

Lorenzo Valla and the Traditions and Transmissions of Philosophy

C. S. Celenza

What is “philosophy”? Who is a “philosopher”? These questions underlay much of Salvatore Camporeale’s work, and they are deeper than one might suppose. We can begin with one of Camporeale’s favorite figures, Lorenzo Valla, and listen to one of the ways he answered these questions. In the introduction to his work reforming Aristotelian logic, the *Repastinatio totius dialectice*, Valla situates the debate on wisdom by recalling the case of Pythagoras.¹ “What a marvelous praise of modesty it was,” Valla wrote, when Pythagoras, asked whether he considered himself wise, replied that he was not “wise,” but was rather a “lover of wisdom”—not *sophos*, but *philosophos*.² Valla uses here a humanistic trope, found also in Petrarch’s advice to Luigi Marsili, to the effect that Marsili should shape the practice of his life in order to become a “*verae sapientiae amator*,” a “lover of *true* wisdom.”³

These citations from Petrarch and Valla alert us to the well-studied fact that, in the view of some humanists, academic “philosophy” had usurped the name “philosophy” and the self-searching meaning behind it. Certain humanists were proposing an alternative notion of what wisdom signified and consequently of what philosophy itself—the “love of wisdom”—represented. It seemed that wisdom needed to be located in a more persuasive way in the world of human beings, history, and language, rather than in one of eternal

¹ Lorenzo Valla, *Repastinatio totius dialectice*, 2 vols., ed. G. Zippel (Padua: Antenore, 1982).

² Valla, *Repastinatio*, 1.praef.1–2.

³ Petrarca, *Le senili*, 11.14, cited in M. Gill, *Augustine and the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge, 2005), 117. For a similar, Senecan notion, to the effect that “philosophy” has to do with practice as well as words, see Petrarch, *Le senili*, book 1, ed. and tr. U. Dotti and E. Nota (Rome: Guido Izzi, 1993), 3, 17: “Levis est enim solius linguae disciplina; philosophandum nobis et de rebus est, si re ipsa salvi esse cupimus. Hic ligamus animum et quod loquimur sentiamus.” Petrarch records the story of Pythagoras as inventor of the word “philosophy” at Petrarca, *Rerum memorandarum libri*, ed. G. Billanovich (Florence: Sansoni, 1943), 1.24.4–7.

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suprahuman essences; in short, “philosophy” had to be brought closer to rhetoric and philology.

The goal of this paper is to examine this idea in a twofold manner: through the history of terms and concepts as these are refracted by and through the history of institutionalized learning; and through a brief foray into Valla’s preface to his great critique of western logic. There has been a lot of challenging and interesting work on this topic in the last few decades. At the same time, there may be cause to wonder whether relatively recent historians have unwittingly become too bogged down in names, failing to see the real conflict. They have tended to assume that the modern, sharp separation of humanistic “disciplines,” such as rhetoric and philosophy, existed in the same way and with the same force of conviction in the premodern era. True, there are famous ancient, medieval, and early modern examples of self-defined “philosophers” differentiating themselves from “philologists” and vice versa, most notably Seneca, who—lamenting the professionalization of education in his day—complained in a letter that “what was once philosophy, has become philology” (Ep. 108.23). Yet, the more one investigates this problem, and the more one peers beneath the surface of the seemingly stark divisions between “philosophy” and “philology,” the more difficult this strong separation is to maintain.

This notion of the possible interpenetrability of “philosophy,” and “philology,” and “rhetoric” as concepts was probably easier to understand in the Renaissance than it is now. The differences between the Renaissance and our own era lie in institutional context and personal approach, both of which have been, for about six or seven intellectual generations now (but no more than that), supported by a fourfold set of assumptions about what “real” or “professional” philosophy represents: first, that philosophy is primarily about metaphysics and ontology, or rather that there exists a hierarchy in which metaphysics and ontology stand at the top; other things, such as history, language, or rhetoric are “just not philosophy.” Second, a retrospectively understood Cartesian split between mind and body is basically true (and that it is legitimate to project that dualistic split back onto thinkers who did not hold the same *sort* of dualism as axiomatic); and consequently third, that epistemology should be privileged, that is, that knowing and the study of how knowing happens are primarily what philosophy is about. Hence “philosophy” is regulative, a master-discipline that oversees the truth claims of all the others, like history and rhetoric, which—in this view and because of these assumptions—have come to stand on a lower rung of the disciplinary ladder. And finally, fourth, philosophy trains the mind to become more agile rather than the person to become more morally whole, is primarily about doctrines rather than practice, is centered on the written word rather than on the well-

lived life, and is about settling questions that can lead to truth-claims rather than posing questions than might not admit of unambiguous answers.

These assumptions about the nature of “philosophy” do not inhere in the word itself; nor do they reflect the practice of ancient, much medieval, or early modern philosophy. Rather, this complex of positions reflecting the meaning of “philosophy” is of relatively recent origin. It is bound up with the development of the “philosophical faculty” of the 1810 University of Berlin, a model that, having been reinvigorated and reoriented in the 1860s and 1870s, is in many ways—in its disciplinary traditions, its scholarly habits, and its sociologically reproductive tendencies—still with us today. How did this metaphysically oriented conception of philosophy emerge victorious, so much so that it has seemed legitimate to impose it on generations of premodern thinkers who themselves had no idea of its centrality? We can look for answers to this question by focusing on factors that historians of science would classify as “internalist”—having to do with the internal development of the practice and history of philosophy—and “externalist”—having to do with the cultural and institutional contexts in which these developments found a home.

As to internal developments, it is useful to recall that, for most of its history, “philosophy” was seen to be as much a set of practices as a set of doctrines: a “philosopher” was a “lover of wisdom,” someone with whom others went to study as much because of the way he lived his life as for what he wrote. Pierre Hadot maintains suggestively that much ancient philosophy was primarily a personal affair that had to do with teaching and learning and was not tied to rigid metaphysical hierarchies or to the writing of texts, and that this practice-oriented form of philosophizing has continued into modern times, though it would not often be found in philosophy departments in universities.⁴ Premodern traditions of writing the history of philosophy harmonize well with Hadot’s general idea. In the ancient world, one major way of thinking about the history of philosophy was in the form of *diadochai*, or “successions.” The model was one of schools: through his charisma and reputation for learning, a powerful figure would attract a group of pupils, who would then form a school, where the doctrines would be studied, learned, and passed down from generation to generation. Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives of the Philosophers* is the best known example of this type of ancient history of

⁴ P. Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* tr. M. Chase (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); idem, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Plato to Foucault*, ed. A. Davidson, tr. M. Chase (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1995); see also A. Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

philosophy.⁵ Throughout, one sees not only collections of doctrines; Laertius also documents the style of life of each of the figures treated through copious, personality-revealing anecdotes. Other late ancient figures took seriously the biography of the philosophers in whom they were interested, believing it necessary to study the life of their founder first, before moving on to abstract considerations. When Porphyry, Plotinus's pupil, was editing Plotinus's *Enneads*, step one was to prefix a "Life of Plotinus" to the text; the need to have a "life" to understand the "work" represented an assumption so deeply held that it did not even need to be articulated.⁶ In the ancient world, when speaking about a philosopher, it would have been unthinkable not to discuss his life, to offer a *bios* that integrated his thought with his life.⁷

This link between life and work reflects not only the practice-oriented nature of ancient philosophy, but also the practice of reading and writing philosophy from the Hellenistic era through to the era of Descartes. In a fundamental sense, the reading and writing practice to which I am referring was exegetical and commentary-oriented, as Hadot has emphasized. This is not to say that the written works of thinkers from this vast period were formally works of exegesis or written in the genre of commentary. Rather, the mindset behind them was fundamentally exegetical. Today, conditioned, perhaps, by vestiges of nineteenth-century philology and its love of the Urtext, we might still tend to misread the intention of, say, an Alexander of Aphrodisias, when he professes—as he does at the beginning of his own *De anima*—that his goal "will be satisfactorily accomplished if the doctrine of the soul

