from the highest, unbiased rational point of view. And if he could trace them back to specific *acts* founded in the nature of reason itself, he could also explain how and why different philosophies reached different conclusions without taking sides among them. This method was particularly appealing because it appeared to elevate the critique of pure reason above the field of philosophical struggles and turn it into precisely a neutral arbiter.¹¹²

As noted above, this historical application was partly implicit in the first *Critique*. In the early 1790s, both Kant himself and his followers attempted to develop it and make it more explicit. One of the first attempts at this was proposed by Karl Heinrich Heydenreich in a short essay entitled "Einige Ideen über die Revolution in der Philosophie, bewirkt durch Immanuel Kant, und besonders über den Einfluß derselben auf die Behandlung der Geschichte der Philosophie" ("Some ideas about the revolution in philosophy caused by Immanuel Kant, and in particular about its influence on the treatment of the history of philosophy").

¹¹² Cf., e.g., Johann Gottlieb Buhle, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie und einer kritischen Literatur derselben. Achter Theil* (Göttingen: Vandenhöck und Ruprecht, 1804), p. 538.

With an implicit reference to Eberhard, Heydenreich noted that many adversaries of Kant resorted to historical arguments in order to show the unoriginality and fruitlessness of Kant's criticism. According to Heydenreich, however, history actually gave witness to the very opposite – it “reliably raises the novelty and uniqueness of the Kantian system above all doubt”,¹¹³ for at no point before Kant did one encounter a critique of reason. When someone who had studied Kant's philosophy “turns to the pre-Kantian systems”, Heydenreich wrote,

he will in each of them find in living activity the essential striving of reason to philosophise. He will also find true objects of philosophy perceived and presented[.] [...] But he will search in vain among them for so much as the idea of an examination, determination, and testing of the faculty of philosophising itself, through which this faculty would be given its true direction, assigned its unique objects, and drawn the boundaries that are irrevocably given by nature itself. Rather, he notices that all philosophers before Kant set out to explain the objects of philosophy without worrying about the critique of the faculty through which they wanted to explain, and that all their attempts were merely hit-and-miss ventures.¹¹⁴

This point, taken in itself, appears as little more than a historical apology for Kant. But Heydenreich's main goal was not just to highlight the novelty of Kant's critique of reason. Rather, his intention was to show that “just as Kant's critical works necessarily caused a total revolution in philosophy, so they also make necessary a total transformation of the method for treating philosophical history”.¹¹⁵ This method consisted of tracing each philosophy back to the nature of reason itself as this nature had been determined by Kant's critique.

Crucially, Heydenreich underlined that this method was an *impartial* one. If the historian carefully judged the philosophers of the past from the perspective of reason itself, then his perspective would also be the most universal one that united the most opposed philosophical schools. The conflicts lay in the particular products of reason to which these schools adhered; however, if these products were traced back to the faculty that produced them, they would reveal themselves to be rooted in something transcending their particular premises and conclusions. They could also be shown to be *necessary*, for they sprang from the nature of reason and were

¹¹³ Heydenreich, “Einige Ideen”, p. 215.

¹¹⁴ Heydenreich, “Einige Ideen”, p. 216.

¹¹⁵ Heydenreich, “Einige Ideen”, p. 229.

therefore unavoidable steps it must take rather than contingent and unfounded theses. In the critique of reason, Heydenreich therefore claimed to have identified “the only yardstick that can be valid here”.¹¹⁶

A similar understanding was proposed by Georg Gustav Fülleborn. Fülleborn had studied philosophy in Halle and came into contact with both Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* and Reinhold’s *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, which made him a convinced adherent of critical philosophy. But according to his own description, it was only when he acquainted himself with the history of philosophy that he came to realise the true significance of the Kantian revolution.¹¹⁷ In 1791, Fülleborn began publishing a journal entitled *Beyträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie* that would soon become the main forum for post-Kantian discussions of the topic. The vast majority of the articles were authored by Fülleborn himself, but the journal also included contributions by, among others, Reinhold, Carus, and Christian Garve.

Particularly illuminating is Fülleborn’s article on the history of ancient Greek philosophy contained in the first issue of the journal. There were, Fülleborn noted, a number of difficulties connected to the study of this early thought: the sources were fragmentary, the teachings were often passed down through oral instruction rather than through writings, and even the written sources were frequently presented in a poetic language that made interpretation difficult. Ultimately, however, this did not need to worry the historian too much, for “the first and oldest philosophemes must have come from the very same source as the one from which the opinions of the later as well as the newest thinkers have flown: from the nature of the human faculty of representation”.¹¹⁸ “The task of philosophy has been the same in all times: to seek out the necessary grounds and the necessary ways of the connection of things”.¹¹⁹ Just like Heydenreich, Fülleborn thus approached his task by tracing the philosophical teachings back to their source in reason as such. Through this method, the historian would be able to account both for the ways in which reason surpassed its necessary boundaries and the ways in which each philosophical system presented a rational truth: “[i]n the earliest speculation, as in the later, the laws of understanding and the ideals of reason have expressed themselves”.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Heydenreich, “Einige Ideen”, p. 217.

¹¹⁷ See Georg Gustav Fülleborn, “Geschichte meines philosophischen Studiums”, *Beyträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, no. 3 (1793).

¹¹⁸ Georg Gustav Fülleborn, “Über die Geschichte der ältesten griechischen Philosophie”, *Beyträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, no. 1 (1791), p. 54.

¹¹⁹ Fülleborn, “Über die Geschichte der ältesten griechischen Philosophie”, p. 55.

¹²⁰ Fülleborn, “Über die Geschichte der ältesten griechischen Philosophie”, p. 55.

Fülleborn's article is significant because it did not just discuss this approach to the history of philosophy in general terms – it also attempted to operationalise it and apply it to a particular source material. In his journal, Fülleborn had the opportunity to further develop this method in concrete historical studies. He returned to it, for example, in an article on Xenophanes, where his aim was to interpret “the opinion of the Colophonian” not only from the historical sources, but also “with constant regard to the nature of the human faculty of representation”.¹²¹ Following this, Fülleborn went on to a general outline of Xenophanes's theory of being. This was done in the form of a series of premises and conclusions written in the first person, inviting the reader to carefully follow the argument and its development. Fülleborn himself found no logical errors in Xenophanes's theory; he took it to be “twined into the most solid chain of inference”.¹²² To the extent that any objections could be made to it, they could thus not concern the formal structure, but rather the nature and scope of pure rational enquiry. This was the error Fülleborn believed that he had identified: namely, he argued, Xenophanes had taken his reasoning to pertain to the things in themselves. However, critical philosophy had shown “that no cognitions are possible through mere reason”.¹²³ Summing up his reading of Xenophanes, Fülleborn thus passed the following judgement:

The doctrine of the Colophonian wise man [*Weise*] thus arose from an easily explainable self-deception of reason, according to which the ideal unity and magnitude, the ideal Whole, the idea of the absolute subject were held to be properties of the things[.]¹²⁴

In making this claim, Fülleborn cannot be said to be neutral in the sense that he refrained from judgements about Xenophanes's philosophy; on the contrary, he did in fact characterise it as a “self-deception”. But since this was a self-deception *of reason*, the error was nonetheless in itself a rational one.¹²⁵ This was, to Fülleborn and the other post-Kantians, the chief merit of the critical method. It did not amount to the simultaneous acceptance of opposite

¹²¹ Georg Gustav Fülleborn, “Xenophanes. Ein Versuch”, *Beyträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, no. 1 (1791), pp. 63–64.

¹²² Fülleborn, “Xenophanes. Ein Versuch”, p. 68.

¹²³ Fülleborn, “Xenophanes. Ein Versuch”, p. 69; cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. A255/B310, A269–70/B325–26.

¹²⁴ Fülleborn, “Xenophanes. Ein Versuch”, p. 73.

¹²⁵ Compare the opening of the Transcendental Dialectic, in which Kant characterised transcendental illusions as “natural and unavoidable” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. A297–98/B354).

doctrines (which would constitute a paradox), but rather to the claim that all of these opposites were rooted in one and the same reason. Many historical thinkers may have made an illegitimate use of the rational laws by over-extending their sphere – but the historian equipped with the tools of critical philosophy was able to identify such missteps, thus recovering the true, rational core of each philosophical system.

Importantly, it was therefore not just the case that all philosophies were mixtures of truth and error (a stance that was, as we shall see in the following chapters, not uncommon among historians before the Kantian age). Rather, the innovative aspect of Fülleborn's approach is that it approached the error itself as an *expression* of a rational truth, a *clue* that the historian could trace back to its origin in the nature of reason. The history of philosophy was not, then, a series of failed attempts mutually rejecting each other; the initial appearance of error was a deceptive one that turned into truth once the neutral, critical historian managed to sufficiently appreciate its underlying principle. In a later issue of his journal, Fülleborn presented this notion of the critical philosopher's neutrality in an even more explicit manner:

The critical philosopher takes no sides, he is neither exclusively a dogmatic nor exclusively a sceptic, neither materialist nor immaterialist, or whatever the individual sect names may be. He regards all these claims from the perspective of their relation to the laws of human spirit: he finds nothing finally determined [*Ausgemachtes*] in the doctrines of the empiricist or rationalist, nor does he doubt with the doubter. Instead, he pays attention above all to the extent to which the claims of the one and the doubts of the other are founded in those general laws of human spirit, the extent to which one or the other surpassed the boundaries of the faculty of cognition or withdrew to them.¹²⁶

Kant returned to the same issue in a short essay published in 1798, where he announced the “imminent conclusion of a tract of perpetual peace in philosophy”.¹²⁷ He began by tracing the need for philosophy to man's essence as a rational animal. This need could not but express itself as a drive to oppose one's own thought against that of others, which led to “open war” of “school against school like army against army”.¹²⁸ Like Fülleborn, Kant took such

¹²⁶ Georg Gustav Fülleborn, “Was heißt den Geist einer Philosophie darstellen”, *Beyträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, no. 5 (1795), pp. 199–200.

¹²⁷ On this text, see Günter Zöller, “Pax Kantiana: Kant zum ewigen Frieden in der Philosophie”, *철학·사상·문화*, no. 8 (2009).

¹²⁸ Kant, “Verkündigung”, p. 414.

struggles to be necessary, but held that critical philosophy nonetheless possessed the ability to bring them to a final end.¹²⁹ It alone could clear up the misunderstanding whereby the postulates and ideas of practical reason were confused with things in themselves.¹³⁰ Importantly, Kant believed that the realisation of critical philosophy would put an end to the philosophical wars not by crowning either side as the victor, but by making all struggling parties freely put down their weapons: it would be “a peace covenant so constituted that it is immediately formed (without capitulation) as soon as [the parties] understand one another”.¹³¹ Critical philosophy served as the only truly neutral negotiator that could give both sides their dues.

From Appearance to Essence

In the case of Heydenreich, this explanatory model was closely tied to the Kantian project: it was possible only through the three *Critiques* (and above all the first). Fülleborn found an additional resource in Reinhold’s *Elementarphilosophie* and its foundational principle of the faculty of representation. As time went on, less orthodox post-Kantians began making use of similar thought figures that were not so closely tied to the philosophical projects of Kant and Reinhold. In an essay written on the occasion of the *Preisfrage* (although not actually submitted to the competition), Salomon Maimon presented as the condition for tracing philosophical progress the insight that “human spirit remains identical to itself”. Therefore, he went on, “[b]oth the ways of its progress to perfection and its aberrations are (apart from some accidental modifications) just the same in all times and in all parts of the world”.¹³² Similarly, Georg Friedrich Daniel Goess claimed that the most crucial insight demanded of the historian of philosophy did not concern the individual character of each philosopher, but rather the character of human spirit as such and its abilities, “[f]or only these contain the universally valid principles of the reason that is common to all men”.¹³³ Thus, the yardstick applied by the historian should consist of “these necessary and unchanging

¹²⁹ Kant, “Verkündigung”, p. 416.

¹³⁰ The peace treaty, then, was to be reached through the realisation of “on the one hand, the powerlessness of *theoretical* proofs” and “on the other, through the strength of *practical* principles [*Gründe*]”. Kant, “Verkündigung”, p. 416.

¹³¹ Kant, “Verkündigung”, p. 421.

¹³² Salomon Maimon, *Ueber die Progressen der Philosophie, veranlaßt durch die Preisfrage der königl. Akademie zu Berlin für das Jahr 1792: Was hat die Metaphysik seit Leibniz und Wolf für Progressen gemacht?* (Berlin: Wieweg, 1793), p. 6. The essay was republished the same year in Salomon Maimon, *Streifereim im Gebiete der Philosophie. Erster Theil* (Berlin: Wilhelm Wieweg, 1793).

¹³³ Goess, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 40.

laws and principles of which the essence of all philosophies consists”,¹³⁴ and these laws were, conversely, “the communal source from which all philosophies of old and new philosophers flow”.¹³⁵ In both of these cases, the concept of human spirit replaced that of reason. But the explanatory model remained the same: it was a model that took all philosophies to be *expressions* of a single, eternal source, and it thus functioned by distinguishing between the outer form and inner essence. The establishment of this conceptual framework marked one of the most significant developments in post-Kantian historiography of philosophy and therefore deserves closer attention.

The 1790s saw the rise of a number of concepts aimed at grasping this distinction between a philosophy’s appearance and essence. For example, in his early public Jena lectures, J.G. Fichte defined philosophy as rooted in the activity of human spirit. This activity, he went on, could not be communicated directly, but had to be expressed in an ossified *product* such as a given textual presentation. However, the product must not be mistaken for philosophy in itself; instead, it should be approached as a sign pointing beyond itself, to a truth located outside the particular, hardened form. Thus, the mere learning and memorisation of a given doctrine was still not to be considered true philosophy:

[E]ven if one employs this principle in this quite correct manner, it still remains entirely possible that one has merely learned the letter of this principle without having grasped its spirit. Perhaps one employs the formula that expresses this principle because one has accepted it on trust or faith, or perhaps because one has noticed how useful it is for providing specific explanations for all of those things which philosophy is supposed to explain. Nevertheless, so long as one has not had the intuition of what is expressed in this formula, then one possesses no more than a formula.¹³⁶

“Philosophy”, Fichte continued, “is not something that floats in our memory or is printed in books for us to read; instead, philosophy is what has stirred and transformed our spirit”.¹³⁷

Fichte himself did not explicitly discuss spirit and letter in relation to the interpretation of philosophy’s history, but the concepts were frequently used

¹³⁴ Goess, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 41.

¹³⁵ Goess, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 43.

¹³⁶ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 204; Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe II,3: Nachgelassene Schriften 1793–1795* [GA II,3], ed. by Reinhard Lauth and Hans Jacob (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1971), pp. 329–30.

¹³⁷ Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, p. 207 [GA II,3: 332–33].

by historians of philosophy as well. It received its most elaborate treatment by Fülleborn in an article entitled “Was heißt den Geist einer Philosophie darstellen?” In the opening of the article, Fülleborn defined the concept of spirit as related to no fewer than seven different but overlapping meanings: it referred to “the *inner* of an object” as opposed to its outer form, to “the *general* or whole” as opposed to its parts, to “the *essential* in an object as opposed to the contingent”, to “the most *primary* [*Hauptsächlichsten*], most distinguished, most important”, to “the *pure* that remains after the separation from all foreign or that was already there before the addition of this foreign”, and finally to “the *living*” as well as the “invigorating [*das Belebende*]”.¹³⁸ Through all of this, we can clearly see how Fülleborn envisioned the task of the historian as that of reaching beyond the appearance to an inner, essential core.

Later, Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann used the same viewpoint to criticise the method generally employed by earlier historians. These pre-critical textbooks, he wrote,

contain nothing but collected notices from the lives of the philosophers and their claims as they are found scattered about, without penetrating the spirit of them [...] or dry excerpts from the writings of philosophers that neither characterise the spirit of the author nor give anything else than the mere letter of his system.¹³⁹

This understanding had significant implications pertaining to the role of the historian, who must himself possess a considerable spiritual ability. One of the earliest discussions of this topic was offered by Reinhold in an article published in Fülleborn’s journal. The history of philosophy, Reinhold proposed, must be carefully distinguished from the “literary history of this science”, which consisted only of “a complete and precise list of the important works that belong in the realm of philosophy”.¹⁴⁰ It must also be distinguished from “the *recounting of the doctrines and opinions* of the philosophers”.¹⁴¹ Such an account, Reinhold thought, could at most be considered to offer “the *mere materials* of the history of philosophy, but in no way this *history itself*”.¹⁴² The true history was, in other words, located beyond the letter of the

¹³⁸ Fülleborn, “Was heißt den Geist einer Philosophie darstellen?”, p. 192.

¹³⁹ Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band* (Leipzig: Barth, 1798), p. lxxv.

¹⁴⁰ Karl Leonhard Reinhold, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie. Eine Akademische Vorlesung”, *Beyträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, no. 1 (1791), p. 28.

¹⁴¹ Reinhold, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie”, p. 28.

¹⁴² Reinhold, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie”, p. 29.

doctrines: it was produced only through the interpretative work of the historian who moved further and uncovered their philosophical spirit. Even someone who possessed all “necessary and useful historical, philological, grammatical, and logical aids” was, Reinhold claimed, “with all this preparation called to be the collector and *mechanical* editor of the materials for a future history of philosophy, but not to be the inventor of its plan, not to be the architect of its scientific edifice”.¹⁴³

The distinction between spirit and letter thus allowed the post-Kantians to develop their understanding of the historiographic practice. In particular, they found in it a resource for treating the issue of philosophical quarrels. To them, such quarrels presented themselves only at the surface level of philosophical *expressions*. At this level, philosophies could differ in regard to a great number of circumstances: the time and culture in which they were produced, the individual character and aims of their authors, their particular mode of expression and conceptual framework, etc. Through all of this, apparent conflicts and contradictions could arise – indeed, even the philosophers themselves could believe that they were in conflict. But the task of the historian was to reach deeper: rather than just reproducing the doctrines of the past as they appeared, he had to penetrate them and reach into the rational spirit. Again, this work would serve a dual purpose. On the one hand, it would uncover the aberrations of reason and its misuse of its own principles; on the other, it would also lay bare the universally *valid* rational principles present in each system of philosophical thought. In this sense, there was also a necessary truth in every system, although the pre-critical thinkers may not have been wholly conscious of the nature of this truth. We encounter here one of the first elaborate formulations of the hermeneutic ambition to understand the thinkers better than they could understand themselves.¹⁴⁴ This ambition was made possible only by the establishment of a conceptual framework that distinguished between appearance and essence, spirit and letter, or outer form and inner truth. Since the model made it

¹⁴³ Reinhold, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie”, p. 32. Reinhold characterised this as a history concerned with “the inner fate of the science” as opposed to its external circumstances. Similarly, Fülleborn himself wrote that “a list of the outer circumstances and causes that led a thinker to philosophise in a particular way has no place in a history of philosophy” (Fülleborn, “Was heißt den Geist einer Philosophie darstellen?”, p. 202).

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. A313–14/B370; Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Sämtliche Werke. Dritte Abtheilung, Dritter Band* (Berlin: Reimer, 1835), p. 362.

possible to conceptualise the work of the historian as a movement from surface to core, I will refer to it as a “depth model”.¹⁴⁵

This model simultaneously allowed for a reconceptualisation of two connected concepts: that of history itself and that of the historian. Concerning the historian, the post-Kantians moved the ideal from *erudition* to *philosophical spirit*. It was not enough for the historian to know and gather his sources; rather, his most crucial task consisted of the philosophical interpretation of them.¹⁴⁶ As a consequence, *history* was no longer understood as located in the sources and past events themselves. In Reinhold’s words, all of these were only the materials *out of which* history was brought about. History itself was now instead understood as the product of the historical interpretation.

The Progress of Philosophy

So far, I have focused mainly on the issue of philosophical discords. But the prize question also explicitly concerned another issue, namely, that of metaphysical or philosophical *progress*. As I shall argue, however, the post-Kantians took these issues to be closely related. This had already been indicated by Kant, as he connected the metaphor of metaphysical mock battles to the metaphor of reason getting lost on its way. To both him and his followers, the lack of progress presented itself precisely *as* discord and conflict. This added a further aspect to the question as such: the problem of accounting for historical quarrels could be traced back to the more fundamental problem of accounting for philosophical progress (or the lack thereof). As we shall see, Kant and his followers also understood the notion of progress as offering a new *solution* to this problem. Indeed, only through an examination of philosophical progress did they believe that the historian could formulate a satisfactory peace treaty for the quarrelling parties.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ This term was first coined by Fredric Jameson, by whose work my own use of it is inspired. See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 12.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, pp. 34, 41.

¹⁴⁷ The emergence of a progress narrative in the historiography of philosophy has previously been noted by Braun. See also Martin Bondeli, “The History of Philosophy as Progress Towards a System of Reason”, in *From Hegel to Windelband: Historiography of Philosophy in the 19th Century* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015); Brandt, “Epochen und Stadien der Metaphysik”; Antoine Grandjean, “Kant als Historiker der Metaphysik: ein Fortschritt ohne Geschichte”, in *Über die Fortschritte der kritischen Metaphysik: Beiträge zu System und Architektonik der kantischen Philosophie*, ed. by Andree Hahmann and Bernd Ludwig (Hamburg: Meiner, 2017).

It was no coincidence that the notion of progress played such a central role in the post-Kantian programme for the historiography of philosophy, for this notion was fundamental to Enlightenment-era historical thought in general. As shown by Reinhart Koselleck, the German term *Fortschritt* was in fact a neologism that firmly established itself only in the 18th century. Earlier historians had certainly possessed a number of concepts denoting historical changes and movements. But these concepts – for example, *Fortgang*, *Fortdauer*, and *Progreß*¹⁴⁸ – differed from *Fortschritt* in an important respect: they emphasised a cyclical nature of history rather than a linear one, and therefore were not tied to ideas of gradual improvement or purposeful development. *Fortschritt*, by contrast, was associated precisely with the idea of an overarching purpose and end of history.¹⁴⁹ It was an inherently teleological and value-laden concept.

The possibility of this historical narrative depended on three conditions. First, the measurement of progress required a stable subject that remained itself throughout its transformations and changing determinations; it needed to be a history about a continuously existing *something* that progressed. This was one of the reasons that 18th-century historians began writing histories of “mankind” in general.¹⁵⁰ Second, progress did not just denote change in general, but rather purposeful change directed at the full realisation of the subject’s highest end. It was therefore necessary to identify this end and use it as a guiding principle of the historical narrative. Third, this also changed the interpretative approach to the interrelations between historical events. Rather than presenting them as exemplary and meaningful in their own right, the historian had to organise them into a developing whole, presenting them as steps along a path of progress or as links in a continuous chain. Put more concretely, a history written according to a narrative of progress presupposed a series of successive *stages* or *epochs* whereby its subject approached its final end step by step.

Now, the post-Kantians thought, the first two of these conditions had already been fulfilled by Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. By tracing all philosophical systems back to reason itself, he had proposed a stable subject that persisted through the historical transformations of philosophy. More-

¹⁴⁸ The distinction between *Progreß* and *Fortschritt* cannot be satisfyingly carried over to English. Unless anything else is explicitly noted, my use of the English term “progress” should be read as a translation of the German *Fortschritt*.

¹⁴⁹ “Fortschritt”, in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. 2: E–G*, ed. by Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett, 1998), pp. 352, 384.

¹⁵⁰ “Fortschritt” (*Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe 2*), p. 352. See also Helmut Zedelmaier, *Der Anfang der Geschichte: Studien zur Ursprungsdebatte im 18. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2003), p. 256.

over, by presenting philosophy in general and metaphysics in particular as a fundamental need of reason, he had also delimited the regulative end towards which the progress of history must tend.

What was less obvious was whether Kant's first *Critique* could be said to fulfil the third criterion, namely, the ordering of historical events into a continuous chain forming a gradual realisation of history's final end. As we have seen, Kant's own sketch for a history of pure reason lacked an explicit temporal dimension; rather than epochs or stages, it was organised according to classes of philosophical principles and methods. For the prize question to be sufficiently answered, this structure needed amendment.

This was something of which Kant himself was certainly aware. In his draft for the *Preisschrift*, he claimed that tracing the progress of a science was usually a straightforward task. Astronomy and chemistry, for example, "have already found their historians", and Kant believed that non-empirical sciences such as mathematical analysis and pure mechanics "soon shall find theirs too".¹⁵¹ For metaphysics, however, the endeavour was considerably more complicated. Metaphysics was

an ocean without shores, in which the progress leaves no trace and whose horizon contains no visible target through which one could perceive how much one has approached it. – Regarding this science, which has almost always existed only in the idea, the task at hand is very difficult, and one must almost doubt the possibility of solving it[.]¹⁵²

So how, then, could progress in metaphysics be secured? This question was of crucial importance for the critical project as such, but it had not yet been sufficiently answered. With the prize question as a crucial impulse, both Kant and other critical philosophers now began to turn precisely to this question.

Pragmatic History

In doing this, the Kantians did certainly not need to begin from nothing. Around the middle of the 18th century, a number of voices had already been raised calling for the total reform of historical scholarship and writing.

¹⁵¹ Immanuel Kant, "Welches sind die wirklichen Fortschritte, die die Metaphysik seit Leibnizens und Wolf's Zeiten in Deutschland gemacht hat?", in *Akademie-Textausgabe Band 20: Handschriftlicher Nachlaß 7* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1942), p. 259. Kant was fond of the ocean metaphor; cf. Immanuel Kant, "The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God", in *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770*, ed. by David Walford and Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 111 [AA2: 66]; Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. A235/B294, A395–96.

¹⁵² Kant, "Fortschritte", p. 259.

Previous historians, the proponents of this reform argued, had been content with just enumerating one historical event after another without worrying about their interconnection and their relation to history's final end. This criticism was influentially presented by J.C. Gatterer in an article published in 1767. "Judging from how one usually presents history in speech and writing among us", he wrote,

one appears to always presuppose that it is merely a work of memory. Thus, the whole effort of the teacher or writer usually is directed at finding a method for how the events can most easily be brought into memory and kept there.¹⁵³

This method, Gatterer went on to claim, was not even worthy of the name history; rather, it was at most an annal or a chronicle in which the author merely listed the events according to their chronological order. One of Gatterer's colleagues at Göttingen University, August Ludwig Schlözer, advocated a similar view.¹⁵⁴ World history, he wrote, could either be conceptualised as "an *aggregate* of all special histories" or as "a *system* in which the world and humanity constitute the unity".¹⁵⁵ As an aggregate, the individual events would be connected in a merely arbitrary way without painting a general picture of humanity as a whole. But in such a narrative, Schlözer went on, "the *general gaze* which encompasses the whole is still missing. This mighty gaze transforms the aggregate into a *system* and brings all states on the face of the earth back to a unity, the human race".¹⁵⁶

Gatterer and Schlözer both proposed detailed programmes for achieving such a systematic structure. First of all, they believed, it demanded an elaborate effort of selection and interpretation by the historian. "The *universalhistoricus*", wrote Schlözer,

lifts out [the world events] from the already prepared material of innumerable special histories, collects them completely, appropriately picks them out, and

¹⁵³ Johann Christoph Gatterer, "Vom historischen Plan und der darauf sich gründenden Zusammenfügung der Erzählung", in *Allgemeine historische Bibliothek. Erster Band* (Halle: Johann Justinus Gebauer, 1767), p. 27.

¹⁵⁴ On the historical programme of Gatterer and Schlözer, see Gérard Laudin, "Gatterer und Schlözer: Geschichte als 'Wissenschaft vom Menschen'?", in *Die Wissenschaft vom Menschen in Göttingen um 1800*, ed. by Hans Erich Bödeker, Philippe Büttgen, and Michel Espagne (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008).

¹⁵⁵ August Ludwig Schlözer, *August Ludwig Schlözers Vorstellung seiner Universal-Historie* (Göttingen/Gotha: Johann Christian Dietrich, 1772), p. 14.

¹⁵⁶ Schlözer, *Universal-Historie*, pp. 18–19.

orders each history in relation to the other parts and to the whole plan: this gives them the *form*.¹⁵⁷

In the view of Schlözer, precisely this effort of summarising and selecting from the endless, unmanageable mass of special histories was one of the main tasks of the universal historian. We can easily see how this relates to the problem of keeping up with rapidly growing research that was outlined in the introduction above.¹⁵⁸

Rather than just compiling and retelling the events of the past, then, the historian must find their inner connections, select the ones that were more important, and piece them together in a continuous order. To Gatterer, this could be achieved only if the historian grasped the ways in which the events related to each other as causes and effects. In such an organisation, their arbitrary order would be replaced by a *necessary* one.

“The history writer who works in this way”, Gatterer summarised his method, “is *pragmatic*”.¹⁵⁹ Through Gatterer, the concept of pragmatic history became a staple of German enlightened historiography in general. The term itself had been used since antiquity, but in the context of the German Enlightenment it took on a new meaning: it began denoting precisely a connected and systematic account of past events as opposed to their mere enumeration.¹⁶⁰ Thereby, history in a pragmatic sense could be distinguished from the annal and chronicle, which did not concern themselves with the interpretation and connection of the source material. The pragmatic account of history was further characterised by the careful selection undertaken by the historian: its wholeness concerned not an exhaustive account of the sources and events (indeed, some of them had to be sorted out as either unimportant or superfluous), but rather the coherent chain they formed together.¹⁶¹

Kant himself was influenced by this outlook. This is perhaps most evident in his *Ideas for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* (1784),¹⁶² in

¹⁵⁷ Schlözer, *Universal-Historie*, pp. 13–14.

¹⁵⁸ On this, see also Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, p. 60.

¹⁵⁹ Gatterer, “Vom historischen Plan”, p. 80.

¹⁶⁰ Gudrun Kühne-Bertram, “Aspekte der Geschichte und der Bedeutungen des Begriffs ‘pragmatisch’ in den philosophischen Wissenschaften des ausgehenden 18. und des 19. Jahrhunderts”, *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, 27 (1983), pp. 167–68; Daniel Breazeale, “Fichte’s Conception of Philosophy as a ‘Pragmatic History of the Human Mind’ and the Contributions of Kant, Platner, and Maimon”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 62.4 (2001), p. 687.

¹⁶¹ See Wellmon, *Organizing Enlightenment*.

¹⁶² I refer here not to Kant’s use of the concept “pragmatic”, but rather to his philosophy of history and its relation to the historiographical ideals put forth by Gatterer and Schlözer. On Kant’s concepts of the

which he similarly distinguished between history viewed as a “planless aggregate of human actions” and as “a *system*”.¹⁶³ To Kant, this latter approach was proper to a *philosophical* approach to history, i.e., to the philosophy of history. It demanded that the historian not get caught up in the empirical material as such, but rather seek to organise it according to a transcendental principle located beyond the mere appearance. It needed, in other words an “*a priori* rule”.¹⁶⁴ Even though the *material* of history consisted of empirical facts, the *organisation* of this material had to be developed through a principle given independently of experience.

Towards a Pragmatic History of Philosophy

The 1790s saw the vigorous introduction of these ideas in the field of the historiography of philosophy as well. This is perhaps most evident in the recurring objection that earlier historians had produced nothing but planless aggregates. A clear example of this can be found in the article that Reinhold published in Fülleborn’s journal. As we have seen, Reinhold too distinguished the gathering of the historical materials from their more elaborate organisation. Only once such a systematic order was achieved, Reinhold believed, could one claim to possess the history of philosophy itself.¹⁶⁵

Statements of this kind would become commonplace among the post-Kantians. Echoing Reinhold, Fülleborn wrote that

[o]ur age has no use for such collections: we demand no inventory of places, but reasoning [*Raisonnement*] about the meaning of the whole, no enumeration of singular opinions, but general results: and in fact it is only these that make the history of philosophy, above all the ancient, important and instructive to us.¹⁶⁶

pragmatic, see Kühne-Bertram, “Aspekte der Geschichte und der Bedeutungen des Begriffs ‘pragmatisch’”, pp. 162–65.

¹⁶³ Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose”, in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. by Hans Siegbert Reiss (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 52; Immanuel Kant, *Akademie Textausgabe. Band 8: Abhandlungen nach 1781* [AA8] (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971), p. 29. On the distinction between aggregate and system, see also Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Beiträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Mißverständnisse der Philosophen*, ed. by Faustino Fabbianelli (Hamburg: Meiner, 2003), p. 4.

¹⁶⁴ Kant, “Idea for a Universal History”, p. 53 [AA8: 30].

¹⁶⁵ Reinhold, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie”, p. 29.

¹⁶⁶ Georg Gustav Fülleborn, “Kurze Geschichte der Philosophie”, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, no. 3 (1793), pp. 3–4; cf. Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, p. 129.

Also Tennemann argued that a history of philosophy would be more purposefully constructed the more it focused on the “*connection of the materials into a whole*”.¹⁶⁷ Only if all particular notices and materials were in this way related to a unifying idea, he went on, “can one say that it is *history of philosophy*, only then does the manifold of it acquire *unity and connection*”.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, Goess wrote that “the precise *historical* list of opinions” was “still no history of philosophy” but merely a collection of materials.¹⁶⁹

The form of historiography that Goess presented as the alternative to this mere aggregate was dubbed precisely “pragmatic”. He was far from alone in using this term. “A *pragmatic history of philosophy*”, wrote Maimon, “must present not *opinions of the philosophers*, but *modes of thought* [*Denkungsarten*], not *writings*, but *methods*, not *disconnected fancies*, but *systems*”.¹⁷⁰ A few years later, Buhle defined the history of philosophy as “a pragmatic account of the most important attempts made by the most excellent minds of the old and new time to bring this science about”.¹⁷¹

The method of pragmatic history outlined by Gatterer thus allowed the post-Kantians to further develop the depth model outlined above. For the material gatherer was, in their view, precisely a historian who failed to see the deeper, inner connections among the historical sources: he might be an erudite and knowledgeable scholar, but he was marked by a lack of true philosophical spirit. As this critique was more elaborately tied to the notion of progress, it gained a new dimension. The depth model now concerned not only the interpretation of individual philosophies, but also their temporal relationship, i.e., their development in relation to one another. Since this aspect was of a distinctly historical character, the depth model allowed the post-Kantians to propose a new concept of history as such. Like Gatterer and Schlözer, they did this by distinguishing the true history from the annal or chronicle. History was moved from the *res gestae* to their rational interpretation undertaken by the historian. In this sense, the solution proposed by

¹⁶⁷ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. lxvi; see also p. xxi, where Tennemann explicitly refers to the “connection of the events” as the “*pragmatic spirit of history*”.

¹⁶⁸ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. lxvii.

¹⁶⁹ Goess, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 34.

¹⁷⁰ Maimon, *Ueber die Progressen der Philosophie*, p. 6.

¹⁷¹ Johann Gottlieb Buhle, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie und einer kritischen Literatur derselben. Erster Theil* (Göttingen: Vandenhöck und Ruprecht, 1796), p. 1. For further examples of how the term was used, see Fülleborn, “Was heißt den Geist einer Philosophie darstellen?”, p. 200; Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, “Übersicht des Vorzüglichsten, was für die Geschichte der Philosophie seit 1780 geleistet worden”, *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*, 2.8 (1795), p. 330.

the post-Kantians consisted of a reinterpretation of the concept of history and the nature of historical enquiry.

Such a pragmatic history could further contribute to the resolution of past philosophical quarrels. As they were connected in a chain of gradual development, the individual doctrines and philosophical systems could be reinterpreted as necessary steps in reason's progress towards its highest philosophical ends. In such an account, even mistaken attempts to realise a flawless philosophy – even those that, as Fülleborn remarked about Xenophanes, were ultimately nothing but reason's self-deceptions – could serve the function of moving reason forward on its path.

The central status of this idea is illustrated by Reinhold. "The history of philosophy", Reinhold claimed, "mentions only epoch-making works of the science, those that have brought forth essential changes in its form and determined its respective state".¹⁷² The historian of philosophy was not mainly tasked with presenting an all-encompassing list of philosophical writings. Rather, he above all had to show how these writings related to the gradual development of the philosophical science itself. Only as a history of progress could the history of philosophy achieve its ends, and this demanded selection and organisation.

Putting the Model into Practice

It should be noted that Kant himself was not fully convinced that the history of philosophy was – or could be written as – the progress of reason. We have already seen how he in the first *Critique* lamented the *lack* of any clear progress in metaphysics. In his prize essay draft he presented another argument indicating the same stance. Metaphysics, he claimed, was of such a nature that it could not be partly achieved, and thus its development could not be thought as divided into multiple steps. Instead, in metaphysics, reason possessed "all or nothing".¹⁷³ The only thinkable progress would then be from the total non-existence of metaphysics to its full realisation.

Then, however, Kant moved on to a somewhat different approach. To answer the Academy's question, he wrote, one must first ask oneself "what reason wants with metaphysics?"¹⁷⁴ The formulation establishes the first two criteria for a history of progress that I have outlined above: a stable subject and a final end towards which this subject strives. In the case of metaphysics,

¹⁷² Reinhold, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie", p. 28.

¹⁷³ Kant, "Fortschritte", p. 259.

¹⁷⁴ Kant, "Fortschritte", p. 259.

Kant proposed that this end consisted of “the progress from cognition of the sensible to cognition of the supersensible through reason”.¹⁷⁵

Once equipped with this yardstick, Kant moved on to a discussion of the development towards the end in question, i.e., to what he alternately referred to as the “steps” (*Schritte*) and “epochs” (*Epoken*) of metaphysics. In its striving for supersensible knowledge, he proposed, reason was first necessarily led to the application of the laws of experience also to objects beyond experience, such as God and the immortality of the soul. However, in approaching these objects, reason found itself torn between mutually exclusive but equally valid standpoints. As its second stage, reason was thus thrown into scepticism, i.e., the denial or doubt of the possibility of supersensual knowledge in general. To move beyond this aporia, reason finally turned to an examination of its own nature, i.e., to criticism. We find here, then, a reiteration of the three positions outlined in the “History of Pure Reason” of the first *Critique* – but in the *Preisschrift*, they formed a chronological sequence depicting reason’s gradual and necessary self-development.¹⁷⁶

Kant presented this tripartite division of reason’s metaphysical attempts accompanied with historical references: the first, dogmatic stage was “older even than the time of Plato and Aristotle”,¹⁷⁷ whereas the second, sceptical stage could arise only as a reaction to dogmatism and was thus “naturally of a somewhat later origin”,¹⁷⁸ Criticism as the third and final stage was of course located only in Kant’s own time. Simultaneously, the order was not a wholly linear one, as the first two stages of reason could present themselves time and time again, both in the thought of the single individual and in different ages. More than springing from empirical studies of the history of philosophy, the division constituted a *logical* development arrived at by an *a priori* examination of reason’s immanent laws.¹⁷⁹ But this did not mean that a temporal dimension was altogether lacking. Indeed, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant had already described the dogmatic stage as the childhood of pure reason and criticism as achieved only in its mature age.¹⁸⁰

In his “Was heißt den Geist einer Philosophie darstellen?”, Fülleborn similarly distinguished three “ways of philosophising”. There existed, he

¹⁷⁵ Kant, “Fortschritte”, p. 260.

¹⁷⁶ The division of philosophy into dogmatism, scepticism, and criticism was used also in Kant, “Verkündigung”, pp. 415–16.

¹⁷⁷ Kant, “Fortschritte”, p. 262.

¹⁷⁸ Kant, “Fortschritte”, p. 263.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Brandt, “Epochen und Stadien der Metaphysik”.

¹⁸⁰ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A761/B789.

proposed, a dogmatic, sceptical, and critical spirit and as a consequence, “*asserting, doubting, and examining* are then the inner, essential, general, prominent, and living in the different philosophies of the thinkers”.¹⁸¹ Fülleborn followed Kant also in relating this tripartite division to the development of the individual. This figure, both rhetorical and methodological in nature, was in fact common among Enlightenment era historians of mankind, who often drew parallels between the single human being and the species as such. Just as the individual passed through childhood and youth before reaching a mature age, so also the whole species had to gradually develop and educate itself, they thought. For Fülleborn, this approach lent itself just as much to philosophy. Thus, he described its earliest period as its “cradle years” when it was still driven by “youthful fantasy” and drawn to mythological explanations of the world.¹⁸² Only step by step could philosophy reach beyond this childhood naïvety and develop into a true science. In this sense, both the development of philosophy and the fancies and mistakes that occurred during this developmental path could be explained precisely as a necessary progress.

An *a priori* History

At this point, we need to take a slight detour to note an important characteristic that, in line with Fülleborn’s view, distinguished the history of philosophy from other forms of history – namely, that the difference between the dogmatic, sceptical, and critical spirits was actually given *a priori*, being revealed by the critique of pure reason itself.

As we have seen, Kant had previously talked about an *a priori* rule for the general history of mankind. However, this rule could refer only to the regulative, transcendental *aim* of history, not to its empirical content. Also the historian of philosophy was, Fülleborn believed, in need of such a rule. In philosophy, however, *the content itself* was also given *a priori*, for it was produced by nothing but pure reason. Thus, Fülleborn wrote, “we already *a priori* possess a full overview of all possible philosophies, and as a consequence also of the whole history of philosophy”.¹⁸³ Unlike the progress of mankind in general, the progress of reason in its philosophical activity was in other words given already in the concept of reason itself, independently of empirical data.

¹⁸¹ Fülleborn, “Was heißt den Geist einer Philosophie darstellen?”, p. 194. See also Carus, *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 127–31.

¹⁸² Fülleborn, “Kurze Geschichte der Philosophie”, pp. 5–6.

¹⁸³ Fülleborn, “Über die Geschichte der ältesten griechischen Philosophie”, p. 57.

The concept of an *a priori* history would become a frequently repeated and hotly debated one. Maimon, for example, appears to have agreed with Fülleborn's stance, claiming that "[a] pragmatic history of philosophy [...] must be written *a priori*".¹⁸⁴ And in the scattered remarks for the prize essay known as the "Lose Blätter", Kant drew the same conclusion. "A philosophical history of philosophy", he wrote,

is itself not historically [*historisch*] or empirically possible, but possible rationally [*rational*], that is *a priori*. For even if it presents facts of reason, it does not borrow these facts from the historical account [*Geschichtserzählung*] but draws them from the nature of human reason as philosophical archaeology.¹⁸⁵

Soon after in the manuscript, Kant posed the question of

[w]hether a scheme of the history of philosophy lends itself to be drafted *a priori*, with which the epochs and opinions of the philosophers from the available sources coincide as if they themselves had had this scheme for their eyes and then had progressed in the knowledge of it.¹⁸⁶

The answer was unambiguous:

Yes! Namely, if the idea of a metaphysics unavoidably pushes itself onto human reason and reason feels a need to develop it, but this science as a whole nonetheless lies predetermined in the soul, albeit only embryonically.¹⁸⁷

The concept of an *a priori* history is certainly not easy to interpret. Did it indicate that the historian of philosophy needed no sources at all, but was able to deduce the whole history of philosophy through reason alone? Or was it only the general form that could be given in this way, whereas the contents of it had to be sought out in the sources? As we shall see, the post-Kantians themselves were not in full agreement concerning these questions.

¹⁸⁴ Maimon, *Ueber die Progressen der Philosophie*, p. 6.

¹⁸⁵ Immanuel Kant, "Lose Blätter zu den Fortschritten der Metaphysik", in *Akademie-Textausgabe Band 20: Handschriftlicher Nachlaß 7* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1942), p. 341.

¹⁸⁶ Kant, "Lose Blätter", p. 342.

¹⁸⁷ Kant, "Lose Blätter", p. 342. Compare Kant's later comment on history *a priori* in "The Contest of the Faculties" in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. by Hans Siegbert Reiss (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 177; Immanuel Kant, *Akademie Textausgabe. Band 7* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1972), pp. 79–80.

One more elaborate discussion of them was offered by Fülleborn. If the historian did not rely mainly on outer sources but rather on *a priori* principles, he wrote, it may appear that his work “would lose the faithfulness demanded of every history and turn into a novel”.¹⁸⁸ This worry, Fülleborn went on, would certainly be justified for an *empirical* history – i.e., a history of *events*. However, the history of philosophy was concerned not with empirical events, but with “human thoughts”; here, “the historian sticks to records that lie open to anyone’s insight”.¹⁸⁹

It was in this context that Fülleborn most explicitly presented his understanding of critical philosophy as the only truly neutral point of departure. A historian belonging to any particular school, he wrote, could reasonably be accused of interpreting the past of philosophy only in line with the understanding of this school and therefore not achieve an unbiased account. But since critical philosophy could grasp the nature of reason as such, it could also be trusted to offer the universally valid *a priori* principles from which philosophy’s development could be judged.¹⁹⁰ Interestingly, Fülleborn here argued that the historian of philosophy thereby had a unique access to the facts upon which his account was based. Whereas the general historian had to rely on reports of events he himself could not witness, the historian of philosophy “has in front of himself only facts, recorded facts”. Therefore, he only had to “observe what happens”¹⁹¹ – strikingly, what *happens* in the present tense. The facts of the history of philosophy were not external ones, but facts of reason, and were therefore immediately present in the consciousness of the historian who thought through and with the records from the past.¹⁹²

Summary and Conclusions

In the view of Reinhold, most previous works claiming to be histories of philosophy appeared rather as histories of “human folly” populated by “mental patients” [*Tollhäusler*].¹⁹³ The reason for this lay in the deficient philosophical understanding of the historians. They had been content to

¹⁸⁸ Fülleborn, “Was heißt den Geist einer Philosophie darstellen?”, p. 197.

¹⁸⁹ Fülleborn, “Was heißt den Geist einer Philosophie darstellen?”, p. 198.

¹⁹⁰ Fülleborn, “Was heißt den Geist einer Philosophie darstellen?”, pp. 198–99.

¹⁹¹ Fülleborn, “Was heißt den Geist einer Philosophie darstellen?”, p. 198.

¹⁹² Not everyone was convinced by this line of argument; it would meet harsh criticism not only from the anti-Kantians, but also from some prominent Kantian historians. This controversy will be examined in greater detail in chapter 5 below.

¹⁹³ Reinhold, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie”, pp. 29, 31.

present the doctrines of past thinkers as mere “opinions” rather than as examinations rooted in reason itself. Since they had not managed to fully understand the views of their objects of study, they had resorted to presenting them as absurd fancies. Even “the most famous, and often also most commendable, self-thinkers of antiquity” were “abused in the most unworthy fashion” by such historians, for they did not possess the ability to identify the “rational meaning” of their thought.¹⁹⁴

Reinhold’s way of putting the issue clearly illustrates the point presented in the opening of this chapter: that he and the other post-Kantians explained the chaos of contradictory opinions in the history of philosophy not as the fault of philosophy itself, but as the fault of its unskilled historians. This was the reason that philosophical historiography needed to be reformed.

In this reform project, the post-Kantians distinguished between the outer appearance and the inner truth of philosophical teachings. This distinction offers us a useful point of departure for interpreting the late-18th-century development of the concept of “history of philosophy”. It illustrates that the Kantians and post-Kantians thought of history in terms of *depth*: the historian was assigned the task of penetrating the inner essence of his material and dividing it from its outer form. This ambition shaped their treatment of a number of problems related to the historiography of philosophy.

Above all, we have seen that the depth model pertained to the question of opposing philosophical doctrines. To the post-Kantians, both truth and reason necessarily had to be singular and eternal. At face value, however, the history of philosophy contained not just a single, harmonious, and connected system. The post-Kantians took this to be nearly scandalous, as it ultimately risked undermining the concept of philosophy as such. By interpreting philosophical conflicts as related only to the outer form rather than the inner essence of reason, however, they acquired a method for getting around the problem.

The same line of reasoning was also applied to the issue of impartiality. The post-Kantians strongly emphasised that the historian of philosophy must free himself from sectarian biases before approaching the historical teachings of philosophy. The yardstick could not be the personal opinions of the historian, but had to be the nature of reason itself. Here, too, the perspective must be deeper than at the surface level. Only by striving further, towards the nature of pure reason or human spirit as such, could the historian claim true neutrality.

¹⁹⁴ Reinhold, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie”, p. 31.

This also offered a strong case for the revolutionary nature of critical philosophy. To the post-Kantians, Kant's criticism indeed constituted a decisive progress in philosophy. But the progress was not one that left the past behind and refused to turn back towards it; it was one that *opened up* the past as a source of rational truth, one that could discover in previous philosophies a rational core to be uncovered and reinvigorated through the historical interpretation.

Performative Concept Work

What type of activity did the post-Kantians in fact undertake as they introduced this understanding? As I claim, we can best describe it as *performative concept work*, for their strategy consisted of introducing and putting into use a new concept of history and a new understanding of the task of the historian. The method consisted, then, of a conceptual shift: they practically proposed a new concept of history that denoted the shift from the empirical events of the past to their transcendental, rational meaning.

I have shown above that this new concept of history was not just a radical break with all tradition. On the contrary, the post-Kantians could successfully introduce it only by tying it together with a tradition that had already begun developing before them. They found useful resources in Enlightenment historiographical ideals in general and in the method of pragmatic history in particular. Their way of transforming the meaning of "history of philosophy" was thus conditioned by both its continuity with existing conceptual conditions and its break with opposing frameworks. The post-Kantians strategically adopted a set of meanings tied to historiographical practice and rejected other ones. In doing so, they strove to transform the conditions for the debate as such, to alter the presuppositions as to what historiographical questions could be asked and how one could formulate an answer to them. This allowed the post-Kantians to, as a rhetorical device, accuse previous histories of ultimately not being histories at all. Thereby, they acquired a powerful resource to explain philosophical quarrels as rooted more in deficient historical consciousness and flawed historical methods than in the nature of philosophy itself.

Among the main results of this performative concept work was that the history of philosophy acquired a new, stable subject in reason or human spirit itself. Given this premise, Kant wrote in his prize essay draft, the history of philosophy would be "not the history of opinions that randomly arise here or

there, but the history of reason developing itself from concepts”¹⁹⁵ – or as Thaddä Anselm Rixner later put it, it would be “the Iliad and Odyssey of human spirit”.¹⁹⁶

Given this emphasis on the unity of reason as the underlying, connecting principle of the history of philosophy, one might ask what happened to the *philosophers*. As individuals with particular ways of thinking, particular characters, historical conditions, and ambitions, it appears that they were moved to the background in the Kantian and post-Kantian narratives. To a certain extent, this was indeed the case. In fact, however, the matter was more complicated than it might appear. Examining these complications will shed further light on the post-Kantian historiographical project. This is the topic of the next chapter.

¹⁹⁵ Kant, “Fortschritte”, p. 343.

¹⁹⁶ Thaddä Anselm Rixner, *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie zum Gebrauche seiner Vorlesungen. Erster Band: Geschichte der altertümlichen, sowohl barbarischen als klassischen Philosophie* (Sulzbach: J.E. von Seidel, 1822), p. 7.

CHAPTER 2

From the History of Philosophers to the History of Philosophy

Aristotle was born, worked and died. Let us now turn to his thought.

*Martin Heidegger*¹⁹⁷

Presentations of historical philosophers often begin with a brief account of the philosopher's life. Such biographical overviews can include, for example, the dates of the birth and death of the philosopher in question, the city in which they lived, the teachers they had, and the universities at which they taught. When Heidegger, in his 1924 lectures on Aristotle, parodied this convention, his intention was to show that biographical summaries of this kind were philosophically unimportant. The thought, rather than the fate of the thinker, was to be considered the object of the philosophical lecture, and the thought was accessible independently of any biographical background information.

The same view was expressed in Heidegger's lectures on Schelling's *Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, in which it was also supported by a more developed argument. "When a thinker's work, or pieces and traces of his works, are available", Heidegger wrote, "the 'life' of a philosopher must remain unimportant for the public. We never get to know what is essential in a philosophical life through biographical descriptions anyhow".¹⁹⁸ According to Heidegger, the truly philosophical was thus located only in the works of the historical thinker, and even when these works had been lost, the *traces* of them were richer philosophical sources than biographical data could ever be.

¹⁹⁷ Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger, *Briefe 1925 bis 1975 und andere Zeugnisse*, ed. by Ursula Ludz (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1999), p. 184. A different version of the quotation can be found in Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Band 18: Grundbegriffe der Aristotelischen Philosophie*, ed. by Mark Michalski (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2002), p. 5.

¹⁹⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985), p. 5.

Heidegger's view can be understood as a criticism of a common convention, but he was far from the first to reject the philosophical value of biographical accounts. In fact, there is a long tradition in the historiography of philosophy according to which philosophical thought must carefully be separated from the individual life and fate of the thinker, and indeed from all other empirical contexts.

This tradition can be traced to the post-Kantian philosophy of the 1790s. One of its first advocates was Reinhold, who, in his article in Fülleborn's journal, wrote that "the biographies of the philosophers have no place whatsoever in the history of philosophy". Instead, the historian should "merely [take] an interest in the inner fate of the science, but not in its caretakers and proponents".¹⁹⁹ Following Reinhold, this standpoint was repeated by a multitude of post-Kantian historians. In the *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie*, Buhle wrote that the history of philosophy was "not a collection of literary and biographical notes on the life circumstances and writings of individual philosophers".²⁰⁰ In the essay *Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, Grohmann cautioned historians not to "mix up the depiction of the *fates of philosophy* with the depiction or history of the *fates of the philosophers*, which belongs to the descriptions of their lives and only concerns the individuals, the persons".²⁰¹ In the same vein, Goess rhetorically asked why most previous historians of philosophy had devoted so much attention to

how a man's way of thinking was influenced by the laws, customs, and regulations of the state he lived in, by the travels he made, the teachers whose education he profited from, and the friends whose company he enjoyed, without considering that this influence is rarely noticeable, or in any case only possible to assuredly determine to a small degree[.]²⁰²

The persistent repetition of this position shows that it was central to post-Kantian historiography of philosophy. This is also confirmed by the fact that it was often presented as an explicit critique of older scholars, tightly interwoven with the objections we examined in the previous chapter. Simply put, the distinction between the history of philosophers and the history of

¹⁹⁹ Reinhold, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie", p. 27.

²⁰⁰ Buhle, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Theil*, pp. 2–3.

²⁰¹ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 60. On the same page, Grohmann also distinguished the history of the "fates of philosophy" from the history of philosophy proper.

²⁰² Goess, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 29–30; cf. also Fülleborn, "Was heißt den Geist einer Philosophie darstellen?", p. 202.

philosophy formed an integral part of the post-Kantian historiographical project. Indeed, this was one of the key transformations in the wake of the 1791 *Preisfrage*.

In this chapter, I examine this transformation of philosophical historiography in four steps. First, I present a theoretical perspective that offers a historical context for the role of biographies in the history of philosophy: Pierre Hadot's research on philosophy as a way of life. Second, with this perspective as a point of departure, I move on to an examination of German historiography of philosophy predating the breakthrough of Kantianism. Here, the eclectic Christoph August Heumann serves as the main example. In the tradition established by Heumann, the concept of "philosophy" was to a high degree understood as a form of lived praxis, and the concept of "history" was understood as what Reinhart Koselleck refers to as a "collection of examples". Third, I examine how both of these concepts were transformed by the post-Kantian historians of philosophy. For them, philosophy was a transcendental science of pure reason, and from this it followed that it must be impersonal, essentially independent of the thinker and his individual character. The task of the historian was no longer to portray the exemplary lives of the philosophers, but to portray the developments of reason *abstracted* from all individual and empirical circumstances. Fourth, I show how these conceptual transformations did not ultimately lead to less interest in the lives of philosophers, but rather to a new framework for interpreting the philosophical life.

Pierre Hadot on Philosophy as a Way of Life

Previous studies of the history of philosophical historiography have often touched upon the biographical genre and its status in different traditions, but this issue has rarely been studied in depth in its own right.²⁰³ This chapter thus intends to offer a new contribution to the historiography of philosophy as a research field. The relevance of the examination extends beyond this specific field, however: the question under investigation is intimately related to the larger issue of how to conceptualise the philosophical way of life.²⁰⁴ This issue

²⁰³ Schneider offers the most detailed discussion, in particular through his examination of biographical accounts of Socrates, Jesus, and Spinoza. See Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, pp. 149–82. Other examples of detailed studies, albeit of a different source material, can be found in *Biography, Historiography, and Modes of Philosophizing: The Tradition of Collective Biography in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Patrick Baker (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017).

²⁰⁴ Through this, the chapter also stands in relation to the strain of research on the persona of the philosopher. For some examples, see *The Philosopher in Early Modern Europe: The Nature of a Contested*

is a main theme in the research of the French historian of philosophy Pierre Hadot.²⁰⁵

In his studies of antique thought, Hadot shows that Greek and Roman philosophers did not conceive of philosophy solely as theoretical discourse. Rather, philosophy was treated as inseparably connected to the ways of life that the different philosophical schools advocated; it was, first and foremost, a lived praxis.

Hadot notes that this understanding is not common today, and that it is particularly absent in dominant narratives of the history of philosophy. This leads him to the following question:

If ancient philosophy established such an intimate link between philosophical discourse and the form of life, why is it that today, given the way the history of philosophy is usually taught, philosophy is presented as above all a discourse, which may be theoretical and systematic, or critical, but in any case lacks a direct relationship to the philosopher's way of life?²⁰⁶

Hadot's answer is that the concept of philosophy gradually changed during the Middle Ages and the early modern period. Universities and scholasticism played a crucial role in this development: when philosophy was reshaped to fit into scholastic curricula, the emphasis shifted from philosophy as life practice to philosophy as purely theoretical discourse. A clear modern example of this is, according to Hadot, idealist system philosophy of the 19th and 20th centuries:

The dominance of Idealism over all university philosophy, from Hegel to the rise of existentialism and subsequently the vogue of structuralism, has done much to foster the idea that the only true philosophy must be theoretical and systematic.²⁰⁷

Identity, ed. by Conal Condren, Ian Hunter, and Stephen Gaukroger (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Andreas Rydberg, "The Persona of the Wolffian Philosopher in Early Eighteenth-Century Germany", *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 44.2 (2021); Andreas Rydberg, "Georg Friedrich Meier and the Promotion of the Philosopher in the German Civic Enlightenment", *Lychnos: Årsbok för idé- & lärdomshistoria*, 2021. On the persona of the scholar and scientist in a broader sense, see Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), p. 198; Jason De Stefano, "From Objectivity to the Scientific Self", *Qui Parle*, 23.2 (2015), pp. 89–114.

²⁰⁵ Influential works by Hadot include Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. by Michael Chase (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2004); Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. by Arnold I. Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Pierre Hadot, *The Selected Writings of Pierre Hadot: Philosophy as Practice*, trans. by Matthew Sharpe and Federico Testa (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

²⁰⁶ Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 253.

²⁰⁷ Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 261.

At first glance, it appears as though the post-Kantian polemics against the philosophical value of biographies can easily be fitted into this explanation. The historians who argued against the biographical genre, it would seem, simply advocated the conception of philosophy as “theoretical and systematic” as opposed to philosophy as lived praxis. In fact, however, this description would be far too simplified and fail to recognise the nuances in 19th-century debates on the history of philosophy. One reason for this is discussed by Hadot himself: according to him, the idea of philosophy as a way of life did not simply disappear during the Middle Ages. Even though the purely theoretical understanding of philosophy might generally have become dominant, there was a series of prominent countertraditions. Above all many Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers strove to formulate conceptions of philosophy as ethical, societal, and self-cultivating practice. One of Hadot’s prime examples of this is Kant, who frequently criticised the “scholarly or scholastic concept of philosophy”. Instead, Kant understood philosophy as a form of self-realisation. This is most clearly expressed in the categorical imperative, in which Hadot identifies “one of the fundamental themes of the way of life proper to ancient philosophy”.²⁰⁸

Against this background, then, the fact that the post-Kantian historians so emphatically rejected the value of biographical descriptions becomes more challenging to interpret. A possible explanation could be that they emphasised the theoretical aspects of Kant’s philosophy rather than the practical ones, and that their understanding of philosophy thus differed from that of Kant himself. This explanation would certainly not be baseless, but I will argue for a different conclusion. I claim that the post-Kantian historians did in fact take an interest in the lives of historical philosophers, but that they understood the philosophical way of life in a different way than earlier historians did. Unlike Hadot, I am thus not asking the question of *whether* philosophy was understood as a way of life or not, but rather *how* the philosophical way of life was understood, and in particular how the concept was transformed during the period under examination.

This also means that I do not uncritically accept the way Hadot interprets Kant’s understanding of philosophy. For Hadot, Kant is an example of how the ancient philosophical life ideal lived on in the modern, enlightened tradition. My intention is, in contrast, to show that the Kantian conception of the philosophical life differed from earlier conceptions in crucial ways. Indeed, it was for this reason that the post-Kantian historians of philosophy

²⁰⁸ Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 269.

could reject the philosophical value of the biographical genre as it had been practiced by earlier scholars. To examine the nature of this rejection, however, it is necessary to contrast it to the tradition they wanted to break away from.

Heumann and the Eclectic School

In 1715, Christoph August Heumann began publishing the journal *Acta philosophorum*. There are at least two reasons to consider this publication an important event in intellectual history. First, *Acta philosophorum* was the first-ever journal devoted specifically to the history of philosophy.²⁰⁹ Second, Heumann represented a conception of the history of philosophy that came to dominate in Protestant Germany until the breakthrough of Kantianism: in opposition to scholasticism and (the chiefly Catholic) concordism, Heumann wanted to lay the foundation for an eclectic history of philosophy. This reform project made it necessary for him to offer an in-depth discussion of the meaning and purpose of studying this discipline. Through this achievement, his scholarship has often been described as epochal.²¹⁰ However, when the post-Kantians formulated their own programme for writing the history of philosophy, they did this in explicit opposition to the eclectic movement founded by Heumann and later developed by Johann Jakob Brucker. To understand the post-Kantian view of the history of philosophy it is therefore useful to first examine the works of Heumann, and in particular his way of connecting the history of philosophy with the philosophers as historical individuals.

A clear illustration of this can be found in Heumann's article "Ehrenrettung der Xanthippe". Here, Heumann's ambition was to revise the well-established view of Socrates's wife Xanthippe as a quarrelsome and unruly woman. This view, he claimed, was in fact supported only by unreliable sources, most of which were written long after the death of Xanthippe herself. In sources from her own lifetime, on the other hand, unflattering portraits of

²⁰⁹ Mario Longo, "The Theory of 'Historia Philosophica'", in *Models of the History of Philosophy. Volume II: From the Cartesian Age to Brucker*, ed. by Gregorio Piaia and Giovanni Santinello (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), p. 403; Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, "Christian Thomasius, Invisible Philosophers, and Education for Enlightenment", *Intellectual History Review*, 18.3 (2008), p. 319.

²¹⁰ See, e.g., Braun, *Geschichte der Philosophiegeschichte*, p. 110; Haim Mahlev, "A Philosophy of the Patriarchs? The Agenda behind Christoph August Heumann's *Acta Philosophorum*", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 76.4 (2015); Zedelmaier, *Der Anfang der Geschichte*, p. 59. On Heumann's thought in general, see the anthology *Christoph August Heumann (1681–1764): gelehrte Praxis zwischen christlichem Humanismus und Aufklärung*, ed. by Martin Muslow, Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, and Helmut Zedelmaier (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2017).

Xanthippe were generally absent: not even Aristophanes, who demonstrably did not hesitate to ridicule Socrates, mentioned anything relating to Xanthippe's immoral character.²¹¹ Furthermore, in the accounts of Plato and Xenophon, Xanthippe was generally portrayed as a virtuous and loving wife.

Heumann's careful source criticism is in many ways characteristic of the Protestant eclecticism of which he was a proponent: his objections to commonly repeated stories and myths also contained a rejection of the authority of scholastic tradition.²¹² In the context of this chapter, however, the aspect deserving particular attention is the way in which Heumann characterised the importance of the life and personality of the historical philosopher.

Heumann clearly stated that his aim was not only to save the honour of Xanthippe – just as much, he intended thereby to save the reputation of *Socrates*. If Socrates was a wise and virtuous man, he reasoned, it seemed improbable that his wife would have lacked these qualities. And even if Xanthippe was in fact quarrelsome at the start of the marriage, then surely the great philosopher Socrates must have taught her the importance of good manners, thereby improving her moral standing:

Thus, we do not hesitate to doubt the story of Xanthippe, and this all the more so since it is unlikely that Socrates, whose wisdom was praised by the oracle, would have chosen his wife so badly, or that he would not have corrected her manners [*Sitten*] in marriage. [...] And if *he who cannot manage his own house well* cannot be viewed as a good teacher, then neither can we view Socrates as a good *philosophus* if we imagine that he in marriage let his wife behave any way she pleased, and that he did not, by way of good manners, lead her to the path of morality.²¹³

For Heumann, what was at stake in the question of the moral character of Xanthippe was therefore really the value of Socratic philosophy. A true philosopher must, in his opinion, live by his or her²¹⁴ teachings – only in the

²¹¹ Christoph August Heumann, "Ehren-Rettung der Xanthippe", *Acta philosophorum*, no. 1 (1715), pp. 107–09.

²¹² Cf. Sicco Lehmann-Brauns, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte: Philosophiegeschichte zwischen Barock und Aufklärung* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2004), p. 364.

²¹³ Heumann, "Ehren-Rettung der Xanthippe", p. 106–07.

²¹⁴ Unlike many of his contemporaries, Heumann explicitly argued that philosophy was not reserved for men. In fact, his journal contained a number of articles examining historical female philosophers. See the recent republication entitled Christoph August Heumann, *Acta Philosopharum, das ist, Nachricht von der Philosophie des Frauenzimmers (1721)*, ed. by Anke Graneß and Namita Herzl (Baden-Baden: Olms, 2023).

unity of life and teaching could the legitimacy of the teaching appear. The personality of Xanthippe therefore gave testimony as to whether Socrates was a true philosopher.

