HUNGARIAN PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW

VOL. 65. (2022/1)

The Journal of the Philosophical Committee
of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Reconstructivists not dead: Methodologies in the history of early modern philosophy

Edited by Judit Szalai and Oliver Istvan Toth

Contents

Reconstructivism not dead

The immediate occasion for this special issue was Christia Mercer's influential paper "The Contextualist Revolution in Early Modern Philosophy", which appeared in the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (Mercer 2019). In her paper, Mercer clearly demarcates two methodologies of the history of early modern philosophy. On the one side she puts 'reconstructvisits' (also called 'appropriationists' or 'collegialists'), who are not interested in the context of the text and what the author actually said; they merely want to pluck arguments from texts for their own aims and purposes. On the other side she puts contextualists, who aim at "getting things right" and articulate the authentic view of the author. She argues that there has been a silent contextualist revolution in the past decades, and the reconstructivist methodology has been abandoned.

The extent to which contextualism rules supreme in current historiography of early modern philosophy is evidenced, on Mercer's reading, by the debate between Michael Della Rocca and Daniel Garber. In his paper "Superheroes in the History of Philosophy: Spinoza, Super-rationalist", published in the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (Garber 2015), Garber presents his critical comments on Della Rocca's book *Spinoza* (Della Rocca 2008). There, Garber argues for the first-order claim that Spinoza did not in fact adopt the version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason that Della Rocca ascribes to him. Further, in Garber' view, their interpretive difference concerning Spinoza's actual position results from a methodological disagreement: whereas Garber aims at grasping the meaning of Spinoza's claims in their context, paying close attention to the different and historically contingent motivations Spinoza had for making those claims, Della Rocca assumes that there is a single overarching agenda behind Spinoza's claims and interprets individual statements in light of that agenda.

In his reply "Interpreting Spinoza: the Real is the Rational", which appeared in the same issue of the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (Della Rocca 2015), Della Rocca argues that he has good textual reasons for attributing Spinoza his version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. In addition, he denies that there is a methodological difference between him and Garber, since they both aim

at reconstructing the actual views of Spinoza; they merely evaluate the possible routes by which one can arrive at those views differently. Whereas Garber cherishes the study of historically contingent debates, Della Rocca is keener to examine conceptual connections between different claims. Mercer in her paper effectively takes Della Rocca's side by formulating her "Getting Things Right Constraint". In her view, every historian of philosophy who strives to get things right and to get to the actual views of the author qualifies as a contextualist.

On the basis of this debate, as well as the intellectual atmosphere at different academic events, one can easily get the impression that 'reconstructivist' has become a pejorative label that everyone outright rejects. Mercer's examples of reconstructivist historians of philosophy are deceased (P. F. Strawson, Margaret J. Osler, Richard Watson, and Bernard Williams), anonymous (the fans of philosopher* mentioned by Lisa Downing), or authors whose more recent work followed a contextualist methodology (Jonathan Bennett). The reconstructivist camp seems to have turned into a shadowy group, largely extinct by now, not unlike the Death Eaters in the fictional universe of Harry Potter. There are some figures who previously belonged to this group, but they have since reformed their ways – or so it seems. Sometimes it is rumoured that certain people may still have secret allegiance to it, but no one dares to fly its banner openly.

We decided to create this special issue because we believe that reconstructivist methodology does not deserve this shadowy existence. Looking around, we still see a lot of fruitful reconstructivist research, even if not self-identified as such. Our aim is twofold. First, to present methodological reflections on what exactly reconstructivist methodology consists in, how it is different from contextualism, and how it can provide new perspectives and insights not available for contextualists. Second, to demonstrate, with the help of case studies, that reconstructivist research can produce relevant and exciting new results.

Martin Lenz's paper "Did Descartes Read Wittgenstein? A Dialogical Approach", which is a revised version of his inaugural lecture at Groningen University in 2017, combines both of these aims. (We should mention that it is a special honor for us to feature this text, since its original version, available online, prompted the discussion that led to our decision to create this special issue.) In this text, Lenz argues that contextualism and reconstructivism are not exclusive methodologies; rather, both have their own their strengths and weaknesses, which can be overcome by a joint, dialogical approach. The reader of historical texts written in different eras is a person thinking partly in terms of historically and socially constructed concepts of other periods; therefore, one cannot but read one author with other authors in mind. Lenz's reading of Descartes' and Wittgenstein's notions of error exemplifies the way in which a combined method can deliver new insights in the history of philosophy.

Tad M. Schmaltz in his paper "Getting Things Right in the History of Philosophy" challenges a central tenet of Mercer's paper. Mercer has presented

her "Getting Things Right Constraint" as an ecumenical approach meant to encompass all relevant methodologies in current scholarship. Schmaltz shows that this ecumenical character is merely apparent. Mercer's constraint rules out, e.g., the possibility that the historian of philosophy could understand a historical author 'better' than she did herself (i.e., that the author's own interpretation has no clear priority), as well as the possibility that concepts unavailable to the author could be fruitfully invoked. Schmaltz advocates tolerance, recognizing a multiplicity of possible pragmatic grounds for interpretive approaches and doing away with a sharp distinction between contextualism and reconstructionism – the difference lying more in the weight attached to considerations intrinsic vs. extrinsic to the text studied.

Julie R. Klein in her paper "The Past and the Future of the Present" problematizes objects of contextualist study, the set of authors whose views we recognize as philosophy and deem worthy of study, as well as the contexts pertinent to studying their texts. She claims that the way in which history used to be constructed is characterized by Eurocentrism, patriarchy, and white domination. We need to think about philosophy in a new way, both by putting currently canonical works in new, broader contexts, and by focusing on new works that perhaps challenge our understanding of what counts as philosophy.

Oliver Istvan Toth in his paper "A Defense of Reconstructivism" argues that even if we accept that scholarship rejecting Mercer's "Getting Things Right Constraint" has ceased to be pursued, there is still a live and interesting disagreement between reconstructivists and contextualists. He argues that these methodologies operate with different assumptions about the truth-maker of historical interpretation: contextualists hold that interpretations are made true by a concrete particular, the utterance that has meaning from its actual historical context, whereas reconstructivists hold that interpretations are made true by an abstract particular, the proposition that has inferential properties independently of the historical context of the utterance.

Andreas Blank in his paper "On Reconstructing Leibniz's Metaphysics" demonstrates, using the example of Leibniz's metaphysics, that some subjects cannot be studied using a purely contextualist methodology. He argues against Della Rocca's claim in the paper "The Taming of Philosophy" (Della Rocca 2013) that relying on intuitions always puts a limitation on philosophy. Blank's reading of Leibniz shows that intuitions about mental states can be used without "taming" philosophy, which is a reading that can only be achieved with the help of a reconstructivist rather than a contextualist methodology, abstracting away from immediate context.

Finally, Judit Szalai in her paper "Transparency and Broad Content in Descartes" argues for the application of the contemporary distinction between broad and narrow content in the interpretation of Descartes' philosophy of mind and epistemology, illuminating several mystifying claims concerning self-knowl-

edge. While some of Descartes' statements have been recognized to call for a qualification of the transparency thesis (according to which everything in the mind is directly known to the subject), acknowledging difficulties of access (due to lack of attention/reflection, memory deficiency, or the dispositional character of certain ideas) leaves a number of cases open, which can be accounted for in terms of the injunction, named the "Narrow Content Rule" by the author, to view ideas merely as contents of the mind rather than in their relation to the world.

*

We would like to thank for research support in the frame of grant no. K 125012 of NKFI/OTKA. The publication of this volume was supported by the University of Oxford project 'New Horizons for Science and Religion in Central and Eastern Europe', funded by the John Templeton Foundation, and by the Central European University. The opinions expressed in the publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the John Templeton Foundation or CEU. This special issue has also much benefited from Máté Juhász' input, for which we are very grateful.

Judit Szalai – Oliver Istvan Toth

REFERENCES

Della Rocca, Micheal 2008. *Spinoza*. New York, Routledge.

Della Rocca, Micheal 2013. The Taming of Philosophy. In Mogens Lærke – Justin E.H. Smith – Eric Schliesser (eds.) *Philosophy and Its History. Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy*. New York, Oxford University Press. 178–208.

Della Rocca, Micheal 2015. Interpreting Spinoz. The Real is the Rational. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 53/3. 523–535. URL = https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2015.0049.

Garber, Daniel. 2015. Superheroes in the History of Philosophy: Spinoza, Super-Rationalist. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 53/3. 507–521. URL = https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2015.0045.

Mercer, Christia. 2019. The Contextualist Revolution in Early Modern Philosophy. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 57/3. 529-548. URL = https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2019.0057.

Martin Lenz

Did Descartes Read Wittgenstein? A Dialogical Approach to Reading

Did Descartes read Wittgenstein? You will be pleased to hear that historians of philosophy as well as philosophers deny this. Historians will tell you that Descartes is a philosopher of the 17th century and Wittgenstein is a philosopher of the 20th century. Philosophers will agree but hasten to add that Wittgenstein *rightly* attacked Descartes' concept of mind. As you all know, Descartes famously claimed that all our knowledge is rooted in introspection: That *I* think is absolutely certain. About *you* I cannot be so sure. Wittgenstein attacked this idea, claiming that introspection or gazing inside cannot yield knowledge, since knowledge and thinking are based on social interaction. So both historians and philosophers will tell you that Descartes didn't read Wittgenstein.

However, on closer inspection we can see that they deny the connection between these authors for contradictory reasons. The historian denies it, claiming that you should *not* try to understand an earlier author such as Descartes through a later author. So the historian opposes anachronism. By contrast, the philosopher denies the connection *because* she reads anachronistically: She reads Descartes through the eyes of the later author, that is, through Wittgenstein. Thus, we have a methodological contradiction. So should we or should we not look at Descartes through Wittgensteinian eyes?

As I see it, we should read historical work with a view to contemporary themes, bringing the history of philosophy to bear on current issues, and vice versa. After all, we always bring our presuppositions along when we read old texts. The point, then, is not to shun or deny anachronistic presuppositions, but to make them as explicit as possible.[1] Interesting as this might sound, given what I just said, this seems to be a somewhat hopeless endeavour. If these moves are contradictory, then they seem to be mutually exclusive. In methodological debates about the

[1] This is a revised version of my inaugural lecture at Groningen University in 2017. I am grateful to Oliver Toth for his insightful comments on the latest draft. – See on the relation between philosophical or appropriationist as opposed to historical or contextualist approaches Laerke, Schliesser, and Smith 2013.

history of philosophy, this contradiction is often labelled by distinguishing two approaches: rational reconstruction versus historical reconstruction. While the former seems to focus on assessing arguments by current standards, the latter seems to attempt to be true to the historically pertinent standards. Taking the apparent contradiction between standards as decisive, one might conclude that only one approach gets things right. In this spirit, Christia Mercer recently argued that the friction has now been resolved in favour of historical reconstruction or contextualism.[2] However, even if these moves were to contradict one another, this doesn't mean that only one of them should be followed. As I hope to show, there are good reasons to embrace the apparent contradictions and opt for a plurality of approaches. As I see it, paying attention to the relation between contemporary philosophy, on the one hand, and distant historical periods, on the other, is not only interesting, but also methodologically vital. Why? Well, if we're interested in understanding concepts, such as, for instance, the concept of mind, we need to correct for each other's biases, and this means, amongst other things, making contradictions explicit.

In what follows, I will illustrate this by bringing the two negative answers to the initial question together and form a positive, *synthetic answer*: Yes, Descartes did read Wittgenstein. At least the Descartes *in my mind*, and most certainly in yours, too. Because if someone, who has read Wittgenstein, reads Descartes, he or she will bring the two authors into a dialogue. My aim in doing so is not to present a new interpretation of Descartes or Wittgenstein. Much of what I say will appeal to what by now are standard readings. Moreover, my illustration treats these authors as interchangeable with other examples. So instead of adding to existing interpretations I wish to address the legitimacy of combining different and perhaps even disparate approaches to philosophy and its history.

In defending the synthetic answer to the above question, then, I will show that historians and philosophers need each other. But the reason is not just that collaboration is a nice thing to have; the reason lies in the fact that both philosophers and historians need to *understand* the concepts they are dealing with, and understanding is as much a philosophical as it is a historical endeavour.

I. UNDERSTANDING CONCEPTS

What then does it mean to *understand concepts*? – As a historian of philosophy, I'm mainly interested in what makes concepts, ideas or ideologies grow. Of course, there are other units – like for instance arguments, debates, the fate of texts or events – that we might study. But concepts, such as the concepts of mind,

[2] See Mercer 2019 as well as Weinberg 2019 for initial responses by Charlie Huenemann, Eric Schliesser, and myself.

language, love or freedom, and certain ideas or even ideologies related to them form a lasting repertoire in philosophy. At the same time, such philosophical concepts and ideas are very changeable.[3] As I see it, concepts and other forms of ideas spread and take hold in our minds over time. Likewise, they might be forgotten and vanish again or be replaced by more fashionable ones. So understanding concepts or ideas does not merely involve asking whether the claims related to them are true or consistent; it also requires considering the conditions under which they stick or disappear. Understanding concepts or ideas, then, requires not only spelling out certain necessary and sufficient conditions, but also the historical conditions that make them attractive.

You might compare this to drawing a map of a town. Of course, if you want to get by, it might be enough to have a map of the current layout of Groningen. So you know where to find the station and the university etc. But for understanding how the town works or how to shape its future, you need to know different historical stages. Why, for instance, did people make certain decisions about the architecture, about building this or that road? Why do people stick to certain features, why do so many protest against introducing a tram line?

The same goes for understanding concepts, ideas, and ideologies. If you just want to use a word, a grasp of the current use might seem to be sufficient. But if you want to understand the conflicts that surround our words and ideas, you need extra guidance. Now philosophers often ask why we should bother with historical meanings when we only want to get by in current discussions. However, the factors that make ideas attractive to us now, are mostly already established *before* we enter the scene. Arguably, it's mostly a *past* set of ideas or ideology that we work from, not something we would or even could make up on the spot. To understand our very own concepts, then, we need a conceptual geography, mapping the past and present territories and climates in which certain ideas grow while others decline. As I will suggest now, this requires the interaction between historians and philosophers, and thus of apparently contradictory approaches. Therefore, I will now return to the question whether Descartes read Wittgenstein, and walk you through three possible answers.

[3] Ad hoc, I take a concept to be a more basic unit related to words expressing it. I often use "concept" interchangeably with "idea". In some contexts, I take "ideas" to mean concepts as figuring in specific claims, so somewhat larger units, like a set of beliefs, expressed by (sets of) sentences. In this way, we can distinguish between 'the concept of mind' and 'Wittgenstein's idea (or concept) of mind'. Although I am not committed to a technical understanding of "idea" here, I find much of what I think echoed and indeed expressed in a much better way than I could in Queloz 2021. ch. 1. By contrast, "ideologies" are more pervasive units comprising whole systems of ideas, beliefs and attitudes. Most importantly, I don't take "ideology" always to have a pejorative ring, as I don't believe that there is a non-ideological state of thinking or discussion. If pressed, I would align my understanding of ideologies with that of Smith 2021. 158–177.

II. ANSWER ONE: THE HISTORIAN'S TALE

For many years, I have been particularly interested in the history of the concept of mind. Even if there is a lot to explore inside and outside the historical and contemporary canon, it is quite fruitful to look closely at both Descartes and Wittgenstein. What assumptions do they and other people make when they say that someone has a mind? Mapping out the geography of this concept is particularly exciting and indeed pressing. Why? Well, in recent years we have witnessed perhaps crucial changes even in the public understanding of that concept. For thousands of years the concept of mind has been reserved for humans, but now we are wondering whether to ascribe minds to other animals and perhaps even plants and machines.[4] Such conceptual applications need a certain historical climate, and I for one welcome the fact that we increasingly discuss thinking in non-human animals. But at the same time it's crucial to see that we can't change concepts at will. We have to see where we stand. Concepts might be more or less apt; the *boundaries* of concepts shift historically, and that also means: in accordance with *political* fashions.

Do we think of the mind more like Descartes or more in the fashion of Wittgenstein? Are we ready to tie thought to a lesser degree to introspecting individuals and more to certain types of behaviour? Here, for instance, a thorough understanding of our Cartesian and Wittgensteinian heritage is vital. But before we can answer such questions we have to map out what these concepts entail. Are they mutually exclusive?

So back to the question whether Descartes read Wittgenstein! The first answer I'd like to call the "historian's tale". In some sense, it is the most natural answer, namely a firm "no", shrugging off the question as silly, as a plain form of anachronism. Of course, once you know your dates, you can't ask that question sincerely, or can you?

Well, why not? A plain answer is that historians should avoid anachronism, and describe what past philosophers wrote or meant in a way that is true to their own standards.[5] That means we might explain their work in virtue of earlier but certainly not of *later* philosophers. The thesis is that reading Wittgenstein will tell us nothing about Descartes. Put in our geographical analogy, the historian has a true map of the concept of mind in the 17th century, because she doesn't insert places that aren't there. This is what it means to avoid anachronism.

At first glance this is pure common sense. Of course, Descartes did not read Wittgenstein. But does that also mean that reading Wittgenstein can tell us nothing about Descartes? Let me consider two objections to the historian's an-

[4] See on animal minds Millikan 2004, on plant cognition Calvo and Keijzer 2009, and on artificial minds Franklin 1995.

[5] The charge of anachronism is very common but very rarely discussed at length. See for some critical discussion Rorty 1984 and Adamson 2016.

swer. Firstly, this answer ignores the fact that philosophers and other authors often write for *future generations*. Descartes, Spinoza, but also Kant, Nietzsche and others were clearly writing decidedly *for* future audiences. To explain their texts only by reference to their time impoverishes their philosophical potential. In fact, this point generalises: any research project is future-directed. We would not begin to do research, had we not the hope that it might lead to more knowledge in the future. If we study the development of ideas, it's crucial to look at their potential futures, and this could very well involve Wittgenstein's reaction to the Cartesian concept of mind.[6]

But in cutting off the past from the present and future, the historian's charge against anachronism raises a deeper worry. It pretends that we can look at a past text while ignoring *our own* beliefs. In other words, it presupposes that we can understand the meaning of sentences without taking them to be true or false. I think that this is an impossible scenario. Let me give you a simple example: If I claimed now that "the current reader of this text is a bird", you would immediately see that this sentences is false. The point is: You could not understand the sentence without acknowledging that it is false. This entails that you can't grasp the meaning without knowing what would have to be the case for it to be true.[7]

The same is true of reading a historical text. If you think that Wittgenstein is right, then – it seems – you can't read Descartes without thinking that he is wrong. So the historian's assumption that you can approach Descartes without Wittgenstein is an illusion. Generally speaking, reading past texts only in terms of their own temporal context is an illusion; it turns the past into a disconnected point without any ties to the present. Thus, the historian's insistence on avoiding anachronism is not feasible because the very acts of writing and reading are anachronistic endeavours.

III. ANSWER TWO: THE PHILOSOPHER'S TALE

So did Descartes read Wittgenstein? The philosopher's answer has two parts: "No, he did not. But he *should* have done." Why? Well, Descartes obviously assumed that knowledge is based on introspective acts of an individual human mind. Had Descartes read Wittgenstein, he would have seen that this idea raises an enormous problem. Why? Knowing requires the possibility to get it wrong. But distinguishing between right and wrong requires social interaction. Getting something wrong means to deviate from social rules. Without others who can correct me it doesn't make sense to speak of errors. – Arguably, this kind of

[6] Here, I mainly draw on what Schliesser 2013 calls "philosophic prophecy".

[7] In this regard, I follow Davidson in claiming that meaning is established in virtue of what we hold true, not the other way round. See on Davidson's semantics Kemp 2012. 65–86.

objection to Descartes runs through the works of Wittgenstein, Ryle, right up to authors like Davidson and the psychologist Michael Tomasello. The upshot of the objection is: Descartes and other early modern thinkers, such as Spinoza, Locke and Hume, just misconstrue what the mind is by ignoring its social dimension. Thus, the early modern notion of thinking is inconsistent and inferior to 20th and 21st century concepts of the mind.[8] In terms of our geographical analogy, then, the current philosopher has a better map of the concept of mind, because it's a current map with all the latest achievements.

However, there are severe problems with the philosopher's approach, too. Dismissing the Cartesian idea of mind as inferior rests on the assumption that we have a *better* idea of the mind than Descartes. This is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it takes the canonical understanding of the Cartesian idea of mind as a given and the past as something *already known*. Rather than looking for an answer to the objection, it merely dismisses Descartes' idea. Why do we assume that we know enough about Descartes? The fact that we criticise him, might of course mean that he held a bad view. But it doesn't rule out the possibility that we just don't understand his view very well.[9] Secondly, in doing so, the philosopher ignores the fact that the current concept of mind as socially grounded is a historically grown idea as well. So while the historian isolates the past, the philosopher is in danger of disconnecting the present (and the present standards of validity and rationality) from the past, by seeing her own standards as miraculously exempt from historical conditions and limitations. But this is an illusion. The fact that a philosopher currently endorses a certain concept of mind does not eo ipso make it *better* than the historical alternatives that have been excluded.[10]

Now, someone seeing philosophy as aligned to science or technology might object that such advancements are also reflected in philosophy. Accordingly, philosophical theories might be said to make progress and become better over time. Of course, we recognise such progress in our own thinking. For instance, we might set out defining a term and then refine the definition or account by integrating thoughts and insights that are new to us. Something similar applies to larger projects running for many years. However, the notion of progress presupposes a fixed project. After all, progress is a teleological notion requiring an aim that must be shared between the interlocutors. Yet, if the aim of philosophical

[8] Such caricature of objections against the early modern concept of mind is most clearly developed in Ryle. See for a discussion Lenz 2022. 1–29.

[9] Descartes' so-called dualism is standardly used and taught as a contrast to contemporary ideas about the mind. This way, a number of important tenets get distorted. See for example Francks 2008. 9–74.

[10] This kind of assumption rests on the widely contested idea that temporally later stages coincide with a progress in the discipline. See, for instance, Lenz 2019 for a critical discussion of Scott Soames's recent book.

efforts shifts or changes, the talk of progress becomes problematic or even vacuous. In this sense, later philosophers might be said to have not necessarily improved the understanding of a concept but rather *changed the topic* or at least the focus. For instance, it is one thing to ask for the concept of mind in relation to a supposed divine mind. It is quite another thing to ask for the concept of mind in relation to human behaviour. Although there might be interesting overlap between such approaches, it would be difficult to say they form part of the same project such that one concept could be seen as a straightforward improvement over the other and thus "better" than the former.

So the question the philosopher should ask is: What is it exactly that makes Wittgenstein's thought so attractive? I think one crucial answer is that Wittgenstein shifts the attention from understanding the mind as something that represents objects to something that is embedded in social behaviour. Accordingly, you get a new concept of correctness, one that is not rooted in representation. Instead Wittgenstein thinks of correctness as something governed by conformity not to represented facts, but to social rules of how to behave.

Now so far, it seems that Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians are far apart from Descartes' concept of mind. But what would happen if Descartes actually read Wittgenstein? I think Descartes would exclaim that he agrees with Wittgenstein in some crucial points. Let's therefore move on to the synthetic approach.

IV. ANSWER THREE: THE SYNTHETIC APPROACH

I hope it has become clear that both the historian's and the philosopher's tales start from plausible assumptions but have weaknesses that render them problematic. However, the good news is that, taken jointly, philosophy and history have tools to balance each other's biases. To illustrate this, let's look at the synthetic answer: "Yes, Descartes has read Wittgenstein – insofar as Descartes is considered by someone who has read Wittgenstein". Assuming then that you are familiar with Wittgenstein's writings, the Descartes in your mind is one that has read Wittgenstein. You might of course retort that this is a cheap kind of game to combine contrary perspectives. But at this point I have to ask you to consider this point carefully. So what is special about the synthetic answer? The main point is perhaps that our reading of a text is never exhausted by the focus on that particular text. Rather, our engagement takes place between texts. As such, this is nothing but the phenomenon known as intertextuality, the fact that texts and our understanding of them always involve other texts.[11] You don't wake up in the morning and think "I think, therefore I am". Speech acts and thus texts should be seen as responses to other texts that in turn prompt further

[11] See on intertextuality Margolis 1995. ch. 5.

texts. Accordingly, texts are woven into one another, even when this is not made explicit through straightforward quotations. A claim settles a question, even if the question remains implicit in the text in which the answer occurs. As readers, however, we often read texts in response to our own questions and unavoidably on the grounds of our mostly tacit assumptions. In this sense, "reading is a dialogical act" from the start, establishing relations between texts and producing new responses in our minds.[12] In this sense, texts always also speak to future audiences. Thus, the understanding of a text by a future audience that comes with new assumptions and questions should not, or at least not in principle, be seen as an anachronistic distortion.

The intertextual features can be considered both from the writer's and the reader's pespective. Seen from the writer's perspective, future readings going beyond what a text claims might even be an intended feature of certain genres. A scientific paper can open further conversation and can even be written with the intention that future insights will inform readers and allow them to confirm or contradict. In our daily conversations, we recognise this phenomenon, too, when our attempts to formulate a coherent thought are met with a more succinct paraphrase and we exclaim that this is what we "actually meant to say". Seen from the reader's perspective, it is reasonable to admit that we cannot simply bracket our own assumptions. If our reading of Descartes is built on assumptions informed by Wittgensteinian and other later ideas, it is not sensible to pretend that they are not there. Instead we should make these assumptions as explicit as possible so as to enter into a genuine dialogue with the text. If we find that we don't understand or disagree, for instance, our reaction should not be to say that we ought not to make anachronistic demands. Rather, we could turn to ourselves and ask (in view of the text) why it is that we disagree. This way, the text puts a spotlight on our own expectations and assumptions. Again, we notice such expectations in our daily interactions when realising that we had expected, say, a different conclusion to be drawn and that "we had not seen this coming". This way, we approach a position from which we might be able to say why a conclusion surprises us but does follow for the author. In this sense, the text does not merely afford us something to disagree with but a clue as to what tacit expectations guide our reading. Of course, this interactive process is much more complex than that. What I am trying to gesture at is that a dialogical approach integrates historical and philosophical perspectives without having to construe them as opposites. On the contrary, intertextuality seems to require a joint approach. As I see it, then, taking a decision between what is called a historical and a rational reconstruction is not an either-or matter but one of emphasis. As such, neither is superior, because they require one another.

[12] I take over this fitting phrase from Klein 2013. 156.

If this is right, it entails that we shouldn't look for "the correct" approach to texts in the history of philosophy. Historical contextualism or rational reconstruction emphasise different aspects in a dialogical engagement with the text. If philosophers ignore contexts because they deem them irrelevant, they overlook that their own judgements of relevance are just as contingent and contestable as they think forgotten texts are. If historical contextualists chide philosophers for ignoring the contexts, they overlook the fact that a crucial aim of philosophical reading lies in understanding, not merely a historical source, but one's own assumptions, in confrontation with seemingly strange texts. But contextualist engagement with historical sources is equally misconstrued, if it is construed as obeying mainly to a "getting history right constraint".[13] It is important to see, then, that the shift of emphasis does not merely concern the methodological approach to texts, but also the aim of approaching them. If the engagement is dialogical, this means that the aim is not merely to learn about historical texts or enrich the canon, but also to learn about our assumptions. Historical reading involves a meeting of minds, not the mere study of past minds. Thus, when the aim shifts from understanding past others to current selves, it is justified that the approach emphasises rational over historical reconstruction.

V. A DIALOGICAL READING OF DESCARTES AND WITTGENSTEIN

A key aspect of dialogical reading is that it doesn't merely target a text as a singular remote historical object. Rather, it engages with the historical text in such a way that it also allows for targeting the reader's assumptions as well as the text and related texts under scrutiny. In this respect, the focus of reading should be expected to shift. So the inquiry doesn't merely concern (1) Descartes' concept of mind, but also (2) our response to this concept, and (3) our (perhaps) Wittgensteinian assumptions guiding our response. These points may well be approached from what we often call standard readings and then zoom in on crucial points of contact in given texts. I've tried to suggest sketches of such standard readings of Descartes and Wittgenstein in the previous sections without going into any textual discussion. Yet taken as such, these points might still seem quite static even if more textual discussions were presented. However, as I see it, these steps are merely to be seen as starting points. In addition to these steps, there is the question of what we can learn from such dialogical confrontations about (4) Descartes' concept of mind and about (5) our Wittgensteinian assumptions. After all, so-called standard readings make a helpful starting point,

[13] In this regard, I disagree with Mercer 2019 who, rather than spelling out the aims of historical inquiry, suggests that historical study is guided by the "Getting Things Right Constraint".

but they shouldn't obscure the fact that much of our history (and of our tacit assumptions) has remained unknown and is still to be made explicit.

In the light of these more general remarks, I'd like to make some brief suggestions regarding points (4) and (5). Let me begin by summarising two insights for our reading of Descartes and Wittgenstein that follow from the synthetic approach.

