Intellectual History in a Global Age

The International Dictionary of Intellectual Historians

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This paper sets out a particular concept of intellectual history for discussion and debate concerning the guidelines for our project for the *International Dictionary of Intellectual Historians*. First let me advance the idea that intellectual history is written everywhere, not only in West European countries, where it emerged, but in East European countries, too, and second that it really is a concept that applies not just to Europe alone but to the whole world, although this suggestion will vastly complicate our notions of intellectual history.

There are many forms and methods of writing intellectual history, and a variety of subjects as well. The context in which Masao Maruyama describes ideology is quite different from that in which Michel Foucault constructs his epistemological periods. Cheikh Anta Diop has a very different view of Greek heritage from Anneliese Maier in her work on medieval science. Yet our project requires that, despite the disparity in the writing of intellectual history, we must entertain the notion of a great tradition. If we did not actually start the tradition, we—the restricted Western "we"—have been the first to make it an object of study; and now we—the expanded global "we"—continue to modify and to diversify this tradition. Every new book confirms and also changes ways of writing and explaining, arguing and understanding, learning and teaching in-

These essays are taken from contributions made to a conference held in Wolfenbüttel devoted to the background of the new *International Dictionary of Intellectual Historians*, edited by Ulrich Johannes Schneider and Donald R. Kelley and supported in part by this journal. Professor Schneider describes the current state of this project, and this is followed by essays by four editors of the *JHI*.

tellectual history. As individuals we probably would never be tempted to view the field in such a broad perspective, but we must do this for present purposes, which are to compile an international dictionary of intellectual historians.

While this project is still in creation, some concrete evidence is available on our website (http://idih.hab.de), where you can find quotations defining intellectual history and providing sample articles on four intellectual historians, in fact the same ones mentioned above, namely, the German historian of science Anneliese Maier, the Senegalese philosopher Cheikh Anta Diop, the Japanese political thinker Masao Maruyama, and the French intellectual historian Michel Foucault. There is also a database of nearly 800 head entries, which includes historians from more than 30 disciplines and from more than 60 countries, all eventually to be complemented with articles.

It has taken us some years to bring the project to its present state. It is not only a problem of funding, which has been provided so far on a modest level by the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, the Foundation for Intellectual History in London, the Sarasin Bank in Geneva, and the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel; for there are intellectual difficulties as well. How can we define intellectual history, or (closer to the project's immediate purpose) what is an intellectual historian? The projected dictionary must have some guidelines, and yet these criteria are not easy to establish. Because the aim is to produce a book (as well as an online database), we have to think in practical terms and determine where our curiosity will end. With the dictionary project we automatically imply that intellectual history is written everywhere. Given the obvious disparity of the texts grouped together under this name—especially if we globalize our attention—how can we be sure we can call all those already included "intellectual historians"?

To the question "What is an Intellectual Historian?" the obvious answer is: an intellectual historian is somebody who writes what we call intellectual history. Conversely, intellectual history is what we find intellectual historians doing. Essentially, intellectual history is a literary activity, and an intellectual historian is somebody producing an understanding by writing books.

Intellectual History as Invention

Let us begin with a brief look at Wilhelm Dilthey, one of the leading philosophers of late nineteenth-century German culture, who devoted a major part of his later work to historiography and historical thought. Before his death in 1911, Dilthey also produced histories of early modern European culture, seventeenth-century belief systems, anthropological thought, and the origins of hermeneutics, to mention just a few. His very last work remained a fragment, "The construction of the historical world in the human sciences" (*Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*), in which he raises many

problems of historical understanding and considers their paradoxical and seemingly insoluble nature.

Jürgen Habermas turned to Dilthey for guidance in his 1968 book on *Knowledge and Human Interests* (*Erkenntnis und Interesse*), and pointed out the dialectical character of the hermeneutical disciplines, the "Geisteswissenschaften." In one problematical sentence Dilthey writes, "We are first of all historical beings, before we become observers of history" (*Wir sind zuerst geschichtliche Wesen, bevor wir zu Betrachtern der Geschichte werden*).¹ History writing is a reflection on our being: it brings out the essence of what we are and articulates our very being through history itself.

