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The Futures of the Philosophy of History: An Introduction¹

This theme issue is based on the workshop “The Future of Philosophy of History” that the Centre for Philosophical Studies of History organized in June 2022 at the University of Oulu, Finland. (Along with the editors of this issue, the workshop was organized by Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen and Kalle Pihlainen.) For the event, we invited nine young scholars, academically speaking, to reflect on the future of the philosophy of history, and seven of their contributions are included in revised form in this theme issue.²

In our original introduction text for the workshop, we wrote that the philosophy of history currently is having something of a moment, with key publications displaying a vision for the field having appeared in recent years.³ At the same time we also noted that the field is very heterogeneous. There is at the moment no *common set of questions* or a *common approach* that could give the field some form of overall coherence, nor is there any integrative framework or specific direction for the future visible. Given this situation, some even doubt that the philosophy of history is an intellectual endeavour with any discernable shape or cohesion at all. Additionally, in recent years, new meta-frameworks such as theory of history (sometimes also called historical theory) and the philosophy of the historical sciences have also been introduced. These approaches expressly aim at integrating the philosophy of history and its discussion into wider debates that deal with our relations to the past more broadly or with all the different sciences that share a fundamentally historical

¹ We would like to thank Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, Kalle Pihlainen, and Chiel van den Akker for their advice throughout the editing process. Thanks are further due to 14 anonymous reviewers for their unpaid and usually uncredited work and to Andrew Pattison and his students from the Department of English Philology of the University of Oulu for the copyediting of the texts published in this theme issue.

² Most of the original presentations of the workshop can be watched on the YouTube channel of the Centre for Philosophical Studies of History, through this playlist: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLNKpHjJ-IKEkUk9ZTr4eZLsQu_POJsI8j (20.04.2023). The playlist also includes the recordings of the talks "Theoretical Explorations of the Historical Condition" by Zoltán Boldizsár Simon and "Rules of Engagement. A Philosophical Framework for Assessing Political Influence on Historiography" by Georg Gangl, which are not included in this theme issue.

³ P. Roth, *The Philosophical Structure of Historical Explanation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020); Ch. van den Akker, *The Exemplifying Past. A Philosophy of History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018); A. Currie, *Rock, Bone, and Ruin. An Optimist's Guide to the Historical Sciences* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2018); J.-M. Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

subject matter.⁴ Such attempts at incorporation further add to the doubt that the philosophy of history has any distinct issues or any identity of its own.

If we gauge the wellbeing of the field by the quantitative output created over the last decades though, we might say that the philosophy of history is doing fine as far as the “important things” are concerned.⁵ This much has been shown by a recent bibliometric study of the field conducted by Berber Bevernage and others which indicates an overall and sustained growth in textual output in the philosophy of history in the timespan between 1945 and 2014.⁶ However, this overall growth in publications over the last 70 years might just be the result of an overall expanding academia rather than an indication that the field has *progressed* in any more substantive sense. Without a common set of questions and a shared approach to these questions, it becomes next to impossible to define progress in the field and to develop criteria and metrics for evaluating such progress. Under these conditions, the overall increase in output might as well indicate non-communication or mere verbal exchanges between the different approaches in the field.

So, while there is certainly something going on in and around the philosophy of history, it remains unclear whether this buzz can or should be channeled and turned into a more *concerted effort* that makes progress on specific issues. This “diagnosis” was the initial spark for the organization of our workshop, and it is also the starting point for our thinking about what kind of development would be beneficial for the future of the field. Not so surprisingly, even we two editors of this theme issue do not fully agree on the future direction we would like the field to take. Still, we found some common ground that we believe is also broadly visible in the contributions to this theme issue as well as in some central publications in recent years. Our position in this respect is that the philosophy of history would benefit from a more *focused* and “*disciplined*” approach to the philosophical issues concerning history and historiography.⁷ Timothy Williamson described “philosophical discipline” in the following way:

“To be ‘disciplined’ by X here is not simply to pay lip-service to X; it is to make a systematic conscious effort to conform to the deliverances of X, where such conformity is at least somewhat easier to recognize than is the answer to the original philosophical question.”⁸

⁴ On theory of history, see J. Ohara, *The Theory and Philosophy of History. Global Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022) and H. Paul, *Key Issues in Historical Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015); on the philosophy of the historical sciences, A. Tucker, “Sciences of Historical Tokens and Theoretical Types: History and the Social Sciences” in H. Kincaid (ed.), *Philosophy of Social Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 272-297), and A. Tucker, “Biology and Natural History: What Makes the Difference” in M. I. Kaiser, O. Scholz, and D. Plenge (eds.), *Explanation in the Special Sciences. The Case of Biology and History* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014, 347-366).