– Like many before and after him, Descartes wrote for future generations. As is well known, Descartes was keen to have his famous Meditations published with objections and replies.[14] Wittgenstein's engagement can be construed as another possible objection to the Cartesian concept of mind. Even if one does not agree with Wittgenstein's approach to the Cartesian tradition, there is no principled reason to exclude Wittgenstein's or indeed anyone's from the list of legitimate responses to Descartes. Accordingly, the charge of anachronism misconstrues even the spirit in which the *Meditations* were published.
– By confronting Descartes with Wittgenstein we can also learn something about our Wittgensteinian heritage that still guides current trends of anti-individualism. However, this anti-individualistic understanding of Descartes' philosophy is not owing to Descartes' texts, but probably mainly to the textbook surveys of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Arguably, it's not Descartes but *Wittgenstein* and other 20th-century authors who are obsessed with discussing individualism. As I see it, then, this way of reading Descartes is crucially driven by our assumptions. This doesn't delegitimise this reading, but arguably it can be shown as owing more to an emphasis on our own or 20th-century concerns than those that inform Descartes's reasoning.[15]

In the light of such considerations, historians of philosophy often tend to "correct the record" by exposing a certain reading as anachronistic. As I have already noted, it might be more interesting to look at the anachronistic assumptions as contributions to the dialogue. So I'd like to suggest that we can learn something new about our own interpretive assumptions instead. If we abstain from reducing our question to the issue of which reading is less anachronistic, we can be open to highlighting the different texts or aspects that inform our understanding. Rather than asking whose reading is correct, we might ask how Descartes could or likely would have responded to Wittgenstein's charges. A crucial point to note is that we should not take any standard reading as a given. Indeed, we should not even assume that we already know Descartes' position all too well. Simply saying that Descartes' concept of mind is or is not individualistic de-

[14] See Ariew 2015.
[15] See for further Discussion Lenz 2022, esp. ch. 1, and Avramides 2000.

prives us of *imagining* what Descartes might have said when confronted with the charge of individualism.

So what might Descartes have replied? While this is not the space to go into an exhaustive discussion, a few suggestions might be in order. Descartes could have said that his concept of mind does have a social dimension. Although the point has been made before,[16] it is still often ignored that Descartes does not start from an individualistic understanding of the mind. Arguably, his concept of the mind is a social one in two senses. First, in the sense that he begins the *Meditations* by doubting all the prejudices that we are raised with. If Descartes thinks that we need to free ourselves from popular beliefs, then his assumption must be that the normal state of our mind is that it is populated with beliefs of others, be it through our upbringing or some more focused education. However, there is a second social dimension as well, which is not immediately apparent. As is well-known, Descartes thinks of the human mind always in relation to God's mind. Just as in many medieval conceptions, the early modern mind is taken to be social in that it is seen in relation to God. More to the point, it's the relation to God that determines the truth and falsity of our ideas. According to Descartes' understanding, God grants the truth of our ideas, and it's the deviation from the divine will and standards that constitutes our falling into error.[17] In what sense is this a social account of the mind? Descartes claims that error does not arise from the misrepresentation of an object as such. Rather, I can err because my will reaches farther than my intellect. So my will might extend to the unknown, deviating from the true and the good. And this way I can be said to err and sin. Bringing together error and sin, Descartes appeals to a longstanding tradition that places error on the level of voluntary judgment and action. Accordingly, there is no sharp distinction between moral and epistemic errors. I can fail to act in the right way or I can fail to think in the right way. The source of my error is, then, not that I misrepresent objects but rather that I deviate from the way that God ordained. This is the way in which even perfect cognitive agents such as fallen angels and demons can err. To a first approximation, then, our mind might be taken to be social in that the truth of our ideas is not a property that obtains merely in virtue of the relation between the mind forming the idea and the object, but rather in that it requires the relation to an authoritative being, God. Arguably, it is our mind's relation to another mind, the mind of God, that grants truth. So, the crucial relation is one between minds, not between mind and object. However, Descartes' account of error also suggests an intriguing point of contact with Wittgenstein that might only become explicit once we anachronistically read Descartes with the later Wittgenstein in mind.

[16] See Burge 2007. 420–439.
[17] See for an instructive discussion Corneanu 2011. 84–90.

So what I am suggesting now is the following: Not only is Descartes' concept of mind social in the sense suggested above. Rather, Wittgenstein's own assumptions about the social mind might be seen as inspired by a tradition that unites both Descartes' and Wittgenstein's accounts of error. Arguably, both have a voluntarist understanding of error. Let me explain.

We should begin by suggesting a parallel way of phrasing Descartes' and Wittgenstein's accounts of error: According to Descartes, error is rooted in a *deviation from divine standards*. According to Wittgenstein, error is rooted in a *deviation from social standards*.[18]

What is significant for the question at hand is that God is taken as presenting us with a standard that we can conform to or deviate from when representing objects. Thus, error is explained through deviation from the divine standard, not through a representational model. Of course, you might object that divine standards are a far cry from social standards and linguistic rules. But what might have served as a crucial inspiration for Wittgenstein are the following three points: putting mental acts on a par with action, explaining error and correctness through a non-representational standard, and having a non-individualistic standard, for it is the *relation* of humans to God that enforces the standard on us. In this sense, error cannot be ascribed to a single individual that misrepresents an object; it must be a mind that is related to the standards set by God.

If we accept this historical comparison at least as a suggestion, we might say that divine standards play a theoretical role in Descartes that is similar to social practice in Wittgenstein. To see this, it is helpful to revert to the distinction between theological intellectualists and voluntarists. Theological intellectualists assume that divine standards can be justified by reference to a more fundamental standard, such that God wills the Good because it is good. By contrast, theological voluntarists assume that something is good precisely because God wills it, not because there is some further standard of goodness. Wittgenstein seems to follow this voluntarist idea when saying: "Following a rule is analogous to obeying an order." (*PI* 206)

How, then, does Wittgenstein see the traditional theological distinction? Given his numerous discussions of the will even in his early writings, it is clear that his work is informed by such considerations. Most striking is his remark on voluntarism reported in Waismann's "Notes on Talks with Wittgenstein" (1956): "I think that the first conception is the deeper one: Good is what God orders. For this cuts off the path to any and every explanation 'why' it is good …" Here, Wittgenstein clearly sides with the voluntarists.[19] Indeed, the idea of rule-following as obedience can be seen perfectly in line with the assumption that erring consists in violating a shared practice, just as the voluntarist tradition that

[18] The following discussion of Wittgenstein's voluntarism is largely based on Lenz 2017.
[19] See Bloor 2002. 126–133, who also discusses Wittgenstein's voluntarism.

Descartes belongs to deems erring a deviation from divine standards. If these suggestions are pointing in a fruitful direction, they could open a path to relocating Wittgenstein's thought in the context of the long tradition of voluntarism. They might downplay Wittgenstein's claims to originality, but at the same time they might render both his work and the tradition more accessible.

What I would like to suggest, then, is that a dialogical reading opens up unusual but instructive ways of looking at Descartes in conversation with Wittgensteinian assumptions. It is unusual in that it highlights Descartes as a proponent of a more social view of the mind and Wittgenstein's semantics as related to the theological tradition of voluntarism. It is instructive in that it opens new avenues of looking at these authors as well as at our own intuitions, which might be more strongly related to ideas of voluntarism than meets the eye. If you emphasise the question of truth and falsity in Descartes and Wittgenstein you see that they both endorse an understanding of error as behavioural deviation. And this is of course vital for the concepts of mind and of error that still inform our approaches in the philosophy of mind and in semantics.

Arguably, there are at least two distinct ways of understanding error. One way is the model of misrepresentation: if you look at gin and think it's water, you misrepresent the facts. Another way is the model of deviation from fixed standards: if you look at gin and think it's water, your mind fails to behave in accordance with the created standards. What might just look like a paraphrase is in fact a different model: the first is a model of representation, the second a model of action or behaviour. Once you accept this distinction, you realise that Wittgenstein's understanding of the mind rests on a model that's older than Descartes and might have been inspired by his reading of Augustine, Descartes, Spinoza or Schopenhauer, who all use this model in different guises.

The attraction of this model is obvious: Taking mental acts as a form of conforming or deviating behaviour allows you to put epistemic errors in the same category as moral errors. When I began to consider authors in line with this model, I first thought I was just being overly anachronistic, but then on re-reading Wittgenstein's notebooks I realised that he takes up these ideas explicitly. In construing deviating behaviour as error, this concept of mind arguably goes a very long way and informs not only Wittgenstein but, for instance, current ideas of embodiment and teleological conceptions of mental content.

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

I hope it has become clear that historical and rational reconstructions are a matter of emphasis in a dialogue rather than competing approaches. As I see it, the synthetic approach can provide new insights into the underpinnings salient but

unnoticed in current concepts of the mind. Our current ideas are not better than the old ones; they are just formed in a new climate. But let's return to the methodological point: explicitly confronting philosophical and historical approaches leads to new insights that can inform our understanding of concepts; it balances the biases that each discipline adheres to in isolation. Let's put this once more in terms of our geographical analogy: According to the synthetic approach, the conceptual geographer has both historical maps, that of the 17th and of the 20th centuries. Now both the philosopher and the historian might object that the synthetic approach doesn't properly distinguish the two maps, and conflates past and present. To this I reply that the distinction between maps is merely a heuristic starting point that begins with more or less canonical readings. But we need to see one map *through* the other, and vice versa. Then the historian of philosophy and the philosopher can begin to learn from one another. What do such exchanges yield? Well, only by looking at different conceptual maps that bring out different details can you begin to appreciate the richness of the conceptual landscape. And this is exactly where we need each other. For the synthetic approaches it's crucial not to confuse the conceptual *maps* with the *landscape* to be mapped. We have to recognise that we are always but a *part* of that vast landscape, we move around and *emphasize* different places in the old and new layers of maps. In view of all the talk there is about the need for "new ideas" to tackle the challenges ahead, let me thus finish with the observation that we might not always need new ideas; sometimes we just need people who *understand* ideas.

REFERENCES

Adamson, Peter 2016. All 20 Rules for History of Philosophy.
URL = https://historyofphilosophy.net/all-20-rules-history-philosophy. Accessed: 27 February 2022.

Ariew, Roger 2015. Objections and Replies. In Lawrence Nolan (ed.) *The Cambridge Descartes Lexicon*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Avramides, Anita 2000. *Other Minds*. London – New York, Routledge.

Bloor, David 2002. *Wittgenstein, Rules and Institutions*. London, Routledge.

Burge, Tyler 2007. *Foundations of Mind*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Calvo, Paco – Fred Keijzer 2009. Cognition in Plants. In František Baluška (ed.) *Plant Environment Interactions: Signaling and Communication in Plants*. Berlin, Springer. 247–266.

Corneanu, Sorana 2011. *Regimens of Mind*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Francks, Richard 2008. *Descartes'* Meditations: *A Reader's Guide*. London, Continuum.

Franklin, Stanley 1995. *Artificial Minds*. Cambridge/MA, MIT Press.

Kemp, Gary 2012. *Quine versus Davidson. Truth, Reference, and Meaning*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Klein, Julie 2013. Philosophizing Historically/Historicizing Philosophy. In Mogens Lærke – Justin E. H. Smith – Eric Schliesser (eds.) *Philosophy and Its History: Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Lenz, Martin 2017. What Is an Error? Wittgenstein's Voluntarism. *Blog of the Groningen Centre for Medieval and Early Modern Thought*.
URL = https://www.rug.nl/filosofie/organization/departments/history/gcmemt/blog/what-is-an- error_-wittgenstein_s-voluntarism. Accessed: 27 February 2022.
Lenz, Martin 2019. How Philosophy Does Not Make Progress. Blog post at *Handling Ideas*.
URL = https://handlingideas.blog/2019/12/28/how-philosophy-does-not-make-progress-a-note-on-scott-soames-new-book. Accessed: 27 February 2022.
Lenz, Martin 2022. *Socializing Minds: Intersubjectivity in Early Modern Philosophy*. New York, Oxford University Press.
Margolis, Joseph 1995. *Interpretation Radical but Not Unruly*. Berkeley, University of California Press.
Mercer, Christia 2019. The Contextualist Revolution in Early Modern Philosophy. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 57/3. 529–548.
Millikan, Ruth 2004. *Varieties of Meaning: The 2002 Jean Nicod Lectures*. Cambridge/MA, MIT Press.
Queloz, Matthieu 2021. *The Practical Origin of Ideas*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
Rorty, Richard 1984. The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres. In Richard Rorty – Jerome B. Schneewind – Quentin Skinner (eds.) *Philosophy in History*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 49–76.
Schliesser, Eric. 2013. Philosophic Prophecy. In Mogens Lærke – Justin E. H. Smith – Eric Schliesser (eds.) *Philosophy and Its History: Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
Smith, David Livingstone 2021. *Making Monsters. The Uncanny Power of Dehumanization*. Cambrige/MA, Harvard University Press.
Waismann, Friedrich. 1965. Notes on Talks with Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Review*. 74. 12–16.
Weinberg, Justin. 2019. The Current State of Early Modern Philosophy. *Daily Nous Blog*.
URL = https://dailynous.com/2019/08/02/current-state-early-modern-philosophy/. Accessed: 27 February 2022.

Tad M. Schmaltz

Getting Things Right in the History of Philosophy

I begin where Rudolf Carnap ends in his seminal article, "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology": "*Let us be cautious in making assertions and critical in examining them, but tolerant in permitting linguistic forms*" (Carnap 1950. 40). In his earlier *Logical Syntax of Language*, Carnap labeled this – for understandable reasons – the "Principle of Tolerance" (Carnap 1937. 52). Carnap is concerned primarily with tolerance of alternative formal languages for use in formulating and evaluating claims in the empirical sciences.[1] However, one could entertain the possibility that a counterpart of this principle applies to the study of the history of philosophy. On a first approximation, such a principle would be: *Let us be cautious in making assertions about historical texts and critical in examining them, but tolerant in permitting interpretive forms*. Here we have a Carnapian sort of tolerance for the use of alternative interpretive perspectives in formulating and evaluating claims in historical texts. Moreover, just as Carnap holds that linguistic forms are judged by "their success or failure in practical use" (Carnap 1950. 40), the same, it seems, could be said of the different forms of interpretation employed in the history of philosophy.

In this brief set of remarks, I explore methodological issues relating to the goal of tolerance in the study of the history of philosophy. My investigation focuses in particular on a principle that Christia Mercer has recently proposed as critical for current work in the history of philosophy, namely, the "Getting Things Right Constraint" (hereafter, GTRC). Mercer promotes this principle in the context of reflecting on a 2015 exchange in the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* between Daniel Garber and Michael Della Rocca over the proper methodology for the interpretation of Spinoza. In what follows, I critically examine a narrative that Mercer offers in response to this exchange, according to which

[1] Thanks to Eric Schliesser, Jon Shaheen, Oliver Toth and Judit Szalai for very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

On Carnap's principle of tolerance, see Ricketts 2008. As Ricketts himself notes, Carnap's "Principle of Tolerance" is not so much a principle governing truth and falsity as a pragmatic attitude toward the adoption of a particular formalism as the language of science (218).

there has been a recent "revolution" in the history of philosophy that involves the victory of a "contextualism" defined in terms of the GTRC over a previously dominant "appropriationism", which rejected such a constraint. Then I provide some reasons to think that her insistence on the GTRC as a central constraint on philosophical inquiry into historical texts unacceptably compromises tolerance in the history of philosophy.

Before considering Mercer's GTRC further, however, it will be helpful to have before us some basic points from the exchange that provides the occasion for her emphasis on the centrality of this constraint. The exchange begins with Garber's claim that Della Rocca's work on Spinoza presents this figure as a Rationalist "superhero", sworn defender of an uncompromising version of the PSR (Principle of Sufficient Reason) (Garber 2015. 506–7). As an alternative to this kind of "rational reconstruction", Garber offers an approach that focuses on the views of the historical Spinoza, with all their difficulties, ambiguities, and inconsistencies. To be sure, Garber expresses tolerance when he insists that "I by no means dismiss Della Rocca's project," noting that "rational reconstruction has a long and noble history" (Garber 2015. 519). However, his suggestion is that if the goal is to capture the real Spinoza, Della Rocca's approach does not seem to be particularly promising.[2]

In response, Della Rocca insists that his PSR-driven reading of Spinoza "is firmly anchored in Spinoza's texts," and thus is intended to capture the real Spinoza (Della Rocca 2015. 529). According to Della Rocca, his disagreement with Garber is primarily not a second-order methodological one concerning the goals of the history of philosophy, but rather a first-order dispute over whether his more "holistic" understanding of Spinoza is textually adequate. As in the case of Garber, however, Della Rocca embraces a form of tolerance, noting that "there is no reason in advance" for thinking that either his or Garber's approach is "more likely to lead us to the real, historical Spinoza" (Della Rocca 2015. 533). The proof of the pudding, as they say, is in the eating.[3]

In her consideration on this exchange, Mercer in effect agrees with Della Rocca that Garber's suggestion of a fundamental methodological divide between Della Rocca's rational reconstructionist and Garber's "contextualist" approaches to the history of philosophy is misconceived. Mercer's emphasis is on the crucial methodological agreement between the two that derives from their common acceptance of the aforementioned GTRC. As Mercer expresses it, the GTRC holds that "historians of philosophy should not attribute claims or ideas

[2] However, I take Garber's tolerance for Della Rocca's purported rational reconstructionism to depend on the assumption that this goal is only one of different possible goals the interpreter of Spinoza could have.

[3] In fact, I am inclined to think that Garber's approach is more successful than Della Rocca's at leading us to the real, historical Spinoza. However, my focus here is on the methodological issues Garber raises rather than on the relative fidelity of his interpretation of Spinoza.

to historical figures without concern for whether or not they are ones the figures would recognize as their own." Those who reject the GTRC "approach writings without intending to articulate the authentic views of the historical figure", and for this reason alone they cannot be considered even to be doing work in the history of philosophy. Nevertheless, an insistence that allegiance to this constraint is essential for work in the history of philosophy does not constitute unacceptable intolerance insofar as the constraint itself allows for "very different means to the goal of getting things right" (Mercer 2019. 530). In fact, Mercer takes the dispute between Garber and Della Rocca to illustrate just this point since their differences notwithstanding, they both adhere to the GTRC.

According to Mercer, the methodological divide that Garber uses to distinguish himself from Della Rocca is in fact a thing of the past. She claims that during the 1970s and '80s, contextualist upstarts rebelled against defenders of the reigning method in analytic history of philosophy, namely, "appropriationism", which prioritized relevance to contemporary philosophy over historical accuracy. As examples of the appropriationist line, she cites Jonathan Bennett's 1971 *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes* and Bernard Williams' 1978 *Descartes: The Project of Pure Inquiry* (Mercer 2019. 533–34). As she sees it, however, there was over the next few decades a "silent contextualist revolution" that gradually replaced appropriationism with an alternative for which the GTRC is central. Mercer takes the ultimate victory of this alternative to be indicated by writings from Bennett in 2001 and from Williams in 2006 in which they acknowledge the need for historians of philosophy to attend to the actual views of the figures they study (Mercer 2019. 535–36).

One can question whether the old appropriationist/contextualist distinction was quite as sharp as – or sharp in quite the way in which – Mercer indicates. For instance, there seems to be a clear contrast between the approach of Bennett and Williams, on the one hand, and the approach that Lisa Downing has reported was occasionally employed at Princeton during the 1980s, on the other.[4] As Downing recalls, her teachers sometimes attached "asterisks (pronounced as 'stars') to the names of the great, dead philosophers, to allow one to speak of their views without being responsible for historical accuracy about them" (Downing 2004. 21). Thus, instead of debating the views of the real Locke on the nature of color, for instance, one could stipulate that Locke* was some sort of dispositionalist about color in order to consider the philosophical merits of such a position. I am sympathetic to Downing's own conclusion that this practice is problematic insofar as "one might wonder why Locke is being invoked at all: what is being added to the dispositionalist view by associating it with Locke through the medium of the fictional Locke*?" (Downing 2004. 21). But my

[4] Mercer (2019. 534n18) cites the approach Downing mentions but suggests that is similar to the approach of Bennett and Williams.

point is that whatever Bennett and Williams were doing during the 1970s and '80s, they were not engaging in the sort of practice Downing describes. They may well be criticized for getting the views of the historical figures wrong due to a failure to engage seriously with the historical context of these views. However, it doesn't seem fair to charge Bennett and Williams with not caring at all whether such views correspond in any way to what these figures actually held.

The crucial question at issue with respect to the older "analytic" approach to the history of philosophy, it seems to me, is whether one can recapture what is taken to be philosophically important in historical texts without considering (much) the controversies in which the authors of those texts engaged and the broader historical context in which they wrote.[5] I read the circa-2000 passages from Bennett and Williams that Mercer cites as involving some recognition of the plausibility of a negative answer to this question, as opposed to a newfound attraction to the GTRC. If this is correct, then the change brought on by the silent contextualist revolution was less centered on the GTRC than Mercer's narrative suggests.

Moreover, one can question whether Mercer is correct in thinking that recent developments have made the GTRC constitutive of inquiry in the history of philosophy. It is a sign of trouble, I think, that Mercer's GTRC bears a striking resemblance to the (in)famous methodological principle of Quentin Skinner that "No agent can eventually be said to have meant or done something which he could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what he has meant or done" (Skinner 1969. 28). As Mercer herself acknowledges, this principle has been subject to considerable criticism.[6] To be sure, she also notes that she has "tried to render my GTRC so that it responds to the main complaints leveled against Skinner's version" (Mercer 2019. 535n21). Nevertheless, her GTRC seems to retain a controversial core feature of Skinner's methodological principle insofar as it insists on a guiding "concern" for whether or not certain claims or ideas "are ones the figures would recognize as their own" (Mercer 2019. 530).[7]

[5] It might be suggested that the consideration of the controversies in which the authors of historical texts engaged and the broader historical context in which they wrote is a general requirement for work in the history of philosophy; see note 18.

[6] Mercer 2019. 535n21 cites the critical discussion of Skinner's principle in Lærke 2013. As indicated in Schliesser 2019, the main objection is that this principle cannot be salvaged because "it relies on (unrecoverable) counterfactuals that cannot be grounded in the historical record." I think this line of objection can be related to the objections I raise to Mercer's GTRC, but I will need to leave discussion of this point for (perhaps) another time.

[7] In a comment on Eric Schliesser's blog post on her article, Mercer notes that though she does "give a shout out to Skinner," she nonetheless is distinguished from him in "not being interested in intentions. I purposively avoid using the term" (Schliesser 2019). To be sure, the concern to show that historical authors could recognize certain formulations as their own views is distinguishable from the concern to show that these authors intended to articulate the claims so formulated when offering these views. Nevertheless, the problems that I will indicate for the former concern seem to me to apply equally to the latter concern.

The primacy of such a concern would seem to render disreputable any interpretation in the history of philosophy that strays from the ways in which historical authors conceived – or would/could have conceived – of their own views.

We can turn again to Della Rocca to illustrate the difficulties here. What is at issue once more is Della Rocca's interpretation of Spinoza, though not in his 2008 *Spinoza*, on which Garber focuses, but rather in his 1996 book, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*. In his insightful discussion of the latter work, Allen Wood draws attention to Della Rocca's attempt to overcome interpretive difficulties by appealing to twentieth-century notions not available to the historical Spinoza (Wood 2001. 283–87).[8] In particular, the attempt is to reconcile the following three claims in Spinoza's *Ethics* that seem to be inconsistent:[9]

1. Every mode of extension is caused by another mode of extension (cf. Spinoza, *Ethics* 2p7).[10]
2. "The mind and the body are one and the same thing, conceived now under the attribute of thought, now under the attribute of extension" (cf. *Ethics* 3p2s).[11]
3. No mode of substance conceived under the attribute of thought can cause any mode of substance conceived under the attribute of extension, or vice versa (cf. *Ethics* 3p2).

There is the argument that Spinoza is committed to the conclusion that (3) is inconsistent with (1) and (2).[12] For if mode of extension *A* causes mode of extension *B*, and if *A* is identical to mode of thought *1*, then, it would seem, *1* causes *B*, contrary to (3).

In order to establish the consistency of Spinoza's three claims, Della Rocca draws on W. V. O. Quine's notion of the referential opacity of intensional contexts (Quine 1971). According to Della Rocca's interpretation, the view that Spinoza is expressing is best explained in terms of the fact that causal contexts are intensional, and therefore referentially opaque. That is to say, what is true of causes and

[8] Wood is considering the discussion in Della Rocca 1996. 118–40.

[9] I am drawing on the summary presented in Wood 2001. 284, though I switch (2) and (3) in this summary. I indicate the need for further alterations in note 10.

[10] Given Spinoza's admission in *Ethics* 1p21 that there are certain "infinite modes" that arise not from other modes but immediately from the "absolute nature" of a divine attribute, the claim needs to be recast as follows: Every *finite* mode of extension is caused by another *finite* mode of extension. Further, the more appropriate text for this claim would seem to be *Ethics* 1p28.

[11] This can be rendered as the claim that every mode of thought is identical to some mode of extension, and vice versa.

[12] The argument for this claim that Della Rocca considers is found in Delhunty 1985. 197; cf. Della Rocca 1996. 121–22.

effects depends not only on their identities but also on how they are conceived. In this way, causal contexts are akin to belief contexts insofar as extensionally equivalent expressions are not substitutable in such contexts *salve veritate*.[13] Thus, there is a way of blocking the inference in Spinoza from the identity of modes of extension (thought) with modes of thought (extension) to the conclusion that modes of thought (extension) can cause modes of extension (thought).

Now whether one thinks this solution works or not, the question is whether the historian of philosophy can invoke an interpretation of Spinoza that relies on concepts that were not present in the seventeenth century (at least in their specific Quinean form). The question is consequential, for as Wood notes, "if it is even *possible* that Della Rocca's interpretation is correct, then it must be possible that what Spinoza *means* in the *Ethics* can be properly understood only in terms of concepts not available to Spinoza" (Wood 2001. 286). And with this possibility comes the possibility that there are correct formulations of positions in Spinoza's text that he could not have recognized as his own. In taking such a possibility seriously, we would seem to be violating Mercer's GTRC, as much as Skinner's principle. Yet to rule out interpretations such as Della Rocca's *a priori*, by appeal to such principles, appears to be an intolerable form of intolerance.

In response, one might insist that it is simply a contextualist commonplace that nothing other than the understanding of the historical authors themselves can be used to recapture their own views. However, a passage from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* indicates that this purported commonplace is problematic. In this passage, Kant claims:

> [W]hen we compare the thoughts that an author expresses about a subject, in ordinary speech as well as in writings, it is not at all unusual to find that we understand him better than he understood himself, since he may not have determined his concept sufficiently and hence sometimes spoke, or even thought, contrary to his own intention (Kant 1997. A314/B370).[14]

Of course, the interpreter would be well advised to be (borrowing again from Carnap) cautious and critically reflective before claiming that she understands the historical author better than the author in fact understands – and perhaps even could understand – himself. There is much (contextual) work that needs

[13] For instance, from the fact that Ralph believes that the man at the beach is Ortcutt, as well as the fact that Ortcutt is a spy, it cannot follow that Ralph believes that the man at the beach is a spy (I borrow the example from Quine 1971. 106). Quine famously argues that since claims involving propositional attitudes such as beliefs are referentially opaque in this way, and since this opacity renders such claims problematic in ways that referentially transparent claims are not, it is best to leave out any reference to such attitudes in the language of science. Since causal claims are clearly part of physics, for Spinoza, this same argument cannot apply to his view.

[14] I owe my knowledge of this passage to the citation of it in Wood 2001. 293.

to be done in order to show that a certain determination of a concept to which the author did not have, or even could not have had, access advances the understanding of the problem or issue that the text of that author introduces. However, it would seem to be overly dogmatic simply to invoke something like the GTRC as a reason for dismissing any such line of inquiry at the start. Perhaps the case can be made, perhaps not; better to let the interpreter try, and then judge by the results.

Indeed, certain contextualist projects would seem to require an understanding of a particular historical view in terms inaccessible to its author. For instance, Wood notes the project of considering whether an historical author "belongs to a certain tradition of thinking that was subsequent to him and was based on certain ways of appropriating his thought" (Wood 2001. 287). Since later traditions typically introduce "determinations of concepts" (to borrow from Kant) that go beyond what was accessible to the author, it is questionable that this sort of project could satisfy the concern to show that the author in question could recognize connections they did not have the resources to conceive as something that derive from their own view. Should the historian of philosophy prohibit such projects simply on the basis of the fact that this sort of concern is paramount in the GTRC? It appears to be implausible that she should.[15]

In closing, I would like to consider (again, briefly) a more radical objection to the GTRC that targets its assumption that there is some *thing* in the historical texts, independent of the various interpretations of these texts, that the interpretations do or do not get right (or get more or less right). My concern here is not to dispute the assumption itself; indeed, I have considerable sympathy for it. Rather, I want to explore whether the acceptance of such an assumption is a necessary condition for (legitimate) inquiry in the history of philosophy. Here we can entertain the possibility of a counterpart in the history of philosophy to the view of ontology in the article from Carnap I cited at the outset. In this article, Carnap claims that questions in ontology, such as whether there are abstract entities, can be answered only from within a particular logico-linguistic framework. The question of whether this framework itself is adequate can be only the "external" question of whether we have sufficient pragmatic grounds for adopting it rather than other frameworks (Carnap 1950. 31–32).[16] Similarly, one can imagine a position on which questions concerning what a text says are always

[15] Such contextualist projects are warranted by Mogen Lærke's "historical perspectivism", according to which "the true historical meaning of a past historical text should be defined as *the sum of actually historically immanent or contextually internal perspectives on [the] past philosophical text*" (Lærke 2013. 23). I am not certain, however, that Lærke's historical perspectivism permits the sort of approach to Spinoza in Della Rocca for which Wood is concerned to make room.

