

PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY IN THE ANALYTIC TRADITION

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What history is, what it is about, how it proceeds, and what it is for, are questions which to some extent different people would answer in different ways.

(R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*)

I. Introduction

The study of ancient philosophy deals with a canon that remains largely constant and fixated and that have been intensely addressed, studied and commented upon in some form or other ever since these texts originated. In addition to this, these texts (or at least portions of them) have been the central research objects of generations of classical scholars and historians of ancient philosophy. One is therefore given to wonder if any developments of genuine importance are possible within the field of Hellenistic scholarship (even if this is conceived of more broadly as encompassing not only the study of ancient philosophy but also the history of ideas and other approaches)?

This worry is pressing for anyone working within the fields of classics and the history of philosophy, simply due to the long traditions of these subjects. It is, at least *prima facie*, even more pressing when we are attempting to justify the relevance of a contemporary reinterpretation of ancient texts (governed by modern commentaries and interpretations of these texts by historians and classical scholars, thus due to the derivative nature of such an enterprise inheriting their problems) that is not, or at least not primarily, historiographical but rather normative in character.

The answers to these questions might at first glance seem to radically diverge between the historian of philosophy on the one hand and the ethical theorist on the other, and I do not want to call into question the basic divide between these academic disciplines, but I do think that certain relations exist between their respective answers to these fundamental problems. It is also the case that certain problems are in fact shared between the two disciplines even if they do take on somewhat different forms depending on perspective.

The present text deals with problems belonging to the *philosophy of history*, that is the study of the theoretical aspects of history such as questions concerning the basic nature of history (what are its constituent parts?), the meaning of history (is there a structure to history beyond individual events?), the epistemic constraints of history (how can history be explained, accounted for and represented?), and history's relation to the present (in what sense, if any, can history be said to be constitutive of the present?, How, and to what extent does the present effect each era's representation of historical events?). In addition to addressing some, if not all, of these questions this text also touches upon neighbouring fields of inquiry such as *history theory* and the methodological aspects of the historiography of philosophy.

It is misleading to present the study of the history of philosophy as a unified discipline with an easily defined agenda and a fixated methodological approach. Rather, there exists a myriad of traditions, approaches and schools within the field as well as contributions originating from a long range of different academic disciplines. What is said in the following is anchored in the analytic philosophical tradition. It is thus not concerned with what is often referred to as *speculative philosophy of history*—i.e. a predominantly German tradition within the field emphasising history as a totality of a process of events, structures, and processes subject to interpretation with the meta-historical aim of discerning embracing patterns and directions in the unfolding of

human history over and above the particularities of historical events—but rather with questions concerning the problems that arise in our pursuit of historical explanations and knowledge and how these problems can be aided by philosophical analysis. This is not to say that the distance between analytical philosophy of history and other approaches has not lessened in recent years.¹

In what follows I first discuss the basic duality—the relation between the ancients and us—of the historiographical enterprise along with some different approaches both outside and within the analytical mainstream. After this we turn to the issue of the relation between analytic philosophy and the history of philosophy. Finally we turn to the issue of progress and continuity in the history of ethics.

II. The Dual Aspect of Historiography

On the most general level we are always dependent upon our own interests when we engage in the study of older philosophical texts. The interests, questions, problems and interpretations we bring to the ancient sources are invariably and unavoidably our own. Our interests are the products of hugely complex social, political, personal, historical, cultural and contextual factors that can only partly be explicated and accounted for. Our engagement with historical texts is thus always dependent upon our own vantage point.

Hermeneutically inclined thinkers have put this in terms of how our own intellectual horizon—understood as a conglomerate of tradition, opinion and prejudice—stands as a necessary point of departure in any attempt directed at understanding. This horizon, with all its prejudices, can be brought into the open via our dialogical engagement with the past in what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls *the fusion of horizons*.² Hermeneutic approaches to history, while still mainly to be seen as falling within a continental philosophical tradition, focuses more on the meanings of the intentions and actions of historical individuals rather than historical wholes. Hermeneutics grew out of a long-standing tradition of biblical interpretation, emphasises the linguistic and symbolic nature of human interaction, and maintains that techniques developed for textual interpretation can be fruitfully applied to symbolic human action and products.³ William Dilthey's method of *verstehen* (understanding) is engaged in the active construction of the meanings and intentions of historical actors from their point of view. This method was in turn developed by thinkers such as Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricœur, and others. History is thus approached from the perspective of meaning and language and argues that historical knowledge depends upon the interpretation of meaningful human action and practices in order to discover created interconnections and symbolic interactions.

Put in more Nietzschean terms we could say that historical scholarship has both a genetic and a genealogical dimension where the genetic aspect would take on a counterfactual guise in its attempts at description and understanding whereas the genealogical aspect would concern itself with understanding the self and its interest in history in terms of a retrospective explication of myths, memories, monuments of thought and the creation of identity. This basic insight into the nature of historical consciousness ties past, present and future closely together since our interest in the past emanates both from the present (which is in turn shaped by our past) and from our sense of impetus towards tomorrow.

The distancing from naïve strivings towards objectivity and the questioning of linear cultural consciousness also draws historical scholarship closer to other forms of cultural

¹ Analytic philosophy was never as much of a closed-up internal affair as caricatures of it sometimes makes it out to be but nevertheless it might be justified to speak of a certain increase in external influences from the latter part

² Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method*, 2nd edition, trans. Weinsheimer, Joel and Marshall Donald G., London: Continuum, 1989, p. 398. It is, perhaps, possible to view hermeneutics, in its various shifts and explications from the Ancients to the bible-studies of the middle ages and the Renaissance, German romanticism and Idealism, Schleiermacher and Dilthey, via its ontological turn in the 1920's up till today as an explication of this point.

³ This thesis is at the heart of William Dilthey's sharp divide between the human sciences (dependent upon understanding of meaningful human actions) and the natural sciences (depending upon causal explication of non-intensional events).

expression such as historical novels, photography and other visual representation as well as academic disciplines engaged in the study of such cultural expressions and artefacts (i. e. visual culture studies, literary theory, etc.).⁴ Given these preconceptions, attitudes, or theoretical assumptions historical scholarship itself becomes seen as a cultural phenomenon and milieu subject to change. This opens the door to interdisciplinary efforts from a wide range of academic subjects but it also raises the question of how such different efforts are to be evaluated. There is an overhanging risk of classical historiography setting the norm for such comparative evaluation of different media and genres in such a way as to render alternatives inferior by default. That is, different forms of historical representation and elucidation must be in some way made comparable without any single standard being taken as reigning absolute or given beforehand.