⁵ The other major form of transmitting philosophical knowledge was "doxography," i.e., collections of opinions; this form was tied to the needs of students, teachers, and rhetoricians who needed convenient summaries of opinions, and these collections of opinions were often used and incorporated into the "succession"-oriented accounts. On the ancient historiography of philosophy, including doxography, see J. Mansfeld, *Studies in the Historiography of Ancient Philosophy* (Assen and Maastricht, 1990); idem, *Heresiography in Context: Hippolytus' Elenchos as a Source for Greek Philosophy* (Leiden, New York, and Cologne: Brill, 1992); idem, "Doxography and Dialectic: The *Sitz im Leben* of the 'Placita,'" in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, 2.36.4, ed. W. Haase (New York: De Gruyter, 1990), 3056–3229. As to the succession model, Diogenes Laertius is unique in size, but it is assumed that he used a body of succession literature in composing his work. For Diogenes Laertius, see J. Meier, *Diogenes Laertius and his Hellenistic Background*, Hermes Einzelschriften, 40 (Wiesbaden, 1978); idem, "Diogenes Laertius and the Transmission of Greek Philosophy," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, 2.36.5, ed. W. Haase (New York: De Gruyter, 1990–92), 3556–3602; idem, "Diogène Laërce," in R. Goulet, ed., *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques* 2, 824–833, with addition at 1011–12 by Sylvain Matton on knowledge of Diogenes Laertius in the middle ages; and A. Grafton, "The Availability of Ancient Works," in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. C. B. Schmitt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 767–91, at 781.

⁶ For a set of studies on this work, see L. Brisson et al., eds., *Porphyre: La vie de Plotin*, 2 vols. (Paris: Vrin, 1982–92).

⁷ See J. Sellars, *The Art of Living: The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 15–54.

which [he sets] forth is as clear an exposition as possible of what Aristotle has said on this subject.”⁸ We might think that he is seeking only to reconstruct Aristotle’s original meaning; when instead he is philosophizing creatively in the only way that was appropriate and possible: through *imitative exegesis*, whose underlying intention was not to expound only Aristotle’s arguments but rather to access the truth behind those arguments, of the full extent of which not even Aristotle himself might have been aware. In this sense, much premodern reading practice was forward-looking, in that practitioners assumed that to read was also to interpret, to interpret was to add creatively, and to add creatively to an existing tradition was to philosophize. More modern reading practice, however, is intention-oriented, in that modern interpreters wish either to seek the original intention of the author, or, relatively recently, to deny that we can find it, or to reconstruct the author’s worldview and circumstances: in short, in some sense to have the ancient object rather than the process of interpretation and its creative possibilities be the central node around which discussion turns.

Recent scholarship on the history of the book—one thinks specifically of the work of Adrian Johns and David McKitterick—has brought into relief, in a certain sense, the local nature of reading practice well into the era of printing.⁹ By local I do not mean primarily geographically local, but local in the sense of social networks and intellectual communities. Reading was social, in the sense that, for a text to gain currency, it needed an adequate social network of readers who invested trust in it as authentic. The process of creating that trust had much to do with the reading community’s style of life, even as the reader/philosophers simultaneously looked backward toward the philosopher or philosophical school they studied for similar, authenticity-granting clues. And many of these clues had as much to do with the biography of the philosopher as they did with his doctrines.

This tradition—of not separating the abstract thought of a philosopher from his life—persisted throughout the Middle Ages, at least in the historiography of philosophy. The *Lives of the Philosophers* traditionally attributed to Walter Burley, based on numerous medieval collections, including some partially based on Laertius, became fundamental by the mid-fourteenth century.¹⁰

⁸ Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De anima*, tr. A.P. Fotinis (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979), iv.

⁹ A. Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); D. McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order, 1450–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁰ Burley’s authorship has been called into question by M. Grignaschi in “Lo pseudo Walter Burley e il ‘Liber de vita et moribus philosophorum,’” *Medioevo*, 16 (1990), 131–90. For the wide manuscript diffusion of the text, see J. Prelog, “Die Handschriften und Drucke von W. Burley’s *Liber de vita et moribus philosophorum*,” *Codices manuscripti* 9 (1983), 1–18, who updates J. O. Stigall, “The Manuscript Tradition of the *De vita et moribus* of Walter Burley,” *Medievalia et humanistica* 11 (1957), 44–57; for an edition, see (ps.) Walter Burley,

In the 1430s, the Camaldolese friar Ambrogio Traversari translated Diogenes Laertius from Greek into Latin. Although there was a minor tradition discussing the “schools” of ancient philosophy during the Renaissance, there were no significant Renaissance efforts at writing the history of philosophy as such until later, when new types of histories of philosophy emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, before moving on, it is necessary to make three general observations about medieval philosophy and medieval universities.

First, this essay began by linking Petrarch, Valla, and in general the Italian humanist tradition. In many ways, Petrarch represents a shift in perspective that was important enough to give rise to an Italy- then Europe-wide intellectual movement. He is innovative in a number of ways, especially in his attempt to use a classicizing Latin prose and in the links he makes between that new style and philosophical striving.¹¹ And his reorientation of an existing but secular classicizing movement in a religious direction has been the subject of Ronald Witt’s recent groundbreaking study.¹² At the same time, it is not only with Petrarch that one can detect a certain lack of satisfaction with philosophy (and theology) as it was taught at contemporary universities.¹³ The first medieval universities—Paris, Oxford, Salerno, Bologna—were not founded as universities but rather had, in a sense, simply arisen, as Marsha Colish and others have stressed.¹⁴ They were dynamic, cosmopolitan centers where intellectuals

De vita et moribus philosophorum, ed. H. Knust (Tübingen, 1886); and see G. Piaia, “*Vestigia philosophorum*”: *Il medioevo e la storiografia filosofica* (Rimini: Maggioli, 1983). Sylvain Matton, as above, notes a number of medieval antecedents, including Ps.-Caecilius Balbus, *De nugis philosophorum*, ed. E. Wölfflin (Basel, 1855); Geremia da Montagnone, *Compendium moralium notabilium* of 1285; the *Compendiloquium de vitis illustrium philosophorum* (1270–85) of Jean de Galle; and the *Muhitar al-hikam* of Abu l-Wafa’ al-Mubassir. This latter text was popular in its Spanish translation as the *Bocados de oro*, ed. M. Cromach (Bonn, 1971), which appeared by 1257, and then was Latinized, perhaps by Giovanni da Procida (ob. 1299) from the Spanish version; the Latin version is edited by E. Francheschini, in “Il ‘Liber philosophorum moralium antiquorum,’ Testo critico,” *Atti del reale Istituto Veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti* 91 (1931–32), 393–597. As Matton points out (1012), no full medieval translation of Diogenes Laertius has come to light. Henricus Aristippus, the medieval translator of Plato’s *Meno*, says in the preface to that work that he interrupted his work translating Diogenes to work on Plato; see V. Kordeuter and C. Labowsky, eds., *Plato Latinus, I: Meno, interprete Henrico Aristippo* (London, 1940), 6. It is difficult to know how far he or any other translator progressed before Traversari translated the entire work.

¹¹ See C. S. Celenza, “Petrarch, Latin, and Italian Renaissance Latinity,” forthcoming in the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 35 (2005), 509–36.

¹² R. G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

¹³ As Witt recognizes; see *ibid.*, 245.