[16] The "pragmatic grounds" that Carnap emphasizes include "the efficiency, fruitfulness and simplicity" of the linguistic framework (Carnap 1950. 23).

internal to a particular interpretation of that text. The question of whether that interpretation itself is adequate is just the external question of whether it serves our purposes to adopt it rather than other interpretations. The author's own interpretation has no special priority here and is to be assessed with competing interpretations on the same pragmatic grounds.[17] Insofar as such a position challenges a presupposition of the GTRC, it seems on Mercer's view that it cannot be seriously entertained within the history of philosophy given the success of the contextualist revolution. However, the sort of meta-philosophical issues that Carnap's views on ontology raise certainly are fair game in discussions in metaphysics, and indeed reflection on such views can enrich these discussions. I do not see why something similar could not be possible for the counterpart to Carnap's views in the history of philosophy. But if something similar is possible, it would behoove historians of philosophy to seek out regulative principles of inquiry that are more permissive than the GTRC.[18]

REFERENCES

Carnap, Rudolf 1937. *The Logical Syntax of Language*. Trans. Amethe Smeaton. London, Routledge.

Carnap, Rudolf 1950. Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology. *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*. 4. 20–40.

Delhunty, R. J. 1985. *Spinoza*. London, Routledge.

Della Rocca, Michael 1996. *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*. New York, Oxford.

Della Rocca, Michael 2008. *Spinoza*. New York, Routledge.

Della Rocca, Michael 2015. Interpreting Spinoza: The Real is the Rational. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 53. 523–535.

Downing, Lisa 2004. Old History and Introductory Teaching in Early Modern Philosophy. In Jerome B. Schneewind (ed.) *Teaching New Histories of Philosophy*. Princeton, University Center for Human Values. 19–28.

Garber, Daniel 2015. Superheroes in the History of Philosophy: Spinoza, Super-Rationalist. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 53. 507–521.

Kant, Immanuel 1997. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (trans.) Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Lærke, Mogens 2013. The Anthropological Analogy and the Constitution of Historical Perspectivism. In Mogens Lærke – Justin E. H. Smith – Eric Schliesser (eds.) *Philosophy and Its History: Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy*. Oxford, Oxford University. 7–29.

Mercer, Christia 2019. The Contextualist Revolution in Early Modern Philosophy. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 57. 529–548.

[17] It should be noted, however, that insofar as the counterpart of Carnap's Principle of Tolerance requires such a position, it would hardly be appropriate as a general regulative principle in the history of philosophy.

[18] Which principles could those be, you might well ask? Good question! (To be continued.)

Quine, W. V. O. 1971. Quantifiers and Propositional Attitudes. In Leonard Linksy (ed.) *Reference and Modality*. Oxford, Oxford University Press. 101–111.

Ricketts, Thomas 2008. Tolerance and Logicism: Logical Syntax and the Philosophy of Mathematics. In Michael Friedman – Richard Creath (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Carnap*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 200–225.

Schliesser, Eric 2019. On Getting Things Right (Constraints) in the History of Philosophy. In *Digressions and Impressions* (7/31/2019).
URL = <https://digressionsnimpressions.typepad.com/digressionsimpressions/2019/07/on getting-things-right-constraints-in-the-history-of-philosophy.html>

Skinner, Quentin 1969. Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas. *History and Theory*. 8. 3–53.

Wood, Allen 2001. What Dead Philosophers Mean. In Dieter Schnöcker – Thomas Zwenger (eds.) *Kant verstehen/Understanding Kant*. Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft. 272–301.

Julie R. Klein

The Past and Future of the Present

> I want to draw a map, so to speak, of a critical geography, and use that map to open as much space for discovery, intellectual adventure, and close exploration as did the original charting of the New World – without the mandate of conquest.
>
> (Toni Morrison)[1]

Methodology exercises a certain perennial fascination for historians of philosophy. For many of us whose philosophical practice concerns historical figures or, for that matter, ideas of history, conversations about what Edwin Curley has so aptly called our "dialogues with the dead" remain alive both because the work of our predecessors continues to inspire reflection and because our dialogues with ourselves, that is, our self-understandings, and the intellectual and institutional contours of our field change.[2] Discussions of method investigate how we understand the historical situatedness of thinking, our own relations to the texts and the intellectual inheritances and formations in which we encounter them, and what our interest in the past might say about our relation to the present and the future. If philosophy itself is dialogical, in the sense of constituting itself through ongoing discussions and debates, scholarship about historical works of philosophy enters into these dialogues, joining the conversation from its own moment and horizons. The history of the past is thus a history of the present and a projection into the future.

In what follows, I consider some prevailing models and current problems for historians of philosophy. I have argued elsewhere for a mixed method: contextualist, hermeneutic, and genealogical methods all figure in my own approach to reading texts in the history – or better, histor*ies* – of philosophy.[3] Here, I briefly review those approaches in order to turn to broader questions of boundaries, canons, and our conceptualization of what counts as philosophy. Specifically, what would it mean to adopt a decolonial point of view? My answer is twofold. First, we need an expanding and expansive notion of philosophy and philosophical literacy. No one – no single scholar, no single department or program, no single institution – can aspire to truly comprehensive knowledge, so we will

[1] Morrison 1992. 3.
[2] Curley 1986.
[3] Klein 2013.

need to think what philosophical literacy means and to explore new modes of collaboration and cooperation. Second, rethinking what counts as philosophy – roughly, the historically- and culturally-inflected efforts of human beings to make sense of themselves and the world when other discourses do not suffice – entails shifts in attention and resources. We need to commit material resources to reshaping not simply our ideas, but our institutions. In reflecting on the need for an expanding, less homogeneous and more inclusive approach to philosophy and its histories, I make no claim to completeness and write, as will be clear, primarily from my own perspective as a scholar of medieval and early modern philosophy and from my own position as a North American academic. My range of references reflects my particular intellectual peregrinations and and efforts to think them through. Finally, it must emphasized from the outset that many, many colleagues have devoted themselves and continue to devote themselves to a decolonial, increasingly global, and pluralistic sense of philosophizing. If as philosophers we have been ignoring their work, the fault is our own.[4]

I. SOME PREVAILING MODELS

For Anglophone readers, arguments for unabashed antiquarianism, rational reconstruction and appropriation for contemporary use, and varieties of contextualism have been the predominant ways of framing our relationship to our predecessors' works.[5] The precise boundaries of these models are, to be sure, not always easy to determine. At the extremes, perhaps, the difference between, on the one hand, transmuting historical works into contemporary terms to make them responsive to current problems and, on the other, trying to read historical works on their own terms and carefully marking differences between their worlds and our own is clear. It is, for example, one thing to appeal to authors in translation, transplant them into a contemporary philosophical idiom, and/or investigate historical texts primarily for their relevance to contemporary concerns. It is another to learn languages, grapple with how meaning changes over time and study the dynamics of transmission, and consider the intellectual setting or environment of a text or debate. To pick a very obvious example, if we un-

[4] Thus Bryan Van Norden introduces the term "less commonly taught philosophies" in *Taking Back Philosophy: A Multicultural Manifesto* (2017) precisely to remind readers of the gap between what exists (and scholars who study it) and what happens in mainstream American philosophy departments. Van Norden's "LCTP's" include not only philosophy from Asia, Africa, India, and the Indigenous Americas, which are the primary focus of the book, but also "African American, Christian, Continental, feminist, Islamic, Jewish, and LGBTQ philosophy" (Van Norden 2017. 3).

[5] On these positions and variations thereof, see four well-known collections: Jonathan Rée et al. 1978; Rorty – Schneewind – Skinner (ed.) 1984; Sorell – Rogers 2005; Lærke – Smith – Schliesser (ed.) 2013.

critically export a post-Kantian concept of the a priori to ancient and medieval thinkers, we will be exceptionally confused. Similarly, if we fail to recognize the distinctively Christian history of the ideas of volition and free will and import them uncritically into our readings of Aristotle, Maimonides or Averroes, let alone to Buddhist or Native American philosophy, confusion and ignorance are sure to follow. Yet our practice tends to be more mixed and harder to articulate and limn, for the simple reason that we inevitably read from where we are, that is, from our formation and in light of our own inner archives and training. Reading itself is interactive: no one approaches texts with an empty mind, and our minds are receptive and productive in all sorts of ways. It is surely folly to believe that we can become perfectly transparent to ourselves, and therefore better to believe that vigilance and care will serve us better.

Thinking this way, both the texts we read and we as readers have contexts. Susan James has emphasized that "works of philosophy are best understood as contributions to ongoing conversations or debates",[6] that is, as engaged with constellations of participants (named and otherwise), produced at historical times and places, and embedded in networks of texts, concepts, and problems. Mogens Lærke makes the same point more expansively, arguing that to read contextually is to hold that

> Texts communicate in all possible ways, by reinforcing, contradicting, dismissing, overruling, correcting, expanding, re-appropriating, misconstruing, or confronting each other. In this way, the texts within a given contextual cluster form interpretative perspectives on each other – perspectives that can inform us about the historical meaning of each of them within that specific context…. [T]he meaning of a past philosophical text can be determined by considering the internal, structured argument of the text as a singular response to a given external context of writing established within particular historical circumstances, by considering the text as a structured contribution to a given philosophical controversy. (Lærke 2021. 7.)

Reading contextually thus demands linguistic precision, tracing both the internal lexicon of the author and text we wish to understand and reading widely enough to be alert to intertexts. Because the texts we study emerge in intellectual contexts and specific historical times and places, considerations of the institutional structures, technologies and scientific disciplines, social conventions, literary and aesthetic cultures, and political and economic power or lack thereof that frame philosophical activity and scholarship about it are all relevant. The history of the book, the history of universities and societies or networks beyond its walls, the dynamics of empire, cross-cultural exchanges, political and other crises, technological change and so on all come to mind in enriching our reader-

[6] James 2012. 5.

ly efforts. Spinoza's overly political form of philosophizing makes him an easy case for this kind of approach. Yet he is hardly a unique case when we begin to think of philosophy as part of culture, a situated, connected pursuit carried out in times and places beyond the Athenian port, the stoa, the monastery, the school or university, the seat of power, the scientific society, even the salon. The internal dynamics of philosophical dialogues and intellectual networks need to be thought in tandem with other features of their settings. Far from a historicist *reductio ad contextum*, with its invitation to visit a museum of the past – and presumably to return to our far superior present – reading contextually makes texts legible and lively.

Thinking in terms of context permits us to avoid the pitfalls of overly rigid conceptions of tradition, with their presumptions of identity or self-sameness, closure and unity, and directionality or developmental progress. If we are to think in terms of *traditio*, it seems better to think in terms of concrete transmissions and the way modes of experience and understanding sediment, inevitably unevenly, and shift or disappear. Context can be hermetic and relatively isolated or quite internally diverse, marked by cross-cultural exchanges and hybridizations through travel, exploration, commercial contact, and the dynamics of empire. At scale, studying context moves us beyond generic references to the "East" or the "West," the "North" or the "South," as if such places are clearly demarcated, internally homogeneous (even monolithic), or inevitably opposed to one another.[7] In a similar way, thinking in terms of contexts avoids some obvious problems of periodization; what might meaningfully be called, for example, "medieval" in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic philosophy does not all coincide on a single calendar, nor is the meaning of "modern" entirely singular. Compared to traditions, conversations and debates point to greater fluidity, involving both persistence and change, producing multiplicity, variation, and disruption or divergence as well as – and often simultaneously with – continuity. As Lisa Shapiro has observed, conversations generally presume some shared *topos*, but even common starting points frequently do not provide inevitable ends. Rather the range of conversation is indeterminately wide, open to digressing or developing (depending on one's point of view) through agreements and disagreements, reconsiderations and refinements or displacements of presuppositions and positions,

[7] Edward Saïd's landmark study *Orientalism* pillories the prevailing western view of East and West: "The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" (Saïd 1994. 40). Recent scholarship in medieval philosophy shows the distortion introduced by the categories of "western," in the sense of European, and "eastern." Where do they leave us with respect to the development of philosophy in the Islamic world, whose medieval geography extends from Cordoba to Baghdad and whose impact is immense in the European centers of Latin philosophy? Early modernists, too, are beginning to break down inherited ideas of philosophical geography by studying how works by European authors are received by non-European readers and how works from beyond Europe are received by European readers.

shifting understandings, and so on.[8] Convergence, consonance, and creativity are possible, but also antagonism and mis-hearing, divergence and dissonance, failures of communication and recognition, and frustration or exhaustion, not to mention sheer *aporia*. The contextualist reader must accordingly be a discerning listener, alert to the many ways conversations can go. When we think in terms of conversations, attention to this generative many-wayness thus becomes a kind of method, that is, a met-*hodos*.

Powerful as the idea of context is, especially in conjunction with the models of dialogue, debate, and interaction, context itself is by no means self-evident. Far from being given, context must rather be, quite literally, woven together, and judgments about what constitutes relevant context are contingent and debatable.[9] Whether we delimit context by time, by place, by language, by thematic unity or pursuit of what we see as related problems, by library lists, or by some other factor, delimitation is a matter of judgment. Further, what is the relationship between our ideas about context and our ideas about the meaning of a text we are studying? Judgments about appropriate context for any text or set of texts we seek to understand seem intertwined with our interpretive ideas: ideas about our primary object(s) of study guide ideas about context, and vice versa. Thus it seems difficult, perhaps impossible, to make a clean separation, such that the past is always in some sense our image of the past. For this reason, considerations from hermeneutics, whether oriented by Heideggerian facticity and occlusions of the *Seinsfrage* or in a more Gadamerian vein of reflection on *Bildung* and the production of self-understanding through recovering tradition, and ideas of genealogy, whether more Nietzschean or more Foucauldian, can be of help to historically-oriented scholars. Deconstructive reading, precisely as problematizing ideas of self and other, inside and outside, may similarly be of use. Thinking in terms of hermeneutical circles and/or genealogically calls attention to our own constitution and moment as readers. These questions of readerly constitution, which pertain both to our own formation and to the formation of the times and places in which we conduct our scholarship and articulate our arguments, are both too often under-theorized and exceedingly difficult.

In analyzing the way understanding arises from our historical situation, Gadamer emphasizes that we remain enmeshed with the tradition(s) that have produced us and so oriented by a set of prejudices – literally pre-judgments *(praeiudicia, Vorurteile)* – that shape our experience and understanding. If tradition provides the initial horizon for understanding and interpretation, dialogue, pre-

[8] Shapiro 2004. See especially 237–38.

[9] Spinoza studies supplies a perfect illustration in this regard. His work has been contextualized in terms of Cartesianism, Hobbesian philosophy, Marxisms of different kinds, Dutch politics and political philosophy, stoicism, Jewish and Islamic Aristotelianism, Sufism, and Chinese philosophy (on Chinese philosophy see Lai 1985). Needless to say, one of the challenges of Spinoza scholarship is the wide range of texts at Spinoza's disposal.

cisely as an encounter with another discloses our presumptive commitments and affords a space for reflection. As a space of negotiating difference, conversation can produce displacement and change, not merely repetition, entrenchment, and the dynamics of dominance. On the one hand, Gadamer's analysis combines both a subtle account of our situatedness and insists that our "others" both deserve respect and may actually hold superior views, such that we can and should be moved to a more complex relation to our own tradition(s).[10] On the other hand, Gadamer's notions of horizonality and the "fusing of horizons"[11] raise questions about how other others can be, that is, about the limits of recognition; if fusion is required, whither radical difference and irreducible multiplicity? On the question of alterity, Gadamer is hardly alone is this predicament.

In a very different idiom, Foucault defines genealogy as a practice devoted to exploring "the history of the present"[12] as a contingent formation and as concerned with "the insurrection of subjugated knowledges." Genealogy directs us to "historical contents that have been buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systematizations that mask confrontations and struggles" and "a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity."[13] Foucauldian investigations aspire not to "positivistic returns to a form of science that is more attentive or more accurate," but instead to exhibiting the implicit and explicit paradigms and "power effects characteristic of any discourse that is regarded as scientific."[14] Each genealogical account, moreover, remains open to future disruption and reconfiguration. Far from presuming an order or narrative, genealogy is "gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary" and "operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times."[15] It is a form of disruptive reconsideration that does not aspire to finality.

From a hermeneutic standpoint, our relation to canonical, "major" works or, roughly speaking, the Kuhnian "normal" discourse of our field, is complicated by how their influence has shaped and continues to shape our thinking. It is difficult to read the mainstays and classics (however we identify the list) as distinctive, even parochial or peculiar, rather than as natural or obvious. At the same time, our unreflective, uncontested commitments and horizons operate, in Foucault's sense, to disqualify so-called minor and peripheral works as incom-

[10] See especially *Truth and Method* II.4. Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience (Gadamer 2004. 268–306).

[11] Gadamer 2004. 305–06.

[12] Foucault 1979. 31.

[13] Foucault 2003. 7. Some readers may prefer the model of Foucauldian archeology.

[14] Foucault 2003. 9.

[15] Foucault 1980. 76.

prehensible, even unphilosophical. Non-comprehension and disqualification are hardly starting grounds for productive conversation. Assimilation, illegibility, and inattention are hardly promises of a past with a future. The most obvious result is that many forms of philosophical research are rendered inapt for career-building. The exigencies of securing reliable employment, publication, research support, and other forms of professional status and prestige point in other directions. To be clear, the pressures operate in implicit and explicit ways. The prestige economy in philosophy demands not only quantity but, increasingly, attention to impact metrics and rankings. It is inevitable that scholars will align themselves in relation to the perceived status quo and its norms of permissible variation, even its norms for what represents "originality," "novelty," or that increasingly corporatized word, "diversity." And it is equally inevitable that scholars will accommodate themselves to institutional structures that reward sub-specialization over breadth, publication over teaching and so-called "service," i.e. the critically important work of shaping curricula, organizing conferences, mentoring, and so on. The absence of robust support for translation as a central philosophical activity should also be singled out as an obstacle to expanding our ideas of philosophy. Despite these pressures, reading outside one's field, even when it does not produce something that meets our institutions' ambivalent desires for "interdisciplinary scholarship," attending talks in other disciplines, and all of the other ways of exploring ideas beyond the limits of our own habitual environments and expertise are essential for rethinking the history of philosophy and the future of philosophy as a field.

II. VICTORS' HISTORY

We can also juxtapose Foucault's "subjugated knowledges," taking note of its focus on the operations of power, with Benjamin's critique of historicism as the narrative of victors:

> With whom does historicism actually sympathize? The answer is inevitable: with the victor! And all rulers are the heirs of prior conquerors…Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal process in which current rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried in the procession. (Benjamin 2003. 391.)

Benjamin's critique of victors' history directs our attention to the question of what our histories consign to the margins or even oblivion and whether it is possible to establish a more open practice that interrupts and pluralizes narratives. Benjamin's own historical inquiries undermine reigning divisions between the precious and the discarded, the ephemeral and the historical, the central and

the marginal. This open practice would require us to investigate both what has been omitted from, even written out, of the records and archives and what is encrypted or obscured within them. When we read "the great geniuses" it is easy to miss "the anonymous toil of others who lived in the same period." So many of the dead are simply voiceless: silenced by social structures, displaced by empire and enslavement and all of the cultural destruction they wreak, or simply lost to the ravages of time. Reading with Benjamin, the question is how histories and temporalities emerge and be rethought in their difference and multiplicity as we twist free of both salvation history and "secular" progress in its Kantian, Hegelian and post-Hegelian forms? Benjamin's Angel of History, "propelled backward into the future, ever keeping its gaze on the past" and the related notion of "weak messianic power"[16] direct us to the memory of the oppressed and the possibility of some progress, but withdraw both the image of completeness and the promise of redemption.[17]

In the scholarship on early modern philosophy, Eileen O'Neill's classic essay, "Disappearing Ink: Early Modern Women Philosophers and Their Fate in History," exemplifies the project of reversing disqualification. Interestingly O'Neill proceeds under the sign of Benjamin's Angel of History to restore thinkers and texts excised by historiographers in the wake of the French Revolution. O'Neill calls for their reinstatement not under the banner of a more accurate, more comprehensive history of philosophy on the model of *Geistesgeschichte*, but as part of a continual rethinking of what counts as philosophy and what matters in its history.[18] "Perhaps a philosopher," O'Neill suggests, in possession of a detailed, comprehensive compendium of figures and positions in the history of philosophy, might think of herself as being "in the best position to evaluate philosophical arguments and projects, for she then would be able to judge which were the most innovative, strategically useful, and elegant moves in the game called 'philosophy'." On the contrary, she argues,

> This historical narrative itself never attains closure; it must be revised as philosophy itself changes its rules and even, perhaps, the very goals of the game. The evaluation

[16] Benjamin 2003. 392. On the history of culture as barbarism, see also Convolute N of the *The Arcades Project*: "Barbarism lurks in the very concept of culture – as the concept of a fund of values which is considered independent not, indeed, of the production process in which these values originated, but of the one in which they survive." (Benjamin 1999. 467–68.)

[17] On the question of whether in fact Benjamin retains a vestigial, if dialectically problematized notion of progress, see Allen 2017.

[18] O'Neill 1997. 42. For O'Neill's view that (presumably) more traditional Marxist historical materialism and "postmodern intertextualism" undervalue western philosophy's commitment to justification as an ideal, see her footnote 108.

> of moves in the game, thus, cannot be made after the detailed history is completed; the evaluations must be made as we go along rewriting the history of the discipline – as we "brush history against the grain". (O'Neill 1997. 40.)[19]

Like Benjamin, O'Neill holds that the Hegelian promise of seeing historical time from the perspective of its culmination never materializes. No Spirit recollects itself into temporal events, realizing them as moments of its own self-development and thus transforming the contingencies of history into "a slow-moving succession of spirits," a panoramic gallery of the moments of history as images endowed with the wealth of spirit that the self must "digest" into itself in absolute knowledge.[20] At the same time, as O'Neill recognizes, Benjamin's angelic position is also not ours. The Angel is thrown about, unable to stop the violent storm "which we call progress." Benjamin suggests that it is precisely the Angel's powerlessness that afford him a clear view. We, by contrast, are in possession of only partial sight and a "weak messianic power," each insufficient to do justice to the past and each suggestive not only of our inheritance of spoils, but of our implication in the disasters of the present and future. Adorno makes this point with great force at the end of *Minima Moralia*: "The more passionately thought denies its conditionality for the sake of the unconditional, the more unconsciously, and so calamitously, it is delivered up to the world." The question, then, is how thinking can become both more responsible and more aware of its failure and irresponsibility, not how it can become angelic.[21]

In *medias res*, then, O'Neill's encyclopedic doxography and bibliography of early modern women serves "to overwhelm you with the presence of women in early modern philosophy. It is only this way that the problem of women's virtually complete absence in contemporary histories of philosophy becomes pressing, mind-boggling, possibly scandalous."[22] To face the scandal, we must explore the archives, read, edit and translate, for only making the texts available to scholars can generate new narratives and assessments: "we are at a point…where a rewriting of the narrative of philosophy is called for – one in which a number of the women cited here, and some of the forgotten men, will emerge as significant figures."[23] Twenty five years after "Disappearing Ink," multiple "new narratives" projects are flourishing, changing how we think about philosophy and its

[19] Benjamin 2003 refers to "brushing history against the grain".

[20] Hegel 1997. 492.

[21] I thank Yannik Thiem and Idit Dobbs-Weinstein for many conversations about Benjamin. On Adorno's formulation of responsibility and irresponsibility, see Thiem 2009. On bringing together Benjamin and Adorno's critical historico-philosophical concerns together with the history of medieval and early modern philosophy in Europe, see Dobbs-Weinstein 2015. Eric Schliesser 2019 also comments on O'Neill's invocation of Benjamin.

[22] O'Neill 1997. 32.

[23] O'Neill 1997. 43.

professional-institutional futures.[24] O'Neill's efforts are reflected in the success of projects such as "New Narratives in the History of Philosophy",[25] Project Vox, the Center for the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists at Paderborn University, and a plethora of scholars, centers, and research groups working in many languages, locales, and periods. Research in this area reflects, moreover, the recognition that gender is an historically produced category, intersecting with factors such class, race, and coloniality, such that we cannot unreflectively turn to history with our current categories.[26]

Gender is but one factor on account of which we ought to be overwhelmed with what has escaped or barely attracted our notice and so moved to rethink what might best be called the *histories* of philosophy. Religion has been another axis of exclusionary history, and scholars of medieval and early modern philosophy have moved away from an exclusively Christian focus to reconsider work by Jewish and Islamic thinkers. The histories of Averroism, the study of Hebrew and Arabic in early modern Europe, and the like have reshaped our sense of cross-cultural communication and exchange as well as suppression and exclusion.[27] Beyond these by now familiar borders, studying the translation into Latin by Jesuit missionaries of Confucius' *Analects*[28], the transmission of Buddhist philosophy, and the variety of African and Indigenous thought should become part of rethinking philosophy and its connections to religion by philosophers. I say "by philosophers" because much of this work has been pushed out to departments of religion, anthropology, and area studies programs.[29] Race is a further a paramount example. The entanglements of European and Anglophone philosophy with the politics of empires, missionary activities, colonization, and slavery has occasioned increasing scrutiny – and demands much more, both with respect to the texts we choose to read and teach and with respect to the historiography and formation of our field. Just as the patently patriarchal views of historiographers after the French Revolution wrote women out of the history of

[24] Sadly, O'Neill's early death in 2017 has left us without her brilliance, indefatigable curiosity, and generosity to colleagues.

[25] "New Narratives in the History of Philosophy" is lead by Lisa Shapiro (Simon Fraser University), Marguerite Deslauriers (McGill University), and Karen Detlefsen (University of Pennsylvania) and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The New Narratives group collaborates widely with scholars in and beyond North America. I am a participant in the project.

[26] The literature on the construction of gender is vast, and it is difficult to select a starting point. One brief, incisive sample is Spillers 1987.

[27] On the case of Averroes, see especially Hasse 2016. Malcolm 2019 and Bevilacqua 2020 are also very useful for early modernists.

[28] *Confucius Sinarum Philosophicus* (1687). On Leibniz's interest in and admiration for Chinese philosophy, see Perkins 2007.

[29] Much as I suggest here that our idea of philosophy should expand to include many hitherto excluded "others," it nevertheless remains to see if those "others" wish to count themselves as part of philosophy, however we (re)define it. The academic disciplines and divisions as we have them may require yet more radical rethinking and rearrangement.

philosophy, the patently racist, colonial views of, most prominently, Kant and Hegel have determined the history and content of academic philosophy in the Anglo-European world, effacing work by their predecessors and setting the basic frameworks so many of us have inherited.[30] In this regard, too, it must be noted that if we wish to study the history of the oppressed and disqualified, both Benjamin and Foucault themselves must be read "against the grain" and beyond their limits. They offer us resources, but neither sufficiently investigates the intersection of race and empire.[31]

As early medievalists and modernists, we can push philosophy's boundaries further, rethinking "early modern philosophy" as "early modern European philosophy" precisely because Europe can be, as Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*[32] proposes, decentered and queried by its "others". A truly decolonial view can and should overwhelm our thinking with the startling absence of Asian, African, Indian, and Indigenous American thinkers in the way we conceptualize our field. Indeed, their absence from our minds, in our capacities as scholars and thinkers and in our capacities for shaping institutions through hiring and funding, is "pressing, mind-boggling" and more than "possibly scandalous." This is especially the case in view of the immense efforts of scholars to produce monographs, anthologies, and even teaching suggestions in all of these fields. A short – mainly Anglophone and hardly comprehensive – list of essential scholars would include Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Kwasi Wiredo, Kwame Gyekye, Emmanuel Eze Chukwudi, Philip Ivanhoe, Bryan van Norden, Jay Garfield, Anne Waters, Dale Turner, David Martinez, and James Maffie. Peter Adamson's *History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps* project, which offers podcasts, bibliographies, and books that reach beyond Europe to classical Indian philosophy and

[30] For an overview of Kant's racism and the racist-colonial underpinnings of early modern European social contractarianism, see Mills 1997. On the historiography of philosophy, Park 2013 is as illuminating as it is distressing. Park shows that only a small minority of 18th century historians of philosophy saw philosophy as originating in Greece. Others placed the beginnings of philosophy in India or Africa; some saw both India and Africa as transmitting philosophy to Greece (76). Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* of 1825–26, however, proved especially influential in establishing ancient Greece as the birthplace of philosophy and German Idealism as its telos. India and China belong to philosophy's prehistory; medieval Latin philosophy, in contrast, plays a preparatory role. The *Lectures* notwithstanding, Hegel's relation to Indian philosophy is more sustained and complex than his treatment of other non-European traditions; see Rathore – Mohapatra 2017. Smith 2015 shows that Hegel's construction of the Greco-European essence of philosophy produced what we can call a "disappearing ink" effect in two ways: (1) blotting out prior historiography and entire fields of study and (2) solidifying the separation between philosophy and culture by depicting Greco-European thinking as the expression of reason itself. Smith 2020 considers the question of what a Leibnizian, as distinct from a Hegelian, the history of philosophy would be like.

[31] E.g. Stoler 1995 and Allen 2017.

[32] Chakrabarty 2007, which reflects long term work by the Subaltern Studies Collective. Spivak 1994 is a classic essay.

Africana philosophy, deserves mention as a philosophically sophisticated, erudite, and informal way to learn about material unfamiliar to us.[33]

As Justin E.H. Smith has suggested, historians of philosophy could begin to think about our work on the paradigm of "connected history"[34] and so treat dialogues, conversations, and traditions as locally-inflected, contingently and fluidly shaped and re-shaped efforts to understand with reality and our place in it. When we think this way, admitting the gaps and innumerable complexities that remain opaque and are perhaps permanently lost,

> There is no good reason not to presume full equality of all traditions at the outset, regardless of differences in their mechanisms of transmissions (e.g., textual, oral), or of the degrees of systematization of their commitments from within the traditions themselves. If there is less systematization, as in the case of Bantu philosophy, this simply means that there may be additional work for the scholar to carry out in order to draw it out in a way that will enable outsiders to appreciate it. But the simple difficulty of accessing something can be no evidence for its non-existence, any more than damaged portions of papyri, rendering bits of text illegible, may justify the conclusion that the missing words must have been the unimportant ones. Challenges are not grounds for neglect, but on the contrary for redoubled effort. (Smith 2015. 11.)

