The History of Philosophy and the Persona of the Philosopher

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Although history is the pre-eminent part of the gallant sciences, philosophers advise against it from fear that it might completely destroy the kingdom of darkness — that is, scholastic philosophy — which previously has been wrongly held to be a necessary instrument of theology.¹

Introduction

This paper begins from the premise that one of the most important problems confronting the history of philosophy is a longstanding yet unresolved dispute: namely, over whether in addition to being an object of intellectual history, philosophy must also constitute its method.² This does not raise the question of whether current philosophies can be pursued without historical investigation of their past forms — I assume that they can, but do not discuss this — but does raise the question of whether, as a discipline, the history of philosophy is itself part of philosophy. At the centre of our argument is the question of whether philosophies can be treated in the same way as other historical phenomena, empirically investigated as to their historical significance and causes; or, whether there is something about philosophy — namely its role as the privileged expression of human reason

¹ C. Thomasius, *Cautelen zur Erlernung der Rechtsgelehrtheit* (Halle, 1713; repr. Hildesheim, 2006), 92.
² This paper draws on a larger collaborative project on the persona of the philosopher in early modern Europe. Funded by the Australian Research Council, this project is being undertaken with Conal Condren and Stephen Gaukroger, and its first results have been published in C. Condren, S. Gaukroger, and I. Hunter, eds., *The Philosopher in Early Modern Europe: The Nature of a Contested Identity* (Cambridge, 2006). I am grateful to my collaborators for all that I have learned from them and for their commentary on this paper, which builds on our joint introduction to the edited volume. The paper has also benefited from comments by Knud Haakonssen, Peter Harrison, Jeffrey Minson, Calvin Normore, the editors of *Modern Intellectual History*, and colleagues in the Centre for the History of European Discourses at the University of Queensland.
— that means that it can never be described as a fact, from the ‘outside’, as it will always inform the method of description itself.

Recent discussions of intellectual history have in fact focused on a different kind of question, namely, on whether the object of the discipline should be ideas, as opposed to discourses, texts, speech acts, social practices, paradigms, knowledge-communities, or gendered subjectivities. These discussions turn out to be indecisive for the present question, however; for while some discussants do indeed treat these alternatives to ideas as a means of constituting philosophy as an object of intellectual history, others treat them as a means of showing that philosophy — presupposed concepts, languages, ways of seeing — determines the method of intellectual history. If the Cambridge school’s use of speech act is the key instance of the first approach, then post-structuralist arguments, drawing on Husserl or Heidegger, Derrida or Foucault, represent the second. In purporting to show that past philosophies cannot be objects of empirical investigation — for example, by arguing that contextual investigation is itself mediated by texts and is thus circular or internal — post-structuralism simply rehearses the case for privileging philosophy as the method of intellectual history. I shall suggest — without arguing in detail on the present occasion — that post-structuralism is the inheritor of a practice of philosophical history that flows from Kant via Hegel into Husserl and thence to Derrida. Broadly speaking, this is a line of development that sees Kant’s transcendental forms of subjectivity being pluralised and historicised by Hegel, turned into claustral structures of consciousness by Husserl, with these structures then being rendered linguistic in a whole array of structuralist and post-structuralist concepts: discourse, paradigm, problematic, *episteme*, *différance*, and others. In treating these concepts as quasi-transcendental conditions of possible experience, post-structuralism continues to treat philosophy in the post-Kantian manner — as reason’s mode of reflecting on itself — and is hence constitutively opposed to treating philosophy as an object of empirical history.

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3 For an overview, see D. R. Kelley, “What is Happening to the History of Ideas”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 51 (1990), 3-25.
The central obstacle to understanding this dispute lies in the representation of it as a philosophical impasse or aporia, rather than as something arising from the conflictual history of the history of philosophy. Since the 1980s we have been told that the history of philosophy and intellectual history more broadly is characterised by a fundamental impasse, between the genre of historical contextualisation that views philosophies as empirical activities, and the genre of rational reconstruction that assesses their contribution to philosophical truth.

Seminal essays collected in Rorty, Schneewind and Skinner’s *Philosophy in History* were particularly influential in placing these historiographic genres into a relation of dialectical opposition, treating them as if they were related through complementary intellectual strengths and weaknesses.⁶ Lead essayists — Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and Richard Rorty — thus presented rational reconstruction as permitting past philosophers to be understood from the vantage of rational truth made available by the current state of the discipline, yet thereby risking the charge of anachronistically rewriting the past to serve present interests. Conversely, historical contextualisation was allowed to solve the problem of anachronism, by interpreting past philosophers in terms of their own canons, purposes, and conflicts, while attracting charges of irrationalism and antiquarianism for failing to separate a core of true philosophy from the husk of historical contingency.

Arranged in this way, the opposed genres are ripe for dialectical reconciliation, typically in strategies that embed past philosophies in various contextual media while simultaneously treating these media as oriented to a supra-contextual truth or rationality. Charles Taylor thus proposes to historicise past philosophies as “social practices”, yet insists that these practices contain a moral and intellectual purposiveness that allows their historical development to be judged in terms of philosophical truth and falsity.⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre argues that past philosophies are indeed embedded in specific contextual “paradigms”, while proposing that otherwise incommensurate paradigms continue to communicate via a “Weltanschauung” through which they are held accountable to an overarching rational judgment.⁸ For his part, having established the standard dialectical opposition between the two genres, Richard Rorty

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envisages their reconciliation taking place in a third genre, Geistesgeschichte, which he sees as perpetually forging links between discrete intellectual contexts in order to support a current “honorific” idea of philosophy required for cultural self-validation. It is noteworthy that these modes of reconciliation also serve to harmonise the history of science — typically dealt with via the method of rational reconstruction — with the otherwise more contextualised history of moral and political philosophy, subjecting the two historiographies to a single norm of philosophical-historical development.

The present paper argues that this dialectical presentation of the two genres makes it impossible to approach the key problem — regarding the divergence between philosophy as object and as method of intellectual history — and issues in a significant misunderstanding of the history of intellectual history. This kind of dialectical presentation is itself a *philosophical* method of doing intellectual history, and is a covert means of arguing that philosophy must be a method before it can be an object of intellectual history. If past philosophies are to be constituted as objects of historical investigation then it is necessary to neutralise the philosophical commitments of the dialectical method — in particular its commitment to the doctrine that all human knowledge is based on quasi-transcendental structures known through philosophy — and to replace these with concepts capable of approaching philosophies as empirical activities taking place under specifiable historical circumstances.

Section 1 diagnoses the philosophical sublimation of historical context produced by dialectical arguments of the kind offered by Taylor, MacIntyre, and Rorty. By viewing contexts as if they were “paradigms” or quasi-transcendental structures, these writers treat the context-dependency of past philosophies not as an historical reality but as a philosophical problem — the problem of mutual intelligibility or incommensurability — which is then ‘solved’ through the kinds of philosophical-historical mediation mentioned above. In response to this view it is argued that we should develop a less philosophical and more historical conception of philosophical contexts, not as quasi-transcendental structures with internal objects but as ensembles of cognitive and ethical arts maintained in particular institutional settings. This makes it possible to relegate the supposed transcendental

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incommensurability of past philosophies in favour of an account of their cultural-political rivalries and geo-political dispersion.

It is to this end that section 2 of the paper introduces the concept of the persona of the philosopher, and that of intellectual personae more broadly. The persona of the philosopher is understood as a special kind of self, cultivated by select members of the European intellectual elite as the means of bearing philosophical knowledge. It is intended as an alternative grounding for technical “arts of reasoning” to that provided by such concepts as paradigm, problematic, Weltanschauung, and discourse. The concept of philosophical persona offers to account for the momentum and unity of the ensemble of logical-rhetorical methods, cognitive techniques, and ethical exercises informing a particular philosophy. It does so by approaching them in terms of their anchorage in a ‘higher’ self made available in a finite series of privileged philosophical institutions and pedagogies.