⁵ About those “important things”, Aviezer Tucker wrote in 2001: “[A]s far as the important things are concerned—research, publication, a reading public, genuine philosophical importance, and interesting subject matter—the philosophy of history has never been in better shape and continues to grow and expand.” (A. Tucker, “The Future of the Philosophy of Historiography”, *History and Theory*, 40 (2001), 43)

⁶B. Bevernage, G. Lecker de Almeida, B. Delanote, A. Froeyman, P. Huijbers, and K. van de Mieroop, “Philosophy of History After 1945: A Bibliometric Study”, *History and Theory*, 58 (2019), especially 412-413. For a similarly positive assessment concerning the output of the field in the 1980s and 1990s, see A. Tucker, *Future of the Philosophy of Historiography*.

⁷ We use philosophy of history throughout this text to mean both the philosophy of history and the philosophy of historiography. The philosophy of history, broadly speaking, deals with general questions about the nature of history, historicity, and any form of “substantive historical ontology” (D. Little, *New Contributions to the Philosophy of History* (Amsterdam: Springer 2010), 3) that we presuppose or perhaps have to presuppose. In its substantive forms, it also queries whether there is a pattern, direction, a goal, or some fundamental meaning to history overall. The philosophy of historiography amounts to the “philosophical examination of all the aspects of our descriptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the past” (A. Tucker, “Introduction” in A. Tucker (ed.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 3) and of historiographic practices more generally.

⁸ T. Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 285.

One natural “discipliner” for the philosophy of history in this sense could be historiography itself with its specific disciplinary practices, though there might of course be others too (prime among them logic and rationality). In other words, we believe historiography and its practices hold the potential to focus and discipline the field; through them, we can delineate both a set of central issues and a common approach for the field. Moreover, further institutionalization of the field could also help in developing such focus and “discipline”.

However, we are not saying that all (or any) of the contributors to this theme issue share this exact vision for the future of the field. However, we editors think there are a set of common questions and ways of engaging with those questions identifiable in the contributions. From this we infer that philosophy of history as an academic field might be headed towards a more disciplined future. In what follows, we will introduce *four plausible futures* for the field which are all central for this project of a more focused philosophy of history and which are also discernible to different degrees in the contributions to this theme issue. These concern 1) the disciplinary future of the field; 2) its paradigmatic future; 3) its topical future; and 4) its future approach. Future discussion will hopefully show whether others find the outlined, more disciplined futures of the field as plausible and desirable as we do.

Talking first about the field’s **disciplinary future**, the scholars assembled in this theme issue, along with the editors and other scholars of our generation, are in a sense the “personal future” of the field, as academic subjects can only continue to exist through succeeding generations of disciplinary practitioners. Most of us are “early career scholars”, as the phrase goes, within a few years of our PhDs, and it will be incumbent on us and others of our “generation” to keep the philosophy of history going over the next few decades. Yet, most of us came to the field via different and individual paths that we ourselves had to trample on so to speak, just as we are found in many different departments and institutional structures, often beyond either historiography or philosophy. Both of these, the lack of any more established entrance way into the field and the diffuse institutional positioning of many philosophers of history, indicate a serious *lack of disciplinary recognition and institutionalization* of the field. This lack also accounts, at least partially, for the diversity of backgrounds and the proliferation of positions, approaches, and interests that we see in the field.⁹

This sense of a field lacking recognition was also palpable among the participants of the workshop. All of us had stories to tell about our articles and projects being turned down out of pure ignorance towards the philosophy of history as a field and towards its main themes. While it must be noted that this is only anecdotal evidence, too unreliable to operate as justification for any claims about the actual reasons for rejections. This shared experience nevertheless indicates that younger scholars in philosophy of history wish their field would have more recognition within academia. Further *institutionalization* would offer an obvious solution for this problem. However, gaining institutional recognition might not be possible without further *disciplinization*. In the humanities, institutional recognition and support are often tied to degree and study programmes, as the direct monetarization possibilities for our research are relatively limited. But without being able to present the core problems, approaches, and common positions that exist in the field, study or degree programs cannot be created. In other words: In order for study programs to exist there needs to be a relatively disciplined academic field of study. With such disciplinization would come some recognition, which in turn would facilitate access to publication venues and competitive funding. Disciplines also have more stable mechanisms for reproducing themselves via the students they train and the degrees they confer on those students. And with students and degrees come positions, which means (young) scholars in the

⁹ This lack of any more formal structure is also the reason why we prefer to speak in this text about the philosophy of history as a field instead of a discipline, though we do use both terms interchangeably at times for the sake of stylistic variation. On the reasons for the proliferation of many different positions and frameworks in the field, see also J.M. Kuukkanen, “The current state of play in the theory and philosophy of history: the Roth-Ankersmit controversy and beyond”, *Rethinking History* 18 (2014), 613-619.

philosophy of history could make a living doing what they love. Finally, a certain level of a canonization is required to establish study programs, as theories, themes, and authors to be taught need to be selected. Any such canonization would, however, also produce an *au-delà* of the canon that tends to get overlooked, just as the selection of the canon itself can be biased in all kinds of ways, creating systematic blind spots within the newly formed discipline. This kind of development would likely diminish the heterogeneity of research within the field and thus comes with a price, but in the long run it could lead to more jobs, students, and funding. Mindful of these issues, we invite all scholars in the philosophy of history, and especially those of our generation, to seriously think about the prospects of further institutionalization and disciplinarization of the field.

