

THE PROBLEMS OF THE HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY: A SEARCH FOR THE PHILOSOPHY OF PHILOSOPHIES

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Abstract

This piece on the problems of the history of Western philosophy borders on the long relationship between philosophy and history. It is a relationship that dates back to the time of Aristotle through the period of Descartes to the contemporary epoch. However, unlike the previous discourses on the relationship between philosophy and history, this work raises questions regarding some concerns in this relationship, which has been articulated under the following themes: the issue of conceptual legitimacy, the danger in translated texts, reciprocal causation, eternal recurrence, progress, tentative history, relegation of an entire epoch to the background and the issue of non-scientific and investigative approach. As these questions arise, it does not imply that the current history of philosophy ceases to be genuine history of philosophy. This work, as it is customary in the world of philosophy and philosophizing, rather raises questions that provide a platform for further discussions especially by scholars of the history of philosophy on the current foundation of the history of philosophy. The questions raised do not intend to serve as final questions but as a basis for further interrogations and answers-and in this sense, to sting scholars of the history of philosophy to some level of consciousness often taken for granted. For the purpose of this work, the historical and critical approaches were employed, given that it concerns history and borders on questionings that touch on the foundations of the history of philosophy.

Keywords: *History, Philosophy, Western, Problems, Truth.*

Introduction

One cannot underestimate the fundamental place that history occupies in the life of any society - ancient and modern. Thus, Copleston avers that: "We would scarcely call anyone 'educated' who had no knowledge whatsoever of history"¹. Connecting the significance of the history of philosophy to the development of the mind of the philosopher, he writes further:

¹ F. Copleston. *A history of Philosophy: Greece and Rome*. London: Continuum. 2006, 1.

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To him especially who does not set out to learn a given system of philosophy but aspires to philosophize *ab ovo*, as it were, the study of the history of philosophy is indispensable, otherwise he will run the risk of proceeding down blind valleys and repeating the mistake of his predecessors, from which a serious study of past thought might perhaps have saved him².

It is, therefore, not surprising that Aristotle, before the study of the four causes of things in his *Metaphysics*, began by calling to his aid those who have conducted this investigation in the past. He writes: "...to go over their views then, will be of profit to the present inquiry, for we shall either find another type of cause, or be more convinced of the correctness of those which we now maintain"³. For Paul Oskar Kristeller, the study of the history of philosophy "derives from the fact that this study opens up a much greater variety of problems and topics, solutions and insights than the currently prevalent schools of philosophy do"⁴. He believes that:

Historical scholarship will help us to reconstruct from available sources, both documentary and textual, the life and career of a past thinker, the list of his published, unpublished and lost writings, his connection with certain schools and traditions, his social and economic background and status (to which far too much attention has recently been paid) and above all, his place within the framework of the learning and culture of his time⁵.

Focusing on the excavative capacity of philosophy in its search for the truth, Paul Oskar Kristeller adds that:

The history of philosophy will remind us of many important problems which are now neglected but worthy of renewed study, such as friendship or immortality; of alternative solutions to important

² F. Copleston, *A history of Philosophy: Greece and Rome*, 3

³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. In R. McKeon (Ed.). *The basic works of Aristotle*, pp. 689-934. New York: The Modern Library, 1941, 693, No. 3

⁴ P. O. Kristeller, *Philosophy and its historiography*. *The Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 82. No. 11. 2015, 618-625.

⁵ P. O. Kristeller, *Philosophy and its historiography*, 621

problems which are often arbitrarily excluded or ignored; and of alternative arguments and objections pertaining to these same problems⁶.

The current piece does not in any way undermine the importance of the history of philosophy as the thought-current of these philosophical figures in the historical evolution of philosophy continue to remain the outstanding achievements of the human spirit. This piece points out the author's concerns about a particular historical evolution, which is an important stage in the reading of the history of philosophy, in the sense that philosophy is in this work reflecting on the work that it has created and which it has acknowledged as its own so that it might become a philosophy of philosophies⁷.

Martial Gueroult observes that at this stage of inquiry in the history of philosophy, as philosophy reflects on the work that it has created, scholarship rests on the levels of philosophy and history as independent disciplines making their contributions towards the advancement of a discipline, namely history of philosophy:

On the level of philosophy, we ask ourselves how philosophy can admit and legitimize the very principle of its history; and, if it can, how it can arrive at justifying philosophies as objects worthy of a possible history. On the level of history, we first examine how in fact this history was formed and how philosophy has in fact reacted through the course of time not only to its past, but to the discipline which purports to display its past to it⁸.

