Indiscipline in the Intellectual History. Immersing the History of Philosophy in the History of Knowledge

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Nowadays, one who writes the history of a field of knowledge is confronted with two methodological injunctions that invite him to cross boundaries: globality and interdisciplinarity. This is particularly true if this knowledge is still being practiced, if its history is long and if it has widely circulated in space and across disciplines, as is the case with philosophy. Moreover, the historian of a field of knowledge is asked to justify its social utility and its current relevance. As the idea of the Anthropocene has taken hold in the wake of the ecological crisis, nature has become an important historiographical issue[1]. The history of medieval philosophy, for example, has been very much concerned with animals since the beginning of the century[2]. Finally, the historian who reconstructs a knowledge tradition is often a member of the group of its current practitioners, although the vast field of the history of the so-called «hard» sciences is largely an exception to this rule[3]. Historians of philosophy are often based in departments of philosophy; in Europe they usually hold a doctorate in philosophy. Their historiographical works depend on their posi-

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[1] For a reflection on the history of knowledges and the issue of naturalism, see S. Van Damme, *Seconde nature. Rematérialiser les sciences de Bacon à Tocqueville*, Dijon, Les presses du réel, 2020.

[2] To mention just four very recent studies: M. Cutino, I. Iribarren, F. Vinel (eds), *La restauration de la création. Quelle place pour les animaux?*, Leiden, Brill, 2017; A. Oezle, *Animal Rationality. Later Medieval Theories 1250-1350*, Leiden, Brill, 2018 (followed by A. Oezle [ed.], *Animal Minds in Medieval Latin Philosophy, A Sourcebook from Augustine to Wodham*, Berlin, Springer, 2021); P. Adamson, G.F. Edwards (eds), *Animals. A History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018; S. Piron, *L'occupation du monde*, Bruxelles, Zones sensibles, 2018.

[3] On the history of physics, see S. Shapin, *Why Scientists Shouldn't Write History*, in «The Wall Street Journal», Feb. 13, 2015. Shapin challenges the approach of the physicist Steven Weinberg (*To Explain the World. The Discovery of Modern Science*, New York, Harper, 2015).

tion within their intellectual community; they express conceptions of philosophy and proceed from them.

Although the histories of the various fields of study still practiced today are very different, they have in common a reflexivity acquired at the turn of the nineteenth century, when the historicization of learned practices accompanied their disciplinary institutionalization in universities. The histories of law, medicine, philosophy, theology, art, etc., are emergent properties of those same disciplines. This process, which I describe elsewhere as the advent of a historiographical reason[4], had the function of legitimizing disciplinary practices by connecting them to long-standing traditions – in «continuist» endeavors –, or by challenging traditions to mark a new beginning. In both cases, which are not mutually exclusive, these uses of the past gave rise to various methodological problems which I will first summarize under three key words: anachronism, periodization and definition. I will then present a recent project to overcome the disciplinary aporias of historicism: the history of knowledge. Finally, I will ask what the benefit would be of immersing the history of philosophy in the history and anthropology of knowledge. As exemplary issues, I shall address two «savage» continents of philosophical historiography: the Middle Ages and the United States in the nineteenth century.

1. Three *aporias*

The first methodological breach condemned by historians, that is, anachronism – the sin of all sins according to Lucien Febvre[5] –, consists in reconstructing practices of the past, for example medieval philosophy, from a current conception to which one would grant an atemporal, even eternal nature[6]. Nevertheless, a controlled and productive anachronism was recently rehabilitated by historians who distinguished it from a dogmatic presentism[7]. In a perspectivist approach that does not reduce past practices to what present normativities can accommodate, the historian who is no longer afraid

[4] C. König-Pralong, *Raison historiographique, réceptions croisées et internationalisation de la recherche. L'histoire de la philosophie aux XVIII^e^-XIX^e^ siècles*, in «Fabula: Les colloques. Accuser réception», http://www.fabula.org/colloques/document6561.php.

[5] L. Febvre, *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVI^e^ siècle. La religion de Rabelais* (1942), Paris, Albin Michel, 2003, p. 15: «le péché entre tous irrémissible».

[6] See W. Feuerhahn, *Le chercheur et le discours de ses objets*, in «Questions de communication», 37, 2020, pp. 1-18.

[7] Among other studies: J. Rancière, *Le concept d'anachronisme et la vérité de l'historien*, in «L'Inactuel», 6, 1996, pp. 53-68; N. Loraux, *Éloge de l'anachronisme en histoire*, in «Espaces Temps», 87-88, 2005, pp. 127-139; P. Boucheron, N. Offenstadt, *Introduction générale: une histoire de l'échange politique au Moyen Âge*, in *L'espace public au Moyen Âge. Débats autour de Jürgen Habermas*, ed. P. Boucheron, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2011, pp. 1-21; F. Rexroth, *Fröhliche Scholastik. Die Wissenschaftsrevolution des Mittelalters*, München, Beck, 2018.

of anachronism confronts and compares discourses of various natures, produced at different times, on issues or in contexts that she conceives of as similar. Taking leave of historical narrative, she thus refuses to enter into the hermeneutic circle of historicism, in which the historian is defined as the product of unescapable historical traditions and the past is considered foreign, definitively abolished. «No affirmation of continuity» and «no position of otherness»: such are the two watchwords of a method that organizes the discursive simultaneity of historical discontinuities, according to Frank Rexroth[8].