Nobody will miss the Hegelian overtones of this sentence, which portrays the historian as a servant of the "world spirit," operating an understanding which is intellectually reliving in retrospect the objective process of becoming and transforming "in reality." Dilthey struggled with the cognitive side of historiography, which he saw as recreating an experience which has already been experienced. Luther's Reformation, the English and the French Revolutions, and the Napoleonic wars were all history before they became the subject of contemplation, a history which "made" us before we could understand and describe it.

Today, we may think of our own experience of 1989, the fall of the Berlin wall: who could say that he or she had an understanding of the new world which formed itself at that point in time? To view historical writing as reflections upon real events seems to be a fairly general assumption; but I do not think we can shape our theories about historical writing in the way Dilthey did—and least of all our definition of intellectual history.

Dilthey is fascinating to read because he does not hide the problems he confronts in rethinking historical understanding. He is not suggesting anything to his readers as others have done in talking about history, like Oswald Spengler or Harold Bloom. Dilthey realized very well that there is a construction underlying historical reflection, which he calls "logical subjects" (*logische Subjekte*) and which every historian has to create in order to achieve some meaningful understanding. Logical subjects are concepts like "people," "reason," "progress," and "enlightenment," which we see at work while writing histories. There is a link between Dilthey's post-Hegelian notion of historical cognition as reflection and the post-Kantian constructivism expressed in his belief that historians cannot stick to fact and experience alone but must invent logical subjects as historical agents.

This link reenforces the identity between the object of the history, what it is written about, and the subject of the historian, where he or she is writing

¹ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften* (Frankfurt am Main, 1970), 346.

from; for both belong to some great "we" which makes historiography a readily consumed product. Historical writing in Dilthey's sense is always expected; it may be perhaps surprising, it is certainly enriching, but it always also satisfies a higher need of a greater community of readers who share the experience of which the written history is an authentic part.

Intellectual history is much more than this. One whom we call an intellectual historian is a figure quite different from Dilthey's historian, satisfying a higher need of communal understanding. First of all, writing intellectual history does not mean recapitulating something which has or even could have been experienced before, it is rather inventing the very object which establishes history. Think of the many ways of reinventing the Enlightenment, from early nineteenth-century idealistic condemnation as moralistic reasoning to its late nineteenth-century neo-Kantian appreciation, from the anti-religious sentiment in Paul Hazard to the intense fascination with religion described recently by Martin Mulsow or Jonathan Israel, from its identification with scientific thinking in Ernst Cassirer to the questioning of its disciplinary structure by Michel Foucault, and so on.²

In reality there is no Enlightenment, but only the construction of historians. The same is true for many other "realities" assumed to be at work. In the course of time concepts like Aristotelianism, Protestantism, Liberalism, and Pragmatism mean nothing if there is not first a proper historical description. Thus the primary characteristic of intellectual history is essentially its ability to invent concepts, secondly, its orientation towards the future rather than the past.

The works of intellectual historians must convince their audience of the importance of their subject rather than pleading their own case within a given set of values. Think of the many recent studies about the religious—or at least confessional and denominational—contexts of modern scientific thought, from Pietro Redondi's study of Galileo to André Robinet's essay on Leibniz's church politics.³ Think of the recent "discovery" of philosophical eclecticism in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thought, or of consumerism as a feature of early modern culture. The same may be said of new models for the relationship between European cultures and cultures from colonized countries, new ways of acknowledging the importance of images in the tradition of knowledge, questions of interpretation, a renewed interest in teaching practices, canon formation, and so on.

² Cf. Paul Hazard, *La crise de la conscience européenne 1680-1715* (Paris, 1961; *The European Mind: The Critical Years 1680-1715* [New York, 1990]); Martin Mulsow, *Moderne aus dem Untergrund. Radikale Frühaufklärung in Deutschland 1680-1720* (Hamburg, 2002); Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford, 2001).

³ Cf. Pietro Redondi, *Galileo Heretic* (Princeton, 1987); André Robinet, *G. W. Leibniz, Le meilleur du monde par la balance de l'Europe* (Paris, 1994).