If past philosophies share no essential or continuously evolving form, and must be described instead in terms of the diverse cultivation of philosophical arts and personae in particular historical contexts, then histories of philosophy will be similarly plural and tied to interests and objectives arising in particular historical circumstances. Section 3 of the paper sketches an argument that the contextual history of philosophy emerged during the seventeenth century, as part of a campaign to suspend the incendiary truth-claims of rival theologies and philosophies by treating them as activities taking place within civil society. This represented one of two fundamental challenges to the dominance of European university metaphysics, the other coming from the emergence of mathematical-experimental sciences, which challenged the truth of metaphysics in a different way, by offering non-metaphysical access to experimentally generated phenomena. Placed in this sequence, the dialectical method of intellectual history that emerged with Kantian philosophy at the end of the eighteenth century can be viewed in its proper historical light: as a means of combating the anti-metaphysics of the contextual history of philosophy and the metaphysical indifference of the history of sciences, by dialectically absorbing them into a ‘higher’ philosophical history. The modern historiography of philosophy is largely a symptomatic record of this ongoing intellectual combat.
1. The Subject of Philosophical History

For modern dialecticians like Taylor, MacIntyre and Rorty, the prime representative of historical contextualisation — the genre of intellectual history that they seek to place in complementary opposition to the genre of rational reconstruction — is provided by the Cambridge school historians of political thought, represented most notably by the work of Quentin Skinner and J. G. A. Pocock. The Cambridge school writers have indeed provided an approach to intellectual history in which past forms of thought, philosophies included, can be constituted as objects of empirical historical interpretation and explanation. By viewing past philosophies as speech acts, Skinner in particular has sought to suspend their truth-claims and to interpret them in terms of their mode of acting on and within particular cultural, religious, and political contexts. It is not surprising, then, that the apparent *rapprochement* between Skinner and the dialecticians in the *Philosophy in History* collection was soon followed by a volume in which Skinner and James Tully defended a decidedly non-dialectical, conflictual conception of intellectual history.

We will argue that by approaching the history of philosophy in this way, the Cambridge school inherits a method and an attitude that first appeared in early modern Western Europe. At that time and place, a wide array of writers — Mosheim, Arnold, Thomasius and Brucker in Germany, Giannone in Naples, in Britain Hume and Gibbon, Beausobre in the Huguenot Diaspora — participated in a multi-fronted campaign to historicise doctrinal theology and metaphysical philosophy, initially through the writing of “histories of heresy” and “narratives of civil government”. They did so as a means of suspending the truth-claims of theology and metaphysics, whose absolute and irreconcilable form was tied to religious civil war. To this end they deployed a series of linked claims, arguing that Christian faith had been corrupted through the patristic importation of Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic philosophy;

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that this had led theologians to formulate doctrinal knowledge of transcendent entities lying beyond human understanding; and that the Constantinian church had begun to enforce these doctrines as necessary for salvation, leading to persecution and war.\textsuperscript{13} These arguments amounted to the first historical contextualisation of philosophy and theology, and were themselves used to suspend metaphysical truth-claims and to approach rival philosophies historically, in terms of their effects on civil government and society.\textsuperscript{14} In short, the prototypical forms of contextualist intellectual history emerged as part of cultural-political movement to detranscendentalise and pacify metaphysical philosophy and theology.

For the most part, those seeking to establish a dialectical opposition between historical contextualisation and rational reconstruction have ignored this historical lineage, with the partial exception of Alasdair MacIntyre. With his more acute nose for the ideological enemy, MacIntyre indeed links the context-dependency of philosophy and theology to the discrediting of their truth-claims in early modernity: “For it was in part, at least, the discovery of rival theological modes of enquiry embedded in rival forms of religious practice similarly unable, and for similar reason, to defeat each other’s claims at a fundamental level by rational argument that led to the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment discrediting of theology as a mode of rational enquiry. So the question necessarily arises: why should philosophy not suffer the same discredit?”.\textsuperscript{15} What makes MacIntyre’s last question merely rhetorical or simply philosophical, however, is his treatment of the contextual specificity of past philosophies as the source of a philosophical problem — that of incommensurate paradigms — rather than as a means of investigating their mode of historical existence, or as an instrument wielded by contextualising historians in order to suspend philosophical truth-claims. MacIntyre purports to be arguing for a synthesis of philosophical and historical approaches, but his response in fact illustrates Pocock’s comment that: “It is nearer the truth to say that there has been a continuing Fakultätenstreit, in which the philosophers have

\textsuperscript{13} For a convenient locus, see Thomasius, \textit{Cautelen zur Erlernung der Rechtsgelehrheit}, Ch. 6, “Precautions Regarding the History of the Philosophical Sects”, 108-36.


\textsuperscript{15} A. MacIntyre, “The Relationship of Philosophy to its Past”, in Rorty et al., \textit{Philosophy in History}, 35.
responded to the proposition that philosophy must be understood historically by treating it as a philosophical proposition that is to be explored, criticised, and defended by the practice of philosophy, not the construction of histories”.

This has been the strategy adopted by Skinner’s major philosophical interlocutors. MacIntyre thus develops his response by using Kuhn’s notion of the paradigm to formulate the problem of mutual incomprehensibility that is supposed to arise from historical contextualisation. If the contexts of past philosophies are like Kuhnian paradigms — mutually interlocking systems of presuppositions, concepts, and theory-laden observations giving rise to internal objects of knowledge — then we would have no neutral means for understanding them or assessing their rationality, which threatens to rob intellectual history of its validity. Similarly, Taylor focuses on the metaphor of combat attendant on Skinner’s suspension of truth as a criterion for understanding past philosophies. In the absence of this criterion, it is only battle that determines the historical success of philosophies, and the intellectual historian has no means of understanding the present in terms of the progress of reason and morality. For his part, Rorty formulates the problem of contextual history in terms of the local character of the concepts and norms used by particular intellectual communities. Given that knowledge is confined to community members, then there must be some way of allowing the members of past intellectual communities to “converse” with each other, even if this only occurs in the present through the mediation modern Geistesgeschichte and the intellectual historian as a modern “sage”.

Once the challenge posed by contextualisation has been reformulated in terms of the threat posed by mutual incomprehensibility and incommensurability, then the philosophers are free to ‘solve’ it by invoking various forms of philosophico-historical mediation. MacIntyre thus proposes that specific philosophies are embedded in larger bodies of theory which are in turn embedded in an overarching “scheme of belief” or Weltanschauung. Not only does the overarching Weltanschauung permit a more rational theory to demonstrate its

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17 For a revealing historical discussion of the philosophical debate over incommensurability in its Kuhnian form, see J. H. Zammito, A Nice Derangement of Epistemes: Post-Positivism in the Study of Science from Quine to Latour (Chicago, 2004), 60-89.
18 MacIntyre, “Relationship”, 39-41.
superiority over a less rational one, but MacIntyre insists that it does so in a manner of an Hegelian *Aufhebung*: adherents of the superseded theory can themselves accept this demonstration on the basis of norms that have been preserved in its successor.\(^{21}\) Taylor effects a similar merging of philosophical norm and historical event by treating past philosophies as embedded in social practices. Conceived in an Hegelian-Aristotelian manner, Taylor’s social practices establish moral community and communication for their bearers by virtue of the purpose or “good” embedded in them, which functions as a telos for human intellectual development. This is supposed to enable the criticism of theories for deviating from the moral purpose embedded in an underlying social practice, and the criticism of social practices for deviating from the founding theoretical articulations of their purpose.\(^{22}\) For his part, Rorty forces Skinnerian historical contextualisation and philosophical rational reconstruction into a common dialectical-philosophical space by treating them as the bearers of mutually opposed yet equally “reasonable” pragmatic purposes. The former answers a need for “self-awareness” by revealing the contextual contingency of all philosophies, including our own, while the latter satisfies a desire for “self-justification” by revealing the ignorance of our ancestors in relation to the present progress of reason.\(^{23}\) *Geistesgeschichte* is supposed to mediate these two tendencies of modern reason by assembling a narrative canon of “great dead philosophers” illustrative of rational progress, while remaining conscious of the problem of anachronism, at least to the degree that it treats this canon as a construction.\(^{24}\)

