

Chapter One

History, Philosophy, and the History of Philosophy

Any inquiry into philosophical historiography must say something about the nature of the history of philosophy, and, since the history of philosophy involves the notions of history and philosophy, it must begin by saying something about them as well. In the remarks that follow my primary purpose is to set some limits to the notions in question, distinguishing them from each other and from other notions frequently confused with them. I begin by discussing a difficulty often raised when trying to pinpoint the nature of the history of philosophy. The rest of the chapter is divided into three parts, dealing respectively with history, philosophy, and the history of philosophy. In this context I take the opportunity to raise the thorny question concerning the translation of past ideas into the conceptual frameworks of the present and the controversial issue concerning whether the history of philosophy can include truth value judgments about ideas from the past. The main thesis I defend is that the history of philosophy includes descriptive, interpretative, and evaluative propositions and therefore can avoid neither interpretation nor evaluation. I also defend in passing the position that it is possible to translate past ideas into present conceptual frameworks without substantially distorting them; that is, indeed, the role of interpretation in the history of philosophy. Let me begin, then, with some remarks about the initial difficulty concerning the nature of the history of philosophy to which reference was made.

To investigate the nature of something entails coming up with an appropriate definition of the thing in question. The job of the definition is to specify a set of necessary and sufficient conditions. Thus the traditional definition of *human being* as “rational animal” is sup-

posed to identify those conditions (i.e., rationality, animality, and whatever is entailed by them) that make a human being human and without which he or she could not exist as human. Linguistically one can say that a definition is an expression that identifies the necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be called such and such.

The task of finding definitions has been challenged in contemporary philosophy, in particular by the disciples of Wittgenstein. They argue that it is not always possible to identify necessary and sufficient conditions that apply to all members of a class of things to which we refer with the same term other than the fact that we refer to them with that term.¹ Thus, it is not possible to find a feature common to all cats, tigers, or human beings beyond the fact that they are called cats, tigers, and human beings. The reason is that they seem to be related not in the way in which things that share a feature are related, but rather in the way families are related by resemblance: Each member of the family resembles at least one member of the family in some way, but no member of the family resembles every member of the family even in one way. No tiger is like every tiger even though it is like at least one other tiger in some respect. This is a standard objection against the attempt to find definitions, and one that is certainly sufficiently serious to merit special attention. Because it is such a blanket indictment against the entire procedure of determining definitions and also because I have already dealt in some way with it elsewhere, I shall not consider it further here.² Its discussion should be part of a more specific treatise on epistemology. I mention this objection only to make clear that at some point it has to be met.

The second objection is much more pointed. Unlike the previous one, it is not based on the rejection of any search for definitions. It merely attacks the possibility of establishing a definition of the history of philosophy by arguing that the history of philosophy is not a natural kind and as such is not definable.³ This leaves open, of course, the question of the possibility of the definition of natural kinds, but that is of no concern to us at present.

That the history of philosophy is not a natural kind seems to me rather obvious. Natural kinds include only entities that are naturally produced, that is, entities that are not the product of human art. A fig tree is an instance of a natural kind and so are Paul and my cat Medea. Neither Paul, nor Medea, nor the tree is the result of human creation. Paul's parents had something to do with his conception and fig trees may be planted and cared for, but the processes responsible for their production are not the product of human invention and design. The case is quite different with the chair on which I am sitting or the signs I use to write these thoughts. Neither the chair nor the

signs are instances of natural kinds, for both are the products of human design. The history of philosophy, too, does not seem to me to be in any way like Paul or Medea, but more like the chair and the signs. So I am willing to accept, at least provisionally and for the sake of argument, that the history of philosophy is not a natural kind. This means, of course, that it must be an artificial kind, since the categories of natural and artificial are both exclusive and mutually exhaustive. The history of philosophy, then, must be considered to be the product of human art.

Still, although not natural, the history of philosophy is a kind and as such should be able to be defined in the same way that other artificial kinds are defined. For there is nothing strange, let alone impossible, about defining artificial kinds. The definition in that case will not be the sort of definition that one provides for natural kinds, but it will be a definition nonetheless insofar as it specifies the necessary and sufficient conditions for something to qualify as history of philosophy or to be called "history of philosophy." The fact that these conditions may be conventional or even stipulative does not mean that it is impossible to specify them clearly and with precision nor that they are useless. For example, we will all agree, I am sure, that the letter 'A' is a conventional sign and not a natural kind. Thus the conditions that are necessary and sufficient for something to qualify as A are subject entirely to an agreement among users of A. Yet it is clear also that those conditions are quite effective in determining a good from a bad A, a well written from a badly written A, and in distinguishing an A from, say, a B.