The second future we would like to talk about concerns the heart of those “important things” or the **paradigmatic future** of the field, that is, the different *philosophical frameworks* that are currently being pursued. As we see it, there is no lack of these in the philosophy of history at the moment, something that is also obvious in the different frameworks applied by the contributions to this theme issue, and the question here is whether the field is or should be moving towards something of an overarching paradigm.

One of these philosophical frameworks present in our theme issue is *actor-centered* or *humanistic philosophy of history* in the tradition of R. G. Collingwood and British idealism.¹⁰ This position holds that it is the main task of historiography to understand the reasons historical actors had for their actions, and consequently, the main task of the philosophy of history is to elucidate the presuppositions of such a humanistic understanding of the past via actions and reasons. This approach is represented in our theme issue by the first paper below, Jonas Ahlskog’s “Pre-Narrativist Philosophy of History”, but it has been articulated in a forceful way by others too in the recent years, especially in connection with and as criticism of theories of the Anthropocene, which claim that this new geological period demands a fundamentally new form of non-anthropocentric historiography too.¹¹

As such, this actor-centered and Collingwoodian paradigm is further set against philosophies of history that emphasise *retrospection* and *retrospective redescriptions of the past* as a central characteristic and goal of historiography and as main objects of philosophical interest. Standing in the tradition of Arthur Danto’s book “Analytical Philosophy of History” from the 1960s,¹² these accounts of historiography tend to focus on questions of *narrative* and *narrative explanations*, which are (re-)descriptions of the past that can only be furnished *ex post*. As such, this position has in recent years been championed in the field by Chiel van den Akker and Paul Roth, among others. In these authors, the emphasis on retrospection is wedded to a broadly constructivist understanding of the past, though appropriations of Danto’s central insights about retrospection are not limited to this.¹³ *Constructivism*, then, is another philosophical framework currently

¹⁰ R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1956); J. Ahlskog, *The Primacy of Method in Historical Research: Philosophy of History and the Perspective of Meaning* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2021); G. D’Oro, *Why Collingwood Matters: A Defence of Humanistic Understanding* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, forthcoming).

¹¹ For a criticism of this claim from a humanistic perspective, see G. D’Oro, “In Defence of a Humanistically Oriented Historiography: The Nature/Culture Distinction at the Time of the Anthropocene” in J.-M. Kuukkanen (ed.), *Philosophy of History. Twenty-First-Century Perspectives* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 216-237. For accounts that emphasize the challenges that the Anthropocene poses to our historical thinking, see D. Chakrabarty, “Anthropocene Time”, *History and Theory*, 57 (2018), 5-32, and Z. B. Simon, *The Epochal Event. Transformations in the Entangled Human, Technological, and Natural Worlds* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

¹² A. C. Danto, *Narration and Knowledge. Including the Integral Text of Analytical Philosophy of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

¹³ Roth, *Philosophical Structure of Historical Explanation*; van den Akker, *The Exemplifying Past*. For a different take on the centrality of retrospection in historiography, see G. Gangl, “Narrative Explanations: The Case for Causality”, *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 15 (2021), 157-181.

alive and well in the philosophy of history. The main idea here is that the core cognitive products of the historian—say, their narratives, colligations, or some fundamental meaning the past is said to have—are (retrospective) constructs that cannot be found in the past itself.¹⁴ Next to Danto, the main influences and philosophical commitments of the different constructivist positions stem from analytic philosophy and literary theory. A form of this constructivism is present in this theme issue with Eugen Zeleňák's contribution "On Plurality and Relativism in History". Properly speaking, the traditional *narrativism* of such figures as Hayden White or Frank Ankersmit also falls under this constructivist label, and so does Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen's *postnarrativism* to a certain extent, all of which are also shortly discussed in Zeleňák's contribution.¹⁵

Postnarrativism links to another budding framework in the field, *pragmatist philosophy of history*, which has been in development in its main also by Kuukkanen over the last few years.¹⁶ The central point here is to study historiography as a set of (rational) *practices* that license the historian to make certain material inferences and to articulate subjective but still rationally justified points of view about the past. The general philosophical commitments of this position are derived from the traditional pragmatisms of Dewey and Sellars and especially from the neo-pragmatism of Robert Brandom. In a wider sense, this philosophy of history is represented in our theme issue by Tullio Viola's contribution "Memory, Folk Narratives, and Social Critique". And as Viola also shows, such a pragmatist account lends itself quasi naturally also to issues that are being discussed in wider theory of history concerning the aims and uses of our different relations to the past.

Another philosophical framework focusing on practices that has equally been gaining traction in the field in recent years is *philosophy of history in practice*, which is championed in this theme issue by Adrian Currie with his "Narratives, Events & Monotremes: The Philosophy of History in Practice". This approach has in recent years also been advocated by Herman Paul under the label of "HPH", combined History and Philosophy of History, which is itself modelled after already existing HPS, History and Philosophy of Science.¹⁷ The idea here is to build our philosophy of history on a close examination of what historians are actually doing in their disciplinary practices, with the main philosophical commitments and categories for this endeavour deriving from HPS and discussions in modern postpositivist philosophy of science more generally. The reliance of this approach on philosophy of science also marks a difference to the emphasis on practice that we see in pragmatist philosophies of history.