¹⁴ M. Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400–1400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 265–73; J. Verger, “Patterns,” in H. De Ridder-Symoens, *A History of the University in Europe*, 2 vols. to date (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992–96), 1; 35–67, esp. 47–55.

gravitated. As time went by, local institutions and relatively standardized methods of teaching and learning developed. By 1300, we know of eighteen *studia generalia*; by 1500, there were roughly sixty European universities.¹⁵ As more universities were founded by territorial rulers and after the great schism in 1378 shattered the aspirations toward unity at which, for example, the University of Paris might have aimed, universities became less cosmopolitan. This situation arose both because it was sometimes mandated that citizen-students study at their home universities, and because the need to travel to learn a certain specialty was not that acute by the fourteenth century. Even by then, the number of universities had multiplied, though of course individual specialties would have been cultivated at different centers. By the fourteenth century, a certain standardization had arisen in medieval universities; this is by no means to deny the diversity of these institutions and the *professional* vitality they possessed. Still, if there is anything that can enervate “philosophy” in its original meaning of “love of wisdom,” it is institutionalized standardization. This standardization was professionally useful for the many thousands of students of medieval universities; and there can be no doubt that the traditions of relative intellectual independence of thought, which are an indisputable element of medieval universities, are worth remembering and celebrating.¹⁶ But it was inevitable that, with standardization and professionalization, a sense would arise that problems were studied and questions addressed not because they were valuable in themselves but because they were in the curriculum; one needed to address them for reasons other than their intrinsic value in the quality of human life.

Second, not only Petrarch’s style of humanism but also other contemporary currents show a desire to address deep philosophical and religious problems less abstractly, such as the *Frömmigkeitstheologie* emphasized by Berndt Hamm.¹⁷ Michael Bailey puts it well when he writes that this style of thought “eschewed abstract intellectual debates in favor of addressing actual spiritual problems and pastoral needs.”¹⁸ One of the most famous exponents of this style of thought was the “public intellectual” (as he has been termed by Dan-

¹⁵ Verger, “Patterns,” 45, 47, 57.

¹⁶ On this point, see W. Rüegg, “Themes,” in H. De Ridder-Symoens, *A History of the University in Europe*, 1; 3–34, at 32–34.

¹⁷ B. Hamm, “Frömmigkeit als Gegenstand theologiegeschichtlicher Forschung: Methodisch-historische Überlegungen am Beispiel von Spätmittelalter und Reformation,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 74 (1977); 464–97; idem, “Von der Spätmittelalterlichen reformation zur Reformation: Der Prozeß normativer Zentrierung von Religion und Gesellschaft in Deutschland,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 84 (1993); 7–82, esp. 18–24; cited in M. D. Bailey, *Battling Demons: Witchcraft, Heresy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003): 18, 160, n. 26. See also F. Graus, *Pest—Geissler—Judenmorde: Das 14. Jahrhundert als Krisenzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1987), esp. 118–43.

¹⁸ Bailey, *Battling Demons*, 18.

iel Hobbins), Jean Gerson (1363–1429).¹⁹ The celebrated chancellor of the University of Paris was in step with a trend of his day, in which there was a tendency to move away from seemingly oversubtle inquiries toward works that had a wider public application (and which were written, increasingly, by people with broader public roles). Even the form of works changed, as one sees the rise of the “tract,” which Hobbins defines as “a treatment of a single moral case with some connection to the world outside the university in a form brief enough to be easily distributed.”²⁰ The tract offered a vehicle that allowed theologians to write unconstrained by the formal demands of the commentary or even of the smaller, more issue-specific *quaestio disputata*. In this broader framework, one can state that Italian humanism is a distinct, individual expression of a wider, shared sentiment. In short, many people believed that university-shaped forms of discourse were not suited to addressing some of late medieval European society’s most pressing problems.

The third point relates to recent work, especially by John Inglis and John Marenbon, which has suggested that medieval “philosophy” as such—that is, as an autonomous study of doctrines and problems and with Thomistic epistemology, including dialectic (considered separately from theology) as the high point—is an invention of the nineteenth century.²¹ One would have been hard pressed to find many Christian philosophers who did not believe that what they were doing had at least some relation to theology.²² The point is that the preponderance of modern interpreters of medieval “philosophy” does not see an instinctive relational link between philosophy and theology, and the preponderance of medieval philosophers did. As Marenbon has written: “The historian who detaches passages of *philosophia* from their theological contexts is *imposing* autonomy, not discovering it.”²³ This may sound incendiary to many who study medieval philosophy, because there is a professional apparatus built up around the modern study of medieval philosophy (an apparatus tied to the sociologically reproductive aspects of modern universities); but it is useful to be reminded of the different circumstances within which *philosophia* was studied and taught in the later middle ages. “Teach-

¹⁹ D. Hobbins, “The Schoolman as Public Intellectual: Jean Gerson and the Late Medieval Tract,” *The American Historical Review*, 108 (2003), 1308–37.

²⁰ Ibid., 1318–19.

²¹ J. Inglis, *Spheres of Philosophical Inquiry and the Historiography of Medieval Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

²² J. E. Murdoch, “From Social to Intellectual Factors: An Aspect of the Unitary Character of Late Medieval Learning,” in J. E. Murdoch and E. Sylla, eds., *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning* (Dordrecht and Boston, 1975), 271–348.

²³ J. Marenbon, “The Theoretical and Practical Autonomy of Philosophy as a Discipline in the Middle Ages: Latin Philosophy, 1250–1350,” study #XVI in his *Aristotelian Logic, Platonism, and the Context of Early Medieval Philosophy in the West* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), at 266.

ing” is important as well, since most of what we have of medieval philosophy is the result of teaching (in the form of lectures, which led to commentaries, and disputation questions, which led to *quaestiones*), as Jack Zupko’s recent study of John Buridan brings out so well.²⁴ In other words, though what we now possess are texts, we need to remind ourselves that “texts” meant something different before the triumph of nineteenth-century philology created the notion of an Urtext. The texts we are talking about were products of the reflection of masters who needed to teach, not radically Cartesian mind-selves or romantic individuals who sat down, alone, to “do philosophy.” There was, in the overall enterprise of philosophy, more variability and fluidity, just as the notion of “philosophy” that we see in premodern discussions of the history of philosophy was variable. Indeed, even in the early modern period, before the triumph of Cartesianism, this more flexible conception of philosophy is evident in the historiography of philosophy.

A team of scholars headed by Giovanni Santinello has begun the task of surveying these historiographical writings.²⁵ The most important fact to emerge from their work on “the history of the history of philosophy” is that, before the eighteenth century, “philosophy” was considered in a much broader way than the Kantian, regulative, more recent tradition indicates. The one common thread that runs through a number of divergent thinkers, from Konrad Gesner (1516–65) to Peter Lambec (1628–80), Francisco da Toledo (1532–96) to Otto van Heuse (1577–1652), not to mention many others, is how expansive the notion of philosophy was.²⁶ There is rarely a sense that “philosophy” is primarily about knowledge, or that metaphysics stands at the top of a hierarchy of disciplines. Instead one sees a great variety of opinion on what could be considered “philosophical” or who could be termed a “philosopher.” Philosophy and its history continued to have a broad scope, until eighteenth-century thinkers began to narrow things in the service of conceptual and methodological clarity. The story of this process can be best understood by turning briefly to an influential set of interlocking developments in the internal evolution of philosophy, then returning to the historiography of philosophy.

To understand the way the modern history of philosophy has been shaped and articulated, we must reach back to the era of René Descartes (1596–1650), for that period marks the distant beginning of the epistemological emphasis inherent in modern philosophy, the moment from which it came to

²⁴ J. Zupko, *John Buridan: Portrait of a Fourteenth-Century Arts Master* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).