Strangely enough, given the emphasis on contextualisation of representation just forwarded here, there still persists an aspect of all of this that is common to this cluster of perspectives, disciplines and formats. On a general level, irrespective of specific terminology and philosophical stance or theoretical tradition the basic problem remains the same: historiographical scholarship is necessarily tied to, biased by, and dependent upon the vantage point of the individual scholar and his context.

This effect is far-reaching and often imperceptible. It colours the structure of intellectual activity and understanding down to the level of particular words and concepts. This is true even of the in this context central concept of 'history'. Reinhardt Koselleck tells us that:

Until the 1780's it was only possible to connect history with an object or subject. One could only say: the history of Charlemagne, the history of France, the history of civilisation. Only during the epochal turn shortly before the French revolution did it become possible in Germany to talk of history itself, of history in general. History also became a reflexive concept which reflects on itself without having to be connected to a concrete object or a concrete subject. Only after that was it possible to speak of history in contrast to nature.⁵

The underlying theoretical stance that informs these remarks concerning the very concept of history is intriguing and illustrative when it comes to how our own vantage point relates to our object of study and is therefore worth looking into in more detail.

Koselleck's approach to historical study is commonly referred to as *Conceptual History* (from the German *Begriffsgeschichte*). Though conceptual history as such is a heterogeneous discipline with a myriad of proponents and variations the discipline and its adherents are (by and large) united in the acceptance of two ideas. Firstly, concepts are thought to acquire their meaning through their use in their respective historical contexts in such a way that a concept's applicability and what it can be used *for* as well as its literal meaning is so determined. Secondly, concepts are seen as tools or weapons of debate.⁶ Concepts thus change through the way they are used to meet the ends of the actors using them. Conceptual change is therefore closely linked to socio-political change, which in turn is seen as a dissolving of the sharp divide between theory and practise. Meaning is thus seen as dependent upon diachronic and synchronic contexts of concepts. In this sense Koselleck's theoretical stance can, together with the related account developed by Quentin Skinner, be said to constitute a historical variant of the "linguistic turn" or its descendant, which Richard Rorty has labelled the "rhetoric turn".⁷ The approach is, due to its

⁴ For examples of how this theoretical aspect of historical scholarship is handled within the academic discipline of history itself see, for example, the theme issue "Historical Representation and Historical Truth" of the *Journal of History and Theory* (No. 47, May 2009).

⁵ Koselleck, Reinhardt, "The Temporalisation of Concepts" trans. Klaus Sondermann, pp. 16-24 in *Finnish Yearbook of political Thought*, vol. 1, 1997, p. 19. ; "Begriffsgeschichtliche Anmerkung zur Zeitgeschichte", in V. Conzenius, M. Greshat and H. Kocher (ed.), *Die Zeit nach 1945 als Thema kirchlicher Zeitgeschichte*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988.

⁶ Quentin Skinner asserts: "Koselleck and I both assume that we need to treat our normative concepts less as statements about the world than as tools and weapons of debate." (Skinner, Quentin, "Rhetoric and Conceptual Change", in *Redescriptions. Yearbook of Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory*, pp. 60-73, 1999, p. 62.

⁷ Rorty coined the term at the 1984 Iowa symposium on "Rhetoric of the Human Sciences". See Simons, Herbert

pressing of the political nature of rhetorical shifts and conceptual change, also clearly marked by the *zeitgeist* of its formative years in the late sixties and seventies.

Conceptual history in Koselleck's sense comprises two central theoretical components: a semantic analysis and an overarching substantial analysis of the major conceptual shifts in what Koselleck terms the *Sattelzeit*⁸—the period of radical socio-political change roughly between 1750 and 1850 or 1870 comprising the timeframe following the enlightenment and the period before, during, and after the French revolution that is marked, among other things, by the emergence of key concepts in modern political theory (state, citizen etc.) and neologistic constructions such as “imperialism” and “class” that connects with, and are symptomatic of, “the experience of modern times [that] is simultaneously the experience of a new time”⁹.

Quentin Skinner attempts instead to identify an independent logic of conceptual change to supplement the semantic analysis when he utilizes the basic insights of conceptual history while supplementing them with a model for historical inquiry centred on rhetoric that draws on both the works of Max Weber, Friedrich Nietzsche and John L. Austin.¹⁰ Skinner's social ontology is perspectivist (in a Nietzsche-Weberian sense) in that “our concepts not only alter over time, but are incapable of providing us with anything more than a series of changing perspectives on the world in which we live and have our being.”¹¹ Furthermore Skinner draws on Wittgensteinian ideas in that he argues that there cannot be a history of Lovejoian unit ideas as such (understood as perennial entities) but rather only a history of various uses to which these ideas have been put. He asserts. “There is nothing, I venture to suggest, lying beneath or behind such uses; their history is the only history of ideas to be written”.¹² Skinner thus makes use of Weberian social theory in order to use Austin's ‘speech-act’-theory—in its original form essentially an ahistorical analysis of ordinary language use—suitable for the study of politics and its history. This contrasts Skinner's approach from more reductive models in that it relates the study of (the history of) politics and political theory to the political life rather than reducing the level of explanation to deeper socio-economic factors in the manner done, for example, by more Marxist oriented scholars. This linking of Weberian thought and Speech-act theory also emphasizes the performativity of political discourse, and once we have arrived at this performativity it is easy to see how this can be illuminated by rhetoric since rhetoric (and hermeneutics), just like speech-act-theory sees language as *parole* rather than *langue* in a structuralist or semiotic sense.

Another approach to the history of philosophy, made influential in French scholarship by the likes of Jean-Paul Vernant, and with its most prominent English-speaking counterpart in G. E. R. Lloyd, draws on the sociology of Claude Levi-Strauss in attempting to apply a structuralist reading of Greek myths, tragedies and society.

Yet another approach, made influential by Martha C. Nussbaum and others, that lies close to the analytical mainstream is a utilization of close readings of ancient texts that draws upon literary theory in drawing the study of ancient philosophy closer to the literary studies of works such as Sophocles *Medea* and other tragedies and dramas that deal with moral and philosophical themes.

W., “Introduction” in Simons Herbert W. (ed.), *The Rhetorical turn* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. vii. Note that Skinner, in *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 6, distances himself from a loose, contemporary, usage of the term rhetoric but accepts that he has “chiefly focused on [...] a rhetorical perspective” (Skinner, Quentin, “Rhetoric and Conceptual Change”. p. 64. See also Palonen, Kari, “Quentin Skinner's Rhetoric of Conceptual Change” in *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 61-80.