This understanding was further developed in the series of articles entitled “Einleitung zur *Historia Philosophica*”. Heumann here defined philosophy in general as the search for “humanly useful truths”, and as a consequence of this definition, he claimed that a true philosopher must embody the usefulness of philosophical investigations:

And therefore, this is the test and character of a true *philosophus*: that he is *virtuous*: for wisdom clearly shows him that the vices are most harmful to man, but that, conversely, virtue makes him blissful. However, when someone makes a profession out of wisdom but in deed [*in der That*] is not wise, but rather through a life full of vices makes himself unhappy, then he ought to be viewed not as a *philosophus*, but as a sophist.²¹⁵

Simply put, philosophy was for Heumann a form of *life wisdom* that could only be valid to the extent it was practiced. A distinction between “philosophy itself” and the philosophising individual was neither possible nor desirable. For just this reason, Heumann also described Socrates as the symbol *par excellence* of a true philosopher: no thinker in history could compare him- or herself to Socrates regarding the symbiosis between contemplation and life, between theoretical and practical wisdom. On the other hand, those who devoted themselves to pure speculation without living in accordance with their philosophical principles (e.g., according to Heumann, Descartes) did not deserve the title of philosopher.²¹⁶ For philosophy, he emphasised, was

through and through *scientia practica* that never stops at mere theory and speculation but always turns to *praxis* in all things. And I do not hesitate to say that I cannot consider a pure *theoreticus* to be a true *philosophus*, even if I gladly hold him to be a learned, yes, even profoundly learned man.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Christoph August Heumann, “Einleitung zur *Historia Philosophica*. Drittes Capitel. Von dem Wesen und Begriff der Philosophie”, *Acta philosophorum*, no. 1 (1715), p. 96. A new edition of Heumann’s theoretical articles has recently been published as Christoph August Heumann, *Methodische Überlegungen zur Philosophiegeschichte*: Eine Auswahl aus den Stücken 1 bis 4 der ‘*Acta Philosophorum*’ (1715–1716), ed. by Dominique Epple (Baden-Baden: Olms, 2023).

²¹⁶ Heumann, “Einleitung zur *Historia Philosophica*. Drittes Capitel”, pp. 100–01.

²¹⁷ Heumann, “Einleitung zur *Historia Philosophica*. Drittes Capitel”, p. 100; cf. Lehmann-Brauns, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte*, pp. 371–72.

It is against this background that we must understand Heumann's description of the utility of studying the history of philosophy. This discipline, he claimed, was the best propaedeutic to philosophy in general. In it, the student was placed "in the midst of the choir of *philosophi*", and thereby, step by step, learnt to become a philosopher him- or herself. The history of philosophy was "a stage on which all virtues are performed and, so to speak, present themselves in their natural size".²¹⁸

Ultimately, the purpose of the history of philosophy was therefore the same as the purpose of philosophy in general: to make man virtuous and blissful. However, the history of philosophy, being a livingly portrayed spectacle, had an important advantage over philosophy *per se*: the stories about the wise men and women of the past could awaken *feelings* in the reader. To the extent that they illustrated the utility of philosophical studies using vibrant examples, they had an immediate and irresistible way of revealing why man should strive to be virtuous. Heumann here quoted both Cicero's description of history as *magistra vitae* and Seneca's maxim that "the way (to virtue and wisdom) is long through the rules, but short and powerful through examples".²¹⁹ As a consequence, the history of philosophy could be understood as "philosophy by way of examples" (*philosophia exemplis utens*).²²⁰ Therefore, the lives of the philosophers had an essential role to play in this history:

From this we also realise that in the *historia philosophica*, we must in the future with the greatest diligence finish the biographies of the philosophers to the highest degree possible and present them clearly, and that a *historia philosophica* that lacks these biographies surely has a fundamental flaw.²²¹

Heumann's Eclecticism in the Context of the German Enlightenment

Heumann's view can be seen as a clear example of what Reinhart Koselleck takes to be typical of pre-modern historical thought, namely, the understanding of the sphere of history as a "collection of examples".²²² According

²¹⁸ Christoph August Heumann, "Einleitung zur Historia Philosophica. Das 1. Capitel. Von deren Nutzbarkeit", *Acta philosophorum*, no. 1 (1715), p. 38.

²¹⁹ Heumann, "Einleitung zur Historia Philosophica. 1. Cap", pp. 38–39.

²²⁰ Heumann, "Einleitung zur Historia Philosophica. 1. Cap", p. 38.

²²¹ Heumann, "Einleitung zur Historia Philosophica. 1. Cap", pp. 42–43.

²²² Reinhart Koselleck, "Historia Magistra Vitae: The Dissolution of the Topos into the Perspective of a Modernized Historical Process", in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 28.

to this view, the main purpose of historiography was to present desirable or cautionary stories. Interestingly, Koselleck regards Cicero's characterisation of history as *magistra vitae* as an example of this approach.²²³ Given this concept, the main task of the historian was a rhetorical one: that of portraying the lives of historical persons in an exemplary, instructive, and inspiring manner.

When Heumann formulated his standpoint on the purpose of the history of philosophy, it was precisely this ideal he wished to realise. However, it would be a mistake to view his project as a pre-modern form of philosophical historiography. Instead, Heumann's understanding of the value of philosophy is better contextualised as a thoroughly modern criticism of the scholastic tradition. Here we can return to Hadot, who emphasises that the return to philosophy as praxis was a main characteristic of the Enlightenment: the "general tendency" of enlightened thought was "to force philosophy to leave the closed, fixed circle of the school so that it could become accessible to everyone", or "to unite philosophical discourse and way of life".²²⁴

Indeed, this unification of life and thought constituted one of the most central ambitions of the early German Enlightenment. Among the most prominent champions of it was Christian Thomasius, one of Heumann's chief sources of inspiration. On October 31 of 1687, Thomasius performed a seemingly ordinary act that soon came to be ascribed immense symbolic importance: he advertised his lectures at the University of Leipzig in German rather than the prevalent Latin. The event is traditionally considered the start of the German Enlightenment as such. In this moment, Thomasius became the great reformer of learnedness – a Luther of philosophy, as Heumann later described him.²²⁵

Thomasius was in fact not the first to lecture in German: teaching in the vernacular language was not the norm, but it had taken place for centuries.²²⁶ The image of Thomasius as a pioneer is thus to some extent exaggerated. Nevertheless, there are good reasons to consider him a highly important

²²³ Koselleck, "Historia Magistra Vitae", p. 28.

²²⁴ Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 268.

²²⁵ Christoph August Heumann, "Einleitung zur Historia Philosophia. Sechstes Capitel. Von dem ingenio philosophico", *Acta philosophorum*, no. 4 (1716), p. 609. Despite the post-Kantians' criticism of parts of Thomasius's philosophical outlook, they often repeated praise for his reform project. See, e.g., Johann Gottlieb Buhle, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie und einer kritischen Literatur derselben. Sechster Theil, zweite Hälfte* (Göttingen: Vandenhöck und Ruprecht, 1801), p. 1025.

²²⁶ Michael Maurer, "Christian Thomasius oder: Vom Wandel des Gelehrtentypus im 18. Jahrhundert", in *Christian Thomasius (1655–1728): Neue Forschungen im Kontext der Frühaufklärung*, ed. by Friedrich Vollhardt (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1997), p. 431.

figure of the German Enlightenment, and the language issue does in fact capture some of the crucial aspects of his reform project.

Latin had for a long time formed the basis of an international learned community, a *republica literaria* or *Gelehrtenrepublik*.²²⁷ This linguistic community made possible the spreading of knowledge beyond national borders, but it also excluded the wider *national* audience from learned debates. Latin was reserved for priests, jurists, and professors, but was not generally mastered by the middle classes.²²⁸ With his use of the vernacular language, Thomasius sought to do nothing less than transform science from the exclusive property of the learned to the common property of society.²²⁹ The walls of the university were to be torn down and its teachings made accessible to the larger public, and even those who did not profit from higher education should be able to inform themselves of scientific progress in texts written in their own native tongue. Enlightenment meant *popular* enlightenment, i.e., the general dissemination of knowledge that was put into societal practice and contributed to the spiritual education of the lower classes as well.²³⁰

It is of great importance that Thomasius and the other early *Aufklärer* thus considered themselves opponents of school philosophy,²³¹ and in relation to this, the description of Thomasius as a philosophical Luther is not unjustified. Thomasius's reform project was to a large extent one motivated by Protestant conviction, and one whose self-proclaimed enemy was Catholic scholasticism.²³² For Thomasius, scholastic tradition was characterised by two

²²⁷ See, e.g., Anthony Grafton, *Worlds Made by Words: Scholarship and Community in the Modern West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 9, 156; Wellmon, *Organizing Enlightenment*, p. 47.

²²⁸ Cf. Peter Josephson, "Böcker eller universitet? Om ett tema i tysk utbildningspolitisk debatt kring 1800", *Lychnos: Årsbok för idé & lärdomshistoria*, 2010, p. 184: "Previously marginalised groups of readers such as women [*fruntimmer*] and the 'uneducated' were considered to, through the book market, have been given the opportunity to take possession of knowledge of a kind that until recently had been reserved for a small elite of Latin-speaking men".

²²⁹ Maurer, "Christian Thomasius oder: Vom Wandel des Gelehrtentypus im 18. Jahrhundert", p. 432; Georg Braungart, "Sprache und Verhalten: Zur Affektenlehre im Werk von Christian Thomasius", in *Christian Thomasius (1655–1728): Neue Forschungen im Kontext der Frühaufklärung*, ed. by Friedrich Vollhardt (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1997), p. 366; Thomas Borgstedt, "'Tendresse' und Sittenlehre: Die Liebeskonzeption des Christian Thomasius im Kontext der 'Preciosité' – mit einer kleinen Topik galanter Poesie", in *Christian Thomasius (1655–1728): Neue Forschungen im Kontext der Frühaufklärung*, ed. by Friedrich Vollhardt (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1997), p. 406.

²³⁰ See the preface to *Einleitung zu der Vernunft-Lehre*, where Thomasius discussed the admission of poor students to his lectures: Christian Thomasius, *Einleitung zu der Vernunft-Lehre* (Halle, 1699), pp. 2–4.

²³¹ On Thomasius's critique of the school, see Zedelmaier, *Der Anfang der Geschichte*, pp. 70–76.

²³² On Luther's use of Latin and German, see Hans-Wolf Jäger, *'Öffentlichkeit' im 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1997), p. 53.

equally compromising faults. First, scholasticism was a mode of philosophy based on mere authority rather than the free exercise of reason. Second, Thomasius believed that scholasticism was far too focused on mere logical coherency and theoretical sophistication. In a radical statement, he even objected to the notion that truth was worth striving for as an end in itself: there were, he contended, many “useless and harmful truths” that “make one into a fool rather than a wise man”; therefore, “truths are in themselves neither good nor bad”.²³³ For this reason, Thomasius thought, philosophy was deserving of its name – striving for wisdom – only when it educated the *will* and taught the human being to direct his or her²³⁴ activity towards the good, virtuous, and useful. “He is far wiser”, Thomasius wrote,

who, without subtle and hair-splitting knowledge of the good promotes the benefit of himself and others than he who, through the most subtle reasoning – even if his reasoning concerns the good itself – harms himself and others.²³⁵

This outlook led Thomasius to greatly emphasise the usefulness of studying the history of philosophy. In this history, he believed, the student would acquaint him- or herself with a multitude of different teachings that all contained useful lessons, but that simultaneously could not all be easily reconciled.²³⁶ This would force the student to *think for him- or herself*, to exercise his or her own reason.²³⁷ Precisely this autonomous use of reason related to the philosophical opinions of the past was the meaning of the term “eclecticism”, which denoted the selection and appropriation of philosophemes from many different schools.²³⁸ Such an approach alone, Thomasius believed, could serve to safeguard knowledge from dogmatism, sectarianism,

²³³ Christian Thomasius, *Höchstnöthige Cautelen welche ein studiosus juris, der sich zu Erlernung der Rechts-Gelahrheit auf eine kluge und geschickte Weise vorbereiten will, zu beobachten hat* (Halle, 1713), p. 2.

²³⁴ Like Heumann, Thomasius explicitly argued that “women [*Weibes-Personen*] are just as capable of learnedness as men [*Mannes-Personen*]” (Thomasius, *Einleitung zu der Vernunft-Lehre*, I. Hauptstück, p. 12).

²³⁵ Thomasius, *Höchstnöthige Cautelen*, p. 11; cf. Thomasius’s definition of the philosopher in Thomasius, *Einleitung zu der Vernunft-Lehre*, Preface, “Hoch-Edler Magnifice, Hochgeehrter Herr und Patron” (unpaginated).

²³⁶ Cf. Lehmann-Brauns, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte*, pp. 318–20.

²³⁷ Cf. Zedelmaier, *Der Anfang der Geschichte*, p. 107.

²³⁸ On the concept of eclectic philosophy, see Helmut Holzhey, “Philosophie als Eklektik”, *Studia Leibnitiana* 15.1 (1983); Hans-Martin Gerlach, “Eklektizismus oder Fundamentalphilosophie? Die Alternativen Wege von Christian Thomasius und Christian Wolff im philosophischen Denken der deutschen Frühaufklärung an der Universität Halle”, *Aufklärung*, 12.2 (2001).

and scholastic belief in authority. It was this ideal that would lead his disciple Heumann to begin his work on the *Acta philosophorum*.

Following Thomasius and Heumann, the praxis-oriented conception of philosophy came to play a key role in German Enlightenment culture.²³⁹ In the later 18th century, the movement known as the popular philosophers further developed the eclectic critique of scholastic thought and made it a defining tenet in their reform of learnedness.²⁴⁰ By the proponents of this tendency, the traditional academic philosopher was increasingly accused of being a “school fox” – an ivory-tower-intellectual lost in his private world of speculation and lacking contact with the society around him. In his *Briefe über Gegenstände der Philosophie*, for example, Michael Hißmann depicted the typical school philosophers as “monk-like creatures [...] in the rugged costumes of the school pedants, in monk hoods and priest’s cloaks”. Through these pseudo-philosophers, philosophy had been pulled “from the sphere of life to that of the teaching lectern” and thereby lost its ability to affect the moral education of the populace.²⁴¹ Just as vivid was the caricature of the university philosopher painted by Cay Lorenz Hirschfeld:

With a look that appears to announce an important scene, the doctor of philosophy and master of all seven liberal arts ascends to his wooden throne, from which he is called to tyrannise the reason of the young world. He teaches what no common sense [*gesunder Verstand*] can understand, proves what still no human being has proven, piles together a chaos of empty theorems and

²³⁹ In the course of the 18th century, many prominent German historians followed in his footsteps. Among them was Johann Jakob Brucker, whose *Historia critica philosophica* became the most widely read book on the subject not just in Germany but all over Europe. In his German-language textbook *Kurtze Fragen aus der philosophischen Historie*, Brucker wrote that, while the name philosopher applied to anyone with a thorough knowledge of the true and good, the truly wise man was only he who “exercises this knowledge in his deeds and who thereby obtains true bliss”. Like Heumann, Brucker named Socrates as the prime example of such a truly wise man (Jacob Brucker, *Kurtze Fragen aus der philosophischen Historie, von Anfang der Welt biß auf die Geburt Christi, mit ausführlichen Anmerkungen erläutert. Erster Theil* (Ulm: Daniel Bartholomäi und Sohn, 1731), p. 5). Brucker also shared Heumann’s ideal that the history of philosophy could help its student strive towards virtue and bliss in his own life (Brucker, *Kurtze Fragen. Erster Theil*, p. 17). On Brucker and his influence, see Catana, *The Historiographical Concept ‘System of Philosophy’*; Mario Longo, “A ‘Critical’ History of Philosophy and the Early Enlightenment: Johann Jacob Brucker”, in *Models of the History of Philosophy. Volume II: From the Cartesian Age to Brucker*, ed. by Gregorio Piaia and Giovanni Santinello (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011).

²⁴⁰ On this movement, see Christoph Böhr, *Philosophie für Die Welt: die Popularphilosophie der deutschen Spätaufklärung im Zeitalter Kants* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2003). On their historiography of philosophy in particular, see Mario Longo, “The Göttingen School and Popularphilosophie”, in *Models of the History of Philosophy. Volume III: The Second Enlightenment and the Kantian Age*, ed. by Gregorio Piaia and Giovanni Santinello (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011).

²⁴¹ Hißmann, *Briefe über Gegenstände der Philosophie*, p. 9.

opinions, enumerates, paragraphs, defines, demonstrates, distinguishes, refutes, and calls this heap a system, mocks the useful truth and the instructive feeling of humanity, cheers over the deformed offsprings of his brain and consecrates them with the sacred name of philosophy.²⁴²

In the popularising tendency of the *Aufklärung*, then, a sharp distinction was established between the true philosopher striving for virtue and the school philosopher losing himself in meaningless speculation. As in the case of Heumann, the former was characterised by constantly rooting his thought in personal and societal life, whereas the latter sought empty knowledge that did not improve his moral character. Philosophy was not supposed to constitute a particular form of rational enquiry cut off from experience; it was supposed to be rooted in *gemeiner Verstand* or *sensus communis*. Hirschfeld and Hißmann thus illustrate how the ambitions constituting the foundation of Heumann's historiographical project came to reshape the enlightened understanding of the philosopher. Only with the rise of Kantianism in the historical-philosophical debates of the 18th century were Heumann's ambitions fundamentally challenged.²⁴³

From Predicate to Substance: The Concept of Philosophy among the Post-Kantian Historians

To many 18th-century German intellectuals, eclecticism and enlightenment went hand in hand. So profound was the eclectic influence that by 1772 Christoph Meiners could note that “the whole world nowadays demands of a philosopher that he be an eclectic”.²⁴⁴ But among the post-Kantians, the term eclecticism soon began to take on a more negative set of connotations. No longer associated with free thought and freedom from prejudice, it was increasingly associated with a form of pseudo-philosophy lacking structure and coherence. In the *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, for example,

²⁴² C.C.L. Hirschfeld, *Vom Guten Geschmack in der Philosophie* (Lübeck: Donatius, 1770), pp. 7–8.

²⁴³ A radically different interpretation of Heumann's historiographical practice has been proposed by Leo Catana. According to his interpretation, Heumann was in fact one of the first historians to shift the focus from biography to philosophical system. While the article is certainly interesting and does raise important points, I believe that its main thesis is unconvincing. The reasons for this should be clear from my examination of Heumann above. See Leo Catana, “From Persona to Systema: Heumann's Dethronement of Porphyry's Life of Plotinus and the Biographical Model for Writing the History of Philosophy”, in *Biography, Historiography, and Modes of Philosophizing: The Tradition of Collective Biography in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Patrick Baker (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017).

²⁴⁴ Christoph Meiners, *Revision der Philosophie. Erster Theil* (Göttingen/Gotha: Dietrich, 1772), p. 60. Meiners himself was critical of this demand. See his objections on the following pages.

Reinhold characterised eclectic philosophy as “made out of mutilated fragments from the most different scientific edifices”.²⁴⁵ The popular philosophers were guilty of the same error. Their aversion to speculative thought amounted to the stance “that one must enjoy the blessings of the sun and of reason without pondering about the way in which we get to them”.²⁴⁶

Following from their strong aversion to the eclectic and popular philosophical traditions, the post-Kantians defined themselves as breaking with them, and this break consisted above all else of their novel concept of philosophy as such. In what follows, I will first describe this concept as it was formulated within the context of the historiography of philosophy. Then, I will discuss its application in post-Kantian historiographical practice before returning to a more detailed examination of how the post-Kantian programme differed from the eclectic one.

A Philosophy without Epithets

In his influential article “Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie”, Reinhold harshly criticised all scholars who had previously treated the history of philosophy.²⁴⁷ They had lacked a clear structure and plan in their writings, producing little more than untidy aggregates of data. They had failed to offer a satisfactory delimitation of the subject, thus confusing the history of philosophy with the history of science or learnedness in general. Finally, they had not managed to clearly distinguish between the history of philosophy itself and the history of philosophers.

The root cause to all of these mistakes, Reinhold claimed, was the lack of a clear concept of philosophy. He opened his article by establishing that

not even our most famous teachers of philosophy agree – neither with each other, nor even with themselves – about what the real object of this science, of which they with great right are famous as adepts and caretakers, consists, and I admit to you that I have still not found a single definition of this object that I have considered satisfactory[.]²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie* (Leipzig: Georg Joachim Göschen, 1790), p. 128.

²⁴⁶ Reinhold, *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, p. 69.

²⁴⁷ The importance of the article is particularly emphasised by Ameriks, who writes that “[i]t is not at all clear that before the Reinholdian period there was anything very like the ‘history of philosophy’ in our contemporary sense” (Ameriks, *Kant and the Historical Turn*, p. 9).

²⁴⁸ Reinhold, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie”, p. 6.

He then recounted a series of previous attempts to define philosophy, which were all ascribed various flaws: either they only described philosophy “in a *certain sense*”, or they conversely allowed too much to be included in the term.²⁴⁹ It is no coincidence that Feder, one of the most influential popular philosophers, was one of the cited authors and that Reinhold later in the text directed a harsh criticism against Meiners.²⁵⁰ In another article on a similar topic, Reinhold made his opposition to the popular philosophers even clearer. Their failure to sufficiently define philosophy, he argued, was rooted in their “wish to be of public benefit – to be read by many”.²⁵¹ But through this wish, they simply ended up presupposing the nature of philosophy as already given. Therefore, the question “*what is philosophy*” had “never been raised more rarely than since the time philosophy was popularised among us”.²⁵²

In light of this critique, Reinhold finally proposed his own definition of philosophy. Philosophy “in the strictest sense of the word”, he wrote, is “*the science of the determinate, experience-independent connection of things*”.²⁵³ Only with this concept as a starting point could the history of philosophy be written in a satisfactory way.

This view was widely praised among post-Kantian scholars. Tennemann was of the opinion that Reinhold’s definition marked an important breakthrough for the study of the history of philosophy, and Goess praised him in similar terms.²⁵⁴ Even though they both criticised a series of details in Reinhold’s proposed definition, they also both agreed with its fundamental aspects: for the post-Kantians, philosophy must be understood as an absolutely unconditioned science, defined by its independence from experience.²⁵⁵

It was partly from this general concept of philosophy that the criticism of Heumann and the eclectic school sprang. In the transcendental sphere of philosophical knowledge that the post-Kantians sought to establish, there could clearly be no room for the *thinker* himself to the extent he was under-

²⁴⁹ Reinhold, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie”, p. 6.

²⁵⁰ Reinhold, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie”, pp. 7–8, 30–31.

²⁵¹ Karl Leonhard Reinhold, “Über den Begriff der Philosophie”, in *Beiträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Mißverständnisse der Philosophen*, ed. by Faustino Fabbianelli (Hamburg: Meiner, 2003), pp. 24.

²⁵² Reinhold, “Über den Begriff der Philosophie”, p. 14.

²⁵³ Reinhold, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie”, p. 13.

²⁵⁴ Tennemann, “Übersicht”, pp. 335–36; Goess, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 19.

²⁵⁵ Cf. Kant’s comment on the division of transcendental philosophy: “The chief target in the division of such a science is that absolutely no concepts must enter into it that contain anything empirical, or that the *a priori* cognition be entirely pure” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A14/B28).

stood as a specific, empirical individual. Only reason as such, studied as independent of the empirical circumstances in which it took place, belonged within the true boundaries of philosophy. As Reinhold stated:

[P]hilosophy according not to its matter, but to its essential form, is a product of human spirit; and more precisely a product that cannot contain anything arbitrary, nothing dependent upon accidental qualities of spirit and thus nothing changeable. There still exists no philosophy as long as that which is held to be its essential form can change. This form can be determined neither by the temperaments, characters, and talents of individual men, nor of whole nations, nor by climate, forms of government, and religious constitutions.²⁵⁶

While there were many reasons for the post-Kantians to present these objections to the methods of previous historians, one of their main motives was connected to their ambition to account for philosophical discords. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this seemed to presuppose some type of criterion according to which philosophical progress in general may be measured. As long as the historian merely *recounted* the lives and thoughts of past philosophers, however, no such measuring stick could be applied. Instead, in such a narrative, the post-Kantians worried that the history of philosophy would appear as a chaotic multitude of different positions that reciprocally refuted one another and where no agreement or progress could ever be established. The task of the historian, then, was to identify and apply a principle according to which philosophy was in fact not just an aggregate of arbitrary opinions, but that let the multitude of philosophical teachings appear as a harmoniously connected *whole*.

We have also seen that the post-Kantian solution to this problem consisted of two interconnected steps. First, they found a reliable point of departure in the concept that Kant had put at the centre of philosophical enquiry as such: *reason*. Philosophy, the post-Kantian historians thus claimed, could be understood in no other way than as a product of reason and its self-given vocation to find the ultimate sources of knowledge. Since this reason was necessarily universal in character, it must be regarded as the origin of *all* philosophical systems and thoughts. Thus, the apparent multitude of philosophical ideas throughout history were conjoined in a unity once the historian realised that all ideas flowed from the same, singular source.

²⁵⁶ Reinhold, "Über den Begriff der Philosophie", p. 22.

Second, since reason necessarily strove to organise its knowledge in an all-encompassing philosophical system, this meant that there could be only one definition of *philosophy*. Every philosopher could thus be interpreted as having attempted to realise the One idea of philosophy – or some aspect of it – and thereby as having taken part in the larger progress of philosophy as such, or in “philosophy” in the singular. In Reinhold’s own words:

We will have obtained a historian of philosophy only when we have a *philosophy without epithets*, a philosophy *κατ’ ἐξοχήν* [in the eminent sense], a philosophy that has pushed away all *philosophies* and stands firmly on universally valid principles.²⁵⁷

This background clarifies the nature of Reinhold’s definition of philosophy. As a methodological starting point, his opinion that such a definition was necessary might not seem particularly notable. A study of the history of philosophy obviously presupposes an understanding of what philosophy is; only in light of such an understanding is it possible to turn one’s attention in the right direction, to recognise what belongs to the relevant source material and, conversely, to exclude what does not belong to it. Thus, without a clear definition of philosophy, it seems unavoidable that the historian will end up with an erroneous demarcation of his field, either by including a series of non-philosophical phenomena or by excluding phenomena that, in fact, are philosophical. Precisely these errors were, according to the post-Kantians, common among older historians.

However, this line of reasoning rested on a further, implicit premise, namely, that philosophy and reason *were* in fact distinct objects that could be identified, laid bare, and examined by themselves. For the post-Kantians, this was obvious enough to not need any further justification, but their point of view in fact marked a considerable displacement of the concepts of reason and philosophy. As we have already seen, Heumann’s historiography rested on the premise that philosophy was bound together with the life of the thinker. Its true value was, according to him, expressed only in particular actions and ways of life. Conceived in this way, philosophy was not possible to define in separation from the philosopher, nor was such a definition

²⁵⁷ Reinhold, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie”, p. 32. In the article “Über den Begriff der Philosophie”, Reinhold elaborated on this point: “According to my conviction, only *one single* such concept [of philosophy] and only *one single* philosophy is possible; and to me, already the mere existence of *multiple* philosophies is a ground for the conviction that there still exists *none*” (Reinhold, “Über den Begriff der Philosophie”, p. 13).

desirable.²⁵⁸ Rather than constituting a distinct object in itself, then, philosophy was here understood as a property of *other* objects of study – the thinkers – from which it was not independent. The object of the history of philosophy was thus these other objects bearing the predicate of philosophy, namely, the thinkers and their philosophical teachings understood as harmoniously united.

The post-Kantians turned this conception on its head. For them, philosophy was not only possible to distinguish from the thinkers and their courses of life, but this distinction was the first necessary condition under which an examination of philosophy's history became possible. For Heumann, hardly anything philosophical remained once one abstracted from the philosophers; for the post-Kantians, only through this abstraction was the field of philosophy opened up. In Reinhold's words:

Socrates, Antisthenes, Aristippus, Plato, and other Greeks, and the different conditions of this nation, have impressed different embossings on philosophy; but who could say that philosophy became philosophy through these differences or that one of these embossings, or all of them together, are the form of philosophy? One must rather with great precision separate all accidental determinations from this form if one wishes to speak of it as the essential form.²⁵⁹

These ideals for the historiography of philosophy fit well together with the conceptual development that, according to Koselleck, differentiated Enlightenment historiography from older traditions. Before the modern era, Koselleck argues, the historian understood his object as the historical individuals and their actions. The task was to portray the lives and deeds of individual historical agents, be they kings, generals, or – as in our case – philosophers. The idea was that the student of history could take lessons from these historical figures and apply them to his own life. History was thus treated as a “collection of examples”.

The 18th-century historians, in contrast, strove to write the history of “history itself” understood as its own subject. Thus, rather than the historical individuals, it was history itself that acted, judged, and followed its own ends.

²⁵⁸ Like the post-Kantians, Heumann believed a clear concept of philosophy to be necessary for the historian. Strikingly, however, when he proposed such a concept, he offered a definition of the word *philosopher*: “A *philosophus* is a man who has studied wisdom. But what is wisdom? It is a science of those things that are good for man and thus make him blissful” (Heumann, “Einleitung zur Historia Philosophica. Drittes Capitel”, p. 94).

²⁵⁹ Reinhold, “Über den Begriff der Philosophie”, p. 23.

This meant that the task of the historian could no longer be understood in terms of retelling specific past events. Instead, each historical event had to be related to the meta-concept of history as a whole or history as such:

Until now it had been impossible to think the term without a subject: ‘history’ referred to Charlemagne, France, etc. [...] In other words, history was, as a story, aimed at an associated object. This changed as soon as the enlightened historians sought to grasp “history itself”. “History in and for itself” could be thought without an assigned subject. In relation to the facticity of the people and the events, “history itself” was a meta-concept. [...] Linguistically speaking, history became its own subject.²⁶⁰

When applied to the historiography of philosophy, this conceptual shift appears to mean precisely that the individual philosophers are dethroned from their role as historical protagonists. If the subject of universal history was now understood as “history itself”, the subject of the history of *philosophy* turned into “philosophy itself” or “reason itself”. In this regard, it was freed from its necessary connection to the life and deeds of the individual thinker.²⁶¹

Post-Kantian Histories of Philosophy

At the beginning of the 1790s, the post-Kantian contributions to the historiography of philosophy consisted chiefly of theoretical treaties and programmes. In the second half of the decade, these programmes started being put into practice in large-scale textbooks and multi-volume works tracing philosophy’s development from its beginnings to the contemporary era. The first project of this kind was Buhle’s *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie*, published in eight volumes from 1796 to 1804. This was followed by Tennemann’s *Geschichte der Philosophie*, arguably the most influential post-Kantian work on the topic. Tennemann had previously conducted an extensive study of Plato, in which he wrote that one could reliably use Kant’s system as the yardstick for historical studies of philosophy: “one may suppose that the more truth a system contains, the more it must approach critical philosophy, and conversely, the more it approaches critical philosophy, the

²⁶⁰ “Geschichte, Historie”, in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. 2: E–G*, ed. by Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett, 1998), p. 649.

²⁶¹ Cf., however, Schneider’s statement that the despite explicit references to “the *path of human understanding*”, there was “nowhere [...] during the time” an assumption of “an abstract subject of history and its course” (Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, p. 68). The following sections of this chapter relate to this observation.

truer it must be".²⁶² In his *Geschichte der Philosophie*, Tennemann extended this approach to the history of philosophy as a whole. The first volume was published in 1798, and Tennemann would continue working on the project until his death in 1819.

Given the post-Kantian objections to the use of biographies, one might expect these works to mark a radical break with older conventions and narrative structures. It would seem that biographical accounts must have become notably fewer, and that "philosophy itself" must have taken the place of the philosophers as the organising narrative principle. However, the sources offer a more complex picture than this. In fact, those post-Kantians who moved from the programmatic treaties on the concept of the history of philosophy to the actual *writing* of this history tended to not fully agree with the rejection of the value of biographies. I shall soon move on to an examination of their reasons for this, but first it is necessary to look at the way biographical accounts were in practice employed by Tennemann and Buhle.

Tennemann opened his historical exposé with a lengthy discussion of the theory and method of writing the history of philosophy. The goal of the historian, he wrote, was to present "the *actions of reason, in the way they were carried through, according to their true sense and spirit, in connection and relation to the final end of all striving of reason*".²⁶³ Reason was thus unambiguously presented as the protagonist in the story of philosophy's gradual realisation. Indeed, when Tennemann began his exposition of the history of philosophy, he frequently returned to reflections on the agency of reason itself. On pre-Socratic philosophy, for example, he offered the general conclusion that "reason followed only the natural drive for knowledge without previous examinations of the boundaries of its field, without clear consciousness of the laws of its procedures".²⁶⁴ The result of this was that

[r]eason became aggrieved at itself; it had gone too far in the speculation so that it could neither move forwards nor backwards. This is the general result of the history of philosophy from its beginning until Socrates.²⁶⁵

²⁶² Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, *System der Platonischen Philosophie. Erster Band* (Leipzig: Barth, 1792), p. v.

²⁶³ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. xxxviii.

²⁶⁴ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. 38.

²⁶⁵ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. 38.

Similar generalising formulations recurred also in later volumes. For example, Tennemann described 16th- and 17th-century philosophy as characterised by the “activity of reason” striving to “*free itself from the constraint of external, foreign obstacles, boundaries, and norms*”.²⁶⁶ Reaching the period “From Bacon and Cartesius to Kant”, he remarked that

[h]uman reason had [...] won new perspectives on the essence of philosophy, and in the conviction that what was taught as philosophy in the schools did not correspond to it, it felt more and more compelled to new attempts at laying the foundation of a new system of philosophical knowledge [*Erkenntnisse*].²⁶⁷

In these quotations, reason itself was indeed presented as a historical agent. The “general result” of pre-Socratic philosophy was not discussed in relation to the pre-Socratic philosophers, but to the level of development reason itself had achieved. Similarly, the anti-scholastic tendency of the early modern period was rooted in reason’s inner determinations; reason was ascribed the capacity both to act for itself and to feel within itself a ground driving it to action.²⁶⁸

This being said, biographical presentations are far from absent in Tennemann’s historiography. On the contrary, he devoted great attention to describing the lives, characters, and motivations of historical philosophers. When, at the beginning of the second volume, Tennemann reached the era of Socratic philosophy, he not only gave a detailed account of Socrates’s life, but also offered multiple evaluating reflections on Socrates’s personality. Socrates was described as a “sublime example of virtue”,²⁶⁹ his “independence and steadfastness” being “the most beautiful trait in [his] personality”.²⁷⁰ These characteristics were not independent of his philosophical deeds, but in unambiguous consonance with them: “his character determined the direction of his spirit; his sense for the practical determined the uniqueness of his spirit, through which his action, thought, and feeling came into harmony”.²⁷¹

²⁶⁶ Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Neunter Band* (Leipzig: Barth, 1814), p. 9.

²⁶⁷ Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Zehnter Band* (Leipzig: Barth, 1817), p. 1.

²⁶⁸ It is worth noting, however, that formulations such as these typically occur in introductory sections and differ in form from the following accounts of individual philosophers. They thus appear more as the general framing of Tennemann’s historical account than as the principle underlying the chief parts of it.

²⁶⁹ Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Zweiter Band* (Leipzig: Barth, 1799), p. 38.

²⁷⁰ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Zweiter Band*, p. 28.

²⁷¹ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Zweiter Band*, p. 37.

Regarding this, Tennemann was by no means an exception. Buhle also gave great praise to Socrates's virtuous character and emphasised that Socrates had led a life in harmony with his thoughts:

Socrates was equally honourable as philosopher and as man. The weaknesses of character that he might have had, for example, too great a self-esteem and stubbornness, were so intimately connected to his sublime virtues that it seems as though the latter could not have endured without the former; the former were the necessary shadows in the painting of his personality.²⁷²

The basic assumption that the personality of the philosopher influenced his teachings was even more explicit in Buhle's characterisation of Plato. Buhle here noted that Plato had previously been accused of arrogance – but this, he argued, was immediately disproven by Plato's philosophical convictions:

[I]t is generally implausible that a genius of Plato's form and education could have been capable of such a petty and ignoble way of thinking. [...] [T]he real practical life of a philosopher who constantly strove for the ideal of moral goodness in his reflections, who constantly directed his friends towards it, who even dreamed of realising the image of virtue in a human state, cannot have been in such conflict with his philosophical character as it would have been if one were to regard those alleged facts as historically grounded.²⁷³

It can therefore not be said that the lives of the philosophers played a smaller role for Tennemann and Buhle than they did for pre-Kantian historians. In fact, the dispositions of Tennemann's and Buhle's works are heavily person oriented: the chapters tend to be named after individual thinkers ("Plato", "Aristotle", "Descartes", etc.). Moreover, in the case of Buhle, each of these chapters was even opened with a section on the "Life and Character" of the thinker in question.²⁷⁴

Does this mean, then, that the post-Kantian narratives did in fact not mark any significant departure from older ways of writing the history of philosophy? As I argue, it does not. For even though the post-Kantian historians never broke away from the tradition of giving detailed accounts of the lives of historical thinkers, there was nonetheless an important change in how these accounts were structured and in what aspects were emphasised.

²⁷² Buhle, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Theil*, p. 370.

²⁷³ Johann Gottlieb Buhle, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie und einer kritischen Literatur derselben. Zweyter Theil* (Göttingen: Vandenhöck und Ruprecht, 1797), p. 31.

²⁷⁴ The paragraphs lack headings in the individual volumes, but are given titles in the table of contents included in the last volume: Buhle, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Achter Theil*.

The Thinker as Vessel of Reason

A first important circumstance to note is that Tennemann and Buhle wrote in a different genre than did their post-Kantian predecessors such as Reinhold and Goess. We have seen that a large number of articles concerned with “the concept of history of philosophy” were published during the 1790s. The *theory* of history of philosophy was here established as a topic for philosophical investigation with clear similarities to other philosophical sub-disciplines, for example, philosophy of right and philosophy of art. In these theoretical texts, the post-Kantians were primarily concerned with the *a priori* possibility of the history of philosophy, and it was in this context that they argued for the independence of philosophy from the philosopher as empirical person. What was at stake here was the formulation of a set of rules for how reason developed in history or how the philosophical science was gradually realised. These articles are to be understood as a philosophical debate with academic philosophers as the main audience. Tennemann and Buhle, for their part, wrote extensive, general histories of philosophy. Their audience consisted not just of scholars, but also of students and, to an extent, laypeople.²⁷⁵ Furthermore, their method could not consist of the development of purely *a priori* conceptual determinations; they also had to relate to the historical sources.

The most important new challenge facing Buhle and Tennemann thus concerned the nature of the source material itself. Tennemann and Buhle agreed with Reinhold that philosophy could have no other meaning than the *a priori*, transcendental science of reason itself. The historical sources, on the other hand, were *not* given *a priori*; rather, they were empirical materials that had come about at a specific time and place and that the historian had to situate and interpret according to these characteristics. If one simply listed and recounted these sources, the post-Kantians believed, the result would hardly be philosophical. If one, on the other hand, disregarded them altogether, the result could hardly be called a *history* of philosophy. The necessary task of the historian thus turned out to consist of some kind of linking of the empirical sources with the *a priori* idea of philosophy as such and its transcendental sphere.²⁷⁶

As we have seen, Reinhold, Fülleborn, and Goess had touched upon this issue in describing the sources as expressions of a deeper rational meaning

²⁷⁵ On this genre difference, see Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, p. 304.

²⁷⁶ The problem is not unlike the one that Kant, on a more general level, raised in his examination in the schematism: Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A137/B176.

for the historian to uncover. Even though the gathering and organising of the sources was merely a preparatory step, it was nonetheless an important one. However, these authors said little about how the movement from the sources to their underlying philosophical meaning could in practice be achieved. Since this movement was precisely the aim of Tennemann and Buhle, it is natural that the question of how it could be undertaken took on a greater significance for them.

Tennemann offered the most extensive methodological account on this point. First of all, he distinguished between the immediate and mediate matter (*Stoff*) of the history of philosophy. The immediate, he wrote, consisted only of “*thinking itself, which springs from the striving of reason and aims at the realisation of the idea*”. But this matter could only qualify as historical to the extent that “it can be historically recorded, and thinkers have brought it into the sphere of historical knowledge”.²⁷⁷ This was in turn the case only if the historian could confirm the factual correctness of the source, if he could situate it in a specific time and place and, ideally, determine its authorship.

This made it necessary to connect it to a mediate matter consisting of historical facts or “outer circumstances”. To these belonged, in Tennemann’s view, the culture of a given age, the language of the philosopher, and the state of the arts and sciences. Importantly, he also took it to contain “[t]he life and fates of the philosophers, the peculiarity and culture of their spirit, their character, their spiritual works”.²⁷⁸ Therefore, the historian necessarily had to “always turn his observing gaze also to the life, spiritual character, and education of the thinkers”.²⁷⁹

In a certain respect, Tennemann thus upgraded the importance of biographical accounts. Unlike Reinhold, he did not believe them to be superfluous or external to the proper material of the historian of philosophy. To the extent that the philosopher’s life was important, however, its examination was nonetheless not to be considered an end in itself. Rather, the thinkers as individuals served as a starting point from which the historian could strive towards the deeper rational meaning. The point was that this rational meaning could be historically secured only

to the extent that reason has expressed itself in the person of the philosophers, in whom it is modified through their individuality and other external

²⁷⁷ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. xxx.

²⁷⁸ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. xxxvii.

²⁷⁹ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. lix.

conditions, and thus the *facts that relate to the philosophers and their conditions* belong *mediately* to the matter of the history of philosophy.²⁸⁰

The formulation is illuminating. The individual philosophers certainly all shaped their thought in their own unique ways, but their thought was still to be considered *expressions of reason*, making them vessels of this universal faculty. This was in Tennemann's view what distinguished the history of philosophy proper from the literary history, or *Literargeschichte*, of philosophy. The *Literargeschichte* was concerned mainly with the gathering and compilation of historical texts. In the history of philosophy proper, Tennemann wrote, "all of these materials may partly appear, but they are subsumed under a higher point of view",²⁸¹ namely, that of reason itself and its development towards the ideal of philosophy. Thus, "[i]n the history of philosophy, the centre point to which all connects is the science, in the literary history of philosophy it is the philosopher".²⁸² In other words, the individuality of the thinker and the universality of thought constituted the two poles in the depth model that his historiography as a whole made out, and the task of the historian was to connect them to each other. Tennemann explicitly distinguished this approach from the one that he took to be typical of earlier historians:

It is thus a very incorrect maxim that has until now ruled over most books on history of philosophy, that the philosophers and the schools they founded play the main role and that the whole is divided into single, isolated parties that have no common point of relation. All of this also finds its place in the history of philosophy, but it takes up only the second place, not the first. It is there not for its own sake, but for the sake of a higher end.²⁸³

Tennemann was not alone in defending this view. Some years before, Fülleborn had argued that a "historical-biographical" method constituted part of the history of philosophy, but that it should be distinguished from the "history of philosophy proper".²⁸⁴ Similarly, Buhle believed that the historian should indeed take into account "the particular spiritual physiognomies, characters, and life histories of the philosophers".²⁸⁵ But he must also "always

²⁸⁰ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, pp. xxx–xxxii.

²⁸¹ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. xlv.

²⁸² Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, pp. xlvi–xlvi.

²⁸³ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. lxvii–lxviii.

²⁸⁴ Georg Gustav Fülleborn, "Plan zu einer Geschichte der Philosophie", *Beyträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, no. 4 (1794), pp. 184–85.

²⁸⁵ Buhle, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Theil*, "Vorrede" (unpaginated).

have before his eyes philosophy itself and its fates as his main aim, and use the data from the aforementioned disciplines related to the history of philosophy [...] only subsidiarily”.²⁸⁶ Finally, Carus echoed Tennemann’s sentiment in claiming that the history of philosophy must constitute “a depiction of the objects of philosophy in their subjectivity, that is, the reflection of the idea [of philosophy] in very different individuals – depiction of the most diverse expressions of reason in the person of individual thinkers”.²⁸⁷

Even though Tennemann’s and Carus’s stances on biographies were thus more moderate than Reinhold’s, the difference from Heumann’s historiographical ambitions is still clear. To Tennemann and Carus, philosophy itself was indeed to be separated from the individual life of the thinker, and the latter was to be approached as a clue pointing the historian in the direction of the former. The difference from Reinhold consisted of a shift of emphasis in which the historiographical starting point – i.e., the multitude of empirically given sources and the conditions in which they came about – was more elaborately discussed and examined.

This leads to an interesting result. On the one hand, the post-Kantians did certainly degrade the status of the biographical accounts to a subsidiary task, one functioning as a means to grasp the development of reason rather than as an end in itself. On the other hand, the depth model on which this understanding rested made it necessary to formulate an even more elaborate account of how the philosophical life could be understood: the historian of philosophy was now given the task of examining how philosophers as individuals related to the transcendental and universal idea of the philosophical system. Only if this relation could be cleared up could the historian reliably abstract from the individual and reach the universal.

This task made it necessary to formulate a theory of the philosopher. Since the philosopher ideal employed by Heumann was explicitly *not* related to the ideal of the philosophical science or the notion of a reason transcending the individual, it could not form a sufficient basis for the post-Kantian historiographical programme. As I shall argue, however, the post-Kantian historians found an alternative philosophical life ideal in an ongoing debate between the defenders of criticism and the popular philosophers.

²⁸⁶ Buhle, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Theil*, p. 3.

²⁸⁷ Carus, *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 11.

The Post-Kantian Concept of the Philosophical Life

During Kant's pre-critical period, the popular philosophers often regarded him as an ally in their anti-scholastic struggle. Through his criticism of metaphysics, as well as through his witty, accessible style, Kant appeared to be a proponent of the popularising cause.²⁸⁸ But with the publication of the first *Critique*, this view quickly changed. In the eyes of the popular philosophers, Kant here took a step back to precisely the type of jargon-filled and hair-splitting scholasticism that they wanted to overcome.²⁸⁹

Among those who raised these objections was Christian Garve. In his review of the first *Critique*, published in the journal of the popular philosopher Feder, Garve claimed that the work "always exercises the understanding of its reader if not always instructing it" and "often strains the attention to exhaustion".²⁹⁰ The objection was a subtle one, but the popular-philosophical subtext was clear: to Garve, the chief problem with Kant's critical project was its, in his eyes, nearly impenetrable form. As a consequence of this, Garve took the first *Critique* to lack the practical usefulness that to him constituted one of philosophy's main tasks.

Garve's anonymously published review gave rise to a famous controversy. In the *Prolegomena*, Kant called upon the author to come forth so that the discussion could be continued publicly.²⁹¹ Garve responded to this demand in a long letter to Kant. He stated that the printed version of the review was not true to his original ambitions: the editor Feder had made such great revisions that Garve claimed to not recognise his own arguments.²⁹² Nonetheless, Garve reiterated his concern about the lack of popularity in Kant's form of presentation. "[M]y opinion, perhaps mistaken", he wrote, "is still this: that your whole system, if it is really to become useful, must be expressed in a popular manner, and if it contains truth then it can be expressed".²⁹³

²⁸⁸ Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, pp. 169–70.

²⁸⁹ See, e.g., Schwab, "Ausführliche Erörterung", pp. 104–05.

²⁹⁰ Garve, "Kritik der reinen Vernunft. Von Imman. Kant" [Review], p. 40. Quoted in Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science: With Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Gary C. Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 201.

²⁹¹ Kant, *Prolegomena*, p. 130; Immanuel Kant, *Akademie Textausgabe. Band 4 [AA4]* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1978), pp. 379–80.

²⁹² See Kuehn, *Kant*, p. 267.

²⁹³ Quoted in Immanuel Kant, *Correspondence*, ed. by Arnulf Zweig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 193; Immanuel Kant, *Akademie Textausgabe. Band 10: Briefwechsel 1* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1922), pp. 331–32.

The objections may seem somewhat superficial, being directed towards the vocabulary and mode of expression rather than the philosophical contents. But this in fact illustrates that the conflict was primarily of a meta-philosophical nature: to Garve, philosophy could live up to its name only insofar as it was popular and useful.

From the perspective of the popular philosophers, the line of conflict was thus defined: they believed themselves to be entering into a confrontation with a new form of esoteric school philosophy. The post-Kantian concept of philosophy at first appears to confirm this state of affairs. Against the person- and action-oriented notion of the philosophical life championed by Heumann, Hißman, and Hirschfeld, the post-Kantians counterposed an explicitly impersonal concept concerning only the systematic science. In fact, however, neither Kant nor his followers were willing to accept the premises of the popular-philosophical critique. Professing allegiance to a strictly scholastic tradition and rejecting the demand that philosophy must have a societal, ethical relevance did not appear to constitute a viable defence, and it would certainly not have been in line with the philosophical ambitions of criticism. To justify the project of critical philosophy, it was thus necessary to formulate a position that was neither purely scholastic nor merely popular. This position simultaneously constituted a new ideal of the philosopher and the philosophical life.

In fact, Kant had already outlined such an ideal in the first *Critique*. In the “Architectonic of Pure Reason”, he made a distinction between two concepts of philosophy. On the one hand, there was the “scholastic concept” (*Schulbegriff*) according to which “a system of cognition [...] is sought only as a science without having as its end anything more than the systematic unity of this knowledge, this is the logical perfection of cognition”.²⁹⁴ If philosophy was understood in this sense, it appears that the person of the philosopher necessarily had to fade into the background; here, the focus lay only on the knowledge as such. To this Kant contrasted the “cosmopolitan concept”, or *Weltbegriff*, in which philosophy was instead regarded in relation to “the essential ends of human reason”. Here, philosophy would gain a practical dimension related to the life and deeds of the human being.²⁹⁵ And for this

²⁹⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A838/B866.

²⁹⁵ On Kant’s *Weltbegriff der Philosophie* in relation to the popular philosophers, see Böhr, *Philosophie für die Welt*, pp. 171–83. On the *Schulbegriff* and *Weltbegriff* in general, see *Kant und die Philosophie in weltbürgerlicher Absicht: Akten des XI. Kant-Kongresses*, ed. by Stefano Bacin and others (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2013); Alfredo Ferrarin, *The Powers of Pure Reason: Kant and the Idea of Cosmic Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015); Courtney Fugate, “Kant’s World Concept of Philosophy and Cosmopolitanism”, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 101.4 (2019).

reason, Kant described it as typically “personified and represented as an archetype in the ideal of the *philosopher*”.²⁹⁶

Kant’s point was thus not that the practical and person-oriented conception of the eclectics and popular philosophers was in itself invalid. Rather, he claimed that both this and the strictly scientific approach had their respective values, and ultimately that they were dependent on each other. Unlike the popular philosophers, however, Kant did not take the cosmopolitan concept to be limited to immediate usefulness or to be expressible through tangible examples.²⁹⁷ Rather, the philosopher could act as a “lawgiver of human reason” only by moving *beyond* the sphere of experience, to the transcendental realm of rational ideas. For this reason, what constituted a true philosopher could not be learned from experience; rather, the philosopher was an *ideal* that could never be wholly realised in any one particular individual.²⁹⁸

A similar view was proposed by Reinhold. We have already seen that Reinhold frequently objected to the popular philosophers’ adherence to common sense and their belief that a philosophy’s value could be measured by its usefulness. To this Reinhold opposed a more strictly scientific concept of philosophy. However, this concept was, in his view, not alien to the cosmopolitan, practical, or moral purpose of philosophy.

Reinhold elaborated his own alternative understanding in an article entitled “Ueber den Einfluß der Moralität des Philosophen auf den Inhalt seiner Philosophie”. “*True philosophising*”, Reinhold began by stating, “always presupposes *good will*”, and “*the wisdom in thought* to which philosophy should lead must already beforehand be present in attitude [*Gesinnung*]”.²⁹⁹ Mere thought lacking such a grounding in the good will could thus admittedly be logically and systematically consistent, but it could not be considered philosophy in the true, higher sense of the word:

Already in its original meaning, the name of *philosophy* thus denoted a striving for knowledge for the sake of righteous action; and therefore all

²⁹⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A838–39/B866–67.

²⁹⁷ Cf., e.g., Kant’s discussion of the usefulness of examples in the *Analytic of Principles*: Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. A134–35/B173–74. It is noteworthy that Kant refers critically to Brucker in this context; see p. A316/B372.

²⁹⁸ Cf. Kant’s discussion of virtue in Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. A315/B371–72, A569–70/B597–98.

²⁹⁹ Karl Leonhard Reinhold, “Ueber den Einfluß der Moralität des Philosophen auf den Inhalt seiner Philosophie”, in *Auswahl vermischter Schriften* (Jena: Mauke, 1796), pp. 31–32.

striving for knowledge for the sake of another final end shall always be known as *philodoxy*.³⁰⁰

At first glance, Reinhold's stance here appears surprisingly aligned with that of Thomasius, Heumann, and the popular philosophers, but in his continued line of argument, a crucial difference presents itself. To Thomasius, the striving for goodness was explicitly distinct from the striving for truth as an end in itself. Truth was to be understood as a means to morality and had value only to the extent that it served it. To Reinhold, however, this stance ended up undermining itself. For as long as truth was sought only for the sake of something other, it would be tainted by this external ambition and thus not be recognised in its own nature. "But only to the extent that truth is sought merely *for its own sake* can it be found as *pure* truth", Reinhold wrote. "It is misjudged in the relation between seeking and finding if one wants to find it for the sake of some other final end".³⁰¹

It was not only the notion of truth that was undermined through this approach; Reinhold believed that it also reduced the moral life to a hedonistic striving for mere pleasure. For if one sought knowledge only for the sake of its immediate usefulness, one could root this usefulness only in the sphere of sensuous experience. With this approach, therefore,

understanding can only be enlightened for the *service of the inclinations*. The perfection of its concepts then consists in their efficiency to refine and multiply enjoyments; the correctness of its convictions in their appropriateness to constantly alternating needs of sensibility, and the striving for truth in the agility of the power of judgment to adapt the logical rules to the variability of the external conditions. In this type of culture, the sciences can be nothing but objects and tools of *luxury*, in accordance with which their worth and composition must be judged.³⁰²

Far from achieving a truly moral conception of philosophy, the subsumption of truth under the principle of usefulness would thus serve only a fundamentally selfish notion of sensuous pleasure. In a rhetorical turn of phrase, Reinhold related this to the popular-philosophical notions of common sense and *gesunder Verstand*. Common sense was indeed necessary for philosophy, he argued, but the philosopher who demoted reason to a mere tool in service

³⁰⁰ Reinhold, "Ueber den Einfluß der Moralität des Philosophen", p. 34.

³⁰¹ Reinhold, "Ueber den Einfluß der Moralität des Philosophen", p. 35.

³⁰² Reinhold, "Ueber den Einfluß der Moralität des Philosophen", pp. 52–53.

of inclinations was characterised by an *unhealthy* understanding (*ungesunder Verstand*) rather than a healthy one.³⁰³

Against this approach, Reinhold juxtaposed one that strove for truth without ulterior motives and recognised it as a final end without mixing it with egotistical pleasure seeking. The popular philosophers had accused a purely scientific philosophy of amounting to mere hair-splitting speculation without relation to mankind's moral development. In Reinhold's eyes, however, the scientific endeavour on the contrary played a crucial role in *uncovering* the sphere of ethical life. For if one rejected the notion that there existed a realm of truths beyond usefulness, he argued, one would fall into an empiricist fatalism that failed to recognise the freedom of the will and the moral law. Only in the speculative domain of critical philosophy could this fundamental freedom become apparent and be examined. Summarising his argument, Reinhold thus outlined what he took to be the only two possible approaches to rational enquiry:

[E]ither pleasure and displeasure are subsumed under reason, or reason is subsumed under pleasure and displeasure. In the first case, rationality is used by freedom as *final end*, in the second as a *mere means*; in the first case the *character of the self* is the *self-determination through reason*, in the second it is the *being-determined through pleasure and displeasure*; through the *first* mode of action the *I* becomes a self that *rules over* the desires through reason, through the second a self that *serves* the desires through reason.³⁰⁴

Reinhold's point was thus that the philosopher striving for truth was not opposed to the ideal of the philosopher as someone who strove for the realisation of morality in his own life. Instead, the recognition of truth as an end in itself was the only possible ground for morality, and as a consequence the only viable philosophical life ideal. This line of reasoning built on Kant's scholastic and cosmopolitan concepts of philosophy, but took it one step further. For whereas Kant distinguished between two philosophical concepts and placed the ideal of the philosopher chiefly in the cosmopolitan and moral one, Reinhold instead sought to deconstruct the distinction as such. To him, the ethical task of philosophy consisted precisely *in* the striving for knowledge for its own sake, and through this understanding, he also presented a new conception of the philosopher as a persona.

³⁰³ Reinhold, "Ueber den Einfluß der Moralität des Philosophen", p. 47.

³⁰⁴ Reinhold, "Ueber den Einfluß der Moralität des Philosophen", p. 45.

An even more radical version of this view was proposed by Maimon. “If someone asks me”, Maimon wrote,

why this or that truth is useful, I know of nothing more beneficial to say for truth than that it is useful for *Nothing*, for even if truth can be useful in human life, this mediate use is merely accidental, but according to its determination it should in contrast not dispense a use, i.e., offer a means to something good, but be something good in itself.³⁰⁵

In his *Versuch einer neuen Logik*, Maimon returned to the question of those “worldly people [...] who despise the *speculative sciences* for the sole reason that they do not have any immediate *use* in everyday life”.³⁰⁶ “Who can call the *execution of the soul’s powers in themselves* useless, even if they have no other use? And who can reason away the *bliss* that is connected to this execution?” he asked. “Surely only he who has never savoured it”.³⁰⁷ Inability to regard knowledge as an end in itself was possible only for those who were blind to the nature of truth and the human capacity for it.

Fichte also devoted significant attention to defending systematic and speculative philosophy from popular-philosophical objections. In his 1794 lectures on the vocation of the scholar, Fichte accused the popularisers of reducing philosophy to a mere instruction manual, “as easy to use as a cookbook or an arithmetic book”,³⁰⁸ that could readily be applied without the need for deeper reflection. Here, too, the eclectic vision of usefulness was portrayed as the reduction of knowledge to mere instrumental ends.

Like Reinhold, Fichte contrasted this attitude to one characterised by a spiritual love of knowledge. This attitude, he went on, necessarily drove the philosopher beyond the world of mere appearances. Instead, the true philosopher was one who identified his vocation only in “a deeper region of our spirit”, the “field of Ideas and ideals”.³⁰⁹ Precisely here lay the error of the popular philosopher, who merely “wants to skim the results from the surface, leaving behind the proofs by which these results were obtained”. “He wants

³⁰⁵ Salomon Maimon, “Ueber Wahrheit. Ein Brief des Hrn. S. Maimon, an seinen edlen Freund K. in Berlin”, *Berlinisches Journal für Aufklärung*, 5.1 (1789), pp. 81–82.

³⁰⁶ Salomon Maimon, *Versuch einer neuen Logik oder Theorie des Denkens* (Berlin: Felisch, 1794), p. 266.

³⁰⁷ Maimon, *Versuch einer neuen Logik oder Theorie des Denkens*, p. 267.

³⁰⁸ Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, p. 145; Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe I,3: Werke 1794–1796* [GA I,3], ed. by Hans Jacob and Reinhard Lauth (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1966), p. 26.

³⁰⁹ Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, p. 195 [GA II,3: 318].

to have warmth without light”, Fichte claimed, “but his warmth does not last, for it has no foundation”.³¹⁰

Importantly, the ideal of science that Fichte opposed to this was a fundamentally ethical one. The realm of pure ideas was in his view precisely the source of all moral determination; it moved the philosopher from his subsumption under blind natural laws and elevated him to a higher ethical order:

[J]ust as we were ushered by birth into this material world, so philosophy seeks—by means of a total rebirth—to usher us into a new and higher world. (I am speaking here of transcendental philosophy, not of the ordinary sort of “popular philosophy”—which is not philosophy at all.)³¹¹

Furthermore, the striving for this realm also constituted an ethical summons directed at the individual. For gradually realising the vocation of the philosopher demanded, Fichte believed, never-ending work undertaken on the self, the practice of spiritual abilities and continuous rational labour. Fichte clarified this by referring to the distinction between spirit and letter that we have already encountered in chapter 1. To the mere letter-philosopher, he wrote, philosophy could appear only as a series of propositions and formulas that were applied without being rooted in a deeper spiritual determination. The letter-philosopher could thus learn a philosophical system and repeat its contents; he could even become an expert at this type of intellectual exercise. However, he would remain blind to the deeper force penetrating philosophy and giving it its true ethical meaning. The philosopher of spirit, on the other hand, would realise that each presentation of a philosophy was merely a symbolic representation of a living spiritual force that he had to identify and nourish within himself. Rather than copying the outer form of a teaching, he thus had to recreate the content in constantly new forms and thereby make it part of his own inner essence. “Philosophy”, Fichte concluded, “is something which has to exist within us. It must be our entire being; it must be the whole education of our spirit and heart”.³¹² In another context, Fichte explicitly tied this ideal to the character and personality of the philosopher:

³¹⁰ Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, p. 208 [GA II,3: 333].

³¹¹ Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, p. 203 [GA II,3: 327].

³¹² Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, p. 207 [GA II,3: 333].

The kind of philosophy one chooses thus depends upon the kind of person one is. For a philosophical system is not a lifeless household item one can put aside or pick up as one wishes; instead, it is animated by the very soul of the person who adopts it.³¹³

From this, it is clear that neither Fichte nor Reinhold opposed the ethical ideal of the eclectics and popular philosophers to a notion lacking any relation to the life of the individual.³¹⁴ Instead, their strategy was to turn the archetypes around. Heumann contrasted the useless speculation of the scholastic tradition to a philosophy rooted in experience and praxis. Only the latter, he proposed, could possess true ethical value. Fichte and Reinhold, by contrast, proposed that precisely the demand for usefulness *robbed* philosophy of ethical value; this value could be achieved only if the philosopher constantly strove beyond empirical experience and recognised his determination in the realm of pure ideas. The true ethical summons directed at the philosopher therefore constituted a form of self-realisation, but this self-realisation was possible only if the philosopher regarded truth, knowledge, and reason as ends to strive for independently of any personal ambitions. The philosophical life ideal was one in which the thinker directed his actions and strivings solely towards the realisation of the scientific, philosophical system.

Tennemann on Philosophical Spirit

This new philosophical ideal was a useful historiographical tool for two reasons. First, it could further ground the concept of philosophy itself as the end of philosophy's history, for this end could now be described precisely as the ethical ideal underlying and invigorating the individual philosophers throughout history. To the extent this could be done, their strivings could now be regarded as exemplary precisely because they were directed beyond the individual in his empirical existence, instead constantly tending to the eternal realm of ideals and spirit. Second, it also offered a further opening to account for the multitude of philosophical systems throughout history. As Fichte had argued, a true philosopher could not simply copy the form of existing teachings; rather, he had to regard them as a mere outer expression

³¹³ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings: 1797–1800*, ed. by Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), p. 20; Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe I,4: Werke 1797–1798 [GA I,4]*, ed. by Reinhard Lauth and others (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1970), p. 195.

³¹⁴ On Fichte's conception of the philosopher and the popular and scholastic tasks of philosophy, see Lauth, "J.G. Fichtes Gesamtidee der Philosophie"; Peter L. Oesterreich and Hartmut Traub, *Der ganze Fichte: Die populäre, wissenschaftliche und metaphilosophische Erschliessung der Welt* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006).

of a truth that needed constant rearticulation and that each individual thus had to recreate for himself. In this way, then, each philosopher could be regarded as original and unique even though the striving for philosophy was in itself universal. This was noted by Schelling in his article on the prize essays, where he stated that all true spirit philosophers were both “*in agreement* and at the same time (each one of them) so *original* as is never possible for mathematicians”.³¹⁵

A closer examination of Tennemann’s portrait of Socrates can serve to illustrate the nature of this new philosopher ideal. When Tennemann described Socrates’s character, he essentially agreed with Heumann. Socrates, he claimed, was the perfect example of virtue. In particular, he stood out because of his striving to make those around him virtuous, to teach them how to lead a moral life.

The difference between Tennemann and Heumann lies in how they related this life to the nature of philosophy. As we have already seen, Heumann highlighted Socrates as the ideal philosopher. Tennemann, instead, hesitated to call Socrates a philosopher at all. The reason for this was that Socrates did not, in his view, thoroughly *examine* his ethical principles, did not attempt to form a system out of them. He was “a popular philosopher, more interested in the refinement of humanity, in the use of philosophy in practical life than in the science”.³¹⁶

In this capacity alone, Tennemann argued, Socrates would have had no real claim to a place in the history of philosophy. “However beneficial Socrates, through his example and through his teachings, was for his age, philosophy as a science did not immediately win new prospects through him”.³¹⁷ That Socrates did in the end deserve such a place was, instead, because of the indirect effect of his teachings: he “showed the philosophers a new object worthy of their attention, and thereby gave the spirit of research a new direction”.³¹⁸

What Tennemann here referred to was not least the influence Socrates exercised on one of his students, namely, Plato. Unlike Socrates, Plato carried out a thorough examination of the philosophical concepts with the aim of constructing a system. His studies therefore “concern precisely that which philosophy so pressingly needed at the time, namely, *the concept of cognition*,

³¹⁵ Schelling, “Allgemeine Uebersicht”, p. 97.

³¹⁶ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Zweiter Band*, pp. 3–4.

³¹⁷ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Zweiter Band*, p. 188.

³¹⁸ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Zweiter Band*, pp. 4.

science and philosophy”, and these studies “are therefore to be regarded as *the first attempt to lay a foundation for philosophy as science*”.³¹⁹

Socrates’s *popular* spirit was here contrasted to Plato’s *systematic* and *scientific* spirit. For Tennemann, there was no question that the latter came closer to the true ideal concept of philosophy. The difference between Tennemann’s and Heumann’s concepts of philosophy here becomes clear. Because Tennemann understood philosophy as a systematic science grounded in reason – because he made it a distinct object separate from life wisdom – he was also able to distinguish between the virtuous life in general and the life in service of philosophy.

In fact, in Tennemann’s *Geschichte der Philosophie*, the personalities and psychological constitutions of historical philosophers were frequently used as explanations of their thought. For Tennemann, the personal *Geist* of the individual to a great extent determined the way the individual philosophised.³²⁰ The change in relation to Heumann lay in the role played by the biography in the greater historical narrative. First, Tennemann had an external reference in accordance with which the life of the thinker could be judged, namely, the extent to which the thinker advanced the philosophical science. Second, this also changed the image of the ideal philosopher. The true philosopher was no longer the virtuous and wise man, but rather the man who found his calling in the demands of reason and its striving for a philosophical system. What we can discern in Tennemann’s historiography is therefore not the disappearance of the connection between biography and philosophy, but the emergence of a new ideal image of the philosophical life. The ideal, briefly put, was no longer Socrates and his virtues, but Plato and his systematic spirit.

