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INTELLECTUAL HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

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Donald R. Kelley, *The Descent of Ideas: The History of Intellectual History* (Aldershot, England/Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002)

Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge, England/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

The subdiscipline of historical studies that we now call "intellectual history" claims a distinctive place in contemporary historiography, but its precise characteristics and boundaries are not easily defined. Most intellectual historians embrace an interdisciplinary identity and draw on research methods that push historical studies toward other academic traditions. Indeed, some historians argue that the preoccupation with literature, language, philosophy, religion, and art carries intellectual historians away from the real historical forces that constitute the proper subjects for professional historians. Intellectual historians seek to explain how people have interpreted their cultures, beliefs, and actions, but *real* historians want to explain what people actually did in their daily lives, political institutions, wars, and social conflicts. As their most skeptical professional colleagues perceive it, the work of intellectual historians therefore comes closer to the ethereal labors of philosophers and literary critics than to the archival research and themes of traditional historical studies.

Historians who want to place intellectual history outside of real history, however, might redraw their disciplinary borders if they were to compare the recent books of Donald R. Kelley and Mark Bevir. Although both authors describe the distinctive attributes of the history of ideas, they approach their subject with strikingly different disciplinary perspectives and methodologies. Kelley uses the methods and "discourse" of an intellectual historian, whereas Bevir uses the methods and "discourse" of a philosopher. More specifically, Kelley traces the historical emergence and evolution of a scholarly discipline that seeks to bring ideas "down" from the realm of timeless, transcendent truths into the complex historical realities of social experience, collective or personal identities, human institutions, and the struggle for power. Intellectual historians, as Kelley

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describes them, pursue this "contextualizing" historical project with the help of every intellectual tradition that can help them understand individual creativity, shared beliefs, and cultural conflicts.

Bevir's "logic of the history of ideas," by contrast, systematically examines the processes of human reasoning that give philosophical legitimacy to the historical study of human thought. His philosophical method ignores the changing social, cultural, and institutional contexts in which historians of ideas have always worked because he wants to establish a philosophical logic that will support the historian's claim for a reliable knowledge of past thinkers and beliefs. Bevir therefore refers to past thinkers in order to show how they contribute or (more often) fail to contribute to the correct logic of the history of ideas, but Kelley discusses past thinkers and scholars in order to show how they represented specific philosophical, linguistic, or scholarly phases in the evolving study of intellectual history.

These differences point to an important divergence in the ways that most intellectual historians and philosophers define the characteristics of an academic discipline. Kelley describes disciplines as intellectual traditions that gain coherence through a shared language, a recurring explanatory framework (for example, the emphasis on contexts in intellectual history), and an evolving community of scholars. Bevir describes disciplines as distinctive systems of logic that gain coherence through carefully constructed "forms of reasoning" rather than from historical traditions or institutional contexts. The contrasting approaches to academic disciplines and the different analytical methods in these two carefully written, well-informed books thus show why and how intellectual history lies on the historical side of the academic boundaries that define the categories of modern knowledge and the careers of modern scholars.

Kelley's "history of intellectual history" summarizes insights that have come from his long, impressive immersion in the field. In addition to serving for almost two decades as editor of the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Kelley has written numerous books and articles on influential thinkers, intellectual movements, and diverse approaches to cultural and intellectual history.[1] His editorship of the

1 Kelley has written or edited more than 15 books and published more than 80 articles. Almost all of his writing falls under the broad rubric of intellectual history, but the following books give particular emphasis to the development of historical thought and knowledge: *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship* (New York, 1970); *The Beginning of Ideology: Consciousness and Society in the French Reformation* (Cambridge, 1981); *Historians and the Law in Postrevolutionary France* (Princeton, NJ, 1984); *Renaissance Humanism* (New York, 1991); *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven, CT, 1998); and *Fortunes of History: Historical Inquiry from Herder to Huizinga* (New Haven, CT, 2003). Kelley has been a Professor of History at the University of Rochester and (since 1991) at Rutgers University.

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journal connected him to a "school" of intellectual history (represented by the first editor, Arthur Lovejoy) that tends to stress the continuity and internal coherence of ideas across time rather than dramatic cultural or intellectual ruptures. Despite his affiliation with this "internalist" tradition, however, Kelley recognizes the value of other methods that emphasize the decisive role of social contexts, the shaping influence of language, or the significance of biographical events, gender, and personal experiences. All of these approaches help explain the "descent" of ideas—especially (we might add) if they can build their arguments on the kind of careful research and erudition that Kelley brings to his own books and articles. This exceptional erudition appears often in *The Descent of Ideas* as Kelley narrates the development of historical writing about ideas from late antiquity down to the philosophically informed historiography of the last two centuries. His particular expertise on early modern Europe enables him to place recent approaches to intellectual history within rhetorical and philosophical traditions that go back to the Renaissance; and he reminds his readers that the so-called "linguistic turn" in contemporary intellectual history actually marks a partial "return" to linguistic perspectives that were already shaping intellectual work in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Kelley argues that the historical approach to ideas evolved from early histories of philosophy into a much broader interest in all the "creations of human thought." The distinctiveness of intellectual history (as compared to philosophy) thus emerged in its eclectic willingness to draw upon almost every philosophical "school" for examples of truth and in its historical insistence on the links between ideas and the cultural or social contexts in which they develop. Unlike the metaphysical philosophers, intellectual historians strongly doubted that transcendent ideas could somehow exist outside of time, history, or human cultures. They were instead concerned with what Kelley calls the "descent of ideas" from an imagined transcendent sphere into the historical spheres of language, cultural debates, and human lives.