New Approaches to Intellectual History

When an international group of scholars founded the "International Society for Intellectual History" in 1994 in London, they discussed new approaches to their field of study. Edited by Constance Blackwell in the first issue of *Intellectual News* (1996), these statements are still worth reading. They betray an important moment in reflection upon studies in intellectual history and they reveal a new enthusiasm for it. "L'histoire intellectuelle ... ne se limite pas à quelques phares," Françoise Waquet says in her essay,⁴ and insists that intellectual history includes second and third degree authors, because it focuses on the penetration of ideas as well as their production. She also says that intellectual history is international or at least supra-national, because ideas do not stop at frontiers.

This seems a truism now, but it contains much of the revolutionary power conveyed ten years ago with a new conception of the complexity of our intellectual past. Scholars like Waquet in France, Anthony Grafton in the United States, Helmut Zedelmaier in Germany, and Giovanni Santinello in Italy, to name but a few, have provoked important changes in understanding intellectual history by deviating from the canonical figures in the history of philosophy, in political thought, in science, in literature, and in culture. They also show an acute awareness of the interconnectedness of ideas, problems, and ways of dealing with them.

We may conclude that a very good reason to undertake intellectual history is to escape the narrowness of disciplinary histories. This is even true of some who by design stuck to the canon, like Richard Popkin in the United States or Merab Mamardavili in the Soviet Union, whose work effectively reconceptualized the canon with which they started in the first place—with important for both the canon of the history of philosophy.

The wish to move beyond the disciplines of traditional historical investigation, or at least to broaden them, addresses questions of context, of situation, and of the conditions for intellectual production. In his 1994 statement Anthony Pagden is rather wary of giving his full support to any truly new idea of what intellectual history is all about, but he concedes a change. He says that a "more broadly conceived Intellectual History" has recently developed, "even if, at present, only as a modified form of one or another of the older more established areas of inquiry: as an extension of the history of political thought or of literary studies, the history of science or of art or music, and so on." The

⁴ Françoise Waquet, "Histoire des relations intellectuelles dans la République des Lettres," *Intellectual News*, 1 (1996), 9.

⁵ Anthony Pagden, "The Rise and Decline of Intellectual History," *Intellectual News*, 1 (1996), 15.

question as to why the urge to broaden historical investigations emerged was then answered in part by Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, who pointed to the necessity of international and interdisciplinary research when dealing with early periods of the European cultures. He says that the interest in an truly international intellectual history arose from work done on early modern European history, because national classifications established in the nineteenth century were not useful for the history of scholarship, of erudition, and of the republic of letters.⁶ Thus we can state that a second reason for intellectual history is the development of new areas of research, especially in the period before 1800.

I would like to add a third aspect to the two already stated, that is, the inventive character of intellectual history and its transdisciplinary nature. This third aspect is particularly attractive to contemporary scholars doing historical research in a variety of disciplines and attending to the practical side of intellectual activities. Still quoting from the first issue of *Intellectual News*, we find Edoardo Tortarolo saying that "Intellectual historians ... are in the first place interested in the relationship between texts and worlds of experience." His words pinpoint the essence of the new enthusiasm for intellectual history which opens closed spaces of dogmatic ideas and traditions to complex worlds of scholarly action. Nicholas Jardine, a trained historian of science, is even more specific: "We should try to discover the 'scenes' of past inquiries, the ranges of issues that were both real for, and thought worth pursuing by, past philosophers, historians, lawyers, medics, etc."

For the sake of simplicity, I want to characterize the traditional "history of ideas" as the attempt to reduce complex situations of intellectual activity to a few central ideas. In contrast the new intellectual history includes the many diverse dimensions surrounding those ideas in order to move beyond theoretical understanding to an understanding of historical context and experience.

Christia Mercer's recent book on the young Leibniz and his teachers is a good example of an effectively broadened perspective on intellectual developments. More generally speaking, intellectual history becomes a new discipline precisely at the crossroads of other disciplines, especially, the history of science, philosophy, literature, religion, and art and associated international dialogues between scholars. Let me refer here to the journal *TRACES*, founded and edited during its first years by Naoki Sakai. This journal, published simul-

⁶ Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, "Was ist 'Intellectual History'?" *Intellectual News*, 1 (1996), 17. The entire first issue of *Intellectual News* is accessible in PDF format through the dictionary website (http://idih.hab.de); click on "About Intellectual History."

