

**WHICH PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY FOR  
THE THIRD MILLENNIUM?  
Some reflections on the ‘horizon of  
understanding’ of *Fides et ratio***

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**Introduction: Time and History, an ‘Eternal’ Question**

“Time, time, what is time? In Switzerland they make time, in France time comes to a halt, in Italy time is wasted, in America they say that time is money and in India it doesn’t exist. For me, time is a swindler”.<sup>1</sup> Our culture, in general, leads us to take a greater interest in *existence* – our own and that of objects – that in *essence*, a greater interest in free action than in nature. It is thus marked, as expressed by the title of one of the most celebrated works of our time, by the theme of the relationship *Sein-Zeit*.<sup>2</sup>

The beginning of the new millennium, even with the different and at times profoundly diverse meanings attributed to it, undoubtedly represents a significant moment of interpretation (philosophy of history?) of the so-called ‘turn of the age,’ with results that range from total indifference, to sociological or cultural assessments; and from jubilee celebrations to regurgitations of a millennarianism that is never quite fully laid to rest,<sup>3</sup> even in the midst of a ‘rebirth of the sacred’ that does not disdain to describe itself as an *Age* (*New, Next, ...*); from declarations of the ‘end of history’<sup>4</sup> to hypotheses of new scenarios for the near future, in which the

union of the natural sciences and the universe of computers will usher in a new epoch of scientific innovation and application of technology to the discipline of biology, with the beginning of the *Biotech Century* (Jeremy Rifkin).

How then should we view time? From where does it come, and where is history leading us? These are themes which are ‘eternally new’ for philosophy,<sup>5</sup> in the midst of a cultural *koiné* that sometimes defines itself by a temporal indication, i.e., the *post* of the postmodern,<sup>6</sup> or even that of *post*-postmodernism. Implicitly or explicitly, from the person in the street to the philosopher by profession, every member of the human family and every culture is always accompanied by a ‘*Geschichtsanschauung*,’ just as it is always possible to engage oneself, with equally good results, in the writing of a philosophy of history.<sup>7</sup> If, on the one hand, as H.G. Gadamer has affirmed, “historical consciousness is that which characterizes, more than any other thing, the [...] century” just finished,<sup>8</sup> on the other hand already Nietzsche in his time had issued a warning about the ‘excess of history’.<sup>9</sup>

Even theology, especially in this year 2000, finds itself stimulated in a special way by its acceptance of the challenge of the ‘encounter with history’. As foreseen at the beginning of the twentieth century by E. Troeltsch, this encounter, so well described by W. Kasper, seems to have taken place.<sup>10</sup> The Bull of indiction of the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, summarizing the Christocentrism of the postconciliar ecclesiastical Magisterium, places at the centre the specific and distinguishing element of Christian revelation, affirming that “Jesus is the genuine newness which surpasses all human expectations and such he remains for ever, from age to age” – because “[t]he birth of Jesus at Bethlehem is not an event which can be consigned to the past. The whole of human history

in fact stands in reference to him: our own time and the future of the world are illumined by his presence”.<sup>11</sup> The Christian view of history attributes to it a *Lord*, a ‘culmination and ultimate meaning’,<sup>12</sup> a ‘centre’,<sup>13</sup> which in turn confers upon time an eminently and inescapably Christological value.<sup>14</sup>

This reference to theology at the very beginning of our attempt to analyze which philosophy of history can and should be put forward at the beginning of the new millennium, is not something irrelevant. In point of fact, when we go back to the roots of the discipline it becomes evident that the birth and existence of philosophy of history are directly dependent on the prior existence of a theology of history, also because “the view of history as a unified and final process is a concept of Christian origin”.<sup>15</sup>

The Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio* (*FR*), which provides us with a ‘horizon of understanding’ for the brief notes of this essay, speaks expressly of a ‘Christian philosophy’ (distinct from theology) when it refers to some of the ‘different stances of philosophy’. Within this Christian philosophy, the importance of the historical event (which stands at the centre of the Christian revelation) constitutes the pivotal point of a true and proper ‘philosophy of history’, conducted in the context of the faith.<sup>16</sup> The text of the encyclical also goes on to express itself directly about the error of historicism (*FR* 87, 94).

After a brief review of the history of the discipline, concentrating on elements which in our view are significant, we will attempt to highlight the ‘*reductio ad historiam*’ that calls for a “philosophy of genuinely metaphysical range, capable, that is, of transcending empirical data in order to attain something absolute, ultimate and foundational in its search

for truth” (FR 83). This is true both for the gnoseological consideration of history as well as for the anthropological and metaphysical analysis (which includes also philosophical theology and the study of the relationship between transcendence and history). In this context, an adequate and renewed concept of creation and of analogy seems to us to be of decisive importance, a ‘novelty’ which is useful also for the third millennium. *Fides et ratio* has something interesting to say with regard to this: “There is a pressing need, therefore, that the relationship between fact and meaning, a relationship which constitutes the specific sense of history, be examined also from the philosophical point of view”,<sup>17</sup> which amplifies what R. Aron has already written: “the absence and the necessity of a philosophy of history are elements equally characteristic of our age”.<sup>18</sup>

## 1. A Precise Date of Birth

The consideration of history as reality, and the search for its foundation, is at the basis of the term ‘philosophy of history’ itself. It is the eighteenth century that gives us this term, precisely because it seems that it was during this period that history came to be explicitly included as a specific theme of philosophy. There is no unanimity however about who was the first to create this expression.

In 1765 Voltaire’s *Philosophie de l’histoire* was published, in open polemic with traditional historiography, with the express intent of reconstructing a universal history by means of an objective interpretation of the succession of historical facts, free from any ‘theocentric criterion’ governing the selection of the facts.<sup>19</sup> To be numbered among the founders are also Vico, with his *Principi di una Scienza Nuova d’intorno*

*alla comune origine delle nazioni*,<sup>20</sup> and Rousseau, who elaborated a true and proper 'history of reason'.<sup>21</sup>

The work of Condorcet is also significant: it is the expression of an already mature consciousness of the ambitious project of a complete emancipation of the reading of history from every authority, terrestrial as well as celestial,

“to be achieved by means of the common construction of a ‘civil history’, created however solely by human beings. In search of protection, humankind used to once look upwards, in the direction of an earthly throne or else to heaven; in order to progress, however, it must now courageously turn its face towards the future. This new attitude abolishes the ancient (Augustinian) parallelism between the ‘City of God’ on the way towards the revelation of her eternal destiny, detached from the time of the world, and the ‘City of man’, intrinsically corrupt and transient. The immanentism of the philosophies of history, rejecting every transcendence, now considers time, the world, and earthly life as the only land and home of humankind”.<sup>22</sup>

With the intention of analyzing in depth the birth of modern philosophies of history, H. D. Rauh has written that they represent a response to and a compensation for a widespread ‘crisis of meaning,’ as the first fruits more of a perceived emptiness and disorientation than of a meaningful fullness.<sup>23</sup> The opening up of the world as a result of geographical discoveries; the encounters with ‘other peoples’ with beliefs and worldviews different from those of Europe; the development of scientific knowledge and the affirmation of Cartesian free thinking in philosophy, along with the concomitant devaluation of the events of human history, which were judged to be devoid of any intrinsic rational significance: all these could be numbered among the principal factors in the development of modern philosophies of history.<sup>24</sup> Another important element is the abandonment, at first tacit and then

open, of the model of history represented by the 'Great Code' of the Bible, which furnished us with a scheme which, recognizing in the concept of creation a particular causal relationship between God and creatures, placed creatures in a world in which their secondary causality was recognized and given a place, and the presence of evil in history had a theological interpretation of its own, an interpretation which preserved both the real freedom of human beings as well as the absolute transcendence of God. Galileo and Newton on the one hand and Leibniz and Spinoza on the other, contributed to this process, which could well be termed a process of 'atheization'. It was a process that was pregnant with consequences.<sup>25</sup>

The modern period opens precisely with the problem of the relationship between reason and history, and it gives birth to a philosophy of history. In the reflection initiated by modernity on experience, in relationship to reason, history began to be considered as an area of philosophical research: there was discovered a relationship between reason and history, which is precisely the field of experience. The course of historical events cannot be deduced a priori: the historical fact is contingent, because the contrary is also thinkable and logically possible; the totality of contingent facts becomes one of the 'infinite possible worlds'. If one of these worlds exists, the others cannot exist; therefore, if one of these worlds actually exists, it can only be one choice among an infinite number of worlds which are equally possible though not com-possible.<sup>26</sup>

Radicalizing this typically Leibnizian line of thought, Spinoza will later propose an antithesis between history, understood as the realm of freedom, and nature, understood as the realm of necessary truths. He will try to reduce the contrast between nature and freedom, with a great subsequent

historical influence, developing, in fact, two new concepts of freedom and nature, in a manner that allows for their synthesis.<sup>27</sup>

The problem of the relationship between reason and history which arose at the dawn of modernity, was above all a problem of method.<sup>28</sup> Philosophy, having recognized the contradiction inherent in the absolute separation between reason, nature, and history, looked for a solution:

“Confronted with a nature that was extended and inert, endowed with admirable laws which were just beginning to be recognized, the world of men, the only known rational animals, is reduced to a conglomeration of casual events, unrelated and unintelligible. The only way to escape from this dilemma is to look for a meaning and a logic in history that is different not only from the mechanistic ones of the natural sciences but [...] also from the providential-traditional ones of theology”.<sup>29</sup>

## **2. The Root of the Problem**

If philosophy of history in the modern sense has a precise date of birth, nevertheless humankind is ‘involved in history’ from the very beginning. The word ‘history’ (*storia*) was applied by the Latin peoples to the ‘*res gestae*’ as well as to the ‘*narratio rerum gestarum*’. Not only the words of Latin origin, *historia*, *histoire*, *storia*, *history*, but also the German *Geschichte*, are used with this double significance. The word derives from the Indo-European root *\*wid-*, *+weid*, i.e., ‘to see’.<sup>30</sup> History as *res gestae* designates the totality of human events in their temporal course, and this is history as reality; history as *narratio rerum gestarum* designates the narration of these human events and is therefore history as knowledge.