An even more dramatic example and one that both resembles the cases of philosophy and the history of philosophy more than the one just given and also pinpoints the source of at least some definitions of artificial kinds is the case of an artifact such as a chair. Clearly chairs are artificial kinds, invented by human beings. There was a time at which there were no chairs and some bright ancestor of ours came up with the idea of making one. Presumably human beings sat down from the very beginning, so that there have been objects used as chairs from the moment humans made their appearance on Earth. But that does not mean that there were chairs at the time. Chairs have existed only from the moment in which someone made one. Now, it is also clear that there are comfortable and uncomfortable chairs, chairs that serve their purpose well—we might call them "good" chairs—and chairs that do not serve their purpose well—we might call them "bad" chairs—as well as beautiful and ugly chairs, and so forth. One may want to argue that, once we get into the area of beauty, things get too complicated to draw any conclusions from the

example. But if we restrict ourselves to whether a chair does or does not serve the purpose for which it was intended, we then must accept that we have some kind of idea of what a chair should be. That idea, of course, is a definition of sorts that arises from the function for which the chair was made. Likewise, then, with the history of philosophy: The history of philosophy, as a product of human art, was invented for a certain purpose and that purpose should provide us with criteria whereby we can distinguish between the history of philosophy and other things as well as between good and bad histories of philosophy. That we in fact use such criteria, by the way, is clear from among other things the very distinction we draw between the history of philosophy and chairs.

Thus, to say that the history of philosophy is not a natural kind should not be an obstacle to reaching a definition of it that will distinguish it from other things and allow us to separate good from bad history of philosophy. Having said that, I should point out that in what follows I do not provide a precise and well-formed definition of the history of philosophy. Indeed, I identify only some features associated with it that distinguish it from history and philosophy. The reason is that, given the purpose of this and subsequent chapters, such a definition is not required. There is no need for us, then, to engage in the complicated and controversial process of actually trying to formulate one. Let me begin with history.

I. HISTORY

The term 'history' is ambiguous in the sense that it is used in the language to mean a number of different things. In one sense the term is used to refer to a series of events or happenings.⁴ Thus, for example, we speak of the history of Ancient Greece when we want to refer to a series of events that took place during a certain period of time in Greece. And we also talk about the history of our lives as comprising such events as birth, marriage, education, accidents, and so on. In this sense any event is part of history as long as it is not presently taking place. Indeed, to take place is in a sense to become part of history, since the present consists of a fleeting moment constantly turning into the past.

But the term 'history' has also a second meaning derived from the etymology of the original Greek word, which meant information, inquiry, and narrative. In this sense the term is used to refer to an account of past events rather than to the events themselves.⁵ Insofar as it is an *account* it goes beyond a simple narrative, chronicle, or annal,

for it contains or should contain references to their causes, to the relations among the events in question, and to the consequences they brought about.⁶ Narratives, chronicles, and annals simply record past events dispensing with any attempt to account for them by providing explanations of why they happened and of their relations and results.⁷ Moreover, insofar as history refers to past, rather than future, events, it has to be distinguished from prophecy. Prophecy, like history, is an account of events, but the events in question have yet to occur. History, understood in this second sense, is a product of human enterprise. Although events themselves may or may not be the result of human action, history as an account of such events is necessarily the result of human action. An earthquake is without a doubt a historical happening that must be recorded in the history books of the particular place where it happened, even though it is also a natural event in whose origin human beings play no role. And Caesar's murder by Brutus is also a historical occurrence, although in this case the event is not natural, but rather the result of human will and action. Still, an account of either event is necessarily the product of human will and action. So, history in the second sense, that is, understood as an account of events, is necessarily the result of human enterprise.

There is still a third meaning of the term 'history' that should not be overlooked and that results precisely from the human effort to provide an account of past events. In this sense, 'history' refers to the procedure followed in the production of the account of events. By 'history' is meant, then, a certain discipline of learning whose function is both to produce appropriate accounts of past events and to devise the rules that, when applied, would yield such appropriate accounts.

From what has been said it would appear that there are important ontological differences among history considered as a series of events, history as an account of those events, and history as a discipline of learning. The first may be composed of linguistic or nonlinguistic elements. Demosthenes's speeches are historical events and composed of language, but Caesar's death is not, regardless of what one might wish to call it, a linguistic fact. On the other hand, the description of historical events generally yields linguistic facts, namely, propositions such as: 'Demosthenes gave a speech on such and such a date,' 'Caesar died,' or 'Caesar was killed by Brutus.'