By reformulating contextual specificity in terms of the supposed problem of mutually self-enclosed philosophical paradigms, the three philosophers seek to motivate a particular intellectual and historical dynamic. The problem will be solved through a process that allows the different paradigms to “converse” with each other, permitting their reconciliation within a mediating moment of knowledge and judgment provided by philosophical history itself. In this way MacIntyre’s harmonising *Weltanschauung*, Taylor’s dialectic between embodied theory and theorised practice, and Rorty’s reconciliatory *Geistesgeschichte* all function as images of the unfolding of philosophical reason in and through historical time, more or less in the Hegelian manner. Should we feel compelled, though, to treat the contextual character

\(^{21}\) MacIntyre, “Relationship”, 42-3.
\(^{22}\) Taylor, “Philosophy and its History”, 22-8.
\(^{23}\) Rorty, “Historiography of Philosophy”, 49-56.
\(^{24}\) Rorty, “Historiography of Philosophy”, 56-61.
of past philosophies as posing this kind of philosophical problem and requiring this kind of philosophical-historical solution?

Consider in this regard the relation between Aristotelian metaphysics (and physics) in early seventeenth-century German universities and the political-juridical “civil philosophy” that sought to oppose and displace this metaphysics in Germany’s post-Westphalian Protestant universities. If we examine a standard work of university metaphysics such as the *Opus metaphysicum* of Christoph Scheibler (1589-1653) — published in 1617 and an important textbook for Lutheran and Anglican metaphysics courses in the first half of the seventeenth century — then in fact we do no find a self-enclosed theoretical paradigm functioning as a quasi-transcendental structure of knowledge. Rather, we encounter a large and rather loose ensemble of doctrines, modes of proof, logico-rhetorical techniques, and cognitive exercises. Scheibler’s doctrinal array is heavily dependent on Aristotelian physics, which supplies him with the concepts of form and matter and the four forms of causation. From Aristotelian metaphysics he takes the conception of God as an intellectual being who creates all things (creatures), including the angels and man, through the intellection of their substantial forms. Scheibler’s doctrinal array also includes the specifically Christian-Aristotelian conception of “spiritual substance” — immaterial, a-temporal, self-acting being, capable of occupying matter non-spatially — in addition to a battery of more strictly theological doctrines: creation *ex nihilo*, the doctrines of Christ’s two natures and God’s three persons, and the associated Lutheran teachings of ubiquity and real presence in the Eucharist.

As far as modes of proof are concerned, Scheibler’s relies on the apodictic positing of conceptual definitions — contents supplied by the above-mentioned doctrines — from which are extrapolated the premises of arguments and conclusions capable of functioning as premises of other deductions. This logico-rhetorical technique in turn derives its power and significance from a particular kind of cognitive or spiritual exercise that Scheibler calls “metaphysical abstraction”. Metaphysical abstraction is understood as an inner exercise that allows the metaphysician to abstract from materially embodied concepts in order to apprehend “real” immaterial substances, namely: God, the angels, and separated souls.

Crucially, metaphysical abstraction is not thought of as an aid to knowledge or as a method in

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25 C. Scheibler, *Opus metaphysicum, duobus libris universum hujus scientiae systema comprehendens* (Giessen, 1617).
the modern sense. Rather, it is itself regarded as a privileged form of knowledge, as a result of the transformation that it works on the metaphysician. As spiritual substances are simple intellectual being, while man is a composite of intellectual being and the corporeal substance that ties him to the material world via his sense organs, to know spiritual substances man must conform himself to them. This is the task performed on man’s behalf by the metaphysician, who purges his intellect of its sensorial attachments to matter and bodies through the exercise of metaphysical abstraction, understood as a means of self-transformation and self-perfection: The prime “office” of metaphysics is thus “that it perfects our intellect through the intellection of things of the highest universality”.  

The metaphysician thus does not come to know his central objects — the spiritual substances, their mode of occupying corporeal substances — as the mouthpiece for a quasi-transcendental structure of “conditions of possibility”. He does so, rather, through the painstaking memorisation of a whole array of doctrines, the practiced mastery of specific modes of proof and logico-rhetorical techniques and, most importantly, a powerful intellectual exercise understood as shaping the psycho-cognitive disposition required to accede to knowledge of metaphysical entities. Scheibler’s ethico-technical cognitive ensemble thus does not conform to MacIntyre’s conception of context as Kuhnian paradigm, as it is too loose, contingent, and performative. Neither is it a Taylorian social practice, as it possesses no inner telos or good, only a variety of religious and political purposes associated with the defence of the Lutheran confessional state. Finally, while they do indeed provide the it with motivation and orientation — towards the defence of the Lutheran Eucharist against the Calvinist — local community norms and purposes do not imbue the ensemble with the character of a quasi-transcendental structure as they do in Rorty’s account. This is because the objects of metaphysical knowledge are not that which an intellectual community exists in order to know, but that which are known because this kind of “community” — the network of metaphysicians employed in Protestant philosophy faculties — happens to exist. For this reason, there is no need to treat the ensemble of doctrines, techniques and exercises that

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forms Scheibler’s kind of Aristotelian metaphysics as giving rise to a problem of mutual incomprehensibility in relation to other kinds of philosophy.

To further clarify this point we can look briefly at one of the most important forms of anti-metaphysical philosophy to emerge in post-Westphalian Protestant Germany: the politico-juridical civil philosophy associated with Samuel Pufendorf (1632-1694) and Christian Thomasius (1655-1728), focusing mainly on the latter. These figures also developed their philosophy in the form of an array of doctrines, modes of proof, logico-rhetorical forms, and ethico-cognitive exercises, but did so with a view to undermining university metaphysics and reshaping the landscape of philosophy itself. Thomasius thus drew on Christian doctrines of the damage done to man’s faculties at the Fall, together with Epicurean doctrines of the helplessness of human reason in the face of the corporeal passions, in order to disqualify knowledge of metaphysical objects and man’s supposed capacity for rational self-governance.\textsuperscript{28} He also developed a contextualist history of philosophy, drawn in part from his father, Jacob, and in part from Gottfried Arnold’s massive history of heresy, which viewed metaphysics and theology as products of the historical corruption of Christian faith by Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. This allowed Thomasius to suspend their truth-claims and treat them as historical phenomena, in terms of their impact on law, politics, and civil society.\textsuperscript{29} Thomasius also made moral-therapeutic use of his Epicurean Affektenlehre, deploying it as an ethical exercise designed to induce scepticism in his law students regarding their capacity for knowledge of transcendent objects, thence requiring them to concentrate on ethical self-restraint and to make the best use of the sensory and historical knowledge of which humans are capable.\textsuperscript{30} He thus sought to cultivate a psycho-cognitive attitude that was inimical to metaphysics and theology and receptive to an array of more recent disciplines — public law, political history, Hobbesian-Pufendorfian political philosophy, and the history of


\textsuperscript{30} I. Hunter, \textit{Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany} (Cambridge, 2001), 223-34.
theology and philosophy — all with a view to undermining the intellectual infrastructure of the early modern confessional state.  