We will not stop to analyze the conception of history of past (and present, at least as far as the East is concerned)<sup>31</sup> Indo-European civilizations, including the Greek.<sup>32</sup> We underline, instead, the fact that the rise of Christianity, and in particular Augustinian theological thought, can be considered as a major point of origin of the future philosophy of history. From here we get, for example, the concept of progress and the idea of the universality of human history.<sup>33</sup> Augustine, speaking in the *De Civitate Dei* of the *totum genus humanum* (XII, 28), analyzes above all “the vicissitudes of the *civitas Dei peregrinans*, but he does not neglect those of the *civitas Dei*, of the Paradise towards which every Christian has to look, and of the *civitas terrena*, ruled by the *libido dominandi*, by the thirst for power [...]. Still, the foundation of the Augustinian concept of history is represented by the *civitas Dei peregrinans*, by pilgrim humanity travelling from time to eternity, where this word means both ‘foreigners’ and ‘pilgrims on this earth’ [...]. Only because there exists *peregrinatio* there is history, movement ahead, possibility of changing direction”.<sup>34</sup>

There is certainly a contraposition between cyclical time and linear time<sup>35</sup> (*circula explosa sunt*); nevertheless R. Bodei affirms that “the originality of Augustine [...] lies in the idea of *novum*. The weight of the past no longer overwhelms the individual; redemption presents itself as the possibility of beginning anew. Against the traditionalisms of the past, Christianity introduces the tradition of the new. This is the dynamic aspect that it transmits to Western civilization. The idea of progress finds its remote origins in the idea of the irruption of the new in history”.<sup>36</sup> The theological interpretation of St. Augustine shows how Christianity developed to its fullest extent the theme of the history of salvation as the ‘livability’ of history, the place of reconciliation between finite and infinite, because the negativity of history is borne on the shoulders of

the Son of God. History is the place of ‘exhaustive meaning’, despite the contradictions that it contains.

Augustine introduces also the idea of the correct education of the human race (*humani generis recta eruditio*), affirming that God has gradually educated all humankind to follow certain stages in the world, awaiting its eventual disappearance. One can affirm that this idea “not only lasted up to the 1700s and beyond, but has even undergone a reversal of meaning: the progressive revelation of God in the world does not lead anymore to the catastrophic end of the last of the six ages into which Augustine had divided human history, the day of Universal Judgment, but rather to the concealment of the end and to its reversal into the idea of progress within time, without any ties (or with very thin ones) with the dimension of the eternal”.<sup>37</sup>

We thought it very important to present the originality of the Augustinian synthesis, which connects, as R. Schaeffler has noted, apocalyptic aspects with Platonic ones,<sup>38</sup> opening the possibility for a philosophy of history by means of the theology of history. Freeing itself from theology, philosophy will then be able to consider history as the place for the maturing of the human knowledge of truth, gaining its own access to history and establishing a positive relationship with it.

Augustine has contributed to this in a decisive way also in a second manner, i.e., through the socializing of the development of conscience. The idea of the education of the human race by means of a process of progressive revelation (unlike Plato, for whom it was an individual process) seems to be indispensable, in fact, for the construction of a formally philosophical reflection on history.<sup>39</sup>

Looking at the medieval period instead, a person of particular interest is Joachim da Fiore.<sup>1</sup> In his thinking, “history becomes a manifestation of the intrinsic presence of all the persons of the Trinity in the world”.<sup>2</sup> We are witnessing, in a way, an inversion of sign in history: since the ages do not get old but instead become younger in spirit, history proceeds towards the best, and moves towards the *third reich*:<sup>3</sup>

“The great audacity of Joachim consists in the fact that in his eyes the age of the Holy Spirit, the completion of the Kingdom of God, will not take place exclusively in the next world (even though he does not deny the Apocalypse and the end of all earthly things), but already partially in this one, which from the ‘vale of tears’ will be transformed into a vale full of new life”.<sup>4</sup>

An emerging philosophical meaning is the fact that the Spirit governs history and, by his presence in human beings, makes them free. The reign of the Spirit, the reign of necessity and freedom, makes authority and power superfluous. History is therefore the progressive revelation of truth and the progressive affirmation of freedom.<sup>5</sup>

These elements from Augustine and Joachim seem to be crucial if we are to perceive and situate the import of the whole discussion about the philosophy of history and its ulterior developments. The line of thinking opened by the *Chronicon* of Otto von Freising is also quite significant: following the Augustinian scheme of the two *civitates* and identifying the Church with the *respublica christiana*, there are created the optimal conditions for the theory of the divine right of kings, so well explained by Bossuet (1681) in his work which still contains the idea of providence governing history. Voltaire can thus simply continue the argument, contributing to the progressive secularization of Christian ideas by excluding providence in the Christian sense of the

word, and by transposing the origin as well as the eschatological goal to an immanent and temporal plane.<sup>6</sup>

### **3. Notes on the Development and Crisis of the Philosophy of History**

Barely ten years after the appearance of the word, Herder in his *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Erziehung der Menschheit* (1774) already wants to introduce ‘once again’ a philosophy of history, entering into an argument particularly with Voltaire and the Enlightenment.<sup>7</sup>

The principal Kantian contribution to the philosophy of history was the observation that reason, in its relationship to the world, is affected by the historicity of the latter. If the world, in the way it appears to the subject, is also a product of reason, this means that the subject is endowed with a key for the interpretation and understanding of history. Narrating the history of the actual subject, it becomes possible then to narrate a history of reason: this will become evident in the philosophy of Hegel, precisely in the indication of how reason becomes conscious of itself.<sup>8</sup> It is possible in this way to explain the meaning of history, indicating a trait common to history and reason. Reason has a history; therefore, by narrating the history of reason one can understand history itself (i.e., the development of reason in all of its functions).

The Kantian discovery of the dialectic of reason, together with the immanentism introduced by Spinoza (as negation of the transcendent Being), will lead therefore to the idealistic philosophy of history. In the place of the Spinozan substance, the idealists speak about I, Spirit, human mind, but this immanent I, according to Kant, ‘suffers’ from a dialectic.

After Kant there emerges the possibility of the coexistence of the principle of immanence and the affirmation of the spirit as the exclusive author (without the Transcendent) of history.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, together with Condorcet and Herder, Kant is one of the authors who initiate that attempt, typical of the modern philosophy of history, to radically rationalize human time by “bestowing meaning not only on the past but – even if only in a conjectural manner – also on a future viewed in increasingly positive terms”.<sup>49</sup>

The idealist philosophy of history, as we have said, gathers and synthesises many of the elements discussed so far. History is seen as the history of reason, reason coming to awareness of itself. There is a pre-historic phase, with consciousness distancing itself from the world, regarding itself as the mirror of the world and distinct from it. The second phase is the movement in which reason puts everything into question, rejecting the world with skepticism. Finally there is a third historical phase in which consciousness arrives at an understanding of itself, looking at the world to which it has given origin as part of itself.<sup>50</sup> This phase may be found, albeit with differences not altogether minor, in Fichte,<sup>51</sup> in Schelling,<sup>52</sup> and in Hegel.<sup>53</sup>

For Hegel history is a place in which the consciousness of freedom unfolds under the direction of the Absolute. To achieve the consciousness of freedom, the Absolute utilizes concrete means: passions, egoism. Freedom is therefore the inner and fundamental aspect of history; the means are the external aspect, what is immediately apparent. It is universal reason that controls them in such a way that the universal goal of the spirit is achieved, and so universal reason is the catalyst of the process of history. History is rational, therefore, because the real world coincides in fact with that which should be.

Because of this Hegel can say that universal history represents the plan of providence, and that God governs the world, universal history being the content of his government and the realization of his plan. To understand this is the work, according to Hegel, of the philosophy of universal history. As K. Löwith (cited by Cruz Cruz) points out, this confluence of specific and universal intentions always transforms the 'event' into 'historical action', and this is the key to the whole philosophy of history of the nineteenth century: "without the difference between acting and happening, or between event and action, one cannot explain why it is that in history the consequences always lead to results entirely different from human intentions."<sup>54</sup>

Later, as is known, Marxism presents itself as one of the most complete forms of historicism, building on the idea that history moves towards its end and making the claim to have found the infallible key to its interpretation.<sup>55</sup>

And yet the general problem confronted by historicism<sup>56</sup> was precisely how to respond to the new question asked by the philosophy of history, i.e. how to reconcile universal relativity and historical consciousness.<sup>57</sup> The core of the historicist thesis consists essentially in the consideration of every human assertion as relative to a certain historical form of consciousness.<sup>58</sup> Dilthey "underlines the meaning and the significance – and the substantial equivalence – of the various perspectives and historiographical representations springing from different speculative conceptions."<sup>59</sup> He also talks about *Erlebnis*, i.e., of experience lived in time as "the perpetual proceeding of the present".<sup>60</sup>

Later, while Nietzsche deals with the attitude of human beings in front of history, placing the measure of utility or damage of history "in the plastic strength of a man, of a

population, of a civilization [...] I mean the capacity to grow in their own way in themselves, to transform and incorporate things past and foreign, to heal wounds, to substitute lost parts, to remold in themselves broken forms,” and offering a vision of history in which the stupendous intellectual strength of the thinker does not completely mask his pessimistic naturalism,<sup>61</sup> there are other authors such as K. Jaspers who do not renounce the attempt to arrive at a unitary understanding of universal history, based in this case on ‘faith’ in the unique origin of humanity and in its equally unique destiny, precisely because the unity of history is better clarified if we conceive it not as a fact but rather as a goal. This is the place for the question about the *meaning of history*. The possibility of finding a meaning in history is, according to Jaspers, tied to the possibility of an existential communication between human beings.<sup>62</sup> Jaspers’ reference to the ‘transcendence of meaning’ becomes an affirmation that a unitary, though not totalitarian, vision of history is possible. In this regard, the perspectives opened up by the contributions of W. Benjamin<sup>63</sup> and M. Ortega y Gasset,<sup>64</sup> for example, are quite interesting and full of fertile suggestions.

The concept of ‘genealogy’ elaborated by Nietzsche is taken up by M. Foucault at the end of the nineteen-seventies: it summarizes, according to the author, the idea of history. He describes genealogy, into which the philosophy of history has been transformed, in a context in which the anti-humanistic component is predominant, as a form of history that accounts for the constitution of knowledge, of speech, of objects, without having to refer to a subject which is transcendent with respect to the realm of happenings that it covers, in its empty identity, along the course of history.<sup>65</sup>

#### **4. Contemporary Tendencies of the Discipline**

The Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio* affirms that it is impossible to present “a complete picture of the present state of philosophy, which would, in any case, be difficult to reduce to a unified vision” (FR 91). Among the contemporary philosophies it points out, however, the strange co-presence of nihilism and positivism: “Even so, it remains true that a certain positivist cast of mind continues to nurture the illusion that, thanks to scientific and technical progress, man and woman may live as a demiurge, single-handedly and completely taking charge of their destiny” (FR 91). This has direct repercussions also on the interpretation of history.