²⁵ G. Santinello et al., eds., *Storia delle storie generali della filosofia*, 5 vols. (Brescia: La Scuola, 1981–1995).

²⁶ See I. Tomeo, “Il genere ‘Historia philosophica’ tra cinquecento e seicento,” in Santinello, *Storia*, 1; 63–163.

seem that true philosophy was primarily about knowing. Descartes—not during his lifetime but later—came to be represented as a breaking point in the history of philosophy, the figure with whom modern philosophy began. Today, it is comparatively rare to hear of the history of philosophy in the era between the great thirteenth-century thinker Thomas Aquinas and Descartes. Part of the reason for this gap is connected to a separate problem, itself having to do with the language, Latin, in which some of those intermediary sources were written.²⁷ But a more important part has to do with the way Descartes theorized the soul, as something that was without “extension” but substantially real nonetheless. This step was of fundamental importance in deciding the direction of the history of philosophy, and it is the primary reason why many of the aspects of philosophy central to this article’s argument have not been examined with the generosity of perspective they deserve.

Still, it is useful to point out that, though Descartes is important, he is *retrospectively* important: in his own day, the changes for which he has come to seem so important were not universally accepted and were a matter of unresolved debate.²⁸ One of Descartes’ two most famous and lasting works, the *Meditations*, bears the full title: *Meditations on First Philosophy, in which the existence of God and the distinction of the soul from body is demonstrated*.²⁹ Two important points are inherent. First, there is the proof of the existence of God, which takes its point of departure from his earlier *Discourse on Method* and its “cogito” argument.³⁰ There Descartes, by showing the necessity of assent to the proposition that he is thinking, and thereby a thinking *being*, created a foundation on which to build other arguments. One of these was for the existence of God. These arguments are recapitulated, reaffirmed, and strengthened in the *Meditations*. Second, and more important, are the powerful strategies by which Descartes argues that the soul, though a *substance*, is completely distinct from body.

These occur primarily in *Meditation VI*, where Descartes makes a twofold argument.³¹ First, since mind and body can be separately conceived, this proves that God could create them separately: enough, in Descartes’ eyes, for

²⁷ See C. S. Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance: Humanists, Historians, and Latin’s Legacy* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

²⁸ See D. Garber, “Descartes, the Aristotelians, and the Revolution that Did Not Happen in 1637,” *The Monist*, 71 (1988), 471–86; the studies in R. Ariew and M. Grene, eds., *Descartes and his Contemporaries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and the responses and objections that Descartes insisted be printed together, along with his responses to them, in R. Descartes, *Oeuvres*, eds. C. Adam and P. Tannery, vol. 7 (Paris: Librairie Philosophique, 1964), 91–561.

²⁹ Descartes, *Oeuvres*, vol. 7 (unpaginated reproduction of original title page of third edition): “Meditationes de prima philosophia, in quibus Dei existentia, et animae humanae a corpore distinctio demonstrantur.”

³⁰ Descartes, *Oeuvres*, vol. 6 (1965), 32.

³¹ Descartes, *Oeuvres*, vol. 7; 71–90.

a real distinction. Second, since body is something infinitely divisible, then mind, unitary and indivisible, must also have the status of a real substance, albeit one that is completely immaterial. Not that these points explained in any real way the manner in which mind seems by obvious experience to guide the body (as some contemporaries pointed out to Descartes), but the defense, rearticulation, and reconceptualization of mind/body dualism in such a powerful way had immense influence on the project of philosophy.

At the same time, “philosophy” was just beginning to be fully involved in a long, slow process that continued into modern times: its split from “natural” philosophy, or what became natural science. This process did not occur overnight, but by the end of the eighteenth century, the discoveries of “natural” philosophy and the methods behind those discoveries were assumed norms among intellectuals. The natural world was seen as more or less understandable and eventually predictable through natural science, and “philosophy” came to seem something having a more limited, but as we shall see, also quite exalted purview. This is why the shaping influence of Descartes’ dualism was so much different from anything that had come before. Plato had put forth arguments for a separate, immaterial reality (though of course he did so in the inherently ambiguous genre of dialogue, and though in later dialogues, like *Parmenides* [130b–e], he presented unanswered arguments against the forms); Aristotle had spoken of the need for a “first” philosophy (*Metaphysics* 4.2, 1004a); and there exists a traceable ancient, medieval, and early modern tradition, intimately bound together with Christian theology, stressing the difference between the reality apparent to us, and a greater, truly real reality that has nothing to do with matter as we perceive it. Still, no one before Descartes had so strongly articulated the mind/body split, and early modern natural science had not yet happened. With Descartes’ influential (though disputed) opinions about the soul in play, and with natural science coming to seem indisputable in its methods, the stage was set, in the second half of the eighteenth century, for a new type of philosophizing, one that continued and ultimately solidified many of the inchoate tendencies begun with Descartes. When this new philosophy joined and ultimately became the intellectual backbone of the modern research university, a powerful set of instruments was in place that, taken together, influenced all subsequent pictures of the history of philosophy.

The principal figure articulating this new type of philosophizing was Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who was recognized as formative even during his own lifetime. Indeed, followers of Kant were responsible for the university reforms so important to the subsequent shaping of the notion of what philosophy in fact is. What did they see in his thinking? Why was Kant so influential? How was Kant’s thinking actually translated into institutional terms?

The philosopher, as purely a teacher of reason (from mere principles a

priori), must keep within the narrower circle, and, thereby, also abstract from all experience.³² The “narrower circle” to which Kant refers in this preface to the second, 1794 edition of his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, represents the “pure religion of reason,” which is enclosed, like a concentric circle, within the larger realm of revelation, including history. This quotation highlights a theme that Kant maintained consistently throughout his work: the search to isolate, understand, and use his notion of “pure reason,” *reine Vernunft*. Descartes had presented a forceful articulation of mind as ontologically distinct from body and thereby set in motion the process by which philosophy’s main purview became the study of knowledge and knowing; but Kant brought these preconceptions to a new, more authoritative level. It is worth recalling that Descartes had lived during an era in which educated people thought one could “locate” the soul: it had, then, a quasi physical aspect and consequently his radical separation of soul from body took some time to be accepted. But by Kant’s day, the majority of philosophers no longer really asked the question, “Where is the human soul?” just as natural scientists no longer asked whether gravity was an occult force, or an attribute of God. The question just did not matter, and it was assumed that there were universal laws that governed all things natural (including the human body), even if those laws were not entirely discovered. At the same time, by 1762, the date of his *Social Contract*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau had made a commanding case that there was nothing implicit in humanity that must lead to the socially constructed inequalities in civilized society. After Rousseau’s emphasis on the root equality of all human beings, the seemingly inherent power of those Newtonian and post-Newtonian natural laws seemed alarmingly deterministic, leaving little room for personal freedom, on the one hand, and, on the other, for a transcendent deity.

So when Kant, in his 1781 *Critique of Pure Reason* and 1788 *Critique of Practical Reason*, set forth a system that attempted to take into account, as basic assumptions, both the power of post-Newtonian science and an overriding respect for human beings as decision-making moral actors, people paid attention. Kant stressed that we could have certain, if subjective knowledge, provided that the capacity for human reason was correctly understood. At the center of it all was knowledge: how was knowledge “certain” if it was also ultimately subjective? For Kant, we can intuitively grasp the notion of infinity, even if we can never fully understand it. This fact served as a guarantee of the prospect of certain knowledge, while leaving open the possibility of a kind of transcendence unreachable and ultimately unable to be grasped in our earthly

³² I. Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin, 1900–), 6: 3–202, at 12; English translation (which I have slightly modified) in I. Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, eds. A. Wood and G. di Giovanni, with introduction by R. M. Adams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 33–191, at 40.

lives. Kant's system provoked vigorous debate, but the quest to understand the enterprise of knowing became central to philosophy's mission from that point on. Philosophy was *about* knowing, and knowing happened in an immaterial part of ourselves.