If in post-Westphalian Protestant Germany it was anti-metaphysical civil philosophy — rather than Cartesian physics or Galilean mechanics — that did most to undermine Aristotelian university metaphysics, this was because it offered a rival ethico-technical means of cultivating philosophy and philosophers within the institutional space in the university. This does not mean, however, that adherents of the rival philosophies confronted each other in mutual incomprehension, enclosed within hermetically-sealed structures of knowledge. Aristotelian physics and metaphysics were quite comprehensible to Thomasius. Not only were they the common currency of university education during his youth, but he had been schooled in them by his own father at the University of Leipzig, as indeed had Leibniz, who never gave up on them. Further, despite his opposition to Aristotelian scholasticism, Thomasius continued to draw on elements of it for the elaboration of his own philosophical ensemble, as we can see in his use of the Aristotelian doctrine of man’s “rational and sociable nature” in his early attempt at developing a secularised natural law. In making use of this doctrine, however, Thomasius was neither testifying to the existence of an overarching Weltanschauung joining him to his metaphysical opponents, nor invoking a fundamental moral telos embedded in social and political life. Rather, he was following Grotius’s use of the doctrine as a means of deriving a secular natural law from the rational principle of human sociability, in order to undermine the transcendent principles of Christian natural law. The contingent and strategic character of Thomasius’s use of this doctrine is shown by the fact that he abandoned it in favour of an opposed moral anthropology: the Epicurean conception of man as the creature of uncontrollable and dangerous passions. He did this not least because he discovered that his opponents were also using Grotius’s sociability principle — which they interpreted as the telos of neighbourly love implanted in man by God — as a means of

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33 See C. Thomasius, Drey Bücher der Göttlichen Rechtsgelahrheit (Institutiones jurisprudentiae divinae, 1688), (Halle, 1709), I.i.97, 73.
deriving a natural law higher than the prince’s positive law, thereby presenting an obstacle to the secularisation of law and politics.\textsuperscript{34}

The opposition between Aristotelian metaphysics and civil philosophy that began to emerge in German universities from the middle of the seventeenth century was thus not an expression of their philosophical status as closed theoretical structures supporting incommensurate objects of knowledge. On the contrary, this was an historical antagonism that was brought into existence when an array of politico-juridical philosophers began to attack and displace various elements of the Aristotelian ensemble — with which they were quite familiar — substituting the doctrinal and ethico-cognitive elements of a rival philosophical culture. In doing so, they were driven not by the logic of mutual incomprehension separating different transcendental structures of knowledge, but by the logic of historical conflict emerging from rival religious attachments and political programs.

In order to understand this kind of development, it is necessary to reformulate the historical agent or bearer of philosophical knowledge in a manner that avoids the quasi-transcendental baggage carried by the structuralist concepts of paradigm, problematic, social practice, and knowledge-community. A concept is required that will eliminate a residual structuralism (holism) present in the Cambridge school concepts of speech act and linguistic context, and capture the contingent, loose, and performative character of the ethico-cognitive ensembles that we have been discussing. It is to this end that we introduce the concept of the persona of the philosopher.

\textbf{2. The Persona of the Philosopher}

Like the Cambridge school concept of speech act, the concept of intellectual persona is a means of organising empirical-historical accounts of past philosophies, treating them as activities undertaken using definite intellectual instruments in specifiable historical settings. It differs from speech act in that it seeks to account for such philosophies not in terms of linguistic performatives as such, but in terms of the way in which ensembles of intellectual arts — doctrines, modes of proof, logico-rhetorical techniques, ethico-cognitive exercises,

\textsuperscript{34} For an account of this conflict over the sociability principle, which lasted well into the eighteenth century, see M. Kempe, “Geselligkeit im Widerstreit: Zur Pufendorf-Kontroverse um die socialitas als Grundprinzip des Naturrechts in der Disputationsliteratur in Deutschland um 1700”, \textit{Jahrbuch für Recht und Ethik}, 12 (2004), 57-70.
experimental apparatus, and also speech acts — are tied to a specific sense and kind of self. Further, it does not view such ensembles as the condition of a belief that presents itself “holistically as part of a network of beliefs … within which the various individual items supply each other with mutual support”.\textsuperscript{35} It sees them rather as loose assemblages, acquired through practical mastery, and held together by their pedagogical anchoring in the persona of the philosopher, rather than by a particular belief to which they might give rise. In the history of philosophy, understood as a branch of intellectual history, the persona of the philosopher is introduced in opposition to the philosophical concept of the subject of knowledge. Unlike the philosophical subject — whether the Kantian transcendental subject of reason and morality, or the post-Kantian surrogates of paradigm, social practice, discourse, and knowledge-community — the persona of the philosopher is not arrived at via a quasi-transcendental deduction of norms and rules of reason deemed “necessary” for philosophical understanding. Rather, it is approached via historical investigation of the manner and degree to which the acquisition of an ensemble of intellectual arts, through the formation of a special philosophical self, determines what counts as philosophical understanding for some historical milieu.

The central theoretical and methodological role of the concept of the persona of the philosopher is to dislocate the notion that philosophy is human reason reflecting on its own nature, and thence the idea that the history of philosophy is human reason reflecting on its own development over time.\textsuperscript{36} More positively, by treating “reason” as a generic name for a dispersed array of intellectual arts, and by treating the philosopher as a self cultivated to bear specialised ensembles of such arts, in institutions dedicated to the transmission of particular philosophical traditions, this concept extends the reach of the history of philosophy along two convergent axes. In the first place, it enables us to raise the question of how the desire to philosophise or to become a philosopher is induced — rather than treating this as naturally present in reason’s will to know about its own capacities and limits — and thence to open up the domain of the pedagogical or psychagogical bases of particular kinds of philosophy.

\textsuperscript{35} Skinner, “Interpretation, Rationality and Truth”, 43.

Secondly, it enables us to explore the manner and degree to which acquiring philosophical knowledge depends upon the cultivation of a special philosophical persona.

With regard to the first axis, the persona concept allows us to approach the desire to philosophise or become a philosopher not as something universal, hence beyond historical explanation, but as the outcome of particular regimes of self-problematisation and self-transformation. To see what is at stake here, we can recall that Kant famously treats “philosophising” as something that cannot be learned, opposing it to the “philosophy” of particular historical schools, which can, thereby viewing the desire to philosophise in the Kantian manner as universal or innate. In doing so he invokes a particular image of the chief obstacle to philosophising: namely, our sensuous inclination towards the merely external forms of learnable “school philosophies”. This inclination threatens to distract us from the inner derivation of “rational cognitions” from the “universal sources of reasons — that is, from principles”, constitutive of (Kantian) philosophising. What about this image, though? Is it not something that must be taught and learned? In fact, is it not used to teach apprentice philosophers that they must view all learnable philosophies as hindrances to a pure inner philosophising? In providing novices with this powerful way of calling themselves into question, and imagining a higher truer self, might this not be the means through which the desire to philosophise is induced?

Consider in this regard the role of a particular kind of moral anthropology present in early modern Aristotelian metaphysics: the image of man as a composite being in which the spiritual substance constitutive of God and the angels is joined to the corporeal substance of the animals. In addition to organising detailed metaphysical accounts of perception and the mind-body relation, this anthropology was also used as a means of inducing the desire to undertake the kind of philosophical work in which such accounts are produced. In the small book of advice that the Ferrarese Jesuit philosophy professor Julius Clemens Scotti published in 1636, in order to introduce his students to the study of Thomist-Aristotelian metaphysics,

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we thus find the following exhortations: firstly, owing to its grounding in the intellect, “Philosophy is indeed a divine gift” but, secondly, that this endowment encounters obstacles, because “as long as the will is besieged by the perverse passions, the intellect reasons perversely”. This means, thirdly, that the student is “to trust therefore in authority, to always rely on the reasoning of the learned, and on faith before everything else”.