The neo-positivism of the twentieth century was born of the necessity of reconciling a radically empiricist conception of knowledge with the epistemological developments and implications of contemporary logic and mathematics. In the beginning it was faithful to the original insights of positivism; gradually it passed on to a phase of contraposition between the supporters of the unity of scientific method and those instead who supported the specificity of the methodology of human sciences (taking up again the neo-Kantian, neo-idealistic and historicist German perspectives).<sup>66</sup> The reopening of the polemic was the work of C. G. Hempel, who presented a new version of the positivistic theory of explanation.<sup>67</sup> The so-called ‘analytical philosophy’, dealing with the problem of the possibility of a science of history, contributed to further modification of the meaning of the philosophy of history. Danto’s position, from this point of view, is one of the most representative of analytical philosophy, because it involves all the themes under discussion. It revives a gnoseological analysis of historical narration, studying its logic.<sup>68</sup>

The true and proper ‘watershed’, whatever its merits, for the philosophy of history in this century is nevertheless represented by M. Heidegger, above all because of its repercussions and subsequent importance.<sup>69</sup> Heidegger considers history as the succession of changes in the horizons of truth within which beings manifest themselves to humankind. Thought has therefore the function of overcoming the ‘fall’ into beings and the forgetfulness of Being.<sup>70</sup> Heidegger offers in fact something new, by means of the category of ‘horizons’ which he borrows from phenomenology. The relevance of this gnoseological perspective for philosophy of history is considerable: humankind is irremediably immersed in time, and the interpretation of the world can be constructed only within time. Even the horizon of understanding changes with time, and is defined in terms of an age.<sup>71</sup>

Philosophy talks about history as a ‘mandate’ and a ‘destiny’: the human being is marked by an inescapable destiny and by a mandate, in a given age, to express the truth in that age. Analyzing the relationship between destiny and duty, Heidegger puts forward the key question for giving a response to the problem of the meaning of history. Nevertheless he does not answer this question, and indeed cannot answer it, because in order to have an answer the human being must be capable of deciphering the ground of the being of *das Sein*, and this goes beyond his/her actual horizon of understanding. *Das Sein* is the common ground of both mandate and destiny, but the problem, from the Heideggerian viewpoint, remains closed.<sup>72</sup> The famous expression, “The possibility of access to history is based on the possibility according to which a present is known in every case to be true. This is the first principle of all of hermeneutics”<sup>73</sup> can be presented almost as the watershed of the ‘age of hermeneutics.’<sup>74</sup>

As demonstrated in G. Vattimo, one of the most important disciples of H.G. Gadamer,<sup>75</sup> hermeneutics is no longer merely a technique, neither is it a particular philosophical activity, but an ‘event of destiny’, the manner in which a secularized and turn of the century Europe puts itself in relationship to modernity: “Hermeneutics is to be interpreted as the final moment in the history of metaphysics”.<sup>76</sup> Hermeneutics would constitute the end of the philosophy of history, the end of the history of philosophy, the end of history, an end without limits. Will the destiny of tradition be consummated in this manner?<sup>77</sup> We have landed, at least in this interpretation of hermeneutics, on the other shore indicated by *Fides et ratio*, that of post-modern nihilism: “According to some of them, the time of certainties is irrevocably past, and the human being must now learn to live in a horizon of total absence of meaning, where everything is provisional and ephemeral” (*FR* 90).

What is the situation of the philosophy of history at the end of the second millennium? There are, in the first place, the narrative theories of history. These have taken the place of the traditional philosophy of history. Bodei claims that history can be compared to “a ‘true story’, and for this reason it hinges on the concept of *plot*.”<sup>78</sup> In a certain way, this involves a loss of the philosophical character of history and its connection with the internal logic of events, taking on instead a literary nature which is more concerned with the structure and the rhetorical aspects of the narration.<sup>79</sup> In this regard, Lyotard’s position is even more radical. He claims that philosophies of history are nothing but “*méta-récits*, schemes of rhetorical-narrative organization of narratives which, especially in the modern age, represent in a dramatic form the fairy tale of the emancipation of the human subject in general, or of a people or a class”.<sup>80</sup> According to P. Veyne, instead, it

is necessary to raise the problem of the criteria of selection of the event – since it would be absurd to conceive of history as the quantitative totality of what has happened thus far – and to look for the specificity of history in the nature of its ‘narrative phrases’, which connect at least two events separated in time.<sup>81</sup>

Besides these, there are the original positions of Habermas<sup>82</sup>, Davidson<sup>83</sup> and Ricoeur<sup>84</sup>. The French philosopher, deliberately attempting to distance himself from the “risks of a speculative philosophy of history”, develops his thought around the problem of the objectivity and subjectivity of history according to a double scheme, historical and philosophical. At the core of his argument lies the ambiguity of the notion of ‘sense’ as referring to history. In this context, states Bodei, a question naturally arises: “Are we sure that it is possible to think of or write a history devoid of axes of orientation? Certainly, every history is the ‘weaving together’ of a narration. Still, it is full of theory, of implicit philosophical concepts which condition its structure and meaning. The fact that today the exorbitant claims of comprehension and anticipation of events are greatly reduced does not automatically imply their disappearance, with the consequent eradication of every form of ‘philosophy of history’; rather, it implies their being hidden. The alternative does not consist in a choice between self-proclaimed aseptic histories, purified of every presupposition, and aprioristic or ‘designed’ philosophies, but rather in the explication of the hidden premises and the conjecturable consequences of every narration that claims to understand ‘real’ events, so as to be able to subject them to reasonable critical, methodological and comparative evaluations. When such awareness is absent, ‘miniaturized’ philosophies of history are all around the place while pretending not to exist”.<sup>85</sup>

## 5. 'Reductio ad historiam'

Perhaps these 'miniaturized' philosophies of history, including the 'varieties of Presentism',<sup>86</sup> are the result of a certain *reductio ad historiam* that has taken place in theoretical philosophy. Is it really impossible to propose a philosophy of history that has a wider outlook and higher aspirations, without falling into the all-inclusive comprehensiveness of idealist and historicist philosophies?

In the historical overview above, we have considered certain aspects of the idealist and historicist perspectives in general as well as some of their subsequent developments, which in our view indicate a reduction, a restriction of perspective. We may now turn to some theoretical consideration, and here it seems important to consider seriously certain key categories of metaphysics.

First of all, what type of ontology of historical reality should we develop? No being is so historical as to be devoid of anything metaphysical. History is always the history of something. If the radical 'actualistic' concept of history were true, that is to say, if beings were an infinite succession of momentary actualities without past and without future, one could no longer speak of history. History, like every becoming, depends on an ontology that makes it comprehensible. Here, however, we are dealing with an ontology proper to human beings, necessarily involving freedom. Therefore the history of humankind, because it is a free history, refers back to the constitution of the human person as free being (ontology). Indeed, this history is comprehensible only on the basis of the free choices of human beings. Historical research must go back to the free choices and actions of the human beings who make history. The free plans of action of the free being are like

‘supreme laws’ that make free history comprehensible.

With regard to the laws ‘internal’ to history, it is interesting to compare these with the answer offered by utopian thinking, which offers an enduring model of interpretation. Wanting to free the human being from ‘heteronomy’ (i.e., from the providence of a personal God) in the name of ‘autonomy’, this kind of thinking ends up by absorbing the individual into the group, from which he/she would be ruled and guided. The group takes on the prerogatives of the divine in such a way that faith in the absolute is transformed into faith in a non-absolute. Utopia is therefore a secularization of eschatology: the utopian thinker reserves to himself/herself the prerogative of the final judgement, the absolute knowledge of good and evil. The laws of history have been fully interpreted, their ‘seals’ have been opened (cf. *Rev* 5:1-10).<sup>87</sup>

A *reductio ad historiam* on the basis of the exaltation of human freedom can be seen, for example, in the Sartrean vision. The thesis according to which existence comes before essence<sup>88</sup> leads to the non-existence of human nature, because there does not exist a God who could outline or conceptualize it. The theory thus presents itself as an atheistic and humanist historicism.<sup>89</sup>

With regard to the ultimate goal of history, reason, in its natural or philosophical use, can also question itself about the adequacy of the answer given by the immanentist historians, according to whom this ultimate goal of history is situated either at some point or else within the structure of inner-worldly becoming. As far as the absolute terminals of history are concerned, we find in the first place a conceptual oscillation between the category of creation and that of emancipation. The dialectical solutions regarding history, besides being a

secularization of eschatology, begin in some way from the 'immanentization' of the origin, of the starting point (*a quo*) of humanity and its history. The origin from nothingness (*ex nihilo*) is the point denied by dialectical thinking, which presents itself as emancipatory. Emancipation and denial of creation are understood in fact as equivalent expressions. The main difficulty of modern dialectical thought lies in a development and deepening of its initial limit, for it is precisely this limit that decides human destiny and its final goal. The secularization of eschatology (immanentization of the goal) rests upon the emancipation of the origin, i.e. on the immanentization of the act of creation,<sup>90</sup> and therefore on an inadequate consideration of analogy.

The dialectical consideration of history and many of its consequences, including postmodern ones, involve the negation of creation and the affirmation of the world as ungenerated and indestructible, without beginning and without end, proposing once again the idea of the eternal return, currently very much in fashion. This encourages a close examination, from a philosophical point of view, of the problem of the end of time and of history. This is not the place for doing so, but it is a task to be approached with a metaphysical perspective.

Another obvious *reductio ad historiam* seems to touch the concept of providence. Vico proposed an ontological-cultural reading of this concept, expounding the history of the orders that, beyond the plans of human beings, providence has given "to the great city of the human race", but attempting nevertheless to maintain an interpretation open to the transcendent. Subsequently there has developed instead a secularized interpretation of providence, which maintains that, since it is human beings who make history, providence is only

the immanent law of this same history.<sup>91</sup>

Evidently, every explanation of providence must recognize human freedom: human beings are free and can with their will change the direction of history, but there cannot be a fatal unfolding of history. This assertion must, nevertheless, be clarified. History depends also on a divine operative intention which extends horizontally in time and which requires the free involvement of human beings for its realization. If the dialectical consideration of the penetration of the infinite into the finite converts all of reality into a dialectical whole whose form is the contradiction and whose finality is constituted dynamically, then this 'whole' itself is 'divine'. In this case the rule of reason in the world and in history is itself dialectical, full of contradictions, within which evil and falsity have a necessary place. Thus are wed evil, the negative, and the life of reason, the divine. Such is the 'justification' of God, introduced dialectically into history, i.e., the *teodicea* of a Hegelian matrix: "Our consideration is, therefore, *theodicy*, a justification of God, similar to what Leibniz did metaphysically, in his own way, in abstract and indeterminate categories. His aim is to conceptualize the evil existent in the world, including moral evil, to reconcile the thinking spirit with the negative. It is in universal history that the entire mass of concrete evil appears before our eyes".<sup>92</sup>

In a realistic vision of history, open to the transcendent and non-dialectical, it is possible to consider history itself as the fruit of the action of God on the one hand, and of human beings on the other, in such a way that the truth of every event depends on the implicit presence of providence. History is at once the work of human beings and the work of God. Such a conception is possible thanks to the fundamental metaphysical distinction between the causality of the 'First Cause' and the

concourse of secondary causes.