Secondly, European periodization, whose first attempts were formulated in the Renaissance with the invention of the Middle Ages[9], has informed our ways of thinking about history, producing a deceptive linearity and uniformity. Unlike modern elites who claimed to be «modern», unlike the actors of the «Aufklärung» who debated its definition, it is very unlikely that someone ever thought of himself as belonging to the Middle Ages. That period was forged a posteriori by humanists in order to characterize and denigrate a region of history. Moreover, when western historians consider other societies, the category of the Middle Ages loses all relevance. The professor of Islamic studies Thomas Bauer recently proposed to abandon it for the Islamic domain[10]. There was no Middle Ages in the Islamic lands; ancient traditions were rather cultivated through the *longue durée*. Islamic historiography never rejected ten centuries of its history as pre-scientific dark ages. Furthermore, temporalities were not synchronized in the tenth century C.E.; societies did not interact in a globalized world. Finally, studying the invention of epochal names as well as their uses in historical disciplines leads to their pluralization. From the first half of the twentieth century onwards, historical scholarship has been invited to think of many renaissances[11]. Pablo Blitstein showed how the «multiple renaissances» thesis was co-produced by Arnold Toynbee and Hu Shi[12]. According to Jack Goody, the Renaissance should be pluralized on a Eurasian scale and the idea of

[8] F. Rexroth, *Fröhliche Scholastik*, cit., p. 17.

[9] T. Ricklin, *Giovanni Andrea Bussi und die* media tempestas *oder was die Geschichte von einem Esel lehrt*, in «Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie», 2, 2004, pp. 5-47; C. König-Pralong, *Médiévisme philosophique et raison moderne. De Pierre Bayle à Ernest Renan*, Paris, Vrin, 2016, pp. 9-46.

[10] T. Bauer, *Warum es kein islamisches Mittelalter gab. Das Erbe der Antike und der Orient*, München, Beck, 2019, pp. 28-31.

[11] Among many other studies: A. Jouanna, *La notion de Renaissance. Réflexions sur un paradoxe historiographique*, in «Revue d'histoire moderne & contemporaine», 49, 2002, pp. 5-16. On the historiography of Renaissance in different national traditions: A. Chassagnette, *Les concepts de Renaissance et d'humanisme en Allemagne: quelques remarques sur la (non) définition d'un champ d'étude dans la recherche contemporaine en histoire*, in «Revue de l'IFHA», 2, 2010, https://journals.openedition.org/ifha/244.

[12] P.A. Blitstein, *A Global History of the 'Multiple Renaissances'*, in «The Historical Journal», 64, 2021, pp. 162-184.

a direct rediscovery of Antiquity in Europe should be relativized[13]. In a more pragmatic way, connected history, entangled history, and the study of circulations generated decentered approaches by highlighting the re-uses of the category of Renaissance in other parts of the globe. The most famous case is that of the «Bengali Renaissance», which was so called by its own historical actors. In the nineteenth century, Hindu intellectuals used this category in reference to certain ideals of the Italian Renaissance. They thus intended to promote scientific and cultural projects that emancipated them from British cultural and political hegemony[14].

The third problem is the thorniest. In some respects, it intersects with the other two methodological issues. Writing the history of a knowledge field presupposes a definition of this knowledge, of its methods, of its objects and of its results. At the antipodes of the essentialist or realist position which prescribes what philosophy is *de jure*, the historicist option often calls for a form of nominalism – sometimes qualified as literalism[15] – which aims to approach what philosophy was *de facto*. From this point of view, philosophy coincides with the endeavors that claimed the name of philosophy and with the practices that were conceived as philosophical throughout history. At first sight, this approach is welcoming. For the Middle Ages, the history of philosophy includes, for example, Thomas de Pizan (the astrologer and physician of Charles V), Merlin the Enchanter as he appeared in the *Roman de Merlin en prose*, and lyric poems like the *Joli buisson de jeunesse* by Jean Froissart[16]. However, its perimeter is singularly reduced: the nominalist approach shrinks the canonical corpus significantly. The histories of medieval philosophy are indeed full of texts produced by intellectual actors who did not think of themselves as philosophers. Thomas Aquinas, Peter of John Olivi and John Duns Scotus were theologians. They wrote theology. They sometimes defended this practice by specifically distinguishing it from «philosophy». On the other hand, the principle of literality, insofar as it admits of translation, reduces the history of philosophy, from antiquity to the sixteenth century, to the traditions which were entangled with Greek φιλοσοφία, namely the Byzantine,

[13] J. Goody, *Renaissances. The One or the Many?*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

[14] B.D. Schildgen, G. Zhou, S.L. Gilman (eds), *Other Renaissances. A New Approach to World Literature*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006; K. Raj, *Relocating Modern Science. Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650-1900*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; F. Tinguely (ed.), *La Renaissance décentrée*, Genève, Droz, 2008. For a debate on the relevance of the concept of Chinese Renaissance: T. Maissen, B. Mittler, *Why China Did Not Have a Renaissance – and Why That Matters: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2018.