⁷ Edoardo Tortarolo, "Intellectual History and Historiography," *Intellectual News*, 1 (1996), 18.

⁸ Nicholas Jardine, "Intellectual History and Philosophy of Science," *Intellectual News*, 1 (1996), 33.

⁹ Traces: A Multilingual Journal of Culture Theory and Translation. Traces 1: Specters of the West and the Politics, ed. Naoki Sakai and Yukiko Hanawa (2001); Traces 2: Race Panic and

taneously in Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and English, has a subtitle, "A multilingual journal of cultural theory and translation" which clearly indicates a scope broader than intellectual history including features of culture and problems of translation.

This new pragmatic attention to what actually happened intellectually, rather than being limited only to ideas and doctrines, is in my view the most innovative character of intellectual history today, which indeed makes intellectual history a discipline in its own right. Donald R. Kelley states a similar point when he says: "Intellectual history has its own aims, values, and questions to pose about the human condition; and these cannot ultimately be honored and pursued on the level of theory, which, distracted by the conversations of neighboring disciplines, tends to neglect the practical problems of its own historical craft." Kelley raises the question of the self-awareness of the intellectual historian. He is, by virtue of the major studies, especially *The Descent of Ideas* (2002), best suited to remind us of the tradition we have, even in our attempts of denying it.

The small sample of quotes I have given indicates why leaving the narrow borders of traditional historical investigations behind, opening up new theaters of historical inquiry, and turning to the practical side of things in the realm of ideas constitute in fact an articulation of a new historical concept, a new method of historical understanding. Intellectual History has become not just a new method alongside cultural or social history or a new ideology alongside positivism or structuralism but a new field of historiographical experience. We write intellectual history not only because we want to produce more facts and give more truthful pictures of past things but also because we want to probe into the intellectual past which we know shaped our world as it is today.

Defining an Intellectual Historian

Intellectual history is a dynamic discipline not easily given to exclusive characterization, all the more so because during the twentieth century it has become a global activity. On the other hand a dictionary must proceed to some sort of definition, since it is designed to inform us about the interdisciplinary and international intellectual history we see today.

The editor's point of view must be as generous as possible towards the different disciplines out of which intellectual histories are written and also to the many cultures from which intellectual historians come. At the same time

Memory of Migration, ed. Meaghan Morris and Brett de Bary (2001); Traces 3: Impacts of Modernities, ed. Thomas Lamarre and Kang Nae-hui (2004).

¹⁰ Donald R. Kelley, "What is Happening to the History of Ideas?" *Intellectual News*, 1 (1996), 50; first published in *JHI*, 51 (1990), 3-25.

some sort of comparability between the historians chosen for inclusion in the database must be established.

After months and even years of deliberation we have established three main criteria for our choice of entries, three conditions which, when not met, almost automatically exclude the proposed entry. In the end, the *International Dictionary of Intellectual Historians (IDIH)* will include 1000 of the most important writers in the field. 1) Each historian included must have produced a major work no earlier than 1900 and no later than 1970. This is the first criterion.

- 2) To qualify as intellectual history by the definition used here, the works must be broad in scope, not focused on a single intellectual figure, and in a broad sense be narrative, dealing with development over time. This is the second criterion. The *IDIH* is designed to include those writers who offer the most profound reflection on large movements, the interaction of thought and circumstance. 3) Our third criterion is this: writers chosen for inclusion must have been, or still be, influential on subsequent work: we do not seek to judge the excellence of their work, but only its impact. It is by applying these criteria that we have selected out of over 2000 proposed entries 800 names which you can search in the database. These names have been suggested either by individual scholars, mostly from within our society, or have come from existing dictionaries.
- 1) From the start of the whole project it was clear that we had to have a clearly defined period, just in terms of the size of the dictionary. We chose the twentieth century from 1900 to 1970, the early limit 1900 being the point beyond which it becomes increasingly problematic to identify the practice of writing intellectual history. A major reason to start with the year 1900 is that academic culture expanded and universities were established everywhere in the first half of the twentieth century. There were 1200 universities at the beginning of the twentieth century, and 16,000 at its end, including 300 full universities around the year 1900 and 800 around the year 2000. This expansion took place not just in Europe and North America but all over the world. For example, universities were founded in 1898 in Bejing and in 1912 in Hong Kong, and in 1940 there were already close to 45 universities in Japan. Two Muslim universities were created in India between 1916 and 1920, along with twenty technical universities. There was an African university in Sudan as early as 1912; American universities were founded in Cairo 1919 and in Beirut 1924. Over time this academic development also had its effect on the literary production of intellectual history.