In order to avoid equivocation between the ‘finitely real’ and the ‘infinitely real’, Hegel used the dialectic in which the terms either surpass or else nullify each other. He eliminated, as we have seen, the hiatus between finite and infinite, dialecticalizing both terms as moments of a totality in process. The doctrine of analogy, understood in the classical sense, had instead always avoided a complete heterogeneity between finite and infinite but, in contrast to dialectic, had not depleted the infinite distance between the two. For analogy, finite and infinite are both objects of the same science of metaphysics, but because of the ‘ontological distance’ the infinite is reached metaphysically only as Cause of the finite. The rediscovery of an adequate doctrine of analogy becomes the essential reference point, in our opinion, both for metaphysics in the strict sense as well as for a philosophy of Transcendent Being.<sup>93</sup>

The consequences of this difference for the vision of history are enormous: for classical philosophy, history is contingent. Cruz Cruz notes that this means two things: first, that history might not have existed; second, that history might have existed. There is in fact nothing that is absolutely necessary in the finiteness of history: historical existence is therefore not deducible. God is not under a necessity to create. History is both the act of human beings and the act of God. It is the act of free human beings who work out their destiny, and not the movement of environmental and physical mechanisms. It is nevertheless also the work of a provident God, even though there is no history within God: it is the work of him who places in existence the whole of the finite, maintaining it in existence.<sup>94</sup>

A philosophy of history could perhaps overcome these *reductiones*, opening itself to a vertical and hierarchical vision of the order of all things in general and of freedom in particular. This implies a conception of the real in which the principle of the totality is not within the order of the totality itself. From such a conception derive both the transcendence of the principle with respect to the historical totality of freedoms (a thesis which classical philosophy considered under the concepts of creation and conservation), as well as the vision and totalizing actualization which the principle has regarding the totality of freedoms (expressed by the same philosophy in the ideas of providence and of divine government).

## 6. Spheres of Study

In taking on this challenge, within the perspective of a “philosophy of genuinely metaphysical range, capable, that is, of transcending empirical data in order to attain something absolute, ultimate and foundational in its search for truth”, one that is able to make the move “from phenomenon to foundation, a step as necessary as it is urgent” (*FR* 83), it seems useful to underline, after having recognized in the anthropological and metaphysical sphere (in a broad sense, from gnoseology to the philosophy of transcendent Being) the fundamental theoretical axes of the discussion, the importance of history above all as knowledge and as reality.

The distinction drawn by W. Dray,<sup>95</sup> and recently confirmed by Stanford,<sup>96</sup> between two types of philosophical reflection on history, speculative and critical, is already common knowledge. From the cognitive point of view, if history is a scientifically worked out knowledge from the past of humanity (i.e., of human beings as human), it is a relationship

of adequation between the past (the documents) and the present (the historian). The two levels call for a cognitive activity that unites them. The past of humanity, coming alive in the consciousness of the historian, participates thus in another mode of being. In fact, the past is not simply reproduced as it was when it was 'the present'. It is known instead precisely as past: it is the 'already been,' what 'has happened,' what is 'completed'. What is the value of this knowledge? Is it subjective or does it have objective value? This needs to be studied, and here is the place for hermeneutics. Intelligence must be studied as the faculty that knows historical facts, revealing effectively its discursive structure and making it necessary to conclude that historical knowledge takes the form of narration, since historical knowledge is narrative reason. Here then is the proper place for 'narrativity'.<sup>97</sup>

There is also to be considered the problem of the capacity of our intrinsically dynamic reason to know changes and alterations but not essences or invariable values. The historicist answer of Dilthey is decisive here, affirming that "what man is, is experienced only by means of history". Obviously such a perspective holds that only historical study, and not philosophy or anthropology, can make sense of human beings and their creations. If the essence of human life is unknowable, one can only grasp the distinct historical periods, each with its own particular character, and within them the values and the essences relative to them.<sup>98</sup> An exhaustive answer to Dilthey is definitely possible, but the task is still to be undertaken.

In history viewed as knowledge, an ulterior problem to be considered is that of the value and scientific character of historical knowledge itself. Is scientific history different in character from the natural sciences? Here the field is completely

open, because epistemology is a fertile ground for interdisciplinary exchange, and even the answer to the question ‘What is science?’ alone would call for a lifetime of study.

There is then a fundamental anthropological question linked to history: are we or are we not responsible for the results of our interior or exterior actions which constitute history? Are we caught up in a historical mechanism or do we have an immortal principle that keeps us upright? From the moral point of view are we responsible for what we do, and to what extent (the problem of the extent of responsibility, because otherwise evil would also be justified because it would be useful for the good)? If this effective responsibility were not recognized, the only sin ultimately would be that of putting oneself in opposition to history. Here enters here the enormous theme of human freedom, which is nevertheless historically situated.

With respect to history as reality, in situating the problem of the essence of historical reality, we must ask above all about the matter and the form of history itself. About the ‘matter’ of the historical being, it is evident that historical reality regards the sphere of action and of human operativity. Historical actions have as content, or matter, the simultaneous presence of three elements: temporality, freedom, and sociality-intersubjectivity. This is an area of anthropological study. Investigating further about the ‘form’ of the historical being, from an anthropological perspective it will be necessary to analyze the ‘mode of succession’, because every human action receives something from the past and prepares the fulfillment of the possible future. The form of historical acts is therefore an *indefinite transcendentality*: historical actions influence those that follow and ‘transcend’ themselves to survive into the future. This survival is an effective possibility; it is that which renders possible the present. The past as past is not

really the formal-essential constitution of the historical: it is so in as much as it is fruitful for the present, in as much as it influences the present and transcends it. That which is historical is the past in the present. In this sense, the past forms part of the 'plot' of the becoming of the anthropological subject, through the mediation of consciousness, and affects the community in its construction of history as *humanum fieri*. The present action is historical as such, even if there is no action subsequent to it because the future is not yet realized.<sup>99</sup>

A further aspect to be taken into consideration in the interpretation of history as reality is the question, at once anthropological and metaphysical, of the 'subject' of history: is it an all-comprehensive subjectivity that proceeds with the unfolding of time, leaving behind one structure and taking on another (the objective spirit of Hegel), in some manner substantiated in the *intrahistoria*<sup>100</sup> of M. de Unamuno, or is it located in socio-economic interpretations like those of D. Landes and C. Tilly, who view the subject of history in the 'uniformity' of human conduct, which, elevating itself above time and space, permits the application of mathematical quantification?<sup>101</sup> According to this view, neither concrete facts nor individuals are considered as particularly relevant; the subject seems to merge with the environment. In the end, what reveals itself as significant is neither the individuals nor the *élite*, but the masses.<sup>102</sup> Will it be that the 'law of large numbers' becomes the key factor in the interpretation of history?

From the point of view of metaphysics, one asks above all how one should view the principle that governs the dynamics of history: who is the principal actor in history, and how should we understand this actor? Is this a question of a political ruler, a divine providence, or is it sufficient to think of the 'astuteness of reason' (thus Kant and Hegel), now transformed perhaps into computerized or mass-media intelligences? Are we

perhaps unwittingly forming part of *The Truman Show*, ably directed by the Grand Communicator? Is there perhaps an invisible hand that works in and through the threads of history: do the economic theories of the market, in this time of the global village, represent a secularization of providence, which has perhaps assumed the robes of some multinational lobby?

With respect to the ontological ‘space’ of history, one should consider above all the problem of its beginning and its end: is it possible to indicate a ‘beginning’ and an ‘end’ that polarize all human works and the whole of the historical process? The question about the significance of history beyond everyday events regards the life of every human being.<sup>103</sup> What shall we say philosophically about the Christian belief in a beginning and an ending of history that is not only ‘extra-historical’ but also ‘trans-historical’? The relevance – also for theology – of a philosophy of history of properly metaphysical breadth, one without ‘*reductiones*’, seems to us fundamental.<sup>104</sup>

### **Conclusion: History as the Privileged Place of Profound Unity between *Sein* - *Zeit*, between Anthropology and Metaphysics, between Philosophy and Faith**

J. Cruz Cruz, to whom we owe many of the ideas of the present article, has recaptured and commented upon the definition of history as the ‘process of real capacitation’. The fact that the historian is real, affirms Zubiri, is due to his/her being a ‘processional actualization of possibility’.<sup>105</sup>

The task of every philosophical reflection is, wherever possible, to arrive at an adequate definition of its proper object of study, formally considered according to the study of its ultimate causes, from a cognitive point of view, and of its first causes, from an ontological point of view. The synthesizing

task of the philosophy of history would be that of developing an adequate definition of history,<sup>106</sup> in which the specifically anthropological and the specifically metaphysical dimensions are profoundly united.<sup>107</sup>

A philosophy of this level would prove to be significant also for the recovery, after periods of separation (cf. *FR* 45-47), of the profound unity between faith and philosophy, one which respects their nature as well as their reciprocal autonomy: “Yet closer scrutiny shows that even in the philosophical thinking of those who helped drive faith and reason further apart there are found at times precious and seminal insights which, if pursued and developed with mind and heart rightly tuned, can lead to the discovery of truth’s way. Such insights are found, for instance, in penetrating analyses of perception and experience, of the imaginary and the unconscious, of personhood and inter-subjectivity, of freedom and values, *of time and history*”.<sup>108</sup>

A challenge to be taken up, and above all to be lived, and at the same time to be adequately argued for, the existential encounter between a profound and *contemplated faith* and a *rationality* that stands *open* before the mystery of the human being, the universe and God: a “flight on two wings”<sup>109</sup> in the search for truth also in history, beginning from one’s own.

### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the film by John Huston *Beat the Devil* (1954, dialogues by Truman Capote; Italian version: *Il tesoro dell’Africa*). Cf. also A. F. Aveni, *Empires of Time. Calendars, Clocks and Cultures*, Washington 1989. The translation of some texts that follow is mine. I would like to thank Prof. David Johnson and Dr. Giulia Massazza Gal for their collaboration and discussion of some of the themes dealt with here.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. G. Caviglia, “Gesù Cristo, ‘punto focale dei desideri della storia e della civiltà’” (*Gaudium et spes*, 45). Incontro misterioso e affascinante tra eternità e tempo,” E. Ferasin, ed., *Teologia e vita* (Rome 1992). The reference is evidently to M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (1927) [*Being and Time* (New York 1962)].

<sup>3</sup> It is sufficient to peruse an internet site dedicated to the new millennium, and one finds everything from serious pages of Biblical exegesis to the fantasies of cult followers of UFO’s, from old and new prophecies to bibliography (at least hundreds of volumes) on the end of the world and the end of time. Cf. [www.omnimag.com](http://www.omnimag.com) (January 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York 1992). Cf. also G. Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen: II Über die Zerstörung des Lebens im Zeitalter der dritten industriellen Revolution*, München (1987<sup>4</sup>): there is the danger that technology will substitute the human being as the subject of history.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. S. Palumbieri, *L’uomo e il futuro I-II* (Rome 1991-1993). An internet search with one of the most common search engines available on the web on the term ‘philosophy of history’, already in the summer of 1998, yielded more than 2500 sources.