The success of Kant's philosophizing was amplified by a remarkable moment in the cultural history of the German-speaking lands, in which one saw a merging together of Kantian philosophy, Romantic literary interests, and most importantly, educational politics. It is worth emphasizing that this cultural moment, especially its pedagogical aspect, was—in its size, scope, and eventual worldwide influence—unlike any other before or since in Western history and is still with us today. Historians of education have long understood the foundational character of the new German research universities at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but practicing scholars in the humanities pay scant attention to it. We are only six or seven intellectual generations away from the 1810 origin of the Free University of Berlin, associated with the name of Wilhelm von Humboldt; only four or five away from the late nineteenth century, when this model had triumphed across Europe and had begun to be vigorously exported to the United States, where it was regnant at all major universities by the second decade of the twentieth century; and only about two generations from the moment when many German scholars, compelled by necessity during the Nazi era, left the universities they loved so well, went abroad, and continued the educational practices and trends they had inherited from their homeland, sometimes retrospectively idealizing the Humboldt model. Sociologists have long recognized that higher education is inherently conservative, as an empowered academic generation seeks consciously or unconsciously to reproduce its norms and ideas.³³ In other words, it may just be the case that we are closer to nineteenth-century shaping disciplinary paradigms than we realize and that, should we stop for a moment and scrutinize them, we might want to ask different sorts of questions. This is especially so in the case of philosophy, for (now that we are in a position to return to the historiography of philosophy) we shall see that the idea that philosophy was a regulative discipline became part of both the writing of the history of philosophy and the intellectual architecture of nineteenth-century research universities.

The most important figure in the development of the historiography of philosophy was Jakob Brucker (1696–1770), who authored two histories of philosophy, one in German, the other in Latin. The Latin version had wide diffusion, and its title indicates Brucker's aims; he called it the *Critical His-*

³³ See the classic study of Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1984).

tory of Philosophy (Historia critica philosophiae).³⁴ The language of “Critique” shows us that we are in the same mental universe as Kant and that there was an incipient, if not always fully articulated, consensus regarding the scope, place, and methods of reason.

In the prefaces to both the Latin and the larger German text, Brucker made it clear that he was aware how broad the conception of philosophy had been up to his day. He noted that, were the history of philosophy to become a truly *critical* endeavor, the compass and meaning of the term *philosophy* had to be defined precisely, so that it did not include cultural phenomena that Brucker saw as extraneous to true philosophy: fields like literature, philology, theology, and law. It is with Brucker that we see the Cartesian love for conceptual clarity turned into a dogmatic aspect of an emerging discipline. Although aware that “philosophy” and “wisdom” are bound together by the search for and love of truth, Brucker distinguishes philosophy, and sets it apart as having a higher task to perform. Philosophy, for Brucker, is concerned ultimately with the discernment of principles, and philosophical reasoning is distinguished by three interrelated factors, as Ilario Tomeo has summarized and extrapolated them: first, the presence of clear, indubitable, and certain principles and axioms, from which one can, second, create a “foundational, unforced, and natural proof of premises from previously ascertained axioms, through which, then, [third], the objections raised against these matters can therefore be answered, so that the truth is strengthened all the more.”³⁵

As a historiographical monument, Brucker’s work represented a decisive moment in the history of philosophy. It was from this point on that philosophy began to lose its practical aspect, to demarcate its own area of competence (separating itself from natural philosophy as post-Newtonian science gained ground), and, ultimately, to be subject to disciplinization. From Brucker’s generation on through the Kantian and immediate post-Kantian era, philosophy, conceived and understood in this new way, was not only vigorous and interesting, it was powerful enough to have a permanent, shaping effect on the development of universities. Once Kant and Hegel made their appearance, the final pieces of the puzzle were in place to create the beginnings of a “tradition,” which, in its rigidity, retrospectively imposed its own norms onto a past that had no idea of its fundamental assumptions. It is not that philosophy

³⁴ J. Brucker, *Historia critica philosophiae a mundi incunabulis ad nostrum usque aetatem* (Leipzig, 1742–44, repr. ed. R. Popkin and G. Tonelli, Hildesheim: Olms, 1975); idem., *Kurtze Fragen aus der philosophischen Historie von Anfang der Welt bis auf die Geburt Christi*, 9 vols. (1731–36). Brucker, a Lutheran cleric from Augsburg, was as learned as he was productive and wrote a number of histories of his home city, in addition to histories of philosophy. For background see W. Schmidt-Biggeman and T. Stammen, eds., *Jacob Brucker (1696–1770): Philosoph und Historiker der europäischen Aufklärung* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1998); and Santinello, *Storia*, vol. 2.

³⁵ Brucker, *Kurtze Fragen*, 1, 8; Tomeo in Santinello, *Storia*, 2, 536–37.

stopped at the end of the eighteenth century (of course); the internal developments continued, with some of the most fruitful varieties of modern philosophy occurring outside of university contexts. However, once the internal developments had reached the point that they had at the end of the eighteenth century, the external developments, associated with the rise of the modern research university and the context for teaching and learning that it created, became more important.

There is no need to rehearse here in depth the way the 1810 University of Berlin was reinvigorated by Wilhelm von Humboldt, Friedrich August Wolf, and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, among others, all of whom shared Kant's notion that philosophy was regulative, so much so that the new "philosophical" faculty included all those disciplines, from classics to chemistry, that seemed to share some aspect of the search for truth. This move represented a raise in status for the old "arts" faculty to equal prominence with, if not superiority to, the professional faculties.³⁶ This original, early nineteenth-century vision of the new university meant that the mission of "philosophy" as an institutional ideal was broad, and it is the reason many scholars, regardless of individual discipline, have some sort of "doctor of philosophy" degree. In short, philosophy was the discipline that, because it was the best at evaluating truth claims, could also best serve as the regulator of all the other academic fields that were striving toward the attainment of truth. Given this purview, all the truth-seeking fields (outside of the professional fields of medicine, theology, and law) deserved to be placed in the "philosophical" faculty. In this sense we see the strongest—because institutionalized—instantiation of "philosophy" in what Richard Rorty has termed the "honorific" sense.³⁷ Philosophy stands above the other fields because philosophy evaluates truth claims instead of only searching for truth. But by about the 1860s, the natural sciences had achieved stunning successes, and after that point the humanities began to imitate them in language and approach, signaling a splitting apart of the early, more unified conception of *Wissenschaft* within the philosophical faculty.³⁸

The most noteworthy feature of this new approach is summed up in a

³⁶ For the standard account, see F. Paulsen, with R. Lehmann, *Geschichte des gelehrten Unterrichts auf den deutschen Schulen und Universitäten vom Ausgang des Mittelalters bis zur Gegenwart*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (Berlin and Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1921), 2; 210–47; and for foundational texts of Humboldt, Schleiermacher, and others, see *Die Idee der deutschen Universität: Die fünf Grundschriften aus der Zeit ihrer Neugründung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1956); see also C. S. Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance: Humanists, Historians, and Latin's Legacy* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 1–8, 43–46, 66–68.

³⁷ R. Rorty, "The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres," in R. Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Q. Skinner, *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 49–75, at 58–59.