This piece raises questions that go beyond the usual experience of being dazzled 'by the multiplicity of perspectives'⁹ in the history of philosophy and the concept of the history of philosophy as simply 'a kaleidoscope of changing, competing positions'¹⁰. The author has, therefore, decided to refer

⁶ P. O. Kristeller, *Philosophy and its historiography*, 624

⁷ M. Gueroult, *The history of philosophy as a philosophical problem*. http://monist.oxfordjournals.org/by_gueston, June 7, 2016. p. 564.

⁸ M. Gueroult, *The history of philosophy as a philosophical problem* p. 564.

⁹ W. F. Lawhead, *The voyage of discovery: A historical introduction to philosophy*. (Canada: Nelson Thompson Learning, 2002), xxx

¹⁰ W. F. Lawhead, *The voyage of discovery: A historical introduction to philosophy*, xxx

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to the content of this piece as “The problems of the history of Western philosophy: A search for the philosophy of philosophies”. First, it captures the personal reflections of a philosopher that might not be generally accepted; its non-universality, however, does not in any way make it less an observation or a reflection; and second, it contains the fruits of the author’s reflections during his study of the history of philosophy. These fruits of the author’s thoughts on the history of philosophy constitute the content of this piece which is now shared with friends, students and fellow scholars of different shades.

This reflection is important, given that many scholars have become very comfortable with the history of philosophy that they find nothing wrong with the content or personalities or its arrangement. This work is intended to ignite the possibility of a rethought or the possibility of providing a reason or reasons for their comfortability by providing perspectives contrary to those that have been celebrated in this piece. In this case, this work is hoped to play the role of a philosophical exorcist in terms of conjuring mortified spirits or one that would open new vistas within the parameters of philosophy, especially, the understanding of the history of philosophy.

The History of Philosophy

Paul Oskar Kristeller had argued that in discussing the relationship between philosophy and history that it is necessary to define what philosophy is¹¹, however, this piece takes it for granted that the reader has an understanding of what philosophy is already. The reason for this is to avoid getting into a new controversy as philosophers are yet to agree on what philosophy is. Most philosophers know, as I do, that philosophers agree on what philosophy is until it is put into writing or expressed. This is not in any way to mean that there are no areas of convergences among philosophers regarding the conception of philosophy, but just to mention that there are several areas of divergences. The author assumes that the major reason why Oskar emphasized the need for a definition of philosophy and yet never defined it in his work on *Philosophy and its historiography* is possibly because he also depended on such an assumption. Thus, while the author agrees with Oskar that it is necessary to have such a definition, like him, he takes it for granted that his readers have a

¹¹ P. O. Kristeller, *Philosophy and its historiography*. *The Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 82. No. 11. 2015. pp. 618

basic concept of philosophy. The author will, therefore, proceed to give an understanding of the history of philosophy.

The concept of the history of philosophy as used in this piece is that of Richard Watson, who understands the history of philosophy as the history of philosophical positions, principles and arguments without paying restrictive attention to the person who held them, the time he held them and where he held them¹². The emphasis is, therefore, on the quality of thought and not on the person who held them or, the place where such a person came from or the time when he held such a position. Richard Watson writes:

The history of philosophy as history, then, is a discipline in which the philosophical positions, principles and arguments of philosophers are presented, analysed and explained in the historical contexts of their times... The history of philosophy is also philosophy to the extent that it contributes to on-going philosophical inquiry¹³.

Adding to this, Copleston avers that it is a history that is not simply an enumeration of congeries of opinions or the narration of isolated thoughts devoid of connections with one another¹⁴. If it were, Hegel would refer to it as “an idle tale, or, if you will, an erudite investigation”¹⁵. This is not in any way to agree with Hegel who posits that these connections represent the necessary succession of stages in the development of the history of philosophy- in the sense that “the final philosophy of a period is the result of this development, and is truth in the highest form which the self-consciousness of spirit affords itself”¹⁶. This has not been confirmed by the history of philosophy itself, or else, William Ockham would have been the most important figure and his philosophy the most important piece of the medieval era, and yet, it is not.