<sup>6</sup> In his article “Postmodernism and the Church” (late 1998) the Jesuit T. Howland Sanks has written: “Can the Church *be* and can Christians *live* in a postmodern world? Clearly the answer is yes. But we will need to cultivate modesty, humility, openness to the voices of others, as well as courage, and hope. As a reading of the signs of the time, it may also be that the postmodern condition is revealing the movement of the Spirit among us”.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. C. Roldán, *Entre Casandra y Clío: Una historia de la filosofía de la historia* (Madrid 1997); G. Graham, “History, philosophy of,” E. Craig, ed., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London 1998) 4:453-459; M. Stanford, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (Oxford-Boston 1997).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. H. G. Gadamer, *Il problema della coscienza storica* (Naples 1969) 27 [*Gesammelte Werke* (Tübingen 1985)].

<sup>9</sup> Cf. F. W. Nietzsche, “Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben,” *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* [*Unfashionable Observations* (Stanford 1995)]. Cited by R. Bodei, “Filosofia della storia,” P. Rossi, ed., *La filosofia I. Le filosofie speciali* (Turin 1995) 487.

<sup>10</sup> “History is today our greatest problem”. Cf. W. Kasper, *Einführung in den Glauben* [*Introduzione alla fede*, (Brescia 1973<sup>2</sup>, 164)]. Cf. also J. Ratzinger, *Dogma e storia*, (Milan 1971). As J. L. Illanes has well underlined, the rediscovery of history in the field of theology is very

evident; one of the milestones in this was the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Catholicisme*, by H. de Lubac (1938). De Lubac was followed by many other important writers, among whom, to name but a few, are Thils, Congar, Danielou, Bouyer, von Balthasar, Marrou, Zubiri, Niebuhr, Pieper, Moretti-Costanzi, Dawson, Butterfield, and Ricoeur. Cf. J. L. Illanes, *Historia y sentido. Estudios de Teología de la historia* (Madrid 1997) 34-41.

<sup>11</sup> John Paul II, *Incarnationis Mysterium. Bull of indiction of the Great Jubilee of the year 2000* (Vatican City 1998) n. 1.

<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, *Incarnationis Mysterium* n. 1.

<sup>13</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (Vatican City 1979) n. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (Vatican City 1994) n. 10. Cf. also Caviglia 58-67; S. Palumbieri, *L'uomo e il futuro III: L'Emmanuele, il futuro dell'uomo* (Rome 1994). Truly important is the expression of the encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio*, in n. 6 (1988): "It is precisely this uniqueness of Christ which gives him an absolute and universal significance, whereby, while belonging to history, he remains history's center and goal: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end' (Rv 22:13)".

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Illanes 17.

<sup>16</sup> "In more recent times, there has been the discovery that history as event – so central to Christian Revelation – is important for philosophy as well. It is no accident that this has become pivotal for a *philosophy of history* which stakes its claim as a new chapter in the human search for truth": John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio* [= *FR*] (Vatican City 1998) n. 76.

<sup>17</sup>*FR* 94.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. R. Aron, *Dimensions de la conscience historique* (Paris 1961). Cf. also: R. Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire* [*Lezioni sulla storia* (Bologna 1997)]; R. Aron, *La philosophie critique de l'histoire: Essai sur une théorie allemande de l'histoire* (Paris 1950); R. Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire: Essai sur le limites de l'objectivité historique* (Paris 1986); R. Aron, *Selected writings of Raymond Aron: History, Truth, Liberty* (Chicago 1985).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. F.M.A. Voltaire, "Philosophie de l'histoire," Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique portatif* [*Ouvres Complètes de Voltaire* (Oxford 1980) vols. 35-36].

<sup>20</sup> Cf. G.B. Vico, *Principi di una Scienza Nuova* [*The New Science of Giambattista Vico* (Ithaca 1984<sup>2</sup>)].

<sup>21</sup> Cf. J.J. Rousseau, *Du contrat social* 1, 1, 1. Cf. R.D. Masters and C. Kelly, eds., *The Collected Writings of Rousseau* (Hanover-London 1992-

1994), especially vols. 2-4. This ‘conceptual passage’ is opportunely underlined by R. Schaeffler, *Einführung in die Geschichtsphilosophie* (Darmstadt 1990) 136-144. The contribution of Rousseau is revealed later by Hegel: from the beginning of history there has been a general reason, present but hidden, that slowly becomes conscious of itself and eventually reaches its full maturity. Marx instead takes from Rousseau the correlation between different stages and economic relations: reason is thus driven to invent and to create new institutions.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Bodei 474. With the work of Condorcet - affirms Bodei - “the idea of the possible perfection of humanity favored by a more incisive condescendence of the direction of things definitely acquires more plausibility. The division of history into ten epochs, based on the progress and not on the age of humanity, indicates an ascendant line - and perhaps unstoppable, if one understands how to take advantage of the occasions - of a common civilization not necessarily destined to become old”. Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Cf. H. D. Rauh, *Im Labirinth der Geschichte: Die Sinnfrage von der Aufklärung* (München 1990) 13.

<sup>24</sup> In this sense, Descartes’ distinction between the *veritas* of science and the external *auctoritas* upon which politics or history are based, is fundamental. Against the latter he “had opposed the interior authority of the truth, verifiable by each individual by means of immediate intuition and by reasoning based upon the primary evidence of the *cogito* and the rules deducible from it. History thus became deprived of every internal rationality: not only did it cease to be *magistra vitae*, but it also ran the risk of becoming a cumulation of errors to be disposed of”. Cf. Bodei 469. The separation between nature and history, index of the separation between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, is however not yet absolute in Descartes, who posits God himself as guarantee of the adequation of the *res cogitans* to the *res extensa*. Cf. Schaeffler 24.

<sup>25</sup> “The abandonment of the biblical scheme and of the implicit theodicy that it contains, i.e. of the justification of God for the evil present in reality, leads the philosophy of history to hypothesize a type of alchemic conversion of evil into good by means of the so-called ‘heterogenesis of ends’ (by which individuals follow determinate ends, but the overall result escapes their intentions). Think of, for example, [...] of Vico in the *New Science*”. Cf. Bodei 469.

<sup>26</sup> For Leibniz, such a choice is possible only to the author of the world, i.e., to God the Creator: the totality of the contingent facts of this world is the work of God the Creator, who has chosen the best possible world; otherwise he would not be good. God, who has chosen the best possible

world, is worthy of trust. Cf. Schaeffler 111-112. The wisdom of Leibnizian theodicy is born of the intention of justifying our trust in God, and consequently this treatise can become the central treatise of the *philosophy of history*. Here, fundamentally, lies the origin of the identification, so characteristic of Hegel, between *theodicy* and the *philosophy of history*. There begins, in fact, an embryonic philosophical reflection on history, attempting to demonstrate that contingent events (including the ruined, the corrupt, the decadent) re-enter into the divine plan, which aims at realizing the best. While Leibniz attempts to maintain the concept of a transcendent God, this viewpoint and this attempt at a solution will be taken up by Hegel as a justification of history in the light of an idealism which is distinctly immanent. C. Wolff popularized the theodicy of Leibniz; it entered even into neo-scholasticism. This theodicy presents itself as the claim of human reason to justify the actions of God. But do we really have the criteria for evaluating the actions of God? The philosophical problematic about God should instead be called philosophical theology, and this will have an epistemological constitution which is quite different from that of theodicy. In this regard, cf. also: A. Alessi, *Sui sentieri dell'Assoluto. Introduzione alla teologia filosofica* (Rome 1998); S. Nicolosi, *Modernità e ricerca di Dio. Filosofia ed esistenza di Dio. Da Cartesio agli Enciclopedisti* (Rome 1997).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Schaeffler 117. In this sense, the philosophy of history, as it was introduced into European philosophy, is an immanentist philosophy. Spinoza's substance, being *causa sui*, results in the world being merely an appearance, manifestation of this unique substance of nature, which in its self-expression is free from every conditioning. The whole course of history is conceived in the same way in which Spinoza conceives nature, that is to say, as a whole which manifests itself. History is thus considered in two ways: the historiographers view it *sub specie temporis*, narrating it; the philosophers view it *sub specie aeternitatis*, and they explain it. Spinoza's contribution consists precisely in sanctioning the subjection of reason to history. Once it has become aware of this, philosophy can learn from history and develop a philosophy of history. This discovery, that reason has its own history, was therefore decisive; it thus became possible to understand history by narrating the history of reason. Cf. *ibid.* 118-122.

<sup>28</sup> Immanentizing the transcendent, Spinoza opened the possibility of interpreting the world in such a way as to attribute to reason an affinity with substance, which develops in a manner that is self-determining. If logic is the paradigm of a science exempt from time, it was not easy for philosophers to accept that reason is subject to change in history: they

became convinced of this when it became clear that in order to arrive at a rational understanding of history, it was necessary to insert history into reason. Cf. Schaeffler 123-125.

<sup>29</sup> Bodei 469.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Bodei 461.

<sup>31</sup> Cf., for example, P.I. Ivanhoe, "Chinese Theories of History," E. Craig, ed., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London 1998) 4:446-452.

<sup>32</sup> Among others, cf. the following: D.A. Dombrowski, *Plato's Philosophy of History* (Washington 1981); V. Höfle, *Wahrheit und Geschichte. Studien zur Struktur der Philosophiegeschichte unter paradigmatischer Analyse der Entwicklung von Parmenides bis Platon* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1984); K. Gaiser, *La metafisica della storia in Platone* (Milan 1991).

<sup>33</sup> The structure of the *De Civitate Dei* "is orientated towards answering the fact that the eternity of the Empire, exalted as providential by Christians, was rendered precarious by the sacking of Rome in 410 AD, and this precisely when the State was for quite some time no longer pagan but Christian. If for the pagans the answer and remedy lay in returning to the ancient faith, for Christians it was a question of acquiring a new historical consciousness, clarifying the relationship between Empire and Church, between secular history and ecclesiastical history, within which Augustine situated the relationship between classical culture and Christian faith". Cf. O. Pasquato, "Studi patristici e discipline storiche," *Salesianum* 53 (1991) 87. Cf. especially E. Cavalcanti, ed., *Il De Civitate Dei: L'opera, le interpretazioni, l'influsso*, (Rome-Freiburg-Wien 1996).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Bodei 465-466; Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans* (London 1957).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. O. Cullmann, *Christus und die Zeit* (Zürich 1946).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Bodei 466. In the two cities, which are therefore contemporary, humankind proceeds from dispersion ('knowledge of the evening') to conversion and recollection ('knowledge of the morning'). With this interpretative key, Augustine can explain both the interminable wars of the *civitas terrena*, the reason why the inhabitants of the divine city seem weaker, and why the hope of arriving at knowledge of the truth has a solid and sure basis. Cf. Schaeffler 107.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Bodei 466-467.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Schaeffler 89-104. Augustine comprehends that history is guided by an infallible divine plan, explained in terms of philosophy of knowledge, taking into consideration the fact that every human knowledge is part of a process, the basis of which is the divine truth which at first conceals itself and then calls people to conversion. Further, the apocalyptic

writings provide Augustine with the idea of the revelation of the truth as the end of history: he explains in gnoseological terms that the vision of the truth is the final end of history, which is a process that begins from dispersion and moves towards complete unity.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Schaeffler 107-108.