This ideal image was constructed in relation to an idea of philosophy as science and in relation to a concept of a transhistorical, unconditioned reason. In this regard, it was made possible by the post-Kantian distinction between the history of philosophy and the history of philosophers. Given the understanding of philosophy as a spiritual activity directed towards the realm of ideas, however, the philosophers as individuals still constituted the necessary way in which these ideas were articulated – indeed, every philosopher had to articulate them in his own peculiar manner. When Tennemann and Buhle divided their works into chapters on individual philosophers, this was the end they strove to achieve. Reason itself was universal, but it

³¹⁹ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Zweiter Band*, p. 204.

³²⁰ Cf. Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, p. 61.

presented itself anew in each true thinker. The historian was tasked with tracing these manifold expressions and with presenting them both in their originality and in relation to philosophy itself as their unifying essence.³²¹

Summary and Conclusions

Throughout the examination presented in this chapter I noted an apparent contradiction in post-Kantian writings on the history of philosophy. While they explicitly argued against the use of biographies in the history of philosophy, they nonetheless heavily relied on biographies in their historical expositions.

To an extent, this can be explained with reference to the different genres in which the post-Kantian authors wrote. Generally, the biographies were more important to authors of large-scale works on the history of philosophy than to authors examining the mere concept of this history. However, as I have argued in this chapter, we can also regard these statements – however contradictory they appear – as rooted in one and the same newly emerging ideal of philosophy, the philosopher, and the philosophical life.

In his conceptual-historical studies of the modern period, Koselleck shows that the concept of history was transformed from a collection of examples to an autonomous object transcending the particular historical individuals and their actions. This transformation also applies to the historiography of philosophy. Indeed, when the post-Kantians rejected the value of biographies, it was precisely because they strove to write a history of “philosophy itself”. However, this ultimately posed a new historiographical problem: the historians of philosophy now had to examine how the historical philosophers as individuals related to the transcendental and universal idea of the philosophical system. To solve this problem, they formulated a new conception of the philosophical life as the life devoted to realising this system.

This leads us back to Hadot’s understanding of Kant as a proponent of philosophy as way of life. In Kant’s categorical imperative, Hadot finds a strong similarity to ancient ideals of philosophy as life practice. He also notes, however, that for Kant, the self-realisation made possible by the categorical imperative was one in which the self *transcended* itself because it found a universal and unconditioned law within itself. The categorical imperative

³²¹ Another interesting example of how the philosopher was related to the idea of philosophy is Spinoza; see the examination in Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, pp. 171–80.

thus “must incline the individual to act only in the perspective of the universal”.³²²

This is a fitting description of the way Tennemann and other post-Kantian historians of philosophy understood the ideal of the philosophical life. For them, this life consisted precisely of focusing one’s personal and individual spirit towards that which was both within and transcended the individual: the universal faculty of reason. However, I would propose that this conception was not simply a return to antique philosophical ideals.

Hadot often contrasts the conception of philosophy as way of life to the concept of philosophy as system. This opposition may well be valid for pre-critical philosophers, but it fails to grasp the post-Kantian conception of philosophical praxis. The reason for this is that the post-Kantians always understood the philosophical life precisely as a life *in accordance with* and *aimed at* the systematic character of reason itself. In this regard, their works did not mark a return to earlier ideals of the philosophical way of life, but rather the emergence of a new such ideal.

³²² Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 269.

Barbarians, Orientals, and Greeks: The Question of the Origin of Philosophy

When and where does the history of philosophy begin? Today, few would think much before answering this question: according to a well-established narrative, philosophical thought can trace its origin to ancient Greece and, more specifically, to Thales and the Ionic school. So widespread is this view that it transcends even the most intensely contested philosophical lines of conflict.³²³ There are admittedly recent attempts to challenge it, but there can be no doubt that it is still the dominant one.³²⁴

Fülleborn also shared this opinion. He could come up with no argument, he wrote, “that would keep us from joining the largest and best part of historians of philosophy in placing the beginning of this science in *Greece*”³²⁵ Tennemann agreed. In his *Geschichte der Philosophie*, he began precisely with the Ionic school, offering no discussion of the thought and intellectual culture of societies predating classical antiquity.

This may not appear particularly surprising given the dominance of this narrative today, but on further reflection, there is something puzzling about it. As we have seen, the post-Kantians understood philosophy as a striving immanent to reason itself, or even more broadly to human spirit. This point of departure was further taken to be an absolutely *universal* one: it identified a principle that was common to all human beings in virtue of their very essence. From this, must it not follow that philosophy was present in all human cultures? Must the fundamental needs of reason not have expressed themselves in every society, in every age? We have already seen that this was, in fact, explicitly the stance of many post-Kantian scholars. For example,

³²³ For example, as noted by Peter Fennes, it is one of rather few theses that “would generate agreement between Russell and Heidegger”; see Peter Fennes, “Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism and the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780–1820, by Peter K.J. Park (Review)”, *Critical Philosophy of Race*, 3.1 (2015), p. 152.

³²⁴ For an overview of global histories of philosophies in European languages, see Namita Herzl, “Globale Philosophiegeschichten in europäischen Sprachen: Ein Literaturbericht”, in *polylog* (2021), XLVI, pp. 117–26.

³²⁵ Fülleborn, “Über die Geschichte der ältesten griechischen Philosophie”, pp. 37–38.

Maimon wrote that the progress of human spirit had to be “just the same in all times and in all parts of the world”.³²⁶

Perhaps one could attempt to explain this apparent contradiction with reference to the power of tradition. Could it be that the post-Kantians simply took it for granted without reflection? Fülleborn’s claim that he followed the great scholarly majority makes this seem possible. In fact, however, the historical evidence does not support this interpretation. On the contrary, the view that philosophy was of Greek birth was actually a radically *new* one in the 18th century. As late as 1744, Johann Jakob Brucker presented what he took to be the most common historical narrative as follows:

If we, without further examination, wish to agree with many men of great reputation and with the popular opinion in general, we have to begin the history of philosophy with the beginning of the human race. And not only that: we have to regard the first man, Adam, as a perfect *dialecticus, physicus, ethicus, mathematicus, politicus* and even as a *pansophus* and the most perfect *polyhistor*[.]³²⁷

Brucker was no doubt correct in his characterisation of the “popular opinion”: for the last 200 years, most historians had indeed considered Adam the first philosopher. They then continued their accounts by describing how the original divine wisdom was spread, handed down, and reshaped among a multitude of different peoples. Ancient Egyptians, Persians, Chaldeans, and Celts all had an undisputed place in this narrative. The thought of these peoples was generally categorised under the name “barbaric philosophy” – i.e., philosophy of neither Greek nor Roman origin.

While the gradual secularisation of historiography in the 18th century led to increased opposition to the idea of philosophy’s biblical origins, the concept of barbaric philosophy remained in all textbooks for most of the century.³²⁸ Not until the 1780s was it weeded out from the mainstream narrative. In 1786, the Göttingen historian Christoph Meiners argued against the idea that there were philosophical cultures older than the Greeks. In 1791, Dietrich Tiedemann started his *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie* with Thales, likely becoming the very first modern historian to consider Thales the founder of philosophy.³²⁹ It was this novel view that Fülleborn and Tenne-

³²⁶ Maimon, *Ueber die Progressen der Philosophie*, p. 6.

³²⁷ Brucker, *Kurtze Fragen. Erster Theil*, p. 41.

³²⁸ On this secularisation process, see Zedelmaier, *Der Anfang der Geschichte*, p. 60.

³²⁹ Bernasconi, “Philosophy’s Paradoxical Parochialism”, p. 218.

mann opted to embrace. Later, it was also strongly argued by Hegel and his followers.

The idea of Thales as the first philosopher, so taken for granted in the 21st century, was thus established less than 250 years ago. When the post-Kantians argued for it, they were not defending an already-established view; rather, they took part in the process of establishing this view for the very first time.

This could only occur through the active criticism of other, competing narratives. Such criticisms were indeed frequently voiced both by Meiners, Tiedemann, and the post-Kantians. Strikingly, however, they rarely directed their objections towards the notion of barbaric philosophy. Instead, they argued against another camp of historians that had simultaneously started forming in the late 18th century. This camp was characterised above all by its interest in ancient oriental thought. European scholars had recently been introduced to a number of previously inaccessible records from ancient Indian culture, records that were frequently taken to be the oldest ones in the history of mankind. Building on these sources, a number of historians proposed that the origin of philosophical thought might be located in the Orient.

The late 18th century thus saw a radical transformation of the periodisation of the history of philosophy, and, in particular, of the conception of philosophy's origins. Using the extensive bibliography compiled by the research project "Histories of Philosophy in Global Perspective" at the University of Hildesheim, we can get an enlightening overview of this development (Figure 1). A quantitative analysis of these data shows that in the 18th century, most German books on the history of philosophy considered barbaric philosophy to be the first main period.³³⁰ From the middle of the 19th century, however, this category stopped occurring altogether; instead, historians now debated whether philosophy had begun in the Far East or among the Greeks. The Greek hypothesis was the most successful one, and from 1800, this periodisation was used by a majority of historians. However, for all of the 19th century, the concept of oriental philosophy was represented too, sometimes as an epoch in its own right, and sometimes as a precursor to classical Greek philosophy.

³³⁰ Since the number of German-language books on the subject from this time is rather small, the data should be interpreted with caution. For example, the first period (1720–39) includes only two books, both written by the influential historian Johan Jakob Brucker. For a full list of the titles included in the graph, see the appendix.

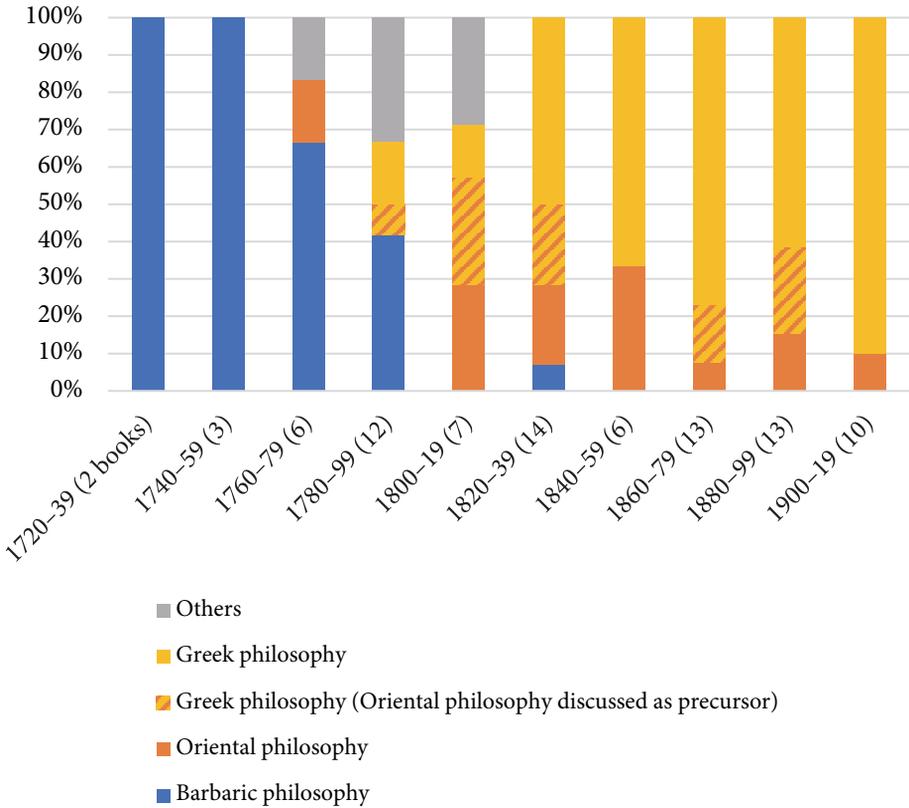


Figure 1: The first epoch of philosophy as named in German-language books on the history of philosophy, 1720–1919. The table only includes books that (1) are included in the bibliographic section of the Hildesheim research project “Histories of Philosophy in Global Perspective”³³¹ and (2) contain a formal table of contents.

This chapter is an examination of these three views of the origin of philosophical thought, the ways in which they related to one another, and the ways in which they altered the understanding of the history of philosophy. In the first instance, they were connected to the concept of philosophy as such. The waning of the biblical narrative and the rise of the opposing Hellenic and orientalist narratives allow us to trace a fundamental displacement of this concept. In arguing for any of these stances, the late-18th-century historians

³³¹ *Deutschsprachige Philosophiegeschichten*, n.d. <<https://www.uni-hildesheim.de/histories-of-philosophy/philosophiegeschichten/deutsch/>> [accessed 10 July 2025].

simultaneously proposed a new understanding of the nature of philosophical inquiry.

However, the different stances debated during the period were also always related to different understandings of mankind's history and its geographical range. More precisely, the new historiographical concepts of "philosophy" were articulated with reference to a similarly new concept of "the Orient" and its relation to Europe. As a side effect of the examination of the concept of philosophy, we will thus also need to examine the development of the concept of the Orient.

This makes it necessary to depart somewhat from the temporal scope and chronology of the previous chapters. My focus will still be the late 18th and early 19th centuries, but to understand the discussions in this period, they must be related to the earlier narratives with which the scholars of this period wanted to break. The chapter will thus start with a more extensive contextualising historical background.

The structure of the chapter is the following: After presenting a summary of previous research, I move on to a historical overview of how historians discussed philosophy's origins from the Renaissance to the 18th century. Thereafter, I examine Tiedemann's, Meiners's, Fülleborn's, and Tenne-
mann's arguments for considering Greece the birthplace of philosophy. While I claim that these arguments were relatively successful, I also intend to show that they did not go unchallenged, and to close off the chapter, I therefore discuss some prominent counterarguments to them.

Previous Research and Contributions of the Chapter

In recent decades, multiple scholars have taken an interest in how philosophy came to be seen as a purely European phenomenon. A seminal study on the topic is Peter K.J. Park's *Africa, Asia and the History of Philosophy*. In it Park examines Christoph Meiners's Eurocentric historiography of philosophy and its connections to Meiners's racial anthropology. He concludes that racist arguments were not only crucial to Meiners's rejection of non-European philosophy, but that these arguments also influenced Kantian historians.³³²

More recently, Eurocentrism in the historiography of philosophy has been examined by the aforementioned research project at the University of Hildesheim.³³³ It also constitutes a central theme in Franz Martin Wimmer's

³³² Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, pp. 149–50.

³³³ *Histories of Philosophy in Global Perspective*, n.d. <https://www.uni-hildesheim.de/media/koselleck/Forschungsprogramm/NEU/EN_Description_Research_Project_English.pdf> [accessed

research on intercultural philosophy as well as in the research of Robert Bernasconi.³³⁴

While my examination in this chapter is greatly indebted to the work of these scholars, I reach results that differ from theirs in crucial respects. First, there has been a tendency in previous research to describe the establishing of the Eurocentric narrative as a quick and relatively straightforward process. For example, Bernasconi has claimed that, by Hegel's time, the conception of philosophy's Greek origins was so universally accepted that it could be called an orthodoxy.³³⁵ Similarly, Park writes that Hegel marks the culmination of the process of exclusion that erased Africa and Asia from the history of philosophy.³³⁶ While both Park and Bernasconi do mention a number of alternative narratives (e.g., the romantic and Schellingian scholars who wanted to include ancient oriental thought in the history of philosophy), they both tend towards a conception in which the Eurocentric narrative quickly became dominant and was never met with successful opposition.

I claim that this description is flawed. In this chapter and its sequel in chapter 6, I show that the Eurocentric narrative was continuously challenged for most of the 19th century. Ultimately, even its proponents were sometimes forced to concede that the objections to it were convincing. Rather than depicting the exclusion of Africa and Asia from the history of philosophy as a quick and straightforward process, I show that this exclusion was only one of multiple positions among historians of philosophy and that these different positions were the object of continuous debate. I therefore claim that, while

29 July 2025]. See also *Philosophiegeschichte in globaler Perspektive*; Rolf Elberfeld, *Philosophieren in einer globalisierten Welt: Wege zu einer transformativen Phänomenologie* (Baden-Baden: Verlag Karl Alber, 2018); *Orders of Knowledge in Philosophy: Critical Assessments*.

³³⁴ Franz Martin Wimmer, *Interkulturelle Philosophie: Geschichte und Theorie* (Wien: Passagen Verlag, 1990); Franz Martin Wimmer, "Unterwegs zum euräqualistischen Paradigma der Philosophiegeschichte", in *Philosophiegeschichte in globaler Perspektive*, ed. by Rolf Elberfeld (Hamburg: Meiner, 2017); Robert Bernasconi, "Heidegger and the Invention of the Western Philosophical Tradition", *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 26.3 (1995); Bernasconi, "Philosophy's Paradoxical Parochialism"; Bernasconi, "Krimskrams. Hegel and the Current Controversy about the Beginnings of Philosophy"; Bernasconi, "With What Must the History of Philosophy Begin?"

³³⁵ "One could say with little exaggeration that scholars had passed with a minimum of debate from one orthodoxy to another simply in the space of a generation" (Bernasconi, "Philosophy's Paradoxical Parochialism", p. 212). In later studies, Bernasconi somewhat modifies this description. He now shows that Hegel, in following Tiedemann's narrative, is in fact objecting to a contemporary romantic idea according to which India is the birthplace of all human culture. Thus, there was indeed still a debate about philosophy's beginning at Hegel's time (Bernasconi, "With What Must the History of Philosophy Begin?"). In my own study, and particularly in chapter 6, I will go yet another step further and argue that this debate continued long after the death of Hegel.

³³⁶ Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, p. 151.

the place of the Orient in the history of philosophy was repeatedly *questioned* during the 19th century, the Orient was not definitely *excluded*.³³⁷

This leads me to the second way in which my examination differs from earlier studies. Until now, scholars of the historiography of philosophy have often focused on the questions of how, when, and why the world outside of Europe was excluded from the history of philosophy. My focus instead lies on a conceptual displacement that is connected to this exclusion and to some extent can be understood as a precondition for it: the displacement that removed the category of barbaric philosophy and in its place put the category of oriental philosophy. In my view, the main transformation of the narrative did not consist in an *exclusion* of the Orient, but rather in the *creation* of it as a historiographical concept. My aim is to examine how this concept was deployed in 19th-century historiography of philosophy, what philosophical ideas were associated with it, and how this concept was used to transform the concept of philosophy itself.³³⁸

Orientalism Studies

Apart from previous studies of the historiography of philosophy, this chapter also stands in relation to the broader field of orientalism studies. No work in this field has been more influential than Edward Said's *Orientalism*, in which Said aims to show how the European self-understanding is conditioned by the creation of the Orient as a negative Other.³³⁹ With this ambition, he offers a reading of a number of French and English 19th-century orientalists.

The importance of Said's study lies less in its empirical results than in its theoretical insights. Employing a Foucauldian framework, Said does not treat "the Orient" as a descriptive term for a distinct geographical place. Rather, he contends that the object to which it referred was ultimately constituted through the very discourse about it: the European scholars did not *discover* the Orient, but to a certain extent *created* it. A similar point is succinctly

³³⁷ Note that the chapter concerns the Orient as it was discussed as a candidate for the *beginning* of the history of philosophy. I will thus not examine how German historians treated later non-Western philosophies, for example, Arab philosophy. For a detailed overview of this particular issue, see Catherine König-Pralong, "Alterität, fremde Nähe und Hybridisierung. Die Araber in der Philosophiegeschichte um 1800", in *Philosophiegeschichte in globaler Perspektive*, ed. by Rolf Elberfeld (Hamburg: Meiner, 2017).

³³⁸ This conceptual displacement has previously been pointed out by Franz Martin Wimmer. Wimmer does not claim to exhaustively describe its implications, however; on the contrary, he notes that it needs to be further elaborated in future studies (Wimmer, "Unterwegs zum euräqualistischen Paradigma", p. 183). Since this chapter aims to reconstruct the concept of oriental philosophy used by 19th-century historians, it can be understood as an attempt at such a further elaboration.

³³⁹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), p. 26.

formulated by Todd Kontje, who notes that 19th-century German scholars used “Orient” in reference to a wide range of cultures and regions whose borders were not sharply defined. Therefore, he writes, the concept of the Orient “has more to do with Western ideology than Eastern geography” and “refers more to an ideological construct than to an actual place”.³⁴⁰

Said’s treatment of the Orient as such an ideological construct has inspired many subsequent studies of European orientalism, but his work has also been the subject of constant debate and critical re-evaluation since its first publication. There are two strands in these discussions that are of particular importance for the present chapter. The first one concerns the origin of European orientalism. Said’s emphasis lies on the modern era, and above all the age of colonialism. But he also identifies the view of the Orient as Europe’s Other already in antiquity, for example, in the writings of Homer and Aeschylus.³⁴¹ Hereby, European orientalism is presented as an almost trans-historical constant. I believe that this is misleading, and indeed that it stands in conflict with the understanding of the Orient as a discursive construct. Ultimately, the strength of treating the Orient in this way is that it allows us to identify its historical contingency. In this chapter, I will argue that, at least within the field of the historiography of philosophy, the modern concept of the Orient marked a significant departure from earlier European worldviews.

The second important issue concerns Said’s composition of source materials. His focus lies on France and England, which he considers particularly important since they had direct political interests in the Orient through their colonial projects. This delimitation is justified through Said’s interpretative framework in which knowledge and power are treated as intertwined and ultimately impossible to untangle from each other. Given this presupposition, however, Germany is reduced to at most secondary importance: Said claims that the Germans were directly dependent on sources and insights gathered by the French and British empires.³⁴²

A number of scholars have criticised Said’s explicit focus on France and Britain and pointed out that many of the most prominent orientalists in the 19th century were in fact German.³⁴³ Some of them have argued that German

³⁴⁰ Todd Curtis Kontje, *German Orientalisms* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. 12.

³⁴¹ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 78.

³⁴² In the introduction, Said offers some partially self-critical comments on his geographical focus; Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 42–44.

³⁴³ See, e.g., J.J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (London/New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 27; Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Washington, D.C./Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. xix; Kontje, *German Orientalisms*, pp. 2–3. For a general overview of how

orientalists were part of European colonialism, albeit indirectly.³⁴⁴ Others have instead claimed that the predominately negative view of the Orient that Said finds in the English and French sources is rather different from the views expressed in the German ones.³⁴⁵

These issues are an important background to this chapter since it examines the concept of the Orient presented by a specific group of 19th-century German intellectuals. In this chapter, I will not attempt to compare the German historians of philosophy to contemporary English and French orientalists, and therefore I do not claim to empirically test whether or not his conclusions apply to Germany. Indirectly, however, my examination will show how the German understanding of the Orient was far more than a recapitulation of results already presented by British and French scholars. On the contrary, the German philosophers were agents in producing a concept of the Orient that did not exist prior to their treatments of it.

Of course, this chapter is not a survey of German orientalism in general, but of the concept of the Orient as it was used in histories of philosophy. This genre of literature appears to be particularly well-suited for shedding light on the role of the Orient in modern European culture. Since philosophy was often considered the epitome of reason and culture, the question of whether it existed in the Orient was intimately connected to Western self-conceptions. Despite this, however, histories of philosophy are underutilised as source material in many studies of European orientalism.³⁴⁶ By examining the role of the Orient in 19th-century histories of philosophy, I therefore aim to offer a much-needed new perspective on European orientalism in broader terms. Since previous studies of the historiography of philosophy, conversely, have rarely discussed the concept of orientalism,³⁴⁷ I at the same time hope to

Said's work has been discussed by scholars of German orientalism, see Daniel L. Purdy and Bettina Brandt, "Introduction", in *China in the German Enlightenment* (Toronto/Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2016), pp. 5–10.

³⁴⁴ E.g., Kamakshi P. Murti, *India: The Seductive and Seduced 'Other' of German Orientalism* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001).

³⁴⁵ See the discussion and the references in Purdy and Brandt, "Introduction", p. 6.

³⁴⁶ For example, in his *Oriental Enlightenment*, J.J. Clarke claims that Hegel was the first historian of philosophy to "subject [Eastern thought] to systematic treatment", a claim that can easily be falsified by earlier sources (Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, p. 66). Important sources on the history of philosophy, e.g., Tiedemann and Meiners, are absent in Clarke's and Marchand's studies. Kontje cites Meiners's *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit*, but neither Meiners's nor Tiedemann's history of philosophy.

³⁴⁷ I take this to include the studies by Park and Bernasconi as well. While they have thoroughly examined the exclusion of African and Asian philosophy from the dominant narrative of the history of philosophy, they have not in detail related their results to the concept of the Orient.

deepen the understanding of the worldview on which 19th century German historians of philosophy based their scholarship.

The Concept of Barbaric Philosophy and its History

The conception of Adam as the first philosopher has roots in a narrative first established by Renaissance philosophers such as Ficino, Steuco, and Pico. The ambition uniting them was to trace pagan philosophy back to an original revelation, a perennial, divine knowledge common to all humanity.³⁴⁸ Thus, despite the apparent contradictions between philosophical schools, there was in fact a higher *unity* guaranteed by God's gift of wisdom to man. The Fall might have obscured this wisdom and made it impossible for man to fully acquire it on Earth, but there was a streak of divine light in every philosophical teaching, and the task of the historian was to identify it. Steuco dubbed this tradition *perennis philosophia* whereas Ficino and Pico used the term *prisca theologia*.³⁴⁹ Since they both posited a harmony between the Bible and philosophy, they could also be characterised as concordism.

In subsequent centuries, many historians of philosophy attempted to prove this thesis empirically. To do this, they deemed it necessary to identify an unbroken connection from Adam to Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle.³⁵⁰ This connection could also serve as a powerful legitimisation of the study of pagan wisdom. For if the pagan Greeks acquired the first seeds of philosophy from the Hebrews, then their philosophies could also be read as harmonious with the divine truth of the Bible.

It was against this background that concordist historians of philosophy elaborated the concept of *philosophia barbarica*. With this term, they referred to any philosophical wisdom predating classical Greece. "Barbaric" was thus taken mainly in a descriptive sense, referring simply to non-Greek culture. It

³⁴⁸ See Luciano Malusa, "Renaissance Antecedents to the Historiography of Philosophy", in *Models of the History of Philosophy. Volume I: From Its Origins in the Renaissance to the 'Historia Philosophica'*, ed. by Giovanni Santinello (Dordrecht/Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), p. 19; Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia Perennis: Historical Outlines of Western Spirituality in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2004), p. 34; Schmidt-Biggemann, "Jacob Bruckers philosophiegeschichtliches Konzept".

³⁴⁹ Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia Perennis*, p. 27.

³⁵⁰ A particularly important role was played by the Cambridge Platonists. See, e.g., Theophilus Gale, *The Court of the Gentiles: Or a Discourse Touching the Original of Human Literature, Both Philologie and Philosophie, from the Scriptures & Jewish Church. Part I: Of Philologie* (Oxon: Gilbert, 1672). For secondary literature on the movement, see Luciano Malusa, "The First General Histories of Philosophy in England and the Low Countries" in *Models of the History of Philosophy. Volume I: From Its Origins in the Renaissance to the 'Historia Philosophica'*, ed. by Giovanni Santinello (Dordrecht/Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), pp. 279–370.

served the purpose of showing that Greek thought was the culmination of a much longer tradition that ultimately extended back to the very first man. For this reason, even *philosophia antedeluviana* – the ancient philosophical tradition dating back to the time before the Flood – was sometimes included under the rubric of barbaric philosophy.³⁵¹ This wisdom lived on through the peoples directly connected to Noah’s sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth. After the flood, philosophy thus spread to the Chaldeans, Persians, Celts, and Egyptians, among others.³⁵²

Egypt here came to play a particularly crucial role for two complementary reasons. First, Egypt offered a further link between God’s chosen people and pagan wisdom. Since the Jews were enslaved in Egypt, it could be argued that the Egyptians also gained at least some of their scientific knowledge directly from them. Second, the Egyptians were also in direct contact with early *Greek* philosophy. It was generally agreed that the Greeks were highly influenced by the Egyptians, as shown not least by Thales’s travels. Here, Greek philosophy could thus mediately be traced back to the divine wisdom offered to the Hebrews by God.³⁵³

This being said, the concept of barbaric philosophy was not limited to peoples directly in contact with Greek culture. Rather, it opened up the history of philosophy to a wide range of pagan societies from different parts of the world. A number of Europeans – for example, the Celts, the ancient Britons, and the ancient Germans – were often included. This serves to illustrate that the concept was not mainly *geographical* in character. The only geographical division upon which it rested was one that distinguished Greece from the rest of the world. A distinction between the West and the East, on the other hand, did not play any central role.

The concordist narrative of the history of philosophy remained dominant until the 18th century. A notable example is Leibniz, who revived and repopularised Steuco’s concept of *perennis philosophia*.³⁵⁴ Furthermore, as

³⁵¹ There were, however, also historians who distinguished between Hebrew and barbaric philosophy. See Zedelmaier, *Der Anfang der Geschichte*, p. 83.

³⁵² On the broad concept of philosophy on which this narrative was based, cf. Schmidt-Biggemann, “Jacob Bruckers philosophiegeschichtliches Konzept”, p. 116; Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia Perennis*, pp. 34–35.

³⁵³ For some examples of discussions of Moses in the historiography of the Renaissance and the 16th and 17th centuries, see Ilario Tolomio, “The ‘Historia Philosophica’ in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries”, in *Models of the History of Philosophy. Volume I: From Its Origins in the Renaissance to the ‘Historia Philosophica’*, ed. by Giovanni Santinello (Dordrecht/Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), pp. 96, 108–09, 114, 121; Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire*, p. 11.

³⁵⁴ Charles B. Schmitt, “Perennial Philosophy: From Agostino Steuco to Leibniz”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 27.4 (1966), pp. 506, 530–31; Hannes Amberger, “Revelation and Progress: The Concept of

late as 1772, we find an example of the biblical history in Büsching's *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*:

We assume as a historical truth that all peoples on earth are offsprings of Noah's sons Japheth, Shem, and Ham, and that the children of these primogenitors received and learned from them the right concepts and messages about God – the eternal spirit, creator, sustainer, and ruler of all things – and about the origin of the world. These concepts were reproduced, received, and learned from Adam to Noah. And so, it is understandable why the teachings of the oldest peoples often agree with those that Moses collected from the traditions.³⁵⁵

Büsching's account of philosophy's development illustrates how concordism was still represented in Germany in the second half of the 18th century.³⁵⁶ At this point, however, the concordist narrative had already come to be questioned by a number of Lutheran German philosophers, to whom it appeared as little more than a version of scholastic theology. This gave rise to a new narrative of the history of philosophy that soon became dominant in German-speaking Europe.

The 18th-Century Secularisation of the History of Philosophy

One ambition of the concordist narrative was to guarantee harmony and unity in the multitude of philosophical teachings. By tracing these teachings back to an original light of revelation, the historian had a method with which he could read them as complementing rather than mutually refuting one another. The only alternative to this narrative appeared to be *sectarianism* – that is, the dogmatic position that only one philosophical system was true, and that all others had to be rejected.³⁵⁷ For example, historians of philosophy

Philosophia Perennis from Steuco to Leibniz”, *Lexicon Philosophicum: International Journal for the History of Texts and Ideas*, no. 7 (2019); Rita Widmaier, “Leibniz: Die natürliche Theologie der Chinesen im Rahmen der *Philosophia perennis*”, *Revista de Filosofia do IFCH da Universidade Estadual de Campinas*, 1.1 (2017).

³⁵⁵ Anton Friedrich Büsching, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie und einiger Lehrsätze derselben. Erster Theil* (Berlin: Bosse, 1772), pp. 4–5.

³⁵⁶ A further example of this is Christian Gottlieb Friedrich Stöwe, *Versuch einer Geschichte der Philosophie bloß zum Gebrauch für Schulen* (Berlin, 1783).

³⁵⁷ For examples of criticism of such views, see Malusa, “The First General Histories of Philosophy in England and the Low Countries”, pp. 167, 254; Giuseppe Micheli, “The History of Philosophy in Germany in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century”, in *Models of the History of Philosophy. Volume I: From Its Origins in the Renaissance to the ‘Historia Philosophica’*, ed. by Giovanni Santinello (Dordrecht/Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), p. 377.

who actively represented the philosophy of Aristotle against that of Plato, or vice versa, could easily be accused of such sectarianism.

The 17th- and 18th-century historians of philosophy in Protestant Germany were not satisfied with either of these alternatives. The concordist view appeared to them to be too closely tied to Catholic scholasticism, while the one-sided, sectarian devotion to a single system seemed both naïve and historically insufficient. For in light of the fundamental fallibility of man, how could any philosopher manage to formulate a philosophy without flaws?³⁵⁸

The solution to this dilemma came through a third position: the *eclecticism* represented by Thomasius, Heumann, and Brucker. Their historiographical approach started from precisely the condition that no philosophy could be wholly perfect and true. Rather, every teaching must contain a mixture of truth and error.³⁵⁹

Here, the eclectics could thus be said to agree with the concordists. The difference lay in that they did not trace the truth of philosophy to a divine revelation. Instead, the eclectics heavily emphasised the need for a strict judgement of every philosophy performed by *reason*.³⁶⁰ Reason and revelation were to be considered two sharply distinct sources of knowledge, as underlined by Thomasius in his *Einleitung zu der Vernunft-Lehre*:

[Those who] make a profession out of learnedness must first carefully consider that in this life, God has entrusted them with *two peculiar lights* to brighten their dim understanding, and they must know to distinguish well between these two lights. The first is the *natural light* or the *understanding* itself, through which man is capable, through natural efforts, of forming a true and clear concept of sensual and earthly things for the uses of this temporal life. The other is a *supernatural* light that arises *from divine revelation*, and through this man learns, to the degree his present imperfection allows, the divine secrets that lead him to a future life.³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ The above description is based on the discussion of early German Protestant historiography in Micheli, "The History of Philosophy in Germany in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century", pp. 377–78.

³⁵⁹ Cf. Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, p. 307; Lehmann-Brauns, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte*, pp. 1, 331.

³⁶⁰ Cf. Zedelmaier, *Der Anfang der Geschichte*, p. 98.

³⁶¹ Thomasius, *Einleitung zu der Vernunft-Lehre*, pp. 5–6 (1. Hauptstück). See also Lehmann-Brauns, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte*, pp. 323–24.

Heumann repeated this distinction, stating that human wisdom was reached “either through divine revelation or through the use of reason”.³⁶² Finally, we also find it in Brucker’s introduction to the *Kurtze Fragen*, where it was unambiguously used to distinguish between philosophy and theology:

[S]ome things are of such a nature that man is not, and cannot be, familiar with them in his current state. Such things must be revealed by God himself; and through this, revealed knowledge of the truth leading to bliss arises. One usually calls this God-erudition [*Gottes-Gelahrheit*] or *theologia*. Other things, however, can be known through the light of reason if this light is used correctly and all the obstacles have carefully been cleared away in the examination, and in this way one truth can be deduced from another. Thus, the true and good can be known through reason, which is the proper office of philosophy.³⁶³

While rational knowledge was thus always insecure and imperfect, the eclectics proposed that it alone could justly be called philosophical. The sages of ancient eras who stood in close contact with God and gained their wisdom through him could thus not be offered a place in the history of philosophy. This also offered a new explanation of the multitude of philosophical teachings throughout history: to the eclectics, this was an effect of man’s limited intellectual abilities.

Among the most prominent historians to present this eclectic view was Brucker. When Brucker mentioned Adam as a candidate for the first philosopher among men, one can easily detect a certain sarcasm in his tone. This view, he claimed, arose only if one “without further examination” accepted the opinion of previous historians – but any further examination would disrupt it. As his chief argument, Brucker claimed that Adam’s knowledge appeared to have its source “more in the light of revelation than in the light of nature”.³⁶⁴ This made it possible for Brucker to distinguish between philosophers and prophets:

[T]he patriarchs, just like the following wise men among the Hebrews, had a double light that showed them the road to true wisdom. The first was the light of divine revelation, that for the most part was immediately communicated, and this brought their wisdom to such a high standing. But precisely for this

³⁶² Heumann, “Einleitung zur Historia Philosophica. Drittes Capitel”, p. 95. See also Christoph August Heumann, “Von der Philosophie der Patriarchen. Erstes Capitel”, *Acta philosophorum*, no. 5 (1716), p. 765.

³⁶³ Brucker, *Kurtze Fragen. Erster Theil*, pp. 6–7.

³⁶⁴ Brucker, *Kurtze Fragen. Erster Theil*, p. 45.

reason it also follows that they should not, in this case, be regarded as *philosophi*, but as prophets, that is, as people who stood in a special contact with God and who learned the heavenly wisdom through His immediate inspiration, and who then also taught this wisdom to others.³⁶⁵

Brucker borrowed much of his argument from Heumann, who had offered a detailed discussion of the notion of barbaric philosophy.³⁶⁶ In Heumann's view, this concept must be wholly rejected. Any pre-Hellenic wisdom, he believed, was to be understood as solely divine, and there thus existed no true philosophical thought before the Greeks.³⁶⁷ Summing up his view, he wrote:

[I]t now follows clearly that the philosophy practiced [I] by the pagan priests, and that one calls *philosophia barbarica*, necessarily is a false and unauthentic one. *Adieu*, therefore, you dear *philosophia Chaldaeorum, Persarum, Aegyptiorum, &c.*, about which one generally makes such a clamour out of blind veneration of antiquity.³⁶⁸

Brucker, however, opted for another narrative. He essentially agreed with Heumann's objections to the inclusion of Adam and the Old Testament patriarchs in the list of philosophers, but he did not forgo a discussion of them in his main historical works. In fact, his *Kurtze Fragen* offered a detailed presentation of their lives, deeds, and teachings. Furthermore, in the title of his work Brucker made clear that it was supposed to cover the history of philosophy "[f]rom the beginning of the world to our times". While Brucker might not have wholly accepted their status as philosophers, he was nonetheless not ready to fully exclude them from the history of philosophy.³⁶⁹ Similarly, Brucker discussed barbarian philosophy in detail and included sections on all of the peoples to whom Heumann had bid adieu.

³⁶⁵ Brucker, *Kurtze Fragen. Erster Theil*, p. 54.

³⁶⁶ Cf. Lehmann-Brauns, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte*, p. 376. Heumann was, in turn, influenced by Nicolaus Hieronymus Gundling: see Lehmann-Brauns, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte*, p. 377; Zedelmaier, *Der Anfang der Geschichte*, pp. 81–83.

³⁶⁷ Heumann, "Von der Philosophie der Patriarchen. Erstes Capitel".

³⁶⁸ Christoph August Heumann, "Einleitung zur Historia Philosophia. Vierdtes Capitel. Von denen Kennzeichen der falschen und unächten Philosophie", *Acta philosophorum*, no. 2 (1715), p. 209. See also Christoph August Heumann, "Eintheilung der Historiae Philosophicae", *Acta philosophorum*, no. 3 (1715). For a detailed examination of Heumann's rejection of barbaric philosophy, see Lehmann-Brauns, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte*, pp. 375–92.

³⁶⁹ Cf. Gregorio Piaia, "European Identity and National Characteristics in the *Historica Philosophica* of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 34.4 (1996), pp. 603–04.

This compromise initially became the typical way of handling antediluvian philosophy by eclectic historians. They inherited the structure and division of epochs from the concordist tradition, but explicitly stated that the Old Testament patriarchs could not without reservation be regarded as philosophers. Gerhard Wilhelm Lodtmann, for example, wrote that Adam, Noah, Abraham, and other Hebrews “could certainly be counted among the wise people, but not among philosophers in the real sense, even though the majority of them possessed human wisdom that was no lesser than that of the seven sages in Greece”.³⁷⁰ Elias Friedrich Schmersal, in a preliminary discussion of the first humans, reached the same conclusion:

What the philosophy [*Weltweisheit*] of the first inhabitants on Earth was like, one can easily find out from the Bible. If one wishes to speak correctly, one must not ascribe to them any philosophy at all: even though they did possess a rather great knowledge of a number of things.³⁷¹

From discussions such as these, it is clear that Brucker’s narrative was not intended to challenge church history as such. It took place *within* the framework of a biblical chronology stretching back to divine creation but argued that philosophical knowledge of the world differed from revealed knowledge.³⁷²

During the second half of the 18th century, two interconnected developments would lead to a more radical alteration of this historical worldview. First, historians guided by Enlightenment ideals strove to lay the foundation of a *secular* historiography of mankind’s development, making it independent of biblical authority. Second, the temporal and geographical limits of the European consciousness were broadened as voyages of discovery and subsequent colonial projects led to new knowledge of the Far East.

³⁷⁰ Gerhard Wilhelm Lodtmann, *Kurzer Abriss der Geschichte der Weltweisheit nach der Ordnung der Zeiten zum Gebrauch academischer Vorlesungen* (Helmstädt, 1754), p. 4.

³⁷¹ Elias Friedrich Schmersal, *Historie der Weltweisheit überhaupt nebst einem Vorbericht von den bisherigen Verfassern dieser Historie* (Zelle, 1744), p. 39. For a further example, see Georg Heinrich Feder, *Grundriß der philosophischen Wissenschaften nebst der nöthigen Geschichte* (Coburg: Findeisen, 1769), p. 15.

³⁷² There were also some historians who retained the term barbaric philosophy but wholly excluded the ancient Hebrews from the history of philosophy. See, e.g., Franz Nikolaus Steinacher, *Grundriß der philosophischen Geschichte* (Wirzburg, 1744), p. 26.

Europe and the Orient

In his *Oriental Renaissance*, Raymond Schwab makes the radical claim that the world did not become “truly round” until 1771.³⁷³ By this time, European naval explorations had led to an explosive increase of knowledge of other parts of the world. Imported porcelain, spices, fabrics, and artworks gave rise to new fashion trends and artistic tendencies, and travel reports presented European readers with fantasy-provoking accounts of distant cultures. As part of this development, European scholars increasingly devoted attention to textual cultures from the newly discovered lands. In particular, they moved their gaze eastwards, where they came upon sources that appeared to be of a far greater age than European classical antiquity. Gradually, they managed to interpret new languages from the Far East and started an intense activity of translation, publication, and commentary.

The start of this process can be traced back to the 16th century, when the Jesuits began sending missionary expeditions to China. An important part of their strategy consisted of learning Mandarin and studying Chinese literature and thought. In particular, they took great interest in Confucianism, which they came to regard as a highly rational system of morality and natural theology. This appeared to present an opening for converting the Chinese: the rational character of Confucian doctrines, the Jesuits reasoned, ultimately made them harmonious with the Bible, and could thus be combined with the revealed truths of Christianity.³⁷⁴

While the mission of converting the Chinese was not very successful, it did lead to another important effect: the introduction of Confucian thought in Europe. The Jesuits translated a number of Confucian writings into Latin, and these texts were met with great interest among European scholars.³⁷⁵

³⁷³ Raymond Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880*, trans. by Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 16.

³⁷⁴ Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, pp. 40–41.

³⁷⁵ Famous examples are Leibniz's and Wolff's studies of Chinese philosophy. For editions in English and German, see Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Writings on China*, trans. by Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont (Chicago: Open Court, 1994); Christian Wolff, *Rede über die praktische Philosophie der Chinesen*, trans. by Michael Albrecht (Hamburg: Meiner, 1988). See also Franklin Perkins, “Leibniz on the Existence of Philosophy in China”, in *China in the German Enlightenment*, ed. by Daniel L. Purdy and Bettina Brandt (Toronto/Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2016), p. 60; Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, p. 40; Daniel Purdy, “Chinese Ethics within the Radical Enlightenment: Christian Wolff”, in *The Radical Enlightenment in Germany: A Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Carl Niekerk (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Axel Rüdiger, “China als philosophiehistorisches Problem zwischen *Philosophia perennis* und frühafklärlichem Eklektizismus”, in *Philosophiegeschichte in globaler Perspektive*, ed. by Rolf Elberfeld (Hamburg: Meiner, 2017).

In 1771, another major event in European oriental scholarship took place: the translation of the *Zend Avesta* into French. In Schwab's words, this was "the first time anyone [i.e.: any European] had succeeded in breaking into one of the walled languages of Asia".³⁷⁶ Soon after, a similar development occurred in European relations with India. Here, too, it was Jesuit missionaries who first introduced Indian thought to the European public in the 16th and 17th centuries.³⁷⁷ But the most expansive period of European Indian studies started with the founding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784. The productivity of the Society was immense. In quick succession, a number of Sanskrit texts appeared in European translations, and the journal *Asiatic Researches* soon gained a large audience among the European educated public.³⁷⁸

These new sources from the Orient raised fundamental questions concerning the European historical consciousness. There was strong evidence that the Chinese and Indian societies were much older than biblical chronology would allow and therefore could not fit into the biblical account of history.³⁷⁹ For church officials and theologians, this was a challenge of immense proportions. For the enlightened *philosophes*, on the other hand, it became an impetus for revolutionising historiography as such. Ideals of a new history of mankind arose according to which historians should map the development of all known civilisations on a secular basis.³⁸⁰ The vogue of Sinomania, followed by that of Indomania, thus served as a potent opening for criticising religious orthodoxy, and thereby the political order in general.³⁸¹

A crucial motive behind this endeavour was the enlightened idea of a universal concept of humanity. The driving force for historians of mankind was precisely to identify a human essence to which all expressions of human culture could be reduced.³⁸² The sources that European travellers and colonisers brought home from other parts of the world seemed to offer a rich

³⁷⁶ Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, p. 7.

³⁷⁷ Wilhelm Halbfass, *Indien Und Europa: Perspektiven Ihrer Geistigen Begegnung* (Basel/Stuttgart: Schwabe, 1981); Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, p. 54.

³⁷⁸ Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, p. 53.

³⁷⁹ See Suzanne L. Marchand, "Where Does History Begin? J.G. Herder and the Problem of Near Eastern Chronology in the Age of Enlightenment", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 47.2 (2014), p. 160; Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, p. 253; Rüdiger, "China als philosophiehistorisches Problem zwischen *Philosophia perennis* und frühafklärischem Eklektizismus", p. 195.

³⁸⁰ Kontje, *German Orientalisms*, p. 46; Bradley L. Herling, *The German Gītā: Hermeneutics and Discipline in the German Reception of Indian Thought, 1778–1831* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 61.

³⁸¹ Cf., e.g., Kontje, *German Orientalisms*, p. 4; Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, pp. 44–46.

³⁸² See Kontje, *German Orientalisms*, p. 4; Zedelmaier, *Der Anfang der Geschichte*, p. 256.

set of materials in which such an essence could be sought.³⁸³ However, realising this universalist aim in the field of history was by no means a simple task. At first glance, the history of mankind did not seem to present a singular humanity that in all times and at all places presented itself in the same way. On the contrary, history contained a multitude of radically different cultures, societies, laws, and religious conceptions. If the task of the historian of mankind was to be achieved, it was thus necessary to identify common denominators in these highly diverse expressions of humanity. But this in itself was not enough: simultaneously, it had to be explained *how* humanity could present itself in such diverse and at times contradictory ways. Why, for example, did some peoples live in civic states and some not? And why did customs and laws differ so much between civic societies, for example, between Europe and Asia?

The key to solving this problem appeared to lie in another concept of crucial importance to the enlightened historians: that of *progress*.³⁸⁴ If man appeared under different circumstances and in different societal structures, this must mean – so they reasoned – that these differences marked *stages* in a historical development, different degrees of cultivation. The unity of the concept of mankind could hereby be retained, while the multitude of human cultures present throughout history did not need to be denied or downplayed. The universalism underlying the enlightened history of mankind was therefore not one void of inner distinctions; on the contrary, these distinctions belonged to its most fundamental presuppositions. Furthermore, given this framework, the conception that all men were equal was not opposed to the conception that peoples, cultures, and historical epochs were hierarchically different: some of them were simply more developed than others.

In their examinations of this progress of human culture, there was one metaphoric device that enlightened historians found particularly useful: the likening of mankind's history to the development of a single human individual. Just as the child differed from the full-grown adult it was to become, they reasoned, so a primitive society differed from a highly developed one. But just as the adult must pass through childhood before he could reach maturity, so any human society must also pass through primitive stages before it could rise to true enlightenment.³⁸⁵

³⁸³ Cf. Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, p. 194.

³⁸⁴ Cf. Zedelmaier, *Der Anfang der Geschichte*, p. 255.

³⁸⁵ See, e.g., Schiller's famous description in Friedrich Schiller, *Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert man Universalgeschichte?* (Jena: Akademische Buchhandlung, 1789), pp. 11–12.

In the German culture sphere, the first history of mankind written according to these principles was Isaak Iselin's *Geschichte der Menschheit* (1764).³⁸⁶ Iselin's work has a complex structure that moves freely between abstract and concrete levels of analysis. It opens with a series of philosophical reflections on the human being as such and the faculties of the human soul. Out of these faculties, Iselin found sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*), imagination (*Einbildung*), and reason (*Vernunft*) to be of particular importance.³⁸⁷ These three faculties simultaneously presented a hierarchy, and they could therefore only develop fully in succession after one another: sensibility dominated the soul in the most primitive state of the human, reason in the most sophisticated. In this way, according to Iselin, the child was characterised by an undeveloped reason, and only as it grew up and became educated could reason finally rise above sensibility and imagination. Analogously, the first stage of human history must be characterised by sensibility or childishness, whereas the highest human society must let reason alone rule over its laws, customs, and moral institutions.

This led Iselin to a three-stage theory of human history in which the faculties of the soul directly mapped onto historical development. Thus, the state of nature could be described as the stage of sensibility, the state of barbarianism or savagery as that of imagination, and finally the true civic stage as that of reason.

In the second part of his *Geschichte der Menschheit*, Iselin moved on to a more systematic application of this development scheme to different human cultures. It was at this point that the Orient came to play a central role in his narrative. Based on the sources made available by European travellers and colonialists, Iselin drew the conclusion that the oriental peoples were the first to move from the stage of barbarianism to civic societies. A tentative explanation lay in the oriental climate: a mild and temperate climate, Iselin suggested, must promote reason's quicker maturation, and the conditions for civic societies were therefore more favourable in Asia than in Europe:

In some lands, nature must not only be improved; it must, as it were, be remoulded. Each sensation [*Empfindung*] of the beautiful, the good, and the

³⁸⁶ This book appeared in multiple editions during Iselin's lifetime. The first edition of 1764 was given the more modest title *Philosophische Muthmassungen über die Geschichte der Menschheit*. I here refer to this work under the title of subsequent editions, including the critical edition edited by Sundar Henny and Isabelle Wienand (to which I also refer in the following footnotes).

³⁸⁷ Isaak Iselin, *Geschichte der Menschheit*, ed. by Sundar Henny and Isabelle Wienand (Basel: Schwabe, 2018), p. 14. On Iselin's influences regarding these three faculties, see Zedelmaier, *Der Anfang der Geschichte*, pp. 249–50.

perfect is there a foreign fruit that in a hard climate must first be grown in greenhouses and that cannot thrive in the open air until the earth itself has lost its original roughness through a long cultivation. From this, the early politisation of the *Orient*, the slower one of *Greece* and *Italy*, and the late one of the *Nordic countries*, is understandable.³⁸⁸

Iselin was far from original in locating the origin of civic societies in the East. For example, Voltaire had reached the same conclusion in his *Essai sur les mœurs*: “When you regard this globe as a philosopher”, he wrote, “you first direct your gaze to the Orient, the cradle of all arts, which gave everything to the Occident”.³⁸⁹

For both Voltaire and Iselin, the Orient was thus the site where mankind rose from barbaric or tribal communities to more sophisticated states characterised by the rule of law. As time went on, it became possible to extend this claim so that the Orient was the cradle of mankind *per se*. This was the case in Johann Gottfried Herder’s philosophy of history.

Herder was by no means an uncritical proponent of the idea of universal, linear progress that generally characterised Enlightenment historiography. One of the chief aims in his *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte* (1774) was to present an alternative view of history in which each people, by virtue of its immanent cultural determinations, must follow its own unique historical path. But this stance did not lead Herder to altogether reject a universalist view of mankind’s development. Instead, in his depiction of mankind’s history, the unique nature of each people was connected to the development of mankind as such, so that universal progress was *conditioned* by each people’s realisation of its particular character. In *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784), Herder elaborated on this conception in the following way:

Mankind, destined for humanity, were from their origin to become a fraternal race [*Brudergeschlecht*] of one blood and by the leading-strings of one formative tradition: and so the whole arose, as even now every family springs forth, branches from one stem, blossoms from one original garden. In my view, God’s special plan for our species, which even by our origin sets us apart from the beasts, must appear the most appropriate, beautiful, and worthy to everyone who ponders the characteristics of our nature, the disposition and constitution of our reason, the means by which we arrive at ideas and form humanity in us. [...] As only one human reason was possible on earth, and

³⁸⁸ Iselin, *Geschichte der Menschheit*, pp. 162–63.

³⁸⁹ Voltaire, *Oeuvres de Voltaire. Tome XV* (Paris: Lefèvre, 1829), p. 247.

Nature accordingly produced only one genus of creatures capable of reason, so she left these rational beings to be educated in one school of language and tradition, taking charge of this education herself by a succession of generations with one origin.³⁹⁰

As many scholars have pointed out, Herder often described this relation between particularity and universality using organic metaphors.³⁹¹ This metaphoric device was often combined with the depiction of mankind's history as analogous to the lifespan of the individual. Hereby, Herder could let a given culture represent a specific age that the individual human being went through in its development.³⁹²

This general understanding allowed Herder to describe history as both a temporal development and a geographical movement. History began its organic life path in a given place on earth, to then travel to new regions as it matured and educated itself.³⁹³ In *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte*, Herder placed the beginning of this journey, or the childhood of mankind, in the Orient. From there, human culture moved to Egypt as it reached boyhood, then to Greece during its adolescence, before it finally became an adult man in Rome. In his *Ideen*, Herder further developed this conception. He gave a detailed account of Chinese and Indian culture, and unambiguously described the Europeans as descendants of the Orient: "Where have all the peoples of Europe come from? Asia".³⁹⁴

The Ambiguities of Orientalism

In summary, in 18th century historiography, the Orient increasingly came to be regarded as the birthplace of humanity (or at least of higher human cultures) by enlightened European scholars. But how did the universal historians characterise this Orient, and how did they distinguish it from European societies?

³⁹⁰ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, trans. by Gregory Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024), pp. 261–62; Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sämtliche Werke XIII* [SW XIII], ed. by Bernhard Suphan (Hildesheim: Olms, 1967), p. 405–06.

³⁹¹ See e.g., Herling, *The German Gītā*, p. 82; Kontje, *German Orientalisms*, p. 78.

³⁹² As Kontje points out, Herder hereby transformed Christian salvation history into a *Bildungsgeschichte* "in which individuals progress toward an uncertain future. The literary genre that corresponds to this transformation is the *Entwicklungs- or Bildungsroman*, but Herder applied the same model of dynamic growth to the history of individual peoples or nations, and to the history of the world as a whole" (Kontje, *German Orientalisms*, pp. 64–65).

³⁹³ On the model of a historical movement from Asia, via the Mediterranean, to Europe, see Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, p. 196.

³⁹⁴ Herder, *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, p. 262 [SW XIII: 406].

The answer to these questions must necessarily consider multiple aspects that, in some senses, appear to contradict one another. First, the status of mankind's point of origin often made the Orient an object of admiration and inspiration for European historians. Here, after all, they believed to encounter the first seeds of a culture founded on reason. There were also a number of concrete aspects of oriental cultures that garnered praise. Voltaire, for example, admired the Chinese for their knowledge of astronomy, for the invention of the paper and of the compass, and above all for their moral philosophy.³⁹⁵

Second, since the universal narrative strove to connect mankind's development into one process, the Orient could be viewed as the ultimate source of European culture – as, in Voltaire's words, the cradle of all arts. Concrete examples were found not least in philosophy. Voltaire believed that Pythagoras must have been influenced by Indian gymnosophism, and indeed that Greek thought in general could be interpreted as developed from an oriental predecessor.³⁹⁶ Similarly, Herder unambiguously traced the peoples of Europe to preceding oriental culture. Iselin was somewhat less definitive in his formulations, but he too saw oriental influences as crucial for the development of Greek culture. Classical Greek antiquity could only appear, he proposed, by a mixture of the mild oriental temperament with the more hardened and weathered temperament of the north.³⁹⁷

Third, however, the narrative of progress seemed to indicate that the Orient, by virtue of being the home of the first distinct epoch, must also be less developed than subsequent European societies. The admiration of oriental culture was thus frequently mixed with condescending strokes. Iselin claimed that oriental societies necessarily found their highest stage of development in despotism. Religion, philosophy, and legislation became the exclusive concern of a caste of priests, while the great majority of citizens remained in a naïve, childlike state of submission:

As the *particular reason* of each citizen was so little developed [*angebauet*]; as it was neither ruined by false opinions nor strengthened through true insights, the *general reason* of the state, *the law*, found little opposition therein. As the *particular will* of the individual [*eines jeden*] was so soft and pliant, as it was ruled by so few intentions, the *general will*, *the order of the kings*, found little subordination therein.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ Voltaire, *Oeuvres de Voltaire. Tome XV*, pp. 267–71.

³⁹⁶ Voltaire, *Oeuvres de Voltaire. Tome XV*, p. 283.

³⁹⁷ Iselin, *Geschichte der Menschheit*, p. 240.

³⁹⁸ Iselin, *Geschichte der Menschheit*, p. 220.

It is clear how the likening of mankind's development to that of the human individual was here put into play. Iselin's Orient might be more developed than the infantile stage of nature, but it was still not fully mature – at least not for *every* oriental person: “[a]ll citizens were thus children or slaves [*Knechte*], dependent on the whim of their father or their lord”.³⁹⁹ We will see how this conception came to play a crucial role for later German philosophers and historians as well.

In Herder's characterisation of the Orient, many of Iselin's descriptions at first appear to be repeated. The Orient occupied the place of the child who had not yet cultivated his reason and ability to understand himself or the world around him. The government had to take the form of a patriarchy, i.e., a fatherly institution ruling over the childish citizens. Greece, on the other hand, marked the individual's progress to maturity and freedom.

In the case of Herder, however, the hierarchy between child and adult was rhetorically turned on its head: Herder used it as a means to criticise scholars who had dismissed oriental culture as despotic and absolutist. Instead, he interpreted the oriental childhood of man as an idyllic, innocent stage of being-at-home in the world. In this regard, the Orient by far surpassed his contemporary Europe: it was the site of a primordial wisdom from which the modern Europeans had much to learn, but of which they had remained ignorant. “Orient, you ground of God chosen just for this!” Herder exclaimed, continuing:

[W]as it not, in the beginning, precisely the Oriental with his *delicate child's sense* who, under the *gentle government of the father*, was the *happiest and most obedient pupil*? Everything was tasted [first] as mother's milk and father's wine! Everything was stored in children's hearts and sealed there with the stamp of *divine authority*! The human spirit received the first forms of wisdom and virtue with a *simplicity, strength, and majesty* that – to put it bluntly – has no equal, no equal at all in our philosophical, cold, European world. And just because we are so incapable of *understanding* this any more, of *feeling* it, let alone *taking delight* in it – we *mock*, we *deny*, and we *misconstrue*!⁴⁰⁰

By praising the Orient in this way, Herder was not rejecting the narrative of Enlightenment history as such. Rather, he consciously put into play a

³⁹⁹ Iselin, *Geschichte der Menschheit*, p. 226.

⁴⁰⁰ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings*, trans. by Ioannis D. Evrigenis and Daniel Pellerin (Cambridge: Hackett, 2004), p. 9; Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sämtliche Werke V* [SW V], ed. by Bernhard Suphan (Hildesheim: Olms, 1967), pp. 483–84.

productive tension that already inhered in the universal-historical account of mankind's development. This tension becomes even clearer when Herder, in his *Ideen*, turned the development from child to adult on its head: by virtue of arising first, the Orient was here described as the "mother of all enlightenment on the inhabited earth".⁴⁰¹ Herder here shone a light upon the temporal paradoxes that immediately followed from the likening of mankind's history to the lifespan of the individual. In doing this, he also showed how the fundamental categories underlying the genre of history of mankind were to some extent open and undetermined.

Where Does the Sun Start to Rise?

There was another important ambiguity in the concept of the Orient. The concept was, of course, geographical in character. Etymologically, it denotes the direction from which the sun rises, a meaning that becomes even clearer in the German synonym *Morgenland*. However, the concept was not a merely descriptive one referring to a distinct geographical region. Rather, it was used as a way of combining geography with both historical development and philosophical concepts: it allowed the universal historian to place faculties of human spirit directly on the world map. Thus, descriptions of the Orient generally did not put their main emphasis on its geographical borders, but rather on its philosophical-historical character.⁴⁰² It was defined above all as the site of a particular kind of political rule (despotism, patriarchy), and a particular stage of spiritual development (fantasy, imagination, and religious devotion).

This philosophical concept of the Orient must clearly be a rather significant simplification. Asian cultures, religions, and philosophies were highly diverse and frequently exhibited differences from one another. For example, European scholars tended to view Chinese thought as remarkably secular (perhaps even atheist),⁴⁰³ whereas Indian thought was described as mythological and allegorical.⁴⁰⁴ When these cultures started being grouped together under the rubric "oriental", the differences necessarily had to be downplayed in favour of an imaginary unity. Iselin's *Geschichte der Menschheit* clearly

⁴⁰¹ Herder, *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, p. 345; Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sämtliche Werke XIV* [SW XIV], ed. by Bernhard Suphan (Hildesheim: Olms, 1967), p. 89.

⁴⁰² Compare the discussion about "philosophic geography" in Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 6–13.

⁴⁰³ See, e.g., the discussion of Pierre Bayle in Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, p. 44.

⁴⁰⁴ E.g., in Voltaire, *Oeuvres de Voltaire. Tome XV*, p. 283.

illustrates this: China, for Iselin, was a prominent *exception* to the general tendency of oriental societies towards priestly rule.⁴⁰⁵

A further result of the way in which universal historians characterised the Orient was that its borders were vaguely defined. For previous European scholars, “orientalism” had generally signified the study of the Near East and its languages, above all the Semitic ones. During the 18th century, the emphasis shifted further eastwards, so that the Far East became the centre of the orientalist’s attention. Herder’s writings on the philosophy of history offer a clear illustration of this geographical shift. When Herder referred to the Orient in his *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte*, it signified mainly the biblical lands of the Near East. In the *Ideen*, however, many of the characteristics Herder had previously ascribed to the Near East were used in descriptions of India. The term “Orient” remained, as did many of its fundamental predicates, but the subject of these predicates had moved to a different location.

Importantly, however, this shift was never definite. Rather, the ambiguity increased, so that both the Near and Far East could be treated as parts of the same oriental stage in humanity’s development. Where the sphere of the Orient ended was far from obvious. Thus, for Iselin, Egypt was a clear example of an oriental culture, whereas Herder distinguished mankind’s oriental childhood from its Egyptian adolescence. Both the temporal and the spatial borders of the Orient were fuzzy and open to interpretation, and the way in which a given author interpreted the concept had less to do with geography and more to do with historical narrative.

This all illustrates that the Orient cannot be treated as a merely *descriptive* concept, but that we must pay attention at the same time to its *performative* dimension. It had no referent that existed prior to the discourse; rather, the concept had to produce and posit its referent *through* its employment. In this sense, the Orient was an idea rather than a place.⁴⁰⁶

Oriental Philosophy

We have seen that the concept of reason played a crucial role in the history of mankind: as the noblest faculty of the human soul, its higher cultivation could be treated as the regulative end of mankind’s development. This conception became a link between the history of mankind and the history of philosophy. For if philosophy was the purest expression of reason, then the

⁴⁰⁵ Iselin, *Geschichte der Menschheit*, p. 230.

⁴⁰⁶ Kontje, *German Orientalisms*, p. 12.

state of philosophy in a given society must directly correlate with the historical stage of this society.

From these premises, it followed that the Orient, where reason had developed far enough to give rise to civic societies, certainly must possess some philosophical culture. But to the extent that the Orient was characterised by a reason that had only partly matured, it appeared that oriental philosophy must also contain traces of the lower faculties of the soul, i.e., sensibility and imagination.

This was indeed the thesis that Iselin presented in his discussion of the sciences in the Orient. Just as political rule was the exclusive matter of a minority, so also philosophy became the secret of the ruling castes: “Enlightenment [*Erleuchtung*] was a privilege enjoyed only by some chosen few. Learnedness was a secret reserved for the priests, the only philosophers of these peoples. Its sanctuary was closed to the admission of the uninitiated”.⁴⁰⁷ The subjects of the oriental states were not only excluded from this sanctuary, but they happily accepted their exclusion:

In despotic states, the citizen is so much more indifferent to the exploration of truth because he convinces himself that the lawmakers and priests have found it for him, or immediately received it from the gods. [...] Therefore he happily concedes to his peaceful idiotism, which is infinitely more valuable to his innate laziness [*Trägheit*] than all the treasures of science[.]⁴⁰⁸

In these quotations, Iselin gave an account not only of *who* could practice philosophy in the Orient, but also of the *form* in which it was practiced. It was a priestly affair, and for this reason ultimately not distinguished from religion, mythology, and superstition:

The noblest objects [of oriental philosophy] were the doctrine of God, of the subordinate gods, of the spirits, of the stars, of morality [*Sitten*]. The interpretation of signs and art of divination constituted, in the eyes of the people and even in the eyes of the greatest, its most prominent and important parts.⁴⁰⁹

Iselin’s characterisation lay in line with the general European understanding of oriental wisdom. Also Voltaire described the mythological and metaphoric style as a defining mark of Indian culture: “Among the Orientals, and above

⁴⁰⁷ Iselin, *Geschichte der Menschheit*, p. 222.

⁴⁰⁸ Iselin, *Geschichte der Menschheit*, p. 223.

⁴⁰⁹ Iselin, *Geschichte der Menschheit*, p. 222.

all among the Indians, everything was treated in the form of fables and allegories".⁴¹⁰ Even though this, in Voltaire's view, made the Indians prone to "superstitions and fabulous mythology", he cautioned that one must not therefore fail to see that their culture also contained many "sublime ideas".⁴¹¹

These sublime ideas referred in particular to the teachings of the Brahmins, which Voltaire – fully in line with the general European understanding – characterised as a philosophical sect. This conception ultimately led to the treatment of "Hindu philosophy" and "Hindu religion" as more or less synonymous terms.⁴¹² Indian wisdom, and by extension oriental wisdom as such, was viewed as philosophy *in the form of* mythology, as reason dressed up in mythological clothing.