[15] For example by W. Feuerhahn, *Le chercheur et le discours de ses objets*, cit.

[16] P. Vesperini, *La philosophie antique. Essai d'histoire*, Paris, Fayard, 2019, p. 49.

Mediterranean, and European philosophies, as well as some Judeo-Islamic traditions, especially the *falsafa*. In fact, this second limitation was achieved by philosophical historiography in the nineteenth century. Academic historians of philosophy purged the history of philosophy of American endeavors and, above all, of Eastern thoughts – Indian, Japanese and Chinese[17]. They thus aimed at naturalizing philosophical reason as a European property, whereas historians of philosophy and encyclopedists of the eighteenth century, like Jacob Brucker, had paid the greatest attention to the philosophies they dubbed «exotic»[18].

On a global scale, the history of circulations challenges nominalism in yet another way. From the seventeenth century onward, intellectual actors from other parts of the world called themselves philosophers. In explicit reference to European philosophy, they sometimes described ancient traditions exogenous to Greek φιλοσοφία as philosophy. Joachim Kurtz has studied the «discovery» of an ancestral «Chinese logic» in the early twentieth century. Chinese intellectuals from that time reclassified ancient Chinese literary corpuses as philosophy by comparing them to Aristotle's syllogistic logic[19]. Were they not justified to do so, just because our disciplinary jurisdiction[20] forbids it? In this case, the requalification of writings as «philosophical» with reference to European philosophy is an anachronistic operation of the second order, an a posteriori historiographical imputation. However, it is now fully part of the history of the knowledge in question, of its own construction. Moreover, philosophy underwent processes of hybridization. Western texts were received in different parts of the world, in translation or in their original languages, and their European philosophies were mixed with complex indigenous traditions. In Japan, the «Kyōto school» intertwined Buddhism and twentieth century German phenomenology. In the Near and Middle East, from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, the thought of Averroes (1126-1198), which had traveled from Spain to various parts of the world, was reinterpreted in the light of a Marxism imported from Europe[21]. Nowadays, a philosophical historiography that aims to be global and that often originated in Western universities

[17] On the current debates on the existence of Chinese «philosophy», see the 27th issue of the journal *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* (2005) directed by Anne Cheng and published with the title *Y a-t-il une philosophie chinoise?*.

[18] C. König-Pralong, *La colonie philosophique. Écrire l'histoire de la philosophie aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles*, Paris, Éditions de l'EHESS, 2019.

[19] J. Kurtz, *The Discovery of Chinese Logic*, Leiden, Brill, 2011.

[20] On this notion, see A. Abbott, *Chaos of disciplines*, Chicago-London, The University of Chicago Press, 2001, p. 136.

[21] A. Von Kügelgen, *Averroes und die arabische Moderne. Ansätze zu einer Neubegründung des Rationalismus im Islam*, Leiden, Brill, 1994. On Kant in Teheran: R. Seidel, *Kant in Teheran. Anfänge, Ansätze und Kontexte der Kantrezeption in Iran*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2015.

reconstructs concrete encounters between traditions with the aim of «sharing the universal»[22]; in other words, of co-producing a non-imperialist universality.

When the historian addresses such issues, she experiences the limits of the literalist approach which distinguishes European «philosophy» from the «wisdoms» or «thoughts» (for want of a better word) of other parts of the world. On a global scale, the study of translations, encounters, controversies, imputations and representations, both synchronic and anachronistic, renders obsolete not only the periodization produced by regional historiographies, but also the definitions relevant within the disciplinary traditions established in the modern European university. Out of intellectual history and the sociology of scholarly practices, a broader and fuzzier history has recently emerged and spread beyond disciplinary traditions: the history of knowledge.

2. From disciplines to knowledge

The various forms of knowledge did not first wait for the invention of the disciplines by the modern university in order to be practiced[23]. For its part, modern historiography followed disciplinary agendas formulated in academic contexts. From the end of the eighteenth century onwards, the histories of the different knowledges have indeed contributed to form and legitimize disciplinary canons, borders and jurisdictions. They thus fitted knowledge in the Procrustean bed of modern disciplines. The way in which Victor Cousin constructed the figure of Descartes is a telling example. Between 1824 and 1826, Cousin edited the complete works of Descartes in eleven volumes. He thus produced the prototype of a philosopher compatible with the conception of the academic discipline that was being imposed in France, partly thanks to him. As Delphine Antoine-Mahut has shown[24], Descartes the physicist, the author of the *Dioptrics*, the *Meteors* and the *Geometry*, was eclipsed in favor of the method theorist and the metaphysician. In Cousin's historiographical and editorial work, the *Discourse of Method* becomes a propaedeutic to metaphysics, in accordance with the philosophical project that

[22] More broadly, on this concept see A. Dujin, A. Lafont (eds), *Le partage de l'universel*, in «Esprit», 461, 2020.