⁸ The metaphorical image of the mountain-pass here transforms a temporal entity—the transitory period between two epochs—into a spacial journey between two naturally distinct regions of space.

⁹ Koselleck, Reinhardt, “The Temporalisation of Concepts”, p. 16.

¹⁰ I focus here exclusively on Skinner's later theoretical development. For an intellectual biography see Pallonen, Kari, *Quentin Skinner: History, Politics, Rhetoric*, Cambridge: Polity, 2003.

¹¹ Skinner, Quentin, “Rhetoric and Conceptual Change”, p. 62.

¹² Ibid., p. 62.

Sympathetic close-readings of ancient texts that are neither naïve or overly cautious stands the chance of establishing a dialogue with those texts that is open-ended and dynamic while at the same time aware of its numerous pitfalls and limitations.

One such pitfall ties the historiography of philosophy closely to philosophy proper. It is easy when one considers older philosophical texts, particularly those of fragmentary character or those authored by heroic statues such as Plato and Aristotle, to bring to them an apologetic drive which aims at rescuing what might seem at first glance a rather ill thought out argument or passage by providing a philosophical analysis that results in the fabrication of a sound argument or a coherent reading of the passage in question.¹³ In relation to this pitfall Julia Annas writes:

One feature of the impetus to treat ancient philosophers as contemporary partners was, and to some extent remains, an anxiety to show that ancient authors are worth contemporary attention, rather than being archaic blunderers. This anxiety led to a rather odd attitude in interpretation, in which no effort is spared to show that an argument which might appear weak or fallacious really contains hidden riches which are worth our time to explore.¹⁴

Michael Frede also warns against this attitude while pointing towards the possibilities inherent in an approach that can retain the element of philosophical analysis while steering clear of the pitfalls involved:

We no longer think that fruitful philosophical work can only be done as part of the construction of a philosophical system. Hence we can turn, e.g., to Aristotle's *Ethics* without having to worry about how Aristotle's views are related to the true philosophical system, and with a free mind from such constraints can follow Aristotle's thoughts for what they may be worth. Hence it can also happen more easily again that we find these thoughts to be philosophically interesting, worthwhile pursuing, in some way promising. And hence the new effort to deal with them in a way which make them philosophically as interesting as they are, no more, but also no less.¹⁵

This problem of overly sympathetic philosophical readings of ancient philosophical texts does not, as Frede rightly notes, rule out the possibility of engaging fruitfully with these texts in a philosophical manner. To see this, and to see how this particular problem relates to the larger issue of the relation between philosophy and its history we must now look at the development of the historiography of philosophy in the western analytic tradition in more detail.

III. The Development of Ancient Philosophy in the Analytical Tradition

In the first half of the twentieth century study of ancient philosophical texts was primarily conducted by people with their basis in the classics¹⁶ and as a consequence the methodology employed in the treatment of these texts were primarily developed in a context of historical and literary study.

This approach was, beginning in the late fifties and early sixties, supplemented by (or

¹³ This rather Gadamerian point could be put in terms of how historical texts have an authority prior to ours (given by the fact that we are, necessarily and in spite of any enlightenment inspired prejudices we might have, situated in tradition) but that this authority is at the same time dependent upon our recognition of its status as such in the present. Gadamer writes: "That which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and our finite historical being is marked by the fact that the authority of what has been handed down to us—and not just what is clearly grounded—always has power over our attitudes and behaviour" and that "[e]ven the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated." (Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method*, 2nd edition, trans. Weinsheimer, Joel and Marshall Donald G. (London: Continuum, 1989, p. 281, 282).

¹⁴ Annas, Julia "Ancient Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century", p. 27.

¹⁵ Frede, Michael, Unpublished manuscript (1992, 27) quoted in Alanen, Lilli, "Om den filosofiska filosofihistoriens idé" *Lychnos*, 2006, 135-148, p. 146.

¹⁶ The notion of 'classical studies' as a discipline is not as unproblematic as it once was. For a discussion of this see Annas, Julia "Ancient Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century", pp. 25-43 in Leiter, Brian (ed.), *The Future for Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

even, at times, substituted for) an approach with its roots in the then recent developments within the analytical mainstream. New modes of argument analysis were brought to bear on the ancient texts in a way that treated ancient authors as contemporary discussion partners. This new development had a dangerous ahistorical tendency in that it to a large part ignored differences between us and the ancients (and the distance between us) in a way that led to a highly selective approach. The approach was selective in three senses. Firstly, it tended to focus on passages from ancient sources that were well suited to be read as being concerned with issues that were more or less easily translatable to modern concerns and ways of phrasing what was thought of as timeless philosophical problems (with an emphasis, in the late fifties and early sixties, on issues concerning language and meaning¹⁷).

Secondly, this approach to the ancients, with its focus on selected passages and problems, led to an understanding of the ancient texts that was radically un-synoptic and under-systematized. In focusing on shorter passages without adherence to their philosophical context within the authorship of the ancient philosopher or school in question the reading provided by this approach became a piecemeal hodgepodge of assorted doctrines presented using contemporary terminology. Furthermore it ignored methodological stances embodied in ancient texts. This led to a misunderstanding of the significance of these selected passages and the importance of the arguments they presented was blown out of proportion.

Thirdly, this approach tended to ignore the relevance of broader contextual factors such as the political and educational climate in the Greco-Roman world as well as literary and religious traditions. It is partly this approach to the ancients that fosters the all too widespread misunderstanding that the development of Ionian natural philosophy constituted an almost unfathomable breach that substituted mythology for philosophy where it was, in fact, rather a continuation and expansion upon a tradition. In a similar manner a failure to realise the importance of the socio-economic aspects of Athenian life and the need for propaganda and rhetoric it fostered has rendered misapprehensions regarding the Hellenistic philosophical schools that comes down to us in the everyday usage of such terms as 'stoic', 'cynic' and 'epicurean'.

It is easy, in retrospect, to look upon this development with contempt, or even pity, provided by our understanding of the need for contextualization and historical sensitivity. This, however, would make us guilty of a fallacy of interpretation that is similar to the one we accuse these early analytical historians of philosophy of making. In order to understand *their* readings of ancient texts we must be aware of the methods, interests and assumptions of early analytic philosophy as well as broader contextual factors. If we fail to do that we are at fault for not properly understanding and accounting for the cultural milieu in which analytical philosophy existed in the earlier half of the twentieth century and against which these readings were done. It must also be noted that these pitfalls and problems are not particular to early analytical philosophy's take on history. Rather, ideas concerning the novelty and ingeniousness of the pre-Socratic Ionian philosophers have a longer history than does analytic philosophy, for example.

