



ON THE HISTORY OF WRITING THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

In the first part the author outlines the origin and development of the study of the history of philosophical historiography, understood as the ripe outcome of that historicism, which from the Renaissance onwards increasingly characterises modern thought. In the second part, the author identifies the problematic aspects of this different and more refined way of approaching the philosophies of the past. On the one hand, the augmented critical awareness that imbues these studies may bring about the bursting out of the latent crisis encountered by the historico-philosophical activity due to the vanishing of the teleological perspective centred around the concept of progress. On the other hand, the critical analysis of the categories and schemes adopted by the historico-philosophical practice may lead to a more appropriate understanding of the philosophical past, with which the theoretical enquiry itself is constantly confronted. In this regard, a paradigmatic example is represented by the analysis of the category called the *modern*.

KEYWORDS: history of philosophy; Renaissance; progress; modernity

1. THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

The interest in the retrospective study of the different ways of ‘practicing the history of philosophy’ develops in a century (the Twentieth) in which the historico-philosophical activity preserves a central role with respect to ‘practicing philosophy’, but at the same time shows unmistakable symptoms of an internal crisis. Indeed, one of the distinguishing features of modern culture is represented – from the middle of the Seventeenth-Century onwards – by the establishment of philosophical historiography as a literary genre provided

with full autonomy and with its own epistemological statute; and it was precisely from the great riverbed of modern philosophical historiography that, during the Twentieth-Century, there arose and expanded the *history of philosophical historiography*: namely, a sort of ‘history multiplied by itself’, an enquiry of a secondary level whose field of research is not represented by the texts *of* the philosophers, but the texts *on* the philosophers, and hence that which was previously a mere *instrument* of knowledge (philosophical historiography) becomes in turn an *object* of enquiry, thus losing its supposed objectivity or neutrality (Santinello 1975; Piaia 1991; Malusa 1993).

It is now to be noted that the interest in the beginnings and most significant stages of philosophical historiography is already present in the cultural climate of the later Nineteenth-Century, in particular of the German historicist school. It is not by chance that the first volume of the new magazine *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (1888), which opens with Eduard Zeller’s programmatic document (“Die Geschichte der Philosophie, ihre Ziele und Wege”), also contains a study by Ludwig Stein on the ‘first’ history of ancient philosophy published in the modern age, whereas in the second volume Wilhelm Dilthey observes that the concept of an “allgemeine or Universalgeschichte der Philosophie” was a typical product of Eighteenth-Century German historiography and connects the rise of a “scientific history of philosophy” (*wissenschaftliche Geschichte der Philosophie*) to the two following preconditions: the refinement of the philological method and – from Winckelmann onwards – the elaboration of an *Entwicklungslehre*, i.e. a theory maintaining the uninterrupted and ascendant development of cultural phenomena.¹ Subsequently, this subject became the object of a monographic study conducted by Johannes Freyer, whose work *Geschichte der Geschichte der Philosophie im achtzehnten Jahrhundert* appeared in Leipzig in 1912 as a volume of the series *Beiträge zur Kultur- und Universalgeschichte* directed by Karl Lamprecht. Moving to France, it is meaningful that, in the same year in which the *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* started to be published, François Picavet elaborated a survey of the historians of philosophy of the last two centuries, starting with Pierre Bayle (*Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 1697), whom he considered to be – even more than Thomas Stanley (*The History of Philosophy*, 1655-62) or Jakob Thomasius (*Schediasma historicum*, 1665) – the modern “founder of the history of philosophy”.² In Italy, a special interest in the history of philosophical historiography seemed to

¹ Stein 1888 (in this regard, however, see the rectification added by Sartore 1959; on historico-philosophical dissertations during the Renaissance, see *Models* I: 3-65; Celenza 2013); Dilthey 1889.

² Picavet 1888: 3-4. In the wake of Picavet, Victor Delbos will start his historical and theoretical treatment with Bayle (Delbos 1917).

emerge at the beginning of the Twentieth-Century with the two leading representatives of neo-idealism, Giovanni Gentile and Benedetto Croce; it is to be noted that their interest is strongly characterised by speculative aspirations of Hegelian origin, which, however, find concrete application above all in the theme of “italian philosophy”, which was typical of the period following the Risorgimento (Malusa 2002).