[23] For example, J. Heilbron described sociological practices in the eighteenth century, before the advent of sociology: *Naissance de la sociologie*, trans. by P. Dirkx, Marseille, Agone, 2006.

[24] D. Antoine-Mahut, *Bien reçu? Trois éditions de Descartes au XIX^e siècle en France*, in «Fabula: Les colloques. Accuser réception», http://www.fabula.org/colloques/document6563.php. On the historiographical metamorphoses of Descartes, see F. Azouvi, *Descartes et la France, Histoire d'une passion nationale,* Paris, Fayard, 2002.

Cousin conceived for the French university, but in disregard for the scientific economy of Descartes. In Descartes's work, the *Discourse* introduced the three essays on natural sciences. Furthermore, with Cousin, Descartes' philosophy ceased to function as a set of moral prescriptions for a good life[25]. As a type of academic knowledge, it became a doctrinal content. In Cousin's program, lived philosophy, redefined as an academic way of life, was assimilated with the practice of the *history of* philosophy[26].

Today, when disciplinary history reconstructs its objects through the *longue durée*[27], it most of the time proceeds more cautiously[28]. It tries to avoid the dangers pointed out by historicism, from anachronism to presentism. Aware of the conditioning of their historiographical practices, which emerged from the modern system of disciplines, most historians distance themselves from Whig history, that is, a reading informed by a modern or current definition of the knowledge whose past they study. In a 2006 volume devoted to the concept of discipline, the historian of philosophy Donald D. Kelley situates the problem of definition in the Renaissance, the moment that marks, according to him, a disciplinary turning point by excluding medieval *scientia*. He tries to circumvent this problem by re-appropriating the concept of *mathesis* (knowledge in the broad sense), which he plays against a narrow and literal definition of philosophy. In the end, however, he recognizes the inescapably Whig character of his program, «since it accepts the current definitions of the particular disciplines in order to write their history»[29].

The strength of this intellectual (and social) conditioning was relativized, however, by researchers who placed themselves outside a particular discipline in order to write the history of an *object* through that of its various constructions. Cristina Chimisso navigated between philosophy, history, anthropology and psychology, to write a history of the history of the mind in the twentieth century. She pointed out the inadequacy of the retrospective disciplinary gaze even for the

[25] See S. Van Damme, *À toutes voiles vers la vérité. Une autre histoire de la philosophie au temps des Lumières*, Paris, Seuil, 2014, especially pp. 47-53.

[26] Mario Meliadò, *Géopolitique de la raison. Sur la pratique de l'histoire de la philosophie à l'école de Victor Cousin*, in C. König-Pralong, M. Meliadò, Z. Radeva (eds), *The Territories of Philosophy in Modern Historiography*, Turnhout-Bari, Brepols-Pagina, 2019, pp. 169-186.

[27] On this recent trend: D. Armitage, *What's the big idea? Intellectual history and the longue durée*, in «History of European Ideas», 38, 2012, pp. 493-507.

[28] However, there are important exceptions, like S. Weinberg, *To Explain the World. The Discovery of Modern Science*, New York, Harper, 2015. According to his realistic (and consequently presentist) view, Physics is discovered from the nineteenth century onwards. It makes no sense to speak of Physics before the advent of modern science.

[29] My translation. D.D. Kelley, *Le problème du savoir et le concept de discipline*, in J. Boutier, J.-C. Passeron, J. Revel (eds), *Qu'est-ce qu'une discipline?*, Paris, Éditions de l'EHESS, 2006, pp. 97-115, here p. 114: «…puisqu'il accepte les définitions actuelles des disciplines particulières dans le dessein d'écrire leur histoire».

last century: Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, considered today as an ethnologist, held a chair of the history of modern philosophy at the Sorbonne and published papers in philosophical journals. Ultimately, disciplines matter less than projects developed by various networks of intellectual actors. Chimisso described her undertaking as follows: «Rather than a history of a discipline, this book is the history of a set of projects which were aimed at investigating the mind»[30]. Along the same line, Stéphane Van Damme wrote the history of naturalism(s) through natural sciences, philosophy and human sciences, from Francis Bacon to Alexis de Tocqueville[31].

To a large extent, such investigations are part of a history of knowledge which, according to its practitioners, offers a «path of historiographic renewal for the history of sciences»[32]. Formulated on the threshold of the twenty-first century by Peter Burke in England and in France by Christian Jacob and Stéphane Van Damme – among others –, this methodological proposal combines intellectual history, mostly dealing with texts, with the history of material practices. It aims to free intellectual and social history from disciplinary definitions and to redeploy its objects in time and across «intellectual worlds»[33] on a global scale. The history of knowledge has taken the spatial turn and is undisciplined.