Moreover, history considered as a discipline of learning may involve either an activity, a set of linguistic facts, or both. The activity occurs when someone is in the process of producing an account of certain events. Clearly the process is neither the linguistic account of events nor the events themselves, but rather the activity whereby the events are described and explained. On the other hand, history as a

discipline may also include a set of linguistic facts or propositions, but those facts and propositions have to be distinguished from the facts and propositions that propose to give an account of nonlinguistic events. They are quite different, indeed, for they formulate, explain, and justify the rules that need to be followed to produce a historical account of events. For example, one such rule might stipulate that "eyewitness accounts of events should be given more weight in the establishment of facts than noneyewitness accounts of events." And another rule might establish that "contemporaneous documentary evidence is generally more reliable than noncontemporaneous verbal evidence." The formulation, explanation, and justification of those rules is what has come to be called "historiography" in order to distinguish it from history considered as a series of events, as an account of those events, and as the activity whereby an account of events is produced. I should add at this point that historiography itself is both a set of rules concerning the procedure to be followed by historians in their production of an account of past events and also the activity, that is, the procedure followed in a historiographical investigation. I omit further immediate reference to this last wrinkle in order to avoid unnecessary complications.

History may be interpreted, therefore, in the following different ways:

- I. History as a series of past events.
- II. History as an account of past events.
- III. History as a discipline of learning
 - A. Activity whereby an account of past events is produced.
 - B. Formulation, explanation, and justification of rules to which the production of an account of past events must adhere (historiography).

Before I go on let me add at this point that the notions of history as a series of past events, an account of past events, and a discipline of learning have all been challenged at one time or another. Some argue, for example, that there are no such things as past events to which we can have access and for which we can provide an account. Past events, they argue, are constructs "created" by the historian, so the whole notion of being able "to account" for them is absurd. Past events are not independent from what we say and think about them. Indeed, the very notion of "a series" of past events points to the kind of ordering that the mind brings into history. The ontological distinction made above between a series of events and the account of it breaks down. Moreover, under these conditions, the whole idea of a

discipline of learning with rules and regulations to guide the procedure whereby an account of past events is produced becomes meaningless and/or useless.

There are many ways of answering this objection, but for our purposes I believe we could dispose of it in the following way. One could point out that this objection is part of a more fundamental epistemic view in which the object of knowledge is seen as dependent on the knower insofar as all the categories through which the knower approaches it are part of the knower and not categories that apply to the object of knowledge independently of the knower. Because this objection is based on a general epistemic assumption, the place to deal with it is not in a specific historiographical context, but rather in a general discussion of epistemology. For our purposes it is sufficient to point out three things: First, the distinction between a series of events and the account of those events is one substantiated by our ordinary ways of looking at the world and therefore can serve for our present limited purpose. Second, this distinction is generally operative in the work of historians and it is only historiographers who challenge it. In that sense it is more appropriate for us to take it for granted than to reject it at the outset. Finally, the very notions of a series of past events and an account of those events are easily distinguishable and seem to reflect the intent of the historical enterprise. For these reasons, then, I believe we can dispense with this objection here, although I do not believe by any means that it need not be addressed or that my answer to it has been completely satisfactory. It is for epistemologists, however, to deal with it in greater detail.⁸

Now, apart from the objection just discussed, the understandings of history as a series of past events or as a discipline of learning seem quite uncontroversial. But the conception of history as an account of past events needs further clarification and analysis. I shall, therefore, turn my attention to this notion before we proceed further.

Let me begin by pointing out that history interpreted as an account of past events does not necessarily have to be linguistic; for example, there are pictorial accounts of events. Moreover, it is logically possible that there may be nonlinguistic, nonpictorial accounts of events as well. For example, it is altogether possible that there are beings who communicate with each other telepathically without the use of linguistic—whether written, oral, or mental—signs, although I have a hard time imagining how that could happen.⁹ On the other hand, it is obvious that most human accounts of events use linguistic signs of one sort or another, and in fact we are restricted to written or oral signs owing to the requirements imposed on the transmission of information over long spans of time. So, for all intents and purposes,

our discussion may be restricted to linguistic accounts. And since linguistic accounts are composed of propositions, my discussion of history as an account of past events will concern the propositions used to provide such an account.¹⁰

A general survey of historical propositions, that is, of propositions that form part of linguistic accounts of past events, yields three basic categories. I use the terms 'descriptive,' 'interpretative,' and 'evaluative' to refer to them. The primary function of descriptive propositions is to present accurately those events and their relations for which there can be direct empirical evidence. Therefore, they involve descriptions of events and their relations, descriptions of contemporaneous statements concerning those events and their relations, and descriptions of what later historians said or wrote concerning those events and their relations as well as descriptions of the relations of the statements of various historians concerning their own views. As examples of these propositions consider the following:¹¹

- 1^h. X killed Y.
- 2^h. X died.
- 3^h. X's death followed X's killing of Y.
- 4^h. M, a contemporary of X, stated that X had not killed Y.
- 5^h. N, another of X's contemporaries, disagreed with M concerning M's view that X had not killed Y.
- 6^h. R, a later historian, stated that M was right in holding that X had not killed Y.
- 7^h. S, another later historian, disagreed with R's view concerning M.