This interest in the *incunabula* of philosophical historiography begins to take a more specific and also more problematic character in the 1930s. The intention is not only to conduct an investigation, out of intellectual curiosity, into the early expressions of an activity of research which was later to become rather flourishing, nor to confirm – in light of these investigations (as Croce, Gentile, and the other Italian neo-idealists were doing) – what is the character of ‘true’ philosophical historiography, but, starting precisely from the research into the ‘origins’, to question radically the meaning and scope of the historico-philosophical activity and its connections with the purely speculative activity. Quite indicative is the fact that in Italy in 1933 there appeared Antonio Banfi’s vast essay entitled “Concetto e sviluppo della storiografia filosofica” and that in the same years, in France, Martial Gueroult started to write his *Histoire de l’histoire de la philosophie*, which was repeatedly corrected and integrated until it appeared (posthumously) only in 1984.³

After the Second World War, the study of the history of philosophical historiography became widespread especially in Italy, coinciding with the crisis of neo-idealism and with the improvement of historicizing methodologies. Worth mentioning are above all the studies carried out by Mario Dal Pra and his school, who represented the heirs of Banfi’s teachings (Dal Pra 1946, 1950, 1996; Del Torre 1976), then Eugenio Garin’s (Garin 1970 and 1982) manifold research, the vast production of the Neapolitan school of Pietro Piovani and Fulvio Tessoro (Morrone 2015), the studies concerning individual authors and subjects promoted by the “Centro di studio per la storia della storiografia filosofica”(CNR), created in 1967 and directed by Gabriele Giannantoni (for example: Castagnino 1972; Faes de Mottoni 1977; Bianco 1980), and finally the realisation of the *Storia delle storie generali della filosofia* (SSGF 1979-2004), whose English translation is now being published (*Models* I, II, III, IV). Among the most recent contributions we point out Borghero 2017, Piaia 2017, Longo 2019, De Lucia *et al.* 2020, and the conference “Presente e futuro, metodi e problemi della storiografia filosofica” (Parma, 13-14 November 2019: see Borghero 2022 and Caroti 2022).

In Germany and France, the most outstanding studies are directed, re-

³ Banfi 1933; Gueroult 1984-1988. In the late 1930s some sketches of the history of philosophical historiography appeared in Hoffmann 1937, and in Bréhier 1938.

spectively, by Lutz Geldsetzer who, on the basis of Nineteenth-Century ‘philosophy of the history of philosophy’, interprets the connection between philosophy and the history of philosophy from a rigorously hermeneutic perspective (Geldsetzer 1968 and 1982; see also Schneider 1990 and 1999, Kolmer 1998; Schmidt-Biggemann and Stammen 1998; Most 2001; Eberfeld 2017), and by Lucien Braun, the author of a *Histoire de l’histoire de la philosophie* that still represents a term of reference and comparison (Braun 1973; see also Vienne 1997; Zarka and Trottein 2001; Daled 2005; Giolito 2008; Bouveresse 2012; König-Pralong 2016 and 2019; Couzinet and Meliadò (eds) 2022). But even in the Anglo-Saxon world, in the past scarcely disposed to undertake studies inspired by continental historicism, there has emerged a certain interest in the ‘Historiography of Philosophy’, which in some authors contains references to the history of this discipline too (Sebba 1970; Rée, Ayers, and Westboy 1978; Rorty 1984; Sorell and Rogers 2005; Hankey 2006; Catana 2008; Learke, Smith, and Schliesser 2013; Reck 2013).

2. PROBLEMATIC ASPECTS OF THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

This rapid survey already suggests the deeper reasons underlying the intensification of the studies developed in this field. It is certain that when a discipline expands and establishes itself, reaching its full autonomy, it becomes necessary to reconstruct the history of its origins and advancements. This also applies to historical disciplines, so much so that in our university *curricula*, we find courses devoted to the “History of historiography”, the “History of literary criticism”, and the “History of art criticism”. It is evident that this ‘history multiplied by itself’ is not limited to recovering and arranging in a chronological sequence the various family portraits, bringing together the more illustrious and the more obscure and forgotten ancestors, but involves an evaluation of the theoretical premises and methodological choices applied each time by the different historiographers of the past. This evaluation cannot avoid being confronted with the present way of conceiving and ‘producing’ the history of philosophy, understood as a *historia rerum gestarum*, and is even stimulated by the markedly problematic character typical of today’s historico-philosophical practice. Indeed, the widening of the scope of research and the multiplying of the interpretations, similar to real geologic strata – as well as the practice of a more and more refined ‘art of suspicion’ – make more difficult the definition of theoretical premises, i.e. the ‘philosophy of the history of philosophy’. This means that both the object of the historico-philosophical practice and the instruments by which this practice is

performed are radically called into question. A diagnosis of this condition of insecurity and of the ensuing loss of identity, in which the historian of philosophy is placed, was already outlined in a very clear form by Lucien Braun during a symposium devoted to “Problems and methods with a view to a history of philosophical historiography”, which was held in Padua in October 1981:

The historical discourse appears to lie in a sort of embarrassment, since it is determined on the basis of multiple and diverse categories, such as the ideas of influence, cause, consequence, crisis, becoming aware, reaction, transitory time, etc. These [conceptual] tools, which are neither unified with one another nor exhaustive on a theoretical plane, originate texts devoid of rigour. The ancient histories [of philosophy], from Brucker to Hegel, showed greater consistency. The embarrassment experienced today by the historiographical practice involves a theoretical comeback of the history of philosophy to itself (Braun 1982: 53).

On the other hand, at the beginning of the 1970s, resting on a different theoretical background and referring in particular to the Italian situation, Eugenio Garin, with his usual clearness, had already observed that historico-philosophical research

[...] after a period of polemical rages, sometimes finds itself again in the alternative between an erudition empty of ideas and the commensuration of a certain past (conventionally reconstructed on the basis of non original readings) with general theoretical schemes assumed *a priori*. Hence the several and useless methodological debates, a little bit of ‘intellectual palaeontology’, some amounts of increasingly detailed erudition, and finally the game of what is alive and what is dead [here he evidently refers to Benedetto Croce’s perspective], of the dead branches and the leafy branches identical to one another, of the great and small philosopher, whether misrepresented or not, of the doctrinal analysis or *philosophia superior* as opposed to the research which is defined ‘philological’ or *philosophia inferior* – that is to say, looking carefully, bad history and bad philosophy (Garin 1971: 342).

These observations were formulated by Garin and Braun several years ago but are still relevant today. The present situation seems even worse if we take into account the changed mental attitude brought about by the phenomenon of cultural globalization. The most important effect of this epochal phenomenon is undoubtedly the recognition of the Eurocentrism that characterizes the history of philosophy, which involves not only the expansion of the geographical perspective, but also a revision of the criteria of judgment, starting from the so-called ‘canon’ (Plott 1963-1989; Nakamura 1975; Kelley 2005; Park 2013; Graneß 2015; Elberfeld 2017; König-Pralong 2019: 81-112; Elberfeld 2021; Greco 2021).

But we must not overlook the fact that globalization favours a horizon-

tal and synchronic dimension rather than a diachronic one and the ensuing diminution of historical awareness. When, for example, our students show interest in the relations between Western philosophical tradition and Eastern thought, they incline to equate concepts and doctrines derived from quite different ages and areas, as if they were contemporary and neighbouring, with a view to their immediate practicability rather than to their comprehension, which involves first of all the acknowledgment of the radical ‘alterity’ of these doctrines, precondition for their contextualisation.

Indeed, as Garin had pointed out at the time, the danger that historico-philosophical research impoverishes itself and loses its value, and, as Braun had clearly explained, the necessity of a theoretical withdrawal of this discipline into itself are two aspects complementary to the crisis of modern philosophical historiography. The presages of this crisis emerged long ago, coinciding with the vanishing of the *general* history of philosophy understood in a definite sense, that is to say centred around the progressive, systematic, and teleological view of knowledge which (from the Eighteenth-Century onwards) established itself through the secularisation of the Judaeo-Christian theology of history, and in particular of the history of wisdom (Santinello 1975: 14; Garin 1982: 44-5). The existing fragmentation of those histories that are still presented as *general* is not only due to the considerable specialisation and to the use of sophisticated methodologies, but indicates that the global meaning – i.e. the perception of *towards where* philosophy is proceeding – is already lost.

Within the problematic picture we have outlined here, the research into the past, more or less remote, of philosophical historiography represents an attempt to offer a solution to the crisis of this discipline. Indeed, the ‘theoretical comeback’ envisaged by Braun implies adequate knowledge and evaluation of the path followed by philosophical historiography, especially – during the modern age – in the course of its establishment not only as *general* history (*ab incunabulis mundi usque ad nostrum aetatem*) but also as a *critical* and *philosophical* history of philosophy, in which the aspirations of truth and history, philosophy and philology (so effectively described by Hegel in the “Einleitung” to his *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, but already clearly defined by Giambattista Vico) find a temporary and unstable reconciliation or at least an always problematic coexistence (Piaia 2020).