The history of knowledge adopts an anthropological approach that neutralizes the hermeneutical circularity of historicism. Like space, time forms a coordinate system devoid of specific ontological consistency. Time is a referential in which the historian places his objects. According to Bruno Latour, «a temporality is in no way temporal. It is a mode of arrangement to link elements»[34]. In other words, temporal and spatial frameworks do not affect their objects in different ways. In this anthropological approach, temporality is not more subjective or more truly experienced than space; it no longer serves to demarcate the human and the humanities from nature, its objectivation and its sciences. The great divides of the nineteenth century, between culture and nature, comprehension and explanation, conscience and science, are no longer operative. The historian asks

[30] C. Chimisso, *Writing the History of the Mind: Philosophy and Science in France, 1900 to 1960s*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2008, p. 3.

[31] S. Van Damme, *Seconde nature*, cit.

[32] My translation. S. Van Damme, *La prose des savoirs. Pragmatique des mondes intellectuels*, Paris, Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2020, p. 8: «une voie de renouvellement historiographique de l'histoire des sciences».

[33] See the previous note.

[34] My translation. B. Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique*, Paris, La Découverte, 1997[2] [1991], p. 102: «…une temporalité n'a rien de temporel. C'est un mode de rangement pour lier des éléments». See also p. 103: «Nous n'avons jamais ni avancé ni reculé. Nous avons toujours activement trié des éléments appartenant à des temps différents […]. C'est le tri qui fait le temps et non pas le temps qui fait le tri».

where and how knowledge is produced[35], rather than investigating its advent and its genealogy. In his *Lieux de savoir*[36], Christian Jacob investigates the «successive places occupied by individual or collective actors on an institutional, disciplinary, or political map»[37], but also the material places, constructed or natural, the instruments, the tools, for example the dictionaries, and the artifacts, like journals. Finally, he also defines places of knowledge as scenes of interaction between intellectual actors.

On the other hand, the history of knowledge is undisciplined. Having become itself a «semi-discipline»[38] with its own journals and societies[39], it does not define its objects by means of disciplinary frameworks, and it does not distinguish science from knowledge. It investigates scholarly practices observed in heterogeneous worlds. The craftsman also produces knowledge, technology does not coincide with Western innovation, and science is not a modern thing. To describe his practice, Peter Burke hesitates between the usual denomination of «history of knowledge» and a plural that better reflects the project: «history of knowledges»[40]. His approach, which he defines as comparative[41], intends to avoid disciplinary and national bias, even when the objects belong to the modern or contemporary world. In this case, the investigation produces a reflexivity of another nature than that of the historicism of the twentieth century. It contributes to writing a history not of disciplines, but of disciplinary specialization. Peter Burke adds that this history is still to be written, «perhaps because such a multidisciplinary project requires an unspecialized scholar»[42]. This ironic remark assumes the criticisms made by some representatives of Science Studies and intellectual history against a history of knowledge that is too vague and that struggles to distinguish itself from intellectual history and cultural history[43].

[35] On the distinction between «place» and «milieu» in the science and technology studies, see S. Dumas Primbault, P.-A. Tortosa, M. Vailly, *Introduction – Milieux, media, écologie des savoirs*, in S. Dumas Primbault, P.-A. Tortosa, M. Vailly (eds), *Lieux et milieux de savoirs : pour une écologie des pratiques savantes*, in «Cahiers Français Viète», Série III, 10, 2021, pp. 1-19.

[36] For a presentation of the project and of the published volumes, see: https://lieuxdesavoir.hypotheses.org.

[37] My translation. C. Jacob, *Qu'est-ce qu'un lieu de savoir?*, OpenEdition press, 2014, http://books.openedition.org/oep/651, § 16: «…lieux successifs occupés par des acteurs individuels ou collectifs sur une carte institutionnelle, disciplinaire, politique».

[38] P. Burke, *What is the History of Knowledge?*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2016, p. 3.

[39] Especially in the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany and Great Britain. See the first issue of the *Journal for the History of Knowledge* (2020): https://journalhistoryknowledge.org/1/volume/1/issue/1/.

[40] P. Burke, *What is the History of Knowledge?*, cit. p. 7 and p. 14.

[41] P. Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2021, vol. II, *From the Encyclopédie to Wikipedia*, p. 2.

[42] *Ibidem*, p. 161.