In addition to this it must be noted that this new way of engaging with the ancient texts did produce illuminating work that proved that a philosophical engagement with these texts was a worthwhile enterprise that was capable of providing illumination on contemporary philosophical issues and that the study of these texts was not solely of antiquarian interest.

This leads us back to what can be referred to as the double aspect of historiography of ancient philosophy: on the one hand it is a process of interpreting the ancients according to *their* preconditions, problems and background, on the other hand it is a process of attempting to come to grips with our own.

None of these goals are fully realisable. We are always dealing with preconceptions,

¹⁷ It is worth mentioning that these questions (meaning, language and, to a certain extent, philosophy of mind) were peripheral phenomena in the ancient debate. See Annas, Julia, "Ancient Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century", p. 33.

interpretations and representations as well as various degrees of fragmentation and uncertainty with regards to the ancient sources. But this does not mean that such an enterprise is void of meaning. Rather, understanding, be it historical or not, is necessarily linked to an interpretative process of just this kind. This duality of the historiographical enterprise links the history of moral philosophy firmly with moral philosophy proper. To account for why certain questions required a philosophical answer in the ancient world, and the reasons for our interest in these questions, is intimately linked with the reasons why certain questions require, or seem to require, philosophical answers in the twenty-first century.

Since the formative years of analytic history of philosophy much have happened and few now think that a plainly ahistorical approach is at all viable. Consequently philosophical analysis is now supplemented with a situating of the works within a broader historical and social context. It is important to note that writing-styles such as Homeric hexameter and the dialogue form raise important obstacles that must be tackled before philosophical engagement with the material can begin. This goes also for cultural and socio-political factors at work in the Greco-Roman world. It is vital to understand the background of economic competition between the Athenian schools when one tries to come to grips with Stoic and Epicurean doctrines expressed in what can be likened to the form of the modern slogan, for example.

The philosophical nature of these texts also raises the need for biographical understanding of the philosophers themselves. The argumentative nature of the philosophical enterprise makes it vital that we understand that the texts that we now have are the products of personal engagement on the behalf of its authors with on-going debates. Philosophical activity can thus, according to this line of interpretation, be seen as “speech-acts”. These acts must also be seen against a background of a continually changing rhetorical schema and a discussion specific logic. That is to say, if we wish to understand the work of a particular philosopher we need to be acquainted with their biographical background. If we are seeking to understand why a certain philosopher does what he does, writes what he writes and argues the way he does we need to understand the particular situation the philosopher in question finds himself in. We have to understand his or hers particular agenda and social setting. Only when we acquire an understanding of the major questions of the time and the then contemporary discussion-partners the philosopher in question had can we understand and explain the philosophers’ particular agenda and way of arguing. This way of looking at the role of biographical research in the history of philosophy thus emphasises philosophy’s role as a personal project.

This biographical methodology in the history of philosophy is especially fruitful when it comes to philosophers with a large constructive project spanning their entire philosophical career. It becomes less evidently fruitful (though by no means obsolete) when we consider philosophers engaged with a myriad of independent or loosely connected sets of questions. Contextualisation of the various sorts here accounted for are hugely important for any historiographical enterprise, indeed for any kind of historical representation or interpretation. There are, however, limits to this contextualisation, primarily due to two factors:

Firstly, the scarcity of the material available to us sets limits to how well we can locate texts in relation to cultural practices. Many works are near impossible to date with more certainty than within one or two centuries, for example. On top of this much of the material we do have access to is decidedly polemical and hagiographical in character.

Secondly, some of our sources are actually quite near in style to modern ways of writing philosophy. This holds especially for large parts of Hellenistic philosophy.

At most then, contextualisation serves as a background or basis against which the philosophical systems, debates and positions of past thinkers can be extracted. The main aim of the historian of philosophy thus begins when such contextualizing work has been done: The explication and assessment of the philosophical argumentation and positioning as such.

Analytic philosophy¹⁸ is often criticised for lack of historical awareness, or even for taking

¹⁸ I will, for present purposes, take it for granted that we possess some working preconception of what constitutes

a “radically ahistorical and modern-progressivist point of view”¹⁹. This critique comes from various sources and, in the words of Hans-Johann Glock, “unites traditionalist philosophers devoted to the study of the *philosophia perennis* with avant-garde ‘continental’ philosophers”.²⁰ Historians of analytic philosophy have pointed to the movement’s lack of historical self-consciousness.²¹ Critics are also to be found among analytic philosophy’s own ranks. Most famously, perhaps, Bernard Williams’s call for historical and genetic perspectives.²²

Sadly, analytic philosophers have by and large ignored this criticism. This neglect has had the effect of allowing historicist critique to go unanswered even in extreme cases where such criticism is completely groundless, misdirected, and easily refuted. Furthermore, important and interesting philosophical questions raised by these issues remain largely unexplored from an analytical standpoint, thus lacking thorough philosophical treatment from all perspectives concerned.

In a trivial sense it is true that philosophical activity in general cannot be completely cut off from its history. As Michael Frede puts it: “Almost all philosophical thought depends on earlier thought [...]. What this reflects is simply the fact that we always do philosophy against the background of the philosophical views and the philosophical reasoning of at least our immediate predecessors, that we cannot, at least to begin with, see the problems except in terms of the views and the reasons of our predecessors, and that however much we free ourselves from their views and reasons, there will always be some dependence on them.”²³ And this is as it should be. Philosophy would be a rather solitary and frightful enterprise if one could not fall back on some kind of tradition, or, as the poet would have it; “To stray away into these forests drear, alone, without a peer”.²⁴

In a similar vein Glock asserts that “[n]either scientists nor philosophers can afford to disregard their *immediate* predecessors, since these are the rivals against which they have to prove their mettle”²⁵, but that he sees no evidence that even what he calls ‘naturalistic historiophobes’ “counsel such complete abstinence”²⁶. And, furthermore, Glock notes, this says rather little regarding the use of studying *remote* predecessors.²⁷ But aside from this rather trivial fact, is there something to be gained by the study of the history of philosophy from a purely philosophical point of view?