Here we can recognise a means of inducing the desire to philosophise that both parallels and forms an historical antecedent for Kant’s. Philosophy is endowed in us by God, and yet there is something about the nature of human beings that impedes the development of this gift. This is because philosophy has its seat in the intellect, which is indeed capable of participating in God’s intelligising of the pure forms and substances, yet this intellect that man shares with God and the angels is simultaneously embodied in his corporeal being, where it is weighed down by material perceptions and distracted by the sensuous passions of the will. Through (Aristotelian metaphysical) philosophy, therefore, man can overcome the corruptions of will and knowledge attendant on his mixed intellectual-sensuous nature and aspire to a higher self capable of pure intellection, as we saw in Scheibler’s treatment of metaphysical abstraction. In other words, the desire to philosophise in the Aristotelian manner is incited through induction into a particular practice of self-problematisation oriented to the cultivation of a certain ‘higher’ kind of philosophical self.

That this is so is shown by the manner in which the teaching of Aristotelian metaphysics was attacked by its civil-philosophical opponents. In seeking to undermine what he called “sectarian philosophy”, Thomasius’s first move was to warn his students off the moral anthropology through which they might come to relate to themselves as intellectual beings and thence encounter the desire for metaphysics. In a set of “precautions” that he issued to his law students at the University of Halle during the 1690s, Thomasius thus targets the intellectualist anthropology and rationalist ethics characteristic of Protestant Schulmetaphysik of the Scheiblerian kind, deeming these to be the central doctrines of “sectarian philosophy”:

These doctrines are: (1) that God and matter are two co-eternal principles; (2) that God’s essence consists in speculation and thought; (3) that the nature of spirits consists in thought; (4) that human nature consists in reason on which depends

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the perfection and happiness of the whole human race; (5) that humanity is a single species and that what is good for one is good for another; (6) that the human will is improved through reason; (7) and that in this way it is very easy to attain wisdom and virtue, namely through the improvement of thought.

Thomasius’s objective was to supplant this Christian-Platonic anthropology with a Christian-Epicurean one, according to which, far from an intellectual being, man is a creature of his blind corporeal passions. Here, man’s irrational passions both threaten him with destruction yet connect him to the material world in a manner from which he can benefit, if he learns to moderate them in accordance with the needs of personal happiness and civil life. By requiring his students to call themselves into question in this way, Thomasius’s anthropology was designed to induce the desire to repudiate metaphysical knowledge — as a delusive subtlety beyond human capacities — and to embrace a philosophy centred on restraint of the passions and the mastery of politico-juridical disciplines required for the governance of civil life.

Whether it is Kant’s critical philosophy, Scheibler’s metaphysics, or Thomasius’s natural law, philosophy thus begins not with the recovery of a universal desire to philosophise. Rather, it begins with induction into a regimen of philosophical self-problematisation designed to motivate cultivation of the particular philosophical persona that it makes desirable. Such regimes transmit what Foucault characterises as “models proposed for setting up and developing relationships with the self, for self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination, for the decipherment of the self by oneself, for the transformations that one seeks to accomplish with oneself as object”. Unlike a literary persona — which the philosopher may freely adopt in order to simulate a rhetorical voice — the philosopher’s persona (and the intellectual persona more generally) is acquired through compulsive emulation of the self that one aspires to become, and is thus not clearly distinguishable from either moral or psychological personality. Rather than emerging from a universal drive to impose intellectual order on chaotic experience — a drive that might be realised in the Kantian categories or in the post-Kantian paradigm, discourse, or episteme — the desire to

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41 Thomasius, Cautelen zur Erlernung der Rechtsgelehrtheit, 113.
43 M. Foucault, The Use of Pleasure (Harmondsworth, 1985), 29.
philosophise arises from induction into the regimen associated with the cultivation of a particular philosophical persona. As objects of intellectual history, past philosophies are not serial historical expressions of a universal human desire for knowledge and understanding, but regimes for inducing such a desire in those whom circumstance or chance have selected to cultivate a philosophical persona. The history of philosophical pedagogy or psychagogy should thus form an integral part of the history of philosophy, as has long been argued by a wide variety of writers.44

The second axis along which the persona concept extends the reach of the history of philosophy lies in the account it offers of the relation between the acquisition of philosophical knowledge and the cultivation of a special philosophical self. The philosopher’s self is usually viewed as a purely formal point of reflexive self-awareness, for example, the “cogito” of Descartes’ sceptical reduction, or the “I” required for the synthesis of a Kant’s perceptual manifold — the “transcendental subject of apperception”, the “I” that thinks. Through the concept of the philosophical persona, though, we learn to see this self as something that the apprentice philosopher cultivates — for example, by learning to perform Descartes’ sceptical reduction as a kind of contemplative exercise — thereby imbuing a particular ensemble of intellectual arts with the unity and dynamism of a culturally valorised and intensely desired “higher self”.

Consider in this regard the role of the “antinomies of reason” in Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason and their relation to the knowledge of critical philosophy. The logico-rhetorical device of antinomy — the pairing of balanced propositions understood as equally true yet mutually contradictory — has a long philosophical history with a variety of ethical-cognitive uses. These include the Pyrrhonian isothenia or equipollence of contradictories, where antinomy is used as a technique for inducing the sceptical suspension of judgment.45 In the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant puts the device to a parallel but different use, as a means of cultivating a special “critical” kind of judgment through the balancing and neutralisation of

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the mutually opposed judgments of the thesis and antithesis. In the famous third antinomy of his transcendental dialectic — the “antinomy of freedom” — Kant thus opposes the propositions that: “Causality in accordance with the laws of nature is not the only one from which all the appearances of the world can be derived. It is also necessary to assume another causality through freedom in order to explain them”. And: “There is no freedom, but everything in the world happens solely in accordance with the laws of nature”.

The immediate object of this exercise is to establish a pattern of thought in which it is possible to entertain the idea of pure freedom — centrally, the idea of an intellectual agent capable of absolutely spontaneous self-willing and self-acting — but not as an object of empirical understanding, or in a way that overturns the causal laws of nature. It is through the exercise of holding these two thoughts in balance that Kant resolves the third antinomy, by motivating a reconciliatory figure of thought: namely, that while it may not be an object of empirical understanding, spontaneous freedom may still be “thought”, as an idea necessary for the operation of reason, even if we do not “know” what it is in itself.

It is only in this form then — as a “transcendental idea” — that spontaneous freedom may be thought, specifically as the idea of the self-generating actions of an intellectual being that nonetheless have effects in the empirical world.

As far as the history of philosophy is concerned, everything hinges on how the antinomy is understood. Despite acknowledging its therapeutic character — at one point he portrays it as the staging of inner battle that neither side can win, resulting in intellectual equilibrium — Kant nonetheless insists that the antinomy is “inevitable” for human reason. Reason, he argues, feels compelled to overstep its limits in both directions, treating both spiritual freedom and causal laws as “things in themselves”, rather than as forms for governing reason in its moral and theoretical uses. This means that the antinomy is natural and universal — part of the “natural and unavoidable dialectic of pure reason” — and that its resolving transcendental ideas possess universal validity as the only means of overcoming the “illusions of reason”.