Note that in all cases the function of propositions 1^h–7^h is descriptive in the sense specified earlier, although in some cases the description is of events (1^h, 2^h) and their relations (3^h) whereas in other cases it concerns what historians and other persons have said or written about those events and their relations (4^h–7^h). Note also that for a proposition to be descriptive it is not necessary that the historians who put it forth themselves have direct empirical evidence of the event the proposition is supposed to describe. Historians can rely on eyewitness accounts of an event, for example. The point I wish to stress, then, is that the primary function of these propositions is to describe an event for which somewhere along the line historians believe there is or could be direct empirical evidence, even if no historian wit-

nessed the event, as most likely they did not. Thus, for example, the proposition 'Brutus killed Caesar' is descriptive even though no historian witnessed the event. The reason is that historians believe there were or could have been eyewitness accounts of it. Indeed, it is quite common to have events for which there are no surviving eyewitnesses, but which nonetheless are the subject of descriptive propositions. For example, let us suppose that when Brutus killed Caesar no one but the two of them were present and that in the scuffle between Caesar and Brutus, Brutus also was mortally wounded and died before anyone entered the room where the event took place. In that case the proposition 'Brutus killed Caesar' would still be descriptive according to the given criteria because, although living eyewitnesses of the event could not have testified to it, there was at least one (perhaps two, if Caesar was aware of what was happening) eyewitness of the event and he could have testified about it. The point, of course, is not whether there are or are not eyewitnesses, or whether they testified or not, or even whether there is any empirical evidence for it or not, but rather whether or not the propositions' function is to describe events of the sort that can yield direct empirical evidence.

The use of the expression 'empirical evidence' is meant to rule out evidence of a nonperceptual nature, such as reports concerning mental states and events even when the reporter is the person who is experiencing them. Thus propositions such as 'I thought X had killed Y' (when 'thought' is used descriptively and not as standing for something like "I believe"), 'I intended to kill Y,' or 'I am mentally distressed when I think that I intended to kill Y,' do not meet the criteria I have established for descriptive historical propositions. One could point out, of course, that the subjects who propose such propositions and are not lying when they do so are describing states of affairs for which they have direct evidence—they are reporting their thoughts, intentions, and mental states. And that seems reasonable to me. But the evidence in question is not "empirical"; it is rather the peculiar type of evidence to which one has access in one's mind. This poses interesting and difficult questions related to the philosophy of mind, but since they are related only marginally to our subject matter and our purposes are limited, they will not be discussed here. Let it suffice to point out that the description of one's mental states is a tricky business for at least two reasons: First, the reporter is an interested party, and interested parties do not make the best witnesses; and second, one's memory of one's mental states is unreliable even in cases where the mental event in question is fairly recent.

It is important to recognize as well that descriptive propositions may be false. That is, even though historians may think the empirical

evidence they have verifies those propositions, they may be wrong. Whether a proposition is descriptive or not, then, does not depend on whether it actually describes accurately the event it purports to describe, but whether it purports primarily to do so on the basis of direct empirical evidence. Most historians' work, by its very nature, is far removed from the events that it studies and thus has to rely on second- and thirdhand sources. But that does not change the descriptive character of certain propositions they use in their accounts.

In contrast with the primary function of descriptive propositions, the primary function of interpretative propositions is not to describe events for which there can be direct empirical evidence, but rather to go beyond them and reconstruct the fabric of unstated motives, intangible factors, and implicit circumstances within which events take place and for which there can be no direct empirical evidence. In addition, some of these interpretations contain broad generalizations based on limited evidence but backed up by more or less accepted historiographical interpretative principles; and others include inferences concerning events for which there is no direct empirical evidence but which it makes sense to suppose happened. This indicates that there is some descriptive import and intent in interpretative propositions, but the historian is well aware that the description is based only on a reconstruction of elements that fails to adhere to strict evidential empirical criteria. Therefore, we find in histories interpretative propositions such as the following:

- a^h. X must have killed Y in order to inherit Y's fortune.
- b^h. That X killed Y meant that X had an intense hatred for Y's mother.
- c^h. The killing of Y gave rise to a series of events that led to the collapse of monarchy.
- d^h. N, a contemporary of X, thought that X had killed Y in order to inherit Y's fortune.

The use of terms such as 'must have,' 'meant,' and 'thought' in the first two (a^h and b^h) and the last (d^h) propositions and the general and causal character of the third proposition indicate that these propositions go beyond the facts for which there can be direct empirical evidence in various ways. The first proposition (a^h) presents a conjecture concerning the reasons why X killed Y. The second (b^h) interprets the import and meaning of what X did. The third (c^h) draws a causal connection for which there can be no direct empirical evidence. Finally, the fourth (d^h) attributes a view to a person which that person may not

in fact have held despite what she actually said or wrote and for which there is no direct empirical evidence. The last case may be illustrated with the example of Galileo, who according to the records of his trial is supposed to have recanted his view that the Earth moves around the Sun. The documented evidence we have indicates that he recanted, and thus on that basis we could infer that he actually thought that the Earth does not move around the Sun. But that would be a conjecture that in fact subsequent history has rejected, going to the extreme of giving credence to an unsubstantiated story according to which Galileo actually said to himself at the end of his trial: "But it moves."