Rethinking Eurocentrism, patriarchy, and white supremacy, moreover, is not merely to admit new voices to speak about old problems.[35] There is, for example, no intrinsic reason to define philosophy in terms of systemization, which may be merely a post-Kantian preference; Nietzsche clearly stands as a European alternative. To be sure, expanding our archives and canons will offer new perspectives on familiar problems in metaphysics, epistemology, politics, aesthetics, and the other familiar subfields of philosophy. There is no doubt that comparative study will enrich us. But changing our reading will also introduce new issues, idioms, and conceptual resources, enabling us not merely to rethink presumptive problems, categories, and narratives, but equally to expand and potentially to redirect our philosophical attention. To avoid re-assimilating new ideas into familiar terms and, equally, to avoid fetishism and tokenism, we will need epistemic humility, modesty, and curiosity. What philosophy been, and what might it be in an increasingly global, decolonized future? To ask this question is to wonder what our successors will think of how we have situated ourselves in relation to the past, articulated our implication in the present, and generated or resisted possibilities for different futures.

[33] On the way Adamson radically reconceptualizes philosophy in the Islamic world, see Fraenkel 2017.

[34] Smith 2015. On connected history, see, for example, Subrahmaynam 2022.

[35] On this theme, see especially Dotson 2012 and Mills 2007.

III. CONCLUSION

I have argued here for a multi-directional approach to the histories of philosophy and for non-imperial curiosity. As Toni Morrison reminds us, domination distorts intellectual adventure and spoils efforts at map-making. Historical practice informed by contextualist, hermeneutical, and genealogical concerns offer, in my view, resources for thinking about what is required to think in and with languages, concepts, times, and places different from one's own. Our dialogues with the dead already take us out of ourselves and put the question of who "we" are in relation to "others" on the table. To the obvious objection that each of us will inevitably have limited scholarly tools and specific interests, it must be said first that literacy is not the same as expertise and that generating richer, more global understandings of the histories of philosophy and the variety of human philosophical endeavors will require new forms of academic collaboration and cooperation. Scholarly energy is finite, scholarly projects infinitely many. Along the same lines, our power to change disciplinary and institutional norms and practices is limited in many ways in the contemporary academy, but it is not non-existent. Changes in the way we study medieval philosophy and changes in the way we study early modern philosophy make it clear that redirection and expansion are possible. Difficult or unsettling as it may be to decenter our familiar philosophical temporalities and geographies, rethink the languages and contexts of philosophy, and alter our professional models, neither the Hegelian museum of *Geist* nor its posterity in our field is a viable paradigm for philosophizing now. Both we and our students after us can envision different futures for philosophy.

REFERENCES

Allen, Amy 2017. *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*. New York, Columbia University Press.

Benjamin, Walter 2003. On the Concept of History. In Howard Eiland – Michael W. Jennings (eds.) Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, Volume 4, 1938–1940. Trans. Edmund Jephrott. Cambridge/MA, Harvard University Press. 389–400.

Benjamin, Walter 1999. *The Arcades Project*. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge/MA, Harvard University Press.

Bevilacqua, Anthony 2020. *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment*. Cambridge/MA, Harvard University Press.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh 2007. *Provincializing Europe*: *Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton/NJ, Princeton University Press.

Confucius *Sinarum Philosophicus* (1687)

Curley, Edwin 1986. Dialogues with the Dead. *Synthese*. 67/1. 33–49.

Dobbs-Weinstein, Idit 2015. *Spinoza's Critique of Religion and Its Heirs: Marx, Benjamin, Adorno*. New York, Cambridge University Press.

Dotson, Kirstie 2012. How Is This Paper Philosophy? *Comparative Philosophy*. 3(1). 3–29. URL = https://doi.org/10.31979/2151–6014(2012).030105

Foucault, Michel 2003. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976. Michel Foucault Lectures at the Collège de France*, Volume 5. Trans. David Macey. New York, Picador.

Foucault, Michel 1980. Nietzsche, Genealogy, History. In Donald F. Bouchard (ed.) *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. New York, Cornell University Press.

Foucault, Michel 1979. *Discipline and Punish*. New York, Vintage.

Fraenkel, Carlos 2017. Deprovincializing Philosophy. *Los Angeles Review of Books* (July 29, 2017). URL = https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/deprovincializing-philosophy

Gadamer, Hans-Georg 2004. *Truth and Method*. London, Bloomsbury Academic.

Hasse, Dag Nikolaus 2016. *Success and Suppresion: Arabic Sciences and Philosophy in the Renaissance*. I Tatti Studies in Italian Renaissance History. Cambridge/MA, Harvard University Press.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friderich 1977. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. Arnold V. Miller. New York, Oxford University Press.

James, Susan 2012. *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics*. New York, Oxford University Press.

Klein, Julie R. 2013. Philosophizing Historically/Historicizing Philosophy: Some Spinozistic Reflections. In Mogens Lærke – Justin E.H. Smith – Eric Schliesser (eds.) *Philosophy and Its History. Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy*. New York, Oxford University Press. 134–158.

Lærke, Mogens – Justin E.H. Smith – Eric Schliesser (eds.) 2013. *Philosophy and Its History. Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy*. New York, Oxford University Press.

Lærke Mogens 2021. *Spinoza and the Freedom of Philosophizing*. New York, Oxford University Press.

Lai, Yuen Ting 1985. The Linking of Spinoza to Chinese Thought by Bayle and Malebranche. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 23/2. 151–178. URL = https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.1985.0027

Malcolm, Noel 2019. *Useful Enemies: Islam and The Ottoman Empire in Western Political Thought, 1450–1750*. Cambridge/MA, Harvard University Press.

Mills, Charles W. 2007. White Ignorance. In Shannon Sullivan – Nancy Tuana (eds.) *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*. Albany/NY, State University of New York Press. 11–38.

Mills, Charles W. 1997. *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca/NY, Cornell University Press.

Morrison, Toni 1992. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge/MA, Harvard University Press.

O'Neill, Eileen. 1997. Disappearing Ink: Early Modern Women Philosophers and Their Fate in History. In Janet A. Kourany (ed.) *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice: Critiques and Reconstructions*. Princeton/NJ, Princeton University Press. 17–62.

Park, Peter K. J. 2013. *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy. Racism in the Formation of the the Philosophical Canon*, 1780–1830. Albany/NY, State University of New York Press.

Perkins, Franklin 2007. *Leibniz and China: A Commence of Light*. New York, Cambridge University Press.

Rathore, Aakash Singh – Rimina Mohapatra 2017. *Hegel's India: A Reinterpretation, with Texts*. New York, Oxford University Press.

Rée, Jonathan – Michael Ayers – Adam Westoby. 1978. *Philosophy and Its Past*. Brighton, Harvester.

Rorty, Richard – Schneewind, J. B. – Skinner, Quentin (eds.) 1984. *Philosophy in History*. New York, Cambridge University Press.

Saïd, Edward 1994. *Orientalism*. New York, Vintage.

Schliesser, Eric 2019. On Eileen O'Neill. The Scandal of Philosophy, and the Angel of History. URL= https://digressionsnimpressions.typepad.com/digressionsimpressions/2019/04/on-eileen-oneill-and-the-angel-of-history.html

Shapiro, Lisa 2004. Some Thoughts on the Place of Women in Early Modern Philosophy. In Lili Alanen – Charlotte Witt (eds). *Feminist Reflections on the History of Philosophy*. Dordrecht, Kluwer. 291–50.

Smith, Justin E.H. 2020. The History of Philosophy in Global Context: Three Case Studies. URL= https://www.jehsmith.com/1/2020/05/the-history-of-philosophy-in-global-context-three-case-studies.html

Smith, Justin E.H. 2015. Tradition, Culture, and the Problem of Inclusion in Philosophy. *Comparative Philosophy* 6(2). 1–13. URL = https://doi.org/10.31979/2151–6014(2015).060204.

Sorell, Tom – Rogers, G. A. J. (eds.) 2005. *Analytic Philosophy and History of Philosophy*. New York, Oxford University Press.

Spillers, Hortesnse J. 1987. Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book. *Diacritics*. 17/2. 65–81. URL = https://doi.org/10.2307/464747.

Spivak, Gayatri 1994. Can the Subaltern Speak? In Patrick Williams – Laura Chrisman (eds.) *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. New York, Columbia University Press. 67–111.

Stoler, Anne Laura. 1995. *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham/NC, Duke University Press.

Subrahmaynam, Sanjay. 2022. *Connected History: Issues and Arguments*. New York, Verso.

Thiem, Yannik 2009. Adorno's Tears: Textures of Philosophical Emotionality. *MLN* April 2009. 124(3). 592–613. URL = https://www.jstor.org/stable/29734529.

Van Norden, Bryan. 2017. *Taking Back Philosophy: A Multicultural Manifesto*. Foreward Jay L. Garfield. New York, Columbia University Press.

Oliver Istvan Toth

A defense of reconstructivism*

In her recent paper, Christia Mercer has argued that contextualism is currently the only methodology in the history of early modern philosophy; its opponent, reconstructivism has been abandoned. She identifies contextualism as a methodology that adheres to the "getting things right constraint", which is the latest incarnation of Skinner's principle. On Mercer's view, a historian of philosophy adheres to this constraint, if she aims at getting at the authentic view of the author, i.e., those views that the author would recognize as her own. By contrast, reconstructivists are historians of philosophy who are plucking claims and ideas from the text without concern for their textual context, i.e., who do not aim at getting to the authentic view of the author. Mercer's aim is to present an ecumenical view: her contextualism is a badge that everyone currently working in the field should feel comfortable wearing (Mercer 2019).

In this paper, I argue that there is a live and interesting methodological disagreement by developing an alternative definition of reconstructivism and contextualism. My alternative definition reveals an implicit theoretical disagreement concerning the question, how to identify the truth-maker of philosophical interpretations, which makes a difference for the respective methodologies. Contextualism assumes that interpretations are made true by concrete particulars – utterances – and their actual properties whereas reconstructivism assumes that interpretations are made true by abstract particulars – propositions – and their properties. By presenting my alternative definitions, I concede that Mercer's reconstructivists, who reject Mercer's getting things right constraint, should not be counted among the historians of philosophy. However, I argue that not everyone who accepts her getting things right constraint pursues the same methodology: for contextualists, getting the historical account right means getting the utterance right, for reconstructivists, getting the proposition right. We should be aware

* I have presented a previous version of this paper at Ursula Renz's graduate seminar at the University of Graz. I would like to thank the participants for their feedback, especially Ursula Renz and Sarah Tropper.

of this difference, otherwise we might mistake genuine methodological disagreements for first order disagreements. I proceed in four steps.

First, I argue that Skinner's principle is a theoretical and not a practical claim by briefly presenting it in its original context. Skinner's principle is meant to address the question, how to identify the meaning of a sentence, not the question, how to get to know that meaning. Consequently, the debate that originates with Skinner's principle is in the first place not about the right methodology by which one can evaluate the truth of an interpretation proposed, rather about the principles by which one can identify the truth-maker of an interpretation. Skinner's principle is about question, what it is for a sentence to have meaning, not how to get to know that meaning.

Second, I propose an alternative distinction between contextualism and reconstructivism relative to Mercer's, which focuses on the truth-maker of an interpretation. On my proposed distinction, the truth-maker of a contextualist interpretation is a concrete particular, the written utterance of a sentence in a concrete social and historical situation. By contrast, the truth-maker of a reconstructivist interpretation is an abstract particular, the proposition that the historian takes the historical author to express by her written utterance.

Third, I argue that from these different theoretical commitments follow different methodological commitments. Contextualist methodology is historicist, i.e., committed to the claims that (1) the meaning of philosophical concepts is immanent to the social and historical context, (2) the actual rather than possible meaning is the object of interpretation, and (3) philosophical claims and arguments cannot be true outside their historical and social context. By contrast, reconstructivist methodology is perennialist, i.e., committed to the claims that (1) the meaning of philosophical concepts is transcendent to the social and historical context, (2) a possible meaning can better capture a philosopher's position than what she actually meant, and (3) philosophical claims and arguments can be true outside their historical and social contexts.

I conclude by revisiting the example of the debate between Daniel Garber and Michael Della Rocca, which was the immediate context of Mercer's article. I argue that my alternative definition of contextualism and reconstructivism captures an actual methodological disagreement between them. In addition, reconstructivism's attractive methodological claims – that it is possible to understand a claim better than the historically available understanding and that historical claims can be true outside their social and historical contexts – depend on the claim that the meaning of philosophical utterances is transcendent to the social and historical context. Should a historian of philosophy wish to keep these attractive claims without accepting the whole reconstructivist package, the burden is on her to show that her methodology is coherent.

I. SKINNER'S PRINCIPLE RECONSIDERED

Even if contemporary contextualists do not necessarily accept Skinner's principle as it was originally formulated in 1969, they generally take it as a rallying point, as a first version of their methodology that was later improved upon (cf. Lærke, Smith, and Schliesser 2013. 2). Skinner's principle states that

> no agent can eventually be said to have meant or done something which he could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what he had meant or done. (Skinner 1969. 28.)

The usual critique against Skinner's principle is that it proposes a methodology that is impossible to follow through, since it construes the truth of interpretations as dependent on potentially unknowable counterfactuals. This critique is formulated in especially clear terms by Koen Vermeir:

> I find Skinner's principle rather unintelligible (indeed, it escapes me how I would ever convince a long dead philosopher to accept any statement I make). Even a generous interpretation of the principle, assuming an imaginary debate between the historian and the historical actor, seems to presuppose what it tries to achieve. In order to decide whether the historian presents a good interpretation of a historical statement, he or she already needs to know what the historical agent would have accepted as a correct description of what he had meant, but this is exactly what Skinner would like to find out in the first place. (Vermeir 2013. 51.)

Indeed, if Skinner's principle would imply a methodology of conducting an imaginary debate with long dead philosophers, as Vermeir suggests, it was hardly promising. The absurdity of such a methodology is nicely exemplified by Rorty's claim quoted by Vermeir, according to which we can attribute Aquinas a position that Aquinas would have adopted, had he read Newton and Hume (Vermeir 2013. 51 fn. 4). Vermeir is perfectly right to note that the empirical evidence for the truth of such claims is pretty thin (cf. Lærke 2013. 19). However, is it really such an imaginary debate that Skinner's principle is about?

If we take a closer look at the context of Skinner's principle, it becomes obvious that it isn't. The sentence that came to be known as Skinner's principle, is actually a conclusion that Skinner draws from his "logical" principle, which is the following:

> if a given statement or other action has been performed by an agent at will, and has a meaning for him, it follows that any plausible account of what the agent meant must necessarily fall under, and make use of, the range of descriptions which the agent himself could at least in principle have applied to describe and classify what he was doing. (Skinner 1969. 29.)

Skinner's logical principle is a very broad theoretical claim about the meaning of intentional human behavior. His point is that human actions – including the utterance of sentences – has meaning because of the agent's intention. The way in which Skinner's logical principle encompasses both actions and utterances indicates that by the "in principle" applicability of descriptions non-occurrent intentions are meant. To elaborate on Donald Davidson's famous example: one does not always think "I intend to switch on the light" when switching on the light. Still, one would accept "switching on the light" as a description of what one was doing, since one had the intention of doing so. By contrast, one would not accept "alerting the burglar" as a correct description of what one was doing, even if one has in fact alerted the burglar, since one had no intention of alerting the burglar.[1]

That Skinner's logical principle is about the determination of the meaning of intentional behavior by the agent's intentions is further supported by Skinner's explicit reference to Austin's speech act theory. According to Austin's speech act theory, one should distinguish the "locutionary content" and the "illocutionary force" of a speech act. In a nutshell, the locutionary content of a sentence is its propositional content, whereas its illocutionary force is the act performed by uttering the sentence. To take a trivial example, the same sentence "there is the door" can have very different meanings when uttered in different contexts, e.g., when it is a reply to an inquiry about the location of the door or when it is an implicit suggestion that the other person should leave. On Austin's theory, the locutionary content of the sentence is the same, but it has different illocutionary forces in different contexts (Lycan 2008. 148). Skinner's claim is that the meaning of an utterance includes its illocutionary force, which is determined by the intention of the agent. Therefore, one cannot properly attribute meaning to historical texts – written utterances – without paying attention to the author's intention.

The way in which Skinner's logical principle is formulated with the help of Austin's philosophy of language indicates that the often-criticized clause about what the historical author could be brought to accept is not about counterfactual scenarios (like what Aquinas would have accepted, had he read Newton),

[1] Note that according to Davidson's position, the agent did alert the burglar because switching on the light is just alerting the burglar; cf. Davidson 1963. I am not committed to any particular interpretation of the philosophy of action presupposed by Skinner's account, still, I think that the general idea behind Skinner's claim is fairly clear.

rather about different descriptions of the speaker's intention determining the illocutionary force of the speech act. Just as one would accept "switching on the light" but not "alerting the burglar" as a correct description of what one is doing when switching on the light – even if one did not consciously entertain such an intention – one would accept certain propositions but not others as correct descriptions of what one has meant with a speech act.

It is still an open question, how one would know what the long-dead speaker's intention was. But the point is that all descriptions are descriptions of an *actual* and spatiotemporally located intention that actually determined the meaning of an *actual* speech act. Whether or not we are going to find out what a historical author meant by a given statement, Skinner's point is that there is a fact of the matter what she meant, that is, what she intended to mean by it. History of philosophy should aim at finding out what the given statement's meaning is – fixed by the speaker's intention – rather than attributing meaning to the statement based on what we, historians, take it to mean. While I am aware that most contextualists today do not accept Skinner's principle as formulated in his original paper, I argue that the characteristic claim of contextualism is still the same: that the statements of historical authors have an *actual* and historically immanent meaning fixed by the *actual* context of the utterance.

II. PROPOSITION AND UTTERANCE

When we look at recent theoretical defenses of contextualism, we find that the common thread in their approaches is an adherence to the claim that history is about what actually happened rather than about what could have happened (Lærke 2013; Vermeir 2013; Smith 2013; Catana 2013). This is fleshed out as the claim that philosophical utterances have meaning only in the context of a specific discussion, hence the name of contextualism.

This view has a fair degree of plausibility: the claim "God has died" certainly has different meanings in the context of Nietzsche's *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (Nietzsche 2013. 1:111) and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel 1986. 547). Not only is this claim plausible, the view that history is in the business of describing what was actually the case, also has an ancient and prestigious pedigree. Famously, Ranke formulated in his *History of the Latin and Teutonic Nations* that the aim of history is not to teach the moral truth, rather to show "how it [the historical event] really was."[2] In a similar manner, Aristotle notes in Chapter IX of his *Poetics* that history relates the particular and the actual, whereas poetry

[2] "Er will blos zeigen, wie es eigentlich gewesen." (Ranke 1885. vii), translation mine. For Ranke, this means that history is not philosophy, the latter of which is in the business of teaching moral truths.

describes the universal and possible.[3] Their obvious and substantial differences notwithstanding, authors as far away in time as Aristotle and Ranke conceived of history as a descriptive science: a good piece of historical writing represents what the case was.

Along these lines, Vermeir distinguishes the philosopher from the historian of philosophy. On his view, the philosopher is someone who "wonders how phenomena or concepts are interrelated with other phenomena and concepts" whereas the historian of philosophy asks "how these phenomena or concepts have come into being" (Vermeir 2013. 56). The historian of philosophy aims at getting the historical story right, i.e., to describe the actual way in which philosophers produced philosophical claims. As he notes, a philosopher could have had many reasons for uttering a claim, but the historian of philosophy is only interested in the one reason that actually caused the utterance.

In a similar manner, Justin E. H. Smith argues that the intention of the author determines the meaning of the philosophical utterance in the same way as the intention of the maker determines the meaning of a stone tool. Both the philosophical utterance in the form of a text and the stone tool are material objects that were produced with a determinate aim in mind. In the case of the stone tool, the author intended "to break stuff", in the case of the philosophical text, she intended it to be read by others. On Smith's view, unless one is able to link a proposed interpretation to the intention of the author, one runs the risk of mistaking accidental features of the text for its meaningful features (Smith 2013. 34–35). Just as features of the stone tool that were not intentionally chosen or made are meaningless, some features of the text are simply accidents that do not have meaning because they were not meant to convey meaning.

What is common to Smith's and Vermeir's contextualist approaches is that they treat philosophical claims as concrete particulars, as one of the many artefacts of the material culture of a society. A historical culture produces a number of different concrete particulars: weapons, buildings, and philosophical texts, all of which reflect the intentions and beliefs of their authors, as well as the norms and institutions of the given society. Therefore, the study of philosophical texts should not radically differ from the study of the other concrete particulars that the given culture has produced. To cite Smith's example, when one attributes meaning to a stone tool, one treats it as the material representation of certain

[3] Aristotle 1995. 1450b36–1451a11. For Aristotle, this means that events described by tragedy, unlike those described by history, have to have meaning. If a general dies in a heart attack before the climactic battle of a campaign, that is a historic event that has to be narrated as it is: a meaningless accident. By contrast, such a sudden and meaningless death is unacceptable in a tragedy. If Sophocles' play would end with Kreon's death because of a sudden heart attack, all tragic effect would be lost. For an account that situates history of philosophy decidedly in the "other" camp (what would be philosophy for Ranke and poetry for Aristotle), see Schliesser 2013.

social and individual beliefs. For example, that the stone tool is the best tool in order to break stuff, that the given material and the given shape are the most efficient for that purpose, and that stuff should be broken. In a similar manner, a philosophical text should be treated as the material representation of certain social and individual beliefs. For example, that some people are to be convinced about some ideas, that the given literary form and the given choice of words are the most efficient for that purpose, what the ideas are that the other needs to be convinced about and what the ideas are that the other probably accepts without the need of convincing.

On the contextualist approach, the text has only as much meaning as the minds of actual and historical figures – or, to use Lærke's terminology: historically immanent perspectives (Lærke 2013. 23) – attributed to it either by producing or by understanding it. If we were able to discover all the actual causes that contributed to the production and contextually internal reception of the philosophical text, all implicit social norms, argumentative assumptions, authorial intentions and discursive contexts, the complete meaning of the text would be described. Of course, the historical reality is far too complex for the historian to come even close to such an achievement, authorial intentions are beyond her reach, discursive contexts, norms and assumptions are preserved only partially. But there is an actual fact of the matter what that philosophical text means, which is embodied in the concrete particular and which makes interpretations true. A philosophical interpretation is true if it describes what is actually the case, if it represents a concrete particular – the philosophical utterance – correctly in virtue of attributing to it the meaning that it actually had. In the same way, the historical interpretation of the stone tool is true if it describes what is actually the case, if it represents the stone tool as the material manifestation of those beliefs and norms which in fact led to its production and regulated its use.

The crucial assumption behind the contextualist methodology is the claim that the "matter" of philosophical utterances is as meaningless as the stone of which the stone tool has been made. This assumption motivates the view that each utterance has only as much meaning that someone has put into it: either the agent (Skinner 1969; Smith 2013) or the society as the set of historical agents (Lærke 2013; Vermeir 2013; Waugh and Ariew 2013). On all contextualist accounts, the philosophical utterance only has the meaning that a historical agent actually took it to mean. This is, however, not that the only way of looking at philosophical utterances. Reconstructivism argues that the "matter" of philosophical utterances can have logical and inferential relations independently of authorial intentions and social practices.

At the core of reconstructivist methodology is the assumption that philosophical utterances express propositions that have meaning and stand in inferential relations independently of the social and historical context in which the utterance was made. Unlike utterances that are concrete particulars, propositions

are abstract particulars that can stand in relations independently of the historical context. Therefore, the utterance can have the meaning that it has not in virtue of its concrete particular causes, rather in virtue of the abstract particular it expresses. And the meaning that the utterance has in virtue of the expressed proposition can be such that no historical agent took the utterance to mean. To develop Smith's analogy, the historical author does not work like the craftsperson shaping the inert stone according to her will, rather like a trainer making the animal do her bidding. Although the trainer's aims and intentions have a significant influence on what the animal does, the animal has a life of her own, and no account of what the animal does is complete, without consideration of that life.

Following this assumption, the reconstructivist does not aim at reconstructing what historical agents took the utterance to mean, rather at discovering what proposition is expressed by the utterance. The reconstructivist does not deny the importance of the context and does not deny that the same sentence can have different meanings in different contexts, as the sentence "God has died" in Hegel's and Nietzsche's works. What the reconstructivist denies is that the same sentence in Hegel's and Nietzsche's works has different meanings because the historical agents took it to mean different things. Rather, it means different things because it expresses different propositions. Insisting on the identification of the proposition expressed by the utterance might sound like nit-picking: what determines, after all, what proposition is expressed by the sentence, if not authorial intentions and social conventions? But the point is that propositions, unlike utterances, have a life of their own: even if authorial intentions and social conventions determine what proposition is expressed by a given utterance, by expressing that proposition, one can say more or something else than what one has intended, or what the others took one to have intended.

As we will see in the next section, insisting on the claim that ultimately propositions and not utterances have meaning, i.e., that the truth-maker of a philosophical interpretation is the (set of) proposition(s) expressed by the utterance rather than the utterance, has far-reaching consequences. The claim that the proposition makes philosophical interpretations true entails that the meaning is historically and socially transcendent. If the meaning is historically transcendent, it is possible for philosophers of different ages to mean the same thing, it is possible for the historian of philosophy to truthfully attribute meaning to a philosophical utterance which no historical agent took it to mean, and it is possible for a philosophical claim to be true outside its historical and social context.

III. HISTORICIST AND PERENNIALIST METHODOLOGIES

1. The meaning of philosophical concepts: historically immanent or transcendent?

The contextualist claim that the meaning of philosophical utterances is determined by historically immanent causes implies that philosophical concepts and problems are also immanent to the given historical and social context. Joanna Waugh and Roger Ariew argue especially clearly for the claim that the concepts used in philosophical utterances do not differ from ordinary concepts, both of which have meaning only with reference to the form of life which the historical author using the given concepts lived. Therefore, it is impossible to translate *salve veritate* philosophical claims (or any other claim for that matter) from a historical language to modern parlance (Waugh and Ariew 2013. 108). At the core of their argument is the claim that philosophical utterances are embodied speech acts (Waugh and Ariew 2013. 93). Therefore, much more belongs to the meaning of an utterance than what can be translated. When understanding spoken speech acts, one cannot abstract from the gestures and intonation of the speaker; when understanding written speech acts, one cannot abstract away from the material and historical context in which the written speech acts were performed (Waugh and Ariew 2013. 110). Similarly to gestures and intonations, philosophical concepts are immanent to the form of life in which the philosophical author lived. Philosophical concepts only have meaning in the given material and historical context, since they represent material inferential practices of the given society (Waugh and Ariew 2013. 111–12). Since philosophical concepts are historically immanent, philosophical problems are also relative to the normative structure of the social space of the author. A philosophical problem is the need to make such normative structures of the social space explicit. In determining what counts as a successful solution to a philosophical problem, philosophical authority rests with the community of inquirers who are committed to living in a shared space of reason (Waugh and Ariew 2013. 113).

Whereas the reconstructivist does not disregard the material and historical contexts, she denies that philosophical concepts represent historically immanent normative structures. Rather, she argues that concepts are abstract particulars, which are building blocks of propositions expressed by the embodied speech acts. Since meaning is an abstract particular, the intonations and gestures of the author do not prevent meaning from being capable of getting translated *salve veritate* to other languages. Intonations, gestures, the material and historical contexts of the philosophical utterance either contribute to the expression of a proposition, in which case the same meaning can be expressed in other material and historical contexts as well, or they are meaningless. That is, reconstructivism entails the view that philosophical problems are perennial: philosophical problems concern the way in which propositions hang together rather than the

explication of the normative structure of a social space. Therefore, reconstructivism entails collegialism: it is perfectly possible that philosophers of different ages have worked on the same problems, since the meaning they have expressed transcends their social and historical context. The claim that Plato and Rawls worked on the same philosophical problem involving the same concept when writing about justice is not ridiculous, it is just very contentious. Whether or not it is true is an empirical question that needs to be decided by discovering the propositions each author expressed in their respective works.

2. The meaning to be interpreted: actual or possible?

The contextualist claim that philosophical utterances only mean what historical agents took them to mean entails that the aim of the history of philosophy is to reconstruct the actual meaning that philosophical utterances have. This view is stated especially clearly by Mogens Lærke, who presents his contextualist view as a correction of Skinner's principle. He argues that Skinner's principle has two major shortcomings.

First, Skinner's principle assigns the author an oversized role in determining the meaning of her utterances. What the author took the meaning of a historical text to be is certainly part of its true meaning, but its true historical meaning contains more than that. To take Lærke's example, even if it is quite unlikely that the meaning Toland attributed to Spinoza's works in his *Letters to Serena* would be the same as the meaning that Spinoza attributed to his own works, the meaning attributed by Toland is part of the true historical meaning of Spinoza's works (Lærke 2013. 16–17).

Second, Skinner's principle admits possible meanings that the historical author could have accepted but didn't actually adopt. On Lærke's view, it is inacceptable for a historian to admit meanings that cannot be attributed to a specific person at a specific moment, even constructs like "an educated seventeenth-century European" are problematic to his mind, since there has never been a generic intellectual, there were specific people with specific beliefs. Therefore, any interpretation has to attribute a meaning to a text from the perspective of a specific person (Lærke 2013. 24–26).