It is useful to distinguish between two modes of critique directed against analytic

‘analytic philosophy’ that is sufficiently precise for the discussion that follows to go on unhindered. For a more throughout discussion see Glock, Hans-Johann, *What is Analytic Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For an historical account see, for example, Soames, Scott, *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century vol.1 The Dawn of Analysis, vol. 2 The Age of Meaning* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003).

¹⁹ Wilshire, Bruce, *Fashionable Nihilism; a Critique of Analytic Philosophy*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, p. 4.

²⁰ Glock, Hans-Johann, “Analytical Philosophy and History: A Mismatch”, *Mind*, Vol. 117, pp. 867-897 (Oct, 2008). Nearly all of the text encompassing this article also forms Ch. 4 of Glock, Hans-Johann, *What is Analytic Philosophy*.

²¹ See, for example, Baker, Gordon, *Wittgenstein, Frege and the Vienna Circle*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988, p. xi), Hylton, Peter, *Russel, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992, p. Vii), Sluga, Hans, *Frege*, (London: Routledge, 1980, p. 2), Sorell, Tom, “Introduction” in Sorell, Tom and Rogers, G. A. J., *Analytic Philosophy and History of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 1, and Glock, Hans-Johann, “Analytical Philosophy and History: A Mismatch”, p. 867.

²² See, for example, Williams, Bernard, “Why Philosophy needs History”, *London Review of Books*, 17 October 2002, pp.7-9.

²³ Frede, Michael, “Introduction”, p. xiv in *Essays in Ancient Philosophy*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

²⁴ Keats, John, *Endymion*.

²⁵ Glock, Hans-Johann, “Analytic Philosophy and History: A Mismatch?”, p. 872, Emphasis in original.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ That is, we have not established even the pragmatic thesis that such study would be useful and we are no way near establishing the stronger thesis that holds such study to be necessary. Cf. Glock, Hans-Johann, “Analytic Philosophy and History: A Mismatch?”, p. 872.

philosophy by historicists. On the one hand we have the claim that analytic philosophers ignore (or even despise) the past. Let us follow Glock and call this *the charge of historiophobia*.²⁸ On the other hand we have the claim that analytic philosophers, when they are engaged with history, tend to distort the past, that is, *the charge of anachronism*. I will here briefly address these charges on a general level before moving on to the question of how we are to approach the issue of the history of ethics more generally.

*The charge of historiophobia*²⁹ – the charge that analytic philosophy ignores the past (or even despises historical study) – can in and of itself benefit from an historical overview. I think that a few examples are sufficient for present purposes.

The Wittgenstein of *Tractatus* saw the history of philosophy as plagued by the “most fundamental confusions” due to the failure of earlier philosophers to grasp the logic of our language and as a result “most propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical”.³⁰ Furthermore, Wittgenstein argued that whenever he read “a philosophical book: it doesn’t improve my thoughts at all, it makes them worse.”³¹ Wittgenstein constitutes something of an exception given his hard-knuckled attitude. It is true, however, that the members of the Vienna Circle ferociously attacked the “metaphysics” of earlier scholars (post-Kantian German philosophers in particular).³² Thus, Carnap asserts:

In the domain of *metaphysics*, including all philosophy of value and normative theory, logical analysis yields the negative result *that the alleged statements in this area are entirely meaningless* [...] Our thesis, now, is that logical analysis reveals the alleged statements of metaphysics to be pseudo-statements”³³

In a similar vein Ayer asserts that “[t]he traditional disputes of philosophers are, for the most part, as unwarranted as they are unfruitful”.³⁴ But this image of even the logical positivists as historiophobes must be revised somewhat. At the very beginning of the preface to *Language, Truth & Logic* Ayer tells us that “[t]he views which are put forward in this treatise derive from the doctrines of Bertrand Russell and Wittgenstein, which are themselves the logical outcome of the empiricism of Berkeley and David Hume”³⁵, thus acknowledging the debt he owes his predecessors and to tradition.

Gilbert Ryle describes his own reaction to the Vienna Circle’s sharp dichotomy between science and nonsense like this:

If, after all, logicians and even philosophers can say significant things, then perhaps some logicians and philosophers of the past, even the remote past, had, despite their unenlightenment, sometimes said significant

²⁸ Glock, Hans-Johann, “Analytical Philosophy and History: A Mismatch”, p. 868.

²⁹ The historiophobic attitude is, obviously, not confined to analytic philosophers. Schopenhauer, for example, remarks: “history has always been a favourite study among those who want to learn something without undergoing the effort required by the real branches of knowledge, which tax and engross the intellect.” ((Schopenhauer, Arthur, [1851] *Parerga and Paralipomena*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974)), II, §233.

³⁰ See Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Tractatus Logicus Philosophicus*, [1922], (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 3.323-3.325, 4.003.

³¹ MS 135: 27.7.47; quoted in Glock, Hans-Johann, *What is Analytic Philosophy*, p.93, and Monk, Ray, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: the Duty of Genius* (London Cape, 1990), p. 495.

³² See Carnap, Rudolf, Hahn, Hans, and, Neurath, Otto, [1929], “Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung: Der Wiener Kreis” in Neurath, Otto, *Gesammelte Philosophische und Methodologische Schriften*, vol. I (Vienna: Hölder-Pilcher-Tempsky, 1981), 299-336. I owe this reference to Glock, Hans-Johann, *What is Analytic Philosophy?*, p. 91. See also Ayer, Alfred Jules, *Language, Truth & Logic* (London: Camelot Press Ltd., 1936), Ch. 1. Interested readers should note that Ayer prior to the publication of *Language, Truth & Logic* Ayer also published an article in *Mind* that is similar to the first Ch. of *Language, Truth & Logic*. See Ayer, Alfred Jules, “Demonstration of the Impossibility of Metaphysics”, (*Mind* (1934) Vol. XLIII(171), pp. 335-345.

³³ Carnap, Rudolf, “The Elimination of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language” [1932], pp. 60-81 in Ayer, Alfred Jules, *Logical Positivism*, (New York: Free Press, 1959, pp. 60-61.

³⁴ Ayer, Alfred Jules, *Language, Truth & Logic*, p. 15.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

things. ‘Conceptual analysis’ seems to denote a permissible, even meritorious exercise, so maybe some of our forefathers had had their Cantabrigian moments. If we are careful to winnow of their vacuously speculative tares from their analytical wheat, we may find that some of them sometimes did quite promising work in our own line of business. Naturally we began, in a patronising mood, by looking for and finding in the Stoics, say, or Locke, primitive adumbrations of our own most prized thoughts. But before long some of them seemed to move more like pioneers than like toddlers, and to talk to us across the ages more like colleagues than like pupils; and then we forgot our pails of whitewash.”³⁶

As this quote shows, analytic philosophy cannot, even in its most extreme early beginnings, be described as wholeheartedly historiophobic. Such tendencies existed among scholars in the analytic tradition, most clearly exemplified, perhaps, by Wittgenstein, and might very well exist still but they are no way near as widespread as they are sometimes made out to be.³⁷ Be this as it may, the quotes by Ryle and Ayer above lean towards anachronism and it is to this charge we will now turn.