[43] See J. Östling, D.L. Heidenblad, *Fulfilling the Promise of the History of Knowledge: Key Approaches for the 2020s*, in «Journal for the History of Knowledge», 1 (1), 3, 2020: https://journalhistoryknowledge.org/articles/10.5334/jhk.24/

3. The United States and the Middle Ages

The theorists of the history of knowledge are for the most part professional historians, trained in history departments in Europe. I shall ask now whether and how the history of philosophy – a knowledge that has singularly restricted the definition of its domain since the nineteenth century – could benefit from this approach. The history of philosophy is no longer written by historians or literary scholars, at least in Europe; it belongs to professional philosophers[44]. What epistemic profit could it gain by immersing itself in the history and anthropology of knowledge? How can it redeploy its objects, relocate them and pluralize them, in order to dialogue with other historical sciences that have responded to the injunctions to think global (or glocal[45]) and *interdisciplinarily*? In order to sketch out some possible answers, I shall take the examples of two regions that were put on the margins of European philosophical historiography at various moments of its history: the United States of the nineteenth century and the Middle Ages. The first allows us to observe transformations of a European device, in this case the history of philosophy, when it is relocated into a new context and loses its hegemonic position. The second invites us to consider two recent historiographical operations: the densification of philosophical populations in regions reputed to be poor in philosophy, and the critical reconstruction of what has been described as a learned colonization of the past.

In the process of its academic institutionalization, the history of philosophy strictly defined its object as a European property[46]. The famous words pronounced by Hegel during his Berlin course on the history of philosophy illustrate this forced Europeanization. Philosophy must henceforth be written in the singular (philosophy «properly speaking»), whereas the historians of the eighteenth century had encountered various forms of it all over the world:

> Thus, we are in the West on the ground of philosophy properly speaking. [...] this freedom we find for the first time in the Greek people. That is why philosophy begins there. In the *East only one* individual is *free*, the *despot*; in Greece the few

[44] On the history of philosophical historiography, see C. König-Pralong *La colonie philosophique*, cit., in which the reader will find a bibliography. Here I merely mention the encyclopedic undertaking directed by Giovanni Santinello and Gregorio Piaia: *Storia delle storie generali della filosofia*, 5 voll., Brescia-Padova, La Scuola-Antenore, 1979-2004 (English translation in progress: *Models of the History of Philosophy*, 3 voll., Dordrecht, Springer, 1993-2015).

[45] On this notion see R. Robertson, *Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity*, in M. Featherstone, S. Lash, R. Robertson (eds), *Global Modernities*, London-Thousand Oaks-New Delhi, Sage, 1997², pp. 25-44.

[46] Specifically on the history of logic, see J. Brumberg-Chaumont, *À l'Est (et au Far-Ouest) de la logique, rien de nouveau*, in C. König-Pralong, M. Meliadò, Z. Radeva, (eds), *The Territories of Philosophy in Modern Historiography*, cit., pp. 39-62.

are *free*; in the Teutonic world the precept is that all are *free*, that is, *man* is *free* as *man*[47].

Yet, in the mid-nineteenth century, Hegel was widely received in the United States, a cultural world which was «not then part of the "West" or "Western science"» according to Kapil Raj and Otto Sibum[48], and which Hegel had excluded from the territory of philosophy. American scientific institutions were still heterogeneous, the German-style research university was non-existent, scholarly practices varied greatly within the same field, and the production of knowledge was less domesticated than in the old continent[49]. All of this did not prevent Hegelianism from taking hold in St. Louis, Missouri, within a club of philosophers[50]. Some of them were self-taught German immigrants, like Henry Clay Brockmeyer, others were descendants of settlers and educated in the United States, like William Torrey Harris, who was appointed U.S. Commissioner of Education in 1889. However, as the main editor of the Hegelian *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Harris, who worshiped Hegel, criticized the Hegelian relegation of non-European peoples to the periphery of philosophy[51]. In his appropriation of Hegel's historiography and through his reuses of Hegelian philosophy, he sought to found a new anthropological universalism in the United States. He redefined philosophy from a social perspective as the way in which «each nation attempts to solve the problems of the world as they appear to it from the standpoint of its national life»[52].

Anthropological universalism, ethnological perspectivism and naturalism were indeed the recurrent characters of philosophies that irrigated American society in the nineteenth century, often without disciplinary channeling. These philosophies were produced by intel-

[47] My translation. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesung über die Geschichte der Philosophie I*, *Werke*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1986, vol. XVIII, p. 122: «So sind wir im Okzident auf dem Boden der eigentlichen Philosophie. […] diese Freiheit finden wir erst im griechischen Volke. Daher fängt hier die Philosophie an. Im Orient ist nur ein Einziger frei (der Despot), in Griechenland sind Einige frei, im germanischen Leben gilt der Satz, es sind Alle frei, d.h. der Mensch als Mensch ist frei».

[48] K. Raj, H.O. Sibum, *Globalisation, science et modernité. De la guerre de Sept Ans à la Grande Guerre*, in K. Raj, H.O. Sibum (eds), *Histoire des sciences et des savoirs. 2. Modernité et globalisation*, Paris, Seuil, 2015, pp. 11-30, here p. 25.

[49] See, among other studies, F. Rudolph, *The American College and University*, Athens-London, The University of Georgia Press, 1990; J.R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019.