But we cannot hide that there is also the risk that this change of direction towards a history of philosophical historiography ends up by turning into a flight or at least into a modification of the centre of gravity of the enquiry. The analysis of the philosophical texts is thus in danger of being replaced by the analysis of other texts whose objects are the philosophical texts themselves: this is like a game of distorting mirrors that provokes a twisting of the discipline into itself, which constitutes the extreme outcome of that “his-

torical illness” Nietzsche had denounced in the second of his *Untimely Meditations*, that is to say the nerveless creature of an already exhausted historicism that ends up by becoming corroded in its craving for a more and more intense self-consciousness.

In this regard, Braun asks: “Does this surplus of consciousness not expose this discipline to the danger of a paralysis in the domain of research, as far as an excess of consciousness can finally result in inhibition?”. And he sadly concludes: “To what are we now condemned? To pure empiricism? To paralysis? To write the history of philosophical historiography?” (Braun 1982: 66). A history of philosophical historiography which, moreover, would merely displace and invariably repropose (on the plane of the relationships between the history of philosophy and the history of philosophical historiography) the problems and misunderstandings which traditionally characterised the *ménage* existing between philosophy and the history of philosophy. As to Wolf Lepenies, with less dramatic tones than Braun and even with a hint of irony, he emphasised the process of specialisation metastasis from which the history of philosophy seems to suffer today, under the combined blows of hyper-theorisation and hyper-historicism:

There are not only many histories of philosophy, but also philosophies of the histories of philosophy, histories of the philosophy of history and histories of the history of philosophy. Most of them confirm the belief that too much reflection leads but backwards and that the brooding scholar always runs the risk of becoming what Diderot once called *un système agissant à rebours* (Lepenies 1984: 144).

From this point of view, the history of philosophical historiography would become nothing other than a pseudocorrective means to overcome the crisis of the history of philosophy: it would not represent a solution but rather an evident sign of this crisis, behind which there take shape the clouds of historical Pyrrhonism (a sort of reversion to Bayle’s *désespoir de la vérité*?) or the shallows of that which is commonly called ‘mere erudition’. Moreover, it seems obvious to ask whether this effort of performing a self-analysis and relativizing the historico-philosophical work might not lead to an annihilation of the vital capacity of the philosophies themselves (not only those of the past but also those of the present), which constitute as many ‘codes’ whose actual operativeness requires that they are not excessively relativized.

3. AN OPERATIONAL EXAMPLE: THE CATEGORY OF ‘MODERN’ IN PHILOSOPHICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

I do not intend to foster any further this conceptual spiral with scarcely pro-

ductive discussions on the legitimacy or even possibility of that which already exists. At most, we should aim at establishing whether ‘that which already exists’, represented by the research into the history of philosophical historiography, can make us grasp more adequately the *historicity* of philosophy, that is to say its contextualisation not only in relation to the moment of the production of philosophical ideas, but also to the moment of the subsequent readings and interpretations these ideas have been given in the course of history. Now, the possible approaches differ according to the type of research, which may focus on the interpretations of an author (for example, the different readings of Aristotle proposed in Germany in the Nineteenth-Century), or on the interpretations of periods or trends of thought considered in their entirety (for example, Scholasticism, or the Renaissance, or Positivism), or again on the interpretations of the ‘general’ history of philosophy (in this case the analysis revolves around the criteria of periodisation and the historiographical categories).

In the first case, the fact of directing one’s attention to the interpretations of an author is aimed especially at reaching a better understanding of the author himself, since hermeneutics teaches us that our outlook on the past is mediated by a long series of preconceived understandings, many of which are precisely of a historiographical or para-historiographical nature. Indeed, a naive approach to the philosophies of the past is now inadmissible, and yet one should not deal with the history of philosophical historiography just in order to compose the traditional *status quaestionis*. The objective is not only to list the various interpretations elaborated so far, in order to avoid reinventing the wheel: indeed, it is precisely by investigating the way in which the various interpretations of a text were elaborated, followed one another and interwove one another that it is possible to gain a more direct and attentive relationship with the text itself.