The charge of anachronism amounts to an accusation that analytic philosophy’s treatment of past thinkers distorts their views by reading features of the present into them. As an illustration of this consider the following quote from Kenneth Westphal’s *Hegel’s Epistemology: A philosophical Introduction to the Phenomenology of Spirit* used by Staffan Carlshamre in an article on the subject of the relation between philosophy and history:

Naturalist elements appear in Hegel’s epistemology in his theses that biological needs (one root of consciousness) involve elementary classification of objects, that the contents of conscious awareness derive from a public world, and that classificatory thought presupposes natural structures in the world. Hegel’s philosophy of mind is deeply functionalist; Hegel rejects mind/body dualism, though without adopting eliminativist materialism.³⁸

It seems that Westphal here, Staffan Carlshamre argues tentatively, falls head over heels into an anachronistic reading of Hegel by interpreting both his questions (the mind/body problem, social epistemology, metaphysics and science) and his chosen positions on these issues (naturalism, functionalism, non-eliminative materialism) completely coincides with a contemporary debate and terminology.³⁹

It is tempting when one considers passages like these to draw a simple distinction between *philosophical* and *historical* readings of texts, and on a general level such a distinction can be quite illuminating. On a more detailed level there are a range of ways in which one can engage with a text that has bearing on both the historical and the philosophical dimensions. Within ‘continental’ philosophy one can distinguish between a range of schools on the issue of the typology of the historiography of philosophy: There is the Kantian school based on some form of progressivism in regard to topical philosophical questions, the hermeneutic school (encompassing Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Heidegger) and The Hegelian tradition which has both a right and a left (western Marxism) wing to name but a few.⁴⁰ The need for classifications between different models of the historiography of philosophy is a pressing issue and comes equipped with its own

³⁶ Ryle, Gilbert, “Autobiographical”, pp. 1-17 in Wood, Oscar P., and Pitcher, George, (eds.), *Ryle*, (London: Maximillian & Co., 1970), pp. 10-11.

³⁷ It is sometimes mentioned in this debate that Gilbert Harman had a sign on his Princeton office door that read “History of philosophy: Just Say No!”, which would suggest a hostile attitude. On closer inspection, however, Harman’s views on the subject turn out to be those one could expect from a philosopher of his stature; measured and reflective. I might not share Harman’s views on the relation between history of philosophy and philosophy, but I do in no way find his views foolish or ungrounded. See Sorell, Tom “On Saying No to History of Philosophy” pp. 43-59, in Sorell, Tom and Rogers, G. A. J., (eds.), *Analytic Philosophy and History of Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 44.

³⁸ Westphal, Kenneth R., *Hegel’s epistemology: a philosophical introduction to the phenomenology of spirit* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2003), p. 52. Quoted in Carlshamre, Staffan, “Filosofi eller Historia?”, (*Lychnos*, 2006, pp. 179-192), p. 180-181.

³⁹ Ibid. p. 181.

⁴⁰ See Piaia, Gregorio, “Bruckner Versus Rorty? On the ‘Models’ of the Historiography of Philosophy”, pp. 69-81, *British Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 9 No. 1 (2001), p. 70-71.

history. From the ancient world stems the doxographical tradition⁴¹ and the *Placita*-literature and from there on until the present different modes and genres of historiography have evolved and it is by no means clear where the demarcation lines are to be set.

Related to this issue is the question of how philosophical and intellectual progress functions over time and how it is to be assessed. How are we to understand the historical development of disciplines of human inquiry in general and moral philosophy in particular? This question is in many ways decisive for our present concerns: Whether historiographical study is fruitful for moral philosophy proper hinges on how we understand the developmental process.

On one extreme view, let us call it *Radical historicism*, attempts at any kind of dialogue across different times is an entirely meaningless enterprise since there is no way to assess a moral theory or position timelessly that is in any way fruitful. According to this position any ethical system of thought is simply an expression of its time and culture. Moral themes that might seem to be reoccurring over time are in effect only illusory similar, in reality they are products of different times in a way that make any comparison meaningless. Thus, the radical historicist holds, there are no suprahistorical essences; permanent ends to human enquiry, enduring identities or truths.

The uttermost opposing view, *Radical non-historicism*, agrees that historical treatment of past ethical thought does nothing in itself to aid the moral philosophical enterprise but it does so for quite different reasons. According to this position historical doctrines can be assessed timelessly by the use of rational argument. The charting of the development of ethics tells us nothing about the merits of different positions. It might be interesting from a doxographical point of view which positions might have been held throughout history and how they have evolved in relation to each other but this does in no way effect the assessment of these historical positions on a philosophical level. Perhaps it is possible to see the idea of Perennial philosophy as a variant of this view. According to *Perennialism* the apparently conflicting paradigms of history are in reality expressions of the same static phenomena. This is a thought developed by Italian Renaissance philosophers such as Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and Agostino Steucho⁴² (1497-1548) that amounts to the belief in, or assumption of, universal recurrence of philosophical insight independent of epoch or culture, including universal truths on the nature of reality, humanity or consciousness (i.e. anthropological universals). The system as such must be universal and internally coherent. "This ideal is itself, therefore, perennial, expressing the persistent hope for finality in the philosophical task."⁴³

On a third view, which we might call *Evolutionism*, it is perfectly sensible to talk about a development of ethics in a strong sense: moral philosophy is seen as having evolved steadily towards current ethical systems. Henry Sidgwick's *Outlines of the history of ethics for English readers* seems to be written out of something that resembles this position. For Sidgwick the history of ethics takes the form of a more or less continually progressive enterprise culminating in the birth and development of utilitarianism. In a similar vein Derek Parfit argues, in his *Reasons and Persons*, that the seeming lack of progress in ethics can be explained by the fact that very few moral philosophers throughout history have been working within a secularised framework and that most of those were concerned with meta-ethics rather than ethics proper and concludes that there are grounds for hope.⁴⁴

⁴¹ For more on this see section VI of this chapter.

⁴² Steucho appears to be the originator of the term with his treatise *De perenni philosophia libri X*, (1540).