To summarise, the concept of the Orient referred to the origin of mankind, the origin of civic society, the origin of reason's development, and as a consequence, the origin of *philosophy*. For this reason, the Orient of the enlightened historians came to displace the previous narrative of barbaric philosophy. The notion of barbarianism, in the sense of non-Greek culture, gave way to the notion of orientalism in the sense of a geographically specific pre-Greek culture that was both distinct from Greece and connected to it. It was this new concept of the Orient that subsequent historians of philosophy unavoidably had to consider.

"The history begins among the Greeks, with Thales"

It should be clear that the intellectual effects flowing from European colonialism extended also to the historiography of philosophy. Not only did the scholarly work on ancient writings from the East present the historians of philosophy with new sources to consider, but even more importantly, the 18th-century histories of mankind displaced the very historical framework *within which* philosophy's past could be understood. Whereas eclectic philosophers had organised their narratives according to conceptions of biblical history, philosophers of the late Enlightenment had to enter a dialogue with universal histories of mankind.

It must once again be underlined that most histories of mankind had already twined an account of the history of philosophy into their narratives. Since the regulative end of mankind's development was the perfection of reason, the sciences in general and philosophy in particular constituted one

⁴¹⁰ Voltaire, *Oeuvres de Voltaire. Tome XV*, p. 283.

⁴¹¹ Voltaire, *Oeuvres de Voltaire. Tome XV*, p. 293.

⁴¹² For examples and a more detailed discussion, see Herling, *The German Gītā*, pp. 62–69.

of the most reliable expressions of human development. Thus, both Iselin and Voltaire gave accounts of the philosophical cultures of the Orient and their influence on Greek antiquity.

Given this background, one might expect to see the Orient gaining the status of the first epoch in histories of philosophy. However, starting in the early 1780s, a diametrically opposite tendency occurred in the German historiography of philosophy. A number of histories of philosophy now radically decreased their sphere of examination: they did away with the category of barbarian philosophy altogether, instead placing philosophy's beginning in Greek antiquity.⁴¹³

The first example of this new narrative was Dietrich Tiedemann's *Griechenlands erste Philosophen* (1780), which examined the philosophical teachings of Orpheus, Pherecydes, Thales, and Pythagoras. One of Tiedemann's overarching goals was to show that these thinkers were not just the first philosophers of Greece, but the first philosophers in all of mankind's known history. Tiedemann later repeated this standpoint in his full-length history of philosophy, *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie*, whose first volume (1791) covered the period "from Thales to Socrates".

As Bernasconi has noted, Tiedemann might well have been the first modern historian to consider Thales the founder of philosophy. But he was not alone in arguing for philosophy's Greek origin. In 1786, Christoph Meiners published a compendium entitled *Grundriß der Geschichte der Weltweisheit*. The chapter structure at first glance appears similar to earlier works – the book begins with a survey of the thought of the Persians, Egyptians, Indians, and a number of other non-Greek peoples. In fact, however, Meiners's ambition with this survey was to prove that none of these peoples possessed any actual philosophy. He depicted their knowledge as childish and shallow, and thereafter went on to describe the seven sages of Greece as the initiators of the first real epoch of the history of philosophy.

When, in the following decade, the post-Kantians entered the field of the historiography of philosophy, they generally followed in Tiedemann's and Meiners's footsteps. In a 1795 article published in the *Philosophisches Journal*, Tennemann discussed a number of publications on the history of philosophy from 1781 and onwards. Tiedemann was praised for having found the correct demarcation of philosophy's history: "[t]he outer borders of the history are

⁴¹³ To be sure, the Greeks had always been afforded a prominent place in European historiography of philosophy. The very category of "barbaric philosophy" implied that the Greeks were the main point of reference for all other philosophical cultures. Nonetheless, the idea that Greeks not only *perfected* philosophy, but that they rather first *created* it, marked a significant departure from earlier historians.

drawn very rightly therein, and thus, the philosophy of the Egyptians, Indians, Chaldeans, etc., is wholly excluded. The history begins among the Greeks, with Thales".⁴¹⁴ When, in 1798, Tennemann published the first volume of his ground-breaking *Geschichte der Philosophie*, this was the narrative he followed himself.

Through Meiners, Tiedemann, and Tennemann, Greece was thus established as a new possible starting point of the history of philosophy. The shift towards this narrative started in the 1780s and continued for around two decades. But what were the reasons behind it, and what were the strategies employed to support its legitimacy? These are the questions to be examined in the following section.

Meiners's Rejection of the Universal Concept of Mankind

In 1788, the anti-Kantian journal *Philosophische Bibliothek* published a critical review of Herder's *Ideen*. According to the reviewer, Herder was mistaken in seeking the beginning of human culture in Asia. "Hindustan, Tibet, Japan, China, and the other realms of Southern Asia", the author claimed, were actually "by far the last to be educated". He went on: "[t]he Hindus received the first seeds of the arts and sciences through Greek, and later through Roman inhabitants and neighbours, and this happened shortly before the birth of Christ".⁴¹⁵

The journal was co-edited by Meiners, and it is highly likely that he was the author of the review. The arguments raised against Herder were consistent with views that Meiners also presented in a number of other, more extensive historical writings. Above all they were fully in line with the narrative he proposed in his main work on the history of philosophy: *Grundriß der Geschichte der Weltweisheit*.

The first chapter of this book bore the title "The Enlightenment of the Ancient Peoples in Asia and Africa". The choice of title was in itself pregnant with meaning. First, it is striking that Meiners avoided the word "philosophy" to describe the thought of Asians and Africans. To previous historians, the

⁴¹⁴ Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, "Fortsetzung der Uebersicht des Vorzüglichsten, was für die Geschichte der Philosophie seit 1780 geleistet worden", *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*, 3.1 (1795), pp. 70–71. Interestingly, Tennemann did not give the same praise to Meiners. Instead, he attributed to Meiners the error of beginning the history of philosophy "from the philosophy of the oldest peoples, the Egyptians, Chaldeans, Indians, Chinese, etc., among whom, however, philosophy never exceeded the age of childhood [...] and who stand in no relation to the actual history" (Tennemann, "Fortsetzung", p. 69).

⁴¹⁵ "Ideen zur Philosophie und Geschichte der Menschheit, von J.G. Herder. Dritter Theil" [Review], *Philosophische Bibliothek*, 1 (1788), pp. 99–100.

applicability of this term would have been rather obvious, but Meiners intended to prove that there was, in fact, no philosophical culture outside of Europe. Second, Meiners did not use the term “barbarians”, referring instead specifically to Africa and Asia. This indicates that he was not particularly interested in dismissing the narrative of previous historians of philosophy. Rather, he inserted himself into a debate with Enlightenment historians of mankind and their conception of humanity’s oriental origins.

Meiners began the chapter by stating that the knowledge of these peoples never surpassed the stage of “childishness and mediocrity”.⁴¹⁶ Claims about a high and developed culture in the Orient were rejected as based on mere prejudice, for in fact, Meiners contended, the sources offered no confirmation that the Orientals developed their sciences to a high standing. For example, the Jesuit descriptions of Chinese wisdom were exaggerated: “the oldest Chinese were devoted to the very same superstitiousness and polytheism that one finds in China still today”.⁴¹⁷ In his discussion of the Chaldeans, Persians, Egyptians, Ethiopians, and Indians, Meiners similarly reached the conclusion that they lacked mature and sophisticated knowledge.

It is clear that Meiners’s view of Asia was far more negative than that of Iselin and Herder, but his descriptions were also directly correlated to these authors. For example, the notion of oriental childishness was fully in line with the general narrative of enlightened histories of mankind. The difference lies in the conclusions drawn from this characterisation (which, as already noted, was in itself always ambiguous). Unlike Iselin and Herder, Meiners consistently took it to signify the inferiority of Eastern culture and thought. This brings us to Meiners’s chief aim with the chapter: to prove that Greek philosophy was in no way influenced by the Asians or Egyptians.

As noted above, Egypt was already considered a main source of early Greek science by pre-modern historians. It was often regarded as a highly developed society, and the travels made to Egypt by early Greek philosophers such as Thales seemed to confirm an Egyptian influence on pre-Socratic cosmogonies. In the universal histories of the Enlightenment, Egypt retained this position as a link between Greece and earlier cultures to the East. We have seen, for example, how Herder placed it between mankind’s oriental childhood and Greek early adulthood.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁶ Christoph Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Weltweisheit* (Lemgo: Meyer, 1786), p. 7.

⁴¹⁷ Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Weltweisheit*, p. 18.

⁴¹⁸ On Egypt’s place in discussions about the history of philosophy, see Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, pp. 227–47; Graneß, “The Struggle to Find the Origin of Philosophy: The Role of Ancient Egypt”,

Meiners conceded that Egypt stood out as one of the most vibrant cultures in ancient times. Furthermore, there could be no question that the Egyptians and Greeks were in close contact by the time of Thales. But this did not mean, Meiners claimed, that the Egyptians influenced Thales. Instead, he proposed that the *opposite* was the case: it was the Greeks that influenced the Egyptians and helped them develop their sciences:

The late emergence and slow development of the sciences in Greece would already in itself prove that the Greeks did not borrow even the elements of it from the Egyptians. But furthermore, it is without doubt that history and geography, the knowledge of nature and medicine, and the mathematical sciences of the Egyptian priests were in a perpetual state of childishness before they were enlightened by the Greeks.⁴¹⁹

Meiners applied the same reasoning to Indian culture. In his discussion of the Vedas, he noted several similarities with Greek philosophy. Therefore, “one of the two must necessarily be based on the other”. This should not, though, be taken to mean that the Greeks took inspiration from the Indians. Instead, Meiners proposed that the Indians became “students of the Greeks” when the latter formed settlements in the region during the era of Alexander.⁴²⁰ The Vedas were therefore considerably younger than previous historians had suggested; according to Meiners, they might have been written as late as the beginning of the Common Era.

In support of these claims, Meiners referred to ancient Greek historians and their accounts of foreign cultures. His reading of these sources soon gives the impression of being both selective and tendentious. Ancient authors who gave testimony to the greatness of Egypt and India were quickly dismissed as unreliable, while those who indicated that these nations were savage and primitive were lauded.⁴²¹

In his detailed study of Meiners’s historiography, Peter K.J. Park convincingly shows the underlying reasons for this tendency: it follows, Park argues, from Meiners’s anthropological views of human races.⁴²² Meiners was

⁴¹⁹ Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Weltweisheit*, p. 11.

⁴²⁰ Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Weltweisheit*, pp. 16–17.

⁴²¹ Cf. Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, pp. 294–95.

⁴²² On Meiners’s race theories, see also Sarah Reimann, *Die Entstehung des wissenschaftlichen Rassismus im 18. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2017), pp. 263–79; Martin Gierl, “Christoph Meiners, Geschichte der Menschheit und Göttinger Universalgeschichte: Rasse und Nation als Politisierung der deutschen Aufklärung”, in *Die Wissenschaft vom Menschen in Göttingen um 1800*, ed. by Hans Erich Bödeker, Philippe Büttgen, and Michel Espagne (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008).

an outspoken proponent of the so-called polygenesis theory, according to which different human races were not related, but rather of different origins. In his *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit*, Meiners distinguished between two races: the “light-coloured and beautiful”, and the “dark-coloured and ugly”.⁴²³ It was this early version of scientific racism that led him to categorically dismiss the idea of scientific culture among non-European peoples.

A further example of this can be found in a short essay published in Meiners’s *Vermischte philosophische Schriften*, where he emphatically rejected the universal concept of humanity. In fact, Meiners claimed, the native inhabitants of Australia or South America were more intimately related to primates than to educated Europeans:

[T]he distance between Man and Man, between Newton and Leibniz, on the one hand, and a New Hollander or inhabitant of the Land of the Fire on the other, is greater than the distance between the latter and the animals closest to our species.⁴²⁴

While anthropological, racist arguments such as these were not explicitly used in Meiners’s history of philosophy, Park is no doubt right that they form the crucial background to his rejection of Asian and African philosophy. Meiners’s reasons for placing philosophy’s origins in Greece are ultimately found in his deeply racist worldview.

This allows us to contextualise Meiners in relation to the genre of mankind’s history, and more precisely in relation to the role of philosophy in this narrative. For the historians of mankind, the task was to bind together all human cultures through a general concept of humanity. Since reason was the highest vocation of mankind, it was furthermore important to trace the continuity of philosophical culture from the first civic societies in the Orient to the era of classical Greece.

This was the idea Meiners intended to disprove; he wanted to show that European mankind was fundamentally different from Asian and African mankind, and that the former did not depend upon the latter for its cultural development. To do this, he employed a set of conceptions imported from histories of mankind but mobilised them for a purpose radically opposed to that of the authors of these histories. He strategically selected some already

⁴²³ Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, p. 81; Christoph Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 2nd ed. (Lemgo: Meyer, 1793), pp. 5–6.

⁴²⁴ Christoph Meiners, *Vermischte Philosophische Schriften. Erster Theil* (Leipzig, 1775), p. 61.

established conceptions about the Orient (i.e., that of oriental childishness) as the basis of his narrative and equally strategically rejected others (the thesis that oriental philosophy preceded and influenced the Greeks). The result was the performative creation of a new concept of the Orient that was radically opposed to that of Europe.

Tiedemann and the Universalist Exclusion of the East

The other prominent historians of philosophy who argued for philosophy's Greek origins did not generally share the ambition to reject a universalist notion of mankind. Rather, they tended to place themselves firmly in the tradition of the historiography of mankind, attempting to find a justification *within* this worldview for considering Greece the cradle of philosophical thought.

This made their endeavour more challenging. Rather than presenting oriental humanity as fundamentally different from European humanity, they needed to show the unity of mankind and its vocation while simultaneously justifying the claim that philosophy – the epitome of man's rational understanding of himself and the world – was not realised in every human culture.

As we have seen, however, Enlightenment historiography already offered a framework for achieving this. The universal character of mankind was not taken to necessarily indicate an ever-present similarity or equality in development; on the contrary, it encouraged the historian to distinguish different cultures by placing them into a hierarchical development scheme. The solution, then, lay in the proposition that philosophy could only arise at a certain level in this hierarchy. Precisely this claim formed the basis of Tiedemann's writings on the history of philosophy.

When Tiedemann proposed Greece as the birthplace of philosophy, he was well aware that his position stood in conflict with the common understanding and that it therefore needed further justification. In the introduction to his *Griechenlands erste Philosophen*, he thus discussed the development of cosmogonies and theogonies predating the Greeks, but he emphatically rejected the claim that these ancient teachings could be called philosophical.

Tiedemann's argumentative strategy can be divided into two complementary and interconnected parts. The first one consisted of a general theory of mankind's gradual development and thus directly placed itself in the field of the history of mankind. The second one related this account of mankind's essence to the concept of philosophy.

Let us begin with Tiedemann's account of mankind's development. According to Tiedemann, man had a fundamental need to understand the world around him and the reasons behind events in nature. In his earliest cultural stages, however, man lacked the "general and abstract expressions" to conduct a careful examination of nature, and he thus failed to identify general laws and principles governing the world.⁴²⁵ The only solution was to take refuge in the faculty of *fantasy*. Thus, the primitive human being formulated myths and fables intended to explain the world's essence and origin.

These myths all followed the same pattern: they were rooted in man's self-understanding and projected this onto the outside world. Their method for making sense of the world was to imagine a will and agency in it, i.e., to personalise and anthropomorphise it:

As long as careful observations have not yet taught man the differences between himself and other beings, he anthropomorphises everything and imagines everything as living, as acting out of free will. In the modes of thought of savage [*wilder*] nations, there are thousands of examples of this[.] Hence the tendency of raw [*roher*] men to animate everything, to make everything similar to man; hence the dressing up of physical appearances as acts of living or human-resembling beings.⁴²⁶

It was precisely this process that gave rise to ancient pagan mythologies and cosmological accounts of the world, and these accounts were consequently to be understood as the product of an uncultivated fantasy allowed to roam freely.⁴²⁷

Tiedemann's theory of the rise of mythologies was intended as a criticism of another view that was common in histories of mankind. As Tiedemann summarised this view, it sprang from the conception that "no man could be so foolish as to take these fables literally, and the sages of old must necessarily have read more into them than the mere letter expresses".⁴²⁸ In other words: mythologies and fables might explain the world in terms of supernatural anthropomorphic beings, but these beings should be understood as metaphorical expressions of a deeper physical knowledge that could be redis-

⁴²⁵ Dietrich Tiedemann, *Griechenlands erste Philosophen oder Leben und System des Orpheus, Pherecydes, Thales und Pythagoras* (Leipzig: Weidmanns Erben und Reich, 1780), p. 7.

⁴²⁶ Tiedemann, *Griechenlands erste Philosophen*, p. 7.

⁴²⁷ On the distinction between fantasy and reason, see also Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, pp. 241, 243, 267–68.

⁴²⁸ Tiedemann, *Griechenlands erste Philosophen*, p. 4.

covered through an allegorical reading. We have seen how this conception was sometimes used to interpret ancient Indian writings.

But this interpretation, Tiedemann contended, must be turned on its head. For if the ancient sages really intended their fables to be allegorical, they must have *first* conducted a careful examination of nature's basic principles and laws. Since the historical sources gave no indication of this being the case, the fables of ancient pagans should not be taken to contain any hidden wisdom beyond their literal meaning.

This brings us to Tiedemann's second line of argument, which started with his concept of philosophy as such. Philosophy, Tiedemann stated, concerned the fundamental principles of the world and its origin. However, this did not imply that *all* accounts of these issues were philosophical. Rather, philosophy was to be understood as a specific type of discourse whose defining property was that it was based on *principles* and *arguments*:

Philosophy is not a mere collection of opinions about philosophical objects, but rather the epitome of opinions developed from principles [*aus Gründen*], be they drawn from concepts or from experience. As long as men draw their opinions on philosophical objects from poetic power and assume systems because they please fantasy, without all proof; and as long as the philosophical opinions are only supported by appearance [*Ansehen*], and more precisely, as was always the case in early times, the appearance of a revelation or thoughtless [*unvordenklich*] tradition, then they cannot justly be regarded as philosophy. All opinions of this kind belong to the history of human understanding as such, to the history of the first and early development of human knowledge, but not to the history of philosophy.⁴²⁹

The consequences of this definition of philosophy should be clear. If philosophy could only refer to argumentative discourse, then it was radically distinct from mythological accounts of the world. Both philosophy and mythological fables might concern the same *object* – i.e., the origin and nature of the world – but they treated this object in fundamentally different ways. Mythology was the result of fantasy; philosophy was the result of reason. It is easy to see how this conception aligned with the premises of histories of mankind, not least Iselin's tripartite division of mankind's sensuous, imaginary, and rational stages.

Tiedemann had thus formulated two complementary conceptions from which the beginning of philosophy's history was to be determined. The first

⁴²⁹ Dietrich Tiedemann, *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie: Von Thales bis Sokrates* (Marburg: Neue akademische Buchhandlung, 1791), pp. xviii–xix.

one defined philosophy as distinct from fantasy and mythology, and the second one stated that mythology predated philosophical enquiry. Both of these distinctions fitted well with the notions underlying enlightened histories of mankind. However, it appears that a third, *empirical* foundation was needed to justify the use of Greece as the point of departure. For it was not in principle unthinkable that peoples older than the Greeks had presented cosmogonies in the form of argumentative, i.e., philosophical, discourse. In Tiedemann's presentation, however, this hypothesis was taken as already disproved. "It is generally admitted", he claimed,

that all the teachings of the Chaldeans, Persians, Indians, and even the Egyptians, as far as it is known to us, either contain mere fictions of half-cultivated [*halb roher*] times or spring from religious conceptions. At least, we have no reliable information that they contain any proofs from concepts or experiences. We thus have no right to speak of a philosophy of these peoples, nor do we have the right to include such teachings in a history of philosophy.⁴³⁰

Tiedemann therefore deemed it unnecessary to conduct his own empirical examination of the thought of these peoples; he took their status as mere mythologies to be already established. Indeed, the contemporary reader who referred to earlier textbooks on the history of philosophy would find barbarian philosophy characterised in precisely this way.⁴³¹ Therefore, it was enough for Tiedemann to sharpen the conceptual distinction between philosophy and mythology; the result of this distinction, that philosophy began with the Greeks, was already obvious. Thus, Tiedemann could simply claim that before the pre-Socratic Greeks,

one did admittedly treat philosophical objects, but one did not treat them philosophically. The so-called theologians or mythologists [...] presented these discussions in poetic clothing, by invoking the muses. Through the whole tone of the teachings, they appeared more as divine revelations than as naturally recognised truths. For this reason, among them there was no talk of reasoning, of proof, of clear explanations; for why should one attempt to prove something that one imagined had been discovered through the Gods themselves?⁴³²

⁴³⁰ Tiedemann, *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie: Von Thales bis Sokrates*, p. xix.

⁴³¹ See, e.g., Steinacher, *Grundriß der philosophischen Geschichte*, p. 27.

⁴³² Tiedemann, *Griechenlands erste Philosophen*, pp. 3–4.

But if mythological accounts of the world were older than philosophical ones, did it then not seem likely that philosophy *arose* out of mythologies and fables, that the first philosophers used such mythical accounts of the world as their first impetus and material? Indeed, Tiedemann himself claimed that the most ancient fables and the first Greek philosophies treated the same topics: they were both *cosmogonies*. Was it not, then, a reasonable hypothesis that the philosophical cosmogonies had used the mythological ones as a first inspiration?

Tiedemann in fact admitted that this was likely the case. However, in his anthropological account, he had already presented a solution to the problem. For if mythological modes of explaining the world were a fundamental characteristic of all uncultivated nations, there was no need to trace ancient Greek philosophy back to *external* influences. Attempting to do so, Tiedemann claimed, would be just as pointless as attempting to prove that the native inhabitants of America were influenced by the Egyptians.⁴³³ By way of conclusion, he wrote that the history of philosophy

is only bound to consider such conceptions and teachings that gave the first philosophers cause for some assertions, concepts, and first principles. Now, it is neither proved nor provable that *Thales* and his first followers gathered their opinions from the Chaldeans, Persians, Indians, and other Orientals, or that they stood in some connection to these. What they borrowed from Egypt was little and can comfortably be integrated on occasion.⁴³⁴

It is worth underlining how Tiedemann here reached the same conclusion as Meiners from the very opposite standpoint. In Meiners's case, the argument against tracing ancient Greek philosophy to an oriental predecessor was that the Orientals and Greeks constituted different human races. For Tiedemann, this conclusion followed from the premise that all human cultures were fundamentally the same. Given this very sameness, Tiedemann argued, one did not need to connect the emergence of different cultures into one continuous movement.

Tiedemann's arguments were connected not only to the genre of mankind's history, but also to the view of the eclectic historians. For the eclectics, philosophy had to be separated from religion: the latter was based on knowledge obtained through revelation, the former on knowledge obtained through reason and examination. The eclectics, however, applied this dis-

⁴³³ Tiedemann, *Griechenlands erste Philosophen*, p. 8.

⁴³⁴ Tiedemann, *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie: Von Thales bis Sokrates*, p. xx.

inction mainly to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Since the pagan barbarians, on the other hand, did *not* gain their knowledge directly through divine revelation, their teachings could be interpreted as the attempts of a primitive reason to understand the world and its principles. Tiedemann, for his part, applied the distinction between philosophy and religion not only to divine truths, but also to pagan thought. Hereby, his use of the notion of the Orient served the purpose of presenting a secularised concept of philosophy.

The Post-Kantian View of the Orient

Meiners and Tiedemann were among the most influential historians of philosophy of their time, but neither of them was part of the quickly advancing Kantian school. Tiedemann, in the preface to *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie*, claimed that he as a historian of philosophy must remain impartial to all philosophical schools,⁴³⁵ but he had also criticised Kant's philosophy in a number of articles in *Hessische Beiträge*.⁴³⁶ Meiners was an even more outspoken anti-Kantian and co-edited the journal *Philosophische Bibliothek*, a main forum for criticism of Kant's philosophy.

As the post-Kantians entered the debates about historiography of philosophy in the 1790s, this background greatly shaped their reception of Tiedemann's and Meiners's respective achievements. Tiedemann was not unconditionally praised, but the post-Kantians frequently complimented his erudition and critical spirit. Meiners, on the other hand, was often rejected as a mere compiler lacking both historical and philosophical insightfulness.⁴³⁷ His opposition to Kantianism was likely an important, albeit usually implicit, reason for the aversion the post-Kantians expressed towards him.

This being said, it is clear that the post-Kantians were influenced by Meiners's and Tiedemann's views of the origin of philosophy. In his article on ancient Greek philosophy, for example, Fülleborn positioned himself

⁴³⁵ "The historian of philosophy has the duty to judge the individual systems and to make their worth, as well as their influence, visible; but according to which measure? Not according to that which he himself finds true or false, for that could easily be untrue in general or become true with time; nor, for the same reason, according to what counts as true or false to his own age. [...] Thus, the merits of individual philosophers are to be measured only according to the conclusiveness and sharpness of their proofs" (Tiedemann, *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie: Von Thales bis Sokrates*, p. ix).

⁴³⁶ Dietrich Tiedemann, "Über die Natur der Metaphysik: Zur Prüfung von Hrn. Professor Kants Grundsätzen", *Hessische Beyträge zur Gelehrsamkeit und Kunst*, no. 1 (1784). See Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, pp. 177–80.

⁴³⁷ See, e.g., Reinhold, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie", pp. 22, 30; Tennemann, "Übersicht", p. 334; Tennemann, "Fortsetzung", p. 67; Carus, *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 84–85, 90. A more positive judgement of Meiners can be found in Buhle, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Theil, Vorrede* (unpaginated).

against previous historians who had talked about a philosophy among the barbarian peoples:

The headline *barbaric* philosophy can be found in every compendium of the history of philosophy. But any average [*mittelmässige*] compendium convinces us that this so-called barbarian philosophy is nothing but an epitome of fantastic poetry that for the most part cannot even be dissolved in experience, and that lacks evidence just as much as it needs it.⁴³⁸

The argument has clear similarities to the one presented by Tiedemann. While Tiedemann did not himself adhere to a Kantian concept of philosophy, his sharpened distinction between religious myths and philosophical examinations fit relatively well with the ideals of the post-Kantian historians. As discussed in earlier chapters, the post-Kantians understood philosophy in terms of reason's self-examination, i.e., as a transcendental science immanent to pure reason itself. From this starting point, it was easy for Fülleborn to make use of Tiedemann's distinction between myths developed by the faculty of fantasy and philosophical cosmogonies developed by argument – that is, by rational examination.⁴³⁹

An even more elaborate version of this view can be found in the introduction to Tennemann's *Geschichte der Philosophie*. In line with the principles of criticism, Tennemann presented reason as the source of philosophy. This reason was already present in man at the lowest levels of culture, where it appeared as the capacity to organise knowledge and actions in accordance with principles:

The need and the capacity to *philosophise* is given to man through *reason*. Reason already expresses itself at its lowest stage as the capacity to connect the manifold of representations into a unity, to research and act in accordance with principles and ends. Every man who is not totally uncultivated [*jeder nicht ganz rohe Mensch*] strives, by virtue of his reason, to connect his representations into a whole and to organise his strivings according to an end.⁴⁴⁰

The highest end of reason was therefore a total unity of both knowledge and action, and it was expressed in the idea of the philosophical system. “The

⁴³⁸ Fülleborn, “Über die Geschichte der ältesten griechischen Philosophie”, p. 37.

⁴³⁹ Fülleborn never authored a full-length history of philosophy, but he did give a brief overview of it in one of his articles: Fülleborn, “Kurze Geschichte der Philosophie”.

⁴⁴⁰ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. xxvi.

thinker in the real sense of the word”, Tennemann wrote, “encompasses the whole sphere of human knowledge and striving and seeks their absolutely final basis and laws. This thinking for the sake of a science is called *philosophising*”.⁴⁴¹

However, at its lowest stages, reason had not yet risen to a clear consciousness of this scientific or philosophical vocation. Philosophising was therefore “the expression of a *higher* culture of reason”,⁴⁴² and the history of philosophy could begin only when this higher level had been reached.⁴⁴³

Like Tiedemann, Tennemann needed to demonstrate why reason’s higher culture began precisely with the Greek pre-Socratics. However, he did not offer any detailed support for this claim, instead simply stating that “as far as the sources we have available inform us, it was only among the Greeks that human spirit reached so far that it raised itself up to the idea of a scientific philosophy and strove to realise this idea”.⁴⁴⁴ Simultaneously, he diplomatically underlined that he did not wish to “deny other nations a philosophical spirit”, and neither did he claim that Greek culture developed totally independently of external influence.⁴⁴⁵ It therefore appears that Tennemann’s view sprang more from Hellenophile inclinations than from active aversion towards ancient non-Greek cultures.

Against the Hellenocentrics

Through Tiedemann and Meiners, Greece was established as a new possible starting point of the history of philosophy. Through Fülleborn and Tennemann, this starting point also became the preferred one among the post-Kantians. It would be a mistake, however, to consider the exclusion of Africa and Asia as definite by the time Tennemann’s *Geschichte der Philosophie* was published. Rather, both Tennemann and his predecessors Tiedemann and Meiners were partisans in a lively debate that would only intensify after their writings had reached the public.

The above examination has shown that at least two types of arguments were used to defend the hellenocentric narrative. First, there was the *empirical* question of whether Greek culture could be understood without relating it to foreign, and above all Egyptian, influence. Meiners took the

⁴⁴¹ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. xxvi.

⁴⁴² Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. xxvi; my emphasis.

⁴⁴³ Cf. Carus, *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 110, 114, 149; Fülleborn, “Kurze Geschichte der Philosophie”, pp. 6, 8.

⁴⁴⁴ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. 3–4.

⁴⁴⁵ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. 3.

most radical stance on this issue, fully rejecting any dependence of Greek culture upon non-Europeans. Tiedemann was somewhat more moderate, claiming that the Greeks borrowed some ideas from Egypt, but that this influence was so little that it could easily be summarised in passing. Similarly, Tennemann wrote that the Greeks did not come up with their sciences independently, but he nonetheless claimed that they had developed these sciences into a unique character with no equal among other peoples.

Second, there was the conceptual question about the nature of philosophy. Meiners was notably uninterested in this issue and did not offer any detailed discussion of it. Tiedemann and the post-Kantians, in contrast, considered it of central importance. They emphasised the distinction between philosophy and mythology, thus gaining a further argument for considering Greece the birthplace of philosophical thought.

Neither of these lines of argument managed to convince all contemporary historians of philosophy. Initially, it was mainly the empirical question of Greece's cultural independence that was the object of debate.

Greece and Egypt

As early as the 1780s, a different option had been presented by Friedrich Victor Lebrecht Plessing. While Plessing advocated that the history of philosophy, and ultimately the history of human understanding in general, should not begin with so-called barbarian or savage peoples, he did present a strong argument that it must begin with the very first civic society. This society, he claimed, was none other than the Egyptian, which undoubtedly predated the Greeks. In a series of writings he thus attempted to show in detail how Egyptian thought was the first and main source for the teachings of the pre-Socratics.⁴⁴⁶

Plessing's views might not have had the same success as those of Tiedemann, Meiners, and Tennemann, but they did offer a way to criticise the conception of philosophy's Greek origins. This is exemplified by J.G. Buhle's review of Tennemann's *Geschichte der Philosophie* published in *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*.⁴⁴⁷ The review (which

⁴⁴⁶ Friedrich Victor Lebrecht Plessing, *Memnonium oder Versuche zur Enthüllung der Geheimnisse des Alterthums* (Leipzig: Maygandschen Buchhandlung, 1787); Friedrich Victor Lebrecht Plessing, *Versuche zur Aufklärung der Philosophie des ältesten Alterthums* (Leipzig: Crusius, 1788); Friedrich Victor Lebrecht Plessing, *Osiris und Sokrates* (Berlin/Stralsund: Lange, 1787).

⁴⁴⁷ The review was anonymous, but Buhle is identified as the author in a handwritten marginal note in the digital edition made available by the University Library of Göttingen. See *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*, n.d. <http://resolver.sub.uni-goettingen.de/purl?PPN31973076X_1799> [accessed 14 April 2025].

Tennemann himself quoted at length in the preface to the second volume)⁴⁴⁸ was highly critical of Tennemann's choice of starting point and explicitly referred to Plessing as an alternative:

The scientific culture and philosophy of the Greeks is in many regards connected to Egyptian culture. Under the assumption that Greek philosophy really was independent enough for the researcher of the history of philosophy to fully pass over a careful consideration of the Egyptians (an assumption that always is problematic), then there are nonetheless recent scholars and astute historians (e.g., Plessing) who for historical reasons fully reject this independence of Greek philosophy.⁴⁴⁹

To some extent, Tiedemann, Meiners, and Tennemann had already anticipated this objection. Meiners stands out for his radical way of answering to it: he wholly rejected the claim that Egypt influenced Greek culture and science in any significant way, instead proposing that Egyptian culture had its roots in Greek influence. This rather far-fetched standpoint does not appear to have been successful and was rarely repeated by later historians of philosophy. Tiedemann and Tennemann, for their part, based their exclusion of Egypt on theoretical and conceptual distinctions between philosophy and mythology. The review of Tennemann illustrates that these arguments, too, failed to convince all contemporary historians and that the ambition of going further back than the Greeks had not been unanimously given up.

The Universality of Reason

If the question of the inclusion of Egypt in the history of philosophy was above all empirical, there was also a more principal issue at stake in defining philosophy's beginnings. We have already seen how the post-Kantians understood philosophy as a fundamental need of reason: reason had no higher task than to achieve a self-understanding in the form of a perfected philosophical system. But if philosophy was reason's highest vocation, how could the historian be justified in excluding a large number of peoples from the history of philosophy? Must there not be philosophical attempts – however primitive and unsatisfactory – even in the most ancient human societies?

⁴⁴⁸ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Zweiter Band*, pp. v–xvi.

⁴⁴⁹ Johann Gottlieb Buhle, "Geschichte der Philosophie von D. Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann" [Review], *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*, no. 13 (1799), p. 123.

This idea, furthermore, seemed to fit well with the emerging historiographical ideals of the late German Enlightenment. As shown in chapter 1, the historians of this period often emphasised that the history of philosophy must form a continuous whole rather than an aggregate of disconnected sources. Furthermore, since philosophy was considered a product of reason, the step was not long from the history of philosophy to the history of man's cultural-political development. In line with this understanding, the thought of pre-Greek cultures could lend itself to a narrative of reason's gradual development from a primitive to a cultured and systematic worldview.

We have already seen how Tennemann attempted to counter these objections. While he did claim that reason was expressed even in the most primitive human societies, he still contended that reason could begin to *philosophise* only at a later stage in its development. However, there were post-Kantian historians who did not share this view. In his *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie*, Buhle argued that reason's gradual development towards a scientific form must necessarily have begun as soon as man rose "from the animal stage where mere instinct ruled" and when "the consciousness of reason was awakened in him".⁴⁵⁰ Therefore, it was impossible for the historian to identify a single people as the originators of philosophy, and neither was it possible to justify the total exclusion of any people.⁴⁵¹

Buhle's description of man's first attempts at explaining the world was similar to Tiedemann's. Like Tiedemann, he claimed that the primitive man had a tendency to imagine living actors behind natural events, and that superstitious anthropomorphism was therefore the first form of human knowledge.⁴⁵² However, whereas Tiedemann had sharply distinguished between such anthropomorphic fables and philosophical inquiry, Buhle described them as intimately connected. He took the explanation of the world in mythical cosmogonies to flow from the demands of reason, not from a fantasy sharply separated from these demands. For this reason, Buhle elected to begin his history with accounts of the Egyptians, Hebrews, Phoenicians, Persians, Indians, Chinese, Celts, and Scandinavians.

Buhle's historical theory of reason thus illustrates that the exclusion of mythology from the history of philosophy was not a necessary consequence of Kantian principles; these principles could just as well be used to argue for

⁴⁵⁰ Buhle, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Theil*, p. 11.

⁴⁵¹ Cf. also Johann Gottlieb Buhle, *Geschichte des philosophirenden menschlichen Verstandes. Erster Theil* (Lemgo: Meyer, 1793), p. 15.

⁴⁵² Buhle, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Theil*, p. 12.

a necessary connection between mythology and subsequent philosophical cosmogonies.

In the 19th century, similar arguments would be employed to great effect against the Hellenocentric narrative. As this happened, however, both post-Kantian system philosophy and the post-Kantian historiographical discussions had moved on to a new stage. Not least, a number of thinkers sought to reinterpret the relation between philosophy's eternal nature and history's ever-changing movement. Before returning to the question of philosophy's origins in Greece or the Orient, it is necessary to examine this development.

Grohmann's Dilemma: The Conflict Between the System and the History of Philosophy

The German idealist philosopher J.C.A. Grohmann had a respectable enough career: he became *Privatdozent* in Wittenberg at the age of 29 in 1798 and then ordinary professor in 1803. He was also a strikingly prolific author, publishing on topics as wide-ranging as child psychology, the art of gardening, phrenology, aesthetics, and university history. It must be said, though, that Grohmann never managed to rise to considerable philosophical fame. He remained a peripheral character in the environment of post-Kantian thought, and today his name is all but forgotten among scholars of the period.

But in fact, Grohmann played an important role in the development of German idealist philosophy. His influence stems chiefly from an innovative essay published in 1797, entitled *Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*.⁴⁵³ In this essay, Grohmann argued that philosophy and history must be considered two fundamentally different types of knowledge: whereas philosophy was concerned with eternal, unconditioned truth given *a priori*, history was concerned with empirical facts. Furthermore, the form of philosophy was systematic while that of history had to be contingent. Uniting these concepts was thus not an easy task. Indeed, Grohmann argued that they were to some extent irreconcilable, and that the history of philosophy might therefore be a contradiction in terms.

To resolve this problem, Grohmann made a proposal that might at first glance appear preposterous: namely, that the history of philosophy could not be chronological. In Grohmann's view, the system was the only form that could fit the material of which philosophy consisted, and this form was fundamentally different from that of chronological development. Therefore,

⁴⁵³ A reworked version of the essay with the new title "Was heißt: Geschichte der Philosophie?" was published the following year. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

a true history of philosophy could be achieved only if the historian organised his sources according to a systematic form given *a priori*.

To Grohmann's contemporaries, this proposal did indeed appear somewhat absurd. Prominent historians such as Tennemann mentioned his essay with ridicule. At the same time, however, Grohmann seems to have put his finger on a difficult but important topical issue. After the publication of his essay, the points raised by him became the subject of intense discussion. Tennemann himself provides an example of this: in the preface to his *Geschichte der Philosophie*, Tennemann devoted significant space to the question of how philosophy could develop in chronological time, making explicit reference to Grohmann's essay. Carus similarly discussed Grohmann's claims in depth in his *Ideen*. Even if neither of them was convinced by Grohmann's proposal, they had to admit that the problem he had posed could not be ignored.

But Grohmann was not just influential among historians of philosophy; he would also play a role in the development of idealist system philosophy in general. Through his article, he had highlighted a crucial issue for any philosophy with systematic ambitions: that this presupposed a perspective outside of chronological development, outside of temporality as such. This issue was put at the forefront of the philosophical projects of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, who all attempted to resolve it by reinterpreting the concepts of philosophy, history, and system. It is fair to say, then, that Grohmann gave a key impulse to the development of these concepts within the framework of German idealism.⁴⁵⁴

Despite this, Grohmann remains a little-studied figure in the era of German idealism. He is almost never mentioned in overarching works on the period, and in the more specialised scholarship on post-Kantian and idealist historiography, the interpretations of his work leave much to be desired.⁴⁵⁵

A main issue with earlier readings of Grohmann lies in their interpretations of his concept of history. Geldsetzer, for example, takes his whole

⁴⁵⁴ For a more thorough justification of this claim, see chapter 5 below.

⁴⁵⁵ This is not to say that Grohmann has been ignored by the prominent scholars of this field. Braun goes particularly far in highlighting his originality, citing him as "one of the most systematic and rigorous thinkers of the era" and noting that he "long before Hegel emphasised the contradiction hidden in the concept of 'history of philosophy'" (Braun, *Geschichte der Philosophiegeschichte*, p. 249). However, Braun's reading remains chiefly text-immanent and offers little broader contextualisation. The same can be said of Gueroult and, to some extent, Piaia et al. In more recent studies, Grohmann is rarely mentioned and even more rarely studied in depth. An exception is Valentin Pluder, "The End of the Story, the End of History", in *From Hegel to Windelband: Historiography of Philosophy in the 19th Century*, ed. by Gerald Hartung and Valentin Pluder (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015).

argument to be based on an antiquated understanding of historical knowledge that was already “dying off” by the late 18th century.⁴⁵⁶ There is a certain truth to this, but it is not the whole truth. In contrast to this, I argue that Grohmann’s importance stems from the very opposite state of affairs: he managed to identify a tension lying in the *modern* concept of history that was just establishing itself in his time. Only by understanding this can we appreciate why Grohmann’s article stirred up such controversy in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Geldsetzer’s interpretation therefore needs to be revised, and doing so is one of the aims of this chapter.

This chapter therefore highlights Grohmann’s importance and illustrates that his writings deserve more thorough scholarly attention. It should be underlined, however, that my chief aim is not to offer an examination of Grohmann himself. Rather, I am concerned above all with the problems he posed and the way they influenced the philosophical discussions during the period as a whole. With this aim, I take Grohmann’s essay as a point of departure and then move on to trace the development of the problems he posed in it. As I argue, Grohmann’s essay can be said to mark the transition to a new stage of the post-Kantian debates on the history of philosophy. In this and the following chapter, I will therefore move forward chronologically from the scope of the previous parts of the study. The present chapter focuses on Grohmann and the responses to him by the post-Kantian historians Tennemann and Carus, whereas chapter 5 discusses the reception of Grohmann by idealist historians belonging to the Fichtean, Schellingian, and Hegelian traditions.

Grohmann’s Proposal

Grohmann was firmly rooted in the tradition of post-Kantian historiography of philosophy. In chapter 1, I identified a number of characteristics of this tradition. First, the post-Kantians assigned themselves the task of explaining and resolving the apparent discord and conflict in the history of philosophy. Second, they had a particular understanding of what a satisfactory solution must contain: in their view, it could be fulfilled only through a neutral, universally valid criterion through which different philosophies could be compared and related to one another. This criterion must not be taken from any particular philosophy – if it were, it would hardly serve as a neutral one – but must nonetheless be related to all philosophies. Third, the post-Kantians agreed that this sought-after criterion could be found only in reason

⁴⁵⁶ Geldsetzer, *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte*, p. 30.

as such, the nature of which had been wholly uncovered only through the *critique* of reason. With the stable base of Kant's revolutionary criticism, then, it had for the very first time become possible to approach the eternal struggles in the history of philosophy and resolve them once and for all.

An important effect of this was that it gave the history of philosophy a characteristic that differed from all other types of historical accounts. Namely, as argued by Fülleborn, Maimon, and Kant, both its subject and its overarching structure were actually given *a priori* – they were revealed by the critique of pure reason itself.

Grohmann shared these views whole-heartedly. In his essay, he described the history of philosophy as a “peace treaty” through which philosophical quarrels were brought to a definite end. Such a peace treaty, he also believed, could be formulated only on the basis of the Kantian critique:

And here, then, is the remarkable Gordian knot that until now has not been untangled! For although the tools to untangle it are there, since the *Critique of Pure Reason* has been published, it has not yet been used for the purposes of a history of philosophy[.]⁴⁵⁷

Like other critical philosophers before him, Grohmann also took Kantian criticism to signify a wholly neutral perspective located beyond any partisan philosophical viewpoint. It was a “philosophy without system”, for its system was only reason itself rather than any of its particular expressions. If the historian elevated himself to the standpoint of criticism, he would therefore be able to gaze over the whole realm of possible philosophical systems and clearly see their relations to one another.⁴⁵⁸

How could this perspective be achieved? Here, too, Grohmann shared the outlook of his predecessors. The historian, he believed, must abstract from all merely contingent, empirical circumstances surrounding philosophical systems and strive to grasp their pure rational content. We have seen that Grohmann was among those who criticised the philosophical-historical value of biographies.⁴⁵⁹ Similarly, he argued that the historian of philosophy need not occupy himself with the cultural or political contexts of particular thinkers or schools. To the extent that a system of thought was indeed philosophical, its value and legitimacy must be independent of all such surrounding circumstances. The “inner” history of philosophy must be an *a*

⁴⁵⁷ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 99.

⁴⁵⁸ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 99.

⁴⁵⁹ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 60.

priori history of reason itself, and such a history must be sharply distinguished from a history of the empirical “fate” of philosophy.⁴⁶⁰

But this is simultaneously the point where Grohmann added a crucial novelty compared with other post-Kantian authors. Even though he essentially followed them in formulating the criteria of a satisfactory history of philosophy, he was far from agreeing with them on how these criteria could in practice be met. In fact, one of his central points was that Reinhold, Fülleborn, and Goess had not managed to live up to their own ideals. In particular, he took issue with their adherence to the chronological form of history.

Grohmann exemplified his point with the difference between Spinoza’s pantheism and the philosophical system “where the infinite being is different from the world”. “How should these systems be posited or ordered in a history of philosophy?”, he asked. “According to chronology? According to when Spinoza lived, when the systems, as it were, appeared in reality?”⁴⁶¹ The point of these rhetorical questions was, of course, that such an order would not say a lot about the philosophical relation between the systems in question. It would remain an *outer* account, an account limiting itself to empirical circumstances without touching upon the intraphilosophical relation between the systems.

The reason for this was that philosophical systems, in Grohmann’s view, constituted a unique form of historical object. General history, he wrote, was concerned with facts or events that occurred in the empirical world. They were “individual, particular, singular facts that are bound to time, to the particular time in which they appeared: they were at one point non-existent and are now gone by”.⁴⁶² This was not so for philosophical systems. As rooted in the *a priori* laws of reason, they had neither beginning nor end in terms of their logical or rational existence. They were “given at once with and in philosophy, regardless of precisely when a man evoked them in the world of appearances as individual facts”.⁴⁶³ Even though one system was first formulated after another, each of them had an atemporal value that must have been the same both before and after its empirical conception. The philosophical standing of Spinozism was not dependent on the fact that Spinoza lived in the 17th century: philosophically, the interpretation of it would need to be the same had he lived a hundred years earlier or later.

⁴⁶⁰ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 59–60.

⁴⁶¹ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 48.

⁴⁶² Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 48–49.

⁴⁶³ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 49.

The point was all the more powerful since the premises were already present in the writings of Reinhold, Goess, and the other post-Kantian historians. They all agreed with the understanding of philosophies as rooted in the necessary *a priori* structure of reason and with the conclusion that the critique of reason was the only valid principle for structuring a history of philosophy. It was with precisely this argument that they objected to the value of biographies and histories of other empirical circumstances surrounding philosophical thought. They just appeared to have missed that temporality and chronology were also subject to the same exclusion. This was at least the way Grohmann interpreted the issue. In his detailed review of previous attempts to define the history of philosophy, he noted that the conflict between philosophy's eternal nature and concepts such as "change" and "development" had simply gone unnoticed.⁴⁶⁴

Systematic and Empirical Knowledge

To a certain extent, Grohmann thus simply added a new conclusion that already followed from the premises of previous post-Kantian programmes for the history of philosophy. As it turns out, however, this conclusion had rather far reaching-implications. For unlike other excluded empirical circumstances such as biographies, the concept of chronology appeared to be an essential characteristic of history as such. This posed a serious problem. If philosophy must by its very nature be located beyond the sphere of temporal change but history *was* the study of the sphere of temporal change, would it not simply follow that the history of philosophy was impossible, that philosophy could not be the object of historical examination? This was a question that Grohmann took seriously – so seriously that he opened the essay by tracing the concepts of philosophy and history back to the concept of knowledge as such. As an overarching structure, he distinguished between three forms of knowledge:

(1) First, there was knowledge of a truly scientific nature. Grohmann here used a concept of science (*Wissenschaft*) in the sense that was typical of German Enlightenment thought: as denoting solely knowledge grounded in the deployment of reason. In the strictest sense, science could therefore not depend on sensory, empirical experience, but must limit itself to pure concepts:

⁴⁶⁴ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 64–90. Grohmann's point was even more pressing since Reinhold had in fact argued for philosophy's unchanging nature in other contexts. See, e.g., Reinhold, "Über den Begriff der Philosophie", p. 13.

The concept of science can, as formal determination, only be something given *a priori*, for it is not conceivable how something that has absolutely certain boundaries and requires fixed, indissoluble connections inside of the boundaries could be abstracted and exhausted from experience, from the accidental connection of things and from the boundaries of these that are never documented with certainty.⁴⁶⁵

Although Grohmann did not state so explicitly, it appears that he admitted the existence of only two sciences: philosophy and mathematics.⁴⁶⁶

For Grohmann, scientific knowledge was furthermore synonymous with *systematic* knowledge, so that science and system referred to one and the same thing. When reason developed its concepts and strung them together through laws and principles given *a priori*, it gave rise to precisely a systematic edifice in which each point had a necessary relation to every other one. There could be no arbitrariness in this structure – the mark of science was that it concerned only the necessary. System was furthermore related to the idea of the wholeness of knowledge so that the boundaries of a science must all be clearly defined *a priori*.

(2) So what status could then be afforded to the knowledge and study of empirical phenomena? To Grohmann, it could never be admitted as scientific knowledge in the strict sense, but it could strive towards a structure *lent* from science – i.e., it could not be a system, but *systemmäßig*, “system-like”.⁴⁶⁷ This could be achieved if *a priori* principles were applied to empirical phenomena through a schematism and if the interpretation of these phenomena proceeded from the individual appearances to the general laws underlying them.⁴⁶⁸ Grohmann illustrated this form of knowledge with the taxonomical study of species. Here, the empirical phenomena were grouped together according to concepts and brought into an order that was not given in experience itself, but imposed on experience by reason.⁴⁶⁹ The result would not be a system per se, for unlike the system, it could not constitute an *a priori*

⁴⁶⁵ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 6.

⁴⁶⁶ That philosophy was scientific in Grohmann's view should be obvious. That he also considered mathematics to be a science in the strict sense is evident from his discussions of the scientific construction of concepts, implicitly referring to Kant's concept of construction used in the first *Critique* and the *Prolegomena*. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A713/B741; Kant, *Prolegomena*, p. 20 [AA4: 272].

⁴⁶⁷ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 11: cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. A645–49/B673–76.

⁴⁶⁸ Grohmann's terminology is taken, of course, from Kant. See the chapter “On the schematism of the pure concepts of understanding” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. A137/B176, A670/B698).

⁴⁶⁹ Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. A651–52/B679–80.

whole but was always provisional. It could, however, manage to harmonise experience with reason and form a bridge between *a priori* principles and empirical, sensuous experience by subsuming the latter under the former.⁴⁷⁰

(3) Grohmann thought that not all empirical knowledge lived up to this character of system-likeness, however. In fact, not all knowledge *should* strive towards this ideal. Instead, some types of knowledge concerned the particular *as* particular and had no reason to subsume it under more general rules. In this case, the phenomena were not brought into an order given by reason, but left in the order they appeared in experience. The structure was here merely “copied” from the senses and may not in any way be modified.⁴⁷¹

This might seem like an unnecessary digression from the question of the concept of the history of philosophy, but the relevance of the examination finally becomes clear in Grohmann’s discussion of the scientific status of general history. As the study and narration of empirical events, history could clearly not be a science in the strict sense according to Grohmann’s conceptual distinctions. As Grohmann argued, neither could it ultimately be system-like. Instead, he wrote,

the aim of general world history is to precisely exhibit the particular as a particular, the events as singular, particular facts, where they naturally must also remain in precisely the outer connection and order according to which they present themselves in the world of appearances; and [...] it contradicts the whole determination and, so to speak, the will of this history if the general or a general is regarded in these events. Thus, it is also very unphilosophical when one talks about a philosophical course of history[.]⁴⁷²

This was so precisely because history was bound to the form of chronological narration, a form that was copied from experience rather than imposed by reason. Given this, however, there appeared to exist a considerable conceptual tension between history and philosophy. They belonged to different categories of knowledge and strove towards fundamentally different aims: history had the task of grasping the particular, philosophy the universal. They were also formed from different sources: whereas philosophy was rooted in pure reason free from the interference of sensuous experience, history was rooted in sensuous experience free from the interference of reason. It is interesting to note that Grohmann explicitly criticised contemporary efforts

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 13–14.

⁴⁷¹ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 20.

⁴⁷² Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 23.

at making history philosophical, including the efforts by some of the Kantians.⁴⁷³ To Grohmann, any such attempt must amount to robbing history of its unique character, something that neither history nor philosophy could gain from.

But if this was so for the philosophy of history, must it not also be so for the history of philosophy? At first, Grohmann appeared to reach this conclusion. "It is indeed curious", he wrote,

when one hears of a history of philosophy[.] History, which in itself contains the attribute of diversity, multiplicity, change, philosophy, which [...] excludes all meaning of change, transformation. Two, as it seems, conflicting concepts nonetheless put together to make out the general "history of philosophy".⁴⁷⁴

Here, then, the issue was posed in its most pointed form: History and philosophy were revealed to be so fundamentally opposed that the unity of them seemed simply impossible.

* * *

Grohmann's conclusion is not wholly self-evident. Against it, one could argue that even if the ideas of reason are eternal, the attempts at grasping and realising them may well be subject to historical transformation. Such transformations could furthermore be considered to constitute precisely a gradual progress aimed at the idea of philosophy as a regulative end, and it is not obvious that the history of this process would constitute a contradiction in terms.

Grohmann argued that such a structure would not be in line with the concept of philosophy. Here, however, one might be tempted to accuse Grohmann of falling into a category error. For even if history and philosophy are different forms of knowledge and aim at different purposes, there appears to be no inherent contradiction in treating philosophy in a historical manner. Such a history would perhaps not itself *be* a philosophy, but it would still be *about* philosophy in the same way that a history of art can be about art without constituting an artwork of its own.

Grohmann did in fact touch upon these objections and propose an answer to them. A history of philosophy, he argued, had philosophy as its material.

⁴⁷³ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 22.

⁴⁷⁴ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 27–28.

Now, the form into which a given material could suitably be put must follow from the material itself. In philosophy, this form could be only the systematic one, and the chronological form of history was thus alien to the demands of the material such a history treated.⁴⁷⁵

It is far from clear that this argument succeeded in refuting the objection, and we shall see that later authors challenged Grohmann on this particular issue. But perhaps the objection actually lies beside Grohmann's point. Of course, he did not deny that there had existed philosophers and philosophical thought following one another chronologically in the past. Neither did he claim that it was in principle impossible to write about sources relating to this past of philosophy according to a chronological structure. What he maintained was that such a history would serve a purpose external to the philosophical science as such. Once philosophy had reached a certain point in its development, it would in this case be unnecessary for it to gaze back at its previous states. The issue at stake for him was, however, that of securing a history of philosophy wholly *immanent* to the idea of philosophy, i.e., one that was also eternally relevant for philosophy in the present. Such a history, he believed, could not view past thought as antiquated attempts, but had to approach them as eternally present in reason itself.

The point, then, was that if one studied past philosophies as empirical facts of history, the result would be a history about philosophy that could not, in itself, be called philosophical. If, on the other hand, one abstracted from the empirical-historical circumstances of past philosophies and examined their purely rational contents, the result would be philosophical, but not historical. Both of these examinations would concern the same object – i.e., past thinkers and their systems – but in approaching them, it appeared necessary to choose between a philosophical and a historical method.

Interpreted in this way, Grohmann's concern does not fall into the category error outlined above. Instead, the issue is now transformed into the question of whether a history of philosophy can be at once historical and philosophically relevant. This was of great importance since the ideal put forth by the post-Kantian historians was precisely that of a *philosophical* history of philosophy.

⁴⁷⁵ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 28.

Grohmann's Concept of the History of Philosophy

Grohmann was not content with noting this problem and leaving it unresolved. The task he took upon himself was to find a way in which a history of philosophy *was* in fact thinkable and realisable.

For Grohmann, there was indeed a relation of contradiction between philosophy and history as forms of knowledge, and there was no way to unite these concepts without encroaching on the nature of either. However, it might be possible to encroach on the nature of one of them without fully giving it up, to achieve a *modified* version of one of the two concepts.

Grohmann was not ready to compromise with philosophy's character as *a priori* and systematic. Therefore, he was left with the option of modifying the concept of *history*. Those aspects of it that did not contradict the essence of philosophy should be preserved, but those that did stand in conflict with the *a priori* character of philosophy must in his view be rejected outright:

It should be clear that the form of a knowledge must always be determined by the material and by the aim one has in treating this material. Thus, even though the word "history" in its usual meaning includes the attribute of chronological enumeration, it does not follow from this that also the history of philosophy must be bound to such a chronological procedure. For the material of philosophy and the proper aim one has in this history may well necessitate its own determination of form and type of treatment.⁴⁷⁶

In fact, if this step was allowed, Grohmann believed that the apparent animosity between philosophy and history could resolve itself rather easily. For as it turned out, the contradictions were all related to the respective forms characteristic of these fields of knowledge: philosophy was systematic while history was chronological and contingent. The history of philosophy must therefore give up the form of history in favour of that of philosophy. Rather than a chronological recounting of philosophical systems in the order they had empirically arisen, it must be a systematic account of their interrelations *in abstraction* from their empirical or factual creation.

Such a structure, Grohmann argued, could still retain a number of characteristics proper to history. First, both general history and the history of philosophy concerned something manifold. The difference was simply that this manifold in general history consisted of empirical events, whereas in the history of philosophy it consisted of "necessary systems" rooted in pure

⁴⁷⁶ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 28.

reason.⁴⁷⁷ Second, history's way of connecting events as cause and effect could be substituted with the philosophical connection of philosophemes, propositions, and systems as logically or rationally based on one another. Thus, a form of logical connection purified of empirical-causal connotations and temporal change was retained. Finally, Grohmann conceded that the history of philosophy might do well to focus only on those systems that had actually already occurred and been proposed in empirical reality. Furthermore, he allowed that the time, place, and authorship of them should be noted (albeit not used as organisational principle).

Like his predecessors, Grohmann believed that the concept of pragmatic history could here serve as an inspiration. He did not agree that the history of philosophy could itself be a pragmatic history in the usual sense of the term, however, for such a history was still dependent on data gathered in experience, and it thus remained system-like rather than truly systematic.⁴⁷⁸ Furthermore, since the history of philosophy must abstract from temporality, the connection of the parts could not constitute a chronological sequence. Instead, the structure Grohmann proposed appears to be more similar to a taxonomy – indeed, he explicitly referred to Kant's "History of Pure Reason" as a blueprint.⁴⁷⁹

Towards the end of the essay, Grohmann presented this ambition through a visually striking metaphor:

The future historian of philosophy – for until now, he does not yet exist – must stand on a height from which everything can be overviewed. Like the landscape painter standing outside of the landscape he captures, the historian of philosophy must stand outside of the realm of philosophical systems so that all lines, all rays of light converge in him and so that he can measure everything out and follow everything to its outermost boundaries.⁴⁸⁰

The paragraph is telling of Grohmann's ambitions for a number of reasons. First, it shows that Grohmann was conscious of the novelty of his proposal: a history of philosophy according to his guidelines had never been written, but was rather a task for the *future* historian.⁴⁸¹ Indeed, since it depended on a

⁴⁷⁷ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 33.

⁴⁷⁸ See, e.g., Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 57.

⁴⁷⁹ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 63–64 (note 2), 99–100.

⁴⁸⁰ Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 99.

⁴⁸¹ The only exception was, according to Grohmann, Kant's first *Critique*. In fact, however, a similar model had also been suggested by Fülleborn at the close of his "Short History of Philosophy". See Grohmann, *Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 99–100; Fülleborn, "Kurze Geschichte der Philosophie", pp. 45–50.

critique of reason, it could not have been achieved before Kant's revolution of metaphysics. Second, the image chosen by Grohmann to illustrate this novel form of history is ripe with meaning. It reiterated the ambition of impartiality through the perspective of elevation. Simultaneously, it emphasised that the kind of impartiality at stake must be one in which the historian fully grasped the nature of reason and philosophy as such; he must find the point where "all rays of light converge in him". Furthermore, the comparison between the philosophical historian and the painter evokes connotations of artistic genius and aesthetic power of judgement. Finally, it is crucial that the history of philosophy was depicted as a landscape. It was concerned, in other words, with a *spatial* organisation between systems rooted in reason, not with a *temporal* organisation in which events followed one another. Grohmann could hardly have found an image more suited to his proposed revolution in philosophical historiography.

The Animosity between Philosophy and History

Grohmann's article was met with strong reactions. The anonymous reviewer in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* was not convinced. Grohmann, he wrote, wanted to "avoid one error, namely, to include something in the concept [of the history of philosophy] that is incompatible with one component – philosophy"; however, this led to the committing of "a much graver error, namely, the total annihilation of the other component, i.e., history".⁴⁸² As we shall see, Tennemann argued in a similar way and ultimately rejected Grohmann's proposal of a non-chronological history as simply absurd, and Carus reached a similar verdict. Nevertheless, both of these authors had to admit that even though Grohmann's *solution* did not satisfy them, the *problem* he had posed could not be ignored. Indeed, after the publication of the article, this problem seemed to be the most crucial one facing the historian of philosophy; any respectable scholar of the subject now had to propose his own solution to it.⁴⁸³

So what was it that made the problem posed by Grohmann so crucial in the eyes of his contemporaries? Why did Tennemann and Carus find it essential to address it? As I shall argue, the reason was that Grohmann had identified a tension immanent to the post-Kantian concept of history as such

⁴⁸² "Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie von Joh. Christian Aug. Grohmann" [Review], *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, 1798.118 (1798), p. 107.

⁴⁸³ Apart from the authors discussed in detail below, see, e.g., Carl Friedrich Bachmann, *Ueber Geschichte der Philosophie* (Jena: Crökerschen Buchhandlung, 1811), p. 63.

– a tension that, were it not resolved, indeed threatened to undermine the post-Kantian programme for the history of philosophy. To elaborate on this, I shall move on to a contextualisation of Grohmann’s article in relation to the modern concept of history. I claim that Grohmann found this concept unsatisfactory for two particularly important reasons: because it was intimately related to, first, the notion of *empirical, a posteriori knowledge* and, second, the notion of *progress*.

Philosophical and Empirical Knowledge

In the technical language of German 17th- and 18th-century school philosophy, the adjective *historisch* did not mainly refer to past events and the study of them. Rather, *historisch* (especially when used attributively with nouns such as *Erkenntnis* and *Wissen*) was a synonym of empirical knowledge in general. It simply denoted *knowledge of fact*.⁴⁸⁴

This use of the term can be traced back to antiquity, but in German philosophy it had been put into its most systematic use by Christian Wolff and his followers. In his *Discursus praeleminalis de philosophia in genere*, Wolff had let “historical” denote “knowledge of those things which are” or “bare knowledge of the fact”.⁴⁸⁵ In this sense, historical knowledge was sharply distinguished from philosophical knowledge. For unlike historical knowledge, he stated, philosophy

progresses further and exhibits the reason of the fact so that it be understood why something of this sort could occur. Who indeed does not see a great difference here? Bare knowledge of the fact and knowledge of the reason of that fact are by no means the same thing.⁴⁸⁶

This distinction subsequently became commonplace in Wolffian textbooks. Hermann Samuel Reimarius, for example, defined philosophical concepts as “those that contain within them the ground of the things and their nature” and that “consequently explain how and why the things are possible”. Historical concepts by contrast “only represent the reality of the thing

⁴⁸⁴ In the following discussion I will focus on the development of this concept in Germany. For an overview of its influence in France, see Piaia, “The Histories of Philosophy in France in the Age of Descartes”.

⁴⁸⁵ Christian Wolff, *Preliminary Discourse on Philosophy in General* (Indianapolis/New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), p. 3, 5. Original Latin edition: Christian Wolff, *Philosophia rationalis sive logica* (Frankfurt/Leipzig, 1732).

⁴⁸⁶ Wolff, *Preliminary Discourse*, p. 5.

according to experience and external characteristics".⁴⁸⁷ Georg Friedrich Meier simplified the distinction by basing it solely on the concept of reason: for him, philosophical knowledge was rational while historical knowledge was not.⁴⁸⁸ Here, we can clearly see that historical and philosophical knowledges were taken to differ not only in their contents, but also in the faculties in which they were grounded: philosophy sprang from reason while history sprang from empirical experience. They were thus knowledges of two separate kinds, both qualitatively and quantitatively distinct from each other.⁴⁸⁹ For the rationalist Leibniz-Wolffian school, the concept of the historical thus served as a negative definition of philosophy: the task of philosophy was to reach beyond the historical by transforming it into rational insight.

Kant inherited the Wolffian distinction between history and philosophy and ascribed to it an equally foundational role in his critical philosophy.⁴⁹⁰ His most elaborate description of it occurs in the "Architectonic" in the first *Critique*:

If I abstract from all content of cognition, objectively considered, then all cognition, considered subjectively, is either historical or rational. Historical cognition is *cognitio ex datis*, a rational cognition, however, *cognitio ex principiis*. However a cognition may have been given originally, it is still historical for him who possesses it if he cognizes it only to the degree and extent that it has been given to him from elsewhere, whether it has been given to him through immediate experience or told to him or even given to him through instruction (general cognitions).⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁷ Hermann Samuel Reimarus, *Die Vernunftlehre*, 3rd ed. (Hamburg: Bohn, 1766), pp. 72–73.

⁴⁸⁸ Georg Friedrich Meier, *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre* (Halle: Gebauer, 1752), pp. 6–7. It is worth noting that Kant used this textbook for his lectures on logic. See Giuseppe Micheli, "Philosophy and Historiography: The Kantian Turning-Point", in *Models of the History of Philosophy. Volume III: The Second Enlightenment and the Kantian Age*, ed. by Gregorio Piaia and Giovanni Santinello (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), p. 704; Michael Albrecht, "Kants Kritik der historischen Erkenntnis – ein Bekenntnis zu Wolff?", *Studia Leibnitiana*, 14.1 (1982).