<sup>40</sup> In the *Expositio super Apocalypsim* and in the *Liber Concordantiae Novi ac veteri Testamenti*, Joachim distinguishes three ages of history, according to three periods, each associated with one person of the Trinity, with the age of the Holy Spirit foreseen to begin in 1260. A very frequent characteristic in the milieu of the pauperistic and spiritual movements of the 13<sup>th</sup> century was the development of a concept of history based on the division by ages, respectively of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Cf. M. Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages. A Study in Joachimism* (Notre Dame-London 1993<sup>2</sup>). Cf. also, especially with respect to the contemporary revival of interest in Joachim's thinking, M. Borghesi, "Gioacchino e i suoi figli," *30 Giorni* (1994/3) 42-46 and particularly J. Grzeszczak, *Dall'età dello Spirito Santo al New Age. Gioacchino da Fiore nella nuova religiosità* (Rome 1997).

<sup>41</sup> Bodei 467.

<sup>42</sup> Bodei 467. Thanks to M. van der Bruck, the expression 'third reign' will pass on to Nazism as *Drittes Reich* (Third Reich).

<sup>43</sup> Bodei 468. The author adds: "Is it a vision lacking in orthodoxy? In the opinion of many contemporary theologians, it would seem that, from the point of view of the most recent Trinitarian doctrines, it is not. According to these recent views, in fact, God has not inserted Himself into time only for the thirty-three years of the life of His Son, Jesus, 'true God and true man'; rather He is present in the whole of history, also in the figures of the Father and the Holy Spirit. In this way, the great paradox of eternity present in time, and of time as absorbing and reflecting the eternal, would be brought to fulfilment: the two Augustinian *civitates*, divine and human, would not be separated anymore, but interwoven, while the *civitas Dei peregrinans*, in the age of the Holy Spirit, would no longer go through the world as a foreign and hostile place. While maintaining the transcendence of the three persons of the Trinity with respect to the world, Joachim must be held responsible for forcing interpretations which foreshadow a sort of temporal pantheism according to which God reveals himself everywhere, not only in the space of nature, but also in the time of man". Cf. *Ibid.* A very serious and contemporary problem, which we will not investigate here.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Schaeffler 109.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Illanes 38. "The philosophies of history which arose in the

eighteenth century and the theological assumptions that in a certain way lead to them, imply in fact a progressive secularization of Christian eschatology and of the vision of historical happening derived from it. The hope, the tension with which the Christian orients himself towards the meta-historical consummation of eschatology is, in virtue of this change of perspective, directed towards a further stage of time”, with the result that “the affirmation of a transcendent fullness truncated at its roots leads to the temptation of idolizing the earthly realizations, transforming them into absolutes”. Cf. *ibid.* 89 and 100.

<sup>46</sup> In his second major work, *Ideen zur einer Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, written between 1784 and 1791 [*Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (London 1968)], almost in the manner of Kant, Herder finds a rationality present also in the world of human beings and their affairs, writing that spaces are full of wisdom, while the times seem to show disorder everywhere; yet it is obvious that human beings are made to look for order, to embrace with a glance a space of time, to construct the future on the past. It is for this reason that human beings are is endowed with recollection and memory. Not believing in the fact that there exists a rationality only in the space of nature, as Galilei, Descartes and Newton seemed to have shown, but locating it also in the time of human history, Herder speaks about ideas in a regulative sense, assumptions which are undemonstrable but necessary for the ordering of events: “proceeding in a direction opposed to that which Schopenhauer and Nietzsche will take, Herder exorcises – for religious reasons, besides philosophical ones – the fear that history and time are without meaning”. Cf. Bodei 472.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Schaeffler 149-150. In order to overcome the Kantian difficulties, idealists will introduce the necessary dialectic of reason. Reason, with Kant, turns out to be dialectical; if reason itself suffers from a dialectic, idealists will take to the ultimate consequences the fact that reason unfolds in three phases: it alienates itself in things, then goes through a radical skepticism (Hume) and finally, thanks to critical philosophy and its idealistic development, reason finally conceives the real relationship between itself and the world. Cf. I. Kant, *The Idea of a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*, R.E. Anchor and E.L. Fackenheim, eds., *Kant on History* (Indianapolis 1963).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, “La fede e la teologia ai giorni nostri,” *L'Osservatore Romano* (26 October 1996) 8. While discussing Hick, the author observes that it seems almost taken for granted by now that Kant has irrefutably demonstrated that the Absolute or the one who is absolute cannot give itself in history, and as such cannot find itself in it. In fact, this is still to

be shown. This is a crucial point, which evidently touches upon the relationship between philosophy and theology. Philosophy, in our opinion, can show that the encounter between the Absolute and history, between eternity and time, is not in itself contradictory and that it cannot be ruled out *a priori*; theology works on the extraordinarily new fact of the specificity of Christian revelation, something that is inaccessible to unaided reason. *FR* 12 reasserts: "History therefore becomes the arena where we see what God does for humanity. God comes to us in the things we know best and can verify most easily, the things of our everyday life, apart from which we cannot understand ourselves. In the Incarnation of the Son of God we see forged the enduring and definitive synthesis which the human mind of itself could not even have imagined: the Eternal enters time, the Whole lies hidden in the part, God takes on a human face. The truth communicated in Christ's Revelation is therefore no longer confined to a particular place or culture, but is offered to every man and woman who would welcome it as the word which is the absolutely valid source of meaning for human life". Furthermore, "Revelation has set within history a point of reference which cannot be ignored if the mystery of human life is to be known" (*FR* 14).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Bodei 475. The author claims that in this way history seems more and more "shot through by a utopian tension that has nothing of the 'static perfection' traditionally ascribed to utopias imagined as societies that are already perfect and therefore unmodifiable. We are now facing not only 'ucronies' [from the *no-place* of *utopia* to the *no-time* of *ucronia*], which shift the perfection of lateral geographical space to time, to the future, making it therefore progressively approachable, [...] but to an inter-weaving of ucrony and history. The latter acts as a counterweight to the abstractions of the preceding utopian thinking, while utopia lends to history its goal and its mobilizing energy, accelerating its otherwise slow rhythms. A 'judicious conjunction' thus takes place: utopia, accepting the reasons of realism and of historical concreteness, mitigates its claims and its premises; history in its turn, no longer guaranteed by a divine plan or by a human Promethean project, provides a map of the obstacles and of the perverse effects which any human project of change encounters." Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Human consciousness cannot arrive at an understanding of itself except by looking at the world, not viewing it as foreign to itself, but rather produced by itself, and therefore in an immanentist perspective. This is reason present in humankind, and it produces the world of nature and history. The history of reason is therefore its re-entry into itself after having gone out of itself. Reason overcomes in this way the contrast

between itself and the world, only if there is something in common, i.e., if they are both rooted in a common principle that first separates them and then reconciles them, allowing the subject to understand that it is the author of the world.

<sup>51</sup> The five stages that J. G. Fichte presents in his *Grundzüge der gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* [*The Characteristics of the Present Age*, in *The Popular Works of Johann Gottlieb Fichte* (London 1889<sup>4</sup>)] of 1804-1805 are marked by moments, in the course of the evolution of humankind, of progressive liberation from the unconditioned domination of instinct over reason.

<sup>52</sup> History is explained as the manifestation of an act of freedom of the absolute. A peculiarity of Schelling is the fact that he shares the opinion according to which history is a process in which the absolute first opposes itself to the world and then recuperates it (this is common to all the idealists); nevertheless, he does not exhaust the absolute in history. Between the absolute and its historical manifestations there is always a gap, constituted by an act of freedom. This is a fertile suggestion for further developments; thus, for example: L. Pareyson, *Ontologia della libertà. Il male e la sofferenza* (Turin 1995); L. Pareyson, *Essere libertà ambiguità* (Turin 1998). On Schelling, cf.: M. Frank, *Friedrich Joseph von Schelling Ausgewählte Schriften* (Frankfurt 1985); X. Tilliette, *Schelling. Une philosophie en devenir* (Paris 1970); W. Marx, *The Philosophy of F.W.J. Schelling. History, System, Freedom* (Bloomington 1984). Schelling gave to posterity also the concept of progress, which was assumed by positive philosophy which with Comte had, on the operative level, “the task of accelerating the submission of nature to the project and direction of human intelligence, which has its most advanced expression in a new science, sociology, dominated by the Enlightenment idea of progress as the incessant perfection of the human race”. Cf. G. M. Pozzo, *Filosofia della storia come metafisica dell'azione* (Castelfranco Veneto 1992) 62-63. The concept of development showed itself suitable for explaining the natural processes of living beings, and this took place in the context of evolutionary positivism, by means of a ‘historicization of nature’ and a ‘naturalization of history’.

<sup>53</sup> J. Cruz Cruz wittily affirms that emancipatory dialectic, common first to Hegel and then to Marx, is the ‘*Grundform*’ of the historiological tradition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Cf. J. Cruz Cruz, *Filosofia de la historia* (Pamplona 1995) 25-26. Hegel spoke of the ‘astuteness of reason’, an expression later converted by Wundt into ‘heterogeneses of the ends’: man achieves and searches for things in view of a personal profit; however, a general and hidden intention guides wills and the course of history

towards the fulfillment of other goals. It was Dilthey who indicated the origins of this perspective in the Christian idea of a progressive education of humanity: St. Clement and St. Augustine were the forerunners of this idea; Vico, Lessing, Herder, Humboldt and Hegel developed it (W. Dilthey, *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften, Gesammelte Schriften* I [Stuttgart 1957] 90. *Introduction to Human Sciences, Selected Works* I [Princeton 1989]). The Christian idea of providence, which governs the course of history without human awareness of its mode of actuation, gave rise to this idea, which became widespread but lost its reference to the transcendent. On the Hegelian philosophy of history, cf: G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über Philosophie der Geschichte [Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (Cambridge 1975)]; Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (Indianapolis 1988); D. Inwood, *Hegel* (London 1983); R. Stern (ed.), *G.W.F. Hegel. Critical Assessments* (London 1993).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. K. Löwith, "Verum et factum convertuntur. Le premesse teologiche del principio di Vico e le loro conseguenze secolari," AA. VV., *Omaggio a Vico* (Naples 1968) 90.

<sup>55</sup> Particularly interesting is the comparison, for example, with E. Bloch (*Geist der Utopie* [Frankfurt 1971]; *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* [Frankfurt 1959]; *Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie* [Frankfurt 1963-1964]; cf. T. H. West, *Ultimate Hope Without God. The Atheistic Eschatology of Ernst Bloch* [New York 1991]), A. Schaff, *Historia i Pravda (Storia e verità* [Rome 1977]), K. Acham, *Analytische Geschichtsphilosophie. Eine kritische Einführung* (Freiburg 1974) and L. Althusser, *Pour Marx* (Paris 1965) with his expression of decisive rejection of every version of philosophy of history.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. C. Thornhill, "Historicism," E. Craig, ed., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London 1998) 4:443-446. Meinecke, representative of German historicism together with Dilthey and Troeltsch (*Der Historismus und seine Probleme* [Tübingen 1922]), has written that the whole task of historicism "consisted in the weakening and rendering fluid and less rigid the doctrine of natural law, with its faith in the invariability of the supreme human ideals and in the absolute and eternal identity of human nature" (cf. F. Meinecke, *Die Entstehung der Historismus*, 1936. *Historicism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook* [London 1972] 5).