⁴³ Loemker, Leroy E., from: "Perennial Philosophy" in *The Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (1st ed., 1973; Scribners, pp. 457-463) p. 457. A view somewhat related to Perennialism is Arthur O. Lovejoy's concept of the Unit-Idea. Lovejoy sees the history of thought (Lovejoy's model is primarily concerned with the history of ideas) as being possible to account for by an analysis of the basic building-blocks of the history of thought –the unit-ideas— which remains relatively unchanged during the course of time and an analysis of how these unit-ideas are combined in new patterns in different eras. According to this model, then, "most philosophical systems are original or distinctive rather in their patterns than in their components" (Lovejoy, Arthur O., *The Great Chain of Being*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, [1936] 1964) p. 3.).

⁴⁴ Parfit, Derek, *Reasons and Persons*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 453-454.

Perhaps there is a grain of truth in all of the above positions. Historical sensitivity and adherence to context is important in understanding past positions but this does not make them impossible to evaluate using rational critique. There are, for example, obvious difficulties pertaining to the relations between stoic ethics and stoic physics. Difficulties that can perhaps only be grasped provided a significant historic understanding of ancient Greek thought, but that are in no way immune to rational assessment once such understanding is provided. There are important deeply embedded differences between an ancient stoic outlook and a modern one, but these are not all-important in such a way as to disallow fruitful criticism. This, I take it, is shown by the work of scholars of Hellenistic thought such as A. A. Long, John, M. Cooper, and Julia Annas, who base their research on philosophical argumentation as well as textual evidence and contextual and historical factors pertaining to the Greco-Roman world. Research of this kind had not even been possible if rational critique would not have been possible. The clearest example of this methodological approach is, perhaps, to be found in the modern discussion of the so-called ‘third man’ argument from Plato’s *Parmenides*. The ‘Third Man’ label for the argument (or family of arguments) directed towards Plato’s theory of Forms comes from Aristotle’s treatment of the problem⁴⁵ and Plato never refers to any argument as the “Third Man” when the issue is presented at *Parmenides* 132a–b. The vast majority of scholars that have engaged in this issue are in agreement that Socrates articulates a version of the theory of forms like the one defended in the dialogues of Plato’s middle period and that *Parmenides* raises a series of objections to this theory and that what follows is a string of eight ‘Deductions’ which are supposed to somehow answer *Parmenides*’ objections. Beyond this rather basic point, however, there is a wide-ranging debate concerning the proper reconstruction of the objections, the logical structure of the ‘Deductions’, and the final point of the dialogue. This debate has deepened our understanding of the pedagogical and logical attributes of the dialogue form as well as our overall understanding of Plato’s philosophical enterprise. The most interesting aspect of this debate for our present purposes is how intertwined and mutually enlightening different approaches such as the history of philosophy, literary theory, logic and philosophy as well as the history of Ideas are in our treatment of this issue. This development is in large part due to the work of Gregory Vlastos whose methodological stance can be said to lie at the very heart of our present problem. It led to the integration of more stringent philosophical method into the historiography of ancient Greek philosophy. The idea that topics, themes and methodology of twentieth-century analytical philosophers were sufficiently similar to the Ancients to enable a kind of dialogue is still central to the subject of history of ancient philosophy, as we know it in the English-speaking world today.⁴⁶

Similarly it is, perhaps, dangerous to look upon the history of ethics as a string of attempts to answer the same questions, but this does not mean that there is no such thing as thematic similarity between epochs or historical links between different positions. Descartes’s discussion of the relation between mind and body is radically different from our modern stating of the mind/body-problem but careful reading and sensitivity to historical factors might reveal points of similarity and origin. It is helpful to be acquainted with the Aristotelian understanding of reasoning from cause to effect to understand Descartes’s usage of the term ‘a priori’ and this in turn might throw new light on our current understanding of epistemological terminology. These insights might help us in understanding our own place in history and identify elements in our own thinking that are marked by both historical and non-historical factors such as how the current discussion of informed consent has close links to the north American legal system, which

⁴⁵ See *Metaphysics* 990b17 - 1079a13, 1039a2; *Sophistical Refutations* 178b36 ff.

⁴⁶ For the classic treatment of this issue see Vlastos, Gregory, ‘The Third Man Argument in the *Parmenides*’, (*Philosophical Review*, 64, 1954: 319–349). Vlastos sets the tone on the very first page of the Article by proclaiming “[i]f any progress in agreement is to be made at this juncture it must come from some advance in understanding of the logical structure of the Argument” (ibid. p. 319). For a treatment of this methodological development see Annas, Julia, “Ancient Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century”, pp. 25-43 in Leiter, Brian (ed.), *The Future for Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

in turn is influenced by enlightenment ideals and so on. Accordingly one could take the history of ethics to incorporate larger themes into which more particular context-specific questions, theories and problems can be grouped together in a manner that makes comparisons fruitful and enlightening. Treating past thinkers as contemporaries engaged in a single continuous debate is problematic at best. The task of understanding past doctrines is not the same as grasping theories of the present but this does not mean that comparison is impossible once we start to understand what past thinkers were trying to say, using the conceptual apparatus available to them.

Perhaps there is also genuine developments in ethics—W. D. Ross' doctrine of *prima facie*-duties⁴⁷ might for instance seem as such a genuine step forward—but we must be aware of the fact that such developments are intimately linked to context-specific ways of posing certain questions and understandings of the role of moral philosophy. Developments are always made on the basis of certain larger frameworks that in turn are dependent upon still larger cultural and historic entities. Furthermore, there is regression as well as progress. Sometimes older theories are prematurely discarded in the name of progress and sometimes positions are inadequately understood and therefore given an unfair critical treatment. Intuitionism was, for example, given a superficial and unfair treatment in textbooks in moral philosophy for the better part of the second half of the 20th century.⁴⁸ Thus, development in ethics more often than not takes the form of clarifications and explications. We must, in dealing with theories of the past, attempt to supply the best statement possible of their main features. In this manner historical explication and philosophical study of theories are intertwined.

Bearing the general problem of progress in mind, it can be fruitful to reflect on more particular issues to form a body of considerations that can help us to come to terms with the relation between the history of philosophy and its relation to philosophical practise.