⁴⁸⁹ For further examples of the distinction, see Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Metaphysics: A Critical Translation with Kant's Elucidations, Selected Notes, and Related Materials*, ed. by Courtney D. Fugate and John Hymers (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 247; Johanna Charlotte Unzer, *Grundriß einer Weltweisheit für das Frauenzimmer* (Halle: Hemmerde, 1767), p. 3–4; Johann Christoph Mayer, *Gründlicher Vorbericht zur Weltweisheit oder zur Philosophie* (Regensburg: Seiffart, 1753), pp. 4–18, 66–67.

⁴⁹⁰ A detailed account of Kant's relation to Wolff in this regard is given by Albrecht, "Kants Kritik der historischen Erkenntnis – ein Bekenntnis zu Wolff?"

⁴⁹¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. A835–36/B863–64; cf. Kant, "Lose Blätter", p. 340.

This distinction would live on and be further elaborated by post-Kantians in the 1790s. A clear example is Reinhold, who presented his definition of philosophy precisely by juxtaposing it with the historical:

Cognition is called *historical* [*historisch*] insofar as it depends on the experience of oneself or someone else and *philosophical* insofar as it depends on *thought*. The *historical* in our cognition is that which we owe to perception, and thus the use of our *senses*, whereas the *philosophical* is that which we owe to reasoning [*Raisonnement*], and thus to the use of reason. The *existence* of the thing and its properties is *perceived*, the way the thing with its predicates is *connected* to other things is *thought*. The senses deliver the *manifold*, which is the matter of our cognitions of the objects of experience, whereas reason brings about the *unity*, through which all manifolds in our cognitions as such are connected.⁴⁹²

It is striking that Reinhold presented this distinction in his article on the concept of the history of philosophy. Given this context, one could be led to think that a history of philosophy was in his eyes indeed impossible. But this conclusion would, of course, be premature. It must once again be emphasised that neither Kant nor Reinhold took *historisch* to refer to the study of past events. Historical-as-factual denoted something different than historical-as-past.

This is the background against which Geldsetzer interprets Grohmann's essay. In his interpretation, Grohmann based his argument precisely on the concept of *historische Erkenntnis*, and not on the modern notion of *Geschichte* that arose in the late German Enlightenment. Geldsetzer therefore takes Grohmann's argument to be based on a "dying concept" of history.⁴⁹³ Similarly, in the *Models of the History of Philosophy*, Giuseppe Micheli contextualises Grohmann's essay in the following way:

In reality, Grohmann was still working, more than it might seem, within the school tradition that distinguished between "historical cognition" (*historisch* in the sense of *faktisch*, that is empirical, merely *ex datis*, not in the sense of *geschichtlich*) and "rational cognition". The term 'history' can be applied to philosophy only by excluding those characteristics that are part and parcel of every history, that is, chronological succession and empirical causality.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹² Reinhold, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie", p. 12.

⁴⁹³ Geldsetzer, *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte*, p. 30.

⁴⁹⁴ Giuseppe Micheli, "Kantianism and the Historiography of Philosophy: Introduction", in *Models of the History of Philosophy. Volume III: The Second Enlightenment and the Kantian Age*, ed. by Gregorio Piaia and Giovanni Santinello (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), p. 780.

At first glance, there appears to be good reason to make this point, but as I intend to show, it ends up missing Grohmann's most innovative contributions. In fact, what Grohmann showed was that the distinction between *historisch* and *geschichtlich* was far from waterproof. In particular, the boundary between them became fuzzy precisely when *philosophy* was discussed as a possible object of historical knowledge.

* * *

When exemplifying historical knowledge, Wolff initially discussed propositions clearly grounded in empirical, sensuous experience. One could possess historical knowledge, he wrote, about the facts "that the sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening" and "that at the beginning of spring the buds of trees blossom forth".⁴⁹⁵ Soon, however, Wolff moved on to discuss the ways in which philosophical doctrines could be the object of historical/factual knowledge. This could be the case if one knew what a particular philosopher taught, but was not aware of the reasons and principles underlying his or her doctrine. Thus, one could for example learn from Euclid "that the angles of a rectilinear triangle are equal to two right angles"⁴⁹⁶ without understanding why this is so or how Euclid arrived at this result. In this case, one would know "only what others have said, and thus [have] only historical knowledge of the [philosophical] knowledge of others".⁴⁹⁷

For Wolff, then, historical and philosophical knowledge were not distinguished through their object, but through the knowing subject's relation to this object. A given claim, doctrine, or state of affairs could always be approached *either* as a mere fact *or* examined by and grounded in reason, and a knowledge that one person had acquired through the use of reason could be grasped as a mere fact by someone else.

Kant repeated this line of reasoning with few changes. Learning philosophy "historically", he argued, would mean memorising propositions and arguments given from the outside without penetrating their true meaning and significance. The person who did this had thus "educated himself by a foreign reason" rather than his own. He had "grasped and preserved well, i.e., he has learned", but he had not understood through the employment of his own reason, and was therefore a "plaster cast of a living human being".⁴⁹⁸ In

⁴⁹⁵ Wolff, *Preliminary Discourse*, p. 3.

⁴⁹⁶ Wolff, *Preliminary Discourse*, p. 94.

⁴⁹⁷ Wolff, *Preliminary Discourse*, p. 94.

⁴⁹⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A836/B864.

this sense, philosophy was made into the active and living force of reason, whereas historical knowledge of philosophy was merely a dead and lifeless copy of it. Historically, one might learn about philosophers and their arguments, but one could never learn *philosophy*, since philosophy must be rooted solely in reason and not in the mere memorisation of facts. Interestingly, Kant exemplified this point with the system of Wolff:

he who has properly *learned* a system of philosophy, e.g., the Wolffian system, although he has in his head all of the principles, explanations, and proofs together with the division of the entire theoretical edifice, and can count everything off on his fingers, still has nothing other than a complete *historical* cognition of the Wolffian philosophy; he knows and judges only as much as has been given to him. If you dispute one of his definitions, he has no idea where to get another one. He has formed himself according to an alien reason, but the faculty of imitation is not that of generation, i.e., the cognition did not arise *from* reason for him, and although objectively it was certainly a rational cognition, subjectively it is still merely historical.⁴⁹⁹

At this point, we can observe how the concept of historical-as-factual starts overlapping with the concept of *Geschichte*. A history of philosophy was, after all, an account of “what others have said”, and its student could thus be said to “educate himself through a foreign reason”. Furthermore, a history of philosophy – like any other history – was to a certain extent concerned precisely with facts. Therefore, the step from *historisch* as “factual” to *Geschichte* was not long.

Indeed, Kant himself did at times use the concept of *Geschichte der Philosophie* as an expression of merely factual knowledge as opposed to the truly rational or philosophical. His most famous statement occurs in the *Prolegomena*:

There are scholars for whom the history of philosophy (ancient as well as modern) is itself their philosophy; the present prolegomena have not been written for them. They must wait until those who endeavour to draw from the wellsprings of reason itself have finished their business, and then it will be their turn to bring news of these events to the world.⁵⁰⁰

It is of crucial importance that Kant here distinguished between the philosopher drawing “from the wellsprings of reason itself” and the historian

⁴⁹⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A836/B864.

⁵⁰⁰ Kant, *Prolegomena*, p. 5 [AA4: 255].

of philosophy who only watched and reported this activity. This indicates that the activity of the historian was *not* rooted in rational enquiry: the historian could not produce philosophy but only discover the leftover traces of the philosopher's productive reason. In other words, the activity of the historian was *historisch* precisely in the sense of non-philosophical or merely factual.

An even clearer overlap of the concepts *historische Erkenntnis* and *Geschichte* can be found in an article about the philosophy of history written by Schelling. Schelling's argument was that history (*Geschichte*) could not be the object of philosophical thought since it referred only to contingent facts understood in a merely empirical way.⁵⁰¹ Once reason elaborated these facts into a systematic form and grasped their grounds, the knowledge would no longer belong to history and instead become philosophical. A philosophy of history was therefore a contradiction in terms. The distinction was precisely the one I have traced back to the Wolffian textbooks, but Schelling took it to refer to *Geschichte* just as much as to *historische Erkenntnis*.⁵⁰²

Schelling's argument concerned the philosophy of history, but it is clear that it could just as well apply to the history of philosophy. Indeed, this was the move Grohmann made in his article on the subject. Given this background, it cannot be said that Grohmann simply confused two concepts of the historical and erroneously inferred conclusions from one to the other. Rather, his point was that those authors who had argued for a philosophical history – a concept of *Geschichte* rooted in reason rather than in mere fact – were themselves unable to uphold the distinction between *historisch* and *geschichtlich*. In this sense, Grohmann identified a crucial tension in the modern concept of history.

Philosophy and Progress

There is another important aspect of Grohmann's article that even more clearly illustrates that the modern concept of *Geschichte* was in play in his examination. This aspect is related to the notion of *progress*.

In the previous chapters, I have shown that this concept played a crucial role for the post-Kantian historians of philosophy. This, I argued, should not come as a surprise, for progress was in many senses the organising principle of German Enlightenment-era historical thought in general. Indeed, it

⁵⁰¹ Schelling, "Allgemeine Uebersicht", p. 190.

⁵⁰² Indeed, Schelling anchored his argument in the etymology of the noun *Geschichte*, which he characterised as "knowledge of that which has happened", from whence he inferred that its object must be "the *changing*, that which *progresses in time*" (Schelling, "Allgemeine Uebersicht", p. 183).

seemed obvious to the post-Kantians that a history presupposed some kind of overarching idea of development and some yardstick with which to measure it; if this were lacking, history would be reduced to mere chronicle or annal.

Grohmann, too, heavily emphasised the need for an overarching structuring principle given *a priori*. What he did not agree with was that the concept of progress could serve as a principle of this kind. On the contrary, he pointed out the ways in which such an understanding brought with it considerable challenges in relation to the history of philosophy. Ultimately, he argued, it was even inapplicable to this history. The most crucial reason for this was that progress indicated a particular understanding of historical time and of the relation between past and present.

This dimension of 18th-century ideas of progress has been thoroughly examined by Reinhart Koselleck. According to Koselleck, progress did not play a constitutive role in pre-modern historical thought. Before the 18th century, the past was instead regarded as essentially similar to the present with no identifiable general tendency towards forward movement. This was simultaneously what lent the past its pedagogical value: it could be viewed as a “collection of examples”, a set of lessons that could readily be applied to present situations. This, Koselleck claims, is the meaning of Cicero’s famous description of history as *magistra vitae*, teacher of life.

This character was in turn conditioned by what Koselleck refers to as a “continuous space of experience”, i.e., that present conditions were taken to be fundamentally analogous with the past:

It implies a thorough apprehension of human possibilities within a general historical continuum. History can instruct its contemporaries or their descendants on how to become more prudent or relatively better, but only as long as the given assumptions and conditions are fundamentally the same. Until the eighteenth century, the use of our expression [*historia magistra vitae*] remained an unmistakable index of an assumed constancy of human nature, accounts of which can serve as iterable means for the proof of moral, theological, legal, or political doctrines.⁵⁰³

The understanding of history as a collection of examples could thus only retain its rhetorical power as long as the ideals to strive towards, and the possible courses of action used in this striving, remained constant. As the concept of history was increasingly tied to the notion of progress, its exem-

⁵⁰³ Koselleck, “*Historia Magistra Vitae*”, pp. 27–28.

plary value was therefore simultaneously undermined. A clear example used by Koselleck is the French revolution. Here, the ideal was not to restore a historical order, but to create a new order with no historical counterpart. The past was no longer a valid pattern for the interpretation of present conditions: it was robbed of this quality simply by virtue of being past.⁵⁰⁴

This presented the historian of *philosophy* with a difficult dilemma. For if philosophy's development was treated in the same way as historical progress in general, it appeared that older philosophical systems and teachings must also be out of date. Just as mankind left older forms of government and customs in its progress towards higher stages, so it would also have to leave its philosophical insights for the sake of more developed ones. If, on the other hand, philosophy was to be the science of the necessary, unchanging laws of reason, then every philosophy must possess an eternal truth independently of when and where it was formulated. Philosophy could in this case *not* be subject to change and development in the same way as empirical conditions.

This was the dilemma that Grohmann so clearly identified. Strikingly, his way of posing the problem again connected it to the distinction between the rational and the factual. In the eyes of the post-Kantians, the idea of progress allowed the possibility of a historiography rooted in reason: since progress presupposed the consciousness of an *end* given *a priori*, it was located beyond the mere empirical sphere of events. But as Grohmann pointed out, the notion of progress simultaneously *must* relate itself to the factual or merely empirical, for only in this sphere could change occur. The ideas of reason, on the other hand, must be absolutely valid *a priori* and could therefore by definition not change.

Crucially, this constituted a new version of the problem examined in chapters 1 and 2: that of accounting for conflicts between philosophical schools. Just as these conflicts called the value and truth of philosophy into question, so also the notion of progress seemed to pull the rug from under the feet of absolute truth claims in philosophy.

If the post-Kantians had solved the problem of conflicts in philosophy by explaining it as part of the notion of progress, they were then faced with the problem returning as a ghost revived *by* that notion. This problem was at the same time a new one: for older historians rooted in the *exempla* tradition, the wisdom and fruitfulness of ancient thought was obvious. In the framework of a continuous space of experience, ancient philosophy was of unquestionable perennial value. We can see this stance still expressed in the writings

⁵⁰⁴ Koselleck, "Historia Magistra Vitae", p. 38.

of Heumann and Brucker, who both identified the pedagogical usefulness of philosophy's history in its ability to teach its student life lessons ready for application in his or her own life. As the post-Kantians were not ready to accept this view of history and its temporal structure, the question of how past philosophies related to present ones became a crucial problem for them.

This was also why Grohmann's arguments could not simply be disregarded. What Grohmann had done was not just to propose his own concept of history that differed from that of the post-Kantians in general; rather, he had examined the nature of the concept of history used by the post-Kantians and identified a tension *immanent* to this concept. On the one hand, the post-Kantian programme for the history of philosophy could be successful only through its application of the notion of progress. On the other hand, this notion seemed to immediately nullify the success it promised. This was the dilemma Grohmann highlighted. Any historian at once rejecting Grohmann's proposed solution to it and defending the post-Kantian programme was thus forced to offer an alternative way out.

The Kantian Counterattacks: Tennemann and Carus

This is what the most prominent of the post-Kantian historians, Tennemann, set out to do in the preface to his *Geschichte der Philosophie*. As already noted above, Tennemann accused Grohmann of having misunderstood the character of history as such. "The condition of all events is time", he wrote, "and *the form of all history is therefore the temporal order*".⁵⁰⁵ If one abstracted from this order, the result would simply be no history at all. In Tennemann's view, the problem was thus more complicated than Grohmann had realised. In his striving to find a concept of the history of philosophy that did not contradict the unchanging nature of philosophy, Grohmann had ended up simply transferring the contradiction to the concept of history. Tennemann identified the core of the error in the notion of *a priori* history, which he took to contain a paradox: "Since the expression already contains two concepts that cancel each other out, it is impossible the concept *history* has been understood in the strict sense".⁵⁰⁶

Nonetheless, Tennemann did not find any errors in Grohmann's line of argument itself. On the contrary, he praised Grohmann's essay for being entirely consistent.⁵⁰⁷ In fact, Tennemann even appears to have agreed with

⁵⁰⁵ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. xii; cf. Tennemann, "Übersicht", pp. 325–26.

⁵⁰⁶ Tennemann, "Übersicht", p. 325.

⁵⁰⁷ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. ix.

Grohmann's critique of Reinhold: it did indeed follow from Reinhold's premises that the history of philosophy could not be chronological, he conceded, and the only reason that Reinhold himself did not reach this conclusion was that he was less true to his principles than was Grohmann. However, since Grohmann's conclusion would mean that a history of philosophy was simply impossible, his essay just ended up showing that neither the notion of *a priori* history nor the line of argument Grohmann built on it was "the most appropriate for the purposes".⁵⁰⁸

Tennemann did agree, however, that philosophy contained something unchanging.⁵⁰⁹ Since he accepted the formulation of the problem itself while rejecting Grohmann's way of resolving it, he was obligated to offer an alternative way out. His method for doing this can analytically be divided into two parts. First, he challenged Grohmann's definition of history. For Grohmann, general history had the aim of depicting the particular in its particularity without subsuming it under more general laws. For Tennemann, on the other hand, history referred to a *rational* examination and elaboration of past events. In his view, the mere enumeration of the events in a temporal order did not live up to the demands of history, but must rather be regarded as a chronicle or annal. In the chronicle, the events remained disparate from one another, and the form as such was therefore contingent rather than necessary. In history, by contrast, the events were connected, linked together as causes and effects. Tennemann summarised this distinction as follows:

When they are isolated, it is no contradiction to think of the individual events as not having happened, or to think of others in their place; but in relation to each other, and in their reciprocal temporal relation, the outward character of contingency is more and more lost the more clearly and completely the series of events and their relations is conceived and held together.⁵¹⁰

Already from the outset, Tennemann had thus freed his concept of history from all connotations of *historische Erkenntnis*. For him, history instead denoted a rational elaboration of the past that turned it into a type of necessary structure. This was unambiguously the modern concept of *Geschichte* developed in the late German Enlightenment. And through

⁵⁰⁸ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. ix.

⁵⁰⁹ Tennemann, "Übersicht", p. 325.

⁵¹⁰ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. xiii.

Tennemann's application of this concept, the animosity between philosophy and history in the sense of merely factual knowledge started dissolving.

What remained was the issue of how philosophy could develop in such a temporal structure. For Tennemann, the type of rational knowledge proper to history did indeed presuppose progress and change – but how could he tie this to the eternal nature of philosophical truth?

This was the second issue Tennemann had to solve. Since he believed the conclusions drawn by Grohmann to follow from his premises, the way out must go back to the premises themselves. Now, Tennemann noted, both Grohmann and Reinhold had anchored their programmes in an eminent concept of philosophy as science. Such a concept did indeed allow for no change or development. But in the history of philosophy, Tennemann contended, the aim was not to depict this system itself, but to examine *how* it could gradually come to be achieved, i.e., the striving towards it and the path this striving took: “through history one wants to know not what is, but rather what happens, has happened, and how it happened”.⁵¹¹

For Grohmann, such a history would never plumb the depths of philosophy, but would merely be a history of its external conditions. If, at a given point in time, philosophy had not yet reached its flawless form, this could only depend upon empirical, contingent circumstances such as the cultural refinement and education of a given era. But Tennemann had a counterargument to this. The circumstances that made philosophy develop gradually were, he proposed, not just to be found in contingent circumstances, but just as much in the inner nature of reason. It lay in this nature that reason only realised its determinations and conditions gradually, i.e., that it must develop itself. It was thus justified to describe philosophical teachings according to their temporal development, and one could thus follow the historical movement of philosophy from a position located inside of pure reason. In this sense, the history of philosophy was the history of the self-development of philosophy, of its process of becoming.⁵¹² “[A] history is thinkable”, Tennemann wrote, “that depicts the progressive culture of reason and the gradual development of philosophy”.⁵¹³

This gradual development was related to the idea of the eminent philosophical system. The point was that, from the historical perspective, the system could not be regarded as something already given. In Tennemann's view, this was precisely where Grohmann and the other post-Kantians had

⁵¹¹ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. xii.

⁵¹² Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. xxix.

⁵¹³ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. xxix.

erred: they had conceived of philosophy as an *object* already at hand so that all changes would denote a move “from the perfected to the imperfect”.⁵¹⁴ Instead of this, Tennemann proposed, the historian must regard philosophy as “the aim that all thinkers who worked for a science had before their eyes”. From this point of view, “all events that belong to the concepts of the history of science appear not as *changes of the science*, but as the *attempts and activities undertaken by reason for the science*”.⁵¹⁵ It is worth noting that the object the historian studied – and simultaneously the subject of the history he wrote – was therefore not philosophy itself, but rather *reason* regarded in its activities aimed at bringing about a philosophy. In this way, then, the concept of the eminent philosophical system could be retained as crucial to the historian, but not as a pre-existing object of study. Instead, it was turned into a regulative end, a horizon towards which all philosophers throughout history tended.

The meaning of this was further elaborated in Tennemann's distinction between *philosophy* as the *product* of reason and *philosophising* as the *activity* of reason.⁵¹⁶ The former, he admitted, was not thinkable as changeable or time bound, and was indeed not a possible object of history. Instead, the task of the historian of philosophy was to present the philosophising activity. And philosophising was not just a possible object of history, but an object that *must* belong to history: as activity rather than result or product, it presupposed movement and transformation. It was, in other words, a type of event or *Begebenheit* – the essential object of historiography:

*History of philosophy is the depiction of the successive development of philosophy or the depiction of the striving of reason to realise the idea of the science of the final grounds and laws of nature and freedom. Philosophising is older than all philosophies and relates to philosophy as the striving to the end. Therefore, it is incorrect to say that the history of philosophy is the depiction of the changes of philosophy. In saying this, one inverts the correct relation between the two and talks about the changes of a thing as if it were already at hand, whereas it really was in becoming. This becoming and progress to the end, the forming and developing, is precisely the most important object of history, and thus, this above all else had to be expressed in the concept of the history.*⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁴ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. xvii.

⁵¹⁵ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. xvii.

⁵¹⁶ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. xxviii.

⁵¹⁷ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, pp. xxix–xxx. On science as an idea of reason, see Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A842/B870.

From this stance, it seems to follow that the history of philosophy would cease at the point where philosophy would in fact be realised; here, the striving of reason would have reached its end and could no longer continue in the way it had before. Tennemann's conclusion was thus that a history of philosophy was possible from the perspective of the inner life of reason, but that it must nonetheless not be confused with the scientific concept of philosophy as such. The history of philosophy ended at the point where the "eminent concept of philosophy" proposed by Reinhold and Grohmann presented itself. "Each history of a science", Tennemann thus claimed, "begins at a point in time when the science was not yet at hand".⁵¹⁸

A largely similar understanding was proposed in Carus's posthumous *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie*.⁵¹⁹ Like Tennemann, Carus took the temporal order to be a necessary predicate of history as such. With an explicit critical reference to Grohmann, he claimed that history became "history-less" if this order was not observed.⁵²⁰ Unlike Tennemann, however, Carus did in fact discuss the concept of history as related to the *historische Erkenntnis* of the particular, or as *cognitio ex datis*. Similar to Grohmann, he sharply juxtaposed this to the nature of philosophy:

History is a form of cognition taken from the contingently given material (*cognitio ex datis*); philosophy, on the other hand, is a form of cognition through the self-activity of spirit, through its most general, necessary and unconditioned activity, and thus brought about *a priori* (*cognitio ex factis*). [...] History offers manifold and contingent materials, philosophy uniform and necessary ones.⁵²¹

Despite this contrast, Carus believed that a history of philosophy was thinkable without internal contradiction. In a line of reasoning that clearly overlapped with that of Tennemann, he described philosophy as a task reason assigned to itself, as an ideal towards which it strived. This ideal was in itself unchangeable. In reality, however, philosophy was something "we seek and approach, but that will nonetheless remain a science still to be found".⁵²²

Carus in fact opened his discussion as such by underlining a classic claim in the philosophy of history: namely, that history presupposed a relation between something changing and unchanging. Without an unchanging

⁵¹⁸ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. xvi.

⁵¹⁹ Cf. Gueroult, *Dianoématique. Livre 1, tome 2*, chap. xxi.

⁵²⁰ Carus, *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 5.

⁵²¹ Carus, *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 5–6.

⁵²² Carus, *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 7.

subject, there would be nothing on which the changing predicates could be observed. The unchanging in general could be understood both subjectively and objectively. Subjectively, it consisted of the “human spirit”, or that which acted and transformed itself throughout history. Objectively, it presented itself as “the idea”, or the final end of spirit’s striving.⁵²³ The history of philosophy in particular, then, would consist of the striving of human spirit to realise the idea of philosophy. And this was indeed Carus’s conclusion:

Here, the question presents itself: can philosophy be an object of history? It can, to the extent that each ideal task allows for a gradual approximation. A history of philosophy would remain impossible if there were no diversions of reason, no distance from its immediate cognition.⁵²⁴

These solutions do appear to solve some of the problems posed by Grohmann, as well as some of the problems Tennemann identified with Grohmann’s own position. Most importantly, Tennemann and Carus were able to defend the chronological form of history without reducing the history of philosophy to a merely external account located outside of the scope of reason itself. It is less clear, however, that they managed to harmonise the eternal truth of philosophical inquiry with the concept of progress. As we have seen, one of the main points made by Grohmann was that any notion of philosophical progress would render older systems obsolete. Tennemann and Carus, for their part, regarded the history of philosophy as the study of the development of reason – but this view reintroduced the issue of relating ancient philosophies to modern ones without reducing the former to antiquated and insufficient attempts.

To an extent, Tennemann’s and Carus’s solutions thus constituted a mirror opposite of Grohmann’s. Whereas Grohmann believed it necessary to modify the concept of history for the purposes of a philosophical historiography, Tennemann and Carus thought that the historian of philosophy must understand *philosophy* in a different way than the systematic philosopher. Indeed, Tennemann explicitly made it clear that

another concept of philosophy is needed for the *history* of philosophy than for a *strictly scientific system* of philosophy; that the concept that is to stand in the forefront of the history of philosophy must be different from the one that determines the scientific edifice of it.⁵²⁵

⁵²³ Carus, *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 5.

⁵²⁴ Carus, *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 8.

⁵²⁵ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. viii.

This diametrical difference simultaneously points to a more fundamental conceptual *agreement* among the three authors. Like Grohmann, Tennemann and Carus considered philosophy and history to be two sharply opposed forms of knowledge; the disagreement concerned only which of the two concepts that needed to be amended for the purposes of the history of philosophy. In this way, Grohmann's dilemma fundamentally influenced even those who in strong terms rejected his historiographical programme.

Summary and Conclusions

In the post-Kantian tradition, the distinction between philosophy and history came to delineate a set of opposites used to clearly define philosophy and its unique character. First, history was empirical and philosophy purely rational or *a priori*. Second, and as a consequence, history could only concern the particular, while philosophy was directed at the universal. Third, history was therefore always a *multitude*, whereas philosophy was necessarily a *unity*, a systematic whole. Finally, history denoted a sphere of constantly changing and contingent facts, while philosophy was concerned only with the eternal and necessary.

Part of the issue relates to the fact that the post-Kantian age was also an age of ongoing reinterpretation of the concept of history. The older conception of history as *magistra vitae* or as a collection of examples was gradually transformed into a conception rooted in ideas of teleology and progress. This new concept also differed from the conception of historical knowledge as synonymous with empirical rather than rational knowledge. Thus, the debates took place on a complex field where multiple sets of connotations overlapped one another, and a certain degree of conceptual confusion is recognisable. This is evident not least in Grohmann's and Tennemann's respective ways of defining "history". Whereas Grohmann took this concept to refer above all to a contingently structured account of mere empirical experience, Tennemann took it to denote a rational elaboration and explanation of empirical events. Unlike Grohmann, Tennemann was more firmly rooted in the emergent tradition of modern philosophy of history and its adherence to rational progress.

As I have shown, however, the conflict arising in the wake of Grohmann's article was not simply one between an old and a new conception of history. Rather, what made Grohmann so influential was that he identified a conflict in the new, emergent concept of history upon which the post-Kantians had previously based their programmes for the history of philosophy. This is an

aspect that has been overlooked in previous research but that is crucial for understanding the historiographical issues at stake during the period.

Furthermore, Grohmann's article also gave an important new dimension to the issue of accounting for the discord between philosophers and philosophical schools of the past. For if history was inherently unsystematic, purely empirical, and contingent, it appeared that the conflicts in the history of philosophy might to some extent have sprung from the form of *history* rather than from philosophy itself. If there was a systematic and necessarily true philosophy, so Grohmann thought, it could only be grasped by reason, but would evade the empirical-historical genre. Its truth and necessity would be of a nature beyond the sphere visible to the historical gaze.

In no way did this constitute a satisfactory explanation as to why philosophies appeared to contradict one another. It did, however, contain an *a priori* condition for a satisfactory solution to the issue: if a history of philosophy was to be possible, it would have to be a history in a different sense of the word. This was Grohmann's realisation, and the issue posed by him appeared crucial to those who read his article.

In the ensuing debates, two types of solutions can be discerned. On the one hand, we have Grohmann's view that the history of philosophy presupposed a modified concept of history. On the other hand, there was Tennemann's view that it was rather the historical concept of *philosophy* that must be modified. Despite this diametrical difference, however, Tennemann and Grohmann agreed on the premises of their respective lines of reasoning: philosophy and history related to each other as contrasting concepts, maybe even as opposites. Any unity between them therefore presupposed a compromise on one side or the other.

As we shall see in the following chapter, later idealist historians were dissatisfied with both of these solutions. In place of them, they attempted to harmonise the concepts of history and philosophy and to resolve the conflict between them at its core.

The Developing System: The Philosophical Historiography of the Idealists

The year 1799 was a dramatic one in German philosophy. In the spring, Johann Gottlieb Fichte was dismissed from his position at the University of Jena following accusations of atheism.⁵²⁶ Robbed of an academic platform, Fichte left for Berlin, where he could only continue spreading his philosophy through private lectures held in his apartment. But perhaps even more upsetting to Fichte himself was the brief declaration “Erklärung in Beziehung auf Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre” written by Kant and published on August 7 the same year. Fichte had repeatedly argued that his system did not differ from the Kantian, but should rather be understood to offer a further *grounding* for Kant’s critical philosophy.⁵²⁷ In his declaration, however, Kant not only denied any such harmonious relationship; he went so far as to describe Fichte’s philosophy as a “totally indefensible system”.⁵²⁸

Kant’s public distancing of himself from Fichteanism was not only shocking to Fichte personally, but also forced many of his contemporaries to reconsider their understanding of the philosophical epoch in which they were active. Admittedly, Fichte’s early Jena system presented in 1794 was far from unambiguously in line with Kant’s criticism, and the same can be said of Reinhold’s *Elementarphilosophie* of the early 1790s. But Reinhold and Fichte themselves insisted that their philosophical endeavours stood in no conflict with Kant’s. As long as this claim remained plausible, the post-Kantian historians of philosophy could stick to the idea that Kant had offered the eagerly sought-after peace treaty ending philosophical quarrels and thereby made metaphysical progress possible on a secure path; indeed, Reinhold and

⁵²⁶ For a detailed account of the atheism dispute, see Anthony J. La Vopa, *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy, 1762–1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 368–424. For a collection of source texts on the affair translated into English, see *J.G. Fichte and the Atheism Dispute: 1798–1800*, ed. by Yolanda Estes and Curtis Bowman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

⁵²⁷ See, e.g., Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, p. 52 [GA I,4: 221].

⁵²⁸ Kant, *Correspondence*, p. 559; Immanuel Kant, *Akademie Textausgabe. Band 12: Briefwechsel 3* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1922), p. 370.

Fichte themselves argued that their respective systems constituted precisely such a progress.⁵²⁹ If, on the other hand, Kant's system stood in conflict with post-Kantian ones, the old issue of accounting for philosophical quarrels seemed to present itself again in a new, even more troubling form: these quarrels then had to be admitted as occurring *after* the proposed peace treaty, and even among those who claimed faithfulness to the peace negotiator himself.

As if Kant's official break with Fichte had not been enough, Fichte's previous follower Schelling also soon distanced himself from his former teacher. In 1800, Schelling presented his novel philosophy of nature, a project that Fichte took to be sharply opposed to the *Wissenschaftslehre* and its grounding of all philosophy in the self-positing of the I.⁵³⁰ Furthermore, whereas Fichte continued to hold that his philosophy was in fact Kantian (even as Kant himself denied it),⁵³¹ Schelling self-consciously claimed to have moved beyond both Kant and Fichte. The philosophical quarrels gradually developing between Fichte and Schelling appeared once and for all to disprove the idea of Kantianism as a definite peace treaty in the field of philosophy. The post-Kantian historians of philosophy had to search for new ways of understanding their task.

The years around 1800 thus marked the beginning of a new period in post-Kantian historiography of philosophy. In contrast to the post-Kantian 1790s, I refer to this period as *idealist*. Somewhat simplified, it could be said that the earlier period was marked to a large extent by conflict between post-Kantians and defenders of pre-Kantian philosophies such as Leibniz-Wolffianism or Lockean empiricism. In the first decades of the 19th century, a new nexus of the debate was the relation between Kantianism and Fichteian, Schellingian, or Hegelian idealism, as well as between these idealist schools themselves. It is to this development that I turn in the present chapter.

In examining the historiography of philosophy of the early 19th century, this chapter will to an extent follow the familiar chronology that begins with Fichte and continues, via Schelling, to Hegel. This may seem to imply the traditional notion of Hegel as the natural endpoint – perhaps even the

⁵²⁹ Reinhold presented this conception, for example, in Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Über das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens* (Jena: Mauke, 1791), p. 72.

⁵³⁰ For a collection of sources regarding Fichte's and Schelling's dispute translated into English, see Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondence (1800–1802)*, ed. by Michael G. Vater and David W. Wood (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).

⁵³¹ Cf. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe I,7: Werke 1800–1801*, ed. by Reinhard Lauth (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1988), pp. 193–94.

ultimate perfector – of German idealism. Such a view would, of course, be far too simplified. Certainly, Hegel presented many original notions pertaining to the history of philosophy and the practice of studying it. These notions, however, can hardly be taken to constitute an unquestionably satisfactory solution to the problems that had dominated the debates since the 1790s. Furthermore, both the problems themselves and the language in which they were discussed were to a large extent inherited from the debates following the 1791 *Preisfrage*. Rather than treating Hegel's as a radically new approach, I intend to show the ways in which it depended on impulses gathered from earlier thinkers. To the extent we can indeed identify a break with these thinkers, it was made possible only through simultaneous continuity with their issues, approaches, and ideals.

This continuity is evident not least in the conception of an eminent system as the prerequisite for philosophical historiography. To an extent, we will see that the Fichteans, the Schellingians, and later the Hegelians, simply moved this concept chronologically forward in time and identified it with their own respective philosophies. In this sense, then, the idealist approach to the historiography of philosophy followed closely in the footsteps of the post-Kantians.

This observation should make us cautious about over-emphasising the novelty of the idealist programme, but it should not lead us to the other extreme: the claim that the idealists offered no new approach at all. In positing their own idealist systems as the necessary precept for untangling the knot of philosophy's history, they achieved far more than a cosmetic change that replaced the term "Kantianism" with "Fichteanism", "Schellingianism", or "Hegelianism". Instead, they believed themselves to be legitimised in this operation only because they had a different understanding of the concept of *the system as such*. Only this new concept, they believed, offered a solution to central problems discussed (but not definitely resolved) by the Kantians. If there was one crucial novelty in the idealist historiographic programme, it consisted precisely in this understanding of the system.

As I intend to show in this chapter, this novel system conception was closely related to the two principal issues that Grohmann had posed in his essay of 1797: first, the relation between the manifold of historical experience and the systematic-rational unity of philosophy, and second, the relation between the notion of change and progress proper to history and the eternal truth that lay at the heart of the philosophical system. As I alluded to in the previous chapter, these issues were not only central to idealist historiography

of philosophy, but they also came to shape the development of idealist system philosophy in more general terms.

This new system conception became fully explicit only by the turn of the century, but it can ultimately be traced back at least to Fichte's 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*. In the context of the debates about the historiography of philosophy, it was first elaborately discussed by one of Fichte's adherents: August Ludewig Hülsen. This chapter therefore begins with an examination of these two authors. Then, I move on to the early writings on the history of philosophy by Schelling and Hegel before examining the historiographical practice of Hegel himself, Friedrich Ast, and Thaddä Anselm Rixner.

Fichte's Pragmatic History of Human Spirit

In the previous chapter, I contextualised Grohmann's article in relation to the distinction between historical and philosophical knowledge. The former was taken to be rooted in empirical experience and bore the marks of contingency, manifoldness, and particularity, whereas the latter was seen as rooted in reason and concerned the necessary, unitary, and universal.

A similar distinction played a central role in Fichte's early *Wissenschaftslehre*.⁵³² In his public lectures in 1794, Fichte presented "absolute unity, constant self-identity, complete agreement with oneself" as the "ultimate characteristic feature of all rational beings".⁵³³ What made the realisation of this vocation complicated, however, was that the absolute unity of reason was not immediately present in man's empirical existence. In sensuous experience, man was instead constantly related to something manifold: a world with contingent objects and ever-changing accidental determinations. The objects of his experience furthermore did not appear as immediately identical to himself, but as existing *beyond* his consciousness of them. Rather than confirming the unity of reason, experience seemed to refute it.

The human being thus possessed two distinct sources of knowledge: on the one hand, the unity of reason; on the other hand, the manifold of sensibility. What Fichte here posed was a version of the distinction between historical and rational knowledge. For Fichte, however, this distinction

⁵³² Some influential studies of Fichte's Jena philosophy in general are Dieter Henrich, *Dies Ich, das viel besagt: Fichtes Einsicht nachdenken* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2022); Lauth, *Transzendente Entwicklungslinien von Descartes bis zu Marx und Dostojewski*; Daniel Breazeale, *Thinking through the 'Wissenschaftslehre': Themes from Fichte's Early Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Beiser, *German Idealism*; Günter Zöller, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy* (West Nyack: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁵³³ Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, p. 149 [GA I,3: 30].

simultaneously posed a problem for the concept of man as such. As long as these types of knowledge were both present in consciousness as mutually exclusive opposites, man would remain in conflict with himself. But since man's vocation was self-unity, this conflict must somehow be resolved. A fundamental task of philosophy was therefore to explain how the manifold of experience could relate to the unity of reason. Only to the extent that these two could be brought back to a common ground, Fichte believed, could philosophy satisfy the demands of reason – and only to this extent could philosophy be regarded as a science in a strict sense.

According to Fichte, there were only two possible approaches to this issue: either the manifold of experience was the ground of the rational unity, or the rational unity was the ground of the manifold of experience. The first of these explanations would, in Fichte's view, be highly unsatisfactory. First, he believed it would constitute a blind appeal to a thing-in-itself located beyond the sphere of possible knowledge, and second, it would give priority to the manifold, thus undermining the rational demand for the unity of knowledge.⁵³⁴

The only remaining option, then, was to consider the ground as located beyond the sphere of experience – it must, Fichte claimed, be something that “neither appears nor can appear among the empirical determinations of our consciousness”.⁵³⁵ It must, in other words, be a purely *rational* and *transcendental* ground.

The transcendental aspect was particularly crucial. For it was not enough, Fichte believed, to give priority to the rational over the empirical or historical: if philosophy was to gain insight into the essence of man as such, it could not irrevocably cut itself off from man's empirical experience of himself and the world around him. Rather, it had to form the foundation of the manifold of experience and explain it. As Fichte put this, the foundational principle was necessarily located beyond all empirical determinations of consciousness, but it must at the same time “[lie] at the basis of all consciousness and alone [make] consciousness possible”.⁵³⁶ Thus, the philosophical task consisted of inferring the historical *from* the rational, or the production of difference, separation, and manifold *from* the principle of unity and oneness.

⁵³⁴ See, e.g., Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, p. 12–13 [GA I,4: 189–91].

⁵³⁵ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre and Related Writings (1794–95)*, trans. by Daniel Breazeale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 200; Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe I,2: Werke 1793–1795* [GA I,2] (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1965), p. 255.

⁵³⁶ Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, p. 200 [GA I,2: 255].

This appears, though, to constitute a paradox. If the staple of reason consisted of its immediate and eternal self-unity, how could it also give rise to the manifold and constitute the ground of it? Would this not entail its self-negation, even its self-annihilation?

Fichte thought himself to be in possession of a solution to this issue. It would be resolved, he believed, if reason was not grasped as an already given state elevated above change and transformation, but was instead approached as a self-producing and self-realising activity.⁵³⁷ This activity consisted of reason's coming to know its own essence. In its striving for such self-knowledge, reason had no other course of action than to give itself a determination. However, Fichte further inferred, a determination also constituted a limitation, and thus a separation and exclusion of something.⁵³⁸ Thus, from the immediate and unconditional unity with itself, reason had to produce a demarcation, a relation to its own non-identity.

This was the point of the three foundational principles that Fichte formulated at the opening of his *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794. The first of these principles Fichte described as an expression of immediate self-unity. In its most fundamental form, this unity was contained in the notion of the self-identity of the I. To think "I", Fichte claimed, necessarily meant to identify the activity and object of thought with each other, and thereby to posit the object in the thought-act as such.⁵³⁹ The thought of the I thus immediately also contained the thought "I = I", "I am I", or even more simply "I am".⁵⁴⁰ Because of this unity of thought-act and thought-object, the concept of the I denoted precisely the essence of rationality – indeed, Fichte repeatedly stated that the I and reason were ultimately one and the same.⁵⁴¹ The nature of the I was to be understood both as self-sufficient identity and as self-producing existence: the I posited itself

⁵³⁷ See, e.g., Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 203–04 [GA I,2: 258–59].

⁵³⁸ Fichte regarded a determination as necessarily constituting a partial abolition of reality. Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, p. 229 [GA I,2: 288–89]; cf. pp. 237 [GA I,2: 297–98], 292 [GA I,2: 355], 323 [GA I,2: 389], 366 [GA I,2: 438].

⁵³⁹ On Fichte's concept of "positing", see Wilhelm G. Jacobs, "Einleitung", in Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre: Als Handschrift für seine Zuhörer (1794)* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2017), pp. vii–xxvi.

⁵⁴⁰ Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 200–07 [GA I,2: 255–64].

⁵⁴¹ See, e.g., Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right: According to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. by Frederick Neuhouser, trans. by Michael Baur (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 3 [GA I,3: 313].

“purely and simply” (*schlechthin*),⁵⁴² without the need for any external point of reference.

The second of Fichte’s three foundational principles complicated this self-relation. For the I was here said to stand in a relation of *non-identity* to its own opposite, something Fichte expressed as “ $I \neq \text{not-I}$ ”.⁵⁴³ At this stage, the not-I could be defined only as that which the I was not: first, it denoted difference or negation in opposition to the self-identity and reality of the I; second, it denoted the manifold as opposed to the unity of the I; and third, it denoted passivity or receptivity (*Leiden*) as opposed to the activity and spontaneity of the I.⁵⁴⁴ The not-I that was here introduced should not, however, be taken to be independent of the self-positing activity of the I. Rather, Fichte insisted that it be understood precisely as a *product* of this activity. In and through its self-positing, the I thus also ended up producing its own negation and positing it beyond its own boundaries.

As essentially striving for identity with itself, however, the I could not remain in this relation of opposition and rest in it. Instead, it must move beyond its limit, seek to incorporate its negation into itself, and thereby restore the unity of its being.⁵⁴⁵ This was further elaborated through the third and final principle.⁵⁴⁶ Fichte here introduced a synthetic unity between the antithetical I and not-I: the I was now said to posit the not-I *within* the I itself, and thus to contain its own opposite as related to its own nature of constant self-production or self-positing. Hereby, Fichte completed his system of principles as forming a sequence of thesis ($I = I$), antithesis ($I \neq \text{not-I}$), and synthesis (the unity of I and not-I *within* the I). Crucially, these moments were taken to be nothing but acts performed by the I itself.

Fichte’s account offered a new approach to the question of rational and historical knowledge: through his conception of the not-I as posited by the activity of the I, he explained the historical as ultimately grounded in the rational. Even more importantly, this explanation simultaneously accounted for the relation between the apparently eternal and unchanging character of the rational and its counterpart in the contingent and ever-changing sphere of the historical. As we have seen, both Grohmann and his critics Tennemann and Carus believed change and development to belong exclusively to the field

⁵⁴² Cf. Daniel Breazeale, “Editor’s Introduction”, in Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre and Related Writings (1794–95)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 102.

⁵⁴³ Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 207–10 [GA I,2: 264–67].

⁵⁴⁴ Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 231 [GA I,2: 291], 233 [GA I,2: 293].

⁵⁴⁵ Cf. Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 295–96 [GA I,2: 357–58].

⁵⁴⁶ Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 210–24 [GA I,2: 267–82].

of the historical. A rational system, by contrast, must in their view be elevated above any such temporal and particularising determinations. Through his mediation of the historical and the rational in the activity of the I, however, Fichte could propose a different system conception. Since the nature of the I, and thus of reason, constituted a self-transforming activity, it could ultimately not be exhaustively grasped in *any* of its particular moments. Neither its original and unrestricted identity nor its determination and relation to the not-I expressed its full truth; on the contrary, both of these elements constantly pointed towards each other. To grasp its own being, it was indeed necessary for the I to determine itself, but since its being was the infinite identity, it always included a surplus exceeding any possible determination.⁵⁴⁷ From separation and otherness, therefore, a continued striving towards a new unity that incorporated the negation into itself was presupposed.⁵⁴⁸

Since each individual form that reason could take in this way pointed to a new task for it – a new antithetical or synthesising activity – this meant that philosophy could only arrive at the true character of the I if it considered the I precisely *in its becoming*, in its movement between different determinations and its transcendence beyond them. Rather than being expressed in a definite and permanent result, the I could only be realised as a constant movement from and towards itself.⁵⁴⁹ Fichte therefore believed that its essence was an absolute, unconditioned action rather than a given object or fact.⁵⁵⁰ As a consequence, his system was intended to be grasped not as given in a solid structure, but as a structure of continuous transformation and movement between forms of appearance.

Fichte's *Grundlage* was true to this ideal. Following the threefold structure of foundational principles, he went on to depict the development of the I as a series of apparently mutually refuting contradictions in the relationship between the I and not-I.⁵⁵¹ But rather than dissolving the I, these contradictions became tasks for it to overcome, stages in its necessary development and self-positing. The system itself thus took the form of a self-transforma-

⁵⁴⁷ Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 297–98 [GA I,2: 360–61]; the same point is made pertaining to the striving of the I at p. 335 [GA I,2: 403].

⁵⁴⁸ Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, p. 330 [GA I,2: 397].

⁵⁴⁹ Cf. Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 294 [GA I,2: 356–57], 335–36 [GA I,2: 404], 338 [GA I,2: 407].

⁵⁵⁰ Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, p. 202–03 [GA I,2: 257–59].

⁵⁵¹ The first such set of contradictions occurs in § 3; the general structure recurs throughout § 4. See Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 211 [GA I,2: 268–69], 225 [GA I,2: 283].

tion or development, a *Bildungsroman* depicting the I in its self-creating activity and not as a stable fact.

This had immediate effects on the conception of the history of philosophy. Through his understanding of reason as activity and of the philosophical system as a system of acts, Fichte brought it closer to the conception of pragmatic history. Like general history, the *Wissenschaftslehre* concerned a sort of event or *Begebenheit*. The *Begebenheiten* in question must admittedly be of a rather different type than empirical events or actions taking place in chronological time – they must be located in a wholly *a priori*, transcendental sphere. But this was, after all, precisely the type of event that Fülleborn, Maimon, and other post-Kantians had taken to be proper to the history of philosophy. In a sense, then, Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* could be read as a peculiar type of *a priori* history of pure reason.⁵⁵²

In fact, Fichte took explicit inspiration from the genre of pragmatic history in regard to his conception of the philosophical system. Towards the end of the section on the “Foundation of theoretical knowledge”, he stated that the *Wissenschaftslehre* would from this point “be a pragmatic history of human spirit”.⁵⁵³ Like Fülleborn, he took this to relate to the notion of facts that were already given in the mind and that the philosopher merely had to raise to consciousness. “We have been laboring until now only to secure entry into this pragmatic history”, he stated,

simply in order first to be able to point to an indubitable *factum*. We have discovered this *factum*, and from now on our perception – which is, to be sure, not blind but engaged in conducting experiments – can peacefully follow the course of events [*dem Gange der Begebenheiten*].⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵² Tennemann used a similar concept of the acts of reason in the introduction to his *Geschichte der Philosophie*. There is good reason to regard his use of this concept as inspired by Fichte. It should also be noted that Tennemann distinguished between the activity of reason, in particular *philosophising*, and the product of this activity, i.e., *philosophy* or the philosophical system. For this reason, Tennemann retained the distinction between the system and history of philosophy. For Fichte, on the other hand, the point was that the system itself constituted nothing but acts, that it was only the expression of the activity of the I. In this way, the opposition between system and transformation was dissolved.

⁵⁵³ Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, p. 302 [GA I,2: 365]; translation modified. See also Johann Gottlieb Fichte, “Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre”, in *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre and Related Writings (1794–95)*, trans. by Daniel Breazale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 186 [GA I,2: 147]. Note that Fichte understood the preceding parts as *not* yet constituting such a pragmatic history. This is explained by the way in which the concept was for him related to that of facts. Also noteworthy is that Fichte in the practical part of the *Foundation* introduced an object of the *Wissenschaftslehre* that was *not a priori*, but given in experience; see p. 324 [GA I,2: 390]; cf. Martin Vrabec, “Fichtes ‘pragmatische Geschichte’ und Hegels ‘Phänomenologie des Geistes’”, *Fichte-Studien*, 43.1 (2016), p. 227.

⁵⁵⁴ Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, p. 302 [GA I,2: 365].

The parallel to Fülleborn is obvious, indicating that he might have been one of Fichte's sources of inspiration. This has been overlooked in previous scholarship on Fichte's concept of pragmatic history.⁵⁵⁵ There is, however, also a crucial difference: Fülleborn did not discuss the *a priori* facts or events of reason as immediately connected to the philosophical system. Fichte, on the other hand, took the pragmatic history to be the form of the system as such. Through this way of characterising the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte thus took a decisive step beyond the historical–rational opposition that had been such a central challenge to the post-Kantian historians.

Hülsen's Fichtean Response to the Prize Question

Despite this self-conscious connection between the system of philosophy and the pragmatic account of history, Fichte himself never explicitly treated the history of philosophy in his writings or lectures. How his conception of the the *Wissenschaftslehre* as a “pragmatic history of human spirit” related to the development of philosophical thought in empirical time thus remains obscure. There is no doubt, however, that his outlook influenced contemporary debates on the historiography of philosophy. The first example of this can be found in a rather remarkable work by August Ludewig Hülsen.⁵⁵⁶

Hülsen's book was written on the occasion of the 1791 *Preisfrage* but published only in 1796. The theoretical and historiographical problems treated in it are similar to the ones we have already encountered among other post-Kantians. Like Fülleborn and Maimon, Hülsen insisted that a history of philosophy must be pragmatic.⁵⁵⁷ Furthermore, a truly pragmatic account could in his view only be achieved once the historian had access to a scientific philosophy, which must for this very reason also “lie wholly and per se [*schlechthin*] outside of the sphere of possible conflict”.⁵⁵⁸ Following from this

⁵⁵⁵ The following studies of Fichte's concept of a pragmatic history of human spirit make no mention of Fülleborn: Ulrich Claesges, *Geschichte des Selbstbewusstseins: Der Ursprung des Spekultativen Problems in Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre von 1794–95* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1974); Vrabc, “Fichtes ‘pragmatische Geschichte’ und Hegels ‘Phänomenologie des Geistes’”; Breazeale, “Fichte's Conception of Philosophy as a ‘Pragmatic History of the Human Mind’ and the Contributions of Kant, Platner, and Maimon”. Breazeale mentions a number of other important predecessors, among whom Platner is perhaps the most prominent. On Platner's use of the concept, see Ernst Platner, *Philosophische Aphorismen nebst einigen Anleitungen zur philosophischen Geschichte. Erster Theil* (Leipzig: Schwickertschen Verlag, 1793), p. 19.

⁵⁵⁶ A detailed examination of Hülsen's essay can be found in Posesorski, *Between Reinhold and Fichte*.

⁵⁵⁷ August Ludewig Hülsen, *Prüfung der von der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin aufgestellten Preisfrage: Was hat die Metaphysik seit Leibnitz und Wolf für Progressen gemacht?* (Altona: Hammenich, 1796), p. 27.

⁵⁵⁸ Hülsen, *Prüfung*, p. 30.

set of principal conditions, Hülsen also joined in the critique of pre-Kantian historians: “The many attempts at the history of philosophy that already are at hand”, he wrote, “must be forgotten”.⁵⁵⁹ As in the case of Grohmann, the ambition was nothing less than revolutionary.

Hülsen also upheld the typical post-Kantian understanding of the history of philosophy as related to the development of reason. In line with that common understanding, he took reason to denote something necessarily eternal, pure, self-sufficient, and self-identical. But reason understood in this way, he noted, “does not correspond to the concept of progress”, for unlike reason, “the concept of progress [is] empirical”.⁵⁶⁰

Although the problem itself is by now a familiar one, Hülsen clearly stood out in the way he attempted to resolve it. First of all, he distinguished between what reason was understood to be by the philosopher and what it appeared to be to *itself*. For as he argued, even if the philosopher was able to regard reason as the epitome of eternal self-identity, reason was not immediately conscious that this was its nature. As long as it rested in an immediate state of self-identity, it was not yet reason “for itself”. Its coming to consciousness of its true being depended upon a form of self-realising activity in which it simultaneously alienated itself from immediate self-identity, in which it “went out from itself so that it *entered into* the world of appearances” or “went out in the field of consciousness in order to come back *to itself*, in order to be reason for itself”.⁵⁶¹

Both the reasoning and the terminology may lead one’s thoughts to Hegel, but Hülsen’s treatise actually predated Hegel’s *Differenzschrift* by five years and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* by thirteen. This is remarkable: Hülsen developed his conception of the dynamic relation between reason in-itself and for-itself not through Hegel, but through Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*. It should be clear from this that his work deserves significant attention in research on the development of idealist system philosophy.

The thoroughly Fichtean inspiration is already apparent at the outset of Hülsen’s examination. Discussing the origin of philosophy in historical time, he listed three *a priori* conditions. First, science in general and philosophy in particular could arise only when the mind came to form its first possible judgement: the absolute positing of something self-identical, expressed as $A = A$. Before this act, consciousness would lack any unity and relation at

⁵⁵⁹ Hülsen, *Prüfung*, p. 27.

⁵⁶⁰ Hülsen, *Prüfung*, p. 25.

⁵⁶¹ Hülsen, *Prüfung*, p. 25; cf. Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 307–08 [GA I,2: 371].

all.⁵⁶² Second, the development of the faculty of judgement necessarily led it to distinguish this unconditionally posited A from other things, i.e., to *counter-posit* things that were not A. Third and finally, judgement went on to relate these mutually exclusive objects to each other in an act of synthesis.

The scheme was clearly based on Fichte's three foundational principles, but Hülsen adapted it in a number of crucial ways serving his particular purposes. First, he was interested in how the positing of theses, antitheses, and syntheses could be applied in interpreting philosophical quarrels throughout history. He identified a necessary ground of such quarrels in the moment of antithesis, where each posited something necessarily stood in conflict with all others. At this point, however, the exact nature of this positing had not yet been accounted for, as it was not clear how to distinguish between the absolute thesis and that which was counter-posit to it. Thus, a number of different synthetic unities, or *systems*, could arise following their respective points of departure, and none of them would be able to sufficiently prove its own thesis as the most universal and necessary one. "With multiple attempts in philosophy", Hülsen summarised, "there thus had to arise multiple systems". Furthermore, these systems all had to claim their own universality, thus entering into conflict with one another:

Thus, there existed not only *one*, but multiple infinities struggling with each other for infinity. We direct our attention to this fact and derive the following important result from it: In the progress of many systems that are opposed to one another in science, each necessarily strives to enforce its claim to science with exclusion of all others[.]⁵⁶³

This leads to the second important difference between Fichte's foundational principles and Hülsen's adaptation of them for the historiography of philosophy. For Fichte, the absolute positing of something self-identical, and thus the very legitimacy of the logical axiom $A = A$, was grounded only in the I: the original thetic positing was the I's self-positing, and all subsequent positing rested upon the self-identity brought about through this act. Hülsen certainly shared this view. He believed, however, that human reason was at first not able to identify its first thetic judgement as an act of the I. Instead it began, as it were, at the wrong end, i.e., in experience, and thus attributed the fundamental characteristics of the I to a given not-I outside of itself. Hülsen

⁵⁶² Hülsen referred to this as a "state of mere representation" (Hülsen, *Prüfung*, p. 9).

⁵⁶³ Hülsen, *Prüfung*, p. 23.

expressed this as the transferral of the posited A from the I to a “being of consciousness”:

A thus had to be that following from which it was posited, namely, a being of consciousness. As a consequence, the I was transferred to A, and since the judgement was *absolute* and the act of transferral was not the condition of A, A necessarily became an I outside of the I.⁵⁶⁴

If philosophical quarrels were thus an effect of this transferral of the I to a not-I in empirical experience, the historian could be an arbiter in these quarrels only by bringing them back to the activity of the I. Doing this, and thus achieving philosophical peace, was in Hülsen’s view the most important task of the historian of philosophy, and he took it to lie at the heart of the prize question.⁵⁶⁵ His answer to it related to the distinction between the empirical and rational. It was when reason “went out into the world of appearances” that it could come into conflict with itself – conflict that was, however, necessary, since this self-expression constituted a part of reason’s striving to know itself or be reason both in and for itself.

So what, then, of the notion of rational progress? Here, too, Hülsen in many respects followed in the footsteps of Heydenreich, Fülleborn, and Reinhold. Progress, he reasoned, was only thinkable if philosophy was not yet realised as a science, but if this science was still *in becoming*. On the other hand, the mapping and evaluation of the progress demanded a perspective *outside* of the philosophical quarrels, a perspective that could be offered only by the wholly realised science itself. Thus, the history of philosophy could be written only once philosophy was already at hand as a fully coherent system resting on the ultimate ground of knowledge as such. Hülsen, however, did not identify this system with Kant’s criticism. Instead, he believed that it was first achieved in “*the Wissenschaftslehre of prof. Fichte in Jena*”.⁵⁶⁶ It was in the principle of the I that the ground of all human knowledge had been uncovered, and as such, it alone allowed for a definite account of all actual and possible philosophical quarrels. “The *Wissenschaftslehre*”, Hülsen wrote, “takes it upon itself to, as the science of all possible knowing, also infer all possible systems from its fundamental principles and to display them in the most complete manner”.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁴ Hülsen, *Prüfung*, p. 19.

⁵⁶⁵ Hülsen, *Prüfung*, pp. 38–39.

⁵⁶⁶ Hülsen, *Prüfung*, p. 156.

⁵⁶⁷ Hülsen, *Prüfung*, p. 158.

This once again raises the question of whether the wholly scientific and perfected system must denote the *endpoint* of progress, the point where progress has nothing else to achieve and philosophy thus comes to rest in an eternal standstill. At certain points, it seems as though Hülsen alluded to this conclusion. He wrote, for example, that the answer to the academy's question presupposed that "a death-like silence would necessarily have to rest over the past for the entire enquiry, and thus over the history of philosophy in general".⁵⁶⁸ At other points in the manuscript, however, Hülsen instead made references to a continuous movement of reflection taking place *within* the final system of philosophy:

Through this circle of free reflection, all the philosophical systems that are situated in it necessarily stand under the same protection of science. For what this is, they are *in becoming*. Thus, in every moment of its circle, reflection philosophises with all systems at once, that is in it all are One, and as a consequence no conflict now remains possible in it. Thus, in order to *observe* the progress of reason to science, the observer must necessarily have grasped the standpoint of science.⁵⁶⁹

Here, Hülsen alluded to an understanding of the system not as a constant everlasting state, but as a dynamic unity between thesis and antithesis. As such, the philosopher who reflected upon and mapped these acts had to describe them as "pragmatic".⁵⁷⁰ Like Fichte himself, Hülsen opened the possibility of interpreting the system not only as the *result* of history, but as the *depiction* of the historical development.

Schelling and Hegel: The Concept of the Developing System

If this developmental aspect of the system remained somewhat ambiguous in Hülsen's treatise, it was far more pronounced in Schelling's account. Schelling's most important treatment of the topic was also written on the occasion of the prize question, though it was a review of the winning essays rather than a contribution to the competition itself. The review format was, however, merely a pretext to make some more general remarks on the nature of the history of philosophy. Schelling only briefly discussed the essays by

⁵⁶⁸ Hülsen, *Prüfung*, p. 121.

⁵⁶⁹ Hülsen, *Prüfung*, p. 154.

⁵⁷⁰ Hülsen, *Prüfung*, p. 164.

Reinhold and Schwab and admitted that he had not even read the essay by the third of the winners, Abicht.⁵⁷¹

With a formulation echoing the post-Kantians, Schelling claimed that the historian of philosophy must occupy a perspective “from which the chaos of different opinions, which from every other standpoint appears totally confused, expresses regularity and agreement”.⁵⁷² This presupposed, in turn, that the philosophical systems were interpreted impartially; if the historian adhered to a particular philosophy, he would unavoidably have to refute all others and thus remain blind to the rulebound nature of the history of philosophy as a whole. According to Schelling, there were two distinct ways of understanding the meaning of such an impartial viewpoint. On the one hand, there was the method of the “humble philosopher” who refrained from any judgement whatsoever. From this perspective, “the merit of each single system appears equally great and slight”, but only because the historian who approached them had himself given up “all high ideals of philosophy” and “all attempts to bring a particular philosophy forwards”.⁵⁷³

This type of impartiality, then, rested upon a general scepticism towards the possibility of philosophical truth. In Schelling’s view, this also made the humble philosopher unable to give a sufficient answer to the Academy’s question. First, because of its blindness to the ideals of advancing philosophy, the approach could say little about the *progress* lying at the heart of this question. Second, it would be just as unable to make sense of philosophical quarrels from its purported perspective of disinterested neutrality. Instead, Schelling wrote, this type of humble, impartial gaze

sees in the contradictions between different scientific edifices actually nothing but a series of useless and pitiable disputes over words and meaningless concepts, and one is therefore inclined to act nobly against philosophy in general, as mere school science, and so to put the most different and contradictory opinions in a total equilibrium of merit.⁵⁷⁴

These issues made it necessary to conceive of an alternative form of impartiality. To achieve this aim, Schelling thought, one had to regard the philosophical systems of the past not from a disinterested distance, but instead

⁵⁷¹ Schelling, “Allgemeine Uebersicht”, p. 95.

⁵⁷² Schelling, “Allgemeine Uebersicht”, p. 98.

⁵⁷³ Schelling, “Allgemeine Uebersicht”, p. 94.

⁵⁷⁴ Schelling, “Allgemeine Uebersicht”, p. 97.

as approaches to a common ideal, because one beholds in them all the same reason, the same problems, the same seeds of a future system that raises itself above all parties and all single systems, that may sometime give them all the surprising proof that they all, taken as a whole, were both correct and incorrect, that they were both true and false.⁵⁷⁵

Schelling presented this line of reasoning with reference to Leibniz's concept of the "perspectival centre point",⁵⁷⁶ but it is clear that the influence came just as much from Reinhold, Fülleborn, and the other post-Kantian historians. Indeed, Schelling explicitly thought that the perspective in question constituted an all-encompassing system of systems:

In order to find what Leibniz found, that what is truly *philosophical* in the contradictory systems also is *true*, one must have the idea of a general system before one's eyes – a system that gives all particular systems, however opposed they may be, connection and necessity in the system of human knowledge itself.⁵⁷⁷

The inspiration from the post-Kantian tradition becomes clearer in Schelling's continued examination. For the two approaches in question, he went on, could be distinguished through their understanding of philosophies as either *spirit* or *letter*. As Fülleborn had argued before him, Schelling wrote that the quarrels between philosophies appeared as unresolvable and pointless battles only if "one sticks to the letter and formula of the systems". By contrast, the historian attempting to capture the spirit of a philosophical system would be able to see

that the true philosophers in essence have always been so much *in agreement* and at the same time (each one of them) so *original* as is never possible for mathematicians; that disagreement has always taken place only between letter philosophers and philosophers of spirit.⁵⁷⁸

With Schelling as a likely source of inspiration, Hegel too distinguished between two possible approaches to philosophical systems of the past in his *Differenzschrift* of 1801. First, there was the method that approached past philosophies as mere information, as facts to be collected and catalogued. This method would constitute a certain form of disinterestedness, for the

⁵⁷⁵ Schelling, "Allgemeine Uebersicht", pp. 94–95.

⁵⁷⁶ Schelling, "Allgemeine Uebersicht", p. 98.

⁵⁷⁷ Schelling, "Allgemeine Uebersicht", p. 98.

⁵⁷⁸ Schelling, "Allgemeine Uebersicht", p. 97.

historian who made use of it regarded his sources from a safe distance, in their “purely objective shape”. “The collector”, Hegel thus wrote,

stands firm in his neutral attitude towards truth; he preserves his independence whether he accepts opinions, rejects them, or abstains from decision. He can give philosophical systems only one relation to himself: they are opinions – and such incidental things as opinions can do him no harm.⁵⁷⁹

As a result, the neutrality of the “curious collector” came at the cost of an apprehension of truth: “He has not learned that there is truth to be had”.⁵⁸⁰ The supposed neutrality had as an effect that philosophical doctrines could appear only as manifold and arbitrary. In the eyes of the collector, they were not living ideas, but dead objects, even “mummies”.⁵⁸¹ They were taken, in other words, to be merely *historical* in the sense of empirical-accidental; indeed, Hegel described this method precisely as one that treated philosophical systems “historically” (*geschichtlich*).⁵⁸²

This is what distinguished the disinterested collection of facts from the other method proposed by Hegel. Rather than viewing philosophical systems as opinions, this one would view them as *truths*. Doing this was, in turn, possible only because the philosophical systems were here recognised as expressions of One spirit or reason. In contrast to the method of the historical collector, Hegel described this second approach as *speculative* or *rational*:

Speculation is the activity of the one universal Reason directed upon itself. Reason, therefore, does not view the philosophical systems of different epochs and different heads merely as different modes [of doing philosophy] and purely idiosyncratic views. Once it has liberated its own view from contingencies and limitations, Reason necessarily finds itself throughout all the particular forms – or else a mere manifold of the concepts and opinions of the intellect; and such a manifold is no philosophy.⁵⁸³

Thus far, then, the solutions of both Schelling and Hegel were rather similar to those of the post-Kantians. Like them, Schelling and Hegel regarded the

⁵⁷⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. by Henry S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), p. 86; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke 4: Jenaer kritische Schriften* [GW4], ed. by Hartmut Buchner and Otto Pöggeler (Hamburg: Meiner, 1968), pp. 9–10.

⁵⁸⁰ Hegel, *Difference*, p. 86 [GW4: 10].

⁵⁸¹ Hegel, *Difference*, p. 86 [GW4: 9].

⁵⁸² Hegel, *Difference*, p. 85 [GW4: 9].