But we must note that it is above all the analysis of the categories more generally used that provides us with the means to dismantle the historiographical *machina*, not just in order to pull it apart but to make our comprehension of the past more discerning and mature, thus manifesting that formative potential which Lutz Geldsetzer (Geldsetzer 1982: 102) justly claimed for the study of the history of philosophy. In the passage quoted above, Braun lists some of these categories, each of which should be examined with a specific investigation. The contribution we would like to make here is to help the analysis of a category (or rather of a super-category) which has been so fully integrated into the historico-philosophical reasoning that it seems *natural* and objective: we are referring to the concept of *modern*, which became the object of a historico-critical discussion – in the margins of the more wide-ranging (and conspicuous) debate concerning *postmodernism* – only towards the end of the past century (Viano 1984; Paolo Rossi 1986).

The first way of approaching the question of the *modern* from the perspective of the history of philosophical historiography consists in referring to the conceptions or self-representations the ‘moderns’ have formed of themselves, which corresponds to asking oneself when and how the becoming aware – *historico more* – of one’s modernity took place. It is obvious that modernity is here understood in a strong sense, i.e. not only as a temporal sequence in continuity with the past – as in the case of the historico-philosophical treatments contained in medieval texts such as Pseudo-Grosseteste’s *Summa philosophiae* or Roger Bacon’s *Opus maius* (Piaia 1983: 73-7 and 107-8) – but as an element representing a radical difference and a positive innovation compared with the philosophies of the past.

A reference to the Seventeenth-Century *querelle des anciens et des modernes* (in its formulations concerning the comparison between past philosophy and modern philosophy) is necessary here; but in order to grasp this matter in its proper perspective, development, and full extent we need to go back a few centuries, in search of an emblematic *terminus a quo* which can be offered by the famous metaphor used by Bernard of Chartres. Indeed, when the good Bernard in the Twelfth-Century affirmed that, in relation to the ancients, we are dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants (*nani gigantium humeris insidentes*) he certainly did not suppose he was placing himself at the beginning of a historico-cultural vicissitude which, over the remaining centuries of the so-called Middle Ages and the early phases of the so-called Modern Age, was to come to an end – on a philosophical plane – with the overwhelming victory of the moderns, inspired by the motto “*Les anciens c’est nous*” (Jeauneau 1968; Israel 2001).

Now, the outcome of this *querelle*, which marks the beginning of the modern age properly speaking, also corresponds to the beginning of modern philosophical historiography, understood in a strong sense, that is to say of a ‘modern’, different, and new way of appraising the historical course of human thought. Not accidentally the short but intense *Discours sur la philosophie ancienne et modern* – which Pierre Coste, the well-known French translator of Locke, prefaced to the third edition of the *Cours entier de philosophie* by the Cartesian Pierre-Sylvain Régis (Amsterdam, 1691) – reverses the historico-philosophical perspective of the Aristotelian René Rapin (*Les Réflexions sur la philosophie ancienne et moderne*, 1676; English transl. 1678) and refers explicitly to Fontenelle in order to reject the myth concerning the superiority of the ancients. Indeed, Coste comes to the conclusion that “with respect to philosophy, the Moderns naturally overwhelm the Ancients”, and indicates three aspects which confirm the superiority of modern philosophers and men of science: the “way of reasoning” (namely the Cartesian method), more extended knowledge, and the availability of scientific instruments which were unknown to the ancients. Within this framework, the most out-

standing figure in modern philosophy is naturally Descartes, whose doctrines are used as a criterion to judge and criticise the theories elaborated by other thinkers (*Models* II: 81-3).

Equally interesting is to observe how, in some Seventeenth-Century authors (Georg Horn, Rapin, Bayle), the consciousness of their modernity and superiority is not only manifest with regard to distant ages, but also concerns the immediately previous century, the Sixteenth, whose *learned* character is contrasted with the specifically *philosophical* character of the current century, the Seventeenth. An indicative aspect is that a similar distance and superiority with respect to Renaissance culture emerges from the *Discours préliminaire* Jean D'Alembert prefaced later on to the *Encyclopédie* (*Models* I: 240; *Models* II: 115-6 and 473; *Models* III: 17). Moreover, it is to be noted that this consciousness of one's modernity does not seem to be regularly present through the Eighteenth-Century; to the contrary, we may perceive considerable repositionings as concerns the dates and modes which define the beginnings of modern philosophy strictly speaking. For example, in the *Histoire des causes premières* (1769) by Charles Batteux (who was close to Condillac's positions), the novelty and role attributed to Descartes appear significantly reduced, whereas in the Kantian Buhle it is the achievement of the critical approach which represents true, essential progress, compared to the heights attained, however sublime, by human thought with Aristotle and with the moderns, from Descartes onwards (*Models* III: 130 and 826).