Based on these two corrections, Lærke argues that "the true historical meaning of a past philosophical text should be defined *as the sum of actual historically immanent or contextually internal perspectives on that past philosophical text*" (Lærke 2013. 23 italics in the original), where these perspectives usually "do *not* converge toward a single unified interpretation" (Lærke 2013. 24 italics in the original).

By contrast, the reconstructivist view that the meaning of philosophical utterances are the abstract propositions with inferential properties that transcend the given social and historical context entails that the aim of the history of philoso-

phy is to discover the (set of) proposition(s) expressed by the written utterance. The utterance can be taken to express a proposition if the proposition explains the utterance's features. I call the proposition possible rather than actual because the attribution of a proposition to a historical utterance does not entail the claim that historical figures actually entertained that proposition. It only entails the claim that the features of the utterance of the historical author are explainable on the assumption that the utterance expresses this proposition. In the case of rival claims, the (set of) proposition(s) that explains more features of the written utterance should be adopted without consideration to actual authorial intentions and contextually immanent reception.

Thus, reconstructivist methodology is not in the business of unearthing the *actual* meaning of the utterance by discovering the authorial intentions and contextually immanent reception of the text, rather in the business of discovering a *possible* meaning of the utterance by discovering a (set of) proposition(s) that explains the features of the utterance. Those features of the utterance can include relations to other utterances made by the same author and to utterances made by contextually internal historical figures as a response to the original utterance. While this claim comes very close to the contextualist methodology in many respects, the disregard for the actual meaning allows for the truthful attribution of propositions that involve concepts demonstrably unavailable in the given historical context. That is, reconstructivism allows that the historical author expressed a view that she herself did not understand and that was only expressed adequately at a later point of history. However, this is only the case, if the assumption that the historical author expressed that view explains more features of the historical author's utterance than rival interpretations.

Thus, reconstructivist methodology allows that we have a better access to the propositions expressed by the historical author than the historical figures did. Therefore, it is perfectly legitimate to attribute meaning to a past philosophical utterance that it could have, but not a single historical figure took it to mean. To take the example discussed by Tad M. Schmaltz in his contribution to the present special issue: it is highly unlikely that anyone in the seventeenth century attributed meaning to Spinoza's claims about the substance's attributes with the help of the concepts of Fregean philosophy; still, we can claim that what Spinoza actually meant is best expressed by Fregean concepts. That is, we can claim truthfully that the actual historical meaning of Spinoza's utterances is a set of propositions that involve concepts that were first explicitly articulated 200 years after the author's death, that Spinoza's authentic view is a view that involves concepts that were not available for him. Of course, such a claim is impossible to make on contextualist grounds, since no historical author took Spinoza to use those concepts, and those concepts were not even available in the period.

Before turning to the next methodological issue, I would like to briefly address a possible objection to this point. One might want to argue that the propo-

sed reconstructivist methodology either results in implausible claims, or it is parasitic on the contextualist research program. Either the reconstructivist takes into account the contextualist research into historical, material, and discursive contexts, and then simply pretends that she has discovered the meaning unearthed by her contextualist colleagues by eyeballing the historical text, or the reconstructivist proposes meanings that are obviously off the track. My answer is twofold.

First, it should be clarified what is meant by the interpretation being off the track in this case. If it means that the proposed meaning is not historically immanent, that is not an objection, that is just the reconstructivist position. If the proposed meaning is off the track in the sense that it conflicts with the historical evidence and there is a rival interpretation that is more in accordance with the historical evidence, that can explain more features of the text, then the proposed interpretation is simply not a good one according to the principles of reconstructivist methodology. To develop Skinner's example, the claim that Marsilius of Padua enunciated a doctrine of separations of powers (Skinner 1969. 29) is false not because he did not intend to do that, rather because there are interpretations that account for features of his text better.

Second, one should not underestimate the interpretative potential of eyeballing the text. While I agree that disregarding the historical context is always bad practice in the history of philosophy, I deny that the only access we have to the meaning of historical texts is through their historical context. A case in point is Thomas of Aquinas reading Aristotle. Aquinas did not read the original text, only a rather corrupt translation of the text. His knowledge of the social and material context of ancient Greece was fragmentary at best. His understanding of the discursive context is even more spotty, he did not even have access to the immediate discursive context, to Plato's texts, to any meaningful extent. Still, his commentaries to Aristotle's major works attest an understanding of the meaning of Aristotle's claims that is arguably superior to the understanding of many modern scholars, who have access to critical editions of the original text and a vast historical knowledge of 4th century BCE Greek society. I argue that explaining the quality of Aquinas's interpretation of Aristotle based on contextualist principles is at least challenging.

3. The truth of philosophical claims: historically immanent or transcendent?

The contextualist position – according to which philosophical problems, as well as the concepts and claims addressing those problems, are historically immanent – entails that philosophical claims are only true or false in their historical and social contexts. Justin E. H. Smith expresses this point quite vividly by comparing past philosophical ideas to ancient pots found at archeological sites.

It would be quite preposterous to evaluate the significance of these pots by their ability to hold water, we value them because they are artefacts of past material cultures that represent the beliefs of members of the past society. In a similar manner, past philosophical ideas are valued because they show how members of a past society thought, not because they would fare well in the context of contemporary debates. We value Kenelm Digby's false theory of weapon salve simply because it shows that there was a person in the 17th century who held this theory (Smith 2013. 41).

Along these lines, a contextualist should be interested in Kant's moral philosophy not because it is instructive for members of our society, rather because there is a historical truth that once lived a person called Immanuel Kant who expressed these views. And that tells us a great deal about the 18th-century German society in which Kant lived. From Smith's analogy it follows that the question whether Kant's moral philosophy is true from our perspective is beside the point, just as it is an uninteresting fact that the ancient pot still holds water. As Vermeir notes when discussing alchemical texts: the historian of philosophy should be careful not to make claims about the "truth" of past philosophical claims in the context of contemporary discourse, since no meaningful result is to be expected from making such claims. Vermeir describes a modern scientist studying the text by conducting the experiments described in it. Had the modern scientist pushed the experiments described by the alchemists to the end, she would have either arrived at the transmutation of gold, which is impossible according to modern science, or she would have concluded that the procedure described was nonsense or fraud, which the historian should not do, since her aim is to describe the worldview of the historical author rather than what the modern historian takes to be the case (Vermeir 2013. 68).

By contrast, the reconstructivist rejects this historical relativism entailed by the contextualist program. According to the reconstructivist, historical authors express timeless propositions formulated with the help of timeless concepts. Of course, the question which timeless proposition is expressed by the temporally situated utterance is always up for debate. But the assumption is that the same proposition can be expressed by authors of different historical and social contexts, which entails that past philosophical claims, the propositions expressed by past philosophical utterances, can be true or false in the context of contemporary philosophy. The reconstructivist rejects the contextualist's methodological modesty proper to a historian of science.

In the history of science, it is just obvious that past texts are not to be approached in an appropriationist manner, it is unlikely that past theories would yield arguments useful in the present context. No one reads Aristotle's natural scientific theory about the impact of climate on human cognitive capacities with an eye to its applicability in contemporary contexts. By contrast, the reconstructivist is appropriationist in the sense that she reads Aristotle's theory of natural slavery

with an eye to its viability in contemporary contexts. That this is a natural assumption in the history of philosophy becomes obvious if we compare articles on the history of science with articles on the history of philosophy. Whereas no one expects the author of an historical article on ancient astronomy to state her allegiance to the scientific truth that the Earth is round and moving around the sun, one would be rather perplexed if an historical article would simply present Aristotle's theory of natural slavery without disavowing those views (cf. Heath 2008. 2 fn. 4).

IV. A DEFENSE OF RECONSTRUCTIVISM

In this paper, I have presented alternative definitions of contextualism and reconstructivism relative to Mercer's. I have argued that the difference between contextualism and reconstructivism is based on their differing views concerning the question what the truth-maker of a philosophical interpretation is. Contextualism is predicated on the assumption that the truth-maker is the concrete particular, the utterance that has meaning from the actual and concrete context, which can include authorial intentions, normative practices of the given society or historically immanent perspectives on the text. From this assumption follows a historicist methodology, which aims at describing the actual meaning that historical figures took the utterance to have, and which is of purely historical interest. By contrast, reconstructivism is predicated on the assumption that the truth-maker is the abstract particular, the utterance that has meaning and inferential properties independent of the social and historical context. From this assumption follows a perennialist methodology, which aims at describing the possible meaning that the philosophical utterance can have, and which is of philosophical interest.

My alternative definition of reconstructivism embraces the labels of collegialism and appropriationism attributed to it by Mercer, but justifies them on methodological grounds. Reconstructivism is collegialist because it is perennialist: if philosophical problems and concepts are timeless, there is no reason to rule out the possibility that philosophers of faraway ages worked on the same problem. Of course, whether this is the case needs to be shown empirically, i.e., by showing that propositions about the same problems are those that make the most sense of the utterances of both philosophers. Reconstructivism is appropriationist for the same reason: if philosophical problems are not relative to the form of life lived by the author, but rather timeless, we should not rule out the possibility that historical authors can have interesting things to say about the problems with which we grapple, since our problems can very well be the same as their problems. Again, whether the past author has anything interesting to say about our

problems needs to be shown empirically. I conclude by considering two possible objections to my argument.

First, one might object that what I say is irrelevant to the ongoing debate, since my alternative definition concerns something else than what Mercer is talking about. Mercer aims at showing that the methodology that does not take into account the context in which the historical texts were written, is not tenable anymore. My reconstructivists are, however, not the same people against whom Mercer argues, since my reconstructivists take into account the context in which the historical text was written, they just assume that its meaning is timeless and not concrete.

Martin Lenz recounts in his blog post his experience at a conference, where Robert Brandom rejected the textual evidence presented by Markus Wild against Brandom's reading of Hume by simply stating that textual evidence does not matter (Lenz 2019). I agree that this is not good practice in the history of philosophy. What I deny is that rejecting this bad practice, which Mercer does for good reasons, ends the interesting methodological debates. Mercer's paper not only presents an argument against the kind of history of philosophy exemplified by Brandom's reaction, her paper argues that the methodological debate is over with this rejection. Contrary to this claim, I argue that after having rejected Mercer's reconstructivists there is still room for an interesting debate between my reconstructivists and contextualists.

That there is room for debate is illustrated by the exchange between Daniel Garber and Michael Della Rocca. Mercer used the example of this debate in order to argue that Garber and Della Rocca actually pursue the same contextualist methodology. On Mercer's view, since they both subscribe to Mercer's getting things right constraint and they both strive to present the authentic views of the author, they are both contextualists. I agree that they both want to get the authentic view of the author right. However, I argue that there is still a fundamental methodological disagreement between Della Rocca and Garber concerning the metaphysical status of the authentic view that they aim to get right. For Garber, the authentic view is the concrete particular, the utterance in its social and historical context. For Della Rocca, the authentic view is the abstract particular, the proposition with its timeless inferential properties.

This disagreement is most obvious when it comes to inconsistencies in Spinoza's philosophy. Garber castigates Della Rocca for not presenting what Spinoza actually meant, only what Spinoza could have meant and what would make sense of his utterances (Garber 2015. 520). Garber himself prefers to present Spinoza in the context of the historical contingencies shaping "the twists and turns, the ambiguities and inconsistencies" in his views (Garber 2015. 521). Della Rocca retorts that he meant to present Spinoza's authentic position even if Spinoza himself failed to completely appreciate the consequences of his own position (Della Rocca 2015. 527). Della Rocca aims at making Spinoza's position

intelligible, which requires that we assume that the claims Spinoza made are compatible (Della Rocca 2015. 534).

Whereas Mercer is perfectly right to note that both Garber and Della Rocca aim at presenting the authentic view of Spinoza, I argue that they disagree about the possibility of attributing inconsistencies to Spinoza because they disagree on what it is that they are looking for. Garber is happy to attribute inconsistent views to Spinoza, since what Garber intends to reconstruct is the philosophical utterance that has its meaning from the actual context of the utterance. If the historical author expressed inconsistent views, that is an interesting historical fact that needs to be explained with the help of actual causes – motivations, historical contingencies pulling the author to different directions. By contrast, Della Rocca intends to reconstruct the (set of) proposition(s) expressed by Spinoza's utterances. Propositions have inferential properties independently of the social and historical context. If the historical author makes utterances that express inconsistent propositions, this shows that the historical author failed to appreciate her own position.

Second, one might argue that my alternative definitions present a false dilemma, since actual historians of philosophy do not embrace either extreme position, rather pursue a mixed methodology. Such a mixed methodology would reject reconstructivism's unattractive assumption of timeless concepts and propositions while preserving its attractive claims that philosophical claims can be true outside their historical and social contexts and that historians are free to use contemporary concepts in interpreting past philosophical utterances. Such a position would aim at reconstructing the meaning of the past philosophical utterance from its actual historical context, but then it would not shy away from considering that meaning in the context of contemporary debates.

To this challenge, I reply that I agree that such a mixed methodology would be attractive, but I doubt that it is coherent. I have argued that the attractive methodological claims of reconstructivism follow from its theoretical assumptions about the perennial philosophical concepts and propositions expressed by philosophical utterances. Unless a philosophical utterance can get meaning from a source other than the actual historical context in which it was made, it is hard to see how it is possible to attribute meaning to a past philosophical utterance other than what historical figures took the utterance to mean. Unless the meaning of philosophical concepts transcends the social and historical context, philosophical claims using those concepts cannot be relevant in other social and historical contexts. If philosophical concepts represent the material inferential practices of societies, it is hard to see how philosophical problems originating in different forms of life could be relevant for us. If someone wishes to still pursue such a mixed methodology, the burden is on her to show its coherence.

REFERENCES

Aristotle. 1995. *Poetics*. Trans. Stephen Halliwell. Loeb Classic Library 199. Cambridge/MA, Harvard University Press.

Brandom, Robert B. 2019. *A Spirit of Trust: A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology*. Cambridge/MA, Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press.

Catana, Leo. 2013. Philosophical Problems in the History of Philosophy: What Are They? In Mogens Lærke – Justin E. H. Smith – Eric Schliesser (eds.) *Philosophy and Its History*. New York, Oxford University Press. 115–33.

Davidson, Donald. 1963. Actions, Reasons, and Causes. *Journal of Philosophy*. 60. 685–700. URL = https://doi.org/10.2307/2023177.

Della Rocca, Michael. 2015. Interpreting Spinoza: The Real Is the Rational. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 53(3). 523–535. URL = https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2015.0049.

Garber, Daniel. 2015. Superheroes in the History of Philosophy: Spinoza, Super-Rationalist. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 53/3. 507–521. URL = https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2015.0045.

Heath, Malcolm. 2008. Aristotle on Natural Slavery. *Phronesis*. 53(3). 243–270. URL = https://doi.org/10.1163/156852808x307070.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 1986. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Werke 3. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag.

Lærke, Mogens. 2013. The Anthropological Analogy and the Constitution of Historical Perspectivism. In Mogens Lærke – Justin E. H. Smith – Eric Schliesser (eds.) *Philosophy and Its History*. New York, Oxford University Press. 7–29.

Lærke, Mogens – Justin E. H. Smith – Eric Schliesser. 2013. Introduction. In Mogens Lærk – Justin E. H. Smith – Eric Schliesser (eds.) *Philosophy and Its History*. New York, Oxford University Press. 7–29.

Lenz, Martin. 2019. Why Is Early Modern Philosophy Such a Great Success? A Response to Christia Mercer. *Handling Ideas* (blog). August 2, 2019. Accessed: 01.03.2022. URL = https://handlingideas.blog/2019/08/02/why-is-early-modern-philosophy-such-a-great-success-a-response-to-christia-mercer/.

Lycan, William G. 2008. *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction, 2nd Edition*. 2nd edition. New York, Routledge.

Mercer, Christia. 2019. The Contextualist Revolution in Early Modern Philosophy. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 57/3. 529–548. URL = https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2019.0057.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. 2013. *Also sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen (1883–1885). Band 1 Also sprach Zarathustra*. Berlin – Boston, De Gruyter.

Ranke, Leopold von. 1885. *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1514*. Leipzig, Duncker & Humblot.

Schliesser, Eric. 2013. Philosophic Prophecy. In Mogens Lærke – Justin E. H. Smith – Eric Schliesser (eds.) *Philosophy and Its History*. New York, Oxford University Press. 209–236.

Skinner, Quentin. 1969. Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas. *History and Theory*. 8/1. 3–53. URL = https://doi.org/10.2307/2504188.

Smith, Justin E. H. 2013. The History of Philosophy as Past and as Process. In Mogens Lærke – Justin E. H. Smith – Eric Schliesser (eds.) *Philosophy and Its History*. New York, Oxford University Press. 30–49.

Vermeir, Koen. 2013. Philosophy and Genealogy: Ways of Writing History of Philosophy. In Mogens Lærke – Justin E. H. Smith – Eric Schliesser (eds.) *Philosophy and Its History*. New York, Oxford University Press. 50–70.

Waugh, Joanne – Roger Ariew. 2013. The Contingency of Philosophical Problems. In Mogens Lærke – Justin E. H. Smith – Eric Schliesser (eds.) *Philosophy and Its History*. New York, Oxford University Press. 91–114.

Andreas Blank

On Reconstructing Leibniz's Metaphysics

I. INTUITIONS AND THE QUESTION OF THE "TAMING OF PHILOSOPHY"

Leibniz is one of the early modern philosophers who lend themselves naturally to contextualizing approaches. One obvious reason is that he refers to literally hundreds of other thinkers; another, methodological, reason is that he adopts a conciliatory approach that tries to combine what is useful in different philosophical traditions while discarding what is less useful. Hence there is undoubtedly a strong need to trace the origins of the many philosophical views to which he responds and to clarify how he modifies and recombines them. Still, contrary to the suggestion that only contextualizing approaches to the history of philosophy can be justified (Garber 2003; Mercer 2019), a reconstructive approach to Leibniz's metaphysics may also have its merits. This is so for two reasons.

The first reason derives from the nature of the source materials that Leibniz has left us – mainly, a seaman's chest full of notes, drafts and letters; even the *Nouveaux Essais,* which looks like a book, is in fact nothing but a huge collection of reading notes on Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding.* To be sure, his philosophical theology has found an orderly exposition in the *Theodicy*. Also, Leibniz produced some brief outlines of his metaphysics, but these shorter writings leave the reader puzzled as to the reasons that Leibniz had for proposing his views. Reconstructing Leibniz's metaphysics need not mean inventing an imaginary Leibniz attributed with views that the historical Leibniz did not hold. Rather, in scattered notes, drafts and letters, Leibniz did give a lot of arguments – one at a time. What requires reconstruction is the question of how these single arguments add up to a large-scale argumentative structure that supports the metaphysics of simple substances and pre-established harmony. Things are further complicated by the fact that the substantive views on metaphysics in the early Leibniz are very different from those in the later Leibniz, which raises the question of whether there are any argumentative continuities that bridge these substantive differences. I think there are such continuities and that, surprisingly, they may contribute much to understanding why Leibniz developed his later metaphysics.

The second reason for taking a reconstructive approach derives from goal-directed considerations. Certainly, reconstructing the logical structure of Leib-

niz's metaphysics would be more rewarding if some insight concerning certain more recent philosophical concerns could thereby be gained. Such an expectation may sound futile when, as Justin Smith has done, the history of philosophy is compared to an archeological excavation, where it would be misguided to expect that a jar found scattered to pieces would hold water (Smith 2013. 41). But this comparison only offers an emblem for an antiquarian view of the nature of philosophical historiography. If an emblem for the reconstructive approach is sought, what comes to my mind is Kintsugi, the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold dust that makes the lines of fracture visible and thereby creates a functional vessel that is both old and new. In any case, I would like to defend the usefulness of taking a reconstructive approach to writing history of philosophy by addressing a problem that was recently diagnosed by Michael Della Rocca – a problem that he labelled "The Taming of Philosophy." The problem itself stems from developments in twentieth-century analytic philosophy, in particular the view that philosophy should, as much as possible, accommodate our everyday intuitions that are expressed in everyday language. There are three central concerns that Della Rocca voices: (1) The method of intuition is "too conservative: it doesn't allow for the radical changes in beliefs that are sometimes required by the aspect of reality that one is investigating" (Della Rocca 2013. 187). (2) In the method of intuition "one's focus is directly on our intuitions about the world, i.e., on bits of our psychology instead of on bits of extra-mental reality" (Della Rocca 2013. 191). (3) In the method of intuition, "when there is some kind of conflict between them, no one way of resolving the conflict is dictated" (Della Rocca 2013. 194).

Della Rocca offers his considerations explicitly in the context of the question of how writing the history of early modern philosophy should be done. For this reason, there is nothing forced in discussing Leibniz's metaphysics in connection with the problem of the "taming of philosophy." But it should be kept in mind that Della Rocca draws a *contrast* between a central trend in twentieth- and early twenty-first-century analytic philosophy and a divergent central trend in early modern philosophy. To be sure, Della Rocca takes the difference to be a matter of degree: "I acknowledge, one can find elements of the [method of intuition] in just about any historical philosopher" (Della Rocca 2013. 179). In particular, he notes that "Leibniz is more concerned than Spinoza is to preserve at least some ordinary beliefs and to show how his system enables us to preserve much of what we ordinarily want to say about the world" (Della Rocca 2013. 185). But this is compatible with Della Rocca's observation that "Leibniz arrives at shocking conclusions far from common sense" – an observation that he takes to imply that "Leibniz is little concerned with making intuitions, as such, focal points in his philosophy" (Della Rocca 2013. 185).

My response to Della Rocca's diagnosis is mixed. I agree that, by studying philosophers such as Leibniz, one could engage more seriously with reality than

by studying recent work on how intuitions can be used to evaluate philosophical theories. Also, I agree that there is an important sense in which Leibniz believes that our everyday ways of speaking can be preserved while at the same time overturning most of our everyday beliefs about the natural world. This sense derives from Leibniz's own distinction between the standpoint of the *système nouveau* – the theory of simple substances – and the standpoint of the *système commun* – the understanding of the world expressed in everyday language. (For detailed studies of this distinction, see Kaulbach 1973; Schüßler 1992.) Leibniz compared the idea of such a change of perspective with what happened in the emergence of Copernican astronomy: Just as talk about the rising of the sun retains its validity in everyday language after the Copernican turn, so too does the everyday view of the world retain its relative validity after the development of the theory of simple substances; just as the rising of the sun is reinterpreted from the standpoint of Copernican astronomy, so can the everyday view of the world be reinterpreted from the standpoint of the theory of simple substances. (*Discours de Métaphysique*, § 27; Leibniz, 1923– VI, 4, 1571–1572.) In fact, the propositions of the *système nouveau* seem to replace the everyday interpretation of the world with an entirely different one. For what could be further from the everyday understanding of the world than a universe constructed of simple substances: Of substances which have no extension and no parts, which can neither come into being nor pass away by natural means, which do not interact causally with other simple substances, but are active in the sense that all their changes result from an internal cause. This seems to be exactly opposite to an everyday view according to which extended objects are composed of parts and stand in relations of causal interaction and mutual dependence. We still can talk about one thing causing a change in another thing, but what really takes place are parallel chains of spontaneous changes in simple substances; we still can talk about the active and passive forces of material objects, but what underlies the phenomena that the natural sciences describe are really the primitive active and passive powers of simple substances; and so on. In this sense, preserving some of our everyday ways of speaking is compatible with overturning the everyday beliefs that these ways of speaking express.

In this sense, Della Rocca is certainly right that Leibniz's metaphysics is not primarily concerned with preserving intuitions. However, I would like to argue that one also could learn from Leibniz how intuitions could be used in a way that does not lead to the taming of philosophy. In what follows, I would like to ask where, in Leibniz's later metaphysics, there are considerations concerning our mental states that do not depend on the theory of simple substances and, therefore, can provide support for the theory. I think that such considerations occur in many places during Leibniz's later years. But their function may become clearer by pointing out some similarities between Leibniz's early and later writings. Of course, many of his metaphysical views have changed in between

(for reasons that will become clearer presently). But some of the arguments that support them already occur in his early years – and, since there is no such thing as a theory of simple substances in these years, these aspects of his thought must be independent of the theory of simple substances. If similar considerations occur later, they, too, can plausibly be taken to be independent of the perspective of the theory of simple substances. In spite of the substantial discontinuities in Leibniz's philosophical development, there remain some meta-philosophical continuities. These continuities derive from the use that Leibniz makes of our everyday understanding of and speaking about the structure of the mental activities and the essential qualities of material objects. These arguments bear significant similarities with some of the currently accepted view of what arguments from intuition consists in. Leibniz's analysis of the mind starts from the Cartesian view of intuition as intellectual perception – a view that shaped a part of the modern and contemporary debates about the nature and justificatory role of intuitions. (For a historical overview, see Chudnoff 2013. 3–6; for defences of this approach to intuitions, see Jackson and Pettit 1990; Chudnoff 2013, chapter 1.) Leibniz's analysis of matter starts from an analysis of the concepts that we use in describing the physical objects we encounter in everyday life – again, something that has a counterpart in contemporary debates about what is called "physical intuitions" (which turn out to be reliable with respect to the qualities of objects of ordinary size at moderate speed but highly unreliable with respect to the qualities of extremely small and extremely fast objects). (See Bealer 1998; Steiner 2000; Köhler 2003.) I will argue that the development of Leibniz's metaphysics shows that intuitions about mental experience are irreversible and infallible, whereas intuitions about the physical world are reversible and fallible. By showing this, I also argue for the use of reconstructivist methodology, since the argument I present cannot be developed using contextualist methodology.

II. INTUITIONS AND LEIBNIZ'S ANALYSIS OF MIND

Famously, Leibniz took up Descartes' view that we have an intellectual perception of our thought and existence. As Leibniz understands it, the proposition "I exist" is not proven by the proposition "I think;" rather, the proposition "I think" is identical with the proposition "I exist thinkingly" – which for him is one of the first factual truths based on immediate experience (*experience immediate*). (*Nouveaux essais*, IV 7 §§ 2–4; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 408.) With a view to knowing our own existence, Leibniz also speaks of an "immediate intuition" (*intuition immediate*). (Quelques Remarques sur le Livre de Mons. Lock, intitulé Essay of Understanding; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 8.) Much of what he says about the mind can be understood as an amplification of this approach. For instance, Leibniz points out that the experience that many differences are to be found in

our thoughts also belongs to the first truths that we perceive immediately within us (De synthesi et analysi universali; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 543). This truth, in turn, forms a source for the knowledge of the concept of change (Leibniz to de Volder, 10. November 1703; Leibniz 1875–1890, II, 258). The same use of intuitions can be found with a view to some other concepts central to Leibniz's later metaphysics – the concepts of a connection between perceptions, spontaneous activity, unity and representation. These concepts, too, derive from Leibniz's analysis of mental operations that are common to all humans and about which all humans have intuitions.

One strategy Leibniz uses to establish the existence of a real connection between perceptions is through the analysis of the relation between noticeable and unnoticeable perceptions. Evidently, the existence of unnoticeable perceptions can only be made plausible by pointing to the traces that these perceptions leave in the noticeable perceptions. As Leibniz argues, there must be perceptions which are not accompanied by attention, memory or reflection but nevertheless must exist either because they have noticeable effects or because we sometimes consciously note that we had them before. (*Discours de métaphysique*, § 33; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 1581–1583; Quelques remarques sur le livre de Mons. Lock intitulé Essay of Understanding; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 6–7; *Nouveaux essais*, préface; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 53–61; *Nouveaux essais*, II 1 § 15; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 116; *Monadologie*, § 23; Leibniz, 1875–1890, VI, 610.) As examples of such perceptions, Leibniz cites the uncounted impressions that enter into a particular sense perception without being able to be distinguished individually (as in the case of hearing the sound of the sea). (*Discours de métaphysique*, § 33; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 1582–1583.) Further evidence for the existence of *petites perceptions* is provided by the observation that some thoughts come back that we have forgotten we had. These need not always take the form of a conscious recollection, as in the example of the poet who, without noticing it, uses a phrase he once read. (*Nouveaux essais*, I 3 § 20; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 106–107.) Leibniz also mentions the observation that we grasp some things more easily because we have grasped them before, even though we have no conscious memory of this (*Nouveaux essais*, I 3 § 20; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 107). In addition, Leibniz points out that, in our dreams, thoughts can reappear that we had at an earlier time, independently of whether we remember that we had them before. As an example, Leibniz mentions that while Justus Julius Scaliger was working on an account of the famous personages of Verona, a grammarian named Brugnolus, unknown to him, appeared in a dream and complained that he had been forgotten in this account; only later did it turn out that this person had actually lived in Verona. Leibniz explicitly cites this in defense of the thesis that even perceptions of which we have no memory leave traces in later mental states (*Nouveaux essais*, I 3 § 20; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 107).

In his early writings, Leibniz describes the phenomena occurring in dreams providing evidence for "the wonderful connectedness of dreams" (Demonstrationum catholicarum conspectus; Leibniz 1923– VI 1, 494). He describes various aspects of how mental states are connected in dreaming:

> [I]t should be noted that the sleeping person at times becomes aware of the fact that she is asleep, and that she nevertheless continues to sleep. Here, we should consider the fact that someone wakes up for a very small interval of time and, once again asleep resumes the previous mental image. But it should also be noted that some human beings can wake up themselves, and this is very familiar to myself, such that when I am oppressed by some unwelcome image, I recall that I am asleep, and I try to open my eyes […]. it should also be considered leaps out of bed arise […] which occur to some people sometimes at the border between being awake and being asleep […]. When this happened to me once, I was unable to fall asleep again for the whole night. For as soon as I was about to fall asleep, I recollected myself and had a feeling of this and jumped up. (De vi persuadendi. De somnia et vigilia. 1669-summer 1670?; Leibniz 1923– VI 2, 276.)