⁵⁸³ Hegel, *Difference*, p. 88 [GW4: 12].

chaotic multitude of past philosophies as transforming itself into regularity once the philosophies were traced back to an underlying principle located beyond the sphere of mere empirical appearance. Like their predecessors, they furthermore identified this principle with the reason or spirit lending a philosophical teaching its life. Finally, they joined the post-Kantians in regarding such a rational principle as immediately relating to the concept of the *system*.

A crucial difference, however, lay in the conception of this system itself. We have seen that the post-Kantians from Reinhold and onwards took the idea of an eminent philosophical system as the prerequisite for philosophical historiography. In such a system, all philosophies would be brought back to their fundamental rational principles and afforded their respective places with clearly defined boundaries. As Grohmann had shown, however, this approach stood in opposition to the depiction of philosophy's history as chronological development. The eminent system, he argued, must instead constitute a necessary and unchanging *a priori* organisation.

Grohmann's critics agreed that the concept of the system implied such an unchanging state. Most prominently, Tennemann considered this notion valid in itself, but accused Grohmann of using it as an excuse to instead rob the history of philosophy of its *historical* character. To write a history of philosophy in the proper sense, he therefore thought it necessary to distinguish the form of history from that of the system. Despite their differences in opinion, then, Tennemann and Grohmann deployed similar concepts of the philosophical system: they took its defining characteristic to be that it elevated itself above historical development. The question was whether the history of philosophy should adhere to the systematic or the chronological-historical form.

At first glance, Schelling's view seems to oscillate between these two positions. As he wrote that the all-encompassing system should be viewed as a common "ideal" located in the future, one may be led to the thought that this system should be considered a regulative end of philosophy's chronological development rather than the form of this development. This would then line up with Tennemann's view. At the same time, however, Schelling underlined that the deeper harmony in the history of philosophy could *not* be made visible "through chronological enumeration of different opinions".⁵⁸⁴ Here, he instead appears to have shared the view of Grohmann.

⁵⁸⁴ Schelling, "Allgemeine Uebersicht", p. 98.

The key difference pertains to Schelling's concept of the system as such. For unlike both Grohmann and Tennemann, he did not conceive of it as something elevated above development and temporal transformation. On the contrary, he wrote that "the system [...] that is to serve as the centre point of the history of philosophy must itself be capable of development".⁵⁸⁵

Given the way the system had been understood by the earlier post-Kantians, this is a puzzling claim. According to both Grohmann and Tennemann, progressive development presupposed some kind of imperfection through which the ideal was not yet fully realised. The eminent philosophical system, however, must be characterised by its ability to exhaustively account for all of human knowledge. Precisely this made its continuous progress unthinkable: any change would at this point denote a deterioration, a *regress* from the true essence and idea of philosophy.

Schelling believed that this issue could be resolved if the notion of development was understood in a different way. He strove to achieve this by introducing a key concept of idealist system philosophy – that of the organism:

Just as nothing develops from a seed that was not beforehand united in it, so nothing can arise in philosophy (through analysis) that was not beforehand present in human spirit itself (the original synthesis). Thus a *communal*, ruling *spirit* permeates all single systems worthy of this name; each single system is possible only through deviation from the general primeval image [*Urbild*] that they all, taken together, approach to a greater or smaller degree.⁵⁸⁶

The idea that all conceivable systems must already be present in human spirit was one that Schelling shared with his post-Kantian predecessors. The notion that this relation could be described with reference to the development of the seed, on the other hand, was a novel one.⁵⁸⁷ Through this image, Schelling proposed a system conception that constituted neither a mere atemporal organisation nor a type of temporal development in which past moments were once and for all replaced by new ones. The development in question was

⁵⁸⁵ Schelling, "Allgemeine Uebersicht", p. 99.

⁵⁸⁶ Schelling, "Allgemeine Uebersicht", p. 98. On the following page, Schelling argued that "every so-called philosophy that is [...] not developed from an inner principle, from inside out *organically*" must be excluded from the history of philosophy and that "an *organising spirit*" must rule over the system at the centre of this history.

⁵⁸⁷ This aspect is also emphasised in Larry Steindler, "The History of Philosophy as an 'Organism': The School of Schelling", in *Models of the History of Philosophy. Volume IV: The Hegelian Age*, ed. by Gregorio Piaia, Giuseppe Micheli, and Giovanni Santinello (Dordrecht: Springer, 2022).

a type of teleology in which the wholeness of the movement constituted the truth.

This conception of the organism was itself not new. We have already seen how Herder frequently used organic life as a metaphor for historical development. A more important source for Schelling's use of the term is Kant's third *Critique*.⁵⁸⁸ To Kant, the organic was distinct from the mechanic in that it connected its moments not as a blind, ever-continuing sequence. Instead, he defined "an organized product of nature" as "that in which everything is an end and reciprocally a means as well. Nothing in it is in vain, purposeless, or to be ascribed to a blind mechanism of nature".⁵⁸⁹ The distinction between the organic and the mechanic concerned not least the relation between cause and effect. In mechanistic terms, this relation was unidirectional so that the cause preceded the effect. In the organic structure, the parts were instead to be considered "reciprocally the cause and effect of their form. For in this way alone is it possible in turn for the idea of the whole conversely (reciprocally) to determine the form and combination of all the parts".⁵⁹⁰ Famously, this notion of the organic also came to play a crucial role for the Jena romantics, who saw in it an opening to move beyond a mechanistic worldview and inscribe into nature a peculiar form of teleology.⁵⁹¹

In the context of Schelling's discussion of the history of philosophy, the introduction of the organism concept thus served a double purpose. First, the organic constituted a unity between the realm of the empirical-historical and the rational.⁵⁹² Second, it also allowed for an approach to temporality as

⁵⁸⁸ See, e.g., Manfred Frank, "Schellings Spekulative Umdeutung des Kantischen Organismus-Konzepts", in *Nature and Realism in Schelling's Philosophy*, ed. by Emilio Carlo Corriero and Andrea Dezi (Torino: Accademia University Press, 2013), pp. 87–114; Annette Sell, "Die Wahrheit des lebendigen Organismus: Hegels und Schellings naturphilosophische Auffassungen des organischen Lebens", *Studia Hegeliana*, 3 (2017), p. 112.

⁵⁸⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. by Paul Guyer, trans. by Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 247–48; Immanuel Kant, *Akademie Textausgabe. Band 5 [AA5]* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1913), p. 376.

⁵⁹⁰ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p. 245 [AA5: 373].

⁵⁹¹ See, e.g., Dalia Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute: Being and Knowing in Early German Romantic Philosophy, 1795–1804* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), pp. 4, 60–63, 122–25; Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung*, pp. 55–66, 747.

⁵⁹² Cf. Schelling's famous statement in *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*: "Nature should be spirit made visible, spirit the invisible nature. Here then, in the absolute identity of spirit *in us* and nature *outside us*, the problem of the possibility of a nature external to us must be resolved" in Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, trans. by Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 42; Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe. Werke 5: Ideen zu einer philosophie der Natur*, ed. by Manfred Durner and Walter Schieche (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1994), p. 107; translation modified.

something other than a unidirectional progress whose result was a sharp distinction between past, present, and future.

Even though Schelling did not explicitly refer to the post-Kantian historians in this context, it is possible to regard his use of the organism concept as an implicit critique of their notions of progress. To them, progress denoted a form of teleological movement that approached an idea. This idea, however, was to a certain extent *external* to the movement; once it was achieved, the movement would come to a halt. It was precisely in this way that the idea marked the *end* towards which the movement tended. If a standstill at the final stage of this process was to be avoided, it was possible only through the positing of this end as merely regulative and empirically unattainable so that history constituted an eternal approach to it.⁵⁹³ The organism concept, by contrast, posited the idea not beyond the development towards it, but in the totality of this movement itself. If the system constituted such an organic whole, it would therefore not be located outside of temporality; rather, it was systematic precisely *because* it was eternally self-developing.

Schelling further elaborated the meaning of this by contrasting his organic system conception to the approach that regarded the system as a “downward running chain”. In such a form, the links would be connected to one another “in eternity”.⁵⁹⁴ This chain certainly constituted a type of necessary structure: each link related to its neighbours as either cause or effect, either means or end. Unlike the organism, however, the links would not in themselves constitute expressions of the idea; rather, they would all remain particulars whose organisation was external to each of them.

The chain had previously been used as a metaphor for pragmatic history by, among others, Gatterer,⁵⁹⁵ and a few years after Schelling’s review, it was also picked up by Tennemann.⁵⁹⁶ Schelling thus appears to have referred to the notion of progress and pragmatism that had developed among the post-Kantian historians. If we read his account in this way, we could say that he accused them of failing to live up to their own ideals. They wanted the pragmatic history to be something other than a mere contingent aggregate – but the chain in which they organised the events could constitute nothing other than such an aggregate, since the parts did not carry within them the organising principle as their living force.

⁵⁹³ Cf. Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, p. 302.

⁵⁹⁴ Schelling, “Allgemeine Uebersicht”, p. 98.

⁵⁹⁵ Gatterer, “Vom historischen Plan”, p. 86–87.

⁵⁹⁶ Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. xxii.

In the organism, on the other hand, each moment or link would present itself as an expression of the universal in its harmonious self-appearance. The particular could here be grasped only in relation to the whole, and the whole only in relation to its parts. Furthermore, this would transform the causal relations between all individual links. The relations would now not be causal in a unidirectional, but in a multidirectional manner so that “each single link in relation to each other is reciprocally cause and effect, means and end”.⁵⁹⁷ “Thus”, Schelling summarised, “all progress in philosophy is only a progress through *development*”, in which “[e]ach single system deserving this name can be regarded as a seed that, admittedly slowly and gradually, but inexorably and in all directions, shapes [*fortbildet*] itself in the most diverse directions”.⁵⁹⁸

Herein lies the decisive difference between Schelling’s conception of the history of philosophy and that of the early post-Kantians. Schelling’s position was undoubtedly indebted to post-Kantian writings, but through his reinterpretation of the concept of the system, he was able to reach another conclusion about how this type of history ought to be structured.⁵⁹⁹

It is important to note that this line of reasoning not only led to a reinterpretation of history as systematic; equally, it entailed the possibility of interpreting the *system* as something *historical*. This topic was developed in one of Schelling’s main systematic works, the *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* of 1800. Here, Schelling set himself the explicit target of presenting “the whole of philosophy as what in fact it is, namely a progressive history of self-consciousness”.⁶⁰⁰ Schelling thus took historicity to be harmonious with the systematic ambition rather than opposed to it. Like Fichte in the *Grundlage*, he structured his work as a movement immanent to self-consciousness in which it gradually formed itself through a series of

⁵⁹⁷ Schelling, “Allgemeine Uebersicht”, p. 98.

⁵⁹⁸ Schelling, “Allgemeine Uebersicht”, p. 98.

⁵⁹⁹ Like Fichte, Schelling tied this notion of development to the concept of action or activity. As Helmut Höfling puts it in a study of Schelling’s concept of “epoch”, “[s]ystem in the transcendental sense thus means *system-act*”, in Helmut Höfling, “Der Epochenbegriff in Schellings System des transzendentalen Idealismus”, *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, 12.4 (1958), p. 508.

⁶⁰⁰ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. by Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), p. 2; Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe. Werke 9.1: System des Transzendentalen Idealismus* [W9.1], ed. by Harald Korten and Paul Ziche (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2005), p. 25. The first time Schelling used the concept of history of self-consciousness was in an article in the *Philosophisches Journal*: Schelling, “Allgemeine Uebersicht”, p. 109. On the historical dimension of Schelling’s concept of subjectivity, see Giacomo Croci, *Die Konstitution von Subjektivität als Geschichtlichkeit: Im Anschluss an F. Schellings ‘System des Transzendentalen Idealismus’ und M. Heideggers ‘Sein und Zeit’* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2023).

transcendental acts. Unlike Fichte, however, Schelling explicitly referred to the stages of this development as “epochs”, thereby further underlining the historical character of the philosophical system.⁶⁰¹

The System as Presence of the Past

The idea of the organic system and its relation to progress was taken up by Hegel in the *Differenzschrift*, where it was more explicitly tied to the status of philosophical attempts of the past. As we have seen, one issue of concern to Grohmann was that chronological progress would rob older philosophies of their contemporary value. In such a historical account, he believed, they would be reduced to something past in the same way as a historical event or action no longer existed in the present.

In his critique of Grohmann, Tennemann had argued that even though philosophy itself could not change, reason could nonetheless develop in its philosophical activity. This activity related to the system of philosophy as a means to an end so that the history of philosophy constituted the movement *towards* the philosophical system, the gradual path to its realisation. It appears, however, that this did not constitute a sufficient solution to the issue of the present value of past philosophies. They would now be united as related to a common idea, but would they not then be located at different distances from this idea so that the older philosophies would necessarily be less complete? Tennemann’s statement in his studies of Plato, namely, that each philosophy could be judged by how close it came to Kant’s criticism, indicates that this was indeed his stance.⁶⁰²

This was the issue occupying Hegel. Like Grohmann, he believed that philosophy could not be said to have a past in the same sense as empirical history: it could not be understood as a series of singular events replacing each other in a chronological series. In his later lectures on the history of philosophy, he argued that such a structure would be contingent in terms of both its form and its content. Philosophy, however, being an “objective science of truth, science of its necessity”, was impossible to properly understand in such a contingent presentation.⁶⁰³

⁶⁰¹ Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, pp. 51–154 [W9,1: 92–229]. On the epoch concept, see Höfling, “Der Epochenbegriff in Schellings System des transzendentalen Idealismus”. Schlegel would use the same term in his lectures on transcendental philosophy: Friedrich Schlegel, *Transcendental-philosophie*, ed. by Michael Elsässer (Hamburg: Meiner, 1991), pp. 11–13.

⁶⁰² Tennemann, *System der Platonischen Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. v.

⁶⁰³ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, p. 171 [GDP: 18]; translation modified.

The same problem lay at the heart also of the *Differenzschrift*. As Hegel here argued, a structure of progressive development towards a regulative end could not manage to get around the problem. In a narrative in which each philosophical attempt was interpreted as an approach to the common idea of philosophy, the contingent sequence of events would admittedly be turned into a regular order. This order would still turn the past into something no longer current, however: older philosophical teachings would be nothing more than “practice studies” that were forcibly surpassed by later thinkers.⁶⁰⁴ Such a view, Hegel wrote, could be legitimate only if one regarded philosophy as a “handicraft” in which the first primitive attempts were pushed aside by new technology and innovation.⁶⁰⁵

The handicraft metaphor is well suited to Hegel’s argument. The point was that a handicraft developed by inventing new methods and refining old ones, so that it gradually became more effective. While the history of this development may certainly be interesting and enlightening, it would not be strictly necessary for anyone wanting to become skilled in the craft itself. Rather than taking the detour through history, the student of the craft could immediately learn the most refined methods of the present. The history of the handicraft thus served a purpose external to the purpose of the handicraft itself.

This, Hegel contended, was not the case for philosophy. The study of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, or Spinoza could not be understood as the study of an ancient tool that had already been replaced by more precise and expedient ones. Rather, historical philosophies were always unconditionally valid as products of the self-examination of reason and could not be replaced or superseded by later philosophies. The claim that present philosophies were superior to ancient ones was, in Hegel’s view, just as absurd as the claim that Shakespeare was superior to Sophocles or Raphael to Apelles.⁶⁰⁶

Through this rejection of the chronological structure, Hegel’s position too at first appears to align with Grohmann’s. But despite his claim of the atemporal value of philosophy, he also took development to necessarily belong to it. This development should not, however, be understood as a

⁶⁰⁴ Hegel discussed this view with reference to Reinhold, but it should be clear that his objections apply just as much to Tennemann. Hegel, *Difference*, p. 87 [GW4: 10].

⁶⁰⁵ Hegel, *Difference*, pp. 86–87 [GW4: 10].

⁶⁰⁶ Hegel, *Difference*, p. 89 [GW4: 12]. It is important to note that Hegel here compared the history of philosophy to the history of art rather than to the history of science, clearly distinguishing his approach from that used by Tennemann and others.

surpassing of the past moments of spirit, but rather as an elaboration and objectification of potentialities already present within spirit.

Like Schelling, Hegel identified the key to the issue in the concept of the organism. “The true peculiarity of a philosophy”, he wrote, “lies in the interesting individuality which is the organic shape that Reason has built for itself out of the material of a particular age”.⁶⁰⁷ Later on in the essay, he returned to this notion and related it to the difference between reason and understanding. The understanding, he claimed, worked by dividing the opposites and demarking their “bounds, ground, and condition”. The result of the work of the understanding was thus similar to the downward-running chain described by Schelling: it created order in the manifold, but merely through stable, unmoving distinctions between contradictories. Reason, by contrast, “unites these contradictories, posits both together and suspends them both”, and this unifying work is what made philosophy into “a system, that is, an organic whole of concepts”.⁶⁰⁸

Through these statements, Hegel sought to account for why philosophies differed from one another: reason did not perform its work in separation from its temporal conditions, but using these conditions as its materials and impulses. What reason built out of these materials was not, however, a dead object, but an organic shape, i.e., something that in itself contained the principle of self-development. This was, Hegel thought, why the reason of a later era could find in past philosophical systems “spirit of its spirit, flesh of its flesh”.⁶⁰⁹

The notion of the organism recurred in Hegel’s later systematic works.⁶¹⁰ In an often-quoted passage from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, for example, he let the different stages of a flower serve to illustrate the immanent movement of the philosophical system:

The bud disappears when the blossom breaks through, and one might say that the former is refuted by the latter. Likewise, through the fruit, the blossom

⁶⁰⁷ Hegel, *Difference*, p. 88 [GW4: 12].

⁶⁰⁸ Hegel, *Difference*, p. 103 [GW4: 23].

⁶⁰⁹ Hegel, *Difference*, p. 88 [GW4: 12].

⁶¹⁰ Note, however, that Hegel in other contexts differentiated between natural and spiritual development; see, e.g., Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Lectures of 1822–3*, ed. by Robert F. Brown and Peter Crafts Hodgson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), pp. 107–09, 155–56; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke 18: Vorlesungsmanuskripte II (1816–1831)*, ed. by Theodor Ebert, Manfred Baum, and Kurt Rainer Meist (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998), pp. 181–83; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen: Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte. Band 12: Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte Berlin 1822/1823 [V12]*, ed. by Karl Heinz Ilting, Karl Brehmer, and Hoo Nam Seelmann (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1996), pp. 38–39.

itself may be declared to be a false existence of the plant, since the fruit emerges as the blossom's truth as it comes to replace the blossom itself. These forms are not only distinguished from each other, but, as incompatible with each other, they also supplant each other. However, at the same time their fluid nature makes them into moments of an organic unity in which they are not only not in conflict with each other, but rather, one is equally as necessary as the other, and it is this equal necessity which alone constitutes the life of the whole.⁶¹¹

This was, in Hegel's view, how to understand the structure of the system as well as the history of philosophy. It constituted a movement in which each stage negated a previous one, but in which it was simultaneously related to the whole in such a way that the individual stage was re-actualised and reflected in the whole. The unconditional truth of the system was thus not to be found in its static nature, but in its particular type of movement that elaborated, developed, and returned to itself. The negation of the preceding truth could thereby be interpreted as a realisation and preservation of it. The system was a development where the past was incorporated and kept alive.

The Reception of The Idealist Programme

In the first decades of the 19th century, Schelling's and Hegel's ideas exerted a significant influence on historians of philosophy. The fundamental historiographical problems discussed during the period continued to be the same as the ones already encountered in the early 1790s, but the answers to them were now increasingly related to notions of both history and system as self-developing organisms.

Interestingly, this was the case even for some historians explicitly critical of Schelling's idealism. In Carl Friedrich Bachmann's lectures published with the title *Über Geschichte der Philosophie*, for example, the author discussed "the view that the history of philosophy is an account of the confusions of the philosophers". We have seen how concerning this view was for both post-Kantians and idealists; to Bachmann, however, these schools were themselves guilty of advancing it. In their accounts, he argued, the history of philosophy turned into a long series of failures

⁶¹¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by Terry P. Pinkard and Michael Baur (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 4; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke 9: Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. by Wolfgang Bonsiepen and Reinhard Heede (Hamburg: Meiner, 1980), p. 10.

until finally someone managed to achieve mastery in this art and to thereby close off the history so that nothing remained for the successors other than improving a single expression, grasping a concept even more sharply, or filling a small gap.⁶¹²

This view, Bachmann went on, was what had led to the “two most daring dogmatic systems”, namely, those of Fichte and Schelling. Nevertheless, despite his sharp opposition to these system builders, Bachmann borrowed a number of crucial aspects of his own historical outlook from them. Indeed, his objections to viewing the history of philosophy as unidirectional progress already came close to those Schelling and other idealists had put forth, and his rejection of viewing philosophy as a craft brings to mind Hegel’s *Differenzschrift*.

This indirect influence was even clearer in Bachmann’s discussion of Tennemann. When Bachmann published the second edition of his essay in 1820, Tennemann had already passed away, and the author was cautious not to speak ill of his “late friend”.⁶¹³ In the end, however, he did not refrain from identifying a crucial problem in Tennemann’s historiography: it rested, he believed, on a “Ptolemaic point of view” in which Kant’s philosophy constituted the centre around which all others rotated. In contrast to this, Bachmann believed that every philosophical system ought to be grasped as itself gravitating around another centre point, namely, “the eternal idea of truth”.⁶¹⁴ Understood in this way, no philosophy could be the last one that grasped truth once and for all; none could complete the striving and longing for truth and make the orbital motion come to a dead rest. Indeed, as Bachmann concluded, philosophy without continuous historical development would be unthinkable:

*Philosophy is only real in its history. This history is the unfolding of its essence, like the life of man is the revelation of his inner. Herein lies the deep meaning of the singular systems: that they are not confusions in order that someone may find the goal, not preparations for a particular epoch, but unavoidable transit points in the orbit of science, the unfolding of the singular organs in the scientific organism.*⁶¹⁵

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⁶¹² Carl Friedrich Bachmann, *Ueber Geschichte der Philosophie*, 2nd ed. (Jena: Crökerschen Buchhandlung, 1820), p. 2.

⁶¹³ Bachmann, *Ueber Geschichte der Philosophie*, 2nd ed., p. 3.

⁶¹⁴ Bachmann, *Ueber Geschichte der Philosophie*, 2nd ed., pp. 3–4.

⁶¹⁵ Bachmann, *Ueber Geschichte der Philosophie*, 2nd ed., p. 59.

Bachmann's essay in general bears witness to a romantic inclination cautious of claims to absolute knowledge based on reason alone. His heliocentric conception of philosophies as satellites of the eternal source of truth certainly differed from both Tennemann's programme and those of the idealists. In evoking the notion of the organism, however, he nonetheless illustrated how this criticism was itself largely based on a conceptual framework developed within idealist system philosophy.

Grohmann's Fichtean Turn

Another scholar who took inspiration from idealist system philosophy was none other than Grohmann. The year after the original publication of his essay, Grohmann republished it under a new title in his journal *Neue Beyträge zur kritischen Philosophie und insbesondere zur Gechichte der Philosophie*. While the majority of the article remained unchanged, Grohmann had added two new sections that substantially changed his outlook. These sections are based on readings of both Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and Schelling's article on the *Preisfrage* debate.

In the first added section, Grohmann elaborated on his earlier discussion of the concept of philosophical spirit. Originally, he had considered any account of philosophical spirit to belong merely to the *outer* history of philosophy. The concept of spirit was here defined as the relation between the *a priori* laws of thought and those of sensibility. A history of philosophical spirit would therefore be a history of how philosophical thought was influenced by contingent, empirically given conditions. It could refer only to a depiction of "the outward garment of philosophy", and as such it was to be sharply separated from the history of philosophy in a strict sense. In the 1798 version, Grohmann modified this argument and claimed that spirit could in fact be considered "in two senses":

first, in an empirical or psychological sense, as we explained it above, and second, as a pure determination given at once with philosophy. In the former case, philosophical spirit was brought about through contingent psychological determinations of the mode of thought through sensibility, through the reciprocal influence of two faculties. It concerned more the outer way, the garment of philosophising. In the latter case, it is *the relation of a system or of philosophy to speculation in general* as this relationship is determined in the ground of each system (the law of thought from which it

departs) to the general system of laws of thought, the original modes of action of human spirit.⁶¹⁶

If philosophical spirit was understood in the second way, Grohmann now argued, a history of it would be “possible *a priori*”.⁶¹⁷ For taken in this sense, it presupposed nothing alien to reason or the faculty of thought. Importantly, Grohmann now took this to indicate that a certain chronology-like sequence was in fact possible as an *a priori* determination:

Now, such a history of the philosophical spirit is possible *a priori*. The different species of this philosophical spirit, and the different epochs that it passes through until it reaches a highest point that it cannot go beyond, must quite appropriately and wholly determinately be possible to draw *a priori* according to the determinate relations and the different contents of the laws of thought. It can well be determined *a priori* that the critical spirit, to the extent it stands at the highest level of speculation, could not begin philosophy and philosophising, but rather can only consist in the end of all philosophical systems when they had all, as it were, been *attempted*. It can be determined *a priori* that philosophy had to begin with a dogmatic spirit to the extent this is proper to the simplest, most natural speculation[.]⁶¹⁸

The development of philosophical spirit was in other words something immanent to philosophy as such. The reason that one philosophy preceded another was no longer ascribed to merely outer conditions, but was instead traced back to the nature of reason itself.

The second added section made a similar point. It opened with a lengthy quotation from Schelling’s article in the *Philosophisches Journal*. With inspiration from this quotation, Grohmann once again proposed that the concept of the history of philosophy could be understood “in a double way”: one could approach it either analytically or synthetically.⁶¹⁹

This double way was, Grohmann went on to claim, rooted in the difference between the perspectives of Kant’s criticism and Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*. “The *Critique of Pure Reason*”, he now believed, “presents the forms and laws of thought as *firm, resting* unities that are given *a priori* to human spirit”.⁶²⁰ Fichte, by contrast, regarded these laws as rooted in *acts* of

⁶¹⁶ Johann Christian August Grohmann, “Was heißt: Geschichte der Philosophie?”, *Neue Beyträge zur kritischen Philosophie und insbesondere zur Geschichte der Philosophie* (1798), p. 41.

⁶¹⁷ Grohmann, “Was heißt: Geschichte der Philosophie?”, p. 43.

⁶¹⁸ Grohmann, “Was heißt: Geschichte der Philosophie?”, p. 43.

⁶¹⁹ Grohmann, “Was heißt: Geschichte der Philosophie?”, p. 69.

⁶²⁰ Grohmann, “Was heißt: Geschichte der Philosophie?”, p. 70.

thought, and the resting qualities were transformed into “real *acts*, *active* ways of acting [*thätige Handlungsweisen*], and the method of philosophising here thus consists of an active synthesis that always progresses from one part to the next”.⁶²¹ Grohmann thus underlined that the Fichtean system allowed for activity and progress immanent to reason itself; such an activity lent itself to a history of philosophy that was *a priori* but nonetheless included movement, change, and progressive culture. There was an important aspect of self-criticism in this new position: while Grohmann still considered his earlier programme for a non-chronological history of philosophy valid, he had by now reached the conclusion that it did not mark the highest possible understanding of the history of philosophy as a concept.

Idealist Histories of Philosophy

In the 19th century, a number of historians of philosophy were influenced by the Schellingian and Hegelian programmes. Among them was the philologist and historian Friedrich Ast, whose *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie* was published in 1807. Ast’s historical work is prominent above all as the first attempt at developing Schelling’s principles into an overarching account of the whole history of philosophy, complete with a complex division of epochs. The premises of the project are typical of idealism. Ast opened with a discussion of the relation between the individual and the universal. The individual, he wrote, had “its ground and end in the whole”, but at the same time the universal

realises itself in the individual. The cognition of the universal without the perception of the individual is thus one-sided and does not correspond to life itself or truth. Therefore, true cognition must grasp the universal and the individual in one. To this [cognition] alone does life appear as what it is according to its flawless idea: a harmony developing itself, a totality that is at the same time individuality both in itself and in its particular parts.⁶²²

Particularly enlightening is Ast’s connection between the concept of truth and that of life. By emphasising that the individual was to be thought as the realisation of the universal rather than excluded from it and describing this relation as living or organic, Ast simultaneously turned the movement of self-realisation into the necessary form of the history of philosophy. The conflict between the systematic and the chronological form noted by Grohmann had

⁶²¹ Grohmann, “Was heißt: Geschichte der Philosophie?”, p. 71.

⁶²² Friedrich Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie* (Landshut: Thomann, 1807), p. iii.

here turned into a conflict *defining* of the system as such, a conflict that lent the system its dynamism and life.

The other prominent Schelling-influenced historian of the 19th century, Thaddä Anselm Rixner, argued for a similar view. In the introduction to his *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie* (1822), Rixner wrote that philosophy must in a certain sense be understood as atemporal. Both *reason*, the organ of philosophy, and *truth*, its object, were necessarily located beyond every contingent and time-bound determination. However, even though each particular system was rooted in this eternal unity of truth and reason, it could only be *realised* as a particular determination of it. Thus, each individual system constituted a “particular, partial depiction” and therefore should be understood as the “mortal side” of truth.⁶²³ These systems were connected to eternity and had their essence in it, but it was in their nature to not be eternal or unchangeable themselves. Ultimately, this paradoxical relation in which eternity was expressed and realised in the mortal – i.e., that which must arise and pass away – was what turned eternity into something living. Indeed, Rixner called for the history of philosophy to be written as “*organic*, in that it, as a depiction of life and the activity of spirit striving to know itself, appears as a living organism dependent on itself and closed in itself”.⁶²⁴

The inner harmony that Rixner took as proper to the history of philosophy therefore did not constitute a conflict-free or durable structure, but a rule-bound and organic play in which opposite determinations crossed over to and dissolved each other. The history of philosophy was harmonious, Rixner wrote,

since it shows and demonstrates how the *One* and the *manifold*, the *infinite* and the *finite*, the *eternal* and the *temporal*, the *ideal* and the *real*, that which *is* and the *appearance*, are always – just as in *all shapes of life*, and thus also *all shapes of science* – eternally *opposed to and separate from one another* in terms of *form* when they are viewed *from the standpoint of reflexion*; but from the standpoint of *reason* they are innerly *One* in terms of the *actual, true essence*. For this reason, the *many and reciprocally opposed philosophies unite in one cognition and intuition*, like intersecting rays of the periphery all amicably are united *in one light* in a single central point.⁶²⁵

⁶²³ Rixner, *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. 5.

⁶²⁴ Rixner, *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. 6.

⁶²⁵ Rixner, *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, pp. 6–7.

Thus, for the idealists, the individual, the temporal, and even the empirical became necessary elements of the essence of philosophy as such. Philosophy could become real only as a definite system, but the definite also had to realise itself as definite in time and space. Both the historical diversity and the mobile and chronological form of presentation were therefore to be understood as expressions of the essence of reason itself. Whereas the Kantians primarily emphasised that one could think of the history of philosophy as systematic only insofar as one found a way from its apparent particularity to an underlying universal system, the later idealists added to this that the system in question must, conversely, also itself contain a movement from the universal to the particular. Only in this way, they believed, could philosophy become alive, and only as alive could it become true.

Hegel himself would present a full account of the history of philosophy: from 1805 to his death in 1831, he repeatedly lectured on the topic. Still of particular importance to him was the issue of how to account for contradictions between philosophers. As we have seen, the risk typically perceived in these contradictions was that they could lead the student to doubt the value of philosophy. Hegel took this issue seriously, but regarded it as based on a misunderstanding. “[H]owever diverse the philosophies may have been”, he argued, “they still share the feature of being philosophies”.⁶²⁶ Using a famous metaphor, he likened the relation between this One philosophy and its manifold forms to the taxonomical relation between fruits in general and particular species. Thus, those who could not see that all philosophies were united made the same mistake as

a (pedantic) patient whom the physician advises to eat fruit, and for whom he prescribes cherries or plums or grapes, but the patient, having a pedantic understanding, does not comply, because none of these things [*Früchte*] are ‘fruit’ [*Obst*]; instead they are cherries or plums or grapes.⁶²⁷

As in the *Differenzschrift*, Hegel distinguished between the approach that regarded past philosophies as opinions and the one that understood them as Truth. To the former, he reiterated, the history of philosophy would indeed appear as a series of contradictions, but to the latter, it would appear as the infinite unfolding of a single idea. This was again taken to relate also to the *form* of history: the history of philosophy could not be sufficiently grasped if it was presented in a contingent chronological order. Instead, philosophy was

⁶²⁶ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, p. 171 [GDP: 19].

⁶²⁷ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, pp. 171–72 [GDP: 20].

by its nature the “objective science of truth, the science of its necessity”.⁶²⁸ Returning to the issue of chronology, he stated that

although the history of philosophy is of course history, it is not dealing with something bygone. The contents of this history are the scientific products of rationality, and they are not something transitory. Labors in this field have yielded what is true, and this truth is eternal, not existent at one time but no longer at another.⁶²⁹

Importantly, however, Hegel did not take this eternal value of philosophy as offering an opportunity to simply return to past systems in the sense of whole-heartedly adhering to them in the present. For as he explicitly claimed, “an earlier philosophy does not satisfy that spirit in whom there lives a more profoundly defined concept”, and as a consequence,

there can be no more Platonists, Aristotelians, Stoics, or Epicureans today. To wish to awaken them, to bring the spirit that is more cultivated, and has gone more deeply within itself, back to such philosophies would be an impossibility, likewise a foolishness, just as when a man strives to be a youth, or the youth strives to be a boy or a child, even though man, youth, and child are [stages of] one and the same individual.⁶³⁰

This description again brings to mind the model of development employed by the post-Kantians: like them, Hegel took the unifying principle of spirit’s development to be comparable to the development of the single individual in its stages of life. In this sense, then, there was indeed an aspect of temporality in the history of philosophy, and the eternal value of earlier thought did not imply that it could just as well have been formulated in the present. However, Hegel added an important reservation to this argument: “Of course”, he wrote, “the Platonic, Aristotelian, and other philosophies live on and are with us; yet philosophy is no longer in the shape and stage it had as Platonism or Aristotelianism”.⁶³¹ The key here lies in the concept of the shape. To Hegel, the essential truth of any particular philosophy was indeed atemporal and could continue to invigorate the spirit of subsequent ages. However, each age also had to give this truth its own particular shape and particular determinations.

⁶²⁸ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, p. 171 [GDP: 18]; translation modified.

⁶²⁹ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, p. 187 [GDP: 46–47].

⁶³⁰ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, p. 188–89 [GDP: 49].

⁶³¹ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, p. 188 [GDP: 49].

From Theory to Praxis

In chapter 2, I noted a difference in approach between the post-Kantian authors of programmes for the history of philosophy and the authors of actual histories. The latter could not be content with general conceptual remarks, but had to tie these to the empirical study and organisation of a source material. A similar challenge presented itself to Hegel, Ast, and Rixner. They all made far-reaching claims about the systematic structure of philosophy's historical development, but these claims had to be supported by the historical narrative itself. It was not enough to *state* such a harmony between history and system; it also needed to be *shown*.

The idealists argued that reason must necessarily transform, externalise, and limit itself in order to return to its essential eternity. Thus, they inferred, the task of philosophy was to systematically reconstruct the path that reason followed and to thereby gain insight into the system of its *a priori* laws. In this interpretation, however, the question was to what extent the inner development of reason related to the actual order of the philosophical systems in the empirical chronology of history. If it did not directly correspond to philosophy's empirical development in historical time, the problem posed by Grohmann seemed to reappear in a new form. If, on the other hand, it was to serve as a guiding principle of the history of philosophy, it seemed to presuppose that philosophy's empirical development was itself rational and systematic – that it, regarded in itself, must be identical to the structure of reason, spirit, or the absolute.

There is a case to be made that this was indeed what the idealists proposed. Hegel, for example, explicitly stated that “the history of philosophy is the same as the system of philosophy”, and that “the history of philosophy itself has to provide the empirical proof” of this.⁶³² In the lectures of 1820–1821 a more elaborate version of this view was proposed: Hegel here argued for a parallel structure between history and logic:

I contend that the historical succession of the systems of philosophy is the same as the succession in the logical derivation of the idea's conceptual determinations. My contention is that, by stripping away from the basic concepts of the systems appearing in the history of philosophy whatever pertains to their external configuration, to their application to particular concerns, and the like, we are left with the different stages of determinations of the idea itself in its logical concepts. Vice versa, by taking the logical progression on its own terms we have, in accord with its main moments, the

⁶³² Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, p. 55 [GDP: 220].

progression of the idea's historical appearances, although one must of course know how to discern these pure concepts within what the historical shape contains.⁶³³

This statement posed more radically than any predecessor the unity between the history and system of philosophy. As such, we can also approach it in two ways. First, it can be read as referring to the distinction between historical and rational knowledge. In Hegel's system, the *Science of Logic* began at the point in spirit's development where pure thought had become united with its object.⁶³⁴ If we relate this to the problem first posed by Grohmann, it indicates that to Hegel, the *Science of Logic* simultaneously denoted the unity of the historical and the rational in the sense that these concepts were understood by Wolff and Kant. For this reason, it could also be understood precisely as structurally harmonious with the history of philosophy.

Second, Hegel's statement pertains to the relation between the chronological and the systematic form. In this sense, it indicates that he thought these forms to coincide so that the history of philosophy could itself be regarded as mirroring the purely logical development from pure concepts. It remains unclear, though, how Hegel believed that this uniformity actually presented itself. As noted by Hans Friedrich Fulda, a crucial interpretative difficulty lies in the fact that there is no obvious structural similarity between the chronology of Hegel's historical lectures and the *Science of Logic*.⁶³⁵ If Hegel did indeed propose that the history of philosophy followed a thoroughly rational, necessary, and logical structure, this structure nonethe-

⁶³³ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, p. 176 [GDP: 27].

⁶³⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. by George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 29; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke 21: Wissenschaft der Logik. Erster Band*, ed. by Friedrich Hogemann (Hamburg: Meiner, 1985), pp. 33–34. There are a number of detailed commentaries on Hegel's *Logic*. Among the most prominent are Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer, *Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik: Ein dialogischer Kommentar* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2020); Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006); Stephen Houlgate, *Hegel on Being* (London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).

⁶³⁵ Hans Friedrich Fulda, "Hegels These, dass die Aueinanderfolge von philosophischen Systemen dieselbe sei wie die von Stufen logischer Gedankenauswicklung", in *Hegel und die Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. by Dietmar H. Heidemann and Christian Krijnen (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007). See also Angelica Nuzzo, "Hegel's Method for a History of Philosophy: The Berlin Introductions to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy (1819–1831)", in *Hegel's History of Philosophy: New Interpretations*, ed. by David A. Duquette (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003); Helmut Schneider, "System und Geschichte der Philosophie bei Hegel: Die Rezeption der Identitätsthe im 19. Jahrhundert", in *Hegel und die Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. by Dietmar H. Heidemann and Christian Krijnen (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007).

less seems to be located beyond the most immediate form of appearance of history.

If Hegel's view remained somewhat ambiguous, however, it was far less so for Ast and Rixner. Ast was consistent in turning the dialectical movement from thesis to antithesis into a scheme for the historical development of philosophy. As the dynamic movement between contradictions, he wrote, the "elements of life correspond to the periods of temporal life in the most determinate way".⁶³⁶ From this, Ast deduced a fourfold division of the history of philosophy. First, there was the epoch of *Urphilosophie*, which simultaneously denoted an originary unity. This was followed first by the period of realism comprising classical Greek thought, then by the period of idealism typical of the Middle Ages, and finally the period of *Realidealism*, offering a synthetic unity of the previous opposing tendencies.⁶³⁷ Rixner proposed a similar fourfold division: "the age of the undivided unity of original life that has not yet reflected on itself", "the age of the external or real element of life emerging from the undeveloped unity", "the period of the spirit turning back to itself from the external to the internal, from the intuition of nature to the contemplation of itself", and finally "the age of the unanimous development [*einträchtigen Bildung*] of both the external and internal life to a beautiful and complete harmony".⁶³⁸ To both Ast and Rixner, each of these epochs was in turn driven by corresponding dialectical oppositions so that the same overarching movement could be discerned both in the micro- and the macrocosm of philosophy's historical path. We are here faced with a structure unambiguously inspired by the architecture of the systematic works of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel.

Summary and Conclusions

The main result of this chapter is that Schelling and Hegel formulated their notions of the philosophical system by tying them to the notion of the self-developing organism. They did so with the explicit ambition of solving issues pertaining to the historiography of philosophy and in order to unite philosophy's temporal development with its systematic-scientific form. For this reason, the development of idealist system philosophy was intimately related to the debates in the wake of the 1791 *Preisfrage* that we have followed

⁶³⁶ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. iv.

⁶³⁷ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. iv–v.

⁶³⁸ Rixner, *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, pp. 11–12.

in the previous chapters; indeed, these debates constituted one of the impulses leading to Schelling's and Hegel's mature systems.

The issues in question were themselves manifold. First, they pertained to the relation between the historical and the rational. As Hülsen argued, however, these two opposites both belonged to the movement of the I between immediate self-identity and mediated being-for-itself. They should thus not be taken as an unbridgeable gap between two forms of knowledge, but as a gap both produced and overcome by reason in its self-positing activity. Hegel implied a similar point in his statement that each particular philosophy was a "shape that Reason has built for itself out of the material of a particular age".

Second, there was the issue of how the systematic form of philosophy could relate to the chronological one of history. We can find a somewhat implicit attempt at solving this issue in Fichte's *Grundlage*. For Fichte, the actions undertaken by the pure I were certainly logically connected to one another and formed a developmental sequence. This sequence was not one in which prior events constituted something already past in relation to subsequent ones; rather, the events reciprocally presupposed and contained one another. Unlike Grohmann, Fichte's understanding of development was not tied to a temporal and empirical sphere; he presented a conception of development that was thoroughly *speculative*.

Hülsen also touched upon this issue. We have seen that he regarded all systems prior to Fichte's as taken up in it rather than excluded by it, so that the movement of reflection within the *Wissenschaftslehre* would encounter all other systems as parts of it. In the closing section of his examination, he added that reason "can do nothing other than to go back into the past and search for itself".⁶³⁹ Since reason found *itself* in this past, however, it appears that the past must also constitute part of its eternal self-presence.

Despite this, Hülsen still reached the conclusion that Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* brought about the end of philosophy. This was the type of notion that Bachmann later used as an objection to the idealist tradition of historiography as such. His criticism was to some extent justified against Hülsen's account, but it applies less clearly to Schelling and Hegel. In their writings, there was instead an explicit ambition to show how the system itself must constitute as a self-developing organism. Conceived as such, its form was intimately related to that of historical development. This was the model taken up by Ast and Rixner.

⁶³⁹ Hülsen, *Prüfung*, p. 166.

By my composition of sources in this chapter, I wish to offer a new approach to the role played by Hegel in the development under examination. Previous research on Hegel's historiography of philosophy has often consisted of close readings paying little or no attention to his contemporary interlocutors. This method has led to valuable examinations of Hegel's arguments and stances as such, but for obvious reasons, it has been less successful in understanding the intertextual situation in which these arguments were developed. As a consequence, Hegel has sometimes been portrayed as a pioneering figure rather than as an intervener in a debate that predated his own contributions.

The previous chapters of this study already offer a critical perspective on this type of account. I have traced many of the conceptions typically ascribed to Hegel further back; they were not original inventions of his, but rather first elaborately put forth by less-known figures such as Fülleborn, Heydenreich, Carus, and Grohmann. The present chapter has thus approached Hegel through this context, as one of many figures in a complex constellation working with concepts that gained their meaning through their collective use by a great number of actors.

This is not to say that there was nothing original in Hegel's endeavour. On the contrary, the chapter has shown that he and Schelling together introduced a number of new conceptions pertaining to the history of philosophy and its relation to the philosophical system. However, these new conceptions could themselves only be formulated as interventions in an ongoing debate; therefore, they can be sufficiently understood only through understanding of the context in which they were put forth and the contemporary issues they sought to resolve.

This raises the question of whether the idealists truly succeeded in their endeavour. Whereas an answer to this question would go against the ambitions of this study, I would like to note that there was at least one issue that appears to have been left unresolved by them. Even though they reinterpreted transformation and development as something immanent to reason and the rational system, it was not obvious how this development related to change and chronology in *empirical* history.

Hegel made a radical statement regarding this by claiming that "the historical succession of the systems of philosophy" was "the same as the succession in the logical derivation of the idea's conceptual determinations". This statement is itself difficult to interpret, and indeed there is no research consensus on how it ought to be understood. A similar difficulty of interpretation presents itself in Grohmann's revised essay. As we have seen,

Grohmann distinguished between a number of different “philosophical spirits” and argued that, *a priori*, they must follow one another in a particular sequence. The spirit of criticism could not begin philosophy, but must mark its end. However, this appears to reintroduce the issue Grohmann was from the start intent on avoiding: that of securing the atemporal value of each philosophy. Furthermore, it posed the question of how the *a priori* sequence related to the empirical development of philosophy. For Grohmann, the spirit of dogmatism could *a priori* be discerned as the first step of philosophy. Does that mean, then, that it was also identifiable in the first known philosophical systems in history so that the *a priori* schema offered a valid application on the historical course? These questions were given no clear answer.

The practical implications of both Hegel’s identity thesis and Grohmann’s revised concept of *a priori* history thus remained obscure. In the cases of Ast and Rixner, by contrast, the form of history is more unambiguously parallel to that of the philosophical system. To them, the speculative law of organic-dialectical development was just as much a law of history, and the historian thus had both the duty and the possibility to identify in history a series of epochs that related to one another as theses, antitheses, and syntheses.

One may ask whether this solution could not be subjected to the same kind of criticism that had been levelled against Grohmann: that it was too reductive and not sensitive enough to the necessary predicates of history as a form of knowledge. In a sense, Ast’s structure in fact goes even further in this direction than the one that Grohmann had first proposed in 1797. As we have seen, Grohmann here argued that historical knowledge was valuable precisely because it *did not* subsume the particular and contingent under universal laws. History must leave the empirical in its proper form, not forcefully fit it into a regularity that was alien to it.

Perhaps, however, we could also turn the perspective around. For the effect of the debate was not just that idealist system ideals shaped the historiography of philosophy – just as much, they led to the development of a historical dimension in system philosophy itself. We can already see this in Fichte’s *Grundlage*, but even more so in Schelling’s *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* and Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, works that bear unmistakable traces of the ongoing discussion pertaining to the conceptual pairs rational–historical, chronological–systematic, and eternal–developing.

Furthermore, even if one were to deem Ast’s solution historically unsatisfactory, there can be no question that it led to a new approach to the historiography of philosophy. This approach not only had implications for

the general form of history, but also offered new ways to approach its *content*. Above all, the early 19th century saw a reinvigorated discussion of the origins of philosophical thought and its geographical location. The next chapter will examine this discussion in more detail.

The Origin of Mankind, the Origin of Philosophy: Orientalist Narratives and their Rivals in the 19th Century

At the beginning of the Napoleonic Wars in 1803, the British linguist and oriental scholar Alexander Hamilton found himself imprisoned in Paris. Hamilton had travelled to France just one year before to study the collection of Sanskrit manuscripts at the Bibliothèque Nationale. As he was now suddenly a citizen of France's enemy, it seemed as though his studies could not be continued. With the help of his French colleagues, however, Hamilton was soon granted the privilege of continued access to the collections. Even though he could not leave France, he had considerable freedom in his academic endeavours.⁶⁴⁰

In his exile, Hamilton was introduced to a German intellectual with a great interest in his work: Friedrich Schlegel, who had likewise recently relocated to Paris with the ambition of studying oriental culture. The two soon became close, and Hamilton moved into Schlegel's apartment where he gave Sanskrit lessons for three hours daily.⁶⁴¹ In spring 1803, Schlegel reported home to his brother August Wilhelm that he had "finally reached the great aim of being proficient in Sanskrit".⁶⁴² Five years later, the crowning achievement of Schlegel's studies was published: an elaborate linguistic and philosophical examination of ancient India entitled *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*.

The encounter between Hamilton and Schlegel illustrates the highly international nature of 19th-century orientalism. It is symbolically significant that Schlegel met with an Englishman in Paris: through their colonial projects in Asia, France and Britain had become the leaders in European scholarship

⁶⁴⁰ John Brockington, "Force Majeure: Alexander Hamilton and the Start of Sanskrit Studies in Continental Europe", in *Significant Others, Significant Encounters* (Heidelberg: Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing, 2023), pp. 140–41.

⁶⁴¹ Ernst Behler, *Friedrich Schlegel in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1966), p. 94.

⁶⁴² Quoted in Behler, *Friedrich Schlegel in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, p. 94.

of Eastern cultures. As Said has argued, colonialism and orientalism went hand in hand. Given this, one might be tempted to also follow Said in ascribing to Germany a rather secondary role in the history of oriental scholarship. After all, Schlegel could enter into this field only by leaving Germany and becoming a student of a former lieutenant in the navy of the East India Company.

But none of these circumstances should make us fail to recognise that Schlegel's own work was highly original. It constituted far more than a mere introduction of English and French scholarship to a German audience; on the contrary, Schlegel's achievement consisted of connecting his newly acquired expertise in Sanskrit with his background in German philology and idealist philosophy. *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* bears clear traces of this schooling. Not least, it constituted an input in the debate about the origin of philosophy that at this time had its unquestionable centre point in Germany.

We have already seen that this debate started in the 1780s through the works of Meiners and Tiedemann and that it gained a new impulse from post-Kantians such as Fülleborn and Tennemann. The main issue debated by these scholars was whether the Orientals could have possessed philosophies in the strict sense of the word, and more precisely, whether one needed to distinguish between philosophical and mythological accounts of cosmological questions. We have also seen that the debates played a role in the development of the modern concept of philosophy as such. As the present chapter will show, the debate continued along these lines in the new century as well. By now, however, it had gained a new impulse through the further development of idealist system philosophy examined in chapter 5 above. The framework through which oriental philosophy was now approached integrated it into an account of philosophy's organic and systematic development in the temporal sphere of history.

While there was agreement about this framework itself, the same cannot be said about the place the Orient should occupy within it. Rather, we can observe two sharply opposed narratives within the tradition of idealist historiography of philosophy. On the one hand, there were those who regarded the Orient as the birthplace of philosophy and as the key to understanding its subsequent development in the West. In this narrative, the Orient was not just included; its status was significantly upgraded compared with its relatively modest place in the historiography of, for example, Buhle.

This narrative was particularly influential among romantically inclined historians. The first and perhaps most important proponent of it was

Friedrich Ast, in whose *Grundriß* the oriental period marked the *Urphilosophie* in which classical, medieval, and modern thought had their root.⁶⁴³

Rixner also believed that the history of philosophy must begin in an *Urphilosophie* preceding the classical era. In the headline to the chapter on this original thought, Rixner referred to it as “barbaric philosophy”,⁶⁴⁴ becoming the last German historian of philosophy to employ this term. But whereas barbaric philosophy had previously involved European pagans just as much as Asian peoples, Rixner took it to be unquestionably centred in the East. As a consequence, this first era in the history of philosophy itself began with the period of “oriental philosophy”.

Idealists further from romantic influence, on the other hand, tended to be sceptical of this upgrading of the Orient. In this camp, by far the most influential thinker was Hegel, who in his lectures on the history of philosophy stated that “[p]hilosophy proper first emerges in the West. [...] In the West we are on the proper soil of philosophy”.⁶⁴⁵ Like Tiedemann and Tennemann before him, he regarded Thales as the first true philosopher. It is clear, though, that he did not consider this narrative self-explanatory. He devoted significant effort to supporting it against possible objections, discussing oriental thought in detail with the aim of showing why it did not have a place in the history of philosophy.

Hegel’s influence played a large part in establishing the Hellenocentric narrative as the norm in Germany. This influence was not all-encompassing, however. In Sweden, where Hegelianism had a relatively weak position among academic philosophers, the orientalist narrative continued enjoying dominance for all of the 19th century. In the last section of the chapter, I will offer a more detailed examination of this context and its relation to Germany. First of all, however, it is necessary to pay attention to the conceptual basis that united the two competing narratives, i.e., the framework within which their discord took place.

The Concept of the Orient

At first glance, it seems obvious that the conflict concerned above all the understanding of the Orient. This is true to a certain extent: as we shall see, Ast, Rixner, and Schlegel were considerably more positive in their view of the Orient than were Hegel and his followers. However, the main issue at stake

⁶⁴³ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 10.

⁶⁴⁴ Rixner, *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. 17.

⁶⁴⁵ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, p. 91 [GDP: 269].

was ultimately not how the Orient itself ought to be characterised; on the contrary, there was broad agreement about what the Orient in essence was and how it was to be distinguished from other eras and cultures in world history.

From Iselin and onwards, the Orient had been considered the original site of religious-mythological thought, an essential character that was reflected in both political institutions and philosophical practices. Ast accepted this characterisation wholeheartedly. In his *Grundriß*, he wrote that oriental philosophy was “still completely engulfed in religion, for its ideas are at once religious intuitions and poetic fantasies”.⁶⁴⁶ In the section on the philosophy of the oriental peoples he thus focused on religious teachings, offering overviews of the theogonies of the Hindus, of the Tibetan Lamaists, of Zoroastrianism, and of the ancient Egyptians. More secular teachings, for example, those of Confucianism, were also discussed, but to Ast, these were more of an exception to than a characteristic mark of oriental culture and thought.

Rixner followed suit: “The elements of orientalism are”, he wrote, “on the one hand, *fantasy, myths, and poetry*, then, on the other hand, *rational ideas and philosophy*”.⁶⁴⁷ In his lectures on the philosophy of world history, Hegel too argued that oriental spirit had its essence in a mixture of religion with both science and political institutions. The constitution of oriental societies, he thus claimed, “is generally *theocratic*; the kingdom of God that is at the same time worldly, God that is at the same time worldly government”.⁶⁴⁸

The Orient had furthermore been regarded by Enlightenment era historians as the birthplace of human culture and political organisation. This, too, continued being an undisputed notion.⁶⁴⁹ If anything, the systematic framework of idealism allowed it to be even more thoroughly developed and grounded; in this framework, the Orient came to be regarded as an original, still unreflected unity, a seed from which all subsequent particulars arose.

⁶⁴⁶ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 17–18.

⁶⁴⁷ Rixner, *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. 18.

⁶⁴⁸ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke 27: Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte. 3: Nachschriften zum Kolleg des Wintersemesters 1826/27*, ed. by Walter Jaeschke, Christoph Johannes Bauer, and Christiane Hackel (Hamburg: Meiner, 2019), p. 847. No English translation of these lectures is available as of yet.

⁶⁴⁹ A clear illustration can be found in the Prussian Academy’s *Preisfrage* of 1806: “Why can the civilisation of the human race be found only in the Orient?” The question was not *whether* this was the case, but *why*. The winning essay was H.E.T. Uckert, *Beantwortung der von der Kön. Preuss. Academie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin für das Jahr 1806 aufgegebenen Preisfrage: Warum die Civilisirung des Menschengeschlechtes nur im Oriente gefunden werde?* (Berlin: Unger, 1807); cf. Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, p. 226.

Thus, Rixner wrote that the first of “the main periods in the history of humanity” constituted “*the age of undivided unity of original life which does not yet reflect on itself*”, during which man regarded life “through fantasy and rational instinct but does not yet know through science”. In religious history, this period was precisely that of the “oriental primeval religion [*Urreligion*]”.⁶⁵⁰ Ast similarly proposed that the Orient, “as the land of the primeval humanity” must also be characterised by the “undividedness of original education”.⁶⁵¹ Hegel essentially agreed with this stance and integrated it into his own systematic framework. In the oriental empires, he wrote, “universality appears in a massive, undivided, and substantial unity”.⁶⁵² In Hegel’s understanding of world history as “the progress of the consciousness of freedom”,⁶⁵³ the Orient was thus, in virtue of its immediate undividedness, also void of subjectivity. India and China were both “lacking – indeed completely lacking – in the essential consciousness of the concept of freedom”. Instead, morality took the form merely of external legislation, “administered by government officials and courts of law”.⁶⁵⁴ Such a state could only take the form of despotism:

The *Oriental*s do not know that spirit, or the human being as such, is intrinsically free; because they do not know this, they are not themselves free. They only know that one [person] is free, but for this very reason such freedom is merely arbitrariness, savagery, and dull-witted passion, or their mitigation and domestication, which itself is merely a natural happenstance or something capricious. This *one* is therefore a despot not a free human being.⁶⁵⁵

By the universal historians of the 18th century, the oriental stage in mankind’s development was most often taken to begin with India. This was the case for both Ast and Rixner. Hegel, by contrast, began his account of world history with China: here, the principle of substantial unity and the lack of individuality was at its most pronounced, so that the form of the despotic

⁶⁵⁰ Rixner, *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. 11.

⁶⁵¹ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 18.

⁶⁵² Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: 1822–3*, p. 183 [V12: 81].

⁶⁵³ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: 1822–3*, p. 88 [GW18: 153].

⁶⁵⁴ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: 1822–3*, p. 125 [GW18: 206–07]; cf. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: 1822–3*, p. 291 [V12: 218]: “What there is of individuality [in India] is only the caprice of despotism. So it is a connection devoid of individuality?”

⁶⁵⁵ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: 1822–3*, p. 87 [GW18: 152].

state was “essentially that of the Chinese Empire”.⁶⁵⁶ India, Persia, and Egypt marked, for their part, stages of dialectical development through which this one substance was gradually transformed towards the individual, a development that was fulfilled as the oriental spirit reached beyond itself and the classical Greek era began.⁶⁵⁷

This leads to the next crucial aspect of the concept of the Orient, namely, its relation to the West in general and Greece in particular. In Hegel’s narrative, Greece was the point in history when spirit truly began recognising itself: “Human spirit, the scholar [*der Gebildete*], feels itself at home in Greece. [...] It is the root of the educated world”.⁶⁵⁸ Here, the Oriental substantialism and theocracy had finally been overcome and the principle of individuality and freedom had developed itself:

In passing over now to the Greek world we enter into the classical world, and the principle we now have before us involves self-conscious freedom coming on the scene. It is the light or the individuality that holds good for its own sake – the oneness or selfhood that in the Egyptian setting appears abstractly and is therefore engaged in struggle. [In Greece,] spirit now becomes liberated in its own concrete existence and in actuality.⁶⁵⁹

Ast also believed Greek culture to mark a significant shift away from the oriental. If the oriental period for him constituted the original unity, Greece was the first culture where this unity came to develop itself through division: it marked the period of *realism*. Oriental philosophy was therefore to be understood as “the unity from which the contradiction in philosophy, the realism of the classical, and the idealism of the Christian, emerge”.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁶ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: 1822–3*, p. 206 [V12: 114]. In the lecture manuscripts of 1831–32 this point was made in greater detail: “In the Chinese Empire the essential imperatives concern relations of individuals to one another, and the emperor upholds them. Here there is not yet any subjective freedom; what we regard as belonging essentially to freedom is lacking. Such a state is essentially a theocracy, is God’s empire”, in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: The Lectures of 1830–1831*, ed. by Peter C. Hodgson and Robert F. Brown, Hegel Lectures (Oxford University Press, 2025), p. 67; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke 27: Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte. 4: Nachschriften zum Kolleg des Wintersemesters 1830/31* [GW27,4], ed. by Walter Jaeschke and Christoph Johannes Bauer (Hamburg: Meiner, 2019), p. 1232.

⁶⁵⁷ In the lectures of 1826–27, China is described as “theocratic despotism”, India as “theocratic aristocracy”, and Persia as “theocratic monarchy”. Egypt then marked the last stage of the Orient leading spirit on to Greece: “Egypt makes out the *inner transition* to the following principle of the free Greek life” (Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 27,3, pp. 849–50).

⁶⁵⁸ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 27,3, p. 981.

⁶⁵⁹ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: 1830–1831*, p. 156 [GW27,4: 1332].

⁶⁶⁰ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 19.

The distinction between Greek and oriental culture was thus not intended to portray the two as unrelated. On the contrary, the point of both Ast's and Hegel's organic-systematic view of world history was that it allowed them to characterise Greece as a development of the oriental that simultaneously constituted a sublation of it: Greece marked the point at which the oriental tendency had reached its limit and had to transform itself into something new, something beyond itself.⁶⁶¹

In summary, then, the views of the Orient presented by Ast, Rixner, and Hegel were remarkably harmonious. All of them understood the history of philosophy in systematic terms and presented a continuity between the development of philosophy and the development of mankind in general. Further, they agreed in tracing mankind's cultural origins to the Orient. Finally, they agreed on some of the fundamental characteristics of oriental spirit: religious modes of thought, abstract universalism, and a still unreflected unity.

The appraisal of this first stage admittedly differed between the three, with Hegel's descriptions being decisively less positive in their tone. For him, the emphasis lay less on the original purity and innocence of the oriental spirit and more on its purportedly despotic, absolutist character. However, this difference in appraisal nonetheless took place within one and the same general frame of conception.

If there was such broad agreement about these ideas, what can then be said to constitute the core of the debate? As I intend to show, the answer to this question is the concept of *philosophy*. What was at stake was not the issue of how to characterise the Orient, but that of how to characterise philosophy *through its relation* to oriental culture. In the 18th-century debates, then, the talk about the Orient was no longer intended to performatively transform this concept itself; rather, the Orient was invoked to performatively transform the *other* concepts to which it was connected or from which it was separated. More concretely, ideas of the Orient and Europe, East and West, were mobilised to further determine the concept of philosophy, and the debate as a whole was thus one in which conflicting notions of philosophical thought clashed with one another. This is the next object of examination of this chapter. In the following two sections, I will consider first the inclusion of the Orient in the historical narratives of philosophy proposed by Ast, Rixner, and Schlegel, and then the exclusion of the Orient in the narrative of Hegel and his followers.

⁶⁶¹ See, e.g., Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: 1822–3*, p. 372 [V12: 315–16].

Romantic Orientalism

A forceful argument for the inclusion of the Orient in the history of philosophy was the idea that reason must necessarily be universal in character. We have seen that already among the Kantians, the claim that philosophy must be as old as human culture was sometimes levelled against the hellenocentric narrative. In particular, Buhle criticised Tennemann for his exclusion of pre-Greek traditions since he believed that some culture of reason had to be identifiable in every society consisting of rational beings. To an extent, this was the argument also championed by Ast and Rixner. In his *Lehrbuch*, Rixner argued that “[t]he striving for the science of knowledge and the research into the cognition of the being of all things according to truth are already originally laid down in the character of humanity as such”, so “philosophy, as an expression of the instinct of reason, could not remain totally alien to any people”.⁶⁶² In the *Grundriß*, Ast similarly claimed that

the periods of the history of philosophy are one with the periods of the history of mankind, because the history of philosophy is an element of the history of mankind. For as humanity educates itself, so also the philosophical spirit inherent to it is educated.⁶⁶³

The history of philosophy must therefore, Ast inferred, extend as far back in time as the historical sources allowed. The positioning of the Orient as the locus of the first era immediately followed from state-of-the-art philological scholarship, which had shown the ancient Sanskrit sources to predate European societies.

Ast presented a series of empirical arguments for this periodisation. First, he claimed that Greek philosophy exhibited unquestionable influence from the Orient. This was evident for purely historical reasons, such as the existence of trade networks connecting Greece to Egypt and Phoenicia,⁶⁶⁴ and it was also clear from the very content of Greek philosophy from Orpheus to Plato. The Greeks shared with the Orientals “the idea of the birth of all things from water” and “of the development of all being from one seed”.⁶⁶⁵ According to Ast, these ideas could not have their origin in Greek culture itself; they

⁶⁶² Rixner, *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. 17.

⁶⁶³ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 10.

⁶⁶⁴ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 52.

⁶⁶⁵ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 52.

presuppose extensive previous research; and could this research have been previously conducted by the *Greeks*, who only through these ideas, through these popular teachers, had to be awakened to a higher, more spiritual life?⁶⁶⁶

Rixner subscribed to the same view. The Greeks, he believed, “have the Orient to thank for their original education, in particular the philosophical and the religious”. This was proven by two circumstances:

not only through the uniformity and consistent accordance between the secret dogma handed down in the oldest Greek mysteries and the primeval ideas of the Orient; one can also historically demonstrate the paths along which the oriental wisdom reached the Pelasgians and Hellenes.⁶⁶⁷

For these reasons alone, then, an account of Greek philosophy that did not tie it to Eastern influences would appear incomplete. However, Ast’s and Rixner’s choice of placing the beginning of philosophy in the Orient was not merely based on their interpretation of empirical sources; it also had a purely speculative dimension. As discussed in chapter 5, their respective histories followed an elaborate structure in which each main period was related to the whole as a moment in its development and in which it furthermore included the macrocosm of the whole in its own microcosm. In this narrative, Ast and Rixner ascribed to the Orient the role of the original unity from which all further philosophical periods could trace their original impulse. It denoted the *Urphilosophie* that, as an original seed, developed itself in a dialectical-organic movement through all subsequent ages. Thus, the original unity was followed first by the realism of the Greek period and then by the idealism of the Middle Ages, before these opposing tendencies were finally brought back to a higher unity in the “ideal realism” of the modern age. To better understand the meaning of this, it is necessary to consider in greater detail Ast’s reading of the oriental philosophical tradition.

Tiedemann and Tennemann had based their exclusion of the Orient on a distinction between philosophical and mythological-religious modes of thought. In the Orient, they claimed, reason had not yet gained independence from superstition, and philosophy could only be said to begin once this independence had been achieved. Neither Ast nor Rixner objected to the characterisation of the Orient as religious and mystical, but this character, they thought, was no reason to exclude it from the history of philosophical

⁶⁶⁶ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 52–53.