Finally, while missing from this theme issue, there is also an *evidentialist framework*, especially concerning questions in the philosophy of historiography, which has in its main been developed by Aviezer Tucker over the last decades, but which has seen some uptake too in recent years.¹⁸ The idea here is to start from the

¹⁴ For different forms of this constructivism and their different retrospective elements, see E. Zeleňák, "Two Versions of a Constructivist View of Historical Work", *History and Theory*, 54 (2015), 209-225.

¹⁵ H. White, *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); F. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic. A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language* (The Hague, Boston, and London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983); J.-M. Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography*.

¹⁶ J.-M. Kuukkanen, "Moving Deeper into Rational Pragmatism. A Reply to my Reviewers", *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 11 (2017), 83-117; J.M. Kuukkanen, "Historiographic Knowledge as Claiming Correctly" in J.-M. Kuukkanen (ed.), *Philosophy of History. Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, 44-66. But also T. Viola, *Peirce and the Uses of History* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2020).

¹⁷ On HPH, see H. Paul, "History and Philosophy of History (HPH): A Call for Cooperation" in J.-M. Kuukkanen (ed.), *Philosophy of History. Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, 165-179; on HPS and its checkered history, see J. Schickore, "Explication Work for Science and Philosophy", *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 12 (2018), 191-211.

¹⁸ A. Tucker, *Our Knowledge of the Past. A Philosophy of Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); A. Tucker, "Historiographic Ancients and Moderns: The Difference between Thucydides and Ranke" in A. Lianeri (ed.), *Knowing the Future Time in and Through Greek Historiography* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016),

central insight that all knowledge of the past is inferential and must be inferred via the information traces that the past left behind in the present, that is, the evidence. For evidentialists, the relationship between (information) theory, evidence, and the products that historians craft therefore becomes the issue of central philosophical importance. The relevant background here are the debates and advances over the last decades in Bayesian and informational epistemology and again postpositivist philosophy of science more generally. And just as the HPH and the pragmatist framework, the evidentialist programme has in recent years advocated empirical analyses of historiographic practices.¹⁹

Now, as this cursory and incomplete overview of the current main frameworks in the philosophy of history shows, we can reasonably describe the state of the art of the field concerning those “important things” in different ways. We might want to highlight the *philosophical frameworks* that are being pursued, or the *problems* that are deemed (most) relevant, or the specific *approach* to those problems that is being advocated, with all of these being interdependent. The frameworks are built on different basic philosophical commitments and background assumptions and through them they show an “elective affinity” for specific problems and specific approaches to these problems, which they describe in a theory-laden way. (Philosophy is in its descriptions just as theory-laden as any science is, though the actual “theory load” is of course different.) Some of the frameworks are even grounded in *different metaphilosophies*. Philosophy of history in practice for instance is broadly naturalist in its approach, making philosophy something of an underlabourer for historiography, whereas humanistic philosophy of history is broadly rationalist in this respect, seeing as its task to clarify the different absolute presuppositions of the sciences and humanities.

On the face of it, this proliferation of frameworks with differing core commitments, main questions of interest, and approaches looks like a situation in which heterogeneity must reign, especially as philosophy, other than the sciences, lacks any standard method(s) for choosing between them.²⁰ While there is indeed no agreed upon method in the philosophy of history, or in philosophy more generally, for choosing between competing philosophical frameworks, we believe that a certain *reorientation towards common questions emerging from the practices of historiography* can be observed. Such a *broadly empirical approach* is visible

361-385; G. Gangl, “Facing the Music. History and Theory in the Key of the Philosophy of Historiography”, in *i Philosophy of History Now !*, <https://www oulu.fi/en/blogs/philosophy-history-now/facing-music> (06.05.2023).

¹⁹ A. Tucker, “Where Do We Go from Here? Jubilee Report on ‘History and Theory’”, *History and Theory*, 49 (2010), 64-84; G. Gangl, *Facing the Music*.

²⁰ On the lack of any overarching paradigm or even agreement on central issues in philosophy, see also D. Chalmers, “Why Isn’t There More Progress in Philosophy?“, *Philosophy*, 90 (2015), 3-31. Given this situation, one could think about the applicability of Planck’s Principle in the philosophy of history. Max Planck, reflecting on the history of physics, famously said that the old generation needs to pass before a new paradigm can become hegemonic through a younger generation that already grows up with the new paradigm and therefore naturally grows into it. While this description of paradigm change is probably not very fitting for many episodes in the history of science, physics included, it might be descriptively accurate for cases of framework discontinuation in the philosophy of history (for a critical account of the applicability of Planck’s Principle in the history of science, see L. Laudan, *Science and Values. The Aims of Science and their Role in Scientific Debate* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1984), 18-19). In our field, it does seem to be the case that certain positions fizzle out over the years because an older generation has (generationally) passed (or moved on to other shores) and a newer one has not taken up the framework anymore for a set of (unknown) reasons. It is arguable that something like this might just be happening now in the philosophy of history to traditional narrativism, and that this has happened to postmodernism over the last decade or so. (On the idea that narrativism is past its prime, see Z.B. Simon and J.-M. Kuukkanen, “Introduction: Assessing Narrativism”, *History and Theory*, 54 (2015), 153-161; for the claim that postmodernism has been mostly abandoned in the philosophy of history, J. H. Zammito, “Historians and the Philosophy of Historiography” in A. Tucker *Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, 63-85). As to why certain frameworks die out in this way, this is an open question. For the moment, sociological hypotheses about the coming and going of intellectual fashions are just as good as those that claim these frameworks were unfit for purpose in the philosophy of history and therefore discarded.