To the type of propositions listed under the interpretative category must be added also propositions that report the mental states of those who report them. For example, take the three mentioned earlier:

e^h. I thought X had killed Y.

f^h. I intended to kill Y.

g^h. I feel distressed when I think that I intended to kill Y.

In these cases, as already pointed out, the evidence for the propositions is not only private and available only to the reporter, it also is not the kind of empirical evidence used to back up what I have classified as descriptive historical propositions. The evidence is direct but it is not empirical, since thoughts, intentions, and feelings are not subject to perception. One thinks thoughts, has intentions, and feels or has feelings, but one does not perceive them as I perceived, for example, that X killed Y.

None of the propositions a^h-g^h, then, restricts itself to the description of events for which there can be direct empirical evidence. The first two propositions refer to motives that may very well have been the causes of the events in question, but that certainly cannot be regarded as facts for which there could be observable evidence. And the third and fourth go well beyond the facts. These propositions, then, describe an edifice of reconstructed circumstances that in turn is used to interpret and make sense of particular historical events within a larger context.

Finally, we come to a third category of historical propositions, the evaluative. These propositions are characterized by the fact that they contain evaluations both of historical events and of the views of historians concerning those events. In this case there is generally no attempt at description. Moreover, the evaluations in question are based on principles and criteria that are part of neither descriptive nor interpretative historical propositions and, therefore, are derived

from sources other than history as we have understood it here; they are either part of historiography, which sets the rules for generating historical accounts, or are derived from some other disciplines. As examples of evaluative propositions consider the following:

- A^h. X was a bad ruler.
- B^h. X's death was advantageous for country C.
- C^h. M, a contemporary of X, was wrong in thinking that X had not killed Y.
- D^h. R, a later historian, who stated that M was right, was wrong.
- E^h. From year y¹ to year y¹⁺ⁿ there was considerable progress.
- F^h. Developments d and d' meant a step backward in cultural development.

This third category of propositions clearly is the most controversial, for the terms 'bad,' 'advantageous,' 'wrong,' 'right,' 'progress,' and 'backward' indicate value judgments. Some historians will want to argue that it is not the business of the historian to issue evaluations of any kind, but simply to describe historical events in an objective and intelligible fashion. Others agree that description is not enough and interpretation is required, but reject the view that evaluation has a place in historical accounts. And the case becomes more controversial in the context of the history of philosophy, as we shall see later. At this point, however, I would like to argue that history involves both *de facto* and *de jure* evaluation. It is evident, *de facto*, that most histories and certainly all good histories make judgments as to the value of historical characters and events. What history of Portugal, for example, would not characterize the eighteenth century Lisbon earthquake as disastrous? And what historian of the Roman empire would refrain from commenting on the lack of moral restraint of Nero and Caligula? Certainly Suetonius was not shy about making such comments. Indeed, I do not think that we can find any history so value-sanitized that it does not have any propositions of the type represented by A^h–F^h.

Not only *de facto*, however, but also *de jure* it makes sense to argue that history without evaluation is not history or at least not good history, for values themselves, though intangible, play important roles in historical development. Therefore, only if historians understand those values *qua* values, by judging their appropriateness and validity, can they truly understand historical processes (more on this when I get to the history of philosophy). Moreover, what would be the use of studying history if we cannot learn anything from it?

And to learn implies judgments concerning what is right and wrong, good and bad, worthy and unworthy, and whether progress or regress has occurred. It should indeed be no surprise that the overriding moralistic concerns of the Greeks and Romans are responsible for their concern with history. We must accept, then, that evaluation and evaluative propositions are an integral part of historical accounts. Since my main concern in this book is with the history of philosophy and not just with history, I will let the case for the inclusion of value judgments in history rest on these grounds. When we come to the history of philosophy, however, I shall provide a more elaborate and, I hope, convincing set of arguments.

