

Editorial Note

Giovanni Bonacina

The subject of this monographic issue is the relationship between philosophy and history. History of philosophy and philosophy of history; philosophy as having a history, and history as a subject of reflection for philosophy. But above all the history of philosophy as a subject of reflection for philosophy. The contributors to this issue share the conviction that this relationship – gradually more problematic, the stronger the aspiration to understand the latter as a science in some twentieth-century approaches to philosophy and the more marked the tendency towards specialization in historiography – is still important, deeming philosophy wrong to place history outside the sphere of its interests and history, or rather historiography, wrong to shirk the questions of philosophy. Hence, the choice by the participants in this monographic issue to subject their reflections to a public whom we would ideally like to be composed of philosophers and historians, and whom, in the case of historians of philosophy, these days increasingly often find themselves in the condition of not being wholly sure as to which of the two families of scholars they belong.

The reflections go in different directions and are developed using different tools. In some cases, a more methodological type of approach prevails; in others, the reference is to one author or another. In the case of the reflection on philosophical historiography, references are not lacking to those related disciplines – the history of ideas, intellectual history, etc. – which, especially in the Anglo-American world, have become the refuge frequented by those philosophy scholars attentive to history. Nonetheless, it is for this same reason that nowadays – in Italy too – they often fail to be recognized as philosophers by colleagues proclaiming to be so “by profession”. This figure of the professional philosopher, inscribed in a sort of well-determined scientific community, tends to assert appeal over the perhaps older but as yet nevertheless well-represented figure of the philosopher-ideologue, shepherd of souls, existential guide and holder of the word of knowledge. Not by chance, all of these interpretations of the trade are characterized by a certain shared diffidence towards the concept of the historicity of philosophy. Indeed, unlike the priest or scientist, typically deemed sacred by a certain, still energetic, positivistic tradition, the very nature of the concept rids the philosopher of any sacred aura.

While not wanting to conceal the naivety of a certain, now unfashionable phi-

Giovanni Bonacina

losophy of history, or the presumption of a certain philosophical historiography with its claim to exercise the only type of philosophy still practicable, the contributors to this issue agree in considering the historical dimension inseparable from philosophy and, without the latter, as risking winding up either a surrogate of religion or a faded copy of science. While these roles are neither new, nor in themselves unworthy, it is impossible to boil down what we conventionally understand as philosophy – referring to the great authors of the philosophical tradition – to these categories. Precisely because the contents of the tradition overshoot these possible topical results of the exercise of philosophy, in the end even those least likely to be swayed are forced to deal with the past of their discipline. In other words, they are forced to contend with the classics and hence also to define who the latter are and why they as such – and not others – should be worthy. In itself, this activity already implies dealing with history: without doubt, the history of the discipline, but in the case of philosophy also history in the broader sense (political history, social history, etc.), of which philosophical thought – but that is not all – is, despite itself even, a noteworthy cultural expression, conditioned by factors that are not only internal but also external to it.