¹² R. A. Watson., What is the history of philosophy and why is it important? *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. Vol. 40. No. 4. 2002, pp. 525-528

¹³ R. A. Watson., What is the history of philosophy and why is it important? *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. Volume 40. Number 4. 2002, pp. 525-528

¹⁴ F. Copleston, *A history of Philosophy: Greece and Rome*. p. 4

¹⁵ Hegel, *History of Philosophy*. I. p. 12

¹⁶ Hegel, *History of Philosophy*. III. p. 553

Traditions of Documentation in Western Philosophy

A cursory glance at the historical evolution of Western philosophy, from the ancient era through the medieval epoch to the modern and contemporary seasons, reveals that there are several traditions in the documentation of the history of philosophy. Paul Oskar Kristeller distinguishes four different traditions or branches of the historiography of Western philosophy, which dates back to the Greeks. These branches include:

- i. **the doxographic tradition:** This school began with Aristotle and his school of philosophy, and their method was that of a schematic tabulation of concepts and problems, and of the definitions and solutions proposed for them by different philosophers¹⁷. This approach is still found in many books of the history of philosophy as in the case of William F. Lawhead's *The voyage of discovery: A historical introduction to philosophy*.
- ii. **the biographical tradition:** this emerged from the works of Alexandrian scholars who focussed on editing the biographies of philosophers. Their presentation of the works of philosophers always began or begins with a short biography of the thinker¹⁸. This is still found in many books of the history of philosophy as in the case of Samuel Stumpf and James Fieser's *Philosophy: History and problems*.
- iii. **the critical approach:** This also dates back to Aristotle, Cicero, Sextus Empiricus, etc. They always began the establishment of their position by summarizing and criticizing the works of their predecessors. In some circumstances, they are found to distort the views of their predecessors to justify their own position¹⁹. This is typical of Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*, and Innocent Asuzu's *Ibuanyidanda*.

¹⁷ P. O. Kristeller, *Philosophy and its historiography. The Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 82. No. 11. 2015. p. 621

¹⁸ P. O. Kristeller, *Philosophy and its historiography*, p. 621

¹⁹ P. O. Kristeller, *Philosophy and its historiography. The Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 82. No. 11. 2015. pp. 621

- iv. **the philological approach:** This approach focuses on the mastery of terms, problems and arguments of philosophy. This emphasizes the need to read and understand the writings of philosophers in the original language in which they were written, that is, if we want to arrive at an accurate understanding of the thought of an author as expressed in the text of his writing²⁰.

These traditions notwithstanding, in every approach, one finds the perpetuation of the connection between the philosophical and the historical. How then is this possible? This nexus between the philosophical and historical is indispensable because philosophy has got to do with the past, and therefore, cannot avoid history, and since history has got to do with the story of the truth, it cannot avoid philosophy. Thus, Martial Gueroult writes: “As something past, philosophy can without difficulty be the object of history, which is defined as the effort to exhume all that is past”²¹.

Major Concerns with the history of Philosophy

The concerns with the history of philosophy border on the search for the validity of the history of philosophy and not an effort to condemn the history of philosophy. Martial Gueroult understands this investigation as a search for the foundations of the validity of the history of philosophy, which:

...is, therefore, of capital interest for its own future, and it is of no less capital interest to philosophy itself insofar as it can only lead to a determination of its essence, a determination founded not on a priori concepts, but on our living experience of it in history²².

The concerns of the researcher with the history of philosophy will, therefore, be discussed under the following themes:

a. The Issue of Conceptual Legitimacy

There is the question of the legitimacy of the concept ‘history of philosophy’. Is it possible to have a history of philosophy documented by philosophers? This question arises from the very nature of history and philosophy as independent areas of inquiry: while historical truth concerns the reconstruction

²⁰ P. O. Kristeller, *Philosophy and its historiography*, pp. 621-623

²¹ M. Gueroult, *The history of philosophy as a philosophical problem*, p. 564.

²² M. Gueroult, *The history of philosophy as a philosophical problem*, p. 566

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of facts or a series of facts in the past, philosophical truths concern the inner ordering of things²³. While it is possible to have a history of philosophy documented by a historian, the question looming at the horizon borders on the possibility of having a history of philosophy documented by a philosopher? These echoes from the fact that both disciplines deal with two different dimensions of truth that are absolutely unconnected.