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There is little reason to think, though, that it is “human reason” that compels anyone to accept either of the opposed judgments. In fact, these are drawn from specific historical philosophical traditions whose conflict Kant was attempting forestall. The notion of a spontaneous transcendent cause for the empirical world is thus a particular doctrine maintained in European university metaphysics. This metaphysics originally formulated the idea of spontaneous freedom via a specific conception of God: as an infinite spiritual being, self-willing and self-acting because not bound by the four causalities — formal, material, efficient and final — that govern the existence of things in the world of bodies in space and time.\(^{50}\) That Kant is drawing on this metaphysical conception of freedom is indicated by the key characteristics that he attributes to spontaneous freedom: the capacity for pure self-activity unconditioned by all empirical determinations. It is also indicated by his recourse to the language of spiritual being in some of the unpublished *Reflexionen* in which he was formulating ideas that would flow into the antinomies of the transcendental dialectic. In a clear anticipation of the third antinomy — in 1776-77, four or five years prior to the published version — we thus find Kant formulating three “Rules of Dialectic”, the second of which states: “Do not subject what does not belong to outer appearance, e.g., spirit, to its conditions”.\(^{51}\) It is not reason, then, that gives rise to the problematic idea of a spontaneous transcendental origin for causal chains in the empirical world, but Kant’s biographical-historical commitment to a central doctrine of university metaphysics. For its part, the other side of the antinomy — the notion that there is no freedom in a world of appearances governed by causal laws — comes from a second species of university metaphysics, the Leibniz-Wolff philosophy, which taught that all cosmic events are determined by a chain of causally “sufficient reasons”.\(^{52}\)

The opposed doctrines of the third antinomy thus arise not as an unavoidable “transcendental illusion” of human reason, but from two historical philosophical doctrines that were opposed to each other on cultural-political grounds: the metaphysical doctrine of spiritual freedom that Kant regarded as indispensable to morality, and the doctrine of causal laws required for knowledge of empirical appearances. Kant clearly presumes some kind of

\(^{50}\) See, for example, Scheibler’s account of God as spontaneously self-acting spiritual being in the *Opus metaphysicum*, bk. II, 496-8.

\(^{51}\) Kant, *Reflexionen*, *AK*, XVII, 704-5.

background cultural familiarity with these doctrines, but what renders them compelling is the antinomy itself; that is, the antinomy not as a natural proclivity of human reason, but as a rhetorical device used in an ethico-cognitive exercise. For this exercise to reach its full psychagogic potential, however, his readers’ desire to philosophise in the Kantian manner must already have been incited in the way we have discussed above: by induction into a conception of themselves as beings whose capacity for drawing “rational cognitions” from inner principles is threatened by their sensuous inclination to believe in external things in themselves.

Only when relating to themselves in this way will readers treat what is in fact an instituted ethico-cognitive exercise as if it were something to which they are compelled by the contrary tendencies of human reason itself. They will do so because in performing the exercise, and thereby (temporarily) suspending belief in pure freedom and natural causality as transcendent realities, they take themselves to be realising a higher rational self, as distinct from simply cultivating a particular intellectual attitude. Rather than personifying “pure reason”, though, this self is in fact a culturally valorised (hence intensely desired) philosophical persona — that of the critical philosopher understood as the one who frees human reason from its own compulsive illusions — to which novices aspire through the performance of the exercise itself. The antinomy provides students with the psycho-technical means of relating to the competing historical concepts of spiritual freedom and natural causality as if they were opposed tendencies of their own inner reason. This allows them to temporarily suspend belief in the objective reality of the concepts — performing what is in effect a devotional thought-experiment — and thereby accede to them in the form of “transcendental ideas”. This inner exercise also performs the important cultural-political task of preserving the metaphysical idea of spiritual freedom from extinction at the hands of doctrines of empirical causation, by treating freedom and causation as ideas governing moral reason and empirical understanding, respectively.

In other words, it is through the cultivation of this philosophical self or persona — the critical philosopher who emancipates human reason from the illusion of “things in themselves” — that the doctrines, modes of proof, and rhetorical techniques of Kant’s philosophy find the motivating unity that gives rise to a particular kind of philosophical knowledge. The knowledge in question is that of “transcendental ideas” — here, the
transcendental idea of freedom — whose understanding as a non-empirical mode of governing thought for moral purposes depends upon performing the inner exercise formative of the persona of the critical philosopher. This dependency of philosophical knowledge on the formation of a particular philosophical persona is clearly not confined to Kantian critique. We have already noted a similar dependency in the case of early modern Aristotelian metaphysics and its civil philosophical rival. It is for just this reason that particular forms of philosophical knowledge are not freely and universally available to a generic human “subject of reason” and, as a result, what has counted as philosophy and a philosopher has been subject to such profound historical variation.53

3. The History of the History of Philosophy

It is no accident that it is in the area of political thought that contextualist intellectual history, in the form of the Cambridge school, has had its greatest success in constituting thought as an object of empirical-historical investigation. The conception of the “political” found in modern contextual histories of political thought — roughly that of a juridically structured exercise of territorial sovereignty by a state separated from transcendent religious and moral imperatives — is one that their early modern prototypes helped to create.54 The early modern histories did this by removing politics from the normative domains of Christian natural law and moral theology and relocating it in the interests and rivalries of the emerging European territorial states, the “context” for political thought. We have already observed, however, that the early modern historians of heresy and civil government were no less preoccupied with philosophical thought. In suspending the truth-claims of Christian university metaphysics, and viewing this discipline in terms of its historical role in elaborating rival confessional theologies, a contextualising history sought to “detranscendentalise” philosophy, typically with a view to demoting it to the position of a propaedeutic in the arts of reasoning.55 This is the source of our conjectural argument —

54 See the helpful discussions in J. Tully, “The Pen is a Mighty Sword: Quentin Skinner's Analysis of Politics”, in Tully, ed., Meaning and Context, 7-25; and Pocock, “Quentin Skinner”.
certainly requiring further research and elaboration — that the contextualist historiographies of philosophy and political thought share a common history, emerging as associated strategies to secularise politics and detranscendentalise philosophy within the seventeenth-century development of a non-theocratic civil culture. If this is so, then the empirical character of contextualist intellectual history — its program of describing thought as a form of conduct anchored in particular historical interests and purposes — will be inseparable from its cultural-political commitment to a secularised understanding of politics and a detranscendentalised conception of philosophy.

This conjectural argument finds a significant degree of confirmation in the emergence of a second, radically opposed historiography of philosophy at the end of the eighteenth century, deriving from Kant’s reconstruction of metaphysics. Not only did Kant’s claim to have discovered the transcendental conditions of a universal human reason lead to the “re-transcendentalising” of philosophy — the repudiation of its propaedeutic role in favour of conception of philosophy as reason’s reflection on its own capacities — but it also led to a new conception of the history of philosophy. Under the Kantian regime, the history of philosophy could not be a representation of philosophical reason as an historical phenomenon, because representation is itself an exercise of philosophical reason. This means that philosophy cannot be an object for an empirical history of philosophy, which must instead assume the reflexive form of reason’s reflection on its own historical evolution towards self-consciousness: Kantian philosophy itself. It was at this point that the argument over whether philosophy is the object or the method of the history of philosophy first emerged, not as a philosophical aporia, but as a dispute between radically opposed cultural-political programs. Indeed, it seems likely that it was Kant himself who first asked the question: “Whether the history of philosophy could itself be a part of philosophy, or must be [part of] the history of learning [Gelehrsamkeit] in general”, unequivocally affirming the former against the latter possibility on the grounds that, as reason’s mode of reflecting on itself, critical metaphysics is the unsurpassable paramount science.