The reflective awareness of the state of sleeping or of the situation of falling asleep indicates that, even in these situations, there is a connection between mental states – a connection between the reflective awareness and the state that is its intentional object. Leibniz also notes that dream images are related to previous experiences: "One thing is most admirable in dream, […] namely the formation of images, which happens by spontaneous concourse in a moment […] This example is well-known: 'hac sunt in fossa Bedae *Venerabilis* ossa', which a poetic monk substituted in a dream for the unsuitable word 'presbyteri.'" (De vi persuadendi. De somnia et vigilia; Leibniz 1923–; Leibniz 1923– VI 2, 277.) Replacing the generic characterization of Beda as a priest by the epithet by which he was to be remembered by posterity presupposes great familiarity with how such commemorative verses work. Hence, if such a replacement can take place while dreaming, this is the indication of the presence of complex active powers of the mind even during sleep. Leibniz argues that the connection between mental activities in dreaming implies that in the mind there is an internal principle of action (De vi persuadendi. De somnia et vigilia; Leibniz 1923–; Leibniz 1923– VI 2, 277). Moreover, his claims about the active nature of mind are seen as being implied by observations that are common to all human beings:

> I do not believe that there is anyone among the mortals who would not confess to me that while dreaming there occur spontaneously … elegant and artfully fabricated images … hence, necessarily there is something I know not what in our mind that is constructive [*architectans*] and harmonious, which as soon as it is liberated from disentangling ideas turns to joining them together. (De vi persuadendi. De somnia et vigilia; Leibniz 1923–; Leibniz 1923 VI, 2, 278.)

In this way, dreaming not only provides evidence for connections between mental states but also for the active powers of the mind. The notion of activity, of course, is another central concept in Leibniz's analysis of the mind. In the *Nouveaux Essais*, Leibniz agrees with Locke that the clearest idea of activity comes from our own minds. Philalèthe voices Locke's position:

> We find in ourselves the power to begin or not to begin, to continue or to terminate various activities of our soul and various movements of our body, and this simply by a thought or a resolution of our mind … This faculty is what we call will. (*Nouveaux essais*, II 21 § 5; Leibniz 1923–; VI, 6, 172–173; see Locke 1975, II, xxi, 5.)

Leibniz essentially agrees with this in the person of Theophile, and only draws attention to the fact that the same results can also follow from unconscious inclinations, which are better called "appetitions" rather than "volitions" (*Nouveaux essais*, II 21 § 5; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 172–173). Later, Theophile resumes Locke's strategy and argues for an active faculty of the mind by observing that we can set chains of thoughts in motion arbitrarily and stop those thoughts that come to us involuntarily. (*Nouveaux essais*, II 21 § 12; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 177; *Nouveaux essais*, II 21 §§ 17–19; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 180; Draft of the letter to de Volder 19. January 1706; Leibniz 1875–1890, II, 282, note.)

Again, this line of argument has parallels in Leibniz's early writings. For example, in *On the Analysis of Thoughts* Leibniz writes:

> *Willing* is thinking and tending towards that which it thinks, striving at something insofar as it represents the same.
> *Willing* is tending towards thinking.
> *To be tending* towards something is to be striving towards it in the highest degree. It should be known that one can strive towards different things, but that among several strivings something is selected towards which the thing tends …
> *To be striving* towards something is being determined insofar as being active …
> *Being determined* is to have all the requisites; viz. the absolute ones insofar as the thing has them.
> *To have the absolute ones insofar as having them;* is to have such requisites that, if their existence is supposed, they do not involve another ultimate subject. (De cogitationum analysi; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 2768–2769.)

Moreover, Leibniz claims that this view of the nature of volition only makes our everyday concept of wanting something explicit. This becomes clear in *Elements of True Piety*, where he explicates the concept of will as follows:

> The *will* is a belief about good and bad. That this is understood by human beings under the term 'will' is obvious from standard ways of speaking, in which, if the definition is substituted for the defined, the sense remains the same. Thus, we say that all people want the good and flee the bad, that No-one wants the bad for the sake of the bad. We want what we think good, and, conversely, what we think good, we want. But if someone rejects this notion of will, he gives it a meaning other than the one that humans are accustomed to, and probably he will not even be able to say what willing is. (Elementa verae pietatis, sive de amore Dei super omnia; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 1360–1361.)

Thus, the connection between belief and will is seen as something implicitly already contained in our everyday concepts and behavior.

A further line of argument leads from the analysis of thinking to the concept of spontaneous activity. Thinking is understood by Leibniz as "acting upon itself" (De affectibus (10. April 1679); Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 1411; Introductio ad Encyclopaediam arcanam (ca. 1683–1685); Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 530–531; Reflexio (1683–1685?), Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 1471). which is why he thinks that the phenomenon of thinking proves the existence of a "principle of a truly inner activity" (Leibniz to Bayle, Dezember 1702; Leibniz 1875–1890. III, 69.) One of the arguments that Leibniz gives for this claim is the consideration that "[t]hinking is nothing but the sense of comparing, or more briefly, the sense of many things at the same time, or of the one in the many" (De conatu et motu, sensu et cogitatione. spring-autumn 1671[?]; Leibniz 1923– VI, 2, 282–283). A possible explanation for the view that every thought involves comparison can be found in the consideration that "[i]t is necessary that in what can be thought there is a reason why it is perceived, that is, why it exists, and this is not in the thinking of a single thing, it is therefore in a multiplicity" (De conatu et motu, sensu et cogitatione; Leibniz 1923– VI, 2, 282). This passage suggests that a mental activity that represents only a single feature of the world would not carry within it an explanation of why sensation arises. The contrast between the notion of thinking of a single object and thinking of a multiplicity suggests that Leibniz is particularly concerned here with an explanation of the complexity of the content of our sensations. For this reason, sensations must arise through the processing of a multiplicity of mental activities that are not yet sensations themselves. Similarly, Leibniz argues, the pleasure or pain that accompanies sensations could not occur without our ability to compare impressions: "Whatever acts on itself, has some memory (for we *remember* when we sense that we have sensed); and consequently, the perception of harmony or disharmony or of pleasure or pain, through the comparison of an old and a new sensory impression" (Elements iuris naturalis, sixth MS [1671]; Leibniz 1923– VI, 1, 483). If no sensation occurs without a feeling of pleasure or pain, then the ability to compare impressions is a requisite for sensation: "two factors, action and reaction,

or the comparison and therefore *harmony*, are required for *sense*, and – without which there is no sense – for *pleasure* or *pain*" (*Theoria motus abstracti* [1671]; Leibniz 1923– VI, 2, 266). Moreover, retaining previous mental states in memory, comparing them, and experiencing them as pleasant or painful implies that sensation involves some higher-order mental operations – operations that have the "actions and passions of the mind" as their object (*Theoria motus abstracti*; Leibniz 1923– VI, 2, 266). In this sense, sensation involves a sense of the mind's own actions and passions. And it is this structure of reflexive mental operations that Leibniz has in mind when he maintains that thought presupposes an active capacity.

The notion of unity derives from Leibniz's analysis of a particular kind of mental activity: self-consciousness. This can be seen in his discussion of the distinction between personal and real identity. In a first version of *Nouveaux Essais* II 27 § 9 one finds the view that personal identity *consists in* self-consciousness (*Nouveaux essais*, II 27 § 9; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 236). In a second version of the same passage, Leibniz holds that self-consciousness *proves* personal identity (*Nouveaux essais*, II 27 § 9; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 236). As he argues, a person preserves his identity even if his memory has gaps or he loses consciousness. A certain degree of conscious connection between mental states is sufficient for the preservation of personal identity and can be supplemented by reports of other people as a further basis for personal identity (*Nouveaux essais*, II 27 § 9; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 236). Real identity, on the other hand, persists according to Leibniz even when consciousness and memory cease altogether (*Nouveaux essais*, II, 1, § 12; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 113–114). At the same time, Leibniz considers self-consciousness as evidence of real identity because, as he argues, "the identity that appears to the same person, who feels himself to be the same, presupposes real identity at each subsequent transition, together with reflection or the sentiment of the I: for an intimate and immediate perception naturally cannot deceive" (*Nouveaux essais*, II 27 § 9; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 236). In this passage, self-consciousness and consciousness of one's mental activities seem to be inseparable: The consciousness that has as its object certain mental activities is always accompanied by the consciousness that they are my mental activities; and the consciousness that they are my mental activities does not occur without the consciousness of those activities.

Leibniz uses the Aristotelian distinction between parts that are prior to a whole and parts that are posterior to a whole (*Nouveaux essais*, II 17 § 1; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 157). In the first case, parts can exist independently of the whole; in the second case, parts cannot exist independently of the whole (See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1036a12–26; *Metaphysics*, 1019a2–14). But how can the concept of a whole that is prior to its parts be applied to the human mind, given that there is a sequence of ever-changing mental states? Leibniz points out that "we do not act as a simple machine, but out of reflection, i.e., of action on ourselves" (De

unione animae et corporis. February 1676?; Leibniz 1923– VI, 3, 480; Leibniz, 1992. 37). And it is the perception of perceptions is what constitutes the *per se* existence of a mind (De origine rerum ex formis; Leibniz 1923– VI, 3, 518; Leibniz, 1992. 75). Leibniz puts the point also as follows:

> *To think* is being the reason of change, or to change itself. Also being the reason of itself. *To think* is indefinable, in the same way as *to sense*, or rather *to act*. And nevertheless, once assumed they are reflected in themselves. Because *we think*, we know that we are ourselves, because *we act*, [we know] that there is something else. (De conatu et motu, sensu et cogitatione; Leibniz 1923– VI, 2, 282–283.)

Leibniz here seems to take up the view that sensation, like thought and acting, essentially involves higher-order operations by means of which we are aware of our sensations, thoughts, and actions. But by being aware of our sensations, thoughts, and actions, we are at the same time aware of ourselves (and also of the beings that are presupposed in our actions). The relation between self-awareness and awareness of our sensations and thoughts exemplifies the connection relation since the relation of existential dependence here seems to go in both directions. On the one hand, self-awareness does not occur independently of the awareness of thought. In this sense, self-awareness depends on the awareness involved in thought. On the other hand, our awareness of sensations and thoughts also does not occur independently of self-awareness. If this is what Leibniz has in mind, the structure of thought involves two different kinds of higher-order mental operations – awareness of thought and self-awareness – that stand in the connection relation to each other: Awareness of thought cannot exist independently of self-awareness, and vice versa. If the reflexive structure of thinking is characterized by the relations of mutual existential dependence just described, it becomes clear in what sense the analysis of the structure of thinking leads to the insight that perceiving, thinking and acting, the consciousness of perceiving, thinking and acting, and self-consciousness form a unity in which the parts cannot exist independently of each other.

The analysis of sensation also provides content to the concept of representation or "expression". As Leibniz explains, "one things expresses another thing when there is a constant and regular correspondence between what can be said about one and what can be said the other" (Leibniz to Arnauld, 9. October 1687; Leibniz 1923– II, 2, 240). And he argues that "[o]ne cannot doubt the possibility of such a representation of several things in a single thing because our soul provides us an example of it" (Leibniz to Arnauld, 9. October 1687; Leibniz 1923– II, 2, 240, note 9). Likewise, Leibniz claims that we experience multiplicity in a unity by becoming aware that every perception comprises a multiplicity in its object (*Monadologie*, §16; Leibniz, 1875–1890. VI, 609). As he analyses it, this multiplicity involves both bodily states and aspects of the external world. As to

the former, Leibniz draws attention to the phenomenon that we have a confused perception of many processes in the body, which must be based on a multitude of *petites perceptions*, but which we cannot distinguish (Leibniz to Arnauld, 6. October 1687; Leibniz 1923– II, 2, 241). Similarly, Leibniz draws on the phenomena of well-being and indistinct discomfort or indistinct restlessness as evidence for the existence of *petites perceptions*, which have as their object indistinctly recognized bodily processes (*Nouveaux Essais*, II 20 § 6; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 164–166). Leibniz also elucidates his thesis that we always perceive our bodies in this way: "[N]othing happens in the body without the soul perceiving it, even if it only notices new impressions that stand out. But even new impressions in the body would not be immediately felt by the soul if it had not previously felt the usual ones." (Semper corpus nostrum percipimus. ca. 1683–1686; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4,1493.) In a note probably written around 1686, Leibniz points out that mental representation involves perception by means of the states of an organic body, and – in addition – the representation of the temporal position of past perceptions and perceptions anticipated in the future:

> The mind has the ability to connect together different states of the body, so that past and future exist together by its help, the past by a kind of reminiscence, the future by presentiment. And although it is true that a body, too, relates to its past and present states, there is, however, this difference: in a body there is nothing but a present state, even if it is an effect relating to a cause in the past and likewise, a cause relating to an effect in the future. But in the soul every state is represented per se, past as past, future as future, present as present: each state is not only expressed as a consequence, but is also represented. (Infiniti possunt gradus esse inter animas (ca. 1686); Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 1524–1525.)

The idea that the soul represents bodily states, thus, leads to the thesis that the soul represents aspects of the external world – namely, those that are represented by bodily states. This is how Leibniz, long before formulating the theory of simple substances, came to the view that the human soul represents the universe from the perspective of the organic body that it animates.

III. INTUITION AND LEIBNIZ'S ANALYSIS OF THE PHYSICAL WORLD

Evidently, the intuitions about the structure of mental activities that Leibniz considers do not suffice to argue for the much stronger claims of the theory of simple substances – the claim that a simple substance possesses absolute spontaneity in the sense that it actively produces *all* of its states, the claim that the present state of a simple substance represents *all* of its past and future states, as well as *all* of the past, present and future states of all other simples substances,

and that material objects are nothing but appearances of collections of such simple substances. Even if these considerations provide a conceptual framework that is needed to formulate the theory of simple substances, much further argument is needed. Arguably, it is Leibniz's analysis of everyday concepts concerning material objects that led him to the insight that these concepts have to undergo profound revision. Here, I will focus on two strands of thought, the first starting from the analysis of extension and resistance, the second starting from the analysis of force.

As to the former line of argument, the early Leibniz offers an analysis of the distinction between body and space that is grounded in our immediately accessible thought about these:

> What men call a *body* must be investigated carefully, for a clear and distinct idea of this gives us access to demonstrations. First of all, men agree that only what is thought of as extended can be called a body […] Men call *space* something which they think is extended but nothing else, unless it be immutable […] However, *space and body* are distinct. For we perceive that we think of space as the same when bodies change, and what we perceive ourselves to be thinking or not thinking we perceive truly. The perception of thought is immediate to the thought itself in the same subject, and so there is no cause of error. Therefore, it is true that we think of space remaining the same when bodies change and that we can think of space without a body which is in it. Now two things are diverse if one can be thought of without the other. Therefore, space and body are diverse. (Specimen demonstrationum de natura rerum corprearum ex phaenomenis. second half of 1671?; Leibniz 1923– VI *2*, 304–305; Leibniz 1969. 143.)

As Leibniz explains, this argument "rests on these two propositions: [1] whatever is perceived clearly and distinctly is possible, and [2] whatever is immediately sensed is true, or whatever the mind perceives within itself, it perceives truly." (Specimen demonstrationum; Leibniz 1923– VI, *2*, 306, Leibniz 1969. 144.) The first premise guarantees that, if the concepts that we experience to have are clear and distinct, then "it is possible for space to remain the same when a body changes" (Specimen demonstrationum; Leibniz 1923– VI, *2*, 306, Leibniz 1969. 144). The second premise guarantees that if we perceive that we can think one concept without thinking the other concept, then we have a veridical experience concerning the concepts that we have.

Discussing the criteria by which we distinguish between bodies and non-bodies, Leibniz maintains that these criteria are mass or *antitypia* – the observable tendency of material objects to resist other material objects – together with extension. Again, he takes this to be the implication of commonly shared views:

> Everyone calls body what possesses some sensible quality; yet, most of the sensible qualities can be subtracted from a body, while it still remains a body. For even if a

> body lacks all color, smell and taste, it is still called a body. Everyone concedes that, for instance, air is a body, even if it is perspicuous and often lacks color, smell and taste; likewise, air is a body, even when it lacks sound. Hence, visible, audible, tactile and olfactory qualities are rejected as being in the least constitutive of the nature of body […] [F]irst qualities – heat, humidity, dryness and coldness – can each be absent […] The other sensible qualities – for instance, smoothness, lightness, tenacity, etc. – are even commonly recognized not to be constitutive of the nature of a body, because they […] arise from other qualities that rather are constitutive […] It remains to indicate a sensible quality that can be attributed to all bodies and only to bodies […]. And this is hardness or *antitypia* together with extension. For whatever humans just sense to be extended or what they just see […], they do not immediately call a body, for they think that sometimes it is a mere image and *phantasma*. But what they not only see but touch, that is, in what they find *antitypia*, this is what they call body, while what lacks *antitypia*, they deny that it is a body. In two things both experts and laymen locate the nature of body, in extension and *antitypia* taken together. (*Marii Nizolii de veris principiis et vera ratione philosophandi libri IV*. 1670; Leibniz 1923– VI, 2, 442–43.)

According to this line of reasoning, essential properties of bodies are only those properties that are always found in bodies. But if we go through the vast majority of the sensible qualities of bodies, it becomes evident that most of them are absent in some bodies and that most of them involve an effect that the qualities of bodies have on sensory organs. This is why we are left with extension together with the property of resistance to touch.

Evidently, claiming that we have immediate insight into clear and distinct concepts raises exactly the question that Della Rocca has asked: How can we be sure that such insight is not restricted to facts about our psychology? Leibniz soon came to the view that the concepts of extension and *antitypia* cannot be sufficient to understand the natural world. Rather, he held that there must be immaterial beings inherent in material objects as well – not only souls inherent in human bodies but immaterial substances in material objects everywhere in nature. Still, his commitment to immaterial beings in nature is motivated by theoretical troubles that arose from the insight that extension and *antitypia* are purely passive qualities.

In a text written around 1680, Leibniz argues that because self-consciousness is part of all normal processes of thinking and perceiving, and as an activity directed toward itself has an active character, the normal processes of thinking and perceiving themselves have an active character that cannot be explained by the passive features of size, figure, and motion (Ars Lulliana Ivonis; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 1092–1093). He also contrasts the active character of self-consciousness with the passivity of matter in a fragment written between 1683 and 1686: "Self-consciousness: an object that can act upon itself seems essentially different from one that cannot. […] [F]rom the concept of extension the property of

acting upon itself cannot be derived." (Reflexio; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 1471.) In other words, the concept of matter characterized solely by passive features, as given by our intuitions about material objects, cannot explain the active features of the soul, as given by our intuitions about the mind. Likewise, the unity characteristic of thought cannot be explained by the qualities of matter since "*an extended thing* [*extensum*] is a continuum whose parts coexist […]" (Enumeratio terminorum simpliciorum. summer 1680–winter 1684/85?; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 391.) As Leibniz explains: "*A continuum* is a whole whose parts can be assumed indefinitely and *have a position* with respect to each other. In this it differs from a unity as well as from an intensive whole, such as potency and heat." (Enumeratio terminorum simpliciorum; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 390.) Due to the difference in their position, the parts of a material object can be understood independently of one another and do not depend for their existence on other parts. In other words, due to their extension, material objects do not possess unity. Leibniz contrasts material aggregates that lack a principle of unity with the experience of perceiving and willing that spells out a sense in which human beings possess unity (Notationes Generales. ca. 1683–85; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 555–556). According to this line of thought, the self-directed activity and the unity characteristic of the mind, contrasted with the passive essential qualities of bodies, show why the mind cannot be a material entity; hence, human beings have to be understood as composite substances constituted by mind and body.

A theory of composite substances may go beyond widely shared everyday beliefs concerning human nature; but the step that overturns everyday beliefs about the nature of inanimate material objects is the step that leads Leibniz to the view that all material objects that have mind-independent reality must have an analogous structure. Already in texts from the early 1680s Leibniz is formulating the fundamental alternative between two mutually incompatible theoretical options – the alternative between the assumption of the existence of the material world and an extreme phenomenalism, according to which material objects are nothing else than mental images of the imagination (Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 307. ca. 1681–86. For a detailed study of this alternative, see Robinet 1986). He is clear that there is no possibility of refuting extreme phenomenalism: "it is utterly impossible to give us certainty about the existence of bodies, or ever to prove by philosophical arguments whether bodies are appearances or substances […] In no way can it be proved by natural reason whether there are divisible or corporeal substances." (Distinctio mentis et corporis. ca. 1677–78; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 1368–1369.) Leibniz's argument for the existence of immaterial substances everywhere in nature therefore is conditional: "I want to show that all bodies in which there is no soul or substantial form are mere appearances, similar to dreams […]" (Notationes generales [ca. 1683–86]; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 555). According to this line of reasoning, *if* we assume that material objects are real, then they have to be individuated by immaterial substances. This shows

that the intermediate step about the existence of composite substances is a necessary condition for the justification of the existence of simple substances. In fact, Leibniz regards the assumption of the reality of matter as equivalent to the assumption that there are composite substances:

> Out of several parts no being that is truly one is composed, and every substance is indivisible, and what has parts is not a being but only a phenomenon. Therefore, the ancient philosophers rightly attributed to those things, about which they said that they constitute an *unum per se*, substantial forms, such as minds, souls or first entelechies, and denied that matter is by itself one being. (Definitiones notionum metaphysicarum atque logicarum; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 627–628.)

In the *Discours de Métaphysique*, Leibniz takes up the argument that properties that have something in them that relates to the perceptions of a cognizing subject, such as size, shape, motion, or the sensually perceptible properties such as color or heat, cannot alone constitute a substance (*Discours de métaphysique*, § 12; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 1545). Leibniz argues that, taken by themselves, material objects are mere aggregates of parts that can be combined in any way to form composites: The individuation of aggregates depends on perception or understanding in such a way that aggregates possess unity only in the mind. (Leibniz to Arnauld, 30. April 1687; Leibniz 1875–1890. II, 97; Leibniz to de Volder, 20. June 1703; Leibniz 1875–1890. II, 250; *Nouveaux essais*, II 24 §1; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 226; Entretien de Philarete et d'Ariste; Leibniz 1875–1890.VI, 586.) Leibniz draws the conclusion that if there were no other principle of identity in the body – namely, a soul or an immaterial substantial form – bodies would have no identity lasting beyond the moment. (*Discours de métaphysique*, § 12; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 1545.) And this amounts to a significant revision of our everyday world view: If the material world is real at all, then there have to be composite substances constituted by matter and an immaterial principle of individuation.

The line of argument that leads Leibniz from the concept of force to the existence of immaterial substances everywhere in nature has a closely analogous structure. The properties that our common notions ascribe to matter are not only insufficient to explain the active properties of mind, they are also insufficient to explain the active properties of matter. This holds especially for the concept of *vis viva* that Leibniz had developed in *De corporum concursu* (1678). (For detailed analysis, see Fichant 1993.) Leibniz starts from the principle that forces are measured according to the effects they produce (Leibniz 1994. 71; Conspectus libelli elementorum Physicae; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 1988). This implies that the concept of force is not only a mathematical quantity, but that forces are at the same time understood as causes of certain effects. This leads Leibniz to the thesis that through the concept of force a *virtus agendi* is attributed to matter: "It follows that bodies are usually moved by themselves after they have once received an impulse

[…]" (Leibniz 1994. 134). One year after he had developed this argument, Leibniz claims to have proven the existence of substantial forms (Leibniz to Duke Johann-Friedrich of Brunswick-Lüneburg. 1679; A I, 2, 225). In a fragment from the time around 1679 Leibniz explicitly establishes a connection between his conception of matter, which had changed due to the concept of force, and the assumption of the existence of substantial forms: "Things occur in the body that cannot be explained by the necessities of matter; these include the laws of motion, which depend on the metaphysical principle of equality of cause and effect. One must therefore write about the soul and show that all things are animate." (Conspectus libelli elementorum Physicae. ca. 1679–80; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 1988.) Assuming that matter has only passive features, the active features of natural phenomena cannot be explained by the nature of matter. Therefore, the explanation of the active features of natural phenomena presupposes the existence of immaterial substances whose activities underlie the active features of the material world. The metaphysical implications of the concept of *vis viva* become particularly clear in the explanations of *Brevis Demonstratio* (1686), in which Leibniz had publicly advocated his new concept of force for the first time:

> I would like to add a remark of importance for metaphysics. I have shown that force is not measured by the product of velocity and mass, but by the future effect. Nevertheless, it seems that force or potency is something real from the present, and the future effect is not. From this it follows that one must recognize in bodies something different from mass and velocity, unless one wanted to deny bodies any active power. (Leibniz to Bayle. 1687; Leibniz 1875–1890. III, 48.)

Since physical forces are something changeable, Leibniz argues, they must have come into being through modification of something constant (Leibniz 1875–1890. IV, 397). However, they cannot be modifications of extended mass, because the latter possesses only passive characteristics (Leibniz to Sophie Charlotte. 1702; Leibniz 1875–1890. VI, 506). Active properties cannot be modifications of something purely passive, because modifications entail a limitation rather than an extension (Leibniz to Johann Bernouilli. 1698; Leibniz 1849–1863. III, 552). Forces must therefore be considered as modifications of something immaterial and active, and since forces are everywhere in nature, such immaterial and active beings must be everywhere, as well. (Leibniz 1875–1890. IV, 397; *Système nouveau*, first draft; Leibniz 1875–1890. IV, 472; Leibniz to Sophie Charlotte [1702]; Leibniz 1875–1890. VI, 506; *De ipsa natura*; Leibniz 1875–1890. IV, 511; Leibniz 1875–1890. VII, 330.)

Similar to the consideration that material objects with purely passive qualities do not have a principle of individuation in them, the consideration that the physical forces observable in material objects cannot be explained by passive qualities leads to a theory of composite substances. The theory of composite

substances is only one argumentative step away from the theory of simple substances. This is so because both the argument from the conditions of individuation and the argument from the conditions of physical forces can be applied to any part of the material constituent of a composite substance. The concept of extension implies that, due to the divisibility of extension, these parts can be considered independently from other parts. If so, the questions of the origin of individuation and the origin of physical forces can be asked with respect to each of these parts. And each of these parts can be regarded to be real unities and to be bearers of forces of their own only if they are conjoined with yet another immaterial substance. (Remarques sur les objections de M. Foucher. 1686; Leibniz 1875–1890. IV, 492; Addition à l'explication du système nouveau. 1695; Leibniz 1875–1890. IV, 572.) And so on, *ad infinitum*. This is the core of Leibniz's conception of an infinity of composite substances contained in the bodily constituent of each composite substance (for detailed analysis, see Nachtomy 2007, chapter 9). This is how the arguments from the concept of force and the passivity of matter to the existence of immaterial substances lead to the conclusion that active and immaterial substances occur everywhere in nature.

And this is the central hypothesis of the theory of simple substances. These immaterial substances are not souls (because nothing speaks in favor of ascribing sensation, consciousness and reflection to them; for detailed analysis, see Blank 2000); but their structure is analogous to minds in the sense that they, too, instantiate identity, unity, activity, and representation. Indeed, Leibniz analyses primitive active powers that underlie physical forces as the tendency of immaterial substances to increase in the clarity and distinctness of their perceptions (and analogously, primitive passive powers that explain the passive properties of material objects as the tendency of immaterial substances to decrease clarity and distinctness of their perceptions; for detailed analysis, see Blank 2003, section 3). Spelling out the details of his view concerning the relation between primary and secondary forces, of course, is a fiendishly difficult task. What matters for the present purposes is that with these interpretive questions we are already deep into his metaphysics of simple substances that replaces our everyday worldview. And this means that a short chain of argumentative steps leads Leibniz from analyzing some everyday intuitions concerning the essential properties of matter to an entirely innovative account of the fundamental structure of reality.

IV. RECONSIDERING THE QUESTION OF THE "TAMING OF PHILOSOPHY"

The interpretation of Leibniz's metaphysics that I have outlined is reconstructive in two senses: (1) It integrates arguments that the historical Leibniz actually formulated into a large-scale argumentative structure that is not found in any of his writings; (2) it uses argumentative similarities between early and

later writings to make the idea plausible that the arguments found in the later writings work independently of their immediate context – the theory of simple substances. This reconstructive approach is meant to show that the analysis of everyday conceptions of mind and body is relevant for the argumentative foundations of Leibniz's later metaphysics *because* it is relevant for the argumentative foundations of his early metaphysics. But even if the starting points of Leibniz's argumentative strategy remain constant, the conclusions that he draws from them change significantly. In this sense, at the end of a long chain of reasoning that starts with the analysis of everyday intuitions concerning the structure of mental activities and the essential qualities of bodies, there emerge metaphysical views that are as untamed as one can hope for. Some of the intuitions from which Leibniz started – those that concern the nature of bodies – get thrown overboard, but the intuitions concerning the nature of the mind are still needed to formulate an alternative view of nature.