From all of this we may conclude, on the one hand, that history comprises a wide range of propositions and that it is a mistake to think, as some philosophers of history have thought, that history is exclusively descriptive, or interpretative, or evaluative. Nor should it be thought, on the other hand, that these categories are meant to be mutually exclusive and exhaustive. They are not mutually exclusive because there may be cases in which a particular proposition does not fit clearly into any one of the three categories and there are cases where a proposition would seem to fall into more than one category. Indeed, some of the examples of propositions that we saw earlier reveal on analysis that they contain elements of description, interpretation, and evaluation. Certainly it is quite evident that most evaluative propositions contain descriptive and interpretative elements even though their primary function may be to evaluate. Take the first example given of evaluative propositions, A^b: "X was a bad ruler." In saying the X was a bad ruler one is also asserting that X was a ruler and thus giving a description. When we come to proposition C^b ("M, a contemporary of X, was wrong in thinking that X had not killed Y"), the use of the term 'thinking' to talk about M clearly indicates an interpretation, since there cannot be direct empirical evidence of what someone else thinks or even of the fact that he or she is thinking. And similar points could be made about most of the other examples of propositions. In short, I am quite aware that the dividing line between these categories of propositions is tenuous, but I do want to insist that with respect to *their primary function* in a large number of cases propositions will clearly fall into one of these categories and only into one; and that most of those propositions that seem to defy this classification can be brought in line with it through analysis.

Again, the categories are not meant to be exhaustive, because it may turn out on further reflection that one or more of these categories need to be subdivided into further categories or that there may be categories not included in the three mentioned. For example, the catego-

ry of evaluative propositions may be subdivided according to various evaluative criteria: one may want to separate those propositions that involve truth value judgments from those that express aesthetic and moral judgments. And interpretative propositions could be subdivided into those that involve psychological elements, social aspects, and so on. Moreover, there seem to be interpretative and evaluative factors that do not fit the categorical analysis as given. For example, clearly the historian "selects" materials and such selection determines in important ways the nature of the resulting historical account. But where do we put selection? Certainly not in the categories that have been specified, since selection is an act and not a proposition. Indeed, I would classify it as an act based, in the best of cases, on some historiographical principle itself expressed by a proposition and, in the worst, on idiosyncratic consciously or unconsciously operating principles. As such, however, selection influences historical accounts and, since it is not based on direct empirical evidence, involves interpretation or evaluation.¹² But selection is not a proposition that is part of the historical account itself. All this should indicate that the analysis of historical propositions into the three categories I have introduced here has its advantages but also its limitations. Those limitations, however, do not undermine the conclusions to which we shall arrive.

Before I finish the discussion of history, I must note a very important feature of historical propositions that seems to characterize all of them regardless of their primarily descriptive, interpretative, or evaluative import: All of them have a reference to temporality, provenance, and individuals. This should come as no surprise, for the aim of history is to give an account of the past, and although that aim is variously carried out through description, interpretation, and evaluation, the descriptions, interpretations, and evaluations that result always carry a reference, either direct or indirect, to time, to a source or origin, and to individuals. This should be evident in the examples of historical propositions we have provided. In all of them there is an explicit temporal element that characterizes all historical propositions. Indeed, even when historians use the historical present tense, it is always evident at some point that the historical account refers to the past.

Now, the case for provenance should be as easy to make. Although there may not be explicit references to a particular place in every historical proposition, even in those cases where there is not, we can always find some indirect reference that indicates that the proposition involves events that took place in a certain location. Temporal reference and provenance, then, are of the essence of history and no account can claim to be historical that lacks reference to time and provenance. The necessary reference to time and provenance

gives history a unique character and separates it from all other disciplines of learning. There are, of course, other disciplines of learning, such as archeology and natural history, that also deal with the past, but a closer look at these disciplines indicates that they are in fact historical. The case of natural history should require little argument, since its historical character is displayed in its very name. And with archeology, it should suffice to point to its concern with the understanding of and accounting for the existence and character of artifacts from the past.

The comparison between history and other disciplines of learning brings me to the third characteristic of historical propositions: the reference to individuals. This raises an interesting issue, namely, the question of whether history can be considered a science, when science is generally understood, as Aristotle postulated more than 2,000 years ago, to deal with the universal. After all, so the argument could go, the aim of science is to discover principles and relations that apply to all cases and which scientists formulate as laws that allow them to understand the way the world functions and to predict the future. Scientists are not interested in what is idiosyncratic of, say, this particular rock or that particular heart; they examine the particular only to learn some general principle that may be applicable to all instances of a type. By contrast, historians seem to do just the reverse; they are interested in particular events rather than in universal laws or principles that govern events.

Of course, if by history one means historiography, then it is clear that it deals with universals, for the aim of historiography is to formulate the universal rules of procedure to be used in all historical investigations. Those rules are meant to apply to the investigation of particular events, but they are not themselves individual or concerned with individual procedures. If they were, they would be useless, since they would apply to an individual case (or cases) and not to any others, whereas it is precisely the latter that the historiographer seeks to understand. But, as mentioned earlier, it is useful to keep history separate from historiography, for the historian and the historiographer are involved in enterprises that have different aims and follow different procedures.