[50] Among other studies: W.H. Goetzmann, (ed.), *The American Hegelians: An Intellectual Episode in the History of Western America*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1973; E. Flower, M.G. Murphy, *The Absolute Immigrates to America: The St. Louis Hegelians*, in E. Flower, M.G. Murphy, *A History of Philosophy in America*, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1977, vol. II, pp. 463-514.

[51] W.T. Harris, *The History of Philosophy*, in «The Journal of Speculative Philosophy», 10, 1876, pp. 225-270, here p. 232.

[52] *Ibidem*, p. 225.

lectual actors from various social milieus, active in heterogeneous scientific spheres: in denominational colleges, universities, clubs and utopian communities, at congresses and in public lectures. From the transcendentalists to college presidents who taught philosophy[53], from university professors to journalists[54], from politicians[55] to cult ministers[56], the philosophical actors were little concerned with demarcating their knowledge from sociology, literature, natural sciences and psychology. The nineteenth-century United States is a land of plenty for the historian of knowledge, while the historian of philosophy will only find his objects by circulating through disciplines, unless he reduces American philosophy to a fuzzy pragmatism[57].

Moreover, the disciplinary definitions of philosophy that prevailed in Europe as well as the European naturalization of philosophy were contested in the United States by intellectual actors for whom philosophy was a secondary concern. Movements led by representatives of the First Nations rehabilitated native philosophies largely derived from oral traditions. In 1903, John Napoleon Brinton Hewitt, a linguist and ethnologist born on a Tuscarora reservation, described the «Iroquoian cosmology» as a primitive philosophy[58]. In 1911, Charles Alexander Eastman (Ohiyesa) represented the Amerindian peoples at the First Universal Races Congress in London. That same year, Ohiyesa, a physician who had studied at Boston University, published *The Soul of the Indian*. In the preface, he affirmed the existence of a «native philosophy», prior to its hybridization with the Bible and «Caucasian philosophy»[59]. Through his rediscovery of a native «Indian» philosophy, Ohiyesa developed a critique of the modern division operated by the white man between scientific rationality on the one hand, and the miracles taught in the churches on the other. Within the American colonial society, historical approaches that redeployed

[53] For example, Asa Mahan, who published *A System of Intellectual Philosophy* in 1847, was the first president of both Oberlin College (Ohio) and Adrian College (Michigan).

[54] George Ripley was a Unitarian minister. Member of the Transcendental Club, he resigned from the church and found the utopian community Brook Farm. He then worked as a journalist at the *New York Tribune*. Among other philosophical works, he translated French philosophy (especially Cousin and Jouffroy) into English.

[55] The most famous of politicians-philosophers was Thomas Jefferson. We also mentioned William T. Harris.

[56] The Reverend and theologian James Murdock, editor of the *Church Review*, published a history of German philosophy with the title *Sketches of Modern Philosophy, especially among the Germans* (1842).

[57] However, Scott L. Pratt has recently revised the history of American pragmatism, discovering its Native roots: *Native Pragmatism. Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2002.

[58] J.N.B. Hewitt, *Iroquoian Cosmology*, in «Twenty-First Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1899-1900», Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1903, pp. 127-339, here p. 134.

[59] C. Eastman, *The Soul of an Indian*, Boston, Mifflin, 1911, quoted in W.G. Regier (ed.), *Masterpieces of American Indian Literature*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2005, p. 156 and p. 149.

philosophy and criticized its scholarly colonization by European elites appeared at the very moment of the academic institutionalization of knowledge.

Medieval philosophy was marginalized much earlier than non-European philosophies. Oriental scholarship, literature and philosophy were still largely valued in eighteenth-century Europe[60], while the medieval centuries had been banished from the history of progress. This exclusion found a late echo in Heidegger, beyond the powerful medievalist currents of the nineteenth century[61]. Like Hegel a century before him, Heidegger equated philosophy properly speaking with the condition of the free man. He thus pronounced the death sentence of medieval philosophy:

> Since true philosophizing, that is, the perfectly free questioning of man, is not possible for the Middle Ages; since, on the contrary, completely different attitudes are essential during this age, since there is basically no philosophy of the Middle Ages...[62].

This condemnation had relatively little impact among historians of philosophy. Since Jacob Brucker in the mid-eighteenth century, medieval philosophy was part of the great historiographical constructions, although it was often depreciated and neglected in the teaching of philosophy in schools. However, the question of its definition has never been definitively answered, and it is still acute today.

The new version of the most famous German history of philosophy, the *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, founded in the second half of the nineteenth century by Friedrich Ueberweg, reflects the new challenges facing philosophical historiography. The new *Grundriss*, which is currently under development, is intended to be comprehensive. After the volumes on Islamic philosophies, which do not reduce them to the *falsafa* but include the mystics and the *kalām*, the editors have planned volumes devoted to Africa and the Americas. Moreover, in 2017, two volumes (1667 pages) appeared which were dedicated to the thirteenth century. In the introduction, Peter Schulthess, one of the editors, situates the undertaking in relation to other histories of medieval philosophy that are read in universities today. The program he outlines is nothing less than a linking of the history of philosophy to the history of knowledge. To avoid

[60] A. Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2018.

