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Introduction to Vol. 7, No. 2

This issue of *Essays in Philosophy* brings together five articles that work in the spirit of the philosophy of history³/*broadly construed*. Each author provides us a glimpse into the *methodological relationship* between philosophy and history.

The first paper, “Realism, Radical Constructivism, and Film History,” by Nick Redfern, grapples well with this relationship; the author rejects realist epistemologies of “film history,” in favour of “radical constructivism.” Realism of this sort takes the viewer of film, indeed the critically situated “historian of film,” as having a non-interpreter role; the film historian is, following in line with some kind of classical empiricism, *merely* reporting the facts. Radical constructivism is the position that no such unmediated account is possible. The historian confronts film as she would any text or, to borrow an idea from Charles Taylor, a *text analogue*. The historian interprets it, makes judgements about it. Indeed, she is forced to make choices about what is relevant to her reporting, and what is not. This takes an accounting of the historian’s ideas, not just the ideas represented by the film. Not to be confused with a kind of radical historicism, the author here understands “constructivism” as a model---a methodological ‘positioning’ or vantage from which the historian makes her judgements. Presumably this vantage has its own expression, too, even if loosely formed to give sense to what constitutes the model such that from it the “radical construction” can take place. This “basic model of research into cinema” assumes a certain kind of epistemic holism that takes as problematic those “methodological presuppositions” that favour an uncritical empiricism.

The second paper, Anders Schinkel’s “The Object of History,” cleverly dissects the ‘object’ of our study from the ‘objectives’ our studies serve. Attending to some fine-grained distinctions in “method,” the author attempts to provide us with “an analytical tool,” *a model*. The author’s paper is animated by the ideas of Collingwood, Carr and Elton. The idea is that the historian cannot properly ‘distinguish’ between the object of her study and her objectives in picking out the objects she does for study. The article demonstrates the inherent difficulties in thinking of history as a collection of facts. The best we can do, if the author is correct, is to stipulate the statuses of our respective objects of study, their relations and, most importantly, our goals. Here, as in the first paper, we are working within a holism, one that rejects unmediated ‘facts’ in historical understanding.

Our third paper, “Rescuing Hempel from His World,” by Carlos Leone, is at once a historical diagnosis, an attempt to make sense of how the philosophy of history has been set to the margin over the last century, and, also, a soft defence of Hempel’s covering law model of historical understanding.

The author suggests that the rise of the social sciences – included here is history – has set to the margin the kind of historical sense philosophers may have had in another era (before the second half of the twentieth century). Inspired by Danto's observation that an historical orientation in philosophy finds little room on the "present scene," the author sets out to reconstruct, in general terms, the way the 'character' of philosophy and philosophizing has changed over the past fifty or so years. The author marks an historical shift with Hempel's radical, but certainly well discussed, proposal in 1942 that a covering law model of historical explanation was possible; indeed, required. The author defends Hempel, arguing for a scientifically oriented conception of person. What this means requires some discussion, and I have confidence that the author would agree. The paper is a rejection of interpretation and an orienting of 'history' around the possibility of its absorption into scientific theory.

The fourth paper, "Mesocosmological Descriptions: An Essay in the Extensional Ontology of History," by Nikolay Milkov, is a fascinating defence of a "formal ontology" that relies on a Tractarian view of objects. The author sets out an interesting strategy. First, we are reminded of the "old argument," (think Hempel and Popper) namely, that historical study is not different in type from scientific investigation. The author suggests, in line with Hempel and Popper, that historical study and scientific investigation are not different in type. Contra-Hempel and Popper, however, the studies are different in the justificatory stories they tell. This point is not unimportant, for it differentiates the author's position from those who advocate for the "old argument." So second, with the new argument, we are promised, "an alternative scientific philosophy of historical knowledge." Viewing social reality as a "mesocosm," the author sets out to demonstrate how the individual, her geographical context and astronomic world, are related by a kind of ontological dependence. Replacing the familiar dialectic of 'reasons and causes,' the author suggestively argues for "colligation: touching, overlapping, permeating and comprising of events." The author tells us that the "effect of this new approach to history can be summarized as a radical widening of the subject-matter of the discipline by opening of new layers and levels in it, thereby disclosing new chunks of past life." The spirit of this paper is optimistic; it regards as knowable the forces that shaped the past.

The final paper in this issue, Constantine Sandis' "The Explanation of Action in History," nicely brings together the various themes expressed by the other authors. Here, the author teases apart a "conflation" in our talk of explanation between "the conflating view of reasons" and the "conflating view of action explanation." The first conflation suggests that the reasons for which one acts are *also* the reasons for which the act occurs. The second conflation suggests that an explanation of why one acts also explains how the act occurred. The author adroitly identifies a pathology imbuing the debate in the philosophy of history "on the relation of covering laws to historical explanation," namely, the *combining of these two views*. The central insight is that making intelligible the objects of our explanation does not give us insight into the why an agent acts. For that we require understanding why an agent did what she did.

The papers in this issue are an interesting contribution to studies in the philosophy of history. They trade on a vexing tension between the agent's knowledge of her own actions and the observer's getting at her reasons. Our first author suggests that we are involved in "radically constructing" and, indeed, 'reconstructing' the ideas we confront in film; we are, in the end, judge and jury over what parts of our interpretations are worthy of inclusion or which are to be excluded from our accounts.

This is not far from the inspiration behind our second author's paper; the historian and philosopher are advised to remain sensitive to the recalcitrant character of our historical understanding. We are advised to make explicit the model we are using in making sense of the past. Our final two papers see as promising the domestication of our historical understanding into the character and form of scientific theory. Our final paper challenges these views, and moves the debate further still. As with much of our work in philosophy, there are no last words here. We do have some interesting arguments to be considered and debated.

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