³⁸ See L. Daston, "Die Akademie und die Einheit der Wissenschaften," in J. Kocka (ed.), *Die Königlich-preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin im Kaiserreich* (Berlin, 1999), 61–84.

term that the great scholar of Roman law, Theodor Mommsen, coined in 1890 to refer to a practice that had been central for decades: *Grossforschung*—"big research, big science."³⁹ The word designated the undertaking of projects that were so vast that no one person could carry them out individually, but that needed a single guiding mind to direct them. Though a number of venerable series of texts, inscriptions, and so on owe their origin to an earlier period (to the era of enlightenment encyclopedism), it was in the second half of the nineteenth century that most of these gained new and important momentum by being associated with *Grossforschung* and the new self-conception of the humanities in German universities. This conception was generative, as a powerful, leading intellectual had the responsibility to guide and develop a field, directing dissertations, and parceling out the smaller pieces of a project he saw as integrally important to scholarship. All of this standardization was productive: this was its great advantage, and indeed, this productivity was the main reason why the German university system became the envy of the Western world. By the late nineteenth century, it was being exported throughout Europe (with the exception, to an extent, of England) and made its way to the United States.⁴⁰ Between 1815 and 1914, approximately nine thousand Americans went abroad, matriculated at German universities, and found their way back to the United States.⁴¹ Some returned quite starry eyed at the German notions of "Einsamkeit und Freiheit," Lern- und Lehrfreiheit, and other

³⁹ T. Mommsen, in *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1890), 792, cited in R. Vom Bruch, "A Slow Farewell to Humboldt? Stages in the History of German Universities, 1810–1945," in M. G. Ash, *German Universities Past and Future: Crisis or Renewal?* (Providence, R.I.: Berghahn, 1997), 3–27, at 14; see also S. Rebenich, *Theodor Mommsen: Eine Biographie* (Munich, 2002), 135–64.

⁴⁰ For the case of France, see P. Den Boer, *History as a Profession: The Study of History in France, 1818–1914*, tr. A. J. Pomerans (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1998), 175–90; on the exceptional status of England, cf. M. G. Brock, "A 'Plastic Structure,'" in *The History of the University of Oxford*, v.7.2: *Nineteenth-Century Oxford*, eds. M. G. Brock and M. C. Curthoys (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 3–66, at 10 and 13–14; J. Howarth, "The Self-Governing University, 1882–1914," in Brock and Curthoys, *Nineteenth-Century Oxford*, 599–643, at 599 and 619. For a broad comparative study, see K. H. Jarausch, ed., *The Transformation of Higher Learning, 1860–1930: Expansion, Diversification, Social Opening and Professionalization in England, Germany, Russia, and the United States* (Chicago, 1983).

⁴¹ Cf. C. Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780–1910* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 49–62, 77–78, 83–84; C. Diehl, *Americans and German Scholarship, 1770–1870* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), 50; J. Herbst, *The German Historical School in American Scholarship: A Study in the Transfer of Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1965), 1–22; important qualifications with respect to the discipline of history are in G. Lingelbach, "The Historical Discipline in the United States: Following the German Model?" in *Across Cultural Borders: Historiography in Global Perspective*, ed. E. Fuchs and B. Stuchtey (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 183–204; eadem, *Klio macht Karriere: Die Institutionalisierung der Geschichtswissenschaft in Frankreich und den USA in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2003).

staples of the rhetoric surrounding German universities, all of which stressed the essentially apolitical nature of true scholarship, along with the Kantian notion that one should clearly define a problem, then set out reasonable, achievable-in-this-world methods for solving it. A second major wave of contact between German and American universities occurred during the 1930s and early 1940s, when a number of German Jewish scholars, compelled by necessity during the Nazi era, made their way to the United States, enriching American academic life and, as émigrés often do, sometimes retrospectively idealizing the world they had left behind.⁴²

All of this is to say that we are more the inheritors of relatively recent German academic traditions than we sometimes realize. Certainly, when one gets down to specific disciplines and investigates in detail, not only was the German “model” far from homogeneous, but what was assumed to be its central focal point was often variously understood, adapted, and employed in different times and places. But in university contexts, it is broadly speaking true to say that, if not founded on the German template, most universities were “retrofitted” in the early decades of the twentieth century. This process was undertaken to implement the (sometimes imperfectly understood) German inheritances of large-scale, specialized, highly productive scholarship in the humanities, along with the centralized (rather than college-based) faculties and administrations that such a conception required. One part of that German inheritance was the essentially idealist view permeating the writing of the history of philosophy. Let us take a look at one important example of this genre of work, simply to gain an idea of the assumptions and methods behind it.

Eduard Zeller’s *Die Philosophie der Griechen* stands as a monument of learning and insight, combining the best of Prussian philological scholarship with Zeller’s own deeply spiritual sensibility, dating back to his days as a student of Strauss. The great student of early Greek philosophy Hermann Diels wrote that Zeller’s history possessed an “Olympian clarity.”⁴³ It was a work soon translated into English, Italian, and other languages. When Zeller speaks of “The Philosophy of the Greeks,” what, precisely, does he mean by “philosophy”? He tells us clearly at the outset, he means something very specific, something “purely theoretical,” “very close to *Wissenschaft*,” “not just thought, but methodical thought,” which was to be differentiated from “the *unwissenschaftliche* reflection of daily life, as well as from the religious

⁴² See the relevant sections in B. Bailyn and D. Fleming, eds., *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930–1960* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).

⁴³ Diels in E. Zeller, *Eduard Zellers kleine Schriften*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1910–11), 3: 485. For the Strauss connection and the theological leanings, see H. Horton, *The Tübingen School* (Oxford, 1975).

or poetic world-view.”⁴⁴ Philosophy is different from other disciplines because, while they all have one subject in view, philosophy has “the entirety of Being in view.” Philosophy seeks—by recognizing the particular in its relationship to the whole and by finding out the laws that thus obtain—to recognize the whole, thus to see how all knowledge hangs together as one.⁴⁵

Zeller, who died in 1908, was clearly influenced by the Kantian view of philosophy’s disciplinary scope: it was all-embracing and regulative; by Zeller’s day it was woven even further into the intellectual architecture of the university world. He was also influenced by the Hegelian notion that philosophy and its history were in a sense the same: reflections of the emergence, and progress, of the human spirit.⁴⁶

How then should one “do” the history of philosophy? In the same passage, having just described the way true philosophy dealt with pure reason alone, he goes on: “That this very process did not immediately happen from the beginning on, and that this process was often mixed with many other elements, has already been noted and should not surprise us. Still, this should not be permitted to stop us from highlighting [*herauszuheben*], from the whole of Greek spiritual life, whatever has the character of philosophy, and viewing it, for itself, in its historical manifestation.”⁴⁷ Clearly, metanarratively underlying Zeller’s conception is a story having something to do with progress: there were innumerable thinkers that he would treat, but he would only treat those aspects of their thought that were “philosophical.” Not only was it *legitimate* to segment and divide the thought of the thinkers under

⁴⁴ E. Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, 3 vols. in 6 (Leipzig: O.R. Reisland, 1879–1920) 1.1, p. 6: “Ich betrachte demnach die Philosophie zunächst als eine rein theoretische Thätigkeit, d.h. als eine solche, bei der es sich nur um das Erkennen handelt, und ich schliesse aus diesem Gesichtspunkt alle praktischen oder künstlerischen Bestrebungen als solche, und abgesehen von ihrem Zusammenhang mit einer bestimmten theoretischen Weltansicht, von dem Begriff und der Geschichte der Philosophie aus. Ich bestimme sie sodann näher als Wissenschaft, ich sehe in ihr nicht blos überhaupt ein Denken, sondern genauer ein methodisches Denken, d.h. ein solches, das sich eine vernunftmässige Erkenntniss der Dinge mit Bewusstsein zum Zweck setzt, und ich unterscheide sie durch dieses Merkmal ebenso von der unwissenschaftlichen Reflexion des täglichen Lebens, wie von der religiösen und dichterischen Weltbetrachtung.”