This also raises the question regarding the truth that the history of philosophy intends to pursue: is it the truth regarding the reconstruction of series of facts in the past or that of the internal order of reality? Thus, Martial Gueroult raises the following questions:

It would seem that we could hesitate in deciding on which truth we wish to discover: are we in search of a historical truth or of a philosophical truth or of the two at the same time? Can philosophy, which is always expressed through a doctrine given as truth, and thus as timeless, allow itself to be submitted to history, which reduces all philosophy to an event which passes, thus to something without truth (since truth never passes)? Reciprocally, can history, which reduces all philosophy to a passing event, admit a philosophy which always claims to be a truth, which in itself escapes the vicissitudes and laws of history, even though it came into being at a certain moment in history?²⁴

Given the laws of history, there is also the question of the philosopher's qualification to document a history of philosophy since he is not equipped with the right principles as historians are to document such a history? If philosophers are not equipped to undertake such a study, is it possible to regard such a study as 'history of philosophy'? This is not in any way to undermine the versatility of philosophy, but just to raise questions regarding thoughts or realities often possibly taken for granted by the philosopher.

²³ Martial Gueroult, *The history of philosophy as a philosophical problem*. <http://monist.oxfordjournals.org/by> guestonJune7,2016. p. 566

²⁴ M. Gueroult, *The history of philosophy as a philosophical problem*, p. 567

b. The Danger of Translated Texts

What we find in the historical books of philosophy are simply works written from already translated texts about particular philosophers, most times secondary texts without an encounter with the original text. These authors of books on the history of philosophy simply believe that secondary texts are enough for the understanding and presentation of the thoughts of an author. Scholars like Paul Oskar Kristeller, have argued that such documents carry within themselves huge mistakes which blur and distort the original thought of the thinker being discussed. He writes thus:

I advise my colleagues, philosophers and others alike, never to publish anything about ancient philosophy without knowing Greek, or about Medieval, Renaissance or early Modern philosophy without knowing Latin. I wish to add that I follow this rule myself. I have never written, and shall never write about philosophers who I am unable to read in their original language, whether it be Chinese or Sankrit, Arabic or Hebrew, Russian or Danish²⁵.

As a result of this connection between language and philosophy, Heidegger holds that the language question is a being question. In this, he makes a very strong connection between philosophy and language, asserting that the manner of language is the manner of philosophy and that the game of philosophy would be impossible without language²⁶. Heidegger holds that without a sufficient consideration of language, we never truly know what philosophy is... nor what philosophy is as a distinctive manner of language²⁷. In an earlier work, Heidegger posits that the human person uses language not only as a tool for communication but as the modal way for the being of man as *man qua man*:

Language serves to give information... but the essence of language does not consist entirely in being a means of giving information. This

²⁵ P. O. Kristeller, *Philosophy and its historiography. The Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 82. No. 11. 2015. pp. 622

²⁶ I. A. Kanu. *African Language as a tool-box for African philosophy*. PhD Dissertation, Selinus University of Sciences and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, United Kingdom.

²⁷ M. Heidegger. *Erlaeuterungen zu Hoelderlins Dichtung*. Franfurth am Main: Klosterman, 1951, p. 9

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definition does not touch its essential essence, but merely indicates an effect of its essence. Language is not a mere tool, one of the many which man possesses; on the contrary, it is only language that affords the very possibility of standing in the openness of the existent. Only where there is language, is there world...Language is not a tool at his disposal rather, it is that event which disposes of the supreme possibility of human existence²⁸.

Language, therefore, becomes an instrument for the disclosure of the mode of being-in-the-world and gives being its ontological and logical descriptiveness. It is an instrument for the intelligible and articulate disclosure of the being project and worldhood relations in their structural thingness, boundaries and obscurities within their structural matrix in such a manner that something indicates itself as something²⁹. Language makes it possible to comprehend the 'essent' of the essences of being, and since being is intangible and without shape or colour, it is language that makes it comprehensible³⁰.

For Hegel, language becomes not only an instrument for the unveiling of being but the medium for making the world and its worldhood accessible³¹. Interpreting Hegel, Vernom writes further on the relationship between philosophy and language:

Philosophy must be expressed in the contingent language of a community, since all lexicons are material and communal. While philosophy itself cannot enjoy a final or adequate expression, it does not provide us with the necessary tool to grasp the universal structures of speculative thought that both make possible and demand constructive dialogue between subjects about experience. In the final

²⁸ M. Heidegger. *On the way to language*. Trans. P. Hertz. New York: Harper and Row., 1951, p. 276-277

²⁹ M. Heidegger. *Being and time*. Trans. J. Maquarrie and E. Robinson. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962. p. 35

³⁰ M. Heidegger. *An introduction to metaphysics*. Trans. R. Manheim. New York: Doubleday and Company. 1961, p. 40.