These were the historical circumstances in which Kant called for the development of a “philosophical history of philosophy” which he opposed to the “history of learning”

56 This viewpoint remains current, as we can see in Braun, Geschichte der Philosophiegeschichte, 217-36.
57 I. Kant, “Lose Blätter zu den Fortschritten der Metaphysik”, AK, XX, 343.
(Geschichte der Gelehrsamkeit) on the grounds that: “For although it establishes facts of reason, it [the philosophical history of philosophy] does not borrow these from the narration of history but draws them from the nature of human reason in the form of a philosophical archaeology”.\textsuperscript{58} If we examine the form in which this philosophical history is supposed to avoid empirical narratives and draw its account directly from the nature of human reason itself, then we encounter something that is quite striking: its antinomic and dialectical character. In the “History of Pure Reason” with which Kant concludes the Critique of Pure Reason, he thus divides all philosophers into the “sensual” and the “intellectual”, aligning the former with the “empiricists” like Locke, who attempt to derive ideas from experience, and the latter with the “noologists” (or rationalists), like Leibniz, who appeal to rational intuition. In terms of method, there are the sceptics represented by Hume and the dogmatics represented by Wolff, with Kant concluding that the only philosophy that has managed to avoid these antinomic forms is his own, which has recovered the rational conditions of empirical experience through a “critical” method.\textsuperscript{59}

We have of course encountered this schematism before, in the antinomies of the Transcendental Dialectic. There, however, it was presented not as a model for philosophical history but as an analysis of the opposed tendencies of the human intellect. One of the remarkable (and under-researched) dimensions of the First Critique is thus the manner in which Kant takes the antinomies of the Transcendental Dialectic — which we have redescribed as an inner exercise designed to cultivate a “critical” intellectual comportment — and projects them onto “history”, thereby creating a new model for intellectual history. From this redeployment arose a powerful image of the history of philosophy as a progressive dynamic driven by two mutually opposed tendencies: a transcendent rationalism incapable of grasping the sensory limits of knowledge, and an empiricism incapable of grasping the transcendental conditions of experience. As the transcending reconciliation of this opposition, the advent of Kant’s own philosophy is supposed to complete the history of philosophy through the critical discovery of the empirical limits of reason and the transcendental

\textsuperscript{58} Kant, “Lose Blätter”, AK, XX, 341.
\textsuperscript{59} Kant, Kritik, AK III, 550-52; Guyer and Wood, Critique, 702-4.
conditions of empirical experience, thereby manifesting the truth of reason in history. It is as if the illusions of reason are now to be purged through the movement of history itself.

The teleological and triumphalist character of post-Kantian philosophical history is increasingly well understood. Less well deciphered is the manner in which its origin in the ethico-cognitive regimen of the Kantian dialectic imbues philosophical history with a profoundly anti-historical character, designed in fact to combat contextualist empirical history and to defeat its anti-metaphysical secularising cultural-politics. Through his historical projection of the dialectic, Kant provided a means for treating entire historical-intellectual movements — Leibnizian-Wolffian metaphysics and Humean historico-empirical philosophy, for example — as if they were nothing more than embodiments of the opposed (rationalist and empiricist) compulsions of human reason. Once denuded, de-historicised, and philosophically sublimated in this way, such movements could be treated as open to understanding and transcendence merely through a set of operations performed in the philosophical historian’s own mind or discourse — the discursive balancing and reconciling of opposed rationalist and empiricist philosophies — which was now presented as the eschatological “moment” in which reason finally achieves consciousness of itself in time. This is the method that Kant called the “philosophical history of philosophy” and that is now more commonly known as philosophical history.

If we return to the framing argument with which we began this paper — the presentation of a philosophical impasse between a contextualising historical reconstruction accused of relativistic antiquarianism, and a method of rational reconstruction accused of imposing its own truth on past philosophies — then we can begin to see it in a changed light. This way of presenting the state of play in intellectual historiography can now be seen as the direct inheritor of the Kantian dialectic between empiricism and rationalism, and hence of a post-Kantian philosophical history. MacIntyre thus characterises contextualist history of philosophy as turning the past into the “realm only of the de facto”, lacking any means of judging the rationality of past philosophies, while rational reconstructions turn the present into the “realm of the de jure”, lacking any means of historicising the current discipline.

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60 The exemplary modern English rendition of this history is L. W. Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and His Predecessors* (Cambridge Mass., 1969). But see also Braun, *Geschichte der Philosophiegeschichte*, where Hegel is presented as completing the revolution begun by Kant.

Taylor’s presentation is very similar, while Rorty parleys the same stand-off into an opposition between a Skinnerian contextualism satisfying a community need for empirical “self-awareness” and a rational reconstruction satisfying the need of another kind of community for idealised “self-justification”.62 These philosophers thus present what is in fact an unresolved historical conflict between rival intellectual cultures in a scarcely recognisable form: as a conflict between opposed subjective tendencies of reason capable of being known and transcended through their reconciliation in the philosophical historian’s own mind or discourse. This is what is supposed to be achieved through Taylor’s appeal to “social practice”, MacIntyre’s to a reconciliatory Weltanschauung, and Rorty’s to a Geistesgeschichte envisaged as harmonising the rival needs for historical self-awareness and philosophical self-justification. What is in fact achieved, however, is the continuation of the post-Kantian war against the historicisation of metaphysics in an updated, more covert form.

This had three damaging consequences for the discipline of intellectual history. Firstly, it has obscured the degree to which the history of metaphysical, moral and political thought has been driven by historical conflicts between rival philosophies attached to competing cultural, religious and political forces. Conversely, Skinner’s empirical contextualisation of thought is characterised by what James Tully has called the “primacy of practical conflict”.63 We have seen that when the Epicurean civil philosophers attacked the Aristotelian metaphysicians this battle did not occur within a common sphere of universal reason, or on the terrain of a shared social practice or Weltanschauung allowing the rival parties to be judged in accordance with an overarching intellectual purpose or moral telos. Rather it took place through the assembling of (overlapping yet divergent) doctrinal arrays, modes of proof, and ethico-technical exercises, from which diverse forms of philosophical reasoning, knowledge, and ethical aspiration arose. Individuals entered into such intellectual assemblages not through reasoned insight into their truth, but as a result of their induction into a desire to transform themselves in accordance with a highly valorised philosophical persona. Rival philosophies thus confronted each other not on the basis of open-ended rational discussion, but through the gladiatorial discourses of exemplary philosophical personae, personae formed on the basis of longstanding prior commitments to particular

63 Tully, “The Pen is a Mighty Sword”, 22.
philosophical styles and cultural-political agendas. Where a particular philosophy was empowered by the juridical apparatus — as university metaphysics was through canon law and the crime of heresy — then the irreconcilable conflict between rival philosophies could be and was resolved through exemplary juridical coercion, the banning or burning of books, the arrest of their authors.

Montaigne thus advocated the cultivation of skeptical detachment regarding theological and philosophical truth claims, while Bayle insisted on the non-rational and non-demonstrable character of theological doctrine, as a means of withdrawing from a dangerous and unwinnable competition over absolute truth. Thomasius, who had commented on both Montaigne and Bayle in his review journal, the *Monatsgespräche*, undertook his historicisation of metaphysics and theology for similar reasons. In offering his contextual account of the return of metaphysics to the Protestant university — in terms of its role as philosophical attack-dog for rival theologies — Thomasius was also attempting to provide an historical explanation for the irresolvable and dangerous character of philosophico-theological disputes, such that they could only be dealt with through the strategy of state-enforced mutual toleration. It was not, as MacIntyre argues, their context-dependency that “discredited” rival metaphysical theologies in early modernity, as if this were a philosophical problem that might later be corrected. Rather it was the fact that the “histories of heresy” sought to embed theologies and philosophies in particular historical contexts as a means of actively discrediting their rival truth claims and reconstituting them as objects in a history of the government of civil society. The contextual history of philosophy that emerged from the early modern histories of heresy thus not only made sectarian philosophical conflict a central object of investigation, but this style of history was itself in irreconcilable conflict with the form of metaphysical philosophy that it was born to undermine by subjecting it to historical investigation. I have already conjectured that Skinner and Pocock’s mode of contextualisation, in which philosophical truth-claims are suspended, and philosophies are treated as active combatants in the history of political thought, might be seen as the inheritor

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65 This is the central argument of C. Thomasius and E. R. Brenneisen, *Das Recht evangelischer Fürsten in theologischen Streitigkeiten* (Halle, 1696).
66 MacIntyre, “Relationship”, 35.
of this anti-metaphysical style of history. By the same token, the attempt to recuperate their intellectual history as the empiricist side of a larger philosophical-historical dialectic, exemplifies the counter-attack of modern post-Kantian metaphysics.