The year 1900 does not of course in itself signify an important date in the history of intellectual history writing. The history of philosophy, the history of science, literature, religions, and the arts certainly have longer traditions which predate 1900, sometimes by many centuries. Since, following the warning of

Anthony Pagden, the broadening of disciplinary histories can turn them into intellectual histories, I think one should not go back further than 1900 for the basis of an international and interdisciplinary dictionary.

In making this decision we also include the time when two world wars unsettled academic and scientific communities on a global scale. Occupation and emigration forcefully internationalized intellectual history—and I say this in full knowledge of the fact that many scholars were killed in the war and by the police. However, emigration also intensified the transfer of ideas and knowledge, and it helped to foster international communication and interdisciplinary understanding.

The other limit of 1970 is set to allow time for impact to become visible. The scientific advisory committee is there to further agreement on this delicate point. The limit of 1970 is also meant to exclude living historians as far as possible, since the question of their inclusion or exclusion could easily cause dissent within the group of dictionary authors and advisors. However, among the 800 included now we have around one hundred still living. (Being an intellectual historian seems to help one get old.)

2) The second criterion is the work itself. For every author included there is a list of "main works," which should include an original book, a master narrative which sketches the picture of a whole period—for example, central ideas in humanism, main problems of romanticism, etc. Our dictionary is about intellectual history as a practice. We do not want to include authors whose work on the reconstruction of past periods is limited to a single study. For example, Theodor Adorno: although his book, *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, written together with Max Horkheimer, can be regarded as a thesis in intellectual history, I do not think that Adorno qualifies for our dictionary because he did not provide a major narrative, notwithstanding his essays on the history of literature, of philosophy, and of music.

On the other hand we include Max Horkheimer, because his work on philosophy is always also a history of philosophy and had repercussions in that discipline. There is a thin line between advancing ideas about what intellectual history is on the one hand, including studies like Martin Heidegger's on Leibniz and Kant, and on the other hand actually working as an intellectual historian with research in libraries, archives, and all that. Ernst Cassirer for example produced many systematic studies, yet it is because he wrote an influential multi-volume work on the history of epistemology that gains him entry into our dictionary.

The requirement of a historical work, a book truly worked up from the sources, is vital for a dictionary which exhibits ideas as part of complex historical situations, embedded not only in theories but in ways of thinking and methods of reasoning. Hence not everybody concerned with the intellectual past is a

possible entry for us. This has to do not so much with quality but with the historical narrative as a form. We need to distinguish our authors by major book-length contributions to intellectual history, its periods and problems, its ideas and methods, etc. Of course there is no easy way, and there are exceptions, such as Arnaldo Momigliano, the Italian historian of humanism and of the history of classical philology. We have put together a list full of problematic cases, which is available on the internet, because we certainly need a second opinion. Once we start working on the articles themselves, our organizational structure with a board of consultants and a scientific advisory committee will also come into play.

It is important to note that the criterion of historical narrative serves to *exclude* a whole variety of works by scholars whom I want to call, for lack of any other more specific term, commentators, i.e., authors who specialize in certain subjects but never get beyond their area of specialization. Think of the countless studies on Michelangelo, on Voltaire, or on Beethoven. It would give the cultures rich in universities an unfair advantage, if we were to include every author who produced a dissertation on such subjects. The number of theses published on Descartes is too high, as is the number of books on Kant or Hegel.