<sup>57</sup> Scholars who have dedicated themselves to the work of the epistemological foundation of the science of history are R.G. Collingwood, from his *Religion and Philosophy* (1916) to his *The Idea of History* (Oxford 1946) [cf. also W.J. van der Dussen, *History as a Science: The Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood* (The Hague 1981)] as well as, with different results, O. Spengler and A. Toynbee, the latter with the

impressive work *A Study of History*.

<sup>58</sup> “To understand a doctrine from the past correctly, it is necessary to set it within its proper historical and cultural context. The fundamental claim of historicism, however, is that the truth of a philosophy is determined on the basis of its appropriateness to a certain period and a certain historical purpose. At least implicitly, therefore, the enduring validity of truth is denied. What was true in one period, historicists claim, may not be true in another. Thus, for them the history of thought becomes little more than an archeological resource useful for illustrating positions once held, but for the most part outmoded and meaningless now. On the contrary, it should not be forgotten that, even if a formulation is bound in some way by time and culture, the truth or the error which it expresses can invariably be identified and evaluated as such despite the distance of space and time” (*FR* 87).

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Pozzo 67.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. W. Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften [The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences, Selected Works III]* (Princeton). “History [...] transforms itself into a device for offering breadth and depth to the individual experience, to demonstrate its connections with the universal. It redeems individuality in its completeness: far from being ineffable, the individual is the richest of specifications. [...] Every historical understanding opens to each a world with shades different from those to which he was previously accustomed. By means of this, however, each one in the end recognizes himself as part of a whole in which he is actively inserted”. Cf. Bodei 486.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. F.W. Nietzsche, *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*. Nietzsche himself wrote that the sentence of life “is always ruthless, always unjust, because it never emanates from a pure source of knowledge; but the sentence would be identical in most situations, if it were pronounced by justice itself. Because everything that is born is also worthy of dying. For this reason it would be better if nothing were born. It requires great strength to be able to live and to forget, in the sense that to live and to be unjust are one and the same thing”. Cf. *ibid*.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. K. Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (1949) [*The Origin and the Goal of History* (London 1953)]. A fundamental category for Jaspers is the ‘axial period’, which places in 500 BC the ‘turn’ that affects both West and East and constitutes a line of demarcation in history. At the center of the scheme of universal history offered by Jaspers is precisely the axial period, whose temporal limits – past or future – are unknown.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. W. Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (1940), *Gesammelte Schriften I* (Frankfurt 1988)]; W. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illumination* (London 1970)]. Cf. also R. Mate, "La historia como interrupcion del tiempo," R. Mate, ed., *Filosofia de la historia* (Madrid 1993) 271-287.

<sup>64</sup> J. Ortega y Gasset, *Obras Completas II-VI-IX* (Madrid 1983). In particular, *Historia como Sistema y Concordia y Libertad* (1935) [*Philosophy and History* (Oxford 1941)].

<sup>65</sup> Cf. M. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (1975) [*Discipline and Punish* (New York 1977)]; Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I. La volonté de savoir* (1976) [*The History of Sexuality I. An introduction* (New York 1978)]. Cf. also L. Mc Nay, *Foucault. A Critical Introduction* (New York 1994).

<sup>66</sup> Regarding the problem of causal explanation in history it was above all K. Popper, especially in *The Open Society* (K. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* [London 1945]) and in *The Poverty of Historicism* (K. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* [London 1957]) [Cf. also C. Simkin, *Popper's Views on Natural and Social Science* (Leiden 1993)] who extended to historical consciousness the general results of his epistemological doctrine, modeled on the type of explanation dominant in the natural sciences. This resulted in his critique of the essentialism and of the holism of the philosophy of history. In contrast with historicism, for Popper it is not possible to give an authentic 'historical explanation', because it would not have one of the essential presuppositions of every scientific explanation, i.e., universal historical laws. That which the historicist does not see is precisely the difference between historical interpretation (always relative) and explanation, ending in an unjustified absolutism.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. R. Simili, ed., *La spiegazione storica* (Parma 1984); M. D. Predaval Magrini, *Filosofia analitica e conoscenza storica* (Firenze 1979). Hempel attempted to apply to history Popper's model of causal explanation, and thus was born the so-called 'Popper-Hempel theory' or the *covering law* theory, which gave rise to an intense debate, especially in Anglo-American circles. According to this theory an explanation is complete only when that which is to be explained is subsumed under a general law. Cf. F. Stadler, ed., *Scientific Philosophy: Origins and Development* (Dordrecht 1993); C.G. Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History," *Journal of Philosophy* **38** (1942) 35-48; Hempel, *Aspects of Scientific Explanation* (London - New York 1965).

<sup>68</sup> One of the Marxist critics of Danto, K. Acham, recognized in this author a revival of transcendental idealism. Following the reflection

proposed by R. Schaeffler, it does not seem so to us: the work of A. C. Danto is not a history of consciousness, even though it is certainly a history of the transcendental analysis of narrative language. History is not, therefore, the reproduction of the past, but rather a construction of the historian, and in this respect Danto seems idealistic; nevertheless there is a substantial difference in the fact that the diverse explanatory and narrative systems are, according to Danto, an anarchy of systems. In this sense, indeed, it seems to run the risk rather of historical relativism. Cf. A. C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Oxford - Cambridge 1965).

<sup>69</sup> Cf. M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Cf. also T. Sheehan, "Martin Heidegger," E. Craig, ed., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London 1998) 4:307-323. It does not seem exaggerated to affirm that some Heideggerian assertions, while certainly very respectable, are considered almost as a new and definitive 'catechism' which may at most be subject to interpretations but certainly not to radical questioning. The Heideggerian philosophy of history situates itself at the critical point at which, on one side, trying to escape from historical relativism, the philosophy of history was looking for a philosophically justifiable method that would allow it to arrive at an objective scheme for the knowledge of history. These methods are first of all not perennial, but are themselves the result of historical evolution: modern consciousness, dominated by the prestige of the natural sciences, felt in a certain sense the relativism of the historical sciences. On the other hand, with the scientific positions of Reeman, Gödel, Heisenberg and with the paradigms of Kuhn, it seems instead that the natural sciences are themselves also subject to relativism. Historical relativism cannot, therefore, be overcome with 'objective historical science', because it is also itself *filia temporis*; it is itself subject to historicity, even while it claims to free from it. The philosophy of history finds itself back again at the problem of the philosophy of knowledge, this time without the temptations, at least at the beginning, of idealism and of modern science. It is on this level that Heidegger had to work. Cf. Schaeffler 206-207.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Schaeffler 189.

<sup>71</sup> In Heideggerian philosophy, the comprehensions of the world follow each other without finality, by chance, contingently, without any relationship to progress. The work of Heidegger was, therefore, to unify the philosophy of knowledge and history, giving an explanation of history according to horizons of comprehension. On this understanding, the central problem is how to pass from one age to the other. There does not exist, in fact, a horizon of comprehension that allows one to judge the

others, but every horizon of comprehension, in order to be understood in its originality, must nevertheless be compared with the others. Cf. Schaeffler 208-211.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Schaeffler 211-212. Heidegger's inability to answer leaves open the problem of what history is, and this in a way is emblematic of the situation, including the current one, of the philosophy of history. The talk about sending (*Schickung*) and destiny (*Geschick*) is ambiguous, like all of Heideggerian philosophy, which seems to be an 'atheized' scholastic philosophy. What sense does it make in fact to talk of a sending if there is no personal being? These are theological terms which have been emptied of all meaning. Heideggerian philosophy makes affirmations that philosophy cannot say 'by itself,' it draws on theology, it takes over its terms, and uses them after having emptied them. Heidegger is extremely popular in many so-called 'post-modern' philosophical trends (Vattimo, Derrida, Deleuze, Guattari), which abandon the classical philosophy of history and then stop at fragments of some historical directions. Cf. Schaeffler 212-213. Cf. also L. Romera, *Dalla differenza alla Trascendenza: La differenza ontologica e Dio in Heidegger e Tommaso d'Aquino* (Bologna 1996).

<sup>73</sup> Cf. M. Heidegger, *Der Begriff der Zeit* (Tübingen 1989) 29. For a more general presentation of hermeneutics, cf. M. Inwood, "Hermeneutics," E. Craig, ed., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London 1998) 4:384-389.

<sup>74</sup> Rorty [*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford 1980)] defines thus the current age of philosophy, in which the idea of an ultimate foundation of truth has faded and there prevails instead the pragmatic and relativistic conviction of the situatedness of understanding. "The hermeneutic current—now extremely subdivided—with its interest in time and history, hinges upon the movement of our own time, of our history. 'Wild' in Heidegger, then 'urbanized' (according to Habermas' famous metaphor about Gadamer), 'grafted' onto psychoanalysis and structuralism (Ricoeur), smoothening out – if not watering down – American pragmatism with Rorty and Bleichert, the problem of hermeneutics is that – as it happened to existentialism and historicism, of which it is an heir – it ends up designating any type of philosophical thought that looks at the past and interprets texts". Cf. F. Duque, "Historia y historicidad en el existencialismo y la hermeneutica," R. Mate, ed., *Filosofía de la historia* (Madrid 1993) 161-162.

<sup>75</sup> The principal work of H. G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960) [*Truth and Method* (New York 1979)] is one of the fundamental texts of the hermeneutical perspective. Gadamer speaks of historical

consciousness as perception of a historical sense, which is unifying with respect to the material facts that take place, allowing the achievement of an equilibrium between the fragmentation of events and something unifying that is capable of incorporating everything and thereby giving it meaning. History is inseparable from the historian; it does not exist neutral, colourless, even if there can exist an impartial view: “accepting the past is a condition for surviving in the present”. Gadamer, in polemics with Habermas, goes back to the Romantics, and is their true heir as far as the relationship between history and consciousness is concerned. Cf. also H.G. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley 1976).

<sup>76</sup> Cf. G. Vattimo, *Etica dell'interpretazione* (Turin 1989) [*Etica de la interpretacion* (Barcelona 1991) 70, cited in Duque 164]. Duque comments: “Historicity seems to be turned against itself, to the point of swallowing itself, like a Saturn without children to devour, and which proceeds [...] to consume the consumed. Nevertheless, will it consume the *consummatum est* of history?” Cf. *ibid.* Cf. also G. Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture* (Baltimore 1988).

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Duque, “Historia y historicidad en el existencialismo y la hermenéutica” 164. Cf. also F. Duque, *Los destinos de la tradición* (Barcelona 1989) 150-165.

