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Here we have come full circle, since the fact of the conventionality of histories of philosophy can only be explained by means of an intellectual history of philosophy and its teaching practices. If histories of philosophy which are written by philosophers serve—however indirect—teaching purposes, i.e. the 'definition' of philosophy, they are part of the question, what the history of philosophy 'really' is, and not part of the answer to that question. Only a non-philosophical or not-discipline-biased history of philosophy could explain the 'intellectual' shortcomings of traditional histories of philosophy. Of course there is a need for more than just philosophical understanding to write such a history of the cultural meaning of philosophy: so this is no easy job. But principally, we should think of intellectual history as a perspective always taken from one step further back.

### Notes on Intellectual History, History of Philosophy, and History of Ideas

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I wish you saw me half starting out of my chair, with what confidence, as I grasp the elbow of it, I look up—catching the idea, even sometimes before it half way reaches me—I believe in my conscience I intercept many a thought which heaven intended for another man.

(Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, VIII.2)

I am an historian of ideas, I suppose, even if I am usually rather reluctant to admit it because historians of science and cultural historians—I am surrounded by them—tend to be rather rude about it. History of ideas, they say, is an

enterprise which, for all its scholarly pretensions, is inevitably anachronistic in its concern with the ancestry of present-day doctrines, theories and disciplines, and unremittingly intellectualistic in its focus on concepts and contents rather than actions and practices.

In fact history of ideas remains at the heart of all the humanities, and I believe that it is right that it should do so. Of course, certain precautions are in order.

It must be conceded to the critics of traditional history of ideas that, for all their power, ideas have, as it were, no feet. In order to make history of ideas work we must study the concrete ways in which ideas are written up and read, disseminated, received, appropriated. What I have in mind is, in a way, no longer a history of ideas as such, but of ideas in a more material form, ideas as realized in texts—in fact, a history of books in the hands of people reading them, talking about them, and, perhaps, writing about them, borrowing ways of seeing and feeling from them, and even lifting whole pages out of them.

A well-known example is the dissemination of Locke's 'way of ideas': through different editions of the *Essay* and his other writings (with different paginations, different misprints, etc.), through translations, as well as through epitomes and abstracts, reviews in periodicals, dictionaries in different languages, and through essays, mentions (and sometimes travesties) in novels. Some typical questions I should like to ask are: How would an eighteenth-century reader have first got acquainted with the 'way of ideas'? Or, to put it slightly differently, What would have been his/her most probable means of information about it? How would it have appeared to him or her from their reading of standard sources (periodicals, dictionaries, abstracts, etc.)? How much of it would have immediately struck them as interesting, and how much as new? What would they have perceived of, and how would they have talked about, the 'way of ideas' in the different stages of their familiarity with it? and so on. Behind these questions there is another one, crucial: How do we operate in order to identify a plausible eighteenth-century reader? (For instance, quite a few of them are likely to have been women; most of them would have been, and/or made a point of being, amateurs; did they read on their own, or in company?, etc.) It is evident that such an approach would, among other things, end up not only in critical editions, such as the splendid one of the *Essay* by Paul

Nidditch, but also in annotated and commented facsimile reprints of period editions and publications. Of course, Locke's way of ideas was immensely influential; but this does not make it a uniquely interesting case—think of the dissemination and reception of the Port Royal *Logic*, of Berkeley's works, or of Hume's essay 'Of Miracles'.

On another score, however, the critics of the history of ideas should, I think, be resolutely resisted. A robust history of ideas should not avoid, and has no need to apologize for, taking as its objects authors, texts, and theories that are still of interest from a theoretical point of view. This obviously poses some particular problems—the most obvious one being that theoretical interpretations are for the most part misreadings from a historical point of view. But it is worth remembering that these are not specific to historians of ideas, of the sciences, and of philosophy; we share them with, say, the historians of the arts and of music. Some creative appropriations may be irritating, even infuriating. And yet they are also a challenge, and a challenge worth taking up: the attention of philosophers lends our historical work an edge often absent from other areas of history. So not only may philosophers profit from the company of historians of ideas—the reverse is also the case.

The persistent theoretical interest in some figures or doctrines is not only a source of irritation and stimulation. Hume's *Treatise* is still interesting for its treatment of causation—which has been read, more or less creatively and interestingly, for two and a half centuries, by, among others, anonymous contemporary reviewers, Thomas Reid, Kant, Husserl, and so on, to Saul Kripke and Simon Blackburn. It is true that being part of such a tradition may well prevent us from having a historically unpreconceived point of view over our object—how can our Hume be really pre-Kantian, or pre-Husserlian, etc.? But then of course it is more than questionable whether such an unprejudiced point of view on a past fact is ever attainable. On the other hand, where the text has been opened up by such a variety of powerful readings, and has thus become a 'classic' in T. S. Eliot's sense, our study of, and presence in its tradition may make us more aware of what we are doing and why. I am convinced that such a reformed history of ideas can re-integrate history and philosophy, the respect due to the pastness of a past work, and the moral and doctrinal engagement of present-day appropriations.

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## Intellectual History and Dutch Cartesianism

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My personal interest in an International Society for Intellectual History is determined by my interest in Dutch Cartesianism. The history of this phenomenon is essentially that of the transformation of a non-academic philosophy into an academic philosophy, which means a history of how concepts change through and in the confrontation with the institutional and political (religious) contingencies of a certain period in Dutch history. Moreover, Cartesianism developed into a cultural phenomenon with a strong impact on religion, politics, and literature. I think this makes it an ideal subject of intellectual history and consequently an ideal focus for an international conference in intellectual history.

Furthermore, I have a more general interest in such a society, not only because it allows representatives of small countries to broaden their scope and to find for their ideas a more international audience, but also because a number of Dutch institutions would find in such a society a natural ally. I think especially of the Faculty of Philosophy at Utrecht University, which has a strong section in history of philosophy (programmes concentrating on the editing of texts and their 'reception'), graduate schools in philosophical (the section History of Philosophy) and cultural history (the section History of Ideas) and societies for seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century studies.

For anybody connected with these institutions, with all of which I am affiliated, I think an International Society of Intellectual History would be extremely useful.

Finally, I hope it is understood that I am ready to serve the Society in any stage of its evolution, before and after its foundation.