3) The third and last criterion is impact, through which we also exclude many of the commentators just mentioned. We want to include authors who had an impact through their books, translations thereof, and reviews, etc. Only exceptionally will we include authors whose impact was secured through teaching alone—especially some East European authors who, in the period up to 1990, had no chance to publish. We insist on impact because we want to exclude textbook authors who keep to standard knowledge. Similarly, however, we will not be able to avoid ideologically influential work. Here is a quote from the *Global Encyclopedia of Historical Writing*, published in 1998: "We are apt to dismiss, from a liberal present, the notion that history ought to be ideologically driven; nevertheless, it is a fact that history has *always* been influenced, to a greater or lesser degree, by external forces operating on the historian...." Our dictionary will not deny these forces, but name them as clearly as possible.

When it comes to impact, the editors are in urgent need of help from the committees. There must be ways to come to some agreement among a majority of specialists about whether to include certain historians or not, when taking all the relevant data into consideration. With respect to this criterion, conferences will also play an important role, since the project is not only international and interdisciplinary in content but also by virtue of the very process by which it

¹¹ A Global Encyclopedia of Historical Writing, ed. D. R. Woolf (London, 1998), introduction.

will be produced, namely, extensive communication within the international scientific community.

For each historian the dictionary article will offer a range of useful information. There will be a head entry with basic biographical data (including, if applicable, cross references to other biographical dictionaries), followed by a selective bibliography. The article itself includes a short biography stressing education, career, and geographical movements; a characterization of the historian's work; a section on method, which often brings out relations to other intellectual historians; and finally impact, discussing the influence of the historian on subsequent tradition. Hence, in a short space, the reader will see why the historian is significant, how he or she relates to others in the field, and where to look for further information.

Every article places modern intellectual historians in their professional and intellectual contexts, as can be seen, for example, from the sample articles available on the dictionary web page. The article on Japanese historian Masao Maruyama, for instance, tells us in the *biographical* section that Maruyama was the first holder of the chair in history of political ideas at Tokyo Imperial University. The German historian of science Anneliese Maier argued with the theories of French scholar Pierre Duhem: the terms of the disagreement appear in the section which characterizes her *work*. The article on French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault includes a section on *method* which discusses the vexed question of his relation to structuralism. Those unfamiliar with the Senegalese intellectual Cheikh Anta Diop may read about his influence on Afrocentric movements in America and the Caribbean in the section on *impact*.

The articles are medium-length (roughly two pages or four columns) for well-known figures as much as for less famous historians. We do not want to have "classes" of entries in the same way as the *Biographical Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Philosophers*, published in 1996, which indicates by the varying length "the importance of the figures concerned." In our dictionary we give a list of reference works for those rather well-known historians included in dictionaries elsewhere. We do not attempt to assess historiographical achievement on a global scale; rather we want to inform about the overall diversity of historiographical modes in intellectual history. The dictionary will supply a starting point for the reader who wishes to relate historians to other thinkers from widely varying disciplines and distant places. We will deal with historians from all over the world, and must reach readers equally widely. I am confident that our dictionary will contain, in the end, many names not to be found in other printed or online reference works.

¹² Biographical Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Philosophers, ed. Stuart Brown (London, 1996), introduction.

A New Republic of Letters?

The dictionary project addresses the problems of the new globalized world in three ways. One is to build the resources for understanding intellectual history. At present, we lack even a reference list of important intellectual historians that carries the approval of a wide range of scholars. We propose to publish our dictionary of intellectual historians to provide direction for future research. The second is a series of conferences that will bring scholars from many origins together to engage in a dialogue and produce collaborative publications in conference proceedings. Simultaneously, we will use the impetus of the conferences to build a network across the world, communicating through e-mail lists and websites, to build a network of experts in the field. We are conscious that we need scholars from all parts of the world, including those for whom regular access to the internet is difficult.

The dictionary provides an effective tool for understanding the ways in which intellectual histories are written, in which conceptions of the world are molded. There is demand for international and interdisciplinary commerce of ideas about the globalized world. The dictionary project is an invitation to build this knowledge in co-operation with scholars from all over the world, effectively using European resources to de-Europeanize the basis for advanced mutual understanding. Once the basic biographies and bibliographies are available, it will become possible to discuss the impact of political, aesthetic, and religious thought on mentalities and on the formation of the human being in our age.¹³

Herzog August Bibliothek.

¹³ This text was printed in a slightly different version in *Intellectual News*, 14 (2004), 9-15.