Nor should history be confused with the philosophy of history.¹³ The philosophy of history, unlike history, deals with the way in which historical events in general, not particular events, unfold, how they are related, and the forces that bring about change and development. Philosophers of history refer to individuals, as other philosophers and scientists do, in order to gather data that may help them draw generalizations or as examples to illustrate their views. But their

main concern is with the formulation and discovery of the laws and principles that govern history, and those are necessarily universal. The philosophy of history, then, deals with universals, and this is something quite different from history when history is considered as an account of past events.¹⁴

Now, since we do not understand history here as either historiography or the philosophy of history, can we still say that it is a science in spite of its primary concern with the individual rather than the universal? Aristotle answered this question affirmatively but relegated history to a lower scientific level than those disciplines of learning that deal exclusively with the universal. I am not going to defend or attack Aristotle on this point, nor am I going to argue that history is or is not a science. To do that I would have to get involved in an extended discussion of what constitutes scientific knowledge that would take us far from our present concerns and would require more time and space than I have at my disposal. What I am prepared to defend is that the argument against the scientific nature of history based on the fact that history deals with individuals rather than universals is not convincing. I have two reasons to support my claim. The first reason is that, contrary to what Aristotle thought, not all science deals primarily with the universal. We already saw the cases of natural history and archeology, for example. Of course, someone might wish to say that those disciplines themselves, insofar as they do not deal with universals, cannot be considered sciences. But even if we were to grant that natural history and archeology are not really sciences, what do we make of natural theology and astronomy? I mention natural theology both because it is supposed to deal with only one individual, namely God, and because most of those who follow the Aristotelian model accept theology as a science. But even if we were to discard natural theology, we still have astronomy, for an integral component of astronomy is the investigation of individual celestial bodies.

The second reason for affirming that history could be a science in spite of its concern with the individual is, first, that history is not concerned exclusively with the individual, and that the other sciences, even those whose primary concern is the universal, are not concerned exclusively with the universal. It is true that the primary aim of history, as already stated, is the understanding of the past, but such an understanding, because it requires interpretation and evaluation, involves the use of universal concepts and principles. Moreover, part of the aim of history is to learn from the past and as such it does not shy away from the formulation of principles that can be applied to other circumstances. These always will be found in a context whose

overall concern will be with the past, but they themselves may not be restricted to the past. Second, even the sciences that are supposed to be concerned with the universal deal in some ways with the individual. For one, all empirical sciences gather the data on the basis of which they draw generalizations from the observation of individual phenomena. And, once they have reached the formulation of generalizations, those generalizations are applied to individual cases.

In short, it is not the case that all sciences deal exclusively with the universal. Some deal primarily with the universal and secondarily with the individual, whereas others deal primarily with the individual and only secondarily with the universal.¹⁵ Therefore, it makes no sense to argue that history is not a science because it deals primarily with individuals and only secondarily with universals. Hence, it is not the case that, for that reason, history should be considered less scientific than any of the sciences. But that does not mean, of course, that history is a science. To establish that would require much more than I have done here.

II. PHILOSOPHY

The first thing that needs to be noted when discussing philosophy is that the term 'philosophy,' like the term 'history,' presents us with a certain ambiguity. We found that 'history' had at least the following important meanings: (I) a series of past events, (II) an account of past events, and (III) a discipline of learning that could in turn be interpreted as (A) the activity whereby the account of past events is produced or (B) a set of rules to which the production of the account of past events must adhere. The last, (B), was called "historiography."

The ranges of meanings of the term 'philosophy' coincide with some of the categories that apply to 'history' but not with all. No meaning of 'philosophy' corresponds to the meaning of 'history' as series of past events. True, philosophy deals with the world and human experience, but neither the world nor human experience can be called philosophy. On the other hand, there is a sense in which philosophy can be understood as a set of ideas or beliefs concerning something or other that a particular person may hold. Thus we speak, for example, of "Wolfgang's philosophy" as the set of ideas he holds about life, or of "Brunhilda's philosophy of love" as the ideas she has concerning how to go about her work, and so on. Philosophy, understood in this way, is not to be identified with the set of ideas philosophers in particular hold. It is not a worked-out point of view nor does

it involve only certain ideas. It is, in short, the point of view that any ordinary person may have.

Moreover, there is some correspondence among the other categories of meanings for 'history' and those that apply to 'philosophy.' In the first place, philosophy is a discipline of learning that entails both an activity and a set of rules that govern such an activity. These meanings correspond to the meanings of 'history' as activity and historiography, respectively, although the philosophical counterpart of historiography is called philosophical methodology instead. Finally, the resulting product of philosophy understood as a discipline consists in a view of the world that seeks to be consistent, accurate, and comprehensive, and this product is the counterpart of the view of history as an account of a series of past events. Philosophy may be interpreted, therefore, in the following different ways:

- I. Philosophy as a set of ideas or beliefs, concerning anything, that an ordinary person may hold.
- II. Philosophy as view of the world, or any of its parts, that seeks to be accurate, consistent, and comprehensive.
- III. Philosophy as a discipline of learning.
 - A. Activity whereby a view of the world, or any of its parts, that seeks to be accurate, consistent, and comprehensive, is produced.
 - B. Formulation, explanation, and justification of rules to which the production of a view of the world, or any of its parts, that seeks to be accurate, consistent, and comprehensive, is produced (philosophical methodology).

