Editorial: It’s Time for Fresh Ideas

It is now almost five years since I was appointed as editor-in-chief of *Journal of the Philosophy of History* (my first issue was Issue 2 of 2017). While it has been an absolute privilege to work in this role, and often a pleasure too, it is time for me to move on – to make space for future generations, and fresh ideas.

Now is also an excellent opportunity to take stock of what we have published and achieved at large during these almost five years. To start with, we have produced guest-edited *special issues* on R. G. Collingwood; Frank Ankersmit; the testability of philosophical theories by history (*forum debate*); pragmatism and philosophy of history; philosophy of intellectual history and conceptual change (*forum debate*); historical thinking and the human; and the forgotten classics in philosophy of history. We have also published a good number of *review articles* and *book reviews*, and of course unsolicited *research articles*. The total number of the latter is 35, although this is not necessarily the exact number, because in some cases the borderline between a review essay and a research article is vague, and at least one paper in the research paper category was invited.\(^1\) In addition, we have published one interview.\(^2\) It is worth emphasizing that, whether solicited or unsolicited, every research article submission has been anonymously reviewed by two to five readers, and that any invited and submitted paper for a special issue has run the risk of being rejected. Review essays have been refereed by at least one reviewer. The only exception to this rule are the short descriptive book reviews that have been edited by the editors of the journal and by language specialists at the University of Oulu.

Is it possible to conclude anything in general about this outcome? In particular, is it possible to classify the papers into categories and detect some tendencies in the field of philosophy of history? While it is naturally possible to categorize the papers, I am forced to answer in the negative as to the question of finding a general trend; the same goes for spotting any common tendencies. There is so much diversity both in terms of style and topic that no evidence of

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zeroing in on anything can be discerned. There are analytical papers dealing with metaphysical subjects and metaphysics in philosophy, exegetical and/or interpretative articles on key thinkers that share a lot with approaches in intellectual history, conceptual explorations of topics that are similar to studies on politics and/or conceptual history, papers on central issues in the history and philosophy of science, forward-looking interrogations of contemporary societal themes and so on. It is not worth pre-empting readers’ judgments about how these works might be categorized; all are easily discoverable in the public record; readers can and should make up their own minds.

While such diversity can be celebrated, it is also worth asking whether there should be more coherence and coordination in the approaches. This is something that I have puzzled over previously in an editorial too, pondering whether philosophy of history should have a paradigm (liberally interpreting this Kuhnian concept). Probably not, at least if it means forcing one approach over the other. Which or whose paradigm would one choose? Of course, it is a different matter if a group manages to create a concerted framework that is compelling enough for others to follow, as may have happened earlier in the case of analytical philosophy and the philosophy of language in the first and second halves of the twentieth century. In any case, the numbers (of practicing scholars) would not justify such any push towards a paradigm: there are few of us, and any attempt to shrink this scope would be very unwise. In my view, all practitioners should be more than welcome to submit regardless of their nomination and orientation as long as they somehow contribute to the philosophy of history.

Yet there is something more definitive to say. Firstly, in my experience, philosophy of historiography would benefit from a better awareness and understanding of general philosophical discussions. One example will be enough to illustrate what I mean. While the philosophers and theoreticians of historiography have written about explanation for decades, and still frequently refer to these debates, time appears to have frozen: the references all too often pertain to arguments for and (typically) against the covering-law model. In the time since this model was avant-garde a huge deal of work has been done about explanation in philosophy, such as the innovative and popular project by James Woodward. Of course, this may be merely indicative of a more wide-reaching problem in academia: different and even neighboring

fields work on similar topics but are not necessarily aware of others’ developments and do not realize that a neighboring field may have developed more advanced tools. Indeed, this applies the other way too. For example, in the past decade or so, a new interest in narrativity in and of science has rightfully emerged, producing extremely interesting and high-quality scholarship.\(^5\) And yet the practitioners appear to have little awareness of the decades-long theorizing on narrativity in philosophy of historiography (and in literary studies). In vain, one looks for a definition of narrative in these debates.

My point is thus that a better awareness of philosophical studies and topics would prevent us from attempting to invent the wheel again, or worse, from being stuck with the theories and tools of a bygone era. Yet more importantly, some mistakes could perhaps be avoided if one were to rely on the human work and capital accumulated by others. And it is in any case virtuous if one’s knowledge is up to date on any given topic. Naturally, the fields and their exact focuses are different. The ultimate aim in philosophy of historiography is to develop philosophies of and perhaps also for historiography. This is to say that it takes time to study the philosophical topics discussed in “mainstream philosophy” and the time taken must be balanced against more focused attention devoted to more applied topics in philosophy of historiography. Further, a good philosopher of historiography is familiar with the practical work of historiography. Nevertheless, this lack of interdisciplinary exchange is an issue that must be taken into account when the future of the field and its curriculums are considered. I, for one, am convinced that a more intensified focus on the topics of philosophy would improve the quality of the studies in philosophy of historiography.