However, another way – complementary to the previous one – of bringing forward the question of the *modern* as a historiographical category is to distance oneself from the self-consciousness of the protagonists, who are precious but at the same time suspicious witnesses since they are directly involved in historico-cultural vicissitudes of a markedly polemical and ideological character. From this point of view, it is necessary to examine the eminently polemical origin of the notion of *modern*. This feature emerges more clearly if we consider that, as concerns the history of philosophy, the duality between ancients and moderns is in fact a triangle which involves all the problematic aspects of a threefold relationship: indeed, between ancient and modern philosophy there expand the *Middle Ages*, which in the economy of the historico-philosophical treatises and universal histories of the Seventeenth-Century represent a problem and occupy thereby a crucial position, although several authors of the period solve this problem radically, that is to say just removing the Middle Ages from their historiographical view or reducing this epoch to few critical observations. It is indicative, for example, that in the *Esprit des moeurs* Voltaire succeeds in some way in exorcizing and redeeming the gloomy *Moyen Âge*, seeking in it the roots of modern civilisation; but this practice is not applied to Scholastic philosophy, which for Voltaire remains an unshakable negative element, a hard core he just cor-

rodes with his cutting remarks full of muriatic acid (Gatto 1973). In his totally negative appraisal of medieval thought, Voltaire appears to be the heir of the criticisms which had been levelled against Scholasticism by many humanists and reformed authors and which were subsequently given systematization and historiographical dignity by the historians of philosophy of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (Piaia 1998).

In the historico-philosophical field, the category of *modern* takes origin therefore not only as a way of overcoming the ‘ancient’, but as a negation and a refusal of that which is summarily called ‘median epoch’. Looking carefully, we notice a congenital defect in modern philosophical historiography: the *winners* (i.e. the moderns, understood in a strong sense) imposed their point of view at the expense of the *defeated*, who include both the ancients and the medieval but also those who, among the contemporaries, do not adopt a ‘modern’ way of reasoning. According to this perspective (nourished by the idea of progress, which was soon elevated to a real super-category), the ancients and the medieval have a right to be taken into consideration only if and because they *anticipate* the moderns, dissociating themselves, so to speak, from their own epoch and renouncing their own historical identity.⁴

This notion of *modern* was so strong that it was even absorbed and taken over by the followers and successors of the defeated, who were plunged in the same milieu and, on a historiographical plane, elaborated the category of *antimodern* in order to denounce the supposed faults or responsibilities of modern thought and resist its victorious advance. Or else, with provocative audacity, they changed the defence into an attack, asserting at times the greater modernity of cardinal Bellarmine (who advised Galileo to adopt a merely hypothetical conception of science), at times of the other Jesuit thinkers who theorised the right to revolt against a tyrant (unlike the modern theoreticians of absolutism), and at other times of the “barbarous Britons” (i.e. the Oxford *calculatores*), in comparison with Erasmus and the crowd of humanists who are almost unable to understand logic...

4. CONCLUSIONS

But we should ask ourselves: what is the connection between all this and the ways in which the history of philosophy is understood and practiced today? Indeed, the crisis of the idea of progress as a super-category on which the *general* history of philosophy was based until yesterday would seem to have

⁴ On the category of ‘forerunner’, which was to be systematically used in philosophical historiography, see Paci 1956; Viano 1958.

put out of action even the interpretative instruments related to the category of *modern* in a strong sense (as well as of *antimodern*). However, a closer look reveals that the situation is not so linear as it might seem on a hypothetical plane, because what we might call the ‘common historiographical wisdom’ still contains a problematic knot which is still unsolved because it is not adequately recognised and expressed: on the one hand, the history of philosophy has today renounced the teleological and progressive perspective which permeated the traditional *general* histories (and also provided an implicit and reassuring horizon for studies of a monographic and sectional character) but, on the other hand, it continues to use some of the historiographical categories – first of all the category of *modern* – elaborated precisely coinciding with and in connection with the perspective which has now vanished. Hence the necessity to undertake, using the instruments offered by the history of philosophical historiography, a series of operations and restorations which may lead to new acquisitions as well as to the denunciation, and therefore removal, of some evident interpretative distortions. If it is conducted with an extensive scope, this therapeutic action can produce deep effects: actually, the disclosure of settled schematisms and commonplaces can bring about the revision of categories and historiographical theses hitherto considered imperishable, and all this can in turn affect the way of conceiving philosophy and of practicing philosophy. Indeed, the utmost variety justly reigns in the domain of ideas, but at the same time, according to the well-known French dictum, *tout se tient*.

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