CHAPTER SIX

THE INFLUENCE OF THE HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CONCEPT ‘SYSTEM OF PHILOSOPHY’

I. Internal and External Influences

Jacob Brucker’s *Historia critica philosophiae* was the most monumental work on the history of philosophy produced in the eighteenth century—both in terms of its quantitative scale and in terms of its methodological innovation. After its first publication in 1742–1744, it came out in 1766–1767 in a second edition, in which a sixth volume, an appendix, was added. The *Historia critica philosophiae* was later used as the basis for William Enfield’s history of philosophy, *The history of philosophy from the earliest times to the beginning of the present century; drawn up from Brucker’s ‘Historia critica philosophiae’,* an abridged, English paraphrase of Brucker’s Latin opus. Enfield’s work was first printed in London in 1791, and came out in a second edition in 1792, a third edition in 1819, and a fourth edition in 1837. In this way Brucker’s *Historia critica philosophiae* remained in print, in one form or another, for almost hundred years.

These bibliographical facts clearly indicate the popularity of Brucker’s *Historia critica philosophiae*. In addition, Brucker had also written a history of philosophy in German a few years before his *Historia critica philosophiae*, namely the *Kurtze Fragen aus der philosophischen Historie* (1731–1736). Only two years after the first publication of the *Historia critica philosophiae*, Brucker published a Latin textbook geared to the teaching of history of philosophy in higher education, the *Institutiones historiae philosophicae usui academicae iuventutis adornatae*, which came out in a first edition in 1747. A second edition appeared in 1756, and a third edition in 1790. This textbook was based on the historiography presented in the *Historia critica philosophiae*, but it was scaled down in size from six to one volume, and its content was simplified in order to meet the pedagogical needs of classroom teaching.

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1 For Bibliographical information about Enfield’s work, see SCHNEIDER, ‘A bibliography of nineteenth-century histories of philosophy in German, English, and French (1810–1899)’, p. 160.
The fact that Brucker not only addressed a European elite of intellectuals through his Latin *Historia critica philosophiae* in a scholarly and theoretically sophisticated manner, but also cared about how to convey history of philosophy to students in a classroom, probably explains some of his enormous influence. History of philosophy was not an independent discipline taught at German universities in the eighteenth century, but it picked up in the nineteenth century, where it became one of the central disciplines taught at philosophy departments at German universities.2 Brucker’s *Institutiones historiae philosophicae usui academicae inuentitis adornatae*, designed for the teaching of history of philosophy in the Gymnasium, could be used as a model. In this way Brucker’s *Historia critica philosophiae* not only influenced the discipline internally, for instance Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*, which owes several of its entries to Brucker, but also externally, by providing a textbook which could be used, either directly or as a model, in the practice of teaching history of philosophy.3

It could be of great interest to look into the interplay between the shifting historiographies of philosophy and the shifting institutional practice, as far as the latter can be traced in the abundance of statutes related to the teaching of history of philosophy at various Northern European universities from the eighteenth century onwards. In particular, it would be of interest to sift through such statutes in order to see whether historiographical assumptions connected to the concept ‘system of philosophy’ (e.g. periodization, ‘eclecticism’, ‘syncretism’) materialized in the institutional practice, that is, in the selection of primary sources and analytic tools.4

If such an external impact is detectable, it also means that students who were later to become philosophers or historians of philosophy, were predisposed to look at the past through these simple introductory works, affecting their choice of material to be studied, the method employed, and the evaluations of individual past thinkers and epochs. For instance, past thinkers termed ‘syncretists’, such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, would be avoided or at least be dealt with in an less

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3 For the influence of Brucker’s *Historia critica philosophiae*, see p. 12 n. 3 above.