Second, if post-Kantian philosophical history occludes the understanding of intellectual history as ungrounded cultural-political struggle that arose with early modern civil philosophy, then it is no less inimical to a quite different understanding of intellectual history — as progress through successive experimental testing — that arose with the emergence of mathematical-experimental sciences during the seventeenth century. In treating knowledge in the post-Kantian manner, as the product of the internal relations of a quasi-transcendental system — whether this be a social practice, Kuhnian paradigm, discourse, or knowledge-community — philosophical history erases the early modern divergence of the history of sciences from the history of philosophy. The Cambridge school treatment of philosophies as speech acts is not able to overcome this forced integration of the history of sciences within philosophical history, in part due to a residual linguistic structuralism, and in part because its conception of intellectual history as battle is suited to contextualist civil history rather than the experimental history of the sciences.

The anti-representational character of the post-Kantian approach implies that experimental sciences are no more capable of representing external objects than are metaphysical philosophies, from which they are supposed to differ only through the addition of a technical apparatus capable of bringing their supposedly internal objects into external existence. This approach encounters great difficulties, though, when it attempts to deal with the fact that experimental sciences do indeed appear to have a progressive history, characterised by successive defeasible attempts to represent a particular phenomenal field, whereas the history of philosophy appears driven by rivalries and conflicts between intellectually indefeasible positions. MacIntyre attempts to overcome this difficulty by

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denying that philosophy and the experimental sciences have different kinds of history. He argues that both histories have evolved in relation to a single norm of truth, only in the case of philosophy, this norm — Plato’s conception of truth — lies at its origins rather than in its future, suggesting that it must progress backwards in order to reconcile the diversity of its historical forms.69 Rorty’s attempt to deal with the problem is neither less audacious nor more successful. In keeping with his anti-foundational philosophy — a conventionalist post-Kantianism — he argues that, like all knowledge, sciences are based on opinion grounded in rational justification, with the latter being dependent on the norms of a particular community. The differences between the histories of philosophy and the sciences are thus to be regarded as “incidental”, reflecting the fact that the philosophical community permits significant differences in opinions — permits, for example, some members to continue to believe in Aristotelian substances or essences — while the scientific community does not permit such divergence.70

Rorty’s attempt to merge the histories of philosophy and the sciences within a philosophical history of knowledge-communities is unsustainable, however. On the one hand, this philosophical history fails to grasp the fact that the presence of multiple opinions in the history of philosophy reflects not the norms of the philosophical community, but that no such community exists. The persistence of belief in Aristotelian substances and entelechies is a reminder that the attempt to discredit this belief took place not in the form of a rational insight or experimental discovery that could have been accepted by the Aristotelian philosopher, but as a campaign to destroy the intellectual infrastructure of this persona, undertaken by such groups as the civil philosophers. It is the historical fact that this campaign was only partially successful — owing not least to continuous transmission of Aristotelian philosophy and its persona in Jesuit universities — that accounts for the continuing belief in Aristotelian substances and embodied moral purposes, hence for some of the disagreements found in modern philosophy faculties. Disagreement as to the nature of philosophy arises not from the fact that philosophers happen to form a community permitting deviation from a norm, but from the fact there is no such thing as the community of philosophers — no norm

69 MacIntyre, “Relationship”, 45.
of truth in MacIntyre’s terms — only an array of schools divided by longstanding rivalries and conflicts.

On the other hand, the higher degree of fundamental agreement within the sciences cannot be explained in terms of the tighter policing of epistemic norms in the “scientific community”. Rather, this agreement, and the associated progressive character of the history of sciences, arose from a crucial set of changes in the intellectual infrastructure of the persona of the natural philosopher that took place in early modern north-western Europe. As Stephen Gaukroger has argued, the discussion of scientific method in both Bacon and Descartes may be regarded as a self-conscious attempt to reconstruct the persona of the natural philosopher in opposition to the scholastic Aristotelian model. This amounted to a program for purging a whole series of doctrines, intellectual practices, and ethical aspirations anchored in the contemplative persona of the Aristotelian philosopher and his text-driven systems of knowledge. These were to be replaced with an intellectual ensemble capable of supporting an experimental attitude towards phenomena in a milieu characterised by the collective pursuit of sciences deemed beneficial for civil society.\footnote{S. Gaukroger, \textit{Francis Bacon and the Transformation of Early-Modern Philosophy} (Cambridge, 2001); and S. Gaukroger, “The Persona of the Natural Philosopher”, in Condren, Gaukroger, and Hunter eds., \textit{The Philosopher in Early Modern Europe}, 17-34.} This Baconian persona formed the ethical platform for an ensemble of observational routines, recording instruments, mathematical notations, and experimental methods that made it possible to produce defeasible representations of specific fields of phenomena through repeatable experiments. Hence, even though emergent natural sciences were arrived at through the ethical cultivation of a special persona, unlike the metaphysical sciences they were not confined to this cultivation. This is because the persona of the natural philosopher supported cognitive prostheses — of observation, calculation, experiment — that connect the investigator to phenomenal fields that are not themselves dependent on the acts of inner self-transformation. This was the decisive fissure that began to divide the persona of the natural philosopher and the history of sciences from the persona of the philosopher and the history of philosophy, not least because knowledge of the substances, essences, and entelechies of academic philosophy was indeed confined to the cultivation of a special philosophical persona, as we have seen in the case of Kant’s “transcendental ideas”.
Third and finally, as a result of its program to dialectically absorb contextualist intellectual history and the history of sciences, philosophical history is in no position to grasp its own history and current significance. We have already noted what it is about Rorty’s elaboration of philosophical history (Geistesgeschichte) that echoes Kant’s philosophical sublimation of historical understanding: namely, his identification of contextualist history and rational reconstruction with opposed subjective needs — for “self-awareness” and “self-justification” respectively — thereby locating philosophical history as the exemplary moment of reconciliation. According to Rorty, by constructing canons of great philosophers in terms of an “honorific” conception of philosophy, as the highest use of the intellect, philosophical historians — he mentions Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Reichenbach, Foucault, Blumenberg, and MacIntyre — satisfy the need for a self-justifying history of philosophical heroes, while also displaying self-awareness that such canons are indeed only constructions. Not only does this conception of philosophical history erase the historical significance of contextualist history — its emergence as a means of suspending the truth of metaphysical philosophies and embedding them within a history of civil society — it also obscures the manner in which philosophical history emerged from Kant’s historical projection of the transcendental dialectic.

Rorty’s remarks do, though, contain an important pointer to the history of philosophical history, significantly, in his passing characterisation of the persona of the philosophical historian as a modern sage. As the “person who decides what is worth thinking about” and determines which philosophical questions unite us with our intellectual ancestors, the philosophical historian “plays the role which, in the ancient world, was played by the sage”.72 The sage is above all a personage whose exemplary mode of self-cultivation is taken to embody the highest of ethical aspirations — typically by putting his community in touch with a higher redemptive reality — and who exercises moral, intellectual, and sometimes political authority on this basis.73 Kant created the persona of the philosophical historian as modern sage by projecting the transcendental dialectic onto history. As the exemplary mind in which opposed philosophies are harmonised, the philosophical historian assumes the moral and intellectual authority to diagnose the reciprocal cultural crises of rationalism and

72 Rorty, “Historiography of Philosophy”, 60.
empiricism, and the eschatological capacity to foresee their historical resolution, through the progressive realisation of reason in time. Such is the historical meaning of Taylor’s Hegelian-Aristotelian appeal to purposive moral “social practices”, Maclyntre’s parallel summoning of a history of philosophy that has been running backwards from Aristotelianism since the Reformation, and Rorty’s post-Kantian invocation of a Geistesgeschichte capable of holding the fissiparous tendencies of contextual history and the history of sciences within a single philosophical imaginary. We can thus begin to see why the persona of the philosophical historian must be a prime topic for contextual histories of the persona of the philosopher. This is prophetic hermeneutical persona whose extraordinary moral prestige we can recognise in the line running from Kant and Hegel, through Cohen and Cassirer, to Husserl, Heidegger, and Habermas.