in many of the main frameworks in the field as well as in the contributions to this theme issue. The future of the philosophy of history then does, for the moment at least, seem to lie in a set of common questions and a broadly understood common empirical approach to those questions, rather than in a unified paradigm. These two therefore are the next two plausible futures of the philosophy of history that we would like to talk about.

This brings us nicely to the issue of the field's **topical future**; some such common questions are clearly visible in the contributions to this theme issue and indeed get to the heart of those "important things" in the field. The first concerns the already mentioned *relationship between actor-centered and retrospective accounts* of historiography and historiographic descriptions. Phrased as a set of questions: Is there a primary perspective in historiography, and if so, why? Can some historiographic practices and products perhaps be better explained through one specific perspective? Attempts at different answers to these questions can be found in this theme issue in the contributions of Ahlskog and Zeleňák, but also in other recent central works in the field by the "old guard".²¹ What is added to this discussion by this theme issue is a spirited defense of the actor-centered account that tackles the opposing view head-on (Ahlskog) and an emphasis on the analysis of actual historiographic practices as a way forward in this debate (Zeleňák). Both, the *conceptual clarity* with which the issue is stated and the *focus on practices* have the potential to "discipline" the discussion in the way described above. Plus, both texts also show an *appreciation for the complexity* of the issue at stake. The tried and tired oppositions and strict "either-ors" of many older debates and frameworks do not seem to apply anymore and the answers that are suggested instead are more limited but also more promising. In this particular discussion, as Ahlskog and Zeleňák both indicate, the answer might very well be that both perspectives under discussion are central to any proper understanding of historiography and that they describe different aspects of the historian's work. Future discussions should be able to tell to what extent this is the case and whether any one of them has priority over the other.

A second issue of central concern that still engages philosophers of history young and old is *realism*. In our theme issue, this topic is present with a defence of a realist account of historiographic narratives and narrative explanations. Currie argues that narratives and narrative explanations, at least sometimes, faithfully describe what happened in the past and why it happened, and he shows this through the empirical examination of a historiographic debate around "Winston the platypus" and by scrutinizing the archival practices of historians more generally. But of course, the discussion around realism in the philosophy of history is not limited to narrative and narrative explanation; it includes questions about the past existence of all kinds of higher-order entities posited by historians such as colligations or the putative meanings of whole historiographic texts. Questions about the reality of these higher-order entities are in this theme issue taken up by Zeleňák who casts doubt on realist readings of any of them given that there are inconsistent historiographic accounts about basically any major historical event—with Zeleňák's empirical example being the historiography of the French Revolution. While discussions on realism have a long history and a long beard in the field, and in this sense may be tiresome for some, what points the way forward is what Currie and Zeleňák both agree on: the close scrutiny of actual historiographic practices in any effort to try to answer questions about realism. This commitment and especially the actual empirical analyses that both also engage in are new and innovative in the field. The age-old debate on realism can only profit from this approach, and we are hopeful that others will join Currie and Zeleňák on this more practical path towards, or away from, realism.

A third set of questions apparent in the contributions to this issue concerns the *theories and theoretical frameworks* that historians employ in their practices of inferring and describing the past. The question here is: What kind of theories and theoretical entities do historians have to presuppose in their approach to the

²¹ P. Roth, *Philosophical Structure of Historical Explanation*; van den Akker, *The Exemplifying Past*.

past? This question is most centrally addressed in this theme issue by Veli Virmajoki and Adam Bricker, with their respective contributions “Frameworks in Historiography: Explanation, Scenarios, and Futures” and “Thinking about Past Minds: Cognitive Science as Philosophy of Historiography”. Just as with realism, while the question posed here is old and perhaps tiresome to some, the answers that Virmajoki and Bricker give, and their approach, are both innovative and fresh. In the past, the question around which theories and theoretical frameworks historians employ was mainly raised in connection with the social sciences and other humanities subjects and the great names and trends there, most notably Karl Marx, Max Weber, and quantitative and anthropological methods. Virmajoki instead suggests thinking about theory in historiography in terms of Lakatosian frameworks that commit us to both specific pasts and futures. Bricker for his part applies cutting edge insights from cognitive science to the question of theory use, in an effort to understand the “theory of mind” that historians presuppose in their descriptions and explanations of past actors and their actions. Both are again broadly empirical in their approach through discussing actual historiographic examples for their arguments. Bricker moreover applies the empirical results of another science to historiography. So here again, just as before, not just the theoretical take and the conceptual clarity with which it is expounded are fresh, the (partially) empirical approach to a question of long-term interest is at least as innovative. Under these circumstances, this debate is likely to make headway in the future too.