³¹ I. A. Kanu. *African Language as a tool-box for African philosophy*. PhD Dissertation, Selinus University of Sciences and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, United Kingdom.

analysis, philosophy is the speculative presentation of the universal demand for, and infinite pursuit of, a completely objective discourse³².

Thus, Hegel holds that language operates on a universal ground that dismisses the possibility of subjectivity and promotes the possibility of understanding.

c. The reciprocal causation between circumstance and truth

In his reflection on how to study the history of philosophy, Copleston calls on readers of the history of philosophy to develop a sense of sympathy for the philosopher, which involves knowing something about the philosopher, in what looks like a psychological approach whereby the reader understands the state of mind of the philosopher under study. This approach leads the reader to the understanding that philosophers of different historical moments were slaves to their states of mind or their cultural milieu, and this in one manner or the other had a way of standing in their pursuit of the truth which is principal to the philosophical enterprise. Russell writes that:

To understand an age or a nation, we must understand its philosophy, and to understand its philosophy, we must ourselves be in some degree philosophers. There is here a reciprocal causation: the circumstances of men's lives do much to determine their philosophy, but, conversely, their philosophy does much to determine their circumstances³³.

For instance, the pessimistic voluntaristic system of Arthur Schopenhauer which painted the picture of an embittered, soured and disappointed man was only a reaction to Hegelian optimistic rationalism. This is not in any way to say that Arthur did not make any contribution to knowledge or the quest for the truth, his aesthetic theory and contribution in the area of the problem of evil and human suffering remain classic. Hume's denial of metaphysics and anything metaphysical, and Kant's denial of metaphysics as a science shows how personal temperaments, education and other fortuitous circumstances can often lead a thinker up to what Copleston refers to as an intellectual *cul-de-*

³² J. Vernon, J., *Hegel's philosophy of Language*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007, p. 17

³³ B. Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*. London: Unwin University Books. 1975, p. 14

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sac³⁴. Plato, Aristotle, Friedrich Nietzsche, etc., were all the products of their history and times. The liberty of Plato and Aristotle were bound by social cohesion where loyalty was to the city state, and thus, they could see no merit in any other kind of polity. Theirs was a time dominated by religious and patriotic devotion to the state. Is it possible that the states of mind of these philosophers in the history of philosophy had a way of affecting the fundamental project of philosophy, that is, truth?

d. The case of eternal recurrence

A cursory glance at the historical evolution of philosophy reveals that philosophers over the years have been concerning themselves with the same reality or thoughts. The new pages added to these are purely guises, in the sense that those who engage these same old realities engage them within the boundaries of their school of thought or philosophical upbringing or historical context. Thus, Timothy Madigan observes that:

The history of philosophy might be no more than a bad case of eternal recurrence: old problems never die, they just get renamed. If this is the case, then one need only a superficial knowledge of the history of philosophy- just get clear on what the eternal problems are, and the finite ways they can be dealt with, and ignore the messy historical details³⁵.

The continuous focus on these eternal issues places philosophy in a position of irrelevance given that it becomes an acolyte that only pontificates on the altar of ancient ideas. Philosophy, therefore, becomes more of a museum where the ideas of ancient thinkers are kept alive. There is need for philosophy to advance in a linear fashion such that while the voices of the past are heard, they must be heard in such a manner that they fit the present day concerns. The absence of this linearity has discouraged many from entering the field of philosophy. If this is the case, the history of philosophy has a lot to learn from the history of science, where in the contention of Richard Rorty, spheres are

³⁴ F. Copleston, *A history of Philosophy: Greece and Rome*. p. 7

³⁵ T/ Madigan, *The Burden of the History of Philosophy*. Philosophy Now, Issue 45. 2004.
<https://philosophy now.org/issues/45/the-burden-of-the-history-of-philosophy>.

not crystalized³⁶, and thinkers are free from the constraints of circulation. This understanding, unless otherwise considered, is worthy of the thoughts of philosophers of all schools and climes.

