*Intellectual history is not a department of history but rather a way, or a set of ways, of trying to view the whole range of humanity's past—the acts and creations which have left intelligible and communicable traces.*

In terms of hermeneutics intellectual history is not really a discipline but rather a point of view (*Sehepunkt* is the term introduced by Chladenius in the mid-eighteenth century) within a discipline, which is history. The office of the intellectual historian is to explore those areas of the human past in which decipherable traces, usually written or iconographic, have survived, and then to give contemporary meaning to these traces through the medium of language. Intellectual historians may always apply to disciplines such as economics, sociology, political science, anthropology, philosophy, and especially—given the hermeneutical condition and goals of their enterprise—the humanities, beginning with literature and criticism; but at the same time they should not forget their mission or the limits imposed by their cultural horizons and disciplinary limitations.

In general history can never 'speak' except through human ventriloquism, and (to invoke Lyotard) there can be no meta-narratives. We have, of course, founded all sorts of ideologies and utopias, but as frameworks for the story of humanity they all sooner or later come to grief. So, the doctors will always disagree and revisionisms will always recur: 'Sceptical doubt, both with respect to reason and the senses', as Hume wrote, 'is a malady which can never be radically cured, but must return upon us in every moment, however we may chase it away.' And this too, no doubt, is all to the good.

## The Rise and Decline of Intellectual History

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There is a history of the rise and decline of Intellectual History, as a discipline in this century. It goes something like this: The subject has murky, nineteenth-century origins in a widened understanding of a text-dependent *Kulturgeschichte*. It flourished, however, in the pre- and immediately post-war years under a new guise, as the History of Ideas and in North America. Here it became associated with Arthur Lovejoy's project of establishing 'unit ideas' that could be traced, regardless of context or authorial intention, through historical time and across space and genre. It was also linked to Lovejoy's *Journal of the History of Ideas*. This history was neither the history of the intellectual *Geist* of a given time and place (as, say, Dilthey's early work had been), nor the was it the more obviously philosophical history (most properly a *Geistesgeschichte*), which had been around since at least the eighteenth century and whose purpose was largely philosophical. As Hegel famously said, to write the history of philosophy is to do philosophy. The history of unit ideas, whatever else it was, was not doing philosophy.

The History of Ideas, although it produced some notable works (now about due for re-evaluation) did very little for philosophy—most of which at the time was resolutely anti-historical—nor did philosophy do very much for it; neither did it have very much impact on such neighbouring concerns as literary history. Historians who knew that the past was composed of events also tended to ignore it. 'Flapdoodle' as Namier, trying hard to pass for an English gentleman, once described it. Past agents, it was also assumed (if only tacitly), had nothing in their heads when they acted—nothing, that is, except personal interests, which were formed entirely by proto-rational-choice models. In the 1960s this general attitude towards the study of past thinking was replaced by a claim that, even if past agents did have things in their heads, those things were generally unexamined, unreflected-upon, and frequently imposed. Intellectual History, which was the study of reflective texts, and necessarily the texts produced by small élite, was thus deemed to be epiphenomenal. The History of Ideas died, and was replaced by histories of 'mentalities', as a subsidiary of a broader social history, which was believed to be, in some sense, about the 'real', the lived, lives of ordinary people.

'Mentality', in this context, looked suspiciously like the earlier concept of an 'ideology' but was believed to have penetrated deeper into the habits and customs of peoples, ordinary and

not so ordinary. Ideologies, that is, were political, mentalities predominantly cultural. What was left of the old Lovejoy project collapsed into an increasingly narrow concern with philology and the hunt for 'influences' of one writer upon another, later one. It was replaced, too, and with a far greater degree of success, by a number of ancillary histories: the history of the book, the social history of ideas, the history of intellectual groups, and so on. All of these were, at one level or another, concerned to deny that the content of the texts they studied were of any real historical significance. At much the same time, Intellectual History was re-invented out of post-Hegelian hermeneutic theories as a late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century concern with ideologies. In the United States today, Intellectual History is a term that describes a generally Marxist, sometimes Freudian, increasingly post-structuralist understanding of the ordering of the political consciousness of the past hundred years or so.

The only major divergence from this dual trajectory has been in the study of the history of political thought, first in Britain and the United States and now increasingly in France, Germany, and Italy. This has for long been emphatically historicist, even when it has also insisted that its role is closely associated with modern political developments and political ideologies. What has vanished, seemingly for good, is the possibility of writing an intellectual history that, as Lovejoy's did, traverses distinctions between genres and has something to say about changes over long periods of time.

Since the collapse of popularist historiography—or rather its appropriation by the Right—a more broadly perceived Intellectual History is making something of a comeback even if, at present, only as a modified form of one or another of the older more established areas of inquiry: as an extension of the history of political thought or of literary studies, the history of science or of art or music, and so on. It is also significant that there seems to be increasingly more space for the subject within the traditional structure of the universities. Cambridge now has no less than three readers in the subject (although two of them have prefixed other topics to their titles). The chair at Sussex, created *ad hominem* for John Burrow, has now been established, although it has still to be filled.

I would like to suggest that although this history is at best incomplete, and much of it questionable, it does demonstrate two things. The first is that what the new Intellectual History now needs to do, and what this Society will surely help it to do, is to establish an identity, one that is identical with neither the history of philosophy as Hegel and his successors understood the term (although I still believe that that is our nearest ally) nor with the history of political thought as it is done in most Anglo-American university departments. Nor can the new brand of Intellectual History be merely a resuscitation of Lovejoy's original project, much less of the kind of pedestrian, if often worthy, scholarship which clogged the pages of the *Journal of the History of Ideas* for so long before it was rescued by Don Kelley. The human sciences will always be at the mercy of whatever the *Geist* most urgently wants to know about. It is, after all, one of the things which distinguishes them from the natural sciences. And the *Geist* of 2000 has other concerns than those which agitated the professors of the pre-war years. Quite what this new history will look like I cannot say. But I suspect that it will be far less obviously historicist than its predecessors, far less timid about its focus on ideas, and perhaps, too, less concerned with linguistics that it has been recently.

*Intellectual History is making a comeback, even if only as an extension of the history of political thought or of literary studies, the history of science or of art or music.*

The other point is that this Society should not allow itself to become dominated by any one group or school or by the particular research projects and research habits of one particular period or nation. Intellectual History can only really work if classicists can talk to modernists, if historians of science can talk to historians of music, and so on. At the moment there exists no forum for this. This Society should attempt to become that forum.

## Was ist „Intellectual History"?

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Wie hätten Sie's gerne? Doch wohl nicht übersetzt als Intellektualgeschichte und auch