Fourthly, there is the question of how *the present and possible futures* impinge upon the historian’s work and the concepts and theories that they use (there is an obvious overlap here with the previous topic). The former is usually referred to as the issue of presentism, especially in historiography itself, and the latter could by analogy be called the question of “futurism”. The issue of presentism is most prominently raised by Katariina Pulkkinen in this theme issue, with her contribution “On the Compatibility Between Presentism and Anti-Presentism in History of Science”, while Virmajoki addresses the same issue concerning possible futures. Presentism and “futurism” are indeed timely issues for any philosophy of history, and this for internal and external reasons. As Pulkkinen shows, the question of presentism has been animating historians of science over the last decade or so, and just a few months ago, an acrimonious discussion on the topic erupted in American historiography too (and as per usual, the flames were fanned by the often rather antisocial social media).²² Beyond this internal interest and relevance of the topic, the question to what extent historiography should cater to the needs of the present and present-day audience(s) is generally a central issue in our demanding times. In recent years, facing the Anthropocene and the climate catastrophe, the discussion has even been extended to possible futures. Thus, the question is not only to what extent the present and possible futures influence historiography but also in what ways historiography and the knowledge of the past that it produces can help and guide us in our efforts to create desirable, or at least non-catastrophic, futures. These questions are also at the forefront of the “Historical Futures” project that has recently garnered a lot of attention in the field.²³ So, given the importance of these questions to both the historical discipline itself and wider society, we believe that the issues of presentism and “futurism” will be topics of central concern in the philosophy of history for the foreseeable future.

Fifthly and finally, there is the issue of the *relationship between historiography and the other relations to the past* that people maintain in our modern (Western) “historical culture”, be they political, aesthetic, moral, commercial, etc. in nature.²⁴ The question here concerns what role historiography, and with it knowledge of

²² On this very unbecoming debate for the historical profession, see G. Gangl, “History Now! On Presentism and a Strange Online Debate in American Historiography”, in *Geschichtstheorie am Werk*, <https://gtw.hypotheses.org/9274> (06.05.2022).

²³ Z.B. Simon and M. Tamm, “Historical Futures”, *History and Theory*, 60 (2021), 3-22.

²⁴ On the concept of historical culture, see J. Rüsen, “Sense of History: What does it mean? With an outlook onto Reason and Senselessness” in J. Rüsen (ed.), *Meaning and Representation in History* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books,

the past, can and should play in society as a whole. (In this sense, it overlaps with the question about the guidance historiography can give us in creating desirable futures.) This issue is most centrally raised in Viola's contribution to this theme issue, which deals with the emancipatory or other potential of memory and narratives. In fact, this question about the role that our epistemic relation to the past with its focus on truth and rationality should play in the ensemble of those relations could be seen as the overarching theme for a productive dialogue between the philosophy and the theory of history over the coming years. Beyond this, the issue of how to relate to the past has been thrust upon all of us by the growing number of historical claims and even brazen falsehoods that (re-)appeared in political discourse in recent years. Populists and right-wing politicians have been using national and (bogus) nationalistic interpretations of the past to justify their political agendas or even to abandon commitments to international agreements. The most glaring recent example being the war in Ukraine where we (again) witnessed the use of blatant historical lies as ideological justification for the invasion of another country. If there were in the 1990s truly hopes that history as the battle of grand ideologies had ended, the twenty-first century has shown this to be nothing but a pipe dream. Philosophers take pride in their precise thinking and their ability to identify flaws in arguments, but philosophers of history have so far not really engaged with the use and abuse of historical arguments in politics and beyond. Also, in discussions that concern the justification of wars or our responses to climate change, it is unclear where science and philosophy end and politics begins. For all these reasons, we expect discussions about the role of historiography and the use of historical arguments in society to gain momentum over the coming years, and philosophers of history might want to think hard about how political they want to, or have to, get.²⁵

Talking lastly about the **future approach** of the field, the contributions to this theme issue combine an *appreciation for the complexity of the philosophical questions about history and historiography* with a high degree of *conceptual clarity and philosophical rigour*. Moreover, many of them also champion *empirical analyses of historiographic practices*. While it might still be too early to speak of an *empirical or practical turn* in the field in this respect—plus the endless talk of turns is a tiresome trope in itself—the texts assembled here can be read as indication that a philosophy of history based on these characteristics could become the “discipline” the field needs to make progress. At the very least, they show the fruitfulness of such a philosophy of history, and that through it some headway on questions of common concern can be made. Moreover, many of the “old guard” have in recent years also voiced their support for a field with roughly these characteristics, and some have also begun to do empirical analyses similar in their approach to the ones found in this theme issue.²⁶ In all of them, no matter “young” or “old”, this approach also goes hand in hand with the rejection of hyperbole, rhetoric excess, and simple forms of either-or-logic in the field.