e. The Question of Progress

This follows directly from the *case of eternal recurrence*. If the same questions raised by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle are still the same questions being raised today by modern philosophers about being, act, potency, substance, accidents, the existence of God, mind and body problem, etc., there is then the question of progress in the history of philosophy. Will philosophy be considered as progressing or retrogressing? Or will it be better considered a stagnant field of human inquiry? The continuous discussion on these issues as the core of the philosophical enterprise is gradually making philosophy irrelevant in many institutions of learning and non-sympathetic to contexts. The continuous adoration of these old problems positions the modern philosopher as a worshipper of dead and irrelevant ideas. This cannot but affect the relevance of the philosopher himself or herself. This is not in any way to undermine the recent developments in the area of philosophy, which suggests that philosophy is evolving into various forms and shapes based on the needs of its day, but just to say that its traditional tone is no less a determinant factor.

The consequence of this pattern of thinking among philosophers is that while they reflect on the concept of justice and fairness in the works of historical personalities within philosophy like Plato and Aristotle, they deal with these issues as though Plato and Aristotle who had existed hundreds of years ago had the final say on these matters, and thus that the idea has never changed since thousands of years ago; and yet they have changed. This is not in any way to say that justice has ceased to be justice and fairness, but that circumstances surrounding the understanding of these concepts continue to change. In this case, the philosopher becomes more of he or she that tells the story of what things used to be, and therefore, becomes overtaken by the circumstances of his time. And so while he tells beautiful stories about what Aristotle has said, he is not able to adapt to the reality of his own time.

³⁶ R. Rorty, *The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 50.

Within the context of his philosophy of reconstruction or call for the reconstruction of philosophy, John Dewey writes:

The very things that made the great systems objects of esteem and admiration in their own socio-cultural contexts are in large measure the very grounds that deprive them of ‘actuality’ in a world whose main features are different to an extent indicated by our speaking of the ‘scientific revolution’, the ‘industrial revolution’, and the ‘political revolution’ of the last few hundred years. A plea for reconstruction cannot, as far as I can see, be made without giving considerable attention to the background within which and in regard to which reconstruction is to take place³⁷.

Rather than follow continuously in a manner that disregards the very reality that it seeks to understand, philosophers and philosophy must be attentive to the changes taking place in society. It is in attending to such realities that philosophy will find its place in the world of progress.

f. The Crisis of a Tentative History

While we speak of a history of philosophy, there is hardly such a thing as a conclusive universal history of philosophy. With time and changes, what might be regarded as the history of philosophy ceases to be conclusive and universal as new thoughts and interpretations continue to emerge every day. There is always a thesis, followed by an antithesis and a synthesis which becomes a new thesis for the emergence of an antithesis. What Aristotle has considered as the essences of reality might not be same for Jerome Okonkwo or Innocent Asouzu in the 21st century. This presents the history of philosophy as being more of a tentative history than a universal one. It is in this regard that Timothy Madigan writes that:

The history of philosophy is an ever-changing, ever-shifting map of the many paths taken by noted individuals in this quest. No one can travel all its highways and byways, but no one should thus disparage the paths not taken. They might just end up being paths one will

³⁷ John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 1948, p. viii.

stumble upon unexpectedly one day hence, and it's helpful to have a map in hand³⁸.

From the foregoing, even the newest textbook on the history of philosophy that drops from the press today ceases to be a comprehensive history of philosophy given that philosophers and philosophies continue to reflect and emerge respectively. This understanding raises questions regarding the status of what is considered the history of philosophy.

g. The Relegation of an Entire Period

The history of philosophy is an accumulation of several periods and several great thinkers, and it is not possible to have a good grasp of all the works of all the thinkers in the various stages of philosophy. To attempt to understand all in full will entail drowning oneself in an ocean of ideas. This reality has led to the relegation of some periods or period as insignificant in the history of philosophy. This explains for the omission of lengthy discussions on the medieval period as it is considered an unimportant stage in the history of philosophy. Scholars have attempted at providing reasons for this relegation or omission, however, unfortunately such reasons are based on bias and the appropriation of historical authority that a particular scholar may not have.