Leibniz's use of intuitions suggests illuminating answers to Della Rocca's concerns about the method of intuition. This is so because Leibniz's goal is not to preserve as many of our intuitions as possible and equally does not take all intuitions to be revisable in principle. In his view, some intuitions are non-revisable – which is why his description of the structure of thought remains fairly constant across his philosophical development. The non-revisable nature of intuitions about our minds derives from Leibniz's view that we know our thinking through an inner perception *(sentiment intérieur)*, through which our thinking becomes the object of experience (Leibniz to Arnauld, 9. October 1687; Leibniz 1923– II, 2, 252). From a simple perception *(simplex perceptio sive experientia)*, one judges that of which one is conscious in oneself: For example, that I think various things, that various appearances exist in the mind, that I have a certain sense perception, that I dream, or that I who dream exist (De modo distinguendi phaenomena realia ab imaginariis; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 1502). Inner perception is thus modeled along the lines of Cartesian intellectual perception – that is, according to one of the lines of understanding the nature of intuitions still influential today (*Nouveaux essais*, IV 7 §§ 2–4; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 408). Accordingly, Leibniz understands first experiences *(premieres experiences)* to be the first factual truths to which the "immediate apperception of our existence and our thoughts" leads (*Nouveaux essais*, IV 9 §§ 2–3; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 434). And it is the immediacy between this insight and its object that makes such experiences certain:

> There are only two kinds of propositions which are impossible to prove: the former are those whose opposite implies a contradiction […] The latter are those which consist in an inner experience which cannot be further corrected by circumstantial evidence or testimony, because it is immediately present to me and there is nothing between it and me, as these propositions are: I am, I perceive, I think, I want this or that. (*Conversation du Marquis de Pianese et du Pere Emery Eremite*; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 2261.)

Leibniz argues that *reflexion* or *sens interne* "is not limited to the activities of the mind alone, but penetrates to the mind itself" (Echantillon de Reflexions sur le II. livre; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 14). According to Leibniz the method of reflection cannot deceive, because consciousness, which accompanies inner activity, cannot deceive naturally. If these inner experiences were not certain, there would be, according to Leibniz, no truths of fact of which we could be certain (*Nouveaux essais*, II 27 § 13; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 238–239). The cognition of our inner states is immediate and requires no further proof: The activities of the mind are cognized from simple perceptions, and their cognition, unlike the cognition of empirical phenomena, requires no proof of their reality (De modo distinguendi phaenomena realia ab imaginariis; Leibniz 1923– VI, 4, 1502). A role in this is played by the view that although memory can always deceive over a certain temporal distance, the memory of what has immediately preceded does not deceive by natural means; and, as we have seen, Leibniz interprets consciousness as such an immediate memory of mental activities (*Nouveaux essais*, II 27 § 13; Leibniz 1923– VI, 6, 238–239). For this reason, he maintains that the knowledge of our own mind coincides with the knowledge of the nature of things (*Nouveaux essais*, I 1 § 21; Leibniz 1923 – VI, 6, 84). Leibniz says that we immediately become aware of substance and mind by becoming aware of ourselves (Remarques sur le Livre de l'origine du mal; Leibniz 1875–1890. VI, 403). Similarly, he says that the truths of metaphysics depend on the "consideration of the nature of our soul," which is a being and a substance possessing unity, identity, activity, passivity, and duration, activity, passivity, and duration (Leibniz to Burnett, 26. May 1706; Leibniz 1875–1890. III, 307). According to Leibniz, without the inner experience of ourselves, we would have no knowledge of the concept of substance (Leibniz 1948. 558). The same holds for other central metaphysical concepts:

> Extension is a state, thinking is an action […] Everything that thinks, thinks something. The simplest thing is that which thinks that it thinks itself […]. We perceive many things in our mind, such as thinking or perceiving, perceiving oneself, perceiving oneself to be the same, perceiving pleasure and pain […]. The idea of existence and of identity does not come from the body, nor does that of unity. (Leibniz 1923– VI, 3, 518, Leibniz 1992. 75–77.)

This offers an answer Della Rocca's charge that the method of intuition is invariably disconnected from insight into reality. Intuitions about our mental lives capture an aspect of reality – the basic properties of our mind. Thereby, we get insight into some basic metaphysical notions such as identity in the sense of a connectedness between the contents of our mental states at different times, activity in the sense of the ability of changing our own mental states voluntarily. Taken together, these intuitions provide Leibniz with a notion of substantiality. In this sense, intuitions are what guarantees the intelligibility of the concept of substance, and

it provides some examples of substances. Saying that minds are substances thus gives an insight into an aspect of reality – not the whole of it, but only once one has an intelligible concept of substance and some entities that plausibly fall under it does it make sense to ask whether there are further substances in the world.

In turn, this answers Della Rocca's concern that the method of intuition cannot guide us in deciding which intuitions should be given up in order to save other intuitions. In Leibniz's view, there is no question whether these concepts rather than the concepts grounded in inner experience should be thrown overboard – while inner experiences convey certainty, nothing corresponding could be said about our everyday concepts concerning the physical world. Rather, he assigns to intuitions about our mental lives a privileged status as insights that possess certainty and that are constitutive of the meaning of basic metaphysical concepts. By contrast, intuitions about material objects soon lead to explanatory gaps concerning individuation and force, which can be filled only by forming the hypothesis that material objects are mere appearances of underlying simple substances that share some structural features with minds.

This certainly is an instance of "untamed" philosophy. If so, then grounding philosophical concepts in inner experience may not be an obstacle to philosophical innovation but rather enables it. Leibniz's hypothesis that all material objects are appearances of collections of simple, immaterial substances could not be formed without having inner experience of our mental operations that allows us to form the basic concepts needed to formulate the theory of simple substances (such as identity, unity, activity and representation). In this sense, internal experience is the foundation of forming hypotheses about the physical world, even if the simple substances that underlie the well-founded phenomena of the physical world themselves cannot be the object of inner experience and do not share the powers of sensation and reflection. This answers Della Rocca's concerns about philosophical conservatism and adds to answering his concerns about engagement with reality. Assigning to intuitions a crucial function in the formation of metaphysical concepts is compatible with a non-conservative attitude toward thinking about extra-mental reality. Relying on intuitions concerning mental operations thus is not a veil that separates us from reality but rather the enabling condition for thinking about the structure of reality.

REFERENCES

Bealer, George 1998. Intuition and the Autonomy of Philosophy. In Michael Rymond DePaul and William M. Ramsey (eds.) *Rethinking Intuition: The Psychology of Intuition and Its Role in Philosophical Inquiry*. Lanham/MD, Rowman and Littlefield. 201–240.

Blank, Andreas 2000. Leibniz und die panpsychistische Deutung der Theorie der einfachen Substanzen. *Studia Leibnitiana*. 32. 117–125.

Blank, Andreas. 2003. "Incomplete Entities, Natural Non-Separability, and Leibniz's Response to Francois Lamy's *De la connoissance de soi-même*." *Leibniz Review*. 13. 1–17.

Chudnoff, Elijah 2013. *Intuition*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Della Rocca, Michael 2013. The Taming of Philosophy. In Mogens Laerke, Justin Smith, and Eric Schliesser (eds.) *Philosophy and Its History. Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy*. Oxford, Oxford University Press. 178–208.

Fichant, Michel 1993. Mechanisme et métaphysique: Le rétablissement des formes subtantielles (1679). *Philosophie*. 39. 27–59.

Garber, Daniel 2003. Towards an Antiquarian History of Philosophy. *Rivista di storia della filosofia*. 58, 207–17.

Jackson, Frank – Philip Pettit 1990. In Defence of Folk Psychology. *Philosophical Studies*. 59. 31–54.

Kaulbach, Friedrich 1973. Das Copernicanische Prinzip und die philosophische Sprache bei Leibniz. *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 27. 333–347.

Köhler, Eckehart 2003. Physical Intution as Inductive Support. *Vienna Circle Institute Yearbook*. 11., 151–167.

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm 1849–1863. *Mathematische Schriften* (Carl I. Gerhardt, ed.). 7 Bde. Berlin–Halle, Schmidt.

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm 1875–1890. *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz* (Carl I. Gerhardt, ed.). 7 vols.. Berlin, Weidemann.

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm 1923. *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe,* Darmstadt–Berlin–Leipzig.

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm 1948. *Textes inédits d'après les manuscrits de la Bibliothèque provinciale de Hanovre* (Gaston Grua, ed.). Paris, Vrin.

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm 1969. *Philosophical Papers and Letters* (Leroy E. Loemker, trans.). 2nd ed., Dordrecht, Reidel.

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm 1992. *De Summa Rerum. Metaphysical Papers, 1675–1676* (G. H. R. Parkinson, ed. and trans.). New Haven, Yale University Press.

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm 1994. *La réforme de la dynamique. De corporum concursu (1678) et autres textes inédits* (Michel Fichant, ed.). Paris, Vrin.

Locke, John 1975. *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (P. H. Nidditch, ed.). Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Mercer, Christia. 2019. The Contextualist Revolution in Early Modern Philosophy. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 57. 529–48.

Nachtomy, Ohad 2007. *Possibility, Agency and Individuality in Leibniz's Metaphysics*, Dordrecht: Springer.

Robinet, André 1986. *Architectonique disjonctive, automates systémiques et idéalité transcendentale dans l'oeuvre de G. W. Leibniz*. Paris, Vrin.

Schüßler, Werner 1992. *Leibniz' Auffassung des menschlichen Verstandes (intellectus). Eine Untersuchung zum Standpunktwechsel zwischen "système commun" und "système nouveau" und dem Versuch ihrer Vermittlung*. Berlin and New York, De Gruyter.

Smith, Justin 2013. The History of Philosophy as Past and as Process. In Mogens Laerke, Justin Smith, and Eric Schliesser (eds.) *Philosophy and Its History. Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy*. Oxford, Oxford University Press. 30–49.

Steiner, Mark 2000. Mathematical Intuition and Physical Intuition in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy. *Synthese*. 125. 333–340.

Judit Szalai

Transparency and Broad Content in Descartes*

I. Introduction: Is Descartes' account of self-knowledge incoherent?

If there is a single philosopher we tend to associate with the idea of the transparency of the mind, it is Descartes.[1] He has a reputation for holding, indeed inventing the thesis that the subject is fully and directly aware of her own mental states. However, Descartes also wrote passages that seem to flatly contradict the transparency claim. Some recent commentaries have attempted to eliminate the impression that this constitutes inconsistency on Descartes' part, by distinguishing between different types and degrees of consciousness, explicit and implicit judgments, and dispositional and occurrent states.[2] It seems evident by now that for Descartes not all of the subject's mental states are accessible to them at all times. Infants cannot form ideas of their own mental states: they lack reflective consciousness (Hatfield 2011. 366–367; Simmons 2012. 11). (At the same time, they do have 'brute' or 'bare' consciousness.) Properties of dispositional ideas, including innate ones such as the idea of God, can be hidden from the less than careful mental gaze (Rozemond 2006. 58; Simmons 2012. 11–12). Implicit (non-conscious) judgments assessing distance are made while perceiving objects or making habitual movements (Hatfield 2011. 365). Realizing all this has been an important step in the direction of understanding the possibility of self-ignorance in Descartes.[3] Some puzzles remain, nevertheless. Keeping all the above distinctions in mind and putting to one side those cases where mental states are not fully known by the subject due to the mechanism of access, Descartes still seems to leave room for error in our self-judgments. However closely

* I would like to thank Lilli Alanen, Michael V. Griffin, and Dániel Schmal for their thoughtful comments.

[1] See, e.g., Jorgensen 2014; Chalmers 1996; Carruthers 2008.

[2] The problematic character of Cartesian transparency was already noted by Wilson 1978. 138 and Radner 1988. More recent discussions are Alanen 2003; Carriero 2009; Hatfield 2011; Simmons 2012. (For details of these views, see below.) Alison Simmons' article is especially pertinent, aiming as it does to provide a nearly complete account of the issues raised and solutions put forward.

[3] 'Self-knowledge', in line with standard usage in contemporary theory of mind, is understood here in the sense of knowledge of one's mental states; 'self-ignorance' is lack thereof.

and reflectively we attend to our conscious, occurrent states, for Descartes, we may still get them wrong.

The claim I will argue for in this paper is that there is a whole other dimension to the transparency problem in Descartes, over and above lack of self-knowledge due to the difficulties of access. In Cartesian terminology, we may regard ideas as referring to something outside the mind, rather than merely as thoughts. In our contemporary terminology, mental contents may be understood in a broad rather than a narrow way, in which case we may be mistaken about our pains, emotions, and nearly all thoughts [*cogitationes*].

The possibility of such errors of self-knowledge tends to be obscured by our conviction that Descartes was 'the arch internalist' or 'a paradigmatic internalist about mental content', i.e., whose conception of content disregards the relation of the subject's states to her environment.[4] As I will show, however, there is a clearly externalist thread in the Cartesian understanding of ideas. The distinction between narrow and broad content is present in Descartes, in what I call the *narrow content rule*. This is an injunction to view ideas merely as contents of the mind rather than in their relation to the world. Failing to observe this rule opens the door to lack of transparency of a kind different from the inaccessibility of mental content. When we explore this source of imperfect self-knowledge, as I propose to do, cases of opacity of mental content so far unaccounted for, as well as certain aspects of Descartes' account of innate ideas, receive an explanation.

The structure of the paper is as follows. First, I lay out the textual evidence for and against attributing the transparency thesis to Descartes. Next, relying on recent literature, I look at the factors that can reasonably be taken to constrain transparency. As other commentators have argued, Descartes' descriptions of certain mental processes make it plausible, even necessary, to understand his statements about transparency in a somewhat weaker manner. Having shown that taking Descartes' statements less strictly fails to dissolve all tensions, I will expound what I take to be missing from a full account of the possibility of self-ignorance in Descartes: recognizing and reckoning with the distinction between narrow and broad content, clearly made, although not labeled, by Descartes himself in his writings. On the basis of Descartes' – yet unexplored – externalism, we can make sense of the more stubborn cases of a lack of transparency.

[4] Gertler 2011. 32; Lau and Deutsch 2014. Descartes has also been thought to adopt internalism with regard to *justification*, viz. that truth and falsity are answerable only to the subject's *internal* standard of clarity and distinctness. The Arnauld circle has caused some doubt regarding this; see, e.g., Della Rocca 2005.

I. THE PROBLEM OF TRANSPARENCY IN DESCARTES

Let us look at the textual evidence on both sides: claims to the effect that the Cartesian mind is transparent to itself and statements suggesting the necessary imperfection of self-knowledge.[5] I will first mention those passages which motivate the ascription of the transparency thesis to Descartes. One of these famously offers inner awareness as the very mark of thought:

> (i) Thought [*cogitatio*]. I use this term to include everything that is within us in such a way that we are immediately conscious of it [*immediate conscii simus*]. Thus all the operations of the will, the intellect, the imagination and the senses are thoughts. (Second Set of Replies to the Objections to the *Meditations*: AT vii. 160; CSM ii. 113.)

Another passage attributes self-omniscience to the subject:

> (ii) […] there can be nothing in the mind, insofar as it is a thinking thing, of which it is not conscious. […] we cannot have any thought of which we are not conscious at the very moment when it is in us. (Fourth Set of Replies to the Objections to the *Meditations*: AT vii. 246; CSM ii. 171)[6]

Finally, it seems possible to render mental states clear and distinct, thus achieving self-knowledge by viewing them in the right way:

> (iii) […] pain and colour and so on are clearly and distinctly perceived when they are regarded merely as sensations or thoughts [*cum tantummodo ut sensus, sive cogitationes spectantur*]. (*Principles of Philosophy*: AT viiia, 33; CSM i. 217)

Other passages speak *against* the ascription of the transparency thesis to Descartes. First, we seem to make judgments without noticing it, which appears to be rather detrimental to the case of transparency:

> (iv) […] we make the calculation and judgment [that is, concerning size, distance and shape] at great speed because of habit, or rather we remember the judgments we have long made about similar objects; and so we do not distinguish these operations from simple sense-perception […]. (Sixth Set of Replies: AT vii. 438; CSM ii. 295)

[5] I do not put forward a genetic hypothesis concerning the emergence of the transparency problem within Descartes' *œuvre*. A palpable focus on the consciousness of ideas and on adequate self-knowledge seems to start with the Replies to the *Meditations*, and, considering what Descartes has to say about knowing our own passions, it remains present in some form in the period of Descartes' last work, the *Passions of the Soul*.

[6] Cf. the First Set of Replies for a more cautious formulation: "there can be nothing within me of which I am not in some way aware" (AT vii. 107; CSM ii. 77).

We misperceive pains and beliefs, as well as emotions:

> (v) We frequently make mistakes, even in our judgements concerning pain […]. (*Principles*: AT viiia. 32; CSM i. 216)

> (vi) […] many people do not know what they believe, since believing something and knowing that one believes it [*on connaît qu'on la croit*] are different acts of thinking, and the one often occurs without the other. (*Discourse on the Method*: AT vi. 23; CSM i. 122)

> (vii) […] experience shows that those who are the most agitated by their passions are not those who know them best, and that the passions are to be numbered among the perceptions which the close alliance of mind and body renders confused and obscure. (*The Passions of the Soul*: AT xi. 350; CSM i. 339)

Finally, it seems that we might be mistaken about the epistemic properties of our thoughts, even including their clarity:

> (viii) […] there was something else which I used to assert, which through habitual belief *I thought I perceived clearly, although I did not in fact do so*. This was that there were things outside me which were the sources of my ideas and which resembled them in all respects. (Third Meditation: AT vii. 35; CSM ii. 25, e.m.)

In the first group of passages, the very concept of thought seems to imply immediate consciousness of the fact that the subject is having it (i). Perhaps (ii) goes even further than (i): the first sentence is most naturally interpreted as referring not only to the mere awareness of the fact of the mental act but also to the accuracy of establishing its content. Awareness of a volition or perception without the capacity to correctly identify its content would appear to contradict the statement that there is *nothing* in our minds of which we are not conscious. Indeed, it hardly appears possible to know what state I am in without being aware of the content of that state. (How would we establish whether we feel pain or being tickled without awareness of the content of the feeling?)

(iii) is a formulation of the narrow content rule. It states that there is a way to make ideas clear and distinct, viz. regarding them "merely as sensations or thoughts". It also makes it apparent that taking an idea as a mere mode does not mean putting aside its content altogether, for pain and colour *(dolorem quidem et colorem)* are contents rather than acts. Act and content are not independent of each other in terms of awareness. What we apprehend clearly and distinctly is the pain or colour itself, not merely the fact of being in pain or the fact of having a colour sensation.

Do the statements in the second group, registering the possibility of self-ignorance, manifest real self-contradiction on Descartes' part or is the transparency thesis suitably modulated by Descartes himself? Commentators have identified a number of ways in which Descartes, usually more in line with our own psychological intuitions than the Descartes of traditional interpretations, allows for exceptions to, or limits the application of, the transparency thesis, by distinguishing between various forms of access to ideas. Before we get to the accessibility of individual ideas, however, we have to consider the accessibility of causal processes within the mind, for that would also be implied by transparency in its most robust version.

III. SELF-IGNORANCE DUE TO LACK OF ACCESS

Some authors impute the strongest possible transparency claim to Descartes, namely, that the 'everything' of which the subject is necessarily conscious includes even causal relations between mental states: "[a]rguably, Descartes thought that one could *always* discover the causal origins of one's beliefs. On the Cartesian view causal relations that hold between beliefs and experiences and beliefs are reflectively accessible" (Poston 2008). However, it is unlikely that anyone, even Descartes, would maintain this thesis.

A consideration against such an attribution would be that Descartes' understanding of self-deception requires the possibility of not detecting the motivations of our beliefs – for instance, of "an exaggerated kind of self-esteem" (De Araujo 2003. 79). This special case aside, Descartes clearly assumes that we may be unaware of the causes of our inclinations, likings, even our actions. He offers the following story of how he came to have a predilection for cross-eyed women:

> For instance, when I was a child I loved a little girl of my own age who had a slight squint. The impression made by sight in my brain when I looked at her cross-eyes became so closely connected to the simultaneous impression which aroused in me the passion of love that for a long time afterwards when I saw persons with a squint I felt a special inclination to love them simply because they had that defect. At that time I did not know that was the reason for my love; and indeed as soon as I reflected on it and recognized that it was a defect, I was no longer affected by it. (Letter To Chanut, 6 June 1647: AT v. 57; CSMK 322)

Descartes explains this phenomenon by the 'folds' produced in the brain during the original experience, making for a tendency of the same part "to be folded again in the same manner" when the subject goes through a similar experience. Thus, in certain cases, the reason why we cannot trace the causal origins of our mental states is that those origins are *physical*. Processes which are at first blush

intramental, such as coming to like cross-eyed women, are really effects of the body on the mind. An even more surprising example is the body's power to induce the mind to produce poetry, which, as an act of the will, should be the mind's exclusive competence. In a letter to Elizabeth, Descartes explains that if she decides to compose verses, she is – indirectly – inclined to do so by the movement of her animal spirits, which can excite the imagination so much that it supplies the motivation (Letter to Elizabeth, 22 February 1649: AT v. 281; CSMK 367. e.m.).[7]

In all the above cases, mental states and actions, perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, turn out to be caused by physical changes in ways that are less than perspicuous to the subject. But Descartes never claimed that the physical processes that take place in the body are each fully penetrated by the mind. So the next question to ask is whether states or actions that Descartes himself interprets as purely mental can also have mental effects in such a way that the causal link is hidden from the subject. We do not have to deal with *all* types of purely intellectual processes in order to show that transparency may be lacking even where physical processes are not involved. One case proves the point.

Soon after Huygens lost his brother, Descartes tried to console him in the following manner: "We shall go to find [those who died] someday, and we shall still remember the past; for we have, in my view, an intellectual memory which is certainly independent of the body" (Letter to Huygens, 10 October 1642: AT iii. 798; CSMK 216). While ordinary memory "depends on the traces which remain in the brain after an image has been imprinted on it", intellectual memory "depends on some other traces which remain in the mind itself", and cannot be explained "by any illustration drawn from corporeal things without a great deal of qualification" (ibid.). Thus, intellectual memory does not suffer from the obstacle to the consciousness of ordinary memory, viz. the involvement of bodily processes inaccessible to the mind.[8] Even so, full knowledge may be lacking in these cases as well, for we do not necessarily remember the 'intellectual imprinting' responsible for a certain memory. In another letter, Descartes calls intellectual memory "the reflexive act of the intellect": when I have an experience I have had before, I match the new experience with the old one as both belonging to *me* (Letter to Arnauld, 4 June 1648: AT v. 193; CSMK 354). However, the memory may come back without identification of the imprinting event. As Descartes tells us, it is possible that a poet thinks of lines he does not realize he has heard before and believes that he is composing a new piece, while in fact he is recalling one written by another person (Letter to Arnauld, 29 July 1648:

[7] To the objection that composing poetry involves the imagination, which is not a pure intellectual function, it could be replied that we would expect the decision itself to write poetry to come from the mind, even if the actual activity uses material supplied by partly corporeal functions.

[8] On the connection between memory and consciousness in Descartes, see Schmal 2018.

AT v. 220; CSMK 356). Thus, intellectual memory is also fallible, as certain elements of experience may escape it.

Knowledge of causal processes in one's mind necessarily involves memory, for the cause of a state or event at least partly vanishes into the past by the time the effect comes about. Memory is notoriously prone to error: as we have seen, even Descartes' intellectual memory may fail its subject. But there is another, perhaps more compelling consideration in favor of regarding mental causal processes as potentially inaccessible. We may remain ignorant of our own mental causation simply due to lack of knowledge *of its very terms*. Consider (vi): if we cannot necessarily identify our beliefs, then we cannot necessarily identify the casual connections between them, either. It seems safe to say that access to causal processes in the mind is subject at least to the same constraints as mental states in general. So we move on to the latter.[9]

So far, I have considered lack of access to causal *processes*. In the remaining part of this section, I address the issue of lack of access to *individual mental states*.

The possibility that the subject may lack access or access of a particular kind to individual states has been much discussed in recent Descartes scholarship. I will present potential constraints to access under three headings. Limited or lacking access may be due to (1) lack of attention/reflection, (2) memory deficiency, or (3) the dispositional character of ideas.

(1) Descartes obviously realized that attention is a limited resource, whether employed in the service of understanding the outside world or the mind itself. Just as we can attend to this or that object in the physical world, we can attend (or fail to attend) to particular properties of, or changes in, our own minds. In this sense, direct access to part of our mental contents is only potential: we only know what goes on there as long as we actually attend to it. Passage (iv) can be interpreted along these lines: Descartes might be claiming that we actually, habitually re-perform calculations of size over and over again but are only aware of the states involved when paying attention to them. More straightforward textual evidence is in the *Optics*, where we are told that a blind person using two sticks can "determine the places [the ends of his sticks] occupy without in any way knowing or thinking of those which his hands occupy" (AT vi. 135; CSM i. 169). We track the location of our bodily parts continuously but only become conscious of the mental states registering those locations, as well as our (mental and physical) efforts to identify them, when attending to them. Another example by Descartes, from the same work, is that our experiences of the muscle movements involved in looking at a piece of celery on the table are perceptible to a very low degree (AT vi. 135). A subject normally has rather limited access to

[9] We may want to restrict the scope of the infallibility claim to simultaneous thoughts anyway, given the qualification in (ii): "we cannot have any thought of which we are not conscious *at the very moment when it is in us*".

these states. We are still not to count them among non-conscious states, Simmons explains, since it is possible to attend to them reflectively and they contribute to the overall phenomenology of the experience, even though we are not conscious of them *per se*. Simmons, on the basis of such passages, makes a persuasive case that we can talk about different *degrees* of consciousness in Descartes (Simmons 2012. 16).

Arguably, it is even possible to distinguish between different *types* or *senses* of consciousness according to whether mental contents are attended to in a particular, reflective manner. Gary Hatfield (2011) builds the distinction between 'bare' and 'reflective' consciousness on a passage in which Descartes claims that whereas infants only have non-reflective thoughts when, for instance, enjoying nourishment, adults are capable of reflection as well: "when an adult feels something, and simultaneously perceives that he has not felt it before" (AT v. 220f.). Reflective consciousness involves attention to the mental state itself and a sense of its (lack of) novelty. In Hatfield's view, this is the default form of Cartesian consciousness: "the Cartesian subject […] brings together, in a unified arena of awareness, those thoughts of which we are *reflectively* conscious" (372). Thus, Cartesian consciousness proper would require attention in a specific, robust sense.

Attention and reflection seem to be the most important factors that determine access to ideas, so lack of these can certainly render ideas inaccessible. There are other sources of inaccessibility, as well, however, which are responsible for some, perhaps less central, cases: memory deficits and merely *potential* access due to the dispositional character of ideas. These are reviewed in (2) and (3).

(2) There are cogitations we immediately forget and which are thus are not accessible after their occurrence. This emerges from Descartes' answer to the worry that while the Cartesian mind would appear to think all the time, we do not perceive ourselves as incessantly having thoughts, for instance, in sleep:

> To be conscious of our thoughts when we are thinking them is one thing and to remember them afterwards is another. Thus, we think of nothing in sleep without being conscious of it at the same moment, although in most cases we forget them immediately. (Letter to [Arnauld], 29 July 1848: AT v. 221; see also Letter to Gibieuf, 19 January 1642: AT iii. 479.)

Descartes' view that self-knowledge can be constrained by lack of memory of certain states has been duly noted (and sometimes criticized) by commentators. Thus Lilli Alanen: "innumerable thoughts occur without leaving traces in our memory – not only while we are awake but also while we sleep and maybe even before we were born" (Alanen 2003. 54). Similarly, Simmons writes:

> In the end, Descartes only appeals to the vagaries of memory to argue for the existence of fleeting thoughts in infants and sleeping adults that are unaccompanied by other thoughts that serve to make them salient, and so remembered, in our cognitive lives (Simmons 2012. 14).

Simmons' assessment of the situation is that recalling our thoughts is not the default operation of the mind, but an achievement, one which cannot be taken for granted.

Acknowledging the limitations of both attention and memory makes the Cartesian conception of transparency less implausible. Our own contemporary philosophical understanding of the mind, influenced by psychology and cognitive science, is uniformly more sympathetic to this qualified position. The third factor that constrains access, the dispositionality of ideas, conceived in a particular way, is more difficult both to interpret and to endorse.

(3) The tenet that one cannot have a mental state and not be simultaneously aware of it does not seem to hold for standing states, the possibility of which Descartes clearly seems to acknowledge.[10] Thus, innate ideas, when present only dispositionally, not as occurrent thoughts, are not necessarily transparent.[11] We have the ideas of God and of extension, for instance, mostly in an implicit manner. Further, when they do come in an occurrent form, innate ideas often take some effort to figure out, so are not transparent, at least not immediately. As Descartes put it in a letter:

> If I draw out something from an innate idea which is implicitly contained in it but which I had not noticed in it before, for instance, from the idea of triangle that its three angles equal two right angles, or from the idea of God that he exists, it is far from begging the question […] (Letter to Mersenne, 23 June 1641: AT iii. 383).

That we do not necessarily get our innate ideas right, and that getting them right can take effort, is shown by Descartes' answers to objections concerning the idea of God. Here, he recommends that those who fail to find certain properties in their ideas of God take a closer look:

[10] It is easier for dispositionalist readings to account for the possibility of a lack of actual access to some features of an innate idea (for such readings, see, e.g., Nadler 2006. 96; Clarke 2003. 196). Nevertheless, 'occurrentist' readings have also attempted to accommodate (partial) ignorance of innate ideas. Thus, Cottingham (1976. xxxiii) talks about innate ideas being present in their entirety but not fully accessible due to other preoccupations of the mind.

[11] Descartes sometimes seems to understand ordinary beliefs in a dispositional way as well, as shown in remarks like this one: „those who have never philosophized correctly have various opinions in their minds which they have begun to *store up* since childhood" (Replies to the Seventh Set of Objections: AT vii. 324; CSM ii. 481).

> No one can possibly go wrong when he tries to form a correct conception of the idea of God, provided he is willing to attend to the nature of a supremely perfect being. But some people muddle things up by including other attributes […] they constuct an imaginary idea of God, and then – quite reasonably – go on to say that the God who is represented by this muddled idea does not exist. (Second Set of Replies, AT vii. 138: CSM ii. 99.)