What might be most beneficial for the field, then, is not so much a new integrative framework of the form provided by Analytic Philosophy of History or narrativism at the zenith of their influence, or even more strongly an overarching paradigm, but a willingness within the many frameworks currently pursued in the field to turn themselves into actionable (Lakatosian) *research programmes* targeting roughly the same issues

2008), 40-64; on the different relations to the past in our modern Western historical culture, see H. Paul, *Key Issues in Historical Theory*, 31-32.

²⁵ On the current political situation and the challenges that it poses for the philosophy of history, see also A. Tucker, “Historical Evitability. The Return of the Philosophy of History” in J.-M. Kuukkanen, *Philosophy of History. Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, 143-161.

²⁶ See W. Kansteiner, “History Beyond Narration. The Shifting Terrain of *Bloodlands*” in S. Berger, N. Brauch, and Ch. Lorenz (eds.) *Analysing Historical Narratives. On Academic, Popular, and Educational Framings of the Past* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books), 53-82; H. Paul, *History and Philosophy of History*; J.-M. Kuukkanen, *Historiographic Knowledge as Claiming Correctly*; A. Tucker, *Historiographic Ancients and Moderns*; and D. Little, *New Contributions to the Philosophy of History*.

and historiographic practices. Based on their core philosophical principles, the research programmes should formulate hypotheses about these practices and their (disciplinary) history which can then be tested against the practices and the history of historiography.²⁷ As such, these philosophical research programmes cannot be conclusively refuted, just like the frameworks from which they spring. However, a failure to account either descriptively or normatively for the relevant practices would give grounds to question the usefulness of such a programme, much in the spirit Lakatos' idea of "degenerative research programmes" (Lakatos 1970: 239).²⁸ This, of course, does not mean that historiographic practices should be seen as the sole arbiter for all philosophical questions concerning history and historiography. Neither does such a focus preempt any more traditional conceptual, logical, or explicative analysis of the central categories and presuppositions of our historical thinking and being. Also, any actual hypothesis produced by a research programme will be laden by the general (meta-)philosophical commitments of the individual framework, just as will be the selection of the problem and the approach, which all can and should be scrutinized and criticized with the usual philosophical weapons of criticism. However, we do believe that substantial headway on many of the core questions in the field can be made if we "discipline" ourselves by historiography and its practices. The future might therefore lie in a broadly *empirical and practical approach to the main questions of the philosophy of history*. But this of course is itself a position in the metaphilosophy of the philosophy of history that should be further scrutinized and criticized in the future.

This concludes our ruminations about the plausible and perhaps desirable futures of the philosophy of history. We have suggested that the field would profit from more philosophical discipline. Such discipline could be achieved through the further institutionalization and disciplinarization of the field, through a concentration on a common set of central issues, and especially through a broadly conceived empirical approach to these issues.

While the articles of this theme issue have already been briefly discussed above in a variety of contexts, here are the general summaries of the individual contributions (in order of appearance) for your convenience.

In the first article, "Pre-Narrativist Philosophy of History", Jonas Ahlskog argues that the agent-centered perspective is built into the idea of historical knowledge and that it is epistemologically prior to the retrospective descriptions that much of the narrativist tradition of philosophy of history has focused on. His argument is that the agent-centered perspective has been fundamentally misunderstood by the (post-)narrativists—he explicitly discusses the works of Paul Roth and Chiel van den Akker—and because of that its insights have been unjustly neglected in the philosophy of history throughout the last decades. Ahlskog shows this by revisiting the arguments made by pre-narrativist philosophers of history, especially Collingwood, in an effort to prove that the agent-centered perspective is not reducible to other modes of historical thought. He goes on to point out that this is not a scholarly detail, but a central issue for any

²⁷ The classical text on philosophical research programmes is I. Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes" in I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (eds.), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 91-197. On updated versions of this idea, see J.-M. Kuukkanen, "Lakatosian Rational Reconstruction Updated", *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, 31 (2017), 83-102, and H. Chang, "Presentist History for Pluralist Science", *Journal of General Philosophy of Science*, 52 (2021), 103-105. The idea of the creation of such research programmes in the philosophy of history is, to our knowledge, first raised in A. Tucker, *The Future of the Philosophy of Historiography*, 48.

²⁸ I. Lakatos, *Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes*, 179.

(philosophical) understanding of historical research. Is history an autonomous mode of thought or just cultural memory in disguise?