Let me add before I proceed that the understandings of philosophy which have been indicated are by no means exhaustive. One of the most frequent areas where philosophers disagree is precisely in what they interpret philosophy to be. I hope, however, that the classification I have provided would be acceptable to most philosophers. At any rate, for present purposes I shall work with the view of philosophy that sees it at least as a view of the world that seeks to be accurate, consistent, and comprehensive. Those who disagree with such a view will find, I trust, that those disagreements about the nature of philosophy will not alter the validity of my arguments or the soundness of the conclusions I draw from them. I should also add that the reference to "the world" in this working definition of philosophy should not be taken to imply either a realistic metaphysics or a realistic epistemology. I leave open the interpretation of the referent of 'world' in this context.

In order to facilitate matters I shall treat philosophy understood in the stated sense as a set of propositions, in the manner I treated history considered as an account of past events. Note also that philosophical methodology, just like historiography, can be both a set of rules meant to govern philosophical investigation and the activity whereby that set of rules is produced. But, as in the case of historiography, I shall ignore this complication. I shall also bypass the issues that can be raised concerning the relation between philosophy considered as philosophical methodology and epistemology. Let it suffice to say in passing that if epistemology is understood to be concerned with the nature of knowledge and the means of its acquisition, philosophical methodology must be a branch of epistemology, dealing as it does with the means of acquiring a specific kind of knowledge.

Now, then, philosophy as a view of the world should consist of propositions that, like historical propositions, describe, interpret, and evaluate. Regardless of whether one accepts the meaning, objectivity, and truth of philosophical propositions, one would expect that at least most of those authors who have proposed them have intended them to describe, interpret, or evaluate. But the threefold distinction among propositions with which we have been working in the case of history does not seem to work as well in the case of philosophy. Let me explain.

At first it would seem that philosophy does contain purely descriptive propositions. Indeed, the following examples seem to substantiate that claim:

- 1P. P (where, for example, P = God is omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent).
- 2P. Q (where, for example, Q = God is not the cause of evil).
- 3P. P, therefore, Q.

Still, if we go back to the initial presentation of descriptive and interpretative propositions, we find that the primary function of descriptive propositions is to present events and ideas *for which there can be direct empirical evidence*, whereas the function of interpretative propositions is to go beyond empirical facts in order to reconstruct the fabric of unstated motives, intangible factors, and implicit circumstances within which events and ideas occur and for which there can be no direct empirical evidence. But, of course, if the distinction is presented in these terms, then clearly none of the examples of philosophical propositions that have been given and that *prima facie* appeared to be descriptive can be regarded as such, since there can be no direct

empirical evidence to support them. What direct empirical evidence can be brought to bear on the question of God's omnipotence and omniscience, for example? And the same applies to the statement that God is not the cause of evil. Such propositions must be classified, consequently, as interpretative. And, indeed, a survey of philosophical propositions will show that philosophy as such contains no purely descriptive propositions in the sense we have understood here.

Of course, philosophical accounts do contain propositions taken from our everyday discourse that appear to refer to facts for which there is direct empirical evidence. Descartes's famous claim, "I think, therefore I am" contains the proposition 'I am,' which is obviously descriptive. And we also find propositions such as 'Descartes wrote "Cogito, ergo sum"' or 'Peter killed Mary because he hated her.' But upon inspection it turns out that these propositions (1) are used only as examples that illustrate a type of action or event or a particular point of view (the case of 'Peter killed Mary because he hated her. '), or (2) are mentioned and not used (the case of 'Cogito, ergo sum. '), or (3) are part, as in the case of Descartes's 'I am,' of a larger claim for which there cannot be direct empirical evidence, or, finally (4), are historical reports (as is the case of 'Descartes wrote "Cogito, ergo sum."'). So, the first difference we may note between philosophy and history is that in philosophy there are no purely descriptive propositions in the sense that we have understood them, and those that *prima facie* appear to be descriptive turn out, on analysis, to be interpretative.

Since we have concluded that all philosophical propositions are interpretative, there is no need to provide further examples of this category of propositions. The three propositions that appeared to be descriptive but turned out to be interpretative can serve just as well as examples of the interpretative category.

On the other hand, philosophy, like history, does contain evaluative propositions. The following should serve as examples:

A^P. P is true (where, for example, P = God is omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent).

B^P. Argument 3^P is invalid.

C^P. P lacks proof.

D^P. Doctrine 1^P is incoherent.

I do not believe that many philosophers would dispute that the propositions of the types exemplified in A^P–D^P are typical of philosophical discourse. After all, the aim of philosophy is to determine truth value and validity. Indeed, even if we were going to argue, as