⁴⁵ Ibid., “Ich finde endlich ihren Unterschied von den anderen Wissenschaften darin, dass diese alle auf die Erforschung eines besonderen Gebietes ausgehen, während die Philosophie die Gesamtheit des Seienden als Ganzes in’s Auge fasst, das Einzelne in seiner Beziehung zum Ganzen und aus den Gesetzen des Ganzen zu erkennen, und so einen Zusammenhang alles Wissens zu gewinnen strebt.”

⁴⁶ On Zeller’s Hegelianism, see Lutz Geldsetzer, *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert* (Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1968), 94–95.

⁴⁷ Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen*, 1.1, 6: “Dass dasselbe nicht gleich von Anfang an rein auftrat, und dass es vielfach mit anderweitigen Elementen vermischt war, ist bereits bemerkt worden und kann nicht befremden. Diess wird uns aber nicht abhalten dürfen, aus dem Ganzen des griechischen Geisteslebens das, was den Charakter der Philosophie trägt, herauszuheben, und für sich in seiner geschichtlichen Erscheinung zu betrachten.”

study, it was also *necessary*, because only in that fashion could one document true philosophy's evolution. To understand what was "philosophical" in the thought of past thinkers, one needed to separate philosophy from other disciplines. Despite many local differences and a number of exceptions, it is not unwarranted to state that these general assumptions were, in a sense, guiding ones in the writing and teaching of the history of philosophy in German universities by the turn of the twentieth century.⁴⁸ The central assumptions behind the writing of the history of philosophy have not, in truth, changed all that much, and in those few American institutions where the (nonanalytic) history of philosophy is taught, those Kantian assumptions, mediated through Zeller and other inheritors of the idealist tradition, are still operative.

If we refocus our lens, we realize that, generation by generation, the questions we need to ask of the past change; and it is simply not possible to understand what was richest about Italian Renaissance, fifteenth-century thought if one comes to the field assuming unreflectively that metaphysically and epistemologically-oriented philosophy (in short, "purely theoretical" philosophy) is somehow ontologically superior to other forms of philosophy, one of these being rhetorically-based philosophy with its implicit base in philology.

This latter point was the great insight of the Italian historicist approach to the history of Renaissance philosophy, best represented in the work of Eugenio Garin.⁴⁹ Garin has written eloquently about the need to look beyond works self-designated as "philosophy" in an autobiography he wrote late in life, as he reflected on his early education in the Florence of the 1920s: "I learned—or began to learn—not to look for philosophy only in books that proclaimed themselves philosophy books. I began to understand that philosophy—as I read later in Bertrand Russell—did not feed on itself alone, and that one of the ways of approach toward philosophizing is precisely reflection on the exemplary aspects of the various forms of human experience."⁵⁰ Philosophy did not need to be centrally focused on what contemporary doyens of philosophy emphasized. Instead, it could be concerned with this world, rather than another basically indefinable and ineffable one; it could deal with the world in which real human beings move and interact.

This understanding of the importance of history, language, and philology puts Lorenzo Valla and his relation to "philosophy" in a particular light. Valla often took pains to differentiate himself from contemporary philosophers; according to his own testimony, he would rather be considered an *orator* than

⁴⁸ For the teaching of the history of philosophy in German universities and its relative uniformity by the end of the nineteenth century, see U. J. Schneider, *Philosophie und Universität: Historisierung der Vernunft im 19. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1999).

⁴⁹ See Celenza, *Lost Italian Renaissance*, chaps. 2.

⁵⁰ E. Garin, *La filosofia come sapere storico* (Rome: Laterza, 1990), 119–58, at 120–21.

a philosopher. Still, the more important questions for us to ask are: was Valla, in his self-separation from *contemporary* philosophy and his proud waving of the banner of philology and rhetoric, actually being more “philosophical” than the philosophers? Was he engaging in the search for wisdom, the “love of wisdom,” in (what we can see with informed hindsight was) a more effective way than then-institutionalized philosophy might have allowed? There is an important issue of method lurking beneath this question. If, on the one hand, we stick only to contemporary sources and measure Valla against the work and thought of his contemporary, university-based philosopher-theologians, we can state that Valla is not really a philosopher at all, or at least not a good one. If, on the other hand, we look at Valla over the broad history of philosophy, he starts to seem a lot more interesting. The proper comparandi for Valla are not, say, Thomas Aquinas, or William of Ockham, or even John Buridan, but rather Plato, Vico, Nietzsche, and Croce.⁵¹

If, again on the one hand, one assumes that true philosophy’s most important phase ended with Kant, one can make the argument (and it has been done) that most humanists were trivial thinkers: the humanists were *only* rhetoricians, *only* philologists, and rhetoric and philology stand on a lower rung of the ladder of disciplines. When humanists complain about the rigidity of scholastic philosopher-theologians, these complaints represent *only* a disciplinary rivalry. If, on the other hand, one pays attention to modern philosophy, it is apparent that, at the end of the two great twentieth-century traditions (analytical, Wittgensteinian, language philosophy versus continental, Heideggerian existentialism), the main ideas to emerge (in the thought of people like Donald Davidson, Richard Rorty, Jürgen Habermas, and Stephen Toulmin) have centered on the importance of conversation, consensus, and the way language functions in, creates, and delineates social spaces. The best Renaissance humanists, and Valla is of this variety, can speak to us today precisely because they wrote material that has to do with conversation, group dialogue, and the kind of consensus that can be established in the public forum of debate and discussion. But one can only understand this sense of humanism’s importance if one comes at the problem with a perspective that includes modern philosophy with its emphasis, since Nietzsche, on language and its problems.

In this spirit, let us turn back to Valla’s *Repastinatio totius dialectice*—his “re-digging up” of all dialectic, or his “pruning” of all dialectic (“pruning”

⁵¹ See S. I. Camporeale, *Lorenzo Valla: Umanesimo e teologia* (Florence: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1972); idem, *Lorenzo Valla: Umanesimo, riforma e controriforma, studi e testi* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e letteratura, 2002); H.-B. Gerl, *Rheorik als Philosophie: Lorenzo Valla* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1974); P. R. Blum, *Philosophieren in der Renaissance* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004), 44–55.

in this case reflecting Tertullian's use of the word in *Exhortat. Ad Cast.* 6 fin). For this is exactly what Valla does in the work; he ultimately reduces Aristotle's ten categories to the three categories of *substance*, *quality*, and *action*, which for Valla corresponded to the grammatical categories "noun," "adjective," and verb," and he replaces the six medieval transcendentals with *res*, or "thing." Paul Richard Blum puts it well when he stresses that for Valla, the central question was: "What do people really want to discern, when they discuss something? They want to discern a thing in such a way as it is. They do not want to recognize either the being, or even the way of being, of a thing, rather, they want to recognize what it is."⁵² And this they do through language.

In setting out his arguments in the three books of this work, Valla "prunes" what he sees as the excesses of contemporary dialectic.⁵³ I would like to draw our attention to the preface to book one. There Valla presents, in effect, an alternate short history of early philosophy as he attempts to understand why so many in his day seem to be uncritically devoted to Aristotle. Valla begins with his praise of Pythagoras, stressing Pythagoras' modesty in calling himself only a lover of wisdom. Pythagoras' modesty, Valla tells us, was outstanding, but no less praiseworthy was the modesty of those philosophers who, though they had accepted the name of their calling from Pythagoras, were nevertheless not terrified by Pythagoras or his reputation, so that they were willing on certain occasions to disagree with him. They called themselves philosophers not because *Pythagoras* had called himself a philosopher, but because he had done so *rightly*—they were pursuers of truth and virtue, not unquestioning devotees of authority.⁵⁴ This, Valla tells us elsewhere, is what an *orator* does: he looks around, understands context, and, if need be, revises or even disagrees with received opinion.⁵⁵

Valla says recent Aristotelians are much less bearable, given their unwillingness to disagree with Aristotle: as if only Aristotle were wise, as if there had not been other schools of thought before Aristotle, like the followers of

⁵² Blum, *Philosophieren*, 50.