<sup>78</sup> “Going back to the Aristotle of the *Poetica* or to Croce’s *La storia ridotta sotto il concetto generale dell’arte* (1893) [cf. B. Croce, *Philosophy, Poetry, History: An Anthology of Essays* (Oxford 1966)], various thinkers, from Barthes to Hayden White, from Lyotard to Ricoeur – establish a close tie between history and poetry, history and art, and history and narrative, or ‘meta-narrative’”. Bodei 490.

<sup>79</sup> What Barthes implicitly posed, formulating the famous question “whether history truly moves away ‘because of a specific characteristic, because of indubitable properties, from imaginary narration, that which one finds in the epic, in the novel, in drama’” (cf. R. Barthes, “Le discours de l’histoire,” *Informations sur les sciences sociales* 6/4 [1967] 65-75), already presupposing a negative response, becomes explicit in the work of the historian H. White [*Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore-London 1973); *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore 1978); *The Content of Form* (Baltimore-London 1987)]. To the historian he entrusts the task “of transforming historiographical works into ‘icons’ of the past, into constructs of meaning articulated by the *poetic* imagination by means of unifying rhetorical figures (metaphors, metonymy, synecdoche, irony), paradoxically capable of representing

atomized events precisely because it prefigures them". Cf. Bodei, *Filosofia della storia* 490.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Bodei 490. Cf. J. F. Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir* (1979) [*The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis 1979)]; A. Benjamin, ed., *Judging Lyotard* (London-New York 1992); R. Harvey and M.S. Roberts, *Toward the Postmodern / Lyotard* (Atlantic Highlands 1993).

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Bodei 490.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. J. Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981) [*The Theory of Communicative Action* (Cambridge 1984-1987)]; T. McCarthy - D. Hoy, *Critical Theory* (Cambridge 1994).

<sup>83</sup> Cf. D. Davidson, *Actions and Events* (Oxford 1980); E. Lepore - McLaughlin, eds., *Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (Oxford 1985).

<sup>84</sup> Cf. P. Ricoeur, *Histoire et vérité* (1955) [*History and Truth* (Evanston 1965)]; P. Ricoeur, *Temps et récit I-III* (1983-1985) [*Time and Narrative I-III* (Chicago 1984-1988)]. Cf. also D. Wood, *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation* (London 1991).

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Bodei 491.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. W. Dray, *On History and Philosophers of History* (Leiden-New York 1989) 164-190.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Cruz Cruz, *Filosofia de la historia* 193.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. J. P. Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, (1946) [*Existentialism* (New York 1947)]. Cited by Cruz Cruz 216.

<sup>89</sup> The philosopher/writer of *L'Être et le Néant* maintains that the human being is a reality with being and without prior reason or definition: he/she only exists, and we cannot say why. This situation is called facticity, and this excludes that the human being has his/her own essence. Sartre gives the name humanism to this affirmation that the human being is free, that is to say, lacking in a prior essence. To say that the human being is free means, for Sartre, not that he/she has liberty but that he is liberty. If the human living is free, it means also that God cannot exist, because God would be an obstacle to human liberty. The humanism of Sartre expresses an antinomy between the existence of the human being and that of God. Dostoevsky had written that if God did not exist, everything would be permitted; Sartre says that this is precisely the final end of existentialism. Cf. J. P. Sartre, *Existentialism*; Sartre, *L'Être et le Néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique* (1943) [*Being and Nothingness: An Essay of Phenomenological Ontology* (New York 1956)].

<sup>90</sup> Creation is in fact the production of the whole being of a thing, beginning from nothing. *De nihilo* means precisely *ex non aliquo*: it is a

real dependence in being, and can be demonstrated rationally as dependence of the contingent on the absolute.

<sup>91</sup> The immanentists (positivists, idealists, Marxists and existentialists) saw in providence exclusively the internal logic of human things, the rationality of history, the real law of events. In this explanation one accepts only an immanent god. As Viazzi affirms, for positivism providence is “the expression of the character of necessity conferred upon the development of social realities”. Cf. P. Viazzi, *La modernità e il positivismo di G. B. Vico* (Milan 1903) 25. The neo-idealists such as Croce and Gentile explicitly view providence as the logic or the rationality of history, absolute immanent reason. They do not admit therefore that providence is not the rationality or the logic of history, but rather the cause of this rationality and logic. On the other hand, the authors close to existentialism have considered providence as immanent and as a dynamic structure of the human mind. In this regard J. Cruz Cruz quotes R. Sabarini (R. Sabarini, *Il tempo in G. B. Vico* [Rome 1954] 41-46 and 79) and E. Paci (E. Paci, *Ingens Sylva: Saggio sulla filosofia di G.B. Vico* [Milan 1949] 136-137). According to this interpretation, when one thinks that God is transcendent in a metaphysical sense, one utilizes only a transcendental law, the validity of which is restricted to the phenomenon of human history, and which in human operation provides it with the way to recognise it. On the contrary, the concept of providence does not exhaust itself in the human, nor does the work of human beings in history make providence superfluous: if the human being is the maker of history, providence is its architect. Cf. Cruz Cruz 247.

<sup>92</sup> G. F. W. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über Philosophie der Geschichte* 42. Quoted by Cruz Cruz 249.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. A. Alessi, *Sui sentieri dell'essere* (Rome 1998); Alessi, *Sui sentieri dell'Assoluto: Introduzione alla teologia filosofica*, esp. pp. 289-352.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Cruz Cruz 253. J. Ratzinger has written: “If the door to metaphysical knowledge remains closed, if the boundaries set by Kant to human knowledge remain insurmountable, then faith is bound to atrophy, because it lacks breathing space and lives in uncertainty”. Cf. J. Ratzinger, “La fede e la teologia ai giorni nostri” 8.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. W.H. Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History* (Oxford 1987); Dray, *On History and Philosophers of History*. The ‘critical philosophy’ of history aims at clarifying the nature of the research proper to the historian, with the goal of ‘situating it’, so to say, on the ‘map of knowledge’. The ‘speculative philosophy’ of history tries to discover in history, in the course of events, a design or significance which goes beyond mere historiography, and this is what is traditionally referred to as ‘philosophy

of history'. Both these have to be kept in mind, as becomes evident from a glance at the texts published in the most important review on these topics: *History and Theory*. "This review publishes articles, review essays, and summaries of books principally in the areas of critical philosophy of history, speculative philosophy of history, historiography, historical methodology, critical theory, time and culture and related disciplines" ([www.wesleyan.edu/histjrnl/hthome.htm](http://www.wesleyan.edu/histjrnl/hthome.htm) [January 1999]).

<sup>96</sup> "In all subjects the way to make progress (as every teacher knows) is to ask questions. Philosophy arises from a sense of wonder [...]. The first lot, about cause, significance, etc., are really about how historians think. The second lot, about pattern and progress and repetition, are about the course of history itself. This corresponds to the distinction already drawn between history-as-account and history-as-happening. The former kind belong to what is called analytical or critical philosophy of history; the latter to speculative or substantive philosophy of history. It happens that most of the age-old questions belong to the speculative kind; the analytical kinds of questions are the ones that have predominated in the twentieth century". M. Stanford, *A Companion to the Study of History* (Oxford-Cambridge 1994) 231.

<sup>97</sup> Cf., for example, H. Kellner, "Narrative in History: Post-Structuralism and Since," *History and Theory* (26/09/1979) 1-25; J. Passmore, "Narrative and Events," *History and Theory* (26/09/1987) 68-74; H. White, "The Structure of Historical Narrative," *Clio* 1/2 (1972) 5-20; M. Cruz, *Narradividad: la nueva sintesis* (Barcelona 1986); P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. C. G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History* (Middletown 1968) 65-67.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Cruz Cruz 22; S. Palumbieri, *L'uomo e il futuro I*, 1-32; Palumbieri, *L'uomo e il futuro III*, 331-374.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. M. de Unamuno, "En torno al casticismo," *Ensayos* II (Madrid 1945) 140 ["On Authentic Tradition," *Essays and Soliloquies* (New York 1925)].

<sup>101</sup> Cf. D. Landes and C. Tilly, *History as a Social Science* (Englewood Cliffs 1971) 5-21.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. B. Baylimn, "The Challenge of Modern Historiography," *American Historical Review* 87 (1982) 1-24.

<sup>103</sup> "Moreover, a cursory glance at ancient history shows clearly how in different parts of the world, with their different cultures, there arise at the same time the fundamental questions which pervade human life: *Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there*

*evil? What is there after this life? [...] They are questions which have their common source in the quest for meaning which has always compelled the human heart. In fact, the answer given to these questions decides the direction which people seek to give to their lives". FR 1*

<sup>104</sup> Cf. *FR*, esp. n. 77. Cf. also C. Cantone, *Trascendenza e storia* (Rome 1996).

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Cruz Cruz 208. Cf also A. Millan Puelles, *Ontologia de la existencia historica* (Madrid 1955); X. de Zubiri, *Naturaleza, Historia, Dios* (Madrid 1944); de Zubiri, *Sobre la Esencia* (Madrid 1962); de Zubiri, *Inteligencia Sentiente* (Madrid 1980).

<sup>106</sup> In considering history as reality, it would seem that R. Schaeffler presents such a definition in a sufficiently adequate manner: "history is a sequence of real mutations and of the mutations of social forms of consciousness in mutual dependence, in such a way that human consciousness forms itself through such mutations. Such mutations are made possible by the fact that human consciousness aims at truth as to an ideal goal that allows for criticism, and therefore transformation, and presupposes this same truth as a condition that makes intersubjective understanding possible". Cf. Schaeffler 87-88.

<sup>107</sup> "In this sense, metaphysics should not be seen as an alternative to anthropology, since it is metaphysics which makes it possible to ground the concept of personal dignity in virtue of their spiritual nature. In a special way, the person constitutes a privileged locus for the encounter with being, and hence with metaphysical inquiry. Wherever men and women discover a call to the absolute and transcendent, the metaphysical dimension of reality opens up before them: in truth, in beauty, in moral values, in other persons, in being itself, in God". *FR* 83.

<sup>108</sup> The Encyclical Letter continues: "Deprived of what Revelation offers, reason has taken side-tracks which expose it to the danger of losing sight of its final goal. Deprived of reason, faith has stressed feeling and experience, and so run the risk of no longer being a universal proposition. It is an illusion to think that faith, tied to weak reasoning, might be more penetrating; on the contrary, faith then runs the grave risk of withering into myth or superstition. By the same token, reason which is unrelated to an adult faith is not prompted to turn its gaze to the newness and radicality of being. This is why I make this strong and insistent appeal – not, I trust, untimely – that faith and philosophy recover the profound unity which allows them to stand in harmony with their nature without compromising their mutual autonomy". *FR* 48.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. *FR* 1. For an in-depth study of some topics of the Encyclical Letter, with reference to what we have been analyzing here, cf. also: M. Mantovani, S. Thuruthiyil and M. Toso, eds., *Fede e ragione. Opposizione, composizione?* (Rome 1999).