⁶⁶⁷ Rixner, *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. 37.

spirit. Instead, they emphasised a continuity between the mythological and the philosophical and traced the latter back to the former. “The first period of the history of humanity”, Ast wrote, “is the mythical and religious point of departure of its life, the bud from which the real and active life first broke out”.⁶⁶⁸ Since the history of humanity and the history of philosophy must run in parallel, it followed that also “[t]he primeval philosophy of humanity is the religious intuition and cognition of the universe”.⁶⁶⁹

Ast did admit that Greek philosophy had to a certain extent freed itself from the religious-mythological structure of the Orient, but to him, this separation marked only a moment in a process that must tend to the re-establishment of their original unity. For the realism that constituted the chief character of the Greek era was both reciprocally dependent on, and reciprocally conflicting with, the idealist spirit of Christian philosophy during the Middle Ages. Thus, Ast inferred, “none can overcome the other until they, through a reciprocal fertilisation, reconcile with each other in One life and the opposition passes over into a higher unity”.⁶⁷⁰

Just as much as this reconciliation concerned realism and idealism, it also concerned the relation between philosophy and religion. Indeed, towards the end of his examination, Ast explicitly called for a new synthesis between these two:

The complete life is the unconditioned and infinite in the most blissful unity of being and knowing: the divine. Thus, the complete life is One with the religious, the highest completion of philosophy is consequently religion. The goal of philosophy, as of all arts and sciences, is thus to annihilate [*vernichten*] itself in order to pass over to this blissful unity of the divine[.]⁶⁷¹

Once again, we should note here that the difference between Ast and the camp of Tiedemann and Tennemann had less to do with the understanding of what the Orient was than with the understanding of what *philosophy* was. To all of them, the Orient was distinguished by the way in which religion dominated all aspects of human life. The difference lay in the question of whether such a religious culture should be seen as intertwined with philosophy or sharply distinct from it.

⁶⁶⁸ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 11.

⁶⁶⁹ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 17. Compare Rixner, *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. 17.

⁶⁷⁰ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 11.

⁶⁷¹ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 355.

This brings us back to the question of what 18th- and 19th-century scholars referred to with their notion of the Orient. In the first instance, this concept was geographical in character, but as I noted in chapter 3, it also served a much broader function of a more philosophical nature. To both Iselin and Herder, it referred to a particular stage in mankind's development and to certain faculties of the soul, religious practices, and forms of political institution that were typical of this stage. These characteristics were certainly taken to be most easily found in Asian and northern African cultures such as India, Persia, and Egypt, but since they were already at the outset abstractions and generalisations, they could also be used without reference to any particular people or region.

This general approach to the concept of the Orient can be identified in Ast's *Grundriß*, too. As he took it to denote above all a form of philosophy intertwined with a mystic-religious worldview, it was not exclusive to Asian societies. On the contrary, as each given era must in itself mirror the structure of the whole of history, oriental tendencies had to be present in every subsequent stage of philosophy's development. For example, Ast identified a distinct orientalist strain in the thought of Pythagoreanism: whereas Greek thought had previously separated the original unity of the ideal and the real, Pythagoras brought this unity back so that his philosophy rose like "an oriental phoenix".⁶⁷² Similarly, Ast characterised both the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus and the Christian philosophy of the Middle Ages as revived forms of Oriental mysticism.⁶⁷³ Finally, the present age had to be considered a revival of the oriental *Urphilosophie* in a higher form. Ast saw this revival shine through clearly in Spinoza's "rational realism", in which he identified a "Jewish-oriental transfiguration".⁶⁷⁴ Similar oriental transfigurations would only become more pronounced in the system philosophy of Schelling who, together with Spinoza and Fichte, marked the three most important milestones of the modern era.⁶⁷⁵ Again, Ast considered this return to the oriental

⁶⁷² Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 94.

⁶⁷³ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 183, 188. This conception was in itself not totally original; many enlightened historians had characterised medieval thought as a return to religious modes of explanation. However, this was typically regarded as a *regress* that reason had to free itself from once again at the outset of the modern age. Compared to this, Ast had a much more positive view of both Neo-Platonism and medieval Christian thought.

⁶⁷⁴ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 376–77; cf. Thaddä Anselm Rixner, *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie zum Gebrauche seiner Vorlesungen. Dritter Band: Geschichte der neuern und neuesten Philosophie* (Sulzbach: J.E. von Seidel, 1829), p. 79.

⁶⁷⁵ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 447–91. That Ast was nonetheless no uncritical follower of Schelling is clear from his reflections at the end of the section.

more than an empirical fact; to him, it followed from a higher, speculative law of dialectical development:

All contradiction arises temporally, for the original and eternal is unconditioned unity. From the temporal revelation and finite unfolding of this unity emerges the manifold [*Vielheit*] of life, whose principle is division or contradiction. Thus, every contradiction strives back to unity, for the law of all temporal development [*Bildung*] is harmony. Realism and idealism, as the two periods of the temporal life of philosophy that flowed from One original philosophy – the oriental one – thus had to permeate each other once again in a higher period in order to prove their original, only temporarily divided, unity.⁶⁷⁶

In this way, Ast managed to mobilise the ambiguity of the concept of the Orient for a series of systematic-philosophical purposes. First, he could use it as an epitome of the original unity from which philosophy developed and concretised itself. Second, he could link his account to pre-existing notions of Oriental life as religious, presenting a vision of philosophy as intertwined with rather than opposed to religious consciousness. Third, he could tie this necessary speculative development to an emergence in the concrete, empirical realm of history, thereby realising his vision of reason's self-externalisation in the temporally and spatially limited. Ast's account, then, was an elegant performative play with concepts that started in already-established connotations but then transformed and developed them in new directions.

Schlegel's Sanskrit Studies

In Ast's narrative we encounter a clear example of a romantic historical outlook. The narrative of progress typical of Enlightenment thought here came to be significantly amended and challenged. To the romantics, history's forward movement could not be sufficiently understood as constant self-improvement. Rather, it also meant division and loss, a movement away from a stage of immaculate innocence and original unity located at the point of origin of human culture.

Such a view was present in Herder's philosophy of history, but it was also mobilised by romantics in other contexts and genres. One may think, for example, of the opening to Hölderlin's novel *Hyperion*, where the titular hero reflects on his own childhood. "Peace of childhood! heavenly peace!" he

⁶⁷⁶ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 354.

exclaims. “Yes, divine is the being of the child, so long as it has not been dipped in the chameleon colors of men. [...] In the child is peace; it has not yet come to be at odds with itself. Wealth is in the child; it knows not its heart nor the inadequacy of life. It is immortal, for it has not heard of death”.⁶⁷⁷ But as the child developed, this original state was lost through the pursuit of knowledge:

O! had I never gone to your schools! The knowledge which I pursued down its tunnels and galleries, from which, in my youthful folly, I expected confirmation of all my pure joy – that knowledge has corrupted everything for me.⁶⁷⁸

Hyperion’s nostalgic reflections of his childhood are clearly intended to bring to mind the state of Adam and Eve before the Fall, but they also lend themselves to being read as an account of historical development. We have already seen how mankind’s history was frequently taken to mirror the coming-of-age of the individual. In Enlightenment historiography, this process was generally taken to be a happy one leading to ever-greater prosperity and reason. In the words of Hyperion, on the other hand, it acquired a distinctly tragic element. The child who grew up lost his naïve innocence and experienced the shattering of the unity of his world; so also mankind in general had to perceive its development in terms of loss.

Ast’s concept of oriental *Urphilosophie* has a similar dimension. As he first outlined the period of orientalism, he explicitly characterised it as “the golden (paradisical) age”.⁶⁷⁹ In the case of Ast, however, the tragedy of this narrative was to an extent mitigated through the reappearance of the original unity at the end of the development. However, a more radical narrative of decline was proposed by Schlegel in his *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*.

Schlegel’s work first appeared in 1808, the year after Ast’s *Grundriß*. Its structure bears witness to the fact that it was the fruit of his recent language studies. In the first main section of the work, Schlegel offered a detailed linguistic examination of Sanskrit and its relation to modern languages. As he argued, both the Germanic and the romance languages appeared closely related to that of ancient India. This was evident partly in the great lexical

⁶⁷⁷ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion and Selected Poems*, ed. by Eric L. Santner (New York: Continuum, 1994), p. 5.

⁶⁷⁸ Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, p. 4.

⁶⁷⁹ Ast, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 10. Similarly, Rixner wrote that the first period of mankind constituted “the golden age of innocence”. Rixner, *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band*, p. 11.

overlaps, but also – and to Schlegel, more importantly – through the system of inflection. Thus, Schlegel distinguished between languages based on the “change of stem sounds, through flexion”⁶⁸⁰ and languages based on the addition of particles.

What Schlegel proposed was an early theory of what is today known as the Indo-European language family. To Schlegel, however, Sanskrit was not only one language among others in this family: he believed that it was its first source, the original seed from which all others had gradually developed.

If the relevance of this examination to the history of philosophy was difficult to discern at the beginning, it now started to become clearer: Schlegel’s overarching hypothesis was that Indian culture marked the origin of all subsequent human development, and in particular of European culture. In the second part of his work, Schlegel moved on to elaborate this stance through a discussion of Indian philosophy. Like Ast before him, he argued that the mythology of the Indians appeared to be the first source of religious conceptions among other peoples. This indicated that the different cultures across the globe had not developed independently of one another according to some natural law (as had been argued, for example, by Tiedemann). Instead, they were all offshoots from a communal origin.

Schlegel followed Ast in understanding this ancient Indian wisdom as presented in a religious form and in proposing that this form should not be understood as sharply distinct from that of philosophy. However, whereas Ast at least in part remained within the framework of progress and development typical of idealist historical thought, Schlegel proposed a significantly more radical theory. First, he thought that the origin of human wisdom could not be explained with reference to reason or any other faculty of the human soul. Enlightenment scholars, he wrote, had based their examinations on the premise that human societies had at first been primitive and superstitious and that reason could only slowly and gradually come to rule over political and intellectual development:

It is an almost universally accepted opinion that man, starting from a state of complete animal stupidity, driven from one effort to another by necessity, under various external influences and stimuli, has only gradually worked his way up to some degree of reason.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁸⁰ Friedrich Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer, 1808), p. 45.

⁶⁸¹ Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, p. 89.

This, Schlegel believed, was a totally faulty approach. Instead, he proposed a new version of the notion we have previously encountered among the Renaissance concordists, namely, that mankind began its culture through some kind of divine intervention. The Indian belief system, and above all the system of emanation, would be “through and through unexplainable” as a “natural development of reason”.⁶⁸² Only as the expression of divine revelation could one grasp its true meaning. Thus, the “monuments and historical facts” from ancient Asia “unanimously indicate that man did not begin his earthly path without God”.⁶⁸³

Second, this idea of an original revelation also allowed Schlegel to turn the narrative of historical progress on its head. To him, development from the original Indian culture should be understood in terms of a *loss* of an originally revealed truth rather than as a teleological move towards higher, more refined culture. This process had already started among the Indians themselves:

[T]his oldest error, arising from the misuse of the divine gift, from the darkening and misinterpretation of godly wisdom, we find in the Indian records[.] It is the first system that took the place of Truth; wild fictions and rough error, but everywhere traces of godly truth and the expression of the terror and sorrow that the first fall from God must have caused.⁶⁸⁴

Schlegel’s narrative can thus be said to constitute a return to the model of *prisca theologia*. Like the proponents of this model, Schlegel thought that philosophy could only be rooted in the divine and that any development from its original form must be a deterioration of its first perfection. As Schlegel wrote his study of India, however, this paradigm had already been replaced by the Enlightenment view of history as progress. For Schlegel, the reintroduction of the *prisca theologia* narrative thereby served a polemic purpose. Furthermore, he adapted this narrative to integrate a notion of the Orient rather than of barbaric peoples.

The concept of barbaric philosophy was first developed in a framework of historical thought based on the Bible. It traced the development of human wisdom from Adam, via Noah and his sons, to the classical Greek period. The concept of the Orient, by contrast, was originally rooted in a secular form of historiography. It was proposed as a new way of understanding mankind’s

⁶⁸² Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, p. 105.

⁶⁸³ Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, p. 90.

⁶⁸⁴ Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, pp. 106–07.

development without reference to divine intervention, instead focusing on a natural progress of reason. As a consequence, the two notions also related to two distinct understandings of philosophy: “barbaric philosophy” was seen as originating from divine revelation, a concept that came to be challenged by the idea that philosophy was merely rational and independent of God’s direct influence.

To Schlegel, however, the orientalism narrative did not constitute a refutation of the biblical one; on the contrary, he found in the Indian sources a way to further ground a religious understanding of history tied to revelation. The Orient, he proposed, was precisely the site where divine knowledge was first presented to man. If this was the case, the whole endeavour of an enlightened historiography of mankind could be attacked at its core. In this sense, Schlegel’s approach constituted a sort of immanent critique of a secular historiography of philosophy; like Ast, he presented his stance through a rhetorically clever subversion of concepts developed within the enlightened tradition.

If we summarise the historical approaches developed by Ast, Rixner, and Schlegel, we find that they were united above all in their concepts of philosophy. The idea that religion and philosophy were indistinguishable in oriental culture was not one they developed themselves; rather, they inherited it from the enlightened tradition, and most directly from Tennemann. The conclusion drawn from this concept of the Orient, by contrast, was a new one: to neither of them did it appear legitimate to separate philosophy from religion. This view permitted not only the inclusion of the Orient in the historical narrative, but also a reinterpretation of the nature of philosophy as such. By employing the concept of the Orient, Ast, Rixner, and Schlegel were able to justify romantic ideas of a new philosophical-religious unity, a new mythology.⁶⁸⁵

Idealist Hellenism

The romantically reinvigorated idea of philosophy’s oriental origins could not be ignored by the proponents of the hellenocentric narrative. This is evident in the development of Tennemann’s view. In 1812, Tennemann had published an abbreviated version of his large-scope history, the one-volume

⁶⁸⁵ The idea of a new mythology was first put forth in “The Oldest Systematic Programme of German Idealism”, an English translation of which can be found in *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, ed. by Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Schlegel used the concept in a text in the *Athenaeum*: Friedrich Schlegel, “Gespräch über die Poesie”, *Athenaeum*, 3 (1800), p. 96–97.

textbook *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie*. The first version of this compendium stuck with the Greek beginning. In light of the criticism levelled against this narrative, however, Tennemann found it necessary to amend it in the second edition published in 1816. While he still argued that philosophy proper could only refer to reason stripped of mythical clothing, he admitted that this secular stage of reason had a necessary connection to earlier mythological accounts of nature. This led him to include an introductory section about “religious and philosophical opinions of oriental peoples and the first Greek culture”.⁶⁸⁶

Tennemann’s revision of his earlier view demonstrates that the alternatives to the hellenocentric narrative were somewhat successful. While the polygenist Meiners could easily deny the existence of philosophy outside of Europe, it was more difficult for the Kantian Tennemann to justify such a stance without simultaneously giving up the universal concept of reason. Tennemann’s *Grundriß* constituted a compromise that let Greece mark the beginning of mature philosophy, but that did not deny proto-philosophical tendencies in older societies. A similar model was proposed by Carus, who argued that “the primeval history of philosophy is not the primeval history of mankind”. For man, Carus elaborated,

did not begin to philosophise at the first level of his education; even the *weakest, most false* use of reason presupposed *development* of reason. The *first man could* not have been a philosopher, just as little as children are today born philosophers.⁶⁸⁷

After offering an extensive list of arguments for and against the inclusion of the Orient in the history of philosophy, Carus still reached a moderate middle position: “The *law of continuity* [...] demands *some* mention of the pre-Greek peoples. Nor here does nature make leaps, here too the boundaries overlap”.⁶⁸⁸ The Orient still could not be admitted as possessing philosophy proper, but its relation to Greek philosophy made the preliminary examination of it unavoidable.

A similar view was given a more elaborate form in the works of Hegel. It is already clear from the discussion above that Hegel’s view of the Orient was distinctly less positive than that of the romantics. But he too believed that the

⁶⁸⁶ Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie für den akademischen Unterricht*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Barth, 1816), p. 37.

⁶⁸⁷ Carus, *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 110.

⁶⁸⁸ Carus, *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 146.

Orient marked the beginning of human culture and that classical Greece developed from an oriental seed. The difference between the Orient and Greece thus did not follow from their different origins (as Meiners had argued), but constituted a dialectical continuity in which Greece was portrayed as the sublation of oriental spirit: “Thus the Greek world has as its foundation the Oriental world; it starts out from the divinity of nature but reconstructs it, giving it spirituality as its inner soul. This is the Greek principle”.⁶⁸⁹

Since Hegel accepted this tracing of Greek culture to the Orient, one might expect that he would have a similar view of the history of *philosophy*. Ast had made a strong case for the stance that philosophy must begin with the very first human culture. It seems that Hegel could hardly reject this view without undermining his own systematic ambitions. If Greek culture could indeed only be explained as a form that spirit arrived at from its oriental origins, why should the same not be said of Greek philosophy?

There are passages where Hegel indeed appears to have drawn this conclusion. First of all, it should be noted that he did open his lectures on the history of philosophy with a chapter on “oriental philosophy”. This was, he argued, to be taken more as a prologue to than the beginning of the history proper: its position “is only preliminary, and we speak about it only in order to provide the justification for not occupying ourselves with it more extensively, and to explain the relationship in which it stands to thought, to authentic philosophy”.⁶⁹⁰

This solution was similar to that of Tennemann in his *Grundriß* of 1816. Compared with Tennemann, however, Hegel was in fact even less definite in his rejection of oriental philosophy. Whereas Tennemann consistently avoided the term “philosophy” in reference to Asian peoples, Hegel did not. In fact, he used it even in passages where he criticised the image of India and China among orientalist scholars such as Schlegel.⁶⁹¹

However, other statements of Hegel’s run contrary to the inclusion of the Orient in the history of philosophy proper. And compared with his references to oriental philosophy, his arguments for the non-existence of philosophy in the Orient were far more systematic.

In the introduction to his lectures on the history of philosophy, Hegel first distinguished between philosophy and human spirit in general. Philosophy

⁶⁸⁹ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: 1822–3*, p. 372 [V12: 315].

⁶⁹⁰ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, p. 103 [GDP: 365].

⁶⁹¹ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: 1822–3*, p. 120 [GW18: 200]; 124–25 [GW18: 205–06]; 142 [V12: 18].

was certainly to be understood as an expression of spirit, but this did indicate that it was as old as spirit as such. On the contrary, Hegel claimed, it could come into existence only at a particular stage of spiritual development that by necessity had to be preceded by something not yet philosophical. This was because philosophy constituted spirit's making itself an object of thought, its reflection and rational examination of its own essence. Such a self-examination was possible only once spirit was able to recognise its own freedom, i.e., when it had arrived at a notion of individuality:

The history of philosophy begins where thought emerges freely for itself, where thought comes into existence in its freedom, where it tears itself loose from its submergence in nature, from the unity that it has with nature, and constitutes itself on its own account. The history of philosophy begins where thinking goes within itself, is at home with itself.⁶⁹²

This freedom of thought must, according to Hegel, present itself in the outer life of a given people, and above all in their political institutions: "On the practical side, the emergence of thought in its freedom correlates with the blossoming of actual freedom, or political freedom".⁶⁹³

As the conceptual groundwork for distinguishing philosophical from pre-philosophical spirit was laid, Hegel merely needed to apply it to his distinction between the oriental and the Greek stages of mankind's history. At this point, the conclusion pertaining to the status of oriental philosophy should be clear. For the Orient constituted in Hegel's view precisely the stage at which spirit was not yet ripe for individuality and freedom. Indeed, in his lectures on the history of philosophy, Hegel recapitulated the notion that

[s]pirit's oneness with nature is burdened with finitude because universality begins only where thinking freely comes to be free for itself. In light of this it is evident that the Oriental character is spirit's immersion in nature. From the aspect of will we thus have nature's finitude. The will wills itself as finite and not as universal. From this aspect two conditions arise, those of lord and servant. Here we have the sphere of despotism. Put in terms of sensibility, fear is the dominant category.⁶⁹⁴

Similarly, Hegel had already made clear that Greece marked the point in history when this stage of despotism was overcome and when spirit gained a

⁶⁹² Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, p. 88 [GDP: 265].

⁶⁹³ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, p. 88 [GDP: 265].

⁶⁹⁴ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, pp. 228–29 [GDP: 191].

reflexive self-consciousness of its individuality and freedom. As Hegel presented the notion that “philosophy proper begins in Greece”,⁶⁹⁵ this appeared as the only natural conclusion from the premises that were by now firmly established:

Freedom arises only with the Greeks. In the West [*Abendland*], spirit goes within itself for the first time; spirit becomes free, and for itself. In the glare of the East the individual, as merely a semblance, vanishes. Only in the West does the light become the lightning flash of thinking that strikes home within itself, going within itself, spreading out from there and creating its world from within.⁶⁹⁶

From this line of reasoning, we may draw a number of more general conclusions. First, Hegel illustrates how well-established the notion of the Orient had by now become. Oriental thought, oriental religion, and oriental political institutions were terms of immediately recognisable content to the educated public; their connotations were clear and easily lent themselves to generalising theoretisation. Second, however, we should note that each use of the term by a particular author also constituted a performative activation of it for particular purposes. Ast’s and Hegel’s Orient was the same, but this sameness was what allowed them to mobilise it for distinct philosophical-historical aims. As a whole, the difference between Hegel’s idealist position and the romantics arose as a performative struggle for the concept of philosophy, a struggle in which the Orient was employed without itself being in principle contested.

In this struggle, Hegel defended a relatively cautious version of the Hellenic hypothesis. He was critical of the romantic enthusiasm for the Orient, which he contrasted with a considerably more negative view. He was even more hostile towards the romantic notion of philosophy that included the Orient only at the cost of conflating philosophy with religion and mythology. This led him to push aside the Orient from the history of philosophy proper – but he did not wholly reject the value of oriental thought, and nor did he reject its importance in the historical development of philosophical spirit.

If Hegel himself thereby remained a somewhat moderate voice in the orientalism debate, his followers were more radical. In the histories of

⁶⁹⁵ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, p. 285 [GDP: 347]. Note, however, the qualification of this statement: “For us, philosophy proper begins in Greece” (my emphasis).

⁶⁹⁶ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: 1825–6*, pp. 229–230 [GDP: 193].

philosophy written by Hegelians after the death of their teacher, the Orient was either not mentioned at all or was discussed only briefly in order to justify its exclusion. A clear example can be found in Erdmann's *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*:

Human spirit can be tempted and able to grasp its own essence in thought only where it is conscious of its own specific worth. It does not reach there in the Orient except among the Jews. Thus, neither the rules of decency and external behaviour put up by the Chinese wise men, nor the pantheistic and atheistic teachings reached by Indian spirit [...] nor, finally, the confused, half religious and half physicalistic teachings of the ancient Persians and Egyptians can bring us to speak of a pre-Greek philosophy. [...] Philosophising, or wanting to understand the essence of human spirit, means thinking in an occidental, or at least Greek, manner, and the history of philosophy begins with the philosophy of the Greeks.⁶⁹⁷

Erdmann's line of argument illustrates that, at least in the eyes of Hegel's followers, the exclusion of the Orient did follow from the Hegelian system. As long as there was broad consensus about this view, the arguments for it did not need to be carefully crafted and, ultimately, they did not necessarily need to be stated at all. Thus, among the Hegelians, the question of oriental philosophy became an increasingly archaic one. In their view, it had been sufficiently answered, and one was free to devote one's attention to Greek and post-Greek philosophy without worrying about its oriental predecessors.

Whereas this view was widely accepted inside of the Hegelian school, there was still no full consensus outside of it. As late as 1870, Albert Stöckl began his *Geschichte der Philosophie* by dubbing the Orient "the cradle of all human culture".⁶⁹⁸ Philosophy, he contended, was no exception, and thus the philosophies of oriental peoples marked the beginning of philosophy's history. In 1882, in his *Leitfaden zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, the neo-Kantian Jürgen Bona Meyer claimed that the existence of oriental philosophy had become increasingly harder to deny in recent times as the knowledge of the sources had grown. He conceded that oriental thought was often intimately connected to religious conceptions, which distinguished it from Western

⁶⁹⁷ Johann Eduard Erdmann, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Band* (Berlin: Hertz, 1866), p. 11.

⁶⁹⁸ Albert Stöckl, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Mainz: Kirchheim, 1870), p. 12.

philosophy, but this, he argued, “does not cancel out the philosophical character of [the Oriental peoples’] worldviews”.⁶⁹⁹

Even though the dominance of the Hegelians did render the orientalist narrative something of a fringe position, it continued being discussed throughout the 19th century. Its continuous influence even after Hegel may be further illustrated if we direct our attention beyond Germany, across the Baltic Sea.

The Swedish Case

Following the discussion above, we might hypothesise that Hegel played a central role in establishing Greece as the true starting point of the history of philosophy. In fact, there is a context close to, but nonetheless distinct from, idealist system philosophy as it developed in Germany that allows us to further examine this hypothesis: that of Sweden in the 19th century.⁷⁰⁰

Sweden is an interesting object for a case study for two related reasons. First, academic philosophy in Sweden was heavily influenced by Kantian and idealist tendencies from the late 18th to the late 19th century. Second, Sweden differed from Germany through the relatively weak position of Hegelianism: throughout the 19th century, there was only one Hegelian professor in Sweden. Instead, the philosophical landscape was dominated by an idealist system known as Boströmianism after its creator Christopher Jacob Boström. Boström’s school was not only distinct from the Hegelian one; it was often actively hostile towards Hegel and protected its position by working against Hegelian influence at the universities. As we shall see, the Boströmians also differed from the Hegelians through their conceptions of oriental philosophy.

Swedish Post-Kantians and Romantics

The rise of Boströmianism started around the middle of the 19th century. By this point, German philosophy had long been the bread and butter of academic philosophers in Sweden. Daniel Boëthius, a professor of practical philosophy at Uppsala University, is often credited with first introducing

⁶⁹⁹ Jürgen Bona Meyer, *Leitfaden zur Geschichte der Philosophie zum Gebrauche bei Vorlesungen und zum Selbststudium* (Bonn: Marcus, 1882), p. 3.

⁷⁰⁰ The following is a shortened and partially reworked version of my article “Orientalism in 19th-Century Swedish Historiography of Philosophy”, *East Asian Journal of Philosophy*, 2.1 (2022).

Kantianism in Sweden.⁷⁰¹ He did this by translating a series of articles from Fülleborn's *Beyträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie*.⁷⁰² When Kant's philosophy was introduced to the Swedish audience, it was thus from the start in connection with philosophical historiography.

Boëthius had in fact already discussed the latest developments in philosophical historiography before he developed sympathies for Kantianism. In two earlier unpublished manuscripts, he gave a general outline of how the subject had been treated from Diogenes Laërtius to his own time.⁷⁰³ Like many contemporary German historians, he criticised older scholars for lacking systematicity, claiming that they were mere chronicle writers and material gatherers rather than true pragmatic historians.

Two historians were nonetheless praised by Boëthius: Christoph Meiners and Dietrich Tiedemann. That these two in particular were mentioned is striking: as we have seen, Meiners and Tiedemann were pioneers in establishing the Eurocentric narrative of the history of philosophy. Indeed, this was precisely the achievement for which Boëthius praised them. Meiners had proven, he claimed, that the so-called philosophies of Asian peoples were no philosophies at all, and that the starting point of the history of philosophy must therefore be placed in classical Greek antiquity.⁷⁰⁴

Unlike in Germany, however, this narrative did not firmly take root among the post-Kantians in Sweden. Boëthius's student Benjamin Höijer, often considered the most prominent Swedish philosopher of the time,⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰¹ See, e.g., Nordin, *Romantikens filosofi*, p. 41; Anders Burman, "Inledning", in *Benjamin Höijer: Metafysik, estetik, historia*, ed. by Anders Burman and Sven-Olov Wallenstein (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2021), p. 11–12.

⁷⁰² *Stycken til befrämjande af rätta begrep om philosophien, dess ändamål och närvarande tilstånd*, ed. by Daniel Boëthius (Uppsala, 1794).

⁷⁰³ Daniel Boëthius, "Philosophiens historia ifrån de äldsta tider till närvarande tid", 1791, Uppsala universitets handskriftssamlingar, P38; Daniel Boëthius, "Utkast till en historia om philosophiens och i synnerhet moralens äldre och nyare öden", n.d., Uppsala universitets handskriftssamlingar, P38a. Only one of the two manuscripts is dated, but the undated one appears to be written before Boëthius developed sympathies for Kantianism.

⁷⁰⁴ Boëthius is an interesting example of the thesis argued by Park, namely, that Meiners's racial anthropology was not rejected by the Kantians. On the contrary, Park claims, the Kantian historians of philosophy based their view of philosophy's Greek origins on arguments directly imported from Meiners's writings (see, e.g., Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, p. 90). In the case of Boëthius, this indeed seems to be the case.

⁷⁰⁵ On Höijer's life and thought, see Mats Dahllöv, *Det absoluta och det gemensamma: Benjamin Höijers konstfilosofi* (Stockholm: Thales, 2022); Nordin, *Romantikens filosofi*; *Benjamin Höijer: Metafysik, estetik, historia*, ed. by Anders Burman and Sven-Olov Wallenstein (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2021). On Höijer's philosophy of history in particular, see Staffan Carlshamre, "Att berätta historia: Höijer om historieskrivningens förutsättningar", in *Benjamin Höijer: Metafysik, estetik, historia*, ed. by Anders Burman and Sven-Olov Wallenstein (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2021).

opted for another narrative. Following Buhle, he argued that philosophy could trace its roots to the first human societies as such: “In superstition”, he claimed, “lies the first seed of philosophy”.⁷⁰⁶ Höijer then went on to describe how philosophy developed into more systematic forms in early civil societies before it finally reached Greece. While he readily admitted that the Greeks developed philosophy into a far more perfected form, he deemed it necessary to connect early Greek philosophy to a much longer tradition of the use of reason.

This was also the narrative championed by the Swedish romantics. This movement – often referred to as the *Phosphorists*⁷⁰⁷ – was clearly inspired by their German counterparts in their view of philosophy’s historical development. First, they objected to the sharp distinction between philosophy and mythology. In the first-ever Swedish textbook on the history of philosophy, Lorenzo Hammarsköld’s *Grunddragen af filosofiens historia* (1825), the author followed Schlegel in tracing philosophy back to an original divine revelation. This primeval truth was subsequently obscured by the original sin, and following the Fall, philosophy was to be understood as a recollection of the original revelation. “Philosophising”, Hammarsköld wrote, “is thus nothing other than a striving to remember the time when man saw the highest one in the way he is”.⁷⁰⁸ The method for this recollection was, at first, mythological. Every myth, Hammarsköld claimed, was “a symbolically produced, sensual philosopheme”; therefore, “each mythology, or system of myths, must deserve attention from the genealogists of philosophy – for mythology is the most ancient attempt a people makes at explaining the basis of existence, and thus also the basis of knowledge”.⁷⁰⁹

Similarly, Samuel Grubbe objected to the strict definition of philosophy as “separated from positive religion and fully stripped of the mythical clothing in which it at the start was covered”. In its place, he proposed that attempts to understand the concept of philosophy would be more productive if they focussed less on its form and more on its “content and object”.⁷¹⁰ What really

⁷⁰⁶ Benjamin Höijer, *Samlade skrifter. Första delen* (Stockholm: Johan Hörberg, 1825), p. 13.

⁷⁰⁷ The name refers to the journal *Phosphoros* that was published from 1810 to 1813 by Per Daniel Amadeus Atterbom and Vilhelm Fredrik Palmblad. Atterbom himself was interested in the historiography of philosophy and published an extensive examination of it: Per Daniel Amadeus Atterbom, *Studier till filosofiens historia och system* (Uppsala: Palmblad, 1835).

⁷⁰⁸ Lorenzo Hammarsköld, *Grunddragen af filosofiens historia. Första afdelningen* (Stockholm: Holm, 1825), p. 19.

⁷⁰⁹ Hammarsköld, *Grunddragen af filosofiens historia. Första afdelningen*, pp. 19–20.

⁷¹⁰ Samuel Grubbe, *Filosofiska skrifter i urval. Första bandet* (Lund: Lindstedt, 1876), p. 29. The more extensive unpublished manuscript is available at Uppsala University Library: Samuel Grubbe, “Föreläsningar öfver filosofiens historia”, n.d., Uppsala universitets handskriftssamlingar, P56.

defined philosophy was, in other words, not the way in which it was practiced, but rather the *aim* or *idea* regulating the practice. These fundamental ideas could be found not only in purely secular speculation, but were just as present in religious mythologies.

Second, the Swedish romantics followed Ast, Rixner, and Schlegel in taking this to indicate that philosophy's history must have begun before classical antiquity. Thus, Hammarsköld opened his textbook with a chapter on the philosophy of the Ethiopians, Egyptians, Hindus, Persians, Jews, Phoenicians, the first Greeks, and finally the ancient Scandinavians. In the second chapter he reached classical Greek antiquity, starting with the seven wise men. Similarly, Grubbe believed that oriental teachings had an undeniable place in the history of philosophy. While, unlike their Western counterparts, oriental teachings were presented in a mythological-religious form, they were still concerned with the most fundamental questions of philosophy. In fact, according to Grubbe, "in terms of true profundity, many of the mythical philosophemes of the Orient surpass many of the Greek systems".⁷¹¹ Compared with Höijer and Hammarsköld, Grubbe therefore clearly assumed a more positive stance towards oriental philosophy: not only did he consider it the source of Greek thought, but he also contended that it rivaled Greek thought in terms of philosophical quality.

E.A. Schröder also believed that oriental thought constituted a mixture of reason and mythology, an "immediate Nature-wisdom" founded on religious contemplation. As such, it did not "express an all-encompassing unity of reason" and bore "traces of a lack of spiritual freedom".⁷¹² Nonetheless, it was precisely in this mixture of reason and religious contemplation that the origins of philosophy must be identified. The Orient was therefore to be understood as the birthplace not simply of philosophy but of culture in general.⁷¹³

For Schröder there could be no question that Greek culture was deeply influenced by the Orient. Although Greek polytheism may have differed greatly from the oriental worship of nature, and even though the "cheerful, bold humour" of the Greeks stood in sharp contrast to "the feeling of lack of freedom, of fearfulness, that more or less prevails in oriental religious systems and forms of culture",⁷¹⁴ Greek culture was "permeated with fundamental

⁷¹¹ Grubbe, *Filosofiska skrifter i urval. Första bandet*, p. 30.

⁷¹² Eric August Schröder, *Handbok i filosofiens historia. Första bandet* (Uppsala: Wahlström & Co., 1846), p. 11.

⁷¹³ Schröder, *Handbok i filosofiens historia. Första bandet*, p. 15.

⁷¹⁴ Schröder, *Handbok i filosofiens historia. Första bandet*, pp. 79–80.

conceptions that, although they were independently developed by the Greek spirit, undeniably have an oriental origin”.⁷¹⁵

By the mid-19th century, the idea of philosophy’s oriental origins had come to dominate Swedish philosophy. This was simultaneously the point at which the Swedish development began differing sharply from the German. Whereas the romantic narrative in Germany was challenged above all by the Hegelians, Sweden lacked an influential Hegelian tendency.

There were certainly those who defended the Hegelian narrative and its exclusion of oriental philosophy. Most prominent of these was Johan Jakob Borelius, professor of theoretical philosophy at Lund University from 1866 to 1898. In his frequent lectures on the history of philosophy, Borelius followed Hegel’s narrative, claiming that “a philosophical development is absent in the Orient”.⁷¹⁶ Similarly, but even more radically, Fredrik Georg Afzelius argued with explicit reference to Hegel that “[w]hat has been called oriental philosophy is, in fact, no philosophy at all – and the Orient with its so-called philosophy must be *completely excluded from the history of philosophy*”.⁷¹⁷ But Afzelius’s philosophical career was modest: he was employed as an adjunct at Uppsala University but never managed to secure a professorial chair. At the professorial level, Borelius remained the only Hegel follower in Sweden. This was because Hegelianism was soon challenged, and ultimately outmanoeuvred, by the Boströmians.

Boströmianism

Christopher Jacob Boström studied philosophy at Uppsala University under Grubbe and Nils Fredrik Biberg before he became professor of practical philosophy there in 1842. Boström’s predecessors had generally advocated a rather eclectic form of romantic philosophy incorporating influences from both Schelling and Jacobi. Boström clearly had a different approach, however, and formulated his own rationalist-idealist system. With Boström, then, Swedish philosophy developed in a direction relatively independent of Germany. Although there can be no doubt that Boström was inspired by German idealist philosophy – perhaps above all by Schelling’s philosophy of

⁷¹⁵ Schröder, *Handbok i filosofiens historia. Första bandet*, p. 13.

⁷¹⁶ See Borelius’s lecture diary for October 1883: “Föreläsningdiarier och studentförteckningar Lunds universitet”.

⁷¹⁷ Fredrik Georg Afzelius, “Föreläsningar 1866–79. Filosofiens historia”, 1879, p. 190, Uppsala universitets handskriftssamlingar, P 90a6.

identity – Boström believed that his own system went beyond all previous philosophies.⁷¹⁸

Central to Boström's thought was the concept of personality. For Boström, the highest personality was God or the Absolute, of which all other beings were limited expressions. Personalities thus formed a hierarchical system, but all of them were at the same time all included in the highest personality. This highest personality was above the world of phenomena, and therefore independent of both time and space.⁷¹⁹

Boström's philosophy was highly influential at Swedish universities. From Sigurd Ribbing's appointment in 1849 to the end of the century, both professorial chairs in philosophy at Uppsala University were occupied by his followers. The dominance at Lund was less decisive, mainly because of the appointment of Borelius in 1866. That said, Lund, too, had a number of prominent Boströmian professors, and despite Borelius's criticism of the Boströmian system, neither he nor the other Hegelians managed to fundamentally challenge the dominance of Boströmianism at Swedish universities.⁷²⁰

Compared with earlier professors at Uppsala, Boström did not devote many of his lectures to the history of philosophy. He taught the subject in 1840–1841 but after that focused more on ethics, philosophy of religion, and philosophy of right. This does not mean, however, that the history of philosophy had become less important in academic philosophy; rather, it indicates that the Boströmians, being a distinct school with a large number of followers, could develop a certain division of labour. For instance, the history of philosophy was a frequent topic in the lectures of Ribbing, Boström's colleague and devout follower in the chair of theoretical philosophy. Private lessons on the history of philosophy were also offered every semester by docent Pontus Wikner, and from time to time by Erik Olof Burman. At Lund, the subject was often taught by the Boströmian Johan Herman Leander.

This means that the Boströmians' teachings on the history of philosophy were not necessarily identical to the lectures Boström himself presented on

⁷¹⁸ The idea that Boström represented the culmination of idealism was also presented by his follower Axel Nyblaeus in his overview of Swedish philosophy: Axel Nyblaeus, *Den filosofiska forskningen i Sverige från slutet af adertonde århundradet, framställd i sitt sammanhang med filosofiens allmänna utveckling* (Lund: Gleerup, 1886).

⁷¹⁹ For more substantial introductions to Boström's philosophical system, see Nordin, *Den Boströmska skolan och den svenska idealismens fall*; Liedman, *Att förändra världen – men med måtta*.

⁷²⁰ An infamous confrontation between Borelius and Boström that occurred before Borelius gained his professorial chair is described in Nordin, *Den Boströmska skolan och den svenska idealismens fall*.

the topic. In fact, the standardised text on which the Boströmians based their lectures was not written by Boström, but by Ribbing. That text is the compendium *Grundlinier till filosofiens historia* (1864), which was listed as course literature in the curricula at both Uppsala and Lund.⁷²¹ It is clear that this compendium also formed the basis of the lessons by Wikner, Burman, and Leander; the available manuscripts based on their respective lectures all follow the same structure and contain only small differences in content. The following overview is based mainly on these sources, but also on manuscripts of the lectures by Boström himself.⁷²²

The lecture manuscripts generally began by offering a definition of philosophy as the science of the Absolute and the dependence of the relative thereupon.⁷²³ This was followed by a brief discussion of the nature of philosophy's history and a summary of the main historical forms of philosophy presented as a series of dual oppositions (realism and idealism, empiricism and rationalism, etc.). Finally, the main epochs of the history of philosophy were enumerated before the manuscripts continued to the actual historical exposition. The overarching structure was highly schematic. The manuscripts by Wikner and Leander, for example, both identified a pattern of progress, culmination, and regress, each epoch belonging to one of these movements.⁷²⁴ The tripartite structure was thus the main organising principle for their historiography.⁷²⁵

Additionally, all Boströmians followed the same periodisation. As a first division, they distinguished between pagan and Christian thought. The first was further divided into three sub-periods: Eastern thought or orientalism,

⁷²¹ The student manuals emphasise, however, that this text is not suited for individual study but should rather be used in combination with oral lessons. The more extensive *Kollegium i filosofiens historia* by Wikner as well as an unprinted manuscript by Burman (transcriptions of which were circulated by the students) are also mentioned in Uppsala's student handbook of 1887.

⁷²² Christopher Jacob Boström, "Grundlinier till filosofiens historia af mag. doc. Boström jemte Annotationer efter docenten Boströms föreläsningar öfver filosofiens historia", ed. by Gustaf Wilhelm Gellerstedt, n.d., Uppsala universitets handskriftssamlingar, P81y; Christopher Jacob Boström, *Skrifter. Andra delen*, ed. by Hans Edfeldt (Uppsala: Akademiska boktryckeriet, 1883).

⁷²³ Sigurd Ribbing, *Grundlinier till filosofiens historia* (Uppsala: Edquist & Berglund, 1864), p. 5; Per Johan Herman Leander, "Filosofiens historia efter professor P.J.H. Leanders föreläsningar", n.d., Lunds universitetsbiblioteks handskriftssamlingar, 2287; Erik Olof Burman, "Filosofiska anteckningar efter docenten Burman", ed. by O.E. Humble, 1884, p. 219, Uppsala universitets handskriftssamlingar, P96aa.

⁷²⁴ Pontus Wikner, "Filosofiens historia i sammandrag efter docenten Wikners enskilda föreläsningar i Upsala V.T. 1869", 1869, Uppsala universitets handskriftssamlingar, P93c, p. 12; Leander, "Filosofiens historia efter professor P.J.H. Leanders föreläsningar".

⁷²⁵ Wikner and Leander further elaborated on the structure proposed by Ribbing, who distinguished between progress and regress but did not present a third concept of culmination. See Ribbing, *Grundlinier till filosofiens historia*, pp. 9–10.

Greek thought (sometimes referred to as “Western thought”), and Alexandrine thought.⁷²⁶ Following from the development scheme, orientalism was then characterised as a period of progress, classical Greek thought as the culmination, and Alexandrine thought as a regress. In practice, however, Greek philosophy was often presented more as a negation than a culmination of the oriental tradition. As Wikner wrote:

Eastern and Western education [*bildning*] differ in that a) the Eastern is *purely naturalistic*, whereas the Western admittedly is naturalistic to a certain degree, but not purely: it is *anthropomorphic*. b) The Eastern is *directed towards unity*, so that diversity is suppressed, whereas the Western is *directed towards diversity*, so that unity is suppressed. From this it follows that Eastern education is more *monotheistic*, Western is more *polytheistic*. Furthermore, it follows that Eastern education is almost purely pantheistic, whereas Western education has the virtue of being able to grasp the divine in a more concrete manner. c) Eastern education is, at its peak, *religious doctrine*, whereas Western education rises to *speculation*.⁷²⁷

Implicitly, this dichotomy pointed towards the need for a higher unity. In fact, earlier in the manuscript, Wikner defined system as “unity in difference” – in other words, unity of the tendencies of oriental and Western thought.

This was indeed the way the Boströmians understood their own epoch. Boström himself, in the notes from his lectures written by Gustaf Wilhelm Gellerstedt, described the current age as “[t]he period of universality” whose character consisted of the “harmonious unity of the previous opposites [i.e., the Eastern and Western epochs]”.⁷²⁸ In this regard, the Boströmian schema of the history of philosophy bears a close resemblance to the narrative proposed by Ast and Rixner, as well as by the Swedish romantics.

Despite this systematic inclusion of the Orient in the narrative, however, Boström remained rather ambiguous on the question of the philosophical value of oriental thought. In the short manuscript *Schema af filosofiens*

⁷²⁶ I have found only one exception to the inclusion of oriental philosophy as a distinct epoch, namely, Pontus Wikner, *Schema till antropologien jemte notiser om filosofien och hennes historia* (Skara: Petterssonska boktryckeriet, 1867). However, Wikner here described neo-Platonism as an attempt to unite Greek philosophy and “oriental (natural, mystical) elements”; see p. 26.

⁷²⁷ Wikner, “Filosofiens historia V.T. 1869”, p. 25.

⁷²⁸ Boström, “Grundlinier till filosofiens historia”. The manuscript, which predates Ribbing’s *Grundlinier*, follows a somewhat different periodisation than the one the Boströmians would later use. Three main periods are mentioned: the period of unity (or the period of oriental, Asian, and ancient European [*forneuropeisk*] education), the period of particularity (or of European education), and the period of universality.

historia,⁷²⁹ he referred to “oriental *thought*” but to “Greek *philosophy*”, implying that the oriental period did not reach the stage of true philosophy.⁷³⁰ And on the question of how the Orientals influenced Greek culture and education, his standpoint was closely related to that of Meiners and Boëthius. Discussing the “reason for the emergence [of classical Greek philosophy]”, he wrote: “Perhaps from the Orient? No, for it has a wholly different tendency. Whereas orientalism is supported by divine authority and is more *symbolic*, the doctrine of the Greeks is more humane and atheist”.⁷³¹

Nonetheless, this independency of Greek thought from oriental influence did not lead Boström to exclude the oriental epoch from his general narrative. On this issue, his position differed from German historians on both sides of the orientalism debate. While the Boströmiens did not without reservation share the romantics’ positive view of the Orient, they followed the romantics in systematically including the Orient in the history of philosophy.

The Swedish 19th-century debates on oriental philosophy were undoubtedly dependent on German influences. This is clear in the explicit references to Meiners, Tiedemann, Schlegel, Tennemann, and Hegel, but also in the concept of the Orient as such. As in the German case, it is apparent that this concept itself was not the object of conflict. It was widely agreed to constitute a culture in which reason was subsumed under mythology and superstition. As in Germany, the debate concerned the conclusion to be drawn from this premise: did it mean that philosophy could not be traced to the Orient and was thus to be defined as reason freed of religious influence? Or could religious modes of thought be part of philosophy’s essence so that philosophy was indeed traceable to the Orient?

Both of these stances were represented in the Swedish philosophical landscape. But whereas the former of them dominated in Germany at least from Hegel and onwards, it was the latter view that gained the upper hand at the Swedish universities. Starting from the beginning of the 19th century,

⁷²⁹ The manuscript exists in several handwritten transcripts and is also included in Boström’s collected works. However, the form of this manuscript indicates that it was in fact written down by Ribbing. As Liedman has shown, Ribbing attended most of Boström’s lectures during the 1840s and edited them into manuscripts with a distinct structure. This structure, which Liedman describes as a taxonomy or catechism, was then transcribed by and circulated among the students (Liedman, *Att förändra världen – men med mätta*, pp. 165–66).

⁷³⁰ Boström, *Skrifter. Andra delen*, pp. 3–4; my italics. Similarly, Wikner refers to “Oriental religious opinions” but to “Greek religious–philosophical education” (Wikner, “Filosofiens historia V.T. 1869”).

⁷³¹ Boström, “Grundlinier till filosofiens historia”. A marginal note replaces “symbolic” with “allegoric”.

Swedish students both at Uppsala and Lund were exposed to accounts of oriental thought.

Particularly interesting is, of course, the difference between the Boströmian and Hegelian narratives. The Boströmiens were proponents of a rationalist and idealist system philosophy that in many respects differed greatly from the romantic tendency. Nonetheless, they inherited the notion of oriental philosophy developed within the romantic school and included it as a point of departure of their historical narrative as a whole. This supports the thesis that, in Germany, it was precisely the Hegelian influence that led to the gradual decline of the orientalist narrative.

Summary and Conclusions: From Barbarians to Orientals

In the present chapter and chapter 3, I have examined how the concept of philosophy was transformed in relation to a debate about the geographical birthplace of philosophical thought. I have identified a conceptual transformation in which the pre-modern concept of “barbaric philosophy” was replaced by the concept of “oriental philosophy”, a concept that would, however, be fiercely debated throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.

Two particularly important reasons underlie this conceptual shift. First, in German academic philosophy, a distinction between philosophy and religion had become central in the 18th century, above all in the Protestant tradition. Philosophy was in this context understood as a science wholly immanent to the sphere of reason, and it was therefore to be clearly distinguished from faith and revelation. The pre-modern narrative of the history of philosophy was founded upon the opposite ambition: here, the task of the historian was to show how pagan philosophy had its roots precisely in divine revelation. This could be done only by establishing a continuity between the Old Testament patriarchs and the Greeks, and this continuity was in turn made possible by the pagan barbarians as the mediating middle link. Since the German historians of the late 18th century employed a different conception of the essence of philosophy, they consequently had to reject this narrative.

Second, another conceptual distinction that rose to fundamental importance during this time was the one between the West and the East or between Europe and the Orient. To the extent that this distinction was expressed by historians of philosophy, it was intimately connected with the distinction between philosophy and religion or between reason and superstition. The Orient was frequently characterised as a cultural sphere where reason had not

risen to a state of independence, instead being entangled in mythological-religious beliefs. Only in Greece was reason freed from its religious shackles, and only here could philosophy as an independent science begin.

Here, it is worth noting that pre-modern works on the history of philosophy did not emphasise the distinction between Eastern and Western culture. The concept of barbarian philosophy instead included a multitude of peoples both inside and outside of Europe. Sometimes, subdivisions between northern, southern, eastern, and western barbarians were made, but the main organising principle was nonetheless simply the one between barbarians in general and Greeks. Furthermore, the concept of barbarian philosophy did not indicate a single, unified philosophical culture: there was a multitude of barbarian peoples, and the only thing they had in common was that their philosophical beliefs were all diffusions of divine truth. In contrast, the 19th-century concept of the Orient was intended to describe a highly homogenous cultural sphere defined by the subsumption of reason under superstition and despotic religious rule. This conversely meant that Greece, which was previously distinguished from both European and non-European barbarians, was now firmly placed in the context of a wider European cultural history.

Even though a number of prominent historians in the 19th century considered Greece the birthplace of philosophy, it should be clear from the discussion above that there was no lack of alternatives to this view. The historiography of philosophy from Tiedemann and onwards contained a multitude of different narratives that mutually challenged and refuted one another. Apart from Greece, both Egypt and India were frequently presented as possible starting points of the history of philosophy.

Furthermore, the debates did not merely concern the starting point as such; there were also multiple positions on how the narrative as a whole should best be structured. Both Tiedemann and the post-Kantians were proponents of a pragmatic development history in which reason gradually strove towards its ultimate determination (which, according to the post-Kantian view, lay in the perfected system of philosophy). Schlegel instead proposed that this narrative must be turned on its head, and that the highest stage of history was the beginning rather than the regulative end. Herder's historiography was based on similar premises.

It is therefore difficult to identify a single dominant narrative of the history of philosophy during the period. Rather, we seem to stand before a highly diverse debate in which opposite positions were represented by equally strong factions. The conclusion that non-European philosophy was

definitely excluded from mainstream historiography of philosophy is not supported by the sources.

This being said, there was one strong tendency that lets us identify a structure and direction in the seemingly chaotic debates of the period. This tendency did not concern the *opinions* of the historians of philosophy, but rather the very *concepts* that structured the debates and the ways in which arguments for either side could be formulated. From the 1780s and onwards, more and more German historians discussed the origins of philosophy in relation to ideas about *the Orient*.

As described above, historians of the 17th and 18th centuries had generally distinguished between barbarian and Greek philosophy. The former category included any ancient people that did not develop its culture through direct Greek influence, and thus ranged from Germanic and Celtic tribes to societies in eastern Asia and northern Africa. In the 1780s and 1790s, however, mentions of “barbarian philosophy” gradually became less frequent; in fact, most of the historians who argued for philosophy’s Greek origins made no mention whatsoever of this concept.⁷³² Tiedemann, for example, discussed “Chaldeans, Persians, Indians, and other Orientals”, but did not group them together under the rubric of barbarians. Meiners, for his part, discussed these peoples in a chapter entitled “About the enlightenment of the peoples of Africa and Asia”.

It is no coincidence that Tiedemann and Meiners referred to “the Orientals” and “the peoples of Africa and Asia” rather than to the broader category of barbarians. They published their histories of philosophy in a time when orientalism was a rapidly advancing research field and when new sources about Eastern thought became available to the German learned public. This made the question of the Orient’s place in the history of philosophy highly topical. The place of European barbarians, on the other hand, was less of an issue and did not need to be discussed in depth.

For this reason, Tiedemann and Meiners ended up transforming the concept of barbarian thought into the concept of oriental thought. They did not succeed in their ambition to prove that the Orient had no place in the history of philosophy. What they *did* succeed in, however, was fundamentally altering the conditions of the debate. Rather than a debate about barbarians in general, it now became one about oriental thought. In the 1790s, the concept of barbarian philosophy was only used in a minority of textbooks, a tendency that only continued with increased strength in the beginning of the

⁷³² Fülleborn appears to be the only exception.

next century. Instead, authors who wanted to extend the history of philosophy beyond ancient Greece now talked exclusively of “oriental thought” as the oldest philosophical tradition. There is a distinct irony in the fact that what was hereby definitely excluded was not Africa and Asia, but rather the *European* barbarians. The Celts, Britons, and ancient Germans all but disappeared in histories of philosophy of the early 19th century. And when Europeans were discussed – for example, the ancient Scandinavians in the cases of Ast and Hammarsköld – they were included in the chapters on oriental philosophy.

This shows that, even though there was no broad agreement on philosophy’s origin, there was consensus concerning the terms of the debate. In the 19th century, the concept of barbarian philosophy was no longer used, and its place was instead taken by the concept of oriental or Eastern philosophy. This conceptual displacement appears to have occurred quickly and with little or no debate. The question of philosophy’s origins continued to be intensely debated, with multiple different positions being represented. The distinction between Orient and Occident, on the other hand, was never discussed at all: it was taken for granted and marked an analytical premise rather than an object of examination.

Furthermore, there was broad agreement on the basic character of Oriental culture and systems of thought. When Tiedemann rejected the place of oriental peoples in the history of philosophy, he did so by claiming that the thought of the Orientals was always presented in the form of fables and mythologies. This conception would later be adopted by post-Kantian historians such as Fülleborn and Tennemann. In their view, philosophy could only be said to begin once reason freed itself from its entanglement in religious conceptions.

The historians who argued for the inclusion of the Orient did not challenge this *description* of oriental culture, generally agreeing that the Orient was characterised by religious-mythological modes of thought. What they questioned was, instead, the notion that such modes of thought could not be considered philosophical. For example, Buhle contended that ancient mythological cosmogonies must be interpreted as expressions of human reason, and Höijer wrote that superstition was the first seed of philosophy. Ast and Rixner further developed this view by including it in a more systematic idealist philosophy of history.

The idea of oriental philosophy thus marks a conceptual shift: it gained ground at the expense of the older concept of barbarian philosophy and ultimately came to replace this concept altogether. At stake in 19th-century

historiography of philosophy was a geographical reorganisation of philosophy's past, and this reorganisation fundamentally altered the conditions under which the origins of philosophy were discussed.

Results, Conclusions, and Outlook

When Rixner called for the history of philosophy to be written as “the Iliad and Odyssey of human spirit”, he was expressing a particular understanding of both the task of the historian and the nature of the historical object. The latter was not mainly the philosophies of the past, but human spirit as such. And in the course of philosophy’s history, spirit presented itself like the hero of an ancient epic: it fought battles and traversed perilous seas before finally returning to its home shores. The historian, Rixner believed, could depict this process only by striving to be a modern Homer.

By the time Rixner published his *Handbuch*, the prize question on the progress of metaphysics already lay 31 years in the past. Nevertheless, his statement summarises with great precision the most important conceptual transformations that occurred in its wake. Heydenreich and Fülleborn, Buhle and Tennemann, Grohmann and Hülsen, Schelling and Hegel had all intended to transform the history of philosophy into this type of structure. The categories of metaphors typically employed by them illustrate this ambition. For example, Kant repeatedly depicted metaphysics as a dark ocean and the metaphysician as a seafarer navigating it. Even more common was the metaphoric connection between the history of philosophy and the life path of the single individual: in its history, philosophy went through childhood, youth, and maturity. The story of this development had to constitute both an epic and a *Bildungsroman* of human reason. The writing of it required a historian with both philosophical and poetic genius, one who could see a deeper law of order and harmony in the chaotic multitude of sources.

The historian could do this, however, not just by ordering the sources as they were given to him from without. Since the subject of the story was reason or human spirit as such, its journey also took place *within* the historian who wrote it. He himself was Odysseus as much as Homer: he did not just watch the travels and efforts of spirit, but performed them in his own thought. This made philosophy into a unique form of historical object; this was why it, as Hegel put it, concerned itself not with mummies, but with living thought.

This study has followed the journey of establishing this view of the history of philosophy. Throughout the previous six chapters, I have examined the motives that led the post-Kantians to approach the history of philosophy as an object in need of theoretical reflection, the problems they perceived in their treatment of it, and the aims they sought to arrive at through their examinations. In the following pages, I will round off my examination by summarising the answers to the research questions posed in the introduction and the results pertaining to the overarching purpose of the study.

To reiterate, the research questions concern the boundaries of the history of philosophy and, consequently, what was included in and excluded from this field. The notion of boundaries indicates a performative concept work. In other words, I understand by it not the delimitation of the history of philosophy as something already existing, but the ways it could come about through the very acts of definition, discussion, and historiographical praxis. The inclusion and exclusion of something from the history of philosophy was not just the *result* of an already given understanding, but a way of *creating* this understanding through the act of inclusion or exclusion itself.

The opening section of this concluding chapter follows the research questions and is therefore divided into two parts. The first one focuses on the *exclusions* that served to delimit the boundaries of the history of philosophy, the second one on the *internal* organisation of the field inside of these boundaries.

After this, I summarise my results pertaining to the differences between the post-Kantian concept of the history of philosophy and that of their eclectic predecessors. Here, I focus on my interpretation of the post-Kantian approach as rooted in a depth model. In the next section I outline the main contributions of my study to research on post-Kantian philosophy in general and post-Kantian historiography of philosophy in particular. I then turn the temporal perspective forward and discuss how the results allow for new perspectives on the development of German academic philosophy after the age of idealism. Finally, I offer some reflections on those parts of the post-Kantian programme that continue to shape the historiography of philosophy today.

Delimiting and Ordering

Drawing the Boundaries of Philosophy's History

This study has identified two particularly important exclusions from the history of philosophy: the first is the biographies of the philosophers, and the

second is the whole epoch of oriental philosophy. As the examination has shown, neither of these ever disappeared in a definitive manner. There was no consensus concerning their status, and even those who argued against their place in the history of philosophy were not always consistent in following their own principles. Regardless of this, the very possibility of *stating* the need for their exclusion served to reshape the concept of the history of philosophy. Indeed, the formulations pertaining to it are often classic examples of performatives, such as Reinhold's rhetorical repetition of the phrase "I distinguish" in his article in Fülleborn's journal.⁷³³

In the case of the lives of the philosophers, the exclusion fulfilled the function of establishing reason or philosophy itself as a historiographical object. This development fits well with the general tendency towards singularisation and universalisation of concepts that, according to Koselleck, is defining of modern historical thought. However, a main point of my own examination is that such an understanding demanded elaborate performative strategies. The recurring issue of how to handle the philosophers and their individual personalities illustrates this fact. The historiographical concept of a universal reason could be conceived only through methods of separation that freed it from other circumstances and laid it bare as a possible object of historical reflection in its own right. The philosophers' biographies were excluded (or at least demoted) in order for a supraindividual reason to appear in their place.

The question of the Orient, too, was always discussed in relation to the proper object of the history of philosophy. As we have seen, the Orient was often described as a stage of mankind's history characterised by belief in divine authority, superstition, fantasy, and mythology. In line with this understanding, the concept was useful precisely for distinguishing between the development of reason and other faculties of the human soul. However, this application was not given beforehand, but had to be performatively instituted. The Orient was thus employed as a way of sharpening the definition of philosophy; by claiming that there was no philosophy in the Orient, the historians of philosophy simultaneously claimed that philosophy was a form of purely rational discourse. Again, the exclusion functioned positively by turning philosophy into a historiographical object *through* the act of delimiting its boundaries.

In the case of the Orient, this concept work went in both directions. It was not only philosophy that was defined through the exclusion of the Orient –

⁷³³ Reinhold, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie", pp. 21, 23, 25, 27.

just as much, the Orient was defined through its exclusion from philosophy. The geographical borders of the Orient were never unquestionably given, and neither were the characteristics of those cultures that belonged within these borders. Instead, they became possible to conceive of only through the ascription of particular characteristics, and these characteristics had in common that they were precisely *not* those of philosophy.

However, since neither philosophy nor the Orient was given beforehand, any given definition of them could always be challenged. Both of them constituted, as it were, essentially contested concepts that each author mobilised for his own particular purposes. For this reason, the exclusion of the Orient was never final, and each argument for it could be turned on its head.

Organising the Field of Philosophy's History

If there was one particularly important ideal underlying the post-Kantian and idealist historiographical praxis, it was that the history of philosophy must treat a single, unified subject. It constituted a history in which one could trace the determinations and gradual transformations of reason, human spirit, or the pure I throughout its manifold forms of appearance in the empirical realm.

This conception was established by the exclusion of philosophical biographies, external empirical circumstances, and entire geographical regions of the world. Even when all of these had been sorted out, however, it remained necessary to organise the materials that were left as legitimately belonging to philosophy's history. The philosophical writings of Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Descartes, and Leibniz still did not constitute an immediately unified philosophical edifice constructed by a singular transhistorical reason. It was the task of the historian himself to construct this edifice and, in a sense, to channel universal reason through his own historiographical practice.

The unified subject of this history was thus both the condition for and conditioned by a particular narrative structure. The post-Kantian historian of philosophy was faced with the task of connecting his sources to form a harmonious, organic account in which every philosophy was related to all others both temporally and rationally. This organisation was frequently described as pragmatic.

Even though there was consensus around this ideal, there was no universal agreement on how to achieve it or how the result of it should look. The notion of an *a priori* history, for example, was central to Fülleborn, Maimon, and

Grohmann but rejected by Tennemann. Even more heated was the debate about Grohmann's proposed non-chronological history. However, these differences in opinion were themselves possible only given a set of common presuppositions. The scholars engaged in the controversies ultimately agreed that the history of philosophy must treat the nature and expressions of universal reason. They differed in their inferences from this presupposition but could nevertheless enter into a debate with one another on the sole basis of this more fundamental conceptual agreement. Conversely, this agreement was produced only through the utterances about it, thus *in* the discord about it. This paradox is a peculiar characteristic of performativity.

From Eclecticism to Post-Kantianism

In the introduction, I stated the ambition of relating the post-Kantian historiographical practices to earlier traditions. Throughout the following chapters I have done this in different ways. Concerning the issue of pre-Greek philosophy, for example, I identified a break with the concordism that established itself as a historical narrative during the Renaissance. But a more immediate predecessor to the post-Kantians was the school of the eclectics. When the post-Kantians explicitly criticised earlier historians, it was generally the eclectics they had in mind. They were particularly opposed to the eclectic way of explaining conflicts throughout philosophy's history and to the eclectic view of the status of the individual philosopher in the historical narrative.

As I argue, underlying these particular criticisms was a fundamental difference between the eclectic and post-Kantian concepts of, respectively, philosophy and history. This difference concerns what I have referred to as the post-Kantian *depth model*.

The notion of depth is evident in the terms and metaphors employed by the post-Kantians themselves; they took their task to consist of the movement from surface to core, from expression to essence, from letter to spirit. For this reason, the sources themselves were not considered to constitute the history of philosophy as such. Rather, they could become a history of philosophy only through the interpretative work of the historian who strove to uncover their deeper, rational core.

This depth model was activated concerning a number of different questions and problems. In the first instance, it related to the issue of unity and multitude. We have seen that a main problem for the post-Kantians was the recurring conflict in the history of philosophy. For the same reason that

truth – the object of philosophy – must be eternal and unchanging, also reason – the organ through which this truth could be perceived – must be unified and systematic. The history of philosophy did not, however, appear as one harmoniously connected doctrine, but rather as a battlefield between schools.

Here, we can already identify a shift from the eclectics, who explained philosophical conflicts as a necessary consequence of human fallibility. By studying the history of philosophy, one would be presented with a convincing proof of this fallibility, but one would also learn to recognise a true doctrine and distinguish it from a false one.⁷³⁴

The post-Kantian historiographical programme was intended to offer an alternative to this eclectic view. To the post-Kantians, a teaching could be called philosophical only if it was true in the sense of being necessary and rational. This view rested upon the condition that conflicts between philosophical schools could be revealed as pseudo-conflicts, something that could be done only if the doctrines were traced back to their ultimate source: reason or human spirit itself. This solution thus approached each philosophy as an *expression* of a deeper truth: only when the origin common to all philosophies had been demonstrated was the truth and validity of the doctrine proven. The post-Kantians hereby simultaneously transformed the concept of philosophy as such. Through their historiographical theory, this concept was related to a reason that was, on the one hand, universal, but that, on the other hand, had to express itself in a multitude of different ways and thereby constantly developed itself in its historical appearance.

The depth model was also activated in the issue of relating philosophy as such to the individual philosopher. When the post-Kantians rejected the value of biographies, their stance was polemically directed against the eclectics and popular philosophers, who often described the history of philosophy as a gallery of virtuous and exemplary individuals. In line with this view, life and teaching were neither separate nor separable, as the eclectics took philosophy to be synonymous with life practice or life wisdom. Thus, Heumann presented Socrates as the emblematic philosopher: Socratic thought was not abstract, but always expressed in concrete modes of life and moral character. On the other hand, Heumann quickly rejected purely theoretical systems as no true philosophies at all.

Compared with this, the post-Kantian concept of philosophy at first appears essentially impersonal. To the post-Kantians, the truly philosophical

⁷³⁴ See, e.g., Heumann, “Enleitung zur Historia Philosophica. 1. Cap”, p. 32.

was that which superseded individuality and had the same unconditioned value for every rational being. Consequently, they believed that the true philosophical content of a doctrine could be understood only once it had been abstracted from its individual character and brought back to the *a priori*, universally valid determinations of reason.

There are circumstances that complicate the interpretation of the post-Kantian view of this point. As I showed in chapter 2, many post-Kantians in fact devoted significant attention to portraying historical philosophers and their characters. However, this interest in biographies was itself an expression of a depth model. The individual philosopher was regarded as the way in which a supra-individual reason could express itself in the realm of the historical, and the interrelation between reason's universal characteristics and the individual with his particularities was thus reinterpreted as a significant historiographical issue to resolve. As a consequence, the post-Kantians could formulate the ambition of understanding the historical thinkers better than they had understood themselves. This model can thus also be said to establish a basis for the hermeneutic tradition from Schleiermacher and onwards.

