

sen. Es hat sich gezeigt, daß in dieser Epoche die nationalen Klassifikationen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts unpassend sind, daß die wichtige historische Entwicklungen verstellen und verkennen. Das mag zunächst ein kontingentes Faktum sein, aber es macht deutlich, daß die nationalen Traditionen der Wissenskommunikation damals—und wohl auch heute—unzureichend waren und sind. Die Beschäftigung mit den Themen der Frühen Neuzeit spielt deshalb sicher eine wichtige Rolle in der *Intellectual History*. Es hat den Eindruck, als begreife sich *Intellectual History* selbst in der tradition der Gelehrtengegeschichte, die sie selbst als ihren Gegenstand behandelt. Wenn dieser Eindruck stimmen sollte, wäre das vielleicht gar nicht so schlecht.

Intellectual History and Historiography

Edoardo Tortarolo

Dipartimento di Storia, Università di Torino
(Italy)

Intellectual history seems to have enjoyed a very positive success in the last decade. While social history went through an evident crisis and a new cultural history undertook interesting breeding experiments with anthropology and literary criticism, an increasing number of monographs have mentioned intellectual history in their titles: historians apparently consider the term appropriate to their aims notwithstanding the fact that, as Peter Novick has recently reminded us, 'Nailing jelly to the wall was a crusty political historian's characterization of the attempt to write intellectual history.'¹ Librarians seem to have a more definite idea of what 'intellectual history' is up to: more than a hundred books published in the last ten years are listed under the heading 'intellectual history' at the British Library.

A common element is not easy to identify in terms of a single area of investigation or a shared set of assumptions about historical reality, its structure and the relation between the past and the historian. Political economy, urban planning, politics in Renaissance England, Ro-

¹ Peter Novick, *The Noble Dream: the 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 7.

A 'should-be' definition of intellectual history, as expressing the concern with human self-understanding, on the one hand lacks a clear focus and on the other is overambitious.

man poetry—all these themes have been recently analysed in terms of intellectual history, or at least their authors assumed they were doing so.² It must be added that 'intellectual historians' approach their topics with different techniques and different questions. Is it possible or meaningful to force these different researches into a single mould? The old philosophical dictum *nihil est in intellectu quod prius non fuerit in sensus* does not help us define what intellectual history is about (intellectual history would be all historical writing).

Nor is intellectual history in its present form identical with the 'history of ideas' as Lovejoy thought it should be in the 1920s and 1930s. From this vantage point the concern with the necessity of an unbroken continuity expressed in Donald Kelley's otherwise very important essays is misplaced.³ The appeal to the outstanding accomplishments of the past and present members of the History of Ideas Club, founded by Arthur Lovejoy, Gilbert Chinard, and George Boas in Baltimore in 1923, can be very moving. However, a 'should-be' definition of intellectual history, as expressing the concern with human self-understanding, on the one hand lacks a clear focus and on the other is overambitious (indeed intellectual history shares this concern with quite a few other disciplines!).⁴

I would rather pick up Kelley's descriptive definition of intellectual history as comprising

² Jean-Claude Perrot, *Une histoire intellectuelle de l'économie politique: 17.-18. siècle* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1992); Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: an Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Stephen Collins, *From Divine Cosmos to Sovereign State: an Intellectual History of Consciousness and the Idea of Order in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), J. D. Maynard, *Lucretius and the Late Republic: an Essay in Roman Intellectual History* (Leiden: Brill, 1985).

³ 'Horizons of Intellectual History: Retrospect, Circumspect, Prospect', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 48 (1987): 143-69 and 'What is Happening to the History of Ideas?', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 51 (1990): 3-25 (reprinted in this issue, pp. 36-50).

⁴ 'What is Happening to the History of Ideas?', 25 (50).

If political theorists could be persuaded to participate in a Society for Intellectual History, their attention might be drawn to the alternative way of reading, which is understanding previous thinkers in their contexts.

a range of approaches to texts,⁵ which intellectual historians analyse with all possible techniques and asking all possible questions. I would suggest that typical of the intellectual historian is keeping in mind two points, which distinguish the approach in terms of intellectual history from other perfectly legitimate approaches. The first point is the texts' nature as historical artefacts, produced in time, before and after other texts, while the second point is the texts' relevance to a historical problem, whose analysis requires the assumption of a non-textual reality, which the historian projects from his present into the past. Intellectual history is therefore a common ground, strongly interdisciplinary but clearly staked out, for historians of various origins (the historical interest is crucial).

In 1938 Lovejoy listed twelve points forming a rubric for the history of ideas to come. Kelley has aptly commented on the changes that took place ever since. In fact priorities have varied in the last fifty years even more than Kelley is ready to assume.⁶ I plead for the extension of the rubric to include topics whose relevance has dramatically increased for intellectual historians. The history of historiography is prominent among them. There are quite a few reasons why history of historiography belongs to 'intellectual history'. It seems to me that what Lovejoy called *Wissensoziologie* and Kelley sees as entering eclipse,⁷ has been integrated in the last decades into an enlarged vision of the history of historiography that borders on and shares perspectives and problems with the history of science and the analysis of collective imagination. History of historiography has ceased to be the learned description of the straightforward progress to the historical truth. Direct and immediate contact with the past has been acknowledged to be a chimera. If experience of the past is possible at all, it must be either the aesthetic grasping of surviving fragments or the analysis of texts of whatever nature in order to assess

⁵ Ibid., 19 (46).

⁶ Ibid., 13-17 (42-5).

⁷ Ibid., 17 (45).

their meaning in our cultural context. A specialized discipline dealing critically with the attempt to make sense of history is relevant to all branches of history, and especially so to intellectual historians, who are in the first place interested in the relationship between texts and worlds of experience. Besides, it is worth noting that as history of historiography is potentially a pervasive approach, it would greatly profit from a constant interaction with the challenges coming from the wider, interdisciplinary field of 'intellectual history'.

Intellectual History in Political Theory

*John Christian Laursen
Department of Political Science,
University of California, Riverside
(USA)*

An International Society for Intellectual History might make a breakthrough possible for the intellectual history of political theory.

By far the better part of political theory is carried out in historical terms. That is, if we want to think about any question or dilemma in political theory, we begin with a survey of what previous thinkers have said and build upon that basis. This way of thinking is frustrating to some, because it means that reading Habermas, for example, requires familiarity with Durkheim, Weber, Mead, and a host of other figures. The answer to those who question the necessity for this is that this just is the way most great figures think. Those who are not willing to think through the work of the previous thinkers just will not understand Habermas.

There are at least two ways of thinking through the meaning of the previous writers in order to understand Habermas. One is to read their work as a series of analytical points, with no understanding of their contexts, problems, etc. This may be the more common way, but it can lead to unsatisfactory results, missing their points and Habermas's point in citing them. Political theorists of the analytical stripe who talk only with other analytical theorists will never come to appreciate what they are missing. Hence the potential value of talking to other intellectual historians. If political theorists could be persuaded to participate in a Society for Intellectual History, their attention might be