For instance, according to Walter Kaufman, the reason for this relegation or omission is because of the differences we find between the medieval thinkers and Greek philosophers in terms of content and methodology. He believes that medieval philosophy and philosophers had great recourse to authority and already had foreseen conclusions³⁹. And yet, were philosophers expecting that the thinkers of every age would think in the same manner? What then becomes the basis for the categorization of the historical evolution of the philosophical enterprise? To keep to this track will entail ignoring the thoughts of thinkers like Augustine, Ockham, Aquinas, Boethius, Abelard, etc. The relegation of this period and thus these authors in surveys and courses in the history of philosophy is a mistake that modern historians of philosophy are making. Acting as if the period between Aristotle and Descartes did not exist is creating

³⁸ T. Medigan, *The Burden of the History of Philosophy*. Philosophy Now, Issue 45. 2004. <https://philosophy.now.org/issues/45/the-burden-of-the-history-of-philosophy>.

³⁹ W. Kaufman, *The faith of a heretic*. Canada: Double Day, 1961, 31.

a *lacuna* in the history of philosophy as the influences of these thinkers cannot be boycotted.

h. The Non-Scientific and Investigative Spirit

The most part of the history of philosophy reveals that the presentation of such a history is not investigative of the truth about things but the presentation of the development and elaboration of various perspectives about reality. This non-investigative pattern makes philosophy less scientific and more a collection of thoughts treated by different thinkers differently. This gives the impression that such texts are the history or collection of opinions. Rafael Altamira avers that:

Seen thus through the medley of systems and opinions, these questions give the impression of something which is insoluble and by all our processes of knowledge unattainable, something in regard to which it is useless to devote time and energy, since the solution arrived at will not give universal satisfaction, a sign that it is not truly scientific⁴⁰.

This, different from what we find in the sciences, reduces the history of philosophy to a collection of mere opinions. Some of the thoughts that looked universal have been reduced to narratives veiled in parochial senses. Since philosophy is not simply an opinion or a collection of opinions, it raises more questions for the consideration of philosophers.

Conclusion

The current work on the problem of the history of Western philosophy points to the long relationship between philosophy and history; a relationship that dates back to the time of Aristotle whom scholars may regard as the founder of the history of philosophy, given that before he stated his position in his discourse on metaphysics, first systematically reviewed the works of other thinkers who were before him. It is, therefore, not surprising that the critical approach and doxographic tradition of the history of philosophy began with Aristotle. During the modern period, we also see the continuous dialogue

⁴⁰ Rafael Altamira, *The problem of the history of philosophy- The theory of civilization: The method of extending civilization to among the nations*. Lectures presented at the inauguration of the Rice Institute. 1912. pp. 256-278.

between philosophy and history in the work of Descartes. He made a whole collection of problems and notions which he inherited from tradition. This is possible because philosophy, both its present and past, unlike some other areas of study constitutes a cosmos of intelligible realities that relate to one another mutually.

After Descartes, Leibniz made a new marriage between philosophy and its past, that is, history through his philosophy of continuity. He writes that:

The present is pregnant with the future, the future could be read in the past, the distant is expressed in the near; we could know the beauty of the universe in each soul if we could unfold all its folds⁴¹.

This view influenced methodologies in history, which renounced the erudite fragmentation of the history of sects to the advantage of encompassing broader trends, and also commanded a general reform of histories in Germany. With Hegel, given the nature of his philosophy, the reconciliation of philosophy with its past seemed to be achieved. He understood the different moments in the history of philosophy as reflections of the different moments in the history of the mind. The history of philosophy, therefore, translates as the external manifestation of the dialectic of the mind or the eternal categories of logic. Thus, every philosophy cannot break away from its past which echoes its beginning. The implication is that no philosopher could have initiated himself or herself into the philosophical enterprise without passing through the corridors of its history- the past, therefore, becomes the school where he or she is tutored.

While this work on the problem of the history of Western philosophy points to the long relationship between philosophy and history, it distinguishes itself from other reflections by raising questions regarding some concerns in this relationship, which include: the issue of conceptual legitimacy, the danger in translated texts, reciprocal causation, eternal recurrence, progress, tentative history, relegation of an entire epoch to the background and the issue of non-scientific and investigative approach. Do these problems or concerns imply

⁴¹Leibniz, G. W., cited in Martial Gueroult, *The history of philosophy as a philosophical problem*. <http://monist.oxfordjournals.org/by> guestonJune7,2016. p. 580

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that the current history of philosophy ceases to be genuine history of philosophy? not at all. This work rather raises questions that would provide a platform for further discussion especially by scholars of the history of philosophy on the current foundation of the history of philosophy. The questions raised do not intend to serve as final questions but as a basis for further questions and answers.

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