Another aspect of the post-Kantian depth model concerns the purpose of studying the history of philosophy – and here, too, we can identify a considerable conceptual transformation. In the *Acta philosophorum*, Heumann had presented a long list of arguments for the usefulness of studying historical philosophies. Not least he identified the value of such studies in the way they could fend off misunderstandings. Someone who had not studied the history of philosophy could, for example, attribute a philosopher opinions that he did not in fact harbour, confound different philosophical schools, or mistake fables and myths for truths. Someone who was familiar with the history of philosophy would be shielded against such naïve mistakes.

Similar lines of reasoning can also be found among the post-Kantian historians. To them, however, this form of erudite knowledge of the empirical facts and sources did not constitute the history of philosophy itself. Rather, it was degraded to a preparation or an auxiliary science that *served* the actual history. Philological knowledge was a necessary condition for the history of philosophy, but in itself it lacked true philosophical value. This, too, is an expression of the division into an inner and an outer history.

This finally leads to the question of why one ought to study the history of philosophy. To the post-Kantians, this question related to the idea of philosophy as such: the history of philosophy presented, they thought, the ways in which reason articulated itself and made itself visible. In order for the

historian to clearly see this relationship, he had to realise the philosophy within himself, turn himself into a vessel for the spiritual determinations at the heart of every true system of rational thought. The use of the history of philosophy was thus not mere *erudition*, not the encyclopaedic knowledge that was the ideal in the tradition of *historia literaria*. In contrast to this, it could be said that the post-Kantian ideal consisted of philosophical *Bildung*, i.e., a knowledge that was at once a self-realisation and that pointed the individual towards the universal.

The depth model thus marked a significant break with the framework of understanding typical of pre-Kantian historiography, and in particular with the framework that defined the eclectic tradition. Furthermore, it was intimately related to the rise of a number of central concepts of classical German philosophy: systematicity, hermeneutic understanding, dialectical development, and the ideal of *Bildung*.⁷³⁵

All these results lend themselves to conceptual-historical interpretation. Interestingly, at the level of general formulations, the eclectics and the post-Kantians often at first appear to be in agreement. For example, Heumann is often credited with being the first to argue that the historian of philosophy must him- or herself be a philosopher – a stance that the post-Kantians certainly shared.⁷³⁶ Similarly, both Heumann and Kant talked about a “court of reason” in which philosophical conflicts were to be negotiated.⁷³⁷ Even though they used a similar language, however, they differed in their understanding of what it *meant*; the concepts of both the philosopher and reason differed greatly between them. This illustrates the need for contextualisation in the interpretation of the writings of the period: a given statement can be correctly appreciated only through an analysis of the situation in which it was uttered and the nature of the intervention this utterance constituted.

New Perspectives on the Post-Kantian Era

Throughout this study I have reached a number of results that offer new perspectives on post-Kantian philosophy and German idealism as a whole. These results have largely been made possible by the source material itself: most of the texts I have analysed are usually not treated as central to the period in general, and some of them have previously not been examined in

⁷³⁵ I have not been able to exhaustively account for all these concepts within the present work, but I highlight them here as objects in need of future research.

⁷³⁶ Heumann, “Enleitung zur Historia Philosophica. 1. Cap”, p. 34.

⁷³⁷ Heumann, “Von der Philosophie der Patriarchen. Erstes Capitel”, p. 765; Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A740/B768.

detail at all. As I have shown, however, the debate on the nature and concept of the history of philosophy did in fact play a significant role in the development of post-Kantian thought. These debates brought to the forefront a number of issues that would be central not least for idealist system philosophy. Thus, for example, Fichte's notion of a "pragmatic history of human spirit" was anticipated by Fülleborn's and Maimon's discussions of *a priori* history, and Grohmann's attempts to unite the historical with the purely rational in philosophical knowledge constituted an important (albeit implicit) background to Schelling's and Hegel's system conceptions. These connections are not well known in scholarship on the period.

Even less known are the connections between German and Swedish historiography of philosophy. In fact, the unprinted Swedish sources on the topic have not previously been systematically examined at all. Through my uncovering of this material, I have been able to offer new results pertaining to the international entanglement of German idealist historiography of philosophy. Above all, the Swedish sources give us important new information on how the so-called Orient was understood during the period as they illustrate how oriental philosophy could be included in an idealist historical narrative.

However, the new contributions of this study pertain not only to the sources themselves; they also pertain to the interpretation of them. As I stated in the introduction, my ambition has been to treat post-Kantian historiography of philosophy as a collective endeavour with many different actors. Their concepts and their philosophical use of them are rarely traceable to any single author. Each author could produce his own understanding only by relating himself to a broader tradition and to an already given framework of thought. This is not to deny that many of them were original. Rather, my claim is that their originality constituted a performative reinterpretation of concepts that were already given, an intervention in a context that was to some extent already there.

I take it to be particularly important that the study has hereby shed new light on the role of Hegel. I have shown that Hegel's view of the history of philosophy was highly dependent on earlier authors on the topic; indeed, his contributions are understandable only as interventions in an ongoing debate. Hegel certainly altered the course of this debate, and his great influence on it is undeniable. However, he did not independently invent a wholly new concept of the history of philosophy, and neither was he the first idealist to consider the history of philosophy an important issue. Many of the contributions that are traditionally ascribed to him (e.g., the concept of a

systematic structure of history and the parallelism between historical and logical development) had been intensely discussed for years before he entered the debate.

Outlook: After Idealism

The study has thus emphasised the need to reinterpret the historical turn in post-Kantian philosophy and shown that this turn occurred considerably earlier than it has traditionally been dated.⁷³⁸ Furthermore, I believe that it also points to the need to reinterpret the relationship between the post-Kantian era as a whole and the subsequent development of 19th-century academic philosophy.

In his *Philosophie und Universität*, Ulrich Johannes Schneider identifies a significant break in academic philosophy during the 19th century: the history of philosophy went from being a relatively rare topic of lectures and other forms of teaching to dominating the university curricula.⁷³⁹ Schneider's results confirm a relatively well-established view of the development of philosophy as a scholarly discipline. This development can be described as a transition from philosophy as systematic *a priori* science to philosophy as philological-hermeneutic text study.⁷⁴⁰ According to the prior conception, the task of philosophy was to identify the transcendental basis of human knowledge and the laws of pure reason. According to the second, by contrast, philosophy as an academic discipline consisted of the interpretation and evaluation of philosophical texts from the past (e.g., text-critical studies of Aristotle's work or comparative readings of Leibniz's and Spinoza's concepts of substance).

The most prominent examples of philosophers who understood their vocation in systematic terms are, of course, the German idealists. The more philologically oriented conception may in contrast be understood as an attempt to justify philosophy as an academic discipline after the age of idealism had come to an end. As the systematic ideal was increasingly given up – as, in Frederick Beiser's words, the age of idealism gave way to an age of

⁷³⁸ This has previously been argued by Ameriks, *Kant and the Historical Turn*.

⁷³⁹ Schneider, *Philosophie und Universität*; Schneider, "Teaching the History of Philosophy in 19th-Century Germany".

⁷⁴⁰ Herbert Schnädelbach, "Philosophie auf dem Weg von der System- zur Forschungswissenschaft. Oder: Von der Wissenschaftslehre zur Philosophie als Geisteswissenschaft", in *Geschichte der Universität Unter den Linden 1810–2010. Bd. 4: Genese der Disziplinen. Die Konstitution der Universität*, ed. by Heinz-Elmar Tenorth (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2010); Eva Schneider, "Ein Macht- und Methodenstreit um die Philosophie: Der Plagiatsvorwurf gegen I.H. Fichte", *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, 72.2/3 (2016).

realism “more concerned with empirical science and technical progress than philosophy”⁷⁴¹ – many academic philosophers found it necessary to reformulate their scholarly identity and endeavour. The temporal distinction between the two conceptions of academic philosophy thus roughly follows the distinction between idealist and post-idealist German philosophy so that the systematic period transitions into the philological-hermeneutic period sometime after Hegel’s death in 1831.

It is not my intention to challenge the narrative outlined above; I believe that it is generally a correct description of how German academic philosophy was transformed during the course of the 19th century. However, I would like to point out some circumstances that make the distinction less sharp and that must be taken into consideration in the analysis of the historical turn in 19th-century university philosophy.

Crucially, even though the historisation of philosophy as an academic discipline reached its peak only in the second half of the 19th century, the process had already started during the most vigorous period of systematic idealism. To the extent that academic philosophy was transformed after the age of idealism, this break was possible only as the *continuation* of at least one central aspect of idealism, namely, its preoccupation with philosophy’s history.

Relating to this, it is also worth noting that the transformation in question did not replace the post-Kantians and idealists; rather, Hegelians and neo-Kantians were themselves part of the process. Many of Hegel’s disciples, for example, Erdmann and Feuerbach, were prominent historians of philosophy,⁷⁴² and the same is true of the most prominent neo-Kantians.⁷⁴³ Furthermore, those heterodox Hegelians who strove to reform philosophy as a whole frequently did this by emphasising precisely the historical aspects of Hegel’s thought. Thus, idealist narratives of the history of philosophy would continue to influence the form of presentation in the materialist philosophy of

⁷⁴¹ Frederick C. Beiser, *After Hegel: German Philosophy, 1840–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 2.

⁷⁴² Ludwig Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke 2: Geschichte der neuern Philosophie von Bacon von Verulam bis Benedikt Spinoza*, ed. by Werner Schuffenhauer (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1969); Ludwig Feuerbach, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der neueren Philosophie von G. Bruno bis G.W.F. Hegel*, ed. by Carlo Ascheri and Erich Thies (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974).

⁷⁴³ E.g., Meyer, *Leitfaden zur Geschichte der Philosophie zum Gebrauche bei Vorlesungen und zum Selbststudium*; Wilhelm Windelband, *Geschichte Der Philosophie* (Freiburg: Akademische Verlagsbuchhandlung von J.C.B. Mohr, 1892).

Feuerbach as well as in the work of his radical critic Max Stirner.⁷⁴⁴ All of this indicates that academic philosophy of the later 19th century has roots in the speculative system philosophy it is frequently taken to have radically broken with. The same can be said about the developments outside of the universities, for example, the young Hegelian movement. Future interpretations taking this context into account are desirable.

Final Remarks: The Challenges of the Historiography of Philosophy in the 21st Century

What, then, of the relation between post-Kantian and 21st-century historiography of philosophy? In his review of Habermas's *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie*, Michael Hampe proposes a distinction between histories of philosophy written by historians and by philosophers. The latter of these he takes to be typical of Kant, Hegel, and the German idealists. To them, he argues, the history of philosophy was a path towards the conception of their own systems, and all thought of the past was reduced to steps leading up to the idealists themselves.

The previous six chapters have not been intended to falsify this claim. On the contrary, they have made clear that many of the post-Kantian historians indeed took the systems of Kant, Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel to constitute the only possible framework through which the history of philosophy could be interpreted. There are, however, a number of other problems with the way in which Hampe formulates his objections to this historical method. First of all, he implies that it was based on a certain blindness to its own prejudices; in his account, it appears as though the post-Kantian historians were simply unaware of their own biases. But as I have continuously emphasised, this was far from the case: their aim was to *achieve* a neutral interpretation of philosophy's historical development. To grasp their ambitions and historiographical practices, we need to pay attention to how the concept of neutrality was itself understood by them, and their understanding of it may differ significantly from our own contemporary one. As the study has shown, this is also the case for many other key concepts deployed by the post-Kantians. This illustrates the need for a contextualising approach to their writings that does not project contemporary conceptions onto them.

⁷⁴⁴ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, trans. by Manfred H. Vogel (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986); Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, ed. by David Leopold (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Second, however, I also claim that many of the concepts and precepts developed by the post-Kantians do in fact also play a central role in contemporary discussions of the writing of the history of philosophy. This is true not least pertaining to the very distinction between the historical and the philosophical approach, a distinction that was fundamental to the endeavours of the post-Kantian period and that was firmly established only by the historians active during this time. As already noted in the introduction, the methodological and theoretical problems facing contemporary historians of philosophy are thus to a large extent themselves inherited from the post-Kantian tradition.

In the introduction I discussed this continuous influence of the post-Kantian tradition mainly in terms of the problems formulated within it. Whether, and to what extent, the *solutions* proposed by the post-Kantians can also inspire contemporary historiographical practice are questions I have consciously avoided. This study is not intended as an apology for the systematic ideals developed in the late 18th century; rather, it approaches these ideals by historicising them, which is possible only by retaining a certain analytical distance. It should be clear, though, that my own methods and theoretical underpinnings are far from always being in line with those of the post-Kantians. For example, I have not approached their writings as expressions of a universal reason, but as situated and rendered meaningful in a particular historical context. Through the very way I study them, I have thus unavoidably positioned my own historical understanding as contrasting with theirs.

At this point, I will nonetheless allow myself to highlight what I take to be one of the most important and continuously relevant aspects of the post-Kantian historiographical project: namely, through the development and employment of their depth model, they paved the way for an understanding of philosophical historiography itself as an infinite task and of the sources of this history as eternally flowing. The distinction between letter and spirit of past philosophies indicated to them that the interpretation of a given philosophical text could never be wholly saturated; it had to be approached time and time again, reread, reinterpreted, and constantly tied to the mind of every new interpreter. This is why they could formulate the historical ambition of understanding the thought of the past better than the past thinkers could do themselves. To the post-Kantians, then, past thought always contained a surplus of meaning going beyond the conscious ambitions of the authors, rendering them a possible actuality in new historical situations. In this sense, philosophy could enter into a productive and

continuous dialogue with its own past – and a philosophy that refused to do so would be fundamentally flawed.

This understanding has, I would argue, also lived on in many philosophical traditions that are otherwise quite distinct from idealist system philosophy. Indeed, it constitutes something akin to a condition of possibility for a philosophical historiography of philosophy as such. In its best form, it lends to the thought of the past a present value that nonetheless does not rob it of its historicity. It approaches the past not as a row of mummies, but as something that continues to live on *in* and *through* the historical approach to it – that is, in and through the historical distance itself.

The post-Kantians asked themselves whether one could think *with* past philosophers rather than just *about* them, whether one could see in them living thought and not just fossils or mummies. Their answer was a resounding “yes”. Hereby, they emphasised both the possibility and the necessity of philosophy to enter into dialogue with its own past.

Appendices

Note on Overlapping Publications

The following published and forthcoming articles are based on the dissertation and overlap with parts of it.

- Fredrik Bjarkö. “Orientalism in 19th-Century Swedish Historiography of Philosophy”, *East Asian Journal of Philosophy*, 2.1 (2022), pp. 61–98.
- , “Grohmann’s Dilemma: The Conflict Between the System and the History of Philosophy”, *New Studies in the History and Historiography of Philosophy* vol. 16, ed. Karin de Boer, Manuel Tangorra & Pavel Reichl. Forthcoming.
- , “Från filosofernas till filosofins historia”, *Ugglan*, red. Frits Gåvertsson & Jonas Hansson. Forthcoming.

Appendix: Sources of Figure 1

The following titles, sorted by date of publication, are the sources for figure 1.

1720–39

Brucker, Johann Jakob. *Kurze Fragen aus der philosophischen Historie vom Anfang der Welt bis auf die Geburt Christi, mit ausführlichen Anmerkungen erläutert*. 7 vols. Ulm: 1731–1736.

First period according to table of contents: “Philosophia Barbarica”

Categorised as: Barbaric philosophy

Brucker, Johann Jakob. *Auszug aus den kurtzen Fragen aus der philosophischen Historie vom Anfang der Welt biss auf unsere Zeiten*. Ulm: 1736.

First period according to table of contents: “Philosophia Barbarica”

Categorised as: Barbaric philosophy

1740–59

Schmersahl, Elias. *Historie der Weltweisheit überhaupt. Nebst einem Vorbericht von den bisherigen Verfassern dieser Historie*. Zelle: 1744.

First period according to table of contents: “1. Von der Weltweisheit der ersten Einwohner des Erdbodens, der Hebräer und Juden. 2. Von der Weltweisheit der Heiden” (divided into “Barbaren”, “Griechen”, and “Römer”)

Categorised as: Barbaric philosophy

Brucker, Johann Jakob. *Erste Anfangsgründe der philosophischen Geschichte*. Ulm: 1751.

First period according to table of contents: “Philosophia Barbarica”

Categorised as: Barbaric philosophy

Lodtmann, Karl Wilhelm. *Kurzer Abriss der Geschichte der Weltweisheit, nach der Ordnung der Zeiten, zum Gebrauch akademischer Vorlesungen entworfen*. Helmstedt: 1754.

First period according to table of contents: “Die barbarische Geschichte der Weltweisheit”

Categorised as: Barbaric philosophy

1760–79

Formey, Samuel. *Kurzgefasste Historie der Philosophie*. Berlin: 1763. French original in 1760.

First period according to table of contents: “Von der Schöpfung der Welt bis Rom”, divided into “Vor der Sündflut”, “Von der Sündflut bis zur Erbauung der Stadt Rom”, “Barbaren”

Categorised as: Barbaric philosophy

Feder, Johann Georg. *Grundriß der philosophischen Wissenschaften, nebst der nötigen Geschichte, zum Gebrauche seiner Zuhörer*. Coburg: 1767.

First period according to table of contents: “§4 Ungewissheit in der philosophischen Geschichte der barbarischen Völker”, §5–13 Chaldeans, Celts, Arabs, Egyptians, Phoenicians and Ethiopians, Indians, Celts and Scythians, § 15 “Anfang der Philosophie bey den Griechen”

Categorised as: Barbaric philosophy

Boreau-Deslandes, André François. *Geschichte der Philosophie*. Leipzig: 1770. French original in 1737.

First period according to table of contents: “Von dem Zustande der Philosophie vor den Griechen”, including Scythians, Ethiopians, Celts, Indians, Phoenicians, Persians, and Arabs.

Categorised as: Other

Büsching, Anton Friedrich. *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie und einiger wichtigen Lehrsätze derselben*. 2 vols. Berlin: 1772–1774.

First period according to table of contents: “Erster Theil des ganzen Buchs, welcher eine kurze Nachricht von den merkwürdigsten Philosophien enthält”. Includes Chaldean, Persian, Egyptian, Indian, Arab, and Greek philosophy.

Categorised as: Barbaric philosophy

Charles Batteux. *Geschichte der Meynungen der Philosophen von den ersten Grundursachen der Dinge*. Leipzig: 1773. French original in 1769.

First period according to table of contents: “Meynungen der orientalischen Völker und der alten Griechen von der Natur der ersten Grundursachen der Dinge”.

Categorised as: Oriental philosophy

Steinacher, Franz Nikolaus. *Grundriß der philosophischen Geschichte*. Würzburg: 1774.

First period according to table of contents: “Von den philosophischen Anfängen der Barbarn”

Categorised as: Barbaric philosophy

1780–99

Stöwe, Christian G. F. *Versuch einer Geschichte der Philosophie, bloß zum Gebrauch für Schulen*. Berlin: 1783.

First period according to table of contents: “Von der Philosophie der bekanntesten alten Völker ausser den Griechen”, divided into “Philosophie vor der Sündfluth” and “Philosophie nach der Sündflut”

Categorised as: Other

Gurlitt, Johann Gottfried. *Abriß der Geschichte der Philosophie*. Leipzig: 1786.

First period according to table of contents: “Sogenannte Barbarische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Barbaric philosophy

Meiners, Christoph. *Grundriß der Geschichte der Weltweisheit*. Leipzig: 1786.

First period according to table of contents: “Ueber die Aufklärung der alten Völker in Asien und Afrika”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy (oriental philosophy discussed as precursor)

Adelung, J. Christoph. *Geschichte der Philosophie für Liebhaber*. 3 vols. Leipzig: 1786–1787.

First period according to table of contents: “Die Philosophie im Keimen”, including Indian, Persian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Arab, Phoenician, Celtic, Scythian, and Hebrew philosophy.

Categorised as: Barbaric philosophy

Eberhard, Johann August. *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie, zum Gebrauch akademischer Vorlesungen*. Halle: 1788

First period according to table of contents: “Von den außergriechischen Völkern”, including the Hebrews, Chaldeans, Persians, Arabs, Egyptians, Indians, Chinese, Phoenicians, Scythians and Goths, Celts, and Greeks.

Categorised as: Barbaric philosophy

Gmeiner, Franz Xaver. *Literargeschichte des Ursprungs und Fortgangs der Philosophie, wie auch aller philosophischen Sekten und Systemen*. 2 vols. Graz: 1788–1789.

First period according to table of contents: “Von der alten Weltweisheit verschiedener Völker”, including Chaldeans, Sabaeans, Egyptians, Indians, Chinese, Celts, Germans, and Gauls.

Categorised as: Other

Buhle, Johann Gottlieb. *Geschichte des philosophirenden menschlichen Verstandes*. Erster Theil. Lemgo: 1793.

First period according to table of contents: “Vom Ursprung der Philosophie überhaupt. Versuche der Aegyptier”

Categorised as: Other

Eberhard, Johann August. *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie, zum Gebrauch akademischer Vorlesungen*. 2. Verbesserte Auflage. Halle: 1796.

First period according to table of contents: “Von den außergriechischen Völkern”, including the Hebrews, Chaldeans, Persians, Arabs, Egyptians, Indians, Chinese, Phoenicians, Scythians and Goths, Celts, and Greeks.

Categorised as: Barbaric philosophy

Tiedemann, Dietrich. *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie*. 6 vols. Marburg: 1791–1797.

First period according to table of contents: “Von Thales bis Sokrates”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Eberhard, Johann August. *Auszug aus der allgemeinen Geschichte der Philosophie*. Halle: 1794.

First period according to table of contents: “Von den außer-Griechischen Völkern” including the Hebrews, Chaldeans, Persians, Arabs, Egyptians, Indians, Chinese, Phoenicians, Scythians, Goths, and Celts.

Categorised as: Barbaric philosophy

Buhle, Johann Gottlieb. *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie, und einer kritischen Literatur derselben*. 8 vols. Göttingen: 1796–1804.

First period according to table of contents: “Über den Ursprung der Philosophie”, containing Egyptian, Hebrew, Phoenician, Chaldean, Persian, Indian, Chinese, Celtic, and Greek philosophy.

Categorised as: Other

Tennemann, Wilhelm Gottlieb. *Geschichte der Philosophie*. 12 vols. Leipzig 1798–1819.

First period according to table of contents: “Philosophie der Griechen”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

1800–19

Socher, Josef. *Grundriß der Geschichte der philosophischen Systeme von den Griechen bis auf Kant zum Gebrauch öffentlicher Vorlesungen*. München: 1801.

First period according to table of contents: “Geschichte der alten Philosophie”, brief discussion of Chaldeans, Egyptians, Hindus, Chinese, and Celts.

Categorised as: Other

Degerando, Joseph Marie. *Vergleichende Geschichte der Systeme der Philosophie mit Rücksicht auf Grundsätze der menschlichen Erkenntnisse*. 2 vols. Marburg: 1806–1807. French original in 1804.

First period according to table of contents: “Von dem Ursprunge der Philosophie” discussing Chaldeans, Egyptians, and others. Followed by “Erste Periode. Ionische Schule. Pythagoras, Heraklit”.

Categorised as: Greek philosophy (oriental philosophy discussed as precursor)

Ast, Friedrich. *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*. Landshut: 1807.

First period according to table of contents: “Orientalische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Oriental philosophy

Tennemann, Wilhelm Gottlieb. *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*. Leipzig: 1812.

First period according to table of contents: “Griechische Philosophie. Von Thales bis auf Proclus und Damascen”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Snell, Philipp Ludwig. *Kurzer Abriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*. 2 vols. Gießen: 1813–1819.

First period according to table of contents: “Philosopheme nichtgriechischer Völker”, “Iste Periode, von Thales bis Sokrates”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy (oriental philosophy discussed as precursor)

Weiller, Kajetan von. *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie*. München: 1813

First period according to table of contents: “I. Vorwissenschaftliche Periode” (Chaldeans, Persians, Egyptians, Greeks). “II. Wissenschaftliche Periode”.

Categorised as: Other

Hillebrand, Josef. *Geschichte und Methodologie der Philosophie*. Heidelberg: 1819.

First period according to table of contents: “Erste Periode. Von den historischen Anfänge philosophischer Forschungen bis zur Entstehung der sogenannten griechischen Schulen oder bis auf Thales”. Includes Indians, Persians, Tibetans, Chinese, Phoenicians, Chaldeans, Egyptians, Hebrews.

Categorised as: Oriental philosophy

1820–39

Rixner, Thaddä Anselm. *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie*. 3 vols. Sulzbach: 1822–23.

First period according to table of contents: “Geschichte der alterthümlichen, sowohl barbarischen als klassischen Philosophie”.

Categorised as: Barbaric philosophy

Ast, Friedrich. *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*. 2nd ed. Landshut: 1825.

First period according to table of contents: “Orientalische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Oriental philosophy

Schneidawind, Franz. *Die Hauptmomente der Geschichte der Philosophie*. Bamberg: 1825.

First period according to table of contents: “Thales, Anaximenes, Diogenes, Heraclit, Empedocles, Anaximander”.

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Reinhold, Ernst. *Handbuch der allgemeinen Geschichte der Philosophie für alle Wissenschaftlichen Gebildeten*. 3 vols. Gotha: 1828–1830.

First period according to table of contents: “Geschichte der alten oder der griechischen Philosophie”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Ritter, Heinrich. *Geschichte der Philosophie*. 12 vols. Hamburg: 1829–1853.

First period according to table of contents: “Vorgeschichtliches. Von einigen orientalischen Völkerschaften überhaupt”.

Categorised as: Greek philosophy (oriental philosophy discussed as precursor)

Ast, Friedrich. *Hauptmomente der Geschichte der Philosophie*. München: 1829.

First period according to table of contents: “Orientalische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Oriental philosophy

Hegel, G.W.F. *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*. 3 vols. Berlin: 1833–1836.

First period according to table of contents: “Orientalische Philosophie”. “Erster Teil: Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy (oriental philosophy discussed as precursor)

Lichtenfels, Johann von. *Auszug des Wissenswürdigen aus der Geschichte der Philosophie*. Wien: 1836.

First period according to table of contents: “Urgeschichte bis Thales: I. Orientalen, II. Occidentalen”

Categorised as: Oriental philosophy

Kannegiesser, Karl Ludwig. *Abriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*. Leipzig: 1837.

First period according to table of contents: “Einleitung. Orientalische Völker”, “I. Griechische Philosophie”.

Categorised as: Greek philosophy (oriental philosophy discussed as precursor)

Fries, Jakob Friedrich. *Die Geschichte der Philosophie dargestellt nach den Fortschritten ihrer wissenschaftlichen Entwicklung*. 2 vols. Halle: 1837–1840.

First period according to table of contents: “Die Geschichte der Philosophie bei den Griechen von Hesiodos bis zu Paulus dem Apostel”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Schmidt, Eduard. *Umriss der Geschichte zur Philosophie*. Berlin: 1839.

First period according to table of contents: “Erste Hauptperiode. Griechische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *Geschichte der Philosophie. Aus Schleiermachers handschriftlichem Nachlasse*. Berlin: 1839.

First period according to table of contents: “Erste Periode: Bis Sokrates”, beginning with “Ionische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

1840–59

Sigwart, Heinrich Christoph Wilhelm. *Geschichte der Philosophie vom allgemeinen wissenschaftlichen und geschichtlichen Standpunkt*. 3 vols. Stuttgart: 1844.

First period according to table of contents: “Von Thales bis zu den Sophisten”

Categorised as: Greek Philosophy

Schwegler, Albert. *Geschichte der Philosophie im Umriss. Eine Übersicht*. Stuttgart: 1848.

First period according to table of contents: “Uebersicht der vorsokratischen Philosophie”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Noack, Ludwig. *Das Buch der Weltweisheit oder die Lehren der bedeutendsten Philosophen aller Zeiten, dargestellt für die Gebildeten des deutschen Volkes*. 2 vols. Leipzig: 1851.

First period according to table of contents: “Die antike oder griechisch-römische Philosophie

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Uschold, Johann Nepomuk. *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie*. Amberg: 1852.

First period according to table of contents: “Die Philosophie in ihrer Verbindung mit der Religion”, including “Die Anfänge der Philosophie bei den Völkern des Morgenlandes”

Categorised as: Oriental philosophy

Noack, Ludwig. *Geschichte der Philosophie in gedrängter Uebersicht. Lehrbuch zum Gebrauche bei Vorlesungen und zum Selbstunterrichte*. Weimar: 1853.

First period according to table of contents: “Die antike Philosophie oder die Philosophie des griechisch-römischen Alterthums”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Uschold, Johann Nepomuk. *Darstellung des Hauptinhalts der Geschichte der Philosophie*. Amberg: 1855.

First period according to table of contents: “Die Philosophie in ihrer Verbindung mit der Religion”, including “Die Anfänge der Philosophie bei den Völkern des Morgenlandes”

Categorised as: Oriental philosophy

1860–79

Ueberweg, Friedrich. *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie von Thales bis auf die Gegenwart*. 4 vols. Berlin: 1863–1866.

First period according to table of contents: “Philosophie der Griechen”. Headline on “sogenannte orientalische Philosophie” in introduction

Categorised as: Greek Philosophy (oriental philosophy discussed as precursor)

Bauer, Wilhelm. *Geschichte der Philosophie für gebildete Leser, zugleich als Einleitung in das Studium der Philosophie*. Halle: 1863.

First period according to table of contents: “Die vorsokratische Philosophie”, beginning with “die älteren Jonier”.

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Michelis, Friedrich. *Geschichte der Philosophie von Thales bis auf unsere Zeit*. Braunsberg: 1865.

First period according to table of contents: “Die vorsokratische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Erdmann, Johann Eduard. *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*. 2 vols. Berlin: 1866.

First period according to table of contents: Thales

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Hermann, Conrad. *Geschichte der Philosophie in pragmatischer Behandlung*. Leipzig: 1867.

First period according to table of contents: “Die Philosophie bei den Griechen”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Schmid, Franz Xaver. *Geschichte der Philosophie von Thales bis Schopenhauer, vom spekulativ-monotheistischen Standpunkt*. Erlangen: 1867.

First period according to table of contents: “Der griechische Geist”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Dühning, Eugen Karl. *Kritische Geschichte der Philosophie von ihren Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*. Berlin: 1869.

First period according to table of contents: “Weltgeschichtliche Einleitung der Philosophie durch die Griechen”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Stöckl, Albert. *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie*. Mainz: 1870.

First period according to table of contents: “Die orientalische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Oriental philosophy

Deter, Christian Johann. *Kurzer Abriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*. Berlin: 1872.

First period according to table of contents: “I. Periode: Vorsokratische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Vogel, August Gottfried Friedrich. *Philosophisches Repetitorium. Erster Teil. Geschichte der Philosophie*. Gotha: 1872.

First period according to table of contents: “Die jonischen Naturphilosophien”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Poetter, Friedrich Christoph. *Die Geschichte der Philosophie im Grundriß. Ein übersichtlicher Blick in den Verlauf ihrer Entwicklung*. 2 vols. Elberfeld: 1873–1874.

First period according to table of contents: “I. Periode, Von Thales bis zu den Sophisten”.

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Knauer, Vincenz. *Geschichte der Philosophie mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Neuzeit*. Wien: 1876.

First period according to table of contents: “I. Antike (griechisch-römische) Philosophie”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Kirchner, Friedrich. *Katechismus der Geschichte der Philosophie. Von Thales bis zur Gegenwart*. Leipzig: 1877.

First period according to table of contents: “Die Anfänge hellenischer Philosophie: Thales bis Sokrates”. Includes section on “Der Orient”

Categorised as: Greek Philosophy (oriental philosophy discussed as precursor)

1880–99

Meyer, Jürgen Bona. *Leitfaden zur Geschichte der Philosophie, zum Gebrauch bei Vorlesungen und zum Selbststudium*. Bonn: 1882.

First period according to table of contents: “Philosophie der Völker des Orients”

Categorised as: Oriental philosophy

Brasch, Moritz. *Die Klassiker der Philosophie. Von den frühesten griechischen Denkern bis auf die Gegenwart*. 3 vols. Leipzig: 1884–1885.

First period according to table of contents: “Die griechisch-römische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Rabus, Leonhard. *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie. Ein Leitfaden zum Studium der Geschichte der Philosophie und zur Rekapitulation*. Leipzig: 1887.

First period according to table of contents: “Vorsokratische Philosophie” preceded by a paragraph on “Orientalen und Hellenen”

Categorised as: Greek Philosophy (oriental philosophy discussed as precursor)

Baumann, Julius. *Geschichte der Philosophie nach Ideengehalt und Beweisen*. Gotha: 1890.

First period according to table of contents: “Geschichte der alten Philosophie mit einem Anhang über orientalische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Greek Philosophy (oriental philosophy discussed as precursor)

Koeber, Raphael. *Repetitorium der Geschichte der Philosophie*. Stuttgart: 1890.

First period according to table of contents: “Griechische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Bergmann, Julius. *Die Geschichte der Philosophie*. 2 vols. Berlin: 1892–1893.

First period according to table of contents: “Das vorsophistische Zeitalter”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Schultze, Fritz. *Stammbaum der Philosophie. Tabellarisch-schematischer Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie von den Griechen bis zur Gegenwart*. Leipzig: 1892.

First period according to table of contents: “Griechische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Windelband, Wilhelm. *Geschichte der Philosophie*. Freiburg: 1892.

First period according to table of contents: “Die Philosophie der Griechen”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Fränkel, Johann Leonhard. *Kurzes Repetitorium der Geschichte der Philosophie*. Wien: 1894.

First period according to table of contents: “I. Periode: Von Thales bis Sokrates”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Stöckl, Albert. *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie*. Mainz: 1894.

First period according to table of contents: “Die orientalische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Oriental philosophy

Eisler, Rudolf. *Geschichte der Philosophie im Grundriß*. Berlin: 1895.

First period according to table of contents: “Die alte Philosophie (Philosophie der Griechen”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Kirchner, Friedrich. *Geschichte der Philosophie von Thales bis zur Gegenwart*. 3rd edition. Leipzig: 1896.

First period according to table of contents: “Die Anfänge hellenischer Philosophie: Thales bis Sokrates” with a subsection on “Der Orient”

Categorised as: Greek Philosophy (oriental philosophy discussed as precursor)

Rehmke, Johannes. *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie zum Studium und für Vorlesungen*. Berlin: 1896.

First period according to table of contents: “Die jonischen Kosmologen”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

1900–19

Reiner, Julius. *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*. Hannover: 1903.

First period according to table of contents: “I. Teil. Die griechische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Greek Philosophy

Vorländer, Karl. *Geschichte der Philosophie*. 3 vols. Leipzig: 1903.

First period according to table of contents: “Vorsokratische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Vogel, August. *Überblick über die Geschichte der Philosophie in ihren interessantesten Problemen, für weitere Kreise in leicht verständlicher Darstellung bearbeitet*. 2 vols. Leipzig: 1904–1905.

First period according to table of contents: “Die vorsophistische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Siebert, Otto. *Ein kurzer Abriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*. Langensalza: 1905.

First period according to table of contents: “Die griechisch-römische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Kinkel, Walter. *Geschichte der Philosophie als Einleitung in das System der Philosophie*. 2 vols. Gießen: 1906.

First period according to table of contents: “Thales”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Capelle, Wilhelm. *Geschichte der Philosophie*. Berlin: 1908.

First period according to table of contents: “Der ionische Hylozoismus”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Messer, August. *Geschichte der Philosophie*. 4 vols. Leipzig: 1912–1916.

First period according to table of contents: “Erste, vorwiegend kosmologische Periode der griechischen Philosophie”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Friedlein, Curt. *Lernbuch und Repetitorium der Geschichte der Philosophie*. Berlin: 1913.

First period according to table of contents: “Griechische Philosophie”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Rehmke, Johannes. *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*. Leipzig: 1913.

First period according to table of contents: “Die ionischen Kosmologen”

Categorised as: Greek philosophy

Deussen, Paul. *Allgemeine geschichte der philosophie mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Religionen*. 6 vols. Leipzig: 1911–1920.

First period according to table of contents: “Erster Teil: Die Philosophie der Inder”

Categorised as: Oriental philosophy

Sammanfattning

År 1791 utlyste Berlins vetenskapsakademi en prisfråga (ett slags uppsattstävling riktad till den lärda offentligheten) om metafysikens framsteg i Tyskland sedan Leibniz och Wolffs dagar. För de samtida filosoferna var det uppenbart att frågan rörde Kants filosofihistoriska betydelse: i den andra utgåvan av *Kritik av det rena förnuftet* som publicerats 1788 hade Kant beklagat sig över att metafysiken hittills saknat säkra framsteg, en omständighet han ville råda bot på genom sin kritiska filosofi. Kants anhängare betraktade prisfrågan som en impuls att ytterligare grundlägga kantianismens revolutionära betydelse för den metafysiska vetenskapen. Men om detta skulle låta sig göras förutsatte det också, menade de, en detaljerad undersökning av filosofihistoriens begrepp som sådant. Under det följande decenniet kom detta begrepp att bli en av de mest brännande filosofiska frågorna; en mängd artiklar, monografier och hela tidskrifter ägnades åt dess innebörd. I denna avhandling undersöker jag hur filosofihistoriens begrepp omvandlades inom ramen för dessa diskussioner från 1790-talet till 1800-talets mitt.

Jag kontrasterar inledningsvis min egen undersökning mot en vanlig bild av den postkantianska filosofihistorieskrivningen. Denna bild gör gällande att postkantianer och idealister förstod filosofins historiska utveckling som en teleologisk rörelse med idealismen som förutbestämt slutmål, varigenom tidigare filosofier reducerades till steg att passera längs denna redan givna väg. Jag hävdar att detta är missvisande. Det är förvisso sant att filosofihistorien enligt postkantianerna måste vara systematisk och regelbunden. Mindre kända är däremot de omständigheter som ledde postkantianerna till denna uppfattning, de problem de sökte lösa genom den och de historioGRAFiska praktiker de baserade på den. Postkantianerna analyseras och bedöms med andra ord alltför ofta från en presentistisk ståndpunkt som inte tar hänsyn till deras egen historiska situation.

I den föreliggande avhandlingen undersöker jag den postkantianska filosofihistorieskrivningen på ett annat sätt, nämligen genom att situera den i det historiskt specifika sammanhang i vilket den uppstod. Utifrån en kontextualiserande ambition spårar jag för det första postkantianernas historioGRAFiska teori och praktik genom att relatera dem till tidigare traditioner. För

det andra följer jag utvecklingen av deras begrepp om filosofihistorien från dess ursprung i det sena 1700-talet tills det började utmanas av nya riktningar runt 1800-talets mitt.

I min undersökning av utvecklingen i fråga fokuserar jag på de filosofiska och historiografiska *problem* postkantianerna försökte lösa liksom de *målsättningar* de därmed ville uppnå. Ett centralt påstående i avhandlingen är att den postkantianska filosofihistorieskrivningen förde med sig en avgörande omvandling av såväl förståelsen som behandlingen av filosofins historia. De problem postkantianerna diskuterade skilde sig i stor utsträckning från tidigare historikers, och detsamma kan sägas om deras sätt att definiera kriterierna för en giltig lösning på dessa problem (det vill säga deras målsättningar). Begreppen problem och målsättningar hänvisar alltså inte till eviga eller överhistoriska filosofiska frågor, utan till filosofiska frågor givna inom ramen för särskilda, temporalt bestämda traditioner. Annorlunda uttryckt var postkantianerna inte bara missnöjda med tidigare verk om filosofins historia; de hade en i grunden annan uppfattning om filosofihistoriens begrepp som sådant.

Av denna anledning blev detta begrepp i sig en källa till oenighet: postkantianerna kunde anklaga sina föregångare för att ha missförstått dess natur. Några av dem gick så långt som att hävda att det inte fanns några tidigare filosofihistoriker alls i ordets rätta bemärkelse. Men konflikten kring filosofihistoriens begrepp var inte en konflikt mellan två väldefinierade, tydligt avgränsade läger. Snarare var ett utmärkande drag för den postkantianska eran att "filosofins historia" blev ett i grunden omstritt begrepp. Omtolkningar, omförhandlingar och modifieringar av det gav kontinuerligt upphov till debatter även mellan postkantianska historiker.

Detta utgör bakgrunden till de frågeställningar som vägleder min undersökning. Givet att debatterna under perioden gällde själva filosofihistoriebegreppet låter de sig undersökas begreppshistoriskt. Och givet att begreppet i fråga var ett i grunden omstritt sådant kan varje användning av det analyseras som en performativ handling genom vilken det tillskrevs nya betydelser eller befriades från betydelser med vilka det tidigare hade förknippats.

Debatterna i fråga rör därför det filosofihistoriska fältets gränser. Avhandlingens syfte är att så uttömmande som möjligt redogöra för de begrepps- förändringar som detta område genomgick under perioden. De frågor jag avser att besvara genom undersökningen är följande: (1) Hur avgränsade postkantianerna filosofins historia? Vad kunde enligt dem räknas till detta fält, och vad uteslöt de från det? På vilka sätt ritades det filosofihistoriska fältets gränser om i relation till äldre förståelser av det? (2) Hur ordnade

postkantianerna innehållet i detta fält? Vilken typ av struktur ansåg de att filosofihistorien måste följa, och hur relaterade detta till deras uppfattningar om historikern och dennes uppgift?

Avhandlingen relaterar till ett antal delvis överlappande forskningsfält. För det första utgör den ett bidrag till forskningen om postkantiansk filosofi och tysk idealism i allmänhet. Här ansluter den sig till den forsknings-tradition som vidgat perspektivet från närläsningar av ett fåtal tongivande tänkare såsom Kant och Hegel och i stället betraktar perioden som karakteriserad av komplexa tänkarkonstellationer. Avhandlingen utgör för det andra ett bidrag till den forskning om filosofihistorieskrivningens historia som etablerades under det sena 60-talet. Många tidigare studier inom detta fält utgör grundforskning med ändamålet att samla och sammanställa en stor mängd källtexter. Denna avhandling tar avstamp i dessa forskningsresultat men gräver djupare genom frågeställningar som låter större utvecklingslinjer urskiljas och som fokuserar mer på kollektiva processer än på enskilda aktörer.

Ambitionen att undersöka den postkantianska filosofihistoriesynen som producerad av många olika aktörer i samverkan ligger till grund för mina metodologiska vägval. Metoden låter sig delas in utifrån tre sammanhängande begrepp: kontextualisering, rekonstruktion och begreppshistoria. Med *kontextualisering* avser jag ett tillvägagångssätt som närmar sig en text genom att placera in den i ett intertextuellt sammanhang. I denna bemärkelse utgör kontextualisering en sorts hermeneutisk cirkel: förståelsen av den enskilda texten är beroende av förståelsen av det bredare sammanhanget, men det bredare sammanhanget består i sin tur av enskilda källor. Delen och helheten är ömsesidigt medkonstitutiva och refererar ständigt tillbaka till varandra. Med *rekonstruktion* avser jag läsningen och tolkningen av särskilda filosofiska argumentationslinjer. I den rekonstruktiva läsningen betraktas texten som en handling beroende av, men inte reducerbar till, kontexten. Den gör alltid något nytt med sitt eget sammanhang och inbegriper en performativ kraft att skapa något som inte fanns där från början. *Begreppshistoria* är slutligen en metod ämnad att spåra begrepps förändringar, antingen i olika kontexter eller i en sammahängande diakron kontext. Detta perspektiv utgår från att ett givet begrepp, till exempel "historia", "filosofi" eller "framsteg", inte äger en statisk uppsättning betydelser och konnotationer som förblir desamma i olika tider. Snarare förändras begreppen i förhållande till historiska omständigheter så att deras betydelser och möjliga användningsfall alltid är i omvandling.

Avhandlingens källmaterial består av kompendier, filosofihistoriska läroböcker, lärda tidskrifter och föreläsningsskrifter. Tonvikten ligger på tyskspråkigt material, men i kapitel 6 görs även en analys av tidigare obeforskade svenska källor.

I det första kapitlet utgår jag från Berlinakademins prisfråga och den debatt som initierades av den. I min analys av debatten visar jag att postkantianerna etablerade en ny måttstock enligt vilken filosofiska konflikter både kunde förklaras och lösas. Denna måttstock var ”förnuftet självt” såsom det lät sig bestämmas genom Kants kritiska filosofi. Härigenom förvandlade postkantianerna historiens objekt. De betonade att filosofihistorien inte fick förväxlas med historien om enskilda filosofiska läror, med historien om filosoferna och deras liv eller med den filosofiska litteraturens lärdoms-historia. Den nya filosofihistoriska vetenskapen skulle i stället utgöra en historia om det rena förnuftet självt, varigenom den både tillskrevs en ny transcendental enhet och ställdes inför en ny uppsättning historiografiska utmaningar. Jag beskriver denna utveckling som instiftandet av en djupmodell som skilde de filosofiska lärorens uttryck eller bokstav från deras inre förnuftiga väsen eller ande. Detta förde med sig en omvandling av historikernas uppgift: snarare än att redogöra för de enskilda lärorens såsom de omedelbart framstod ålades han nu att nå till en underliggande princip för dem i det rena förnuftet som sådant. Denna uppgift var i sin tur kopplad till begreppet om framsteg: den möjliggjorde en tolkning av de historiska systemens växlingar som nödvändiga moment i en större, regelbunden rörelse mot ett transcendentalt mål.

I kapitel 2 fördjupar jag diskussionen om filosofihistoriens subjekt genom att fokusera på förhållandet mellan det universella förnuftet och den historiska filosofen som person. Jag visar att den eklektiska historieskrivningstraditionen, som hade utövat ett starkt inflytande i Tyskland under 1700-talet, var intimt förbunden med idén om filosofen som en exemplarisk, dygdig individ. Utifrån detta synsätt var filosofihistorien lärorik som en exempelsamling ur vilken dess läsare kunde dra praktiska slutsatser att applicera i sitt eget liv för att uppnå dygd och klokhet. Postkantianerna byggde i stor utsträckning sitt filosofihistoriska program på ett förkastande av denna uppfattning. I dess ställe betonade de filosofins universalitet: såsom uttryck för förnuftet självt överskred filosofin kontingenta omständigheter som den enskilda personens historiska situation. Detta ledde dock inte till ett minskat intresse för frågan om vad som kännetecknade en sann filosof, utan snarare till en omvandling av filosofens begrepp. Kapitlet avslutas således

med en redogörelse för hur detta begrepp förändrades inom ramen för den postkantianska filosofihistorieskrivningen.

I kapitel 3 går jag vidare till frågan om filosofihistoriens början. Före 1700-talet tog filosofihistoriska verk som regel avstamp i världens skapelse och tillskrev Adam rollen som den förste filosofen. Detta narrativ möjliggjorde inkluderingen av ett stort antal geografiska områden både inom och bortom Europa: före antikens Grekland hann historikern med att avhandla bland annat kaldéerna, indierna, perserna, kelterna och egyptierna. För att skilja dessa kulturer från Grekland betecknades de som ”barbariska”, ett begrepp som dock ofta hade en deskriptiv innebörd utan de pejorativa konnotationer det i dag är förbundet med. Under den postkantianska eran blev det i stället allt vanligare att förlägga filosofins ursprung i Grekland. I kapitlet analyserar jag debatten om denna fråga som kopplad till samtida orientalism. Mitt centrala påstående är att idén om filosofins grekiska ursprung betingades av en begreppslig omvandling där ”barbarisk filosofi” ersattes med begreppet ”orientalisk filosofi”. Jag visar också att denna begreppsförskjutning inte bara ledde till ett kategoriskt uteslutande av icke-europeisk filosofi, utan att den också kunde användas för att inkludera Orienten i berättelsen om filosofins och förnuftets historiska utveckling.

I kapitel 4 undersöker jag frågan om filosofiska framsteg. Framstegsbegreppet var centralt för 1700-talets historietänkande i allmänhet, och filosofin var inget undantag. Men det fanns också historiker som ansåg att filosofin inte lät sig tänkas som historiskt föränderlig. Mest framstående bland dessa var J.C.A. Grohmann, som gick så långt som att föreslå en filosofihistoria helt utan kronologisk struktur. Kapitlet utgör en undersökning av Grohmanns artikel och den debatt som uppstod i dess svallvågor. Dess centrala tes är att Grohmann genom sina resonemang illustrerade en tvetydighet i det sena 1700-talets historiebegrepp som sådant. Historia kunde vid tidpunkten användas både som beteckning för kunskap om förflutna händelser och som inbegrepp för empirisk kunskap i motsats till ren förnuftskunskap. Genom att följa debatten om filosofihistoriens begrepp spårar jag relationen mellan dessa två betydelsesfärer och visar hur de i vissa fall överlappade och övergick i varandra.

I kapitel 5 följer jag hur debatten i fråga utvecklades inom ramen för senare idealistisk systemfilosofi. Jag visar här hur spänningen mellan historiens temporalitet och filosofins väsentligt eviga karaktär spelade en central roll för den idealistiska rörelsen i allmänhet och dess filosofiska historieskrivning i synnerhet. Kapitlet blottlägger således en viktig men understuderad bakgrund till de tyska idealisterna och deras filosofiska ambitioner.

Kapitel 6 är tematiskt kopplat till både kapitel 3 och 5. Det utgör en undersökning av hur hegelianer, schellingianer och romantiker förstod frågan om filosofins ursprung. I början av 1800-talet intensifierades debatten mellan de som förlade detta ursprung i Grekland och de som identifierade det i österlandet. Genom att följa dessa debatter belyser jag ytterligare både dessa narrativ som sådana och deras förhållande till moderna idéer om väst och öst. Undersökningen inbegriper ett stort svenskt källmaterial och utgör därigenom ett nytt bidrag till forskningen om orientens ställning i filosofihistoriska narrativ under 1800-talet. Jag visar nämligen att svenska filosofer skilde sig väsentligt från tyska i sin syn på filosofins ursprung: medan majoriteten av tyska historiker, inklusive Hegel och hans lärjungar, förlade detta ursprung i Grekland var det orientalistiska narrativet klart dominerande i Sverige under hela 1800-talet. Dess status på svenska lärosäten etablerades av romantiska tänkare men upprätthölls av den boströmska skolan.

I avhandlingens avslutande avsnitt sammanfattar jag resultaten och gör en utblick mot senare tiders filosofihistorieskrivning. Jag knyter här an för det första till begreppet om förnuftet som filosofihistoriens subjekt och för det andra till den djupmodell som låg till grund för detta narrativ. Just genom denna djupmodell, hävdar jag, skilde sig postkantianerna från sina föregångare inom filosofihistorieskrivningen, och särskilt från den eklektiska traditionen.

Avhandlingen bidrar i sin helhet med flera nya perspektiv på den postkantianska filosofin och den tyska idealismen som sådan. Dessa resultat möjliggörs för det första av källmaterialet i sig: de flesta av de texter jag analyserar betraktas vanligtvis inte som centrala för perioden i allmänhet, och vissa av dem har tidigare över huvud taget inte undersökts i detalj. Men som jag visar spelade debatten om filosofihistoriens natur och begrepp i själva verket en betydande roll i det postkantianska tänkandets utveckling. Dessa debatter aktualiserade ett antal frågor som kom att bli centrala inte minst för den idealistiska systemfilosofin. Till exempel föregreps Fichtes begrepp om ”den mänskliga andens pragmatiska historia” av Fülleborns och Maimons diskussioner om ”historia *a priori*”, och Grohmanns försök att förena den historiska kunskapens kontingens med förnuftets universella nödvändighet var en viktig (om än implicit) bakgrund till Schellings och Hegels systemkonceptioner. Dessa kopplingar är relativt okända inom idealismforskningen.

Ännu mindre kända är kopplingarna mellan tysk och svensk filosofihistoriografi. Faktum är att de otryckta svenska källorna på ämnet tidigare

inte har undersökts systematiskt alls. Genom att undersöka detta material har jag kunnat presentera nya resultat om den idealistiska filosofihistorieskrivningens internationella sammanflätning. Framför allt ger de svenska källorna viktig ny information om hur den så kallade Orienten uppfattades under perioden.

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Särskilt viktigt är att detta tillvägagångssätt möjliggör en omtolkning av Hegels betydelse. I undersökningen visar jag att Hegels filosofihistoriesyn var starkt influerad av tidigare författare och att hans bidrag ytterst bör förstås som ingripanden i en redan pågående debatt. Hegel förändrade utan tvekan debattens förlopp, och hans avgörande inflytande i den är obestridligt. Men han formulerade inte ett radikalt nytt begrepp om filosofins historia oberoende av tidigare tänkare, och han var inte heller den första idealisten som uppvärderade filosofihistorien till en avgörande filosofisk fråga i egen rätt. Många av de innovationer som traditionellt tillskrivs honom (till exempel begreppet om historiens systematiska och förnuftiga struktur och strukturlikheten mellan historisk och logisk utveckling) hade diskuterats intensivt i årtal när han först gav sig in i debatten.

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Index of Names

- Adam, 120, 128, 130, 132, 133, 134, 247, 249
- Afzelius, Fredrik Georg, 260
- Arendt, Hannah, 79
- Aristotle, 13, 71, 79, 101, 128, 131, 218, 274, 280
- Ast, Friedrich, 29, 32, 198, 224, 228, 230, 231, 233, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 250, 252, 254, 259, 263, 268
- Atterbom, Per Daniel Amadeus, 258
- Bachmann, Carl Friedrich, 177, 220, 221, 222, 231
- Baumgarten, Alexander, 179
- Boëthius, Daniel, 256, 257, 264
- Boström, Christopher Jacob, 256, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264
- Brucker, Johann Jakob, 22, 23, 43, 84, 91, 108, 120, 121, 131, 132, 133, 134, 186
- Buhle, Johann Gottlieb, 54, 69, 80, 88, 98, 99, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 115, 157, 160, 161, 162, 236, 242, 258, 268, 271
- Burman, Erik Olof, 261, 262
- Büsching, Anton Friedrich, 130
- Carus, Friedrich August, 20, 41, 56, 72, 105, 157, 159, 166, 167, 177, 186, 190, 191, 192, 201, 232, 251
- Cicero, Marcus Tullius, 87, 88, 184
- Descartes, René, 18, 43, 86, 101, 178, 198, 218, 274
- Eberhard, Johann August, 47, 51, 55
- Erdmann, Johann Eduard, 255, 281
- Feder, Georg Heinrich, 94, 106, 134
- Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, 17, 18, 19, 21, 23, 34, 38, 60, 67, 111, 112, 113, 166, 195, 196, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 211, 216, 221, 222, 223, 230, 231, 233, 245, 279, 280, 282
- Ficino, Marsilio, 128
- Fülleborn, Georg Gustav, 20, 43, 56, 57, 58, 59, 61, 62, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 80, 102, 104, 119, 120, 123, 157, 158, 159, 168, 169, 176, 203, 204, 207, 210, 232, 236, 257, 267, 268, 271, 273, 274, 279
- Garve, Christian, 47, 56, 106, 107
- Gatterer, Johann Christoph, 66, 67, 69, 215
- Goess, Georg Friedrich Daniel, 41, 59, 60, 69, 80, 94, 102, 169, 170
- Grohmann, Johann Christian August, 20, 40, 44, 45, 80, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 180, 181, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 190, 191, 192, 193, 197, 198, 201, 205, 212, 213, 217, 218, 222, 223, 224, 228, 229, 231, 232, 233, 271, 275, 279
- Grubbe, Samuel, 258, 259, 260
- Hadot, Pierre, 81, 82, 83, 88, 116, 117
- Hamilton, Alexander, 235
- Hammarsköld, Lorenzo, 258, 259, 268
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 11, 12, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25, 28, 34, 38, 41, 42, 63, 82, 121, 124, 127, 166, 196, 198, 205, 208, 210, 211, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 260, 264, 271, 279, 281, 282
- Heidegger, Martin, 11, 79, 80, 119, 124

- Herder, Johann Gottfried, 19, 136, 139,
140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 148, 149,
214, 245, 246, 266
- Heumann, Christoph August, 81, 84,
85, 86, 87, 88, 90, 91, 92, 94, 96, 97,
105, 107, 109, 113, 114, 115, 131,
132, 133, 186, 276, 277, 278
- Heydenreich, Karl Heinrich, 44, 45, 54,
55, 56, 59, 207, 232, 271
- Hirschfeld, Christian Cay Lorenz, 91,
92, 107
- Hißmann, Michael, 46, 91, 92
- Homer, 126, 271
- Hülßen, August Ludewig, 20, 21, 23,
198, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 231,
271
- Höijer, Benjamin, 37, 257, 258, 259, 268
- Hölderlin, Friedrich, 246, 247
- Iselin, Isaak, 138, 139, 141, 142, 143,
144, 145, 147, 149, 154, 238, 245
- Kant, Immanuel, 11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22,
25, 34, 35, 38, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47,
48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57,
58, 59, 62, 63, 64, 65, 67, 68, 70, 71,
72, 73, 76, 77, 83, 93, 94, 95, 98, 100,
102, 106, 107, 108, 110, 116, 157,
168, 171, 176, 177, 179, 180,
181, 182, 189, 195, 196, 204, 207,
214, 217, 221, 223, 229, 257, 271,
278, 280, 282
- Koselleck, Reinhart, 32, 33, 64, 81, 87,
88, 97, 98, 116, 184, 185, 273
- Leander, Per Johan Herman, 261, 262
- Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm, 22, 23, 47,
50, 51, 53, 59, 129, 135, 151, 179,
196, 210, 274, 280
- Lodtmann, Gerhard, Wilhelm, 134
- Luther, Martin, 88, 89
- Maimon, Salomon, 18, 19, 21, 47, 59,
67, 69, 73, 111, 120, 168, 203, 204,
274, 279
- Meier, Georg Friedrich, 82, 179
- Meiners, Christoph, 27, 29, 32, 92, 94,
120, 121, 123, 127, 147, 148, 149,
150, 151, 156, 157, 159, 160, 161,
236, 251, 252, 257, 264, 267
- Mendelssohn, Moses, 51
- Meyer, Jürgen Bona, 149, 151, 162, 255,
256, 281
- Moses, 51, 129, 130
- Noah, 129, 130, 134, 249
- Nyblaeus, Axel, 261
- Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni, 128
- Platner, Ernst, 67, 204
- Plato, 13, 71, 85, 97, 98, 101, 114, 115,
128, 131, 217, 218, 242, 274
- Plessing, Friedrich Victor Lebrecht,
160, 161
- Reimarus, Hermann Samuel, 179
- Reinhold, Karl Leonhard, 18, 23, 34,
52, 53, 56, 59, 61, 62, 63, 68, 70, 74,
75, 80, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 102, 103,
105, 108, 109, 110, 111, 113, 157,
169, 170, 180, 187, 188, 190, 195,
196, 204, 207, 209, 210, 212, 218,
273, 282
- Ribbing, Sigurd, 261, 262, 263, 264
- Rixner, Thaddä Anselm, 77, 198, 225,
228, 230, 231, 233, 237, 238, 239,
241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 247, 250,
259, 263, 268, 271
- Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph,
17, 18, 19, 20, 34, 35, 38, 44, 53, 79,
114, 166, 183, 196, 198, 208, 209,
210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216,
217, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224,
225, 230, 231, 232, 233, 245, 260,
271, 279, 282
- Schiller, Friedrich, 137
- Schlegel, Friedrich, 19, 34, 217, 235,
236, 237, 241, 246, 247, 248, 249,
250, 252, 258, 259, 264, 266
- Schleiermacher, Friedrich, 62, 277
- Schlözer, August Ludwig, 66, 67, 69
- Schmersal, Elias Friedrich, 134
- Schröder, Eric August, 259, 260
- Schwab, Johann Christoph, 47, 52, 53,
106, 135, 136, 209
- Seneca, 87
- Socrates, 52, 81, 84, 85, 86, 91, 97, 99,
100, 101, 114, 115, 147, 276

Spinoza, Baruch, 81, 116, 169, 218, 245,
274, 280, 281
Steinacher, Franz Nikolaus, 134, 155
Steuco, Agostino, 128, 129
Stöckl, Albert, 255
Stöwe, Christian Gottlieb Friedrich, 130
Sulzer, Johann Georg, 13
Tennemann, Wilhelm Gottlieb, 61, 69,
94, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104,
105, 113, 114, 115, 117, 119, 121,
123, 147, 148, 157, 158, 159, 160,
161, 162, 166, 167, 177, 186, 187,
188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 201,
203, 212, 213, 215, 217, 218, 221,
222, 236, 237, 242, 243, 244,
250, 251, 252, 264, 268, 271, 275
Thales, 24, 37, 41, 119, 120, 121, 129,
146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 153, 154,
155, 156, 157, 237, 257
Thomasius, Christian, 43, 84, 88, 89, 90,
91, 109, 131
Tiedemann, Dietrich, 120, 121, 123,
124, 127, 147, 148, 152, 153, 154,
155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161,
162, 236, 237, 243, 244, 248, 257,
264, 266, 267, 268
Voltaire, 139, 141, 143, 145, 146, 147
Wikner, Pontus, 261, 262, 263, 264
Wolff, Christian, 50, 53, 90, 135, 178,
179, 181, 182, 229
Xanthippe, 84, 85
Xenophanes, 57, 70
Xenophon, 85
Zierold, Johann Wilhelm, 42

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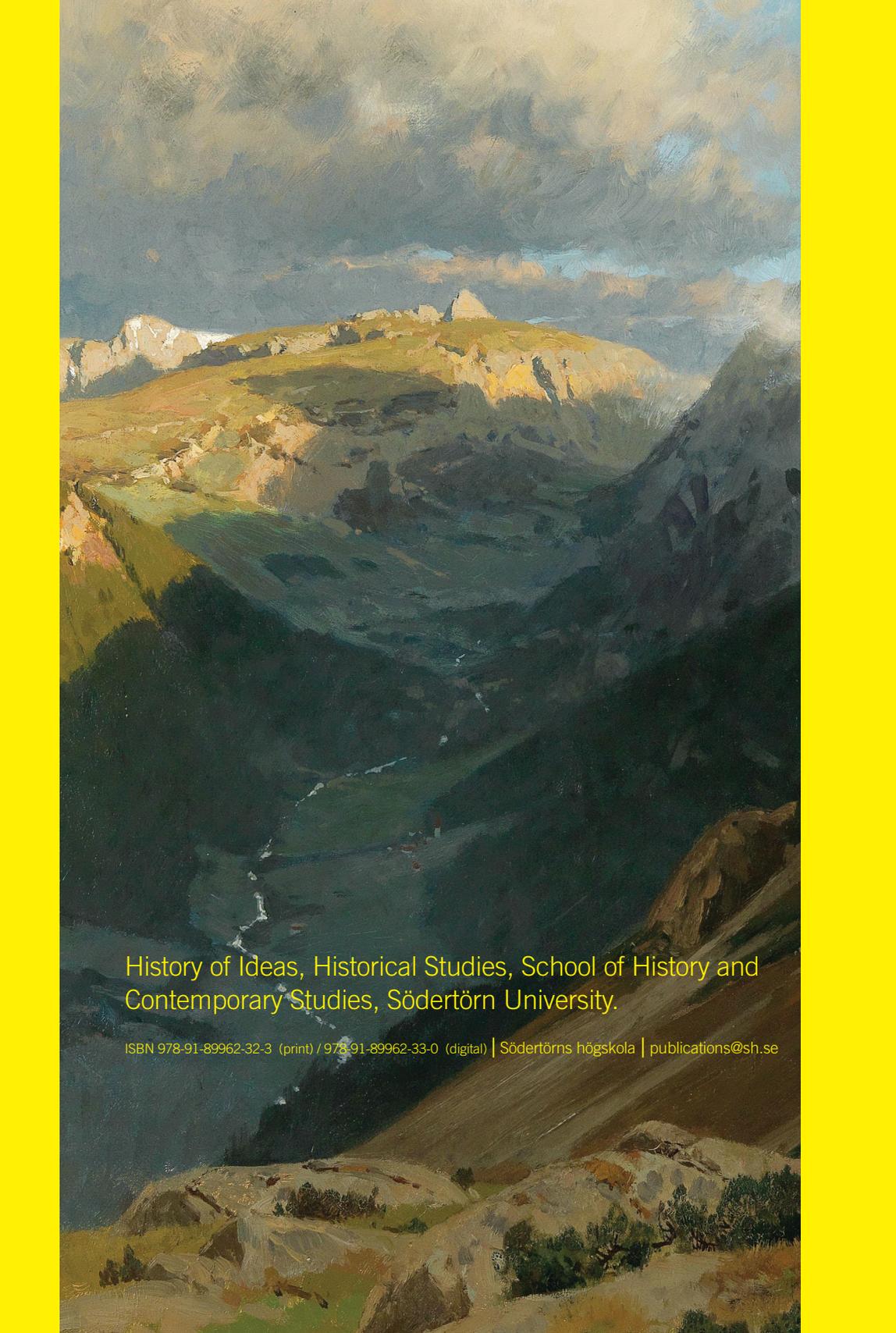
In 1791, the Prussian Academy of Sciences published a prize question on the progress of metaphysics since the time of Leibniz and Wolff. To the German philosophers of the time, it was obvious that the question concerned the historical importance of Kant. In the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* published three years earlier, Kant had complained that metaphysics had thus far lacked any secure progress. His adherents regarded the prize question as an impulse to further ground the revolutionary significance of Kantian critical philosophy. But to do this, they believed, it was first necessary to examine the concept of the history of philosophy as such.

In the following decade, the German literary world was virtually flooded with articles, essays, and entire journals attempting to lay a new foundation for the history of philosophy. The debates concerned, among other things, the beginning and geographical scope of philosophy, the usefulness of studying past philosophical thought, and the laws according to which reason developed in historical time.

The Odyssey of Human Spirit is an examination of this development and the new views of the history of philosophy that it brought about. It argues that the debates in question fundamentally reshaped the concept of the history of philosophy.

Fredrik Bjarkö is a teacher and researcher in the history of ideas at Södertörn University. *The Odyssey of Human Spirit* is his doctoral thesis.





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