I always thought that my job as editor-in-chief is more a facilitator than a gatekeeper. The main purpose and incentive is to provide a venue for good-quality, original and inspirational research in the philosophy of history. I think that we have succeeded in this over the past five years, and I am proud of all the papers and thankful to all the writers that have published in Journal of the Philosophy of History. And yet this role naturally has meant unavoidably functioning as a gatekeeper too. My wish to gear the field towards a heightened philosophical awareness is itself an indication of this. In practice, it has recently manifested in an increasing number of rejections, thereby causing regrettable disappointments to authors. There are two main reasons behind these judgments. A paper has been typically rejected if it does not fit the scope of the journal or its quality is lacking. Indeed, it is a little surprising how reluctant many authors are to revise their papers, even when the instructions to do

\(^5\) LSE – Narrative Science Project – Home (narrative-science.org).
so are clearly articulated by referees and the editors. Too often, only cosmetic or other minor modifications are implemented. Maybe the slogan “publish or perish” has been so widely accepted that it is interpreted to mean that getting published as often as possible must take priority over the quality. This is my other message to the authors after years at the helm of this journal: please work long enough with your papers, take editors’ and reviewer’s comments seriously. I offer a related plea to the institutions that host these authors: try to ensure that the institutional working conditions enable this slow but necessary work. Less is more in this regard. I am fully aware that this is easier to say than to do.

My job was made easier by a highly professional and superbly well-functioning team of editors. Indeed, they and their work has been pivotal for the success of the journal, and I could not have hoped for a better team. My sincerest thanks to Giuseppina D’Oro, Allan Megill, Herman Paul and Marek Tamm for these years. It is absolutely wonderful and reassuring to know that most have decided to continue editing the journal. I thank Eugen Zeleňák, who masterfully and always so reliably selected and edited our review essays and book reviews. One should not forget the excellent work done by Georg Gangl on social media, that is, Twitter and Facebook. Circulation of information via social media is vital these days. Another essential element of the editorial work has been done by the students of English philology at the University of Oulu under the supervision of Andrew Pattison. Eleven classes of students have had an opportunity to work with the papers of *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, and witness that their efforts, too, are publicly globally displayed. This diligent work has added the required professional touch and polish to the end products, something that the publisher has not been able to offer but that an international journal requires. My warmest gratitude to all of them. I am extremely pleased that this cooperation will continue in the future. Further, the founding editor of the journal Frank Ankersmit has stayed in the background but been always available for advice and consultation. I thank for this invaluable support, too.

It is worth adding that all editors and proof-readers have contributed to the journal entirely for free. Finally, I warmly thank all the scholars who have written to the journal, and all who have read it. Writers: at the end of the day, you provide the content that is published. And readers: you have provided the main reason to produce this journal. Thank you!

There are two overlapping challenges that I could not meet despite making some attempts towards these ends. Both deal with the challenge of how to make this journal more widely available. It is evident that interest in *Journal of the Philosophy of History* is wider than the actual readers have authorized access
to this journal. Libraries and other institutions simply do not subscribe enough to satisfy the potential readership. The solution to the lower-than-desired subscription rate would be Open Access. As we know, this is the direction in which academic publishing is moving anyway. This issue was raised a few times with the publisher, but no solution was found. The pandemic did not make it easier and, in effect, deferred any action to the future. It is worth adding yet one more thing. While our editorial team has stayed solid and permanent for the whole five years, there have been numerous changes in the production team of the publisher. Ideally, it would not change quite so much, although the co-operation has nevertheless been good.

It is now time for the new chief editor Chiel van den Akker to continue from here. The future looks bright and reassuring in this respect. To put it bluntly, it is difficult to imagine a more fitting editor-in-chief than Chiel. He is well-read in philosophy, possesses the required sensibility to history and historical research, and already has a proven track record in editing.6 Above all, he is a great and original scholar himself, as his recent books testify.7 This guarantees that he possesses the professional skill-set required of the chief editor and has an insight into the field and scholarship in the philosophy of history and historiography. I am thus very confident about the future of Journal of the Philosophy of History and wish the best of luck for Chiel and all the editors of the journal. Needless to say, I will be reading future issues with keen interest!

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