Identifying exceptions to transparency may acquit Descartes of the charge of insisting on the absurd statement that we have access to everything that goes on in our minds; it does not, however, establish consistency between Descartes' claims. Most cases in group (iv)–(viii) have not been addressed and still stand out as apparently contradicting the transparency claim. Further, several of them seem to remain untouched by a delimitation of the set of states to which transparency applies according to access (limiting that set to, e.g., "actually occurrent conscious perceptions" [Alanen 2003. 55]). The possibilities that we do not know a presently occurrent pain that we attend to (v), that we are mistaken about our passions in general rather than merely in certain individual cases (vii), as well as about the representational properties of ideas (viii), are left wide open.

IV. LACK OF TRANSPARENCY DUE TO BROAD CONTENT

The interpretations I referred to above focus on how we access our mental states. In the cases considered so far, there are obstacles to self-knowledge due to factors influencing access: lack of attention or reflection; irretrievability due to undeveloped cognitive structures (in the case of infants) and to the limitations to storing content (in the case of adults); and the implicit or dispositional rather than occurrent character of certain ideas. I will argue that there is a further, independent dimension to the transparency problem in Descartes, one that concerns the content of ideas rather than the properties of access.

The transparency question has two parts. One is whether all ideas are accessible to the subject, that is, whether we are necessarily *aware of being in a particular mental state*. The other part is whether we necessarily *get the content of our mental states right*. The access problems reviewed above do not distort the content of mental states, but prevent their subject from accessing them, that is, being aware of having the mental state in question. Now we come to the way in which (part of) the content of a mental state, rather than the fact of having it, might lack transparency to the subject, due to the nature of the ideas themselves, rather than the mode of accessing them.[12]

[12] Self-awareness, or awareness of the mental act, may also be thought to influence content in accessing mental states. While this question of direct or indirect awareness of content

We have already encountered one formulation of the issue, in (iii): the subject perceives color and pain clearly and distinctly only "when they are regarded merely as sensations or thoughts" in the mind. More generally, the precept is that, if we are to achieve adequate grasp of an idea we have, we are to consider it in a particular way, disregarding its relation to extramental reality. The phrase Descartes recurrently uses is regarding ideas 'in themselves' or as 'mere modes of thought' rather than considering them in relation to their objects or as 'referring to' something else:

> Now as far as ideas are concerned, provided they are considered solely in themselves and I do not refer them to anything else, they cannot strictly speaking be false; for whether it is a goat or a chimera that I am imagining, it is just as true that I imagine the former as the latter (AT vii. 37; CSM ii. 26).

This is another formulation of what I called the narrow content rule, Descartes' injunction to view ideas merely as modes of thinking, disregarding any relation to reality. Now while 'modes of thinking' might at times be interpreted as applying specifically to acts rather than content, Descartes appears to be thinking of both when he suggests that we disregard ideas' relation to what they purport to represent. Focusing away from ideas' relation to the world never seems to be an answer to a question concerning what act the mind is executing, e.g. whether it is making a judgment, having an emotion, or not. Rendering pain and colour clear and distinct and the "confused and obscure" character of perceptions concern content rather than the act directed at it. Imagining a goat or a chimera are

---

should be distinguished from that of its broad or narrow character, this possibility should also be mentioned.

Awareness of being in a particular mental state might be thought to mediate between the object of cognition and the cognition itself, the awareness being what is 'directly' apprehended, while the object of cognition only indirectly: "Suppose Fred is contemplating the astronomical idea of the sun. That is, Fred is thinking of the sun; the sun is the object of his thought. His act of thinking of the sun is a mental state, while the sun is a physical object; the two cannot be identified. Given transparency, Fred is directly (non-reflectively) aware of his thinking of the sun. But if he is directly aware of his thinking of the sun, and that act of thinking is not identical to the sun itself, then he would seem at best only indirectly aware of the sun itself. His cognition of an external object is in this way mediated by his awareness of his own mental state." (Pessin 2009. 5)

Pessin does not seem to distinguish grasping the mental act one is performing from self-awareness while performing the act. Vili Lähteenmäki (2007) advances a distinction here and claims that while acts are not apt to be objects of consciousness, awareness of objects automatically involves that of the self as well. This self-awareness, which necessarily accompanies the consciousness of content, also influences the experience of content.

The question of broad/narrow content should also be distinguished from that of whether sensations represent or not. The present point concerning transparency with regard to content is that we necessarily get content right when viewing it as narrow, whether or not that content actually represents something.

acts with presentational content,[13] concerning which, according to the narrow content rule, the subject cannot be in doubt.

The presence of the distinction between the narrow and broad content of ideas in Descartes may not be very easy to accept. Other than the apparent anachronism involved,[14] one reason is that Descartes himself did not give names to mental contents acquired in these two distinct ways and never treated the distinction in a systematic fashion. A further factor is that shifts to contexts in which ideas are to be understood in a narrow or a broad way often go unannounced. The cogito argument provides an example of such a shift.

The progressive radicalization of the skeptical arguments at the beginning of the *Meditations* involves the application of the narrow content rule. The possibility of regarding ideas without their links to whatever is outside the mind is essential to the argument. No matter whether the content of my thought is veridical or deceptive, having an idea with that content is indubitable, when considered *merely as an idea* (in the sense of an act with presentational, rather than representational content) rather than a representation of something. I cannot go wrong concerning the fact that I am in doubt or in pain, whatever objects these states are directed at:

> For even if […], as I have supposed, none of the objects of imagination are real, the power of imagination is something which really exists and is part of my thinking. […] I am now seeing light, hearing a noise, feeling heat. But I am asleep, so all this is false. Yet I certainly *seem* to see, to hear, and to be warmed. This cannot be false; what is called 'having a sensory perception' is strictly just this, and in this is restricted sense of the term it is simply thinking. (AT vii. 29; CSM ii. 19.)

After bracketing the relation of ideas to reality and coming to the conclusion that those ideas themselves, along with the subject whose ideas they are, cannot be questioned, Descartes makes a notorious move. He claims that subject is a *thing*, which the argument preceding this proposition makes unjustified. This move is stepping out of the narrow context; the relation to the world has been smuggled back in. The 'I' is not merely a phenomenal one, but a *res cogitans*, which is part

[13] Cf. Wilson 1978.

[14] In agreement with Schmalz 2022 and Lenz 2022 in this issue, I find it possible that our own contemporary concepts can illuminate problems in historical texts. Recognizing the narrowness/broadness of content in Descartes helps account for something in his epistemology and philosophy of mind that has so far seemed inexplicable: why unobstructed access to ideas does not necessarily make for full self-knowledge. I consider the fact that this explanation renders the Cartesian position on the transparency of the mind much less implausible by our own lights only a marginal advantage; my aim is by no means to 'bring Descartes up to' contemporary standards.

of the extramental world.[15] There is a surreptitious transition from viewing ideas in a narrow way to a broad context.

In what follows, I will unpack the implications of the narrow content rule for the transparency of the mind. Commentaries tend to focus on Descartes' instruction to take *sensory ideas* as mere thoughts rather than as involving representational relations when seeking to establish their properties with certainty. But Descartes' rule has an inclusive application, to "sensations or thoughts", that is, potentially to everything contained in the mind (with certain qualifications, to be discussed below). In the Third Meditation, there is a general statement to this effect: "Now as far as ideas are concerned, provided they are considered solely in themselves and I do not refer them to anything else, they cannot strictly speaking be false" (AT vii. 37; CSM ii. 26). What can make those ideas false is relating them to something outside the mind by a judgment. Before clarifying Descartes' conception through an extensive range of examples, we will have a cursory look at explanations attached to – some version of – the rule by commentators.

Marleen Rozemond's view is that we can bracket connections to reality in those cases where ideas of the Aristotelian proper sensibles (perceived by a single sensory faculty only, such as light and sound) are involved. She writes:

> […] we cannot assume that Descartes would be willing to generalize from the certainty of our judgments about perceptions of proper sensibles, which from the point of view of the Aristotelian tradition were privileged, to certainty for all claims about what we seem to sense (or otherwise think or experience). Indeed, his allowance for error about our mental states in other contexts suggests not. (Rozemond 2006. 63–64.)

Rozemond does not offer examples of the possibility of error she has in mind. It is not difficult to provide some, though: perceptions rendered obscure by their inherent link to the body; innate ideas some properties of which do not meet the internal gaze; emotions with dubious causal histories. Now, to be sure, the attempt to clear up the representational properties of an idea may not result in adequate self-knowledge. But the reasons for this have to do with the details, to be seen later, of the application of the narrow content rule to different types of mental states rather than with the privileged character of sensation in regard to self-knowledge.

John Carriero similarly focuses on sensation when addressing Descartes' idea that we cannot go wrong provided we examine our mental contents in separation from the relation they bear to the world (Carriero 2009. 25). He is concerned

[15] I understand this transition as a change in the representational features of the 'I', rather than being premised on the assumption, to the use of which Descartes at this point in the argument is not entitled, that modes require a substance to inhere in.

with unjustified inferences from the phenomenal character of sensation to what is actually there outside the mind. Unlike Rozemond, Carriero offers no explanation, historical or otherwise, for Descartes' conception, and, despite his own focus, does not restrict the circle of mental states to which it applies.

Now sensory ideas do seem to present a special problem concerning representation. As Simmons remarks, "[t]here is just something about our sensory ideas that prevents from having a clear view of what it is they are representing to us" (Simmons 2012. 12). It is difficult to tell, for instance, whether heat is the privation of cold or the other way around (AT vii. 43–44); in general, "for all the rest, like light and colors, sounds, odors, flavors, heat and cold and the other tactile qualities, these are thought by me only in a very confused and obscure way". Simmons takes it to be inherent in the nature of sensory ideas that "[t]he cataracts are on our sensory ideas for good" (13). She notes that we can be cautious in our judgments when attending to them, but what they represent will remain uncertain.

Sensory ideas are special in that there is a stark discrepancy between how their contents depict the world to us and what is 'out there' in the world. This was a point Descartes, following Galilei, took serious pains to establish.[16] What such ideas represent is indeed uncertain. The application of the narrow content rule is meant to render ideas immune to precisely this kind of uncertainty, by having us disregard representational relations. The distinction between narrow and broad content arises in connection with a much more inclusive circle of states as well, however: it extends to desiring, willing, and imagining, as well as having emotions and making judgments. In the following, I will look at the ways in which different kinds of ideas, other than sensory ones, can be viewed in a narrow or a broad way. In some cases, while we can tell narrow from broad context, one of these is necessarily lacking due to the properties of the ideas in question.

Willing and the emotions do not as such represent. These mental states may "not refer […] to anything else", so "cannot strictly be false"; "things which I may desire are wicked or even non-existent, […] does not make it any less true that I desire them" (AT vii. 37; CSM ii. 26). The properties of extramental objects at which desires are directed are irrelevant to establishing the fact, and identifying the presentational properties, of desiring them: the attitude and its content can be recognized regardless. Representation and judgment, even implicit, linking the content of the state to the world, are lacking. As such ideas do not belong to the type in which error is possible (they do not represent, so there is nothing in the world to check them against), their contents are necessa-

[16] For a detailed review of Galilei's influence and Descartes' development of the idea, see Ben-Yami 2015. 51ff.

rily *narrow*. (They may be, and normally are, coupled with some representation, though, and in this sense may be said to 'refer to' something.)[17]

If it is impossible to get the representational content of emotions wrong, there being none, how can Descartes claim that we tend to be profoundly mistaken about the passions in general, and about the passions in the narrow sense in particular (as in vii)? The answer is that while broad contexts can be created by representation, ideas that represent and those that do not may both connect to extramental reality in another way as well, namely through their causal relations. In these cases, it is ignorance of their causal histories that makes ideas obscure.

Having applied the narrow content rule to bracket representational features, we may still lack knowledge of our passions due to a failure to identify their causes. Causal relations are especially difficult to track down in the case of passions in the narrow sense, for here we cannot rely on practices of identifying causes that work for other types of passions. "The perceptions we refer to things outside us, namely to the objects of our senses, are caused by these objects, at least when our judgements are not false" (AT xi. 346; CSM i. 337). Similarly, we judge our feelings of hunger or pain ('perceptions we refer to our body') to be caused by states of our bodies. For the emotions, in contrast, "we do not normally know any proximate cause to which we can we refer them. Such are the feelings of joy, anger and the like, which are aroused in us sometimes by the objects which stimulate our nerves and sometimes also by other causes" (AT xi. 347; CSM i. 337).[18] When those agitated by certain emotions do not know them, they fail to identify these causes. They can still establish the phenomenal properties of the feeling, but they are not aware of its causal connections to other states.[19] As knowledge of its causal history is part of a complete knowledge of the state itself, the content of the passion is, again, taken in a broad way. Thus, there is a narrow ('phenomenal' or 'presentational'), and a broad way of thinking about the emotions, the latter including their causal histories.

A final case in which Cartesian ideas are to be understood in a broad way is that of *ideae innatae*. Innate ideas are those of "God, mind, body, triangle, and in general all those which represent true, immutable and eternal essences" (Letter to Mersenne, 23 June 1641: AT iii. 383). These ideas are universally imparted by God to humans, with determinate representational contents.[20] The extramental

[17] See, e.g., Descartes' description of the process of getting frightened by a wild animal in *The Passions*: AT xi. 355–56; CSM i. 342.

[18] For an exposition of the idea of 'referring' in connection with the passions, see Brown 2006. Chapter 4.

[19] In addition, if we do not know the causal connections of the feeling to other states, we cannot eliminate it. Psychotherapy in *The Passions* mainly consists of severing the link between an emotion and those states that tend to trigger it (such as training ourselves not to react to the sight of a particular type of medicine with disgust).

[20] Here, I put aside the issue of the *truth* of innate ideas, as well as of the innateness of *all* ideas. Although representing true essences may be seen as implying the truth of the repre-

items with which these ideas stand in necessary representational relations are eternal essences rather than items in the physical world**.** (Therefore, it is conceivable that there is no extended world without a change in the innate idea of extension.[21]) An innate idea cannot be fully grasped without its connection to the immutable essence it represents. That is, there is no way to establish its phenomenal features in a way that disregards the link to extramental reality; the content of an innate idea is always broad.[22]

Now what if someone apparently does ignore this link between content and essence and forms a *different* idea of, say, God? "No one can possibly go wrong when he tries to form a correct conception of the idea of God", Descartes will tell them (Second Set of Replies to the *Meditations*: AT vii. 138; CSM i. 99). (This does not mean that all the contents of the idea are accessible *at once*.) Innate ideas come with particular contents, and different contents would change their identities. If someone claims that according to their idea of God, he is extended and imperfect, putting aside the relation to an eternal essence, Descartes tells them that their idea is *not* that of God; they should think again. (That *other* idea of something, not God, could be made transparent more easily, simply by applying the narrow content rule – since there is nothing that inherently relates it to reality in a way that its phenomenal properties cannot be established independently.)

Adequate self-knowledge is significantly more difficult to achieve, and in some cases impossible, when the contents of the relevant ideas are broad. It is highly unlikely that we would be aware of all features of all of our ideas at any particular point: we are barely conscious of the elements that even a couple of innate ideas contain, let alone at the same time be in a position to review the causal properties of our current passions. Complete self-knowledge, that is, a thoroughly transparent mind, would seem to be a futile aim.

---

senting ideas themselves, this implication is not taken for granted by all commentators (see, e.g., Bonnen and Flage 2002. 46ff). In either case, the representational relations described hold. As to the innateness of all ideas, I apply the term 'innate idea' to what Steven Nadler calls 'innate ideas in the strict sense', with its use extending to a rather limited set of ideas only: those traditionally conceived as such (Nadler 2006. 95).

[21] For the innateness of the idea of extension, see AT iii. 383; CSMK 183.

[22] This shows an ambiguity in Descartes' truth criterion of clarity and distinctness in terms of internalism/externalism. This criterion now seems to be inconsistently internalist: what counts as clear and distinct is determined partly by the state of the world. A *clara et distincta idea* of God is not such on the basis of its phenomenal properties only, in the way a pain or a color sensation can be made clear and distinct by disregarding its representational properties.

V. CONCLUSION

In the past decades, Descartes scholarship has started to notice the wild implausibility of attributing the claim of complete mental transparency to Descartes. What has so far garnered attention in this regard is Descartes' recognition of the inaccessibility of certain types of mental states. We are not conscious of all that goes into calculating our next stride, of whatever goes on at the periphery of our field of vision, and of the first impressions we enjoyed in infanthood. Descartes, as textual evidence shows, was much more familiar with this than we had credited him for. This is not the only source of self-ignorance for Descartes, however, as I have been trying to prove on these pages. There is an unlabeled but significant and pervasively applied distinction in Descartes between narrow and broad content, with the latter being an independent contributor to error in self-knowledge. Once this externalist strand in Descartes is fully explored, an important obstacle to a coherent understanding of Cartesian self-knowledge disappears.

REFERENCES

AT Adam, C. – Tannery, P. (eds.) 1996. *Œuvres de Descartes*. 11 Vols. Paris, Vrin.

CSM Cottingham, John – Stoothoff, Robert – Murdoch, Dugald 1985. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vols. I and II. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

CSMK Cottingham, John – Stoothoff, Robert – Murdoch, Dugald – Kenny, Anthony (eds.) 1991. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. III. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Alanen, Lili 2003. *Descartes' Concept of Mind*. Cambridge/MA, Harvard University Press.

Ben-Yami, Hanoch 2015. *Descartes' Philosophical Revolution: A Re-Assessment*. London, Palgrave-Macmillan.

Bonnen, Clarence A. – Flage, Daniel E. 2002. *Descartes and Method: A Search for Method in Meditations*. London, Routledge.

Brown, Deborah J. 2006. *Descartes and the Passionate Mind*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Carriero, John 2009. *Between Two Worlds: A Reading of Descartes's Meditations*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Carruthers, Peter 2008. Cartesian Epistemology: Is the theory of the self-transparent mind innate? *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. 15/4. 28–53.

Chalmers, David 1996. *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*. New York, New York University Press.

Clarke, Desmond 2003. *Descartes's Theory of Mind*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Cottingham, John (ed.) 1976. *Descartes' Conversation with Burman*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.

De Araujo, Marcelo 2003. *Scepticism, Freedom, and Autonomy: The Foundations of Descartes' Theory of Knowledge*. Berlin, Walter de Gruyter.

Della Rocca, M. 2005. Descartes, the Cartesian Circle, and Epistemology without God. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 70. 1–33.

Gertler, Brie 2011. *Self-Knowledge*. New York, Routledge.

Hatfield, Gary 2011. Transparency of Mind: The Contributions of Descartes, Leibniz, and Berkeley to the Genesis of the Modern Subject. In Hubertus Bursche (ed.) *Departure for Modern Europe: A Handbook of Early Modern Philosophy (1400–1700)*. Hamburg, Felix Meiner Verlag. 361–375.

Jorgensen, Larry M. 2014. Seventeenth-Century Theories of Consciousness. In E. N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/consciousness-17th/.

Lähteenmäki, Vili 2007. Orders of Consciousness and Forms of Reflexivity in Descartes. In Sara Heinämaa – Vili Lähteenmäki – Paulina Remes (eds.) *Consciousness: From Perception to Reflection in the History of Philosophy*. Dordrecht, Springer. 455–484.

Lenz, Martin 2022. Did Descartes Read Wittgenstein? A Dialogical Approach to Reading. *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle / Hungarian Philosophical Review*. 66/1. Forthcoming.

Nadler, Steven 2006. The Doctrine of Ideas. In Stephen Gaukroger (ed.) *The Blackwell Guide to Descartes' Meditations*. Holboken/ NJ, Blackwell. 86–103.

Pessin, Andrew 2009. Mental Transparency, Direct Sensation, and the Unity of the Cartesian Mind. In *Topics in Early Modern Philosophy of Mind*. Dordrecht, Springer. 1–37.

Poston, Ted 2008. Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology. *The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. URL = http://www.iep.utm.edu/int-ext/.

Radner, Daisie 1988. Thought and Consciousness in Descartes. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 26/3. 439–452.

Rowland, Mark –Joe Lau, –Max Deutsch 2014. Externalism About Mental Content. In E. N. Zalta. (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/content-externalism/.

Rozemond, Marleen 2006. The Nature of the Mind. In Stephen Gaukroger (ed.) *Blackwell Guide to Descartes' Meditations*. Hoboken/NJ, Blackwell. 48–66.

Schmal, Dániel 2018. Intellectual Memory and Consciousness in Descartes' Philosophy of Mind. *Society and Politics*. 12/2. 28–49.

Schmaltz, Ted 2022. Getting Things Right in the History of Philosophy. *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle / Hungarian Philosophical Review*. 66/1. Forthcoming.

Simmons, Alison 2012. Cartesian Consciousness Reconsidered. *Philosophers' Imprint*. 12/2, 1–21.

Wilson, Margaret D. 1978. *Descartes*. London, Routledge.

Wilson, Margaret D. 1999. Descartes on the Representationality of Sensation. In *Ideas and Mechanism: Essays on Early Modern Philosophy*. Princeton, Princeton University Press. 69–83.

Contributors

Andreas Blank holds a research position funded by the Austrian Science Fund at Alpen-Adria Universität Klagenfurt (A). He has been Visiting Fellow at the Center for Philosophy of Science (University of Pittsburgh), the Cohn Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Ideas (Tel Aviv University), and the Istituto per il Lessico Intellettuale Europeo (CNR, Rome), as well as Visiting Associate Professor at the University of Hamburg and Bard College Berlin.
Email: Andreas.Blank@aau.at

Julie R. Klein is associate professor of philosophy at Villanova University (US). She works mainly in early modern philosophy, particularly Spinoza, and her other interests include Jewish and Islamic medieval philosophy, psychoanalysis, and critical theory.
Email: julie.klein@villanova.edu

Martin Lenz is full professor of philosophy at the University of Groningen (NL), specializing in early modern and medieval philosophy. He has conducted several postdoc projects in Cambridge (2002–2004) and Berlin (2004–2009). After his Habilitation (HU Berlin 2009), he held a visiting professorship in theoretical philosophy at the University of Tübingen (2009–2010) and was director of the Leibniz-Prize research group founded by Dominik Perler (HU 2010-2012). His latest publication is *Socializing Minds. Intersubjectivity in Early Modern Philosophy*, Oxford University Press 2022.
Email: m.lenz@rug.nl

Tad M. Schmaltz is professor of philosophy and James B. and Grace J. Nelson Fellow at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (US). He specializes in early modern philosophy, and is the author of *Malebranche's Theory of the Soul* (1996), *Radical Cartesianism* (2002), *Descartes on Causation* (2008), *Early Modern Cartesianisms* (2017), and *The Metaphysics of the Material World: Suárez, Descartes, Spinoza* (2020). In addition, he has edited or co-edited *Receptions of Descartes* (2005), *Integrating History and Philosophy of Science* (2012), *Efficient Causation: A History* (2014), *The Historical Dictionary of Descartes and Cartesian*

Philosophy (2015), *The Problem of Universals in Early Modern Philosophy* (2017), and *The Oxford Handbook of Descartes and Cartesianism* (2019).
Email: tschmalt@umich.edu

Judit Szalai is an associate professor at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest (H), working in the areas of the history of early modern philosophy, philosophy of mind, philosophical psychology and psychiatry, and the philosophy of technology.
Email: szalai.judit@btk.elte.hu

Olivér István Tóth is university assistant at Karl-Franz-University Graz (A) where he has recently submitted his PhD-thesis. He works on early modern philosophy, especially Spinoza, and 19th-century German-speaking philosophy, especially Hegel.
Email: oliver.toth@uni-graz.at

Summaries

Andreas Blank

On Reconstructing Leibniz's Metaphysics

This article discusses some reasons for taking a reconstructive approach to the argumentative structure of Leibniz's metaphysics. One reason is the fragmentary nature of the countless notes and letters that constitute by far the largest part of Leibniz's philosophical output. Another reason is that conjecturing how the many isolated arguments proposed by Leibniz fit into a large-scale argumentative structure could yield insights into how Leibniz made use of the method of intuition – both in his analysis of mind and in his analysis of matter. Contemporary critics have objected that the method of intuition leads to philosophical conservatism, arbitrary choices between conflicting intuitions, and a preoccupation with psychological facts rather than with reality. By contrast, reconstructing the methodology behind Leibniz's metaphysics could indicate how intuitions could be used in a way that sidesteps these problems. Leibniz gives priority to intuitions concerning the structure of mental operations over intuitions concerning the structure of material objects; this is why intuitions concerning the structure of material objects can be replaced by innovative philosophical theories; these theories, however, make use of metaphysical concepts implied by the analysis of mind and, thereby, can capture facts both about psychology and about the structure of extra-mental reality.
Keywords: Leibniz, metaphysics, intuition, structure, reconstructivism

Julie R. Klein

The Past and Future of the Present

In this essay, I consider contextualism, hermeneutics, and genealogy as methodologies for historical research in philosophy and suggest that they can assist us in rethinking philosophy and its histories in an expansive, pluralistic, and decolonial way. Key reference points are Eileen O'Neill's image of "disappearing ink," Walter Benjamin's image of the Angel of History and critique of victors' history, and Michel Foucault's conceptualization of genealogy as the investigation of disqualified and subjugated knowledges. Just as O'Neill's call for "new narratives" has motivated research into the history of women in philosophy and begun to expand the canon and concept of philosophy, and just as the

integration of studies of philosophy in Jewish and Islamic culture has altered our conceptions of medieval philosophy, current inquires into the entanglement of philosophy with race, empire, colonialism, along with efforts to explore neglected and dismissed material, will undoubtedly reshape our thinking. Racist dismissals of the possibility, let alone the intrinsic interest, of Asian, Indian, African, and Indigenous American philosophy are historically embedded in our field and institutions, but our future need not resemble our past. I argue, additionally, that our intellectual efforts must be matched by institutional change: changing the idea of philosophy demands reflection on our professional practices and requires the commitment of material resources.
Keywords: methodology, contextualism, hermeneutics, genealogy, history of philosophy, decolonial thought, canon, tradition

Martin Lenz

Did Descartes Read Wittgenstein? A Dialogical Approach to Reading

In methodological debates about the history of philosophy, rational reconstructions and historical reconstructions are commonly considered in opposition. While the former seems to focus on assessing arguments by current standards, the latter seems to attempt to be true to the historically pertinent standards. By contrast, this paper is intended to show that these approaches depend on one another. I will illustrate this by showing that, from a contemporary point of view, Descartes can be taken as having read Wittgenstein. At least the Descartes in our minds. Contrasting philosophical and historical approaches, I argue in favour of a dialogical approach to reading that makes explicit not only assumptions about pertinent objects of study, i.e. historical texts, but also the assumptions salient in the readers of such texts. While the first part spells out the assumptions, the second part zooms in on what we can learn about Descartes, Wittgenstein, and ourselves in a dialogical approach.
Keywords: anachronism, historical reconstruction, rational reconstruction, Descartes, Wittgenstein

Tad M. Schmaltz

Getting Things Right in the History of Philosophy

In this brief set of remarks, I explore methodological issues relating to the goal of tolerance in the history of philosophy. My investigation focuses in particular on a principle that Christia Mercer has recently proposed as critical for current work in the history of philosophy, namely, the "Getting Things Right Constraint" (GTRC). Mercer promotes this principle in the context of reflecting on an exchange between Daniel Garber and Michael Della Rocca over the proper methodology for the interpretation of Spinoza. I begin with a preliminary consideration of this exchange. Then I critically examine a narrative that Mercer offers in response to the exchange, according to which there has been a recent revolution in the history of philosophy that involves the victory of a "contextualism" defined in terms of the GTRC over a previously dominant "appropriationism". Finally, I provide some reasons to think that her insistence on the GTRC as a central

constraint on philosophical inquiry into historical texts unacceptably compromises tolerance in the history of philosophy.
Keywords: appropriationism, contextualism, history of philosophy, methodology, tolerance

Judit Szalai

Transparency and Broad Content in Descartes

The traditional picture of Descartes as championing the complete transparency of the mind has been substantially modified in the past decades by commentators (among them Lilli Alanen, Gary Hatfield, Vili Lähteenmäki, and Alison Simmons). Difficulties of access to the subject's own mental states, thoroughly explored in the literature, do not account for all cases of self-knowledge failure in Descartes, however. I argue that a distinction widely used in contemporary philosophy, that between narrow and broad content, illuminates these tenacious cases.
Keywords: Descartes, externalism, transparency, ideas

Oliver Istvan Toth

A Defense of Reconstructivism

In this paper, I argue that there is a live and interesting methodological disagreement between contextualists and reconstructivists by proposing an alternative definition of contextualism and reconstructivsm relative to Mercer's. According to my proposed definition, these methodologies have different presuppositions about the truth-maker of philosophical interpretations. Contextualism holds that the truth-maker is the concrete particular, the written utterance, of which meaning is determined by its actual causes. Reconstructivism holds that the truth-maker is the abstract particular, the proposition, which has inferential properties independently of the social and historical context. I argue that from these presuppositions different methodologies follow. Contextualism follows a historicist methodology, according to which philosophical concepts are meaningful in their historical context, the aim of the history of philosophy is to capture the actual meaning of philosophical utterances, and philosophical claims can only be true in their historical and social context. Reconstructivism follows a perennialist methodology, according to which philosophical concepts are timeless, the aim of the history of philosophy is to capture the possible meaning of philosophical utterances, and philosophical claims can be true independently of their historical and social context.
Keywords: contextualism, reconstructivism, Skinner principle, Spinoza, methodology, history of philosophy