[61] C. König-Pralong, *Médiévisme philosophique et raison moderne. De Pierre Bayle à Ernest Renan*, Paris, Vrin, 2016.

[62] My translation. M. Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*, Frankfurt am Main, Klostermann, 1983, p. 68: «Weil das eigentliche Philosophieren als das vollkommen freie Fragen des Menschen für das Mittelalter nicht möglich ist, sondern in ihm ganz andere Haltungen wesentlich sind, weil es im Grunde keine Philosophie des Mittelalters gibt…».

reducing, in a presentist way, medieval philosophy to the small part that the contemporary analytical philosopher can appropriate, and to avoid constraining it, in a historicist way, to the scholastic institution where it was preferably taught – the Faculty of Arts or Philosophy –, the editor attempts to redeploy the map of knowledge. In the Middle Ages, «*philosophia*» could designate all the disciplines except law and theology, but the latter was full of philosophy and law used logic[63].

Peter Schulthess thus defines medieval philosophy not as a system or a doctrinal corpus; he describes it as a «rhizome»[64]. Its institutions, producers, literary genres and addressees were varied; they belonged to various social groups. Outside of universities, philosophy was practiced in the *studia* of provincial convents and in the courts, both princely and pontifical. Moreover, one cannot ignore that some kinds of philosophy constituted a semi-private and feminine activity, as in the case of Christine de Pizan for example. To organize this plurality, the *Grundriss* adopts two successive frameworks: first regions (assimilated to modern nations), then disciplines and their themes. The latter includes mathematics, physics, medicine and alchemy, as well as knowledge now subsumed under philosophy, such as logic and ethics.

4. Conclusion

Thus, for the Middle Ages, the *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, which assumes its artificial division of history into centuries, proceeds by spatializing historical materials: it distinguishes geographical regions and observes the variations and uses of philosophy circulating between medieval disciplines. In this sense, it follows the program of abandoning historicism carried out by historians of knowledge who challenged the deceptive linearity of the Western logic of time – or chronology. After Jack Goody[65], Dipesh Chakrabarty highlighted the exclusive character of a historicist program that «consigned Indians, Africans, and other "rude" nations to an imaginary waiting room of history»[66]. Similarly, many nineteenth-century historians conceived of the Middle Ages as the waiting room of modernity. While historicism produced spaces of immobility

[63] P. Schulthess, *Vorwort*, in A. Brungs, V. Mudroch, P. Schulthess (eds), *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie. Die Philosophie des Mittelalters, Band 4: 13. Jahrhundert*, Basel, Schwabe, 2017, pp. XXI-XXVI, here p. XXI.

[64] P. Schulthess, *Der Philosophiebegriff*, in A. Brungs, V. Mudroch, P. Schulthess (eds), *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, cit., pp. 5-40, here p. 9.

[65] J. Goody, *The Theft of History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

[66] D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008^2, p. 8.

around its selected objects, it can conversely be interpreted as a regional epistemology produced by an imperial logic. Two medievalists specializing in Iberian literatures and cultures, John Dagenais and Margaret Greer, who will have the last word, have expressed this idea forcefully in a programmatic text. Before focusing on Petrarch's *Africa* – the first thinker to radically oppose medieval scholasticism –, they associate modern geography and historicism as a symmetrical project that aimed at colonizing space and time, and they situate it at the dawn of European imperial expansion:

> Is it possible to colonize a region of history, as it is to colonize a region of geography? There are many reasons to believe so. The history of «the Middle Ages» begins at the precise moment when European imperial and colonial expansion begins. The Middle Ages is Europe's Dark Continent of History, even as Africa is its Dark Ages of Geography[67].

Abstract: Indiscipline in the Intellectual History. Immersing the History of Philosophy in the History of Knowledge

Nowadays, one who writes the history of a field of knowledge is confronted with two methodological injunctions that invite him to cross boundaries: globality and interdisciplinarity. This is particularly true if this knowledge is still being practiced, if its history is long and if it has widely circulated in space and across disciplines, as is the case with philosophy. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the historicization of learned practices accompanied their disciplinary institutionalization in universities. The history of philosophy had the function of legitimizing disciplinary practices by connecting them to a long-standing tradition, or by challenging the tradition to mark a new beginning. In both cases, these uses of the past gave rise to various methodological problems. This paper summarizes them under three key words: anachronism, periodization and definition. It then presents a recent project to overcome the disciplinary aporias of historicism: the history of knowledge. Finally, it asks what the benefit would be of immersing the history of philosophy in the history and anthropology of knowledge. As exemplary issues, it addresses two «savage» continents of philosophical historiography: the Middle Ages and the United States in the nineteenth century.

Keywords: History of philosophy, Historicism, History of knowledge, Anachronism, Literality.

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[67] J. Dagenais, M.R. Greer, *Decolonizing the Middle Ages: Introduction*, in «Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies», 30, 2000, pp. 431-448, here p. 431.