Reading older philosophical texts in an ahistoric, non-contextualizing, way can be incredibly fruitful for mainstream philosophy. Texts such as Plato's *Republic*, Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Hume's *Treatise*, and *Inquiry*, as well as Kant's *Groundwork*, to name but a few, has a substantial pedagogical value when it comes to introducing new students to philosophy. Study of these texts help setting up points of reference by the use of which a common terminology can be anchored. That these texts fill such a function and does it so well can be partly ascribed to the fact that these authors were master stylists writing for a general public (if we take 'general public' to refer to the ancient Athenian upper class etc.) and not for scholars and specialists. The usage of these texts, then, is useful in helping students to grasp more specialised terminology necessary for understanding positions on philosophical issues in contemporary debate. Furthermore older texts can be used as exercise material when it comes to teaching critical thinking and argument assessment. Such study ought not to be considered as courses in the history of philosophy however. They are neither historically nor contextually sensitive and thus fall outside of history of philosophy proper. The views of Plato, Hobbes, Hume, and Kant are presented in such a way as to coincide with, or throw light upon, contemporary debate and terminology in a more or less straightforward manner. Considerations having to do with contextualisation and historicity are in these cases left behind, and oftentimes rightly so. The use of these texts as introductions to contemporary problems and terminology would often diminish if historical considerations would be brought in as a standing element in such courses. This aside, it is not obvious that some

⁴⁷ The fact that C. D. Broad, in his *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, writing at the same time as Ross presents a form of intuitionism that exhibits strong parallelism with Ross' view in *The Right and the Good* serves to emphasize the point that developments are the products of their intellectual milieu, era and therefore context dependent in this sense. See Broad, C. D. *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1930), and Audi, Robert, *The Good in the Right, The Good in the Right: A theory of Intuition and Intrinsic Value*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, pp.17ff.

⁴⁸ For more on this see the introductions by Philip Stratton-Lake to Stratton-Lake, Philip (ed.), *Ethical Intuitionism: Re-evaluations* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, and Ross W. D., *The Right and the Good* [1930] Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, and Audi, Robert, *The Good in the Right: A theory of Intuition and Intrinsic Value*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

historicist remarks cannot be a fruitful addition in courses like these. Some exposition into the notion of *eudaimonia* in a more proper historical-contextualising manner is needed in order to make use of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as a way of introducing students to contemporary virtue ethics, for example.

Anachronistic readings of past philosophical texts can also contribute in a substantial way to the forefront of the mainstream philosophical enterprise. Older philosophical texts and some position extracted from them are used to locate present contributions to philosophy. A clear-cut example of such a case is the rise of what is nowadays referred to as moral particularism. Particularism is roughly put, the view that the rationality of moral thought and judgement does not depend on a suitable provision of moral principles.⁴⁹ This hotly debated issue in contemporary moral philosophy draws inspiration from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is doubtful, however, whether a particularist interpretation of Aristotle, championed by, among others, John McDowell, Martha Nussbaum, and Jonathan Dancy, is historically defensible.⁵⁰ In a similar way Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following has received attention both from mainstream philosophers as well as Wittgenstein scholars.⁵¹ The elaboration of the so-called capabilities-approach by Nussbaum and Amartya Sen is another example.⁵² Furthermore philosophers such as Annette Baier, Barbara Hermann and Christine Korsgaard see themselves, at least partly, as expanding upon a tradition with roots in the writings of a specific historical figure (the first a Humean and the other two Kantians). It might be the case that the work of these philosophers is even aided by the fact that they work against a backdrop of a comprehensive philosophical system—a rare steadiness in an increasingly divided discipline. This approach also has the benefit of being able to fill in gaps and to create conceptual space when these philosophers tackle problems that are close to those discussed by philosophers in the mainline who do not subscribe to such a doctrine or tradition. This, I think, was the case when Christine Korsgaard's discussion in her *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*⁵³ had implications for (or constituted a real alternative in) the debate about the possibilities of distinguishing between final and intrinsic value. This example shows that an approach anchored in a historical tradition need not, in spite of specialised terminology etc., be wholly incommensurable with other theories and traditions. Some work is surely needed to reach such common ground, but it seems to be an actual and practical possibility. In addition to continuing a tradition of thought these scholars are also doing the work of historians of philosophy. Work in this vein runs the potential risk of taking the form of overly protective re-readings of the texts in such a manner that it is of doubtful historical value. It is therefore possible to disagree with all of these theoreticians on specific points of interpretation of their historical source-material but it is hardly possible of accusing them of blatant anachronism *per se*.

The charge of anachronism falls rather more often upon a different group of philosophers. These philosophers are the ones that take to older philosophical texts as a source of un- or underdeveloped alternatives⁵⁴ worthy of consideration without themselves subscribing to the teachings of a particular tradition or philosopher. The charge of anachronism besides, this constitutes a rather effective method for the enrichment and clarification of our conceptual

⁴⁹ The issue of how to precisely define different kinds of particularism is a complicated one. For present purposes this issue can be safely ignored.

⁵⁰ See Irwin, Terence, "Ethics as an Inexact Science: Aristotle's Ambitions for Moral Theory", pp. 100-129 in Hooker, Brand, and Little, Margaret, (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁵¹ See also Sorell, Tom, "On saying No to the History of Philosophy", p. 46 for more on this issue.

⁵² See, for example, Nussbaum, Martha C., *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁵³ Korsgaard, Christine, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially p. 249ff.

⁵⁴ This approach thus, as Catherine Wilson observes, takes its queue from a conception of history championed by Quentin Skinner and Imre Lakatos. See Wilson, Catherine, "Is History Good for Philosophy", pp. 61-82 in Sorell, Tom and Rogers, G. A. J., (eds.), *Analytic Philosophy and History of Philosophy*, p. 79.

space. Much of the early development of modern virtue ethics by such thinkers as Bernard Williams, Gary Watson, and Michael Stocker falls within this category.

These two approaches are, as Catherine Wilson observes, in need of due warning. They sometimes express a tendency to generate readings that are ideologically driven and therefore of little value to historians. These kinds of readings also tend to invite appeals to authority and to be rhetorical in character.⁵⁵ One also has to be watchful of whether one's source material in such cases really fit with our own modern framework. If it does not, such readings can generate confusion in such a way that it tends to obscure contemporary debate rather than enrich and clarify it. It is also possible that the more or less firm footing in comprehensive systems that these theoreticians have can have the effect of restrict their ability to see alternative solutions and possibilities.

If these warnings are heeded however, much can be gained from using historical source material in the manner suggested by using the benefits of working from within a comprehensive framework whilst still being able to tackle contained specialized problems respectively.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 80. Wilson is here speaking of what she calls non-aligned historical inquiry (my second group of theoreticians) but I think that her warnings generalize.