The second article by Adam Bricker offers a new perspective on the question of understanding and representing past minds, thoughts, and reasons by arguing that the philosophy of historiography does not currently have the tools to properly investigate questions related to cognition and should adopt insights from cognitive science. His article "Thinking about Past Minds: Cognitive Science as Philosophy of Historiography" discusses mental state representations and theory of mind in an effort to elucidate how representations of past mental states are used in similar ways in both historiography and everyday life in causally explaining the behaviours of agents. Bricker argues that these processes may be more susceptible to error in historiographical contexts than they are in everyday situations and that this should be more closely scrutinized. Interestingly, he suggests using experimental cognitive sciences in this respect to investigate historians' evaluations of past actors' mental states. However, he notes that this is no easy task. First, one needs to exactly describe how mental state representations are used in different kinds of historiographies, as there might be significant differences between different approaches and historiographic fields in this respect. Then, we would also have to understand how influential cognitive limitations are in affecting the readability of past minds. Only after these empirical works have been accomplished can the actual philosophical work begin. This kind of interesting interdisciplinary work might be what lies in the future of the philosophy of history.

In his article "On Plurality and Relativism in History", Eugen Zeleňák presents an argument that the discussion around the (necessary) plurality of historical interpretations is far from over. Differing, and often competing, interpretations keep appearing about historical events without them managing to form a unified account. However, Zeleňák argues that relativism does not necessarily follow from this situation, even within a broadly constructivist understanding of history. In this argument, he draws from Donald Davidson's diagnosis of conceptual relativism, according to which dualism and representationalism end up bringing forth "confused relativist conclusions." Zeleňák opts instead to "see historical works primarily as outcomes of various practices." By abandoning the dualism of scheme and content, he presents a model where one can be a constructivist and pluralist in one's understanding of historical works without having to worry about relativism. However, he points out that this might require us to change the way we think about historians' work, and accounts of the past.

The fourth article of our theme issue is "Narratives, Events & Monotremes: The Philosophy of History in Practice" by Adrian Currie. It sketches what he calls "The Philosophy of History in Practice". In the article, Currie takes two of Louis Mink's famous anti-realist arguments about historical events and narratives, and compares them with an interesting historiographical case featuring a platypus. According to Currie, Mink's anti-realist arguments do not hold up when confronted with actual historiographic practice. Currie further suggests that such a practice-based account opens up many new routes of research in philosophy of history even beyond the issues relating to narratives, and that the philosophy of history would benefit from a more detailed analysis of historiographic practices. In his own analysis he ends up "suggesting a route to realism" which creates an interesting link between older ongoing discussions in philosophy of history and the practice-oriented perspective presented in the article.

In similar spirit, Karoliina Pulkkinen's article "On the Compatibility between Presentism and Anti-presentism in History of Science" looks into an ongoing debate about presentism and anti-presentism in history of science. She argues that presentist and anti-presentist positions are not as incompatible in the history of science as they are often perceived to be. Her main argument is that at least three subtypes of presentism seem to be compatible with anti-presentist stances. Through compartmentalization of historical methodology, empirical and motivational takes on presentism can be combined with anti-presentism. For the case of critical presentism, Pulkkinen notes how the usual schema where evaluation of past practices is

driven by presentist concerns gets turned upside down and instead the “complexities of the past” are positioned against a critical take of the present, enabling once again compatibility with an anti-presentist understanding of history of science. Identifying these compatibilities makes it possible for Pulkkinen to argue that we can have both presentist and anti-presentist inclinations even within a single investigation when both stances are introduced to the analysis in an effort to provide “genuine understanding of past practices.”

Veli Virmajoki argues in “Frameworks in Historiography: Explanation, Scenarios, and Futures” that the identification of historically relevant outcomes of sequences of events requires that “assumptions about the workings of the relevant domain have to be made”. His take is that these assumptions are drawn from a pre-existing set of factors and principles that he describes as a framework. The core argument is that there are two ways to craft historical explanations: either by constructing patterns that make sense, or by using counterfactual scenarios to show how a different outcome would have followed had the event not happened. Both of these require pre-existing frameworks to function. Virmajoki further points out that there are serious difficulties in explaining where our confidence in historical explanations exactly stems from. Interestingly, he notes that analysing future scenarios offers a venue to explore the usually tacit frameworks that we use because constructing future scenarios reveals the presuppositions and assumptions that we have about the workings of the world. He urges historians (and philosophers of history) to engage with future studies, as this could benefit both fields. Historiography’s presuppositions would in this way become more visible and historiographical insights could in turn improve the scenario-making processes of future studies.

Tullio Viola’s article “Memory, Folk Narratives, and Social Critique: Notes on Jane Addams and the ‘Devil Baby’ Legend” delves into the “link between memory, folk narratives and the development of critical thinking”, as Viola writes in his abstract. He analyses Jane Addams’ book *The Long Road of Woman’s Memory* (1916), in which Addams tries to account for the effects a folklore legend has on the recollections, grievances, and aspirations of working-class women. Viola suggests that folkloristic stories, like legends and tales, can facilitate the articulation of otherwise unvoiced critical takes on society when coming into touch with people’s own life experiences. In his argument, Viola draws on Dewey’s conceptualization of articulation and on insights stemming from feminist philosophy. He identifies the “Devil Baby” legend as a major component in Addams’ philosophical account of memory and emphasises that the articulation of experiences through the use of the legend “involved the seeds of social critique.” This suggests that the legend operates as a cultural memory tool “that marginalized individuals could draw upon in order to express their discontent and grievances.”