⁵³ Valla lists the ten categories at *Repastinatio*, 1.1.6 (here relying on Quintilian, 3.6.23–24; Valla asks "Whom might I better follow in their translation than Quintilian?" "In quorum translatione quem potius quam Quintilianum sequar?"); and he lists the six transcendentals (*ens*, *aliquid*, *res*, *unum*, *verum*, *bonum*) at *Repastinatio*, 1.1.9, immediately thereafter (1.2) reducing them to one, "res," which for Valla stands as the "king" among them. He moves to the ten categories at 1.5 on.

⁵⁴ Valla, *Repastinatio*, 1.proem.3: "Et sane non quia Pythagoras 'philosophum' se vocasset, sed quia recte vocasset, se et ipsi 'philosophos' vocaverunt: non hominem secuti, sed veritatem atque virtutem, quam ubicunque cognovissent, posthabita quorunque auctoritate, ad eam se protinus contulerunt."

⁵⁵ Compare Valla, *Repastinatio*, 2.proem.3–7.

Pythagoras, or of Democritus. And there were other schools: the Stoics and Epicureans, for example, and of course the school of Plato.⁵⁶ And wasn't even Theophrastus, Aristotle's successor, accustomed boldly to disagree with his teacher? Valla "passes over" the fact that the Greeks always admired Homer, Plato, and Demosthenes more than they did Aristotle. What did the Latins think? Was Varro an Aristotelian? Not in the least. And Cicero, as do most, gave Plato pride of place.⁵⁷ Even later syncretists who saw Plato and Aristotle as forming one school of thought did so thinking that Plato was the teacher, Aristotle the student.⁵⁸

Valla laments that Aristotle is not read in Greek: not only have many of his books been translated poorly, but the truth is, there are many things you can say beautifully in Greek that you can't say beautifully in Latin. "This fact," Valla tells us, "has led even some great intellects into many, great errors."⁵⁹ And since this is a work on language, Valla asks: who after Boethius really deserves to be called "Latin" and not "barbarian"? Avicenna and Averroës knew nothing of Latin. "Even if they were great men, still, how much authority should they have when one treats of the force of words," since questions having to do with the force of words are preponderant in philosophy? They should have no authority at all. They are like men talking about how to sail who were raised in the Mediterranean region, but who never saw the sea or got on a boat.⁶⁰ Aristotle does not give much attention to matters that single men out as outstanding, like public deliberation given to the people

⁵⁶ Ibid., 1.proem.4: "Quo minus ferendi sunt recentes peripatetici, qui mihi nullius secte homini interdicut libertate ab Aristotele dissentiendi: quasi sophus hic, non illi, et quasi nemo hoc antea fecerit, ignari peripatetica heresi inventa non modo priores viguissse, ut pythagoream democriticamque, sed alias quoque subortas fuisse, ut stoicam epicureamque, . . . nec ante peripateticam nominatos fuisse platonicos et, qui ab eodem fonte manarunt, academicos. Hi omnes ab Aristotele dissentiunt."

⁵⁷ Ibid., 1.proem.5: "Nonne Theophrastus, Aristotelis successor, a preceptore suo dissentire non timide solet? Hec de Grecis, ut taceam quod Homerum, Platonem, Demosthenem magis quam Aristotelem semper sunt admirati. Quid Latini: nunquid Aristotelem sophum putaverunt? Immo, nec summum philosophum. An Varro Aristotelicus fuit? Minime: sed suum iter tenuit, si Lactantio credere volumus, Platoni et Aristoteli compar. Cicero academicus ac Platonis emulus, qui semper primas in philosophia Platoni tribuit, ut fere omnes fecerunt."

⁵⁸ Ibid., 1.proem.7.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 1.proem.8: "Si modo cognoscere est non in propria, sed in aliena lingua lectitare, ne dicam in non sincera: non solum quia plerique eius libri corrupte translate sunt, sed etiam quia multa belle dicuntur grece, que non belle dicuntur latine. Que res in plurimos maximosque errores, egregia quoque ingenia, induxit."

⁶⁰ Ibid., 1.proem.9–10: "Quotus enim quisque post Boetium exstitit, qui latinus dici mereatur et non barbarus? Nam Avicenna et Averrois plane barbari fuerunt, nostre lingue prorsus ignari et greca forte vix tincti. Quorum, etiam si magni viri fuerint, quanta tamen debet esse auctoritas ubi de vi verborum agitur, que plurime sunt in philosophia questiones? Prope nulla debet auctoritas: tanquam hominum in mediterraneis educatorum, qui nunquam nec mare viderint nec navigium intraverint, disserentium de ratione navigandi."

or in the senate, or administering provinces, or leading armies, or law, or medicine, or writing history, or composing poems.⁶¹

Valla's preface reminds us that, to him, a plurality of voices is important; that a precise philological understanding of the texts one uses as a basis for reflection is necessary; that there is something about the recent practice of philosophy that has led to a kind of sterility and an uncritical use of only one voice in the past, and that, for all these reasons, it was necessary to question and critique inherited categories instead of working within the parameters they described. And, as noted above, it is exactly a questioning of categories that Valla engages in for the rest of the treatise. Much more could be said about Valla. To be highlighted here is simply this: where humanists before Valla had, for three generations, launched criticisms against the *style* of scholastic philosophers, it is with Valla that philology challenges scholastic philosophy on its own ground.

From one vantage point, Valla is unsurprising; he criticizes what seems to him an institutionalized mode of seeking wisdom in the way that other humanists like Petrarch, Salutati, and Bruni had done before, and as Poliziano would do in the next generation. From this perspective, Valla, like other humanists, is engaging in a disciplinary battle, seeking cultural enfranchisement by challenging an institutionally entrenched field of learning.

But this is not all he is doing. In a way that transcends the question of humanists seeking enfranchisement, Valla is advocating, for intellectuals, a new way of life and a different approach to the "love of wisdom." This new approach implies that one should never be afraid to question inherited truths, disciplinary schemes, and received wisdom. From this perspective, Valla's text means something not only in the fifteenth century, but now, as well. Valla's message was that critical reflexivity is essential to the search for wisdom, so that members of every scholarly generation need to scrutinize anew the fundamental guiding assumptions they have inherited. They should scrutinize them in light of the world they live in now, rather than imagining a fictive, timeless place where "reason" has always meant the same thing, where metaphysics has always stood atop an institutionally legitimized hierarchy of disciplines, and where a very few heavily enfranchised intellectuals are the only legitimate guardians of that "tradition." Lorenzo Valla—and Salvatore Camporeale—knew that one could never have a meaningful appreciation of the past if one did not understand where one stood in the present. If we

⁶¹ Ibid., 1.proem.11: "Non enim iis rebus operam dedit [Aristoteles] unde prestantes viri maxime dignoscuntur, aut consiliis publicis vel ad populum vel in senatu, aut administrandis provinciis, aut exercitui ductando, aut causis agendas, aut medicine factitande, aut iuri dicundo, aut responsis consultorum, aut scribundis histories, aut poematibus componendis." Here, compare *ibid.*, 2.proem.6.

understand their central message correctly, we can state that they were, and are, beacons who remind us to examine critically the central premises that guide us, to test our assumptions, and to shape, as much as we are shaped by, the past that we investigate.

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