Meanwhile, intellectual history became distinctive (as compared to classical historiography) in its emphasis on the historical power of ideas. Unlike the military or political historians, intellectual historians never doubted that ideas and languages strongly influenced the "real world" of human societies. They thus sought to understand how ideas shaped human lives at the same time that they were studying how life experiences influenced ideas. All of these themes in intellectual history—its eclecticism, its interdisciplinarity, its contextualism, its emphasis on the interaction between ideas and human experience—provoked criticism from philosophers who placed ideas on a "higher" level outside of history and from materialist historians who questioned the influence of abstractions in human struggles for political or military power. Yet it was precisely this dual emphasis on the historicity of all ideas and creative works as well as the

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theoretical, intellectual components of all human actions that gave intellectual history its scholarly identity and enduring cultural significance.

Kelley finds the modern starting point for intellectual history in the "eclecticism" of the nineteenth-century French philosopher Victor Cousin (1792–1867). Teaching in Paris after 1815, Cousin argued that both "sensualist" and "spiritualist" ideas expressed important truths and deserved equal philosophical attention. His "eclectic" approach to human thought thus brought together diverse aspects of Christianity, Platonism, Descartes, Kant, Scottish Common Sense philosophers, and the historical theories of Vico, Herder, and Hegel. This exceptional appreciation for different philosophers and historical eras would become typical of most later intellectual historians, who refused to identify with a single philosophical "master" or philosophical tradition.

Although Cousin claimed that his eclecticism was both original and uniquely French, Kelley shows that numerous European predecessors had in fact promoted "eclectic" philosophical themes since late antiquity. Eclectic arguments could already be found, for example, in the early third-century (CE) work of Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, which summarized the ideas of ancient philosophers, provided stories about their lives, described the contexts in which they had worked, developed a chronology of philosophical masters, and categorized their key ideas in different "schools" and traditions. Kelley portrays Diogenes as the first important eclectic historian of philosophy, but he also notes that few other writers were willing to follow his eclectic methods over the next 1,000 years. Early Renaissance writers such as Petrarch and the members of a new "Republic of Letters" became natural eclectics, however, by drawing freely on divergent strands of Platonic, Aristotelian, or Stoic thought to define their own ideas. Petrarch was an especially notable example of what Kelley calls "an unashamed eclectic" (p. 67), but most other Renaissance scholars collected their ideas from similarly eclectic readings of classical philosophers, poets, and historians. The rising historical tide seemed to flow toward scholars such as Ermolao Barbaro and his "underlying premise that attention should be given above all to the language of earlier authors as preserved in the sources, and that eloquence, [and] mastery of language is essential to modern philosophizing" (p. 126). Philosophy, in short, was becoming an object for historical and philological studies.

The Renaissance therefore laid the foundation for a new history of ideas, but Cousin's most notable eclectic predecessor was the eighteenth-century German historian of philosophy J. J. Brucker, whose *Critical History of Philosophy* (1741–3) helped to establish what Kelley describes as "the new discipline of philosophical history and the associated eclectic method" (p. 164). This method summarized the main ideas of important philosophers and suggested that valuable truths appeared in widely divergent philosophical traditions. Brucker's history of ideas

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also went beyond the explanation of specific concepts and theories, however, by examining the "external factors" that could have influenced the development of each thinker's ideas. He referred, for example, to the influences of a philosopher's "country, his family, his education, his natural temper, his habits of life, his patrons, friends, or enemies" (Brucker, cited on p. 165), thereby pointing toward the kind of contextualism that later intellectual historians would use to explain how specific thinkers responded to the social and cultural milieux in which they lived.

Both the eclectic respect for widely divergent philosophies and the intellectual interest in the influence of historical contexts were therefore well established in European scholarship by the time Victor Cousin began his lectures in Paris, but these methods gained much wider acceptance over the next two centuries (the term "intellectual history" was not used before the twentieth century). New forms of intellectual history emerged in the hermeneutic methods of Germans such as Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey and in the new literary history of French critics such as Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve. There was also a "new history" of culture in the work of Americans such as James Harvey Robinson and a new historicism in the writings of Italians such as Benedetto Croce—who "carried on the old eclectic method . . . and took what was best in all schools" (p. 274). Intellectual historians thus extended an eclectic tradition that never gained much respect from philosophers or from the rigorous defenders of any specific "school" of philosophy, theology, or science. "Even today," Kelley notes, "the word 'eclecticism' does not have a pleasant ring, suggesting as it does indecision, confusion, lack of definition, and neglect of logical consistency" (p. 39). Yet this eclectic desire to understand, contextualize, and take seriously the truth claims of every philosophical or cultural tradition has given intellectual historians their distinctive disciplinary identity. Where others see confusion and indecision, the advocates of intellectual history see a commendable willingness to enter into historical dialogue with the widest possible range of ideas, cultures, and interpretations of human experience.

The eclectic tendencies that first appeared in the study of rival philosophies constantly reappeared as intellectual historians turned their attention to diverse, often conflicting, forms of literary theory, linguistics, psychology, cultural anthropology, art history, and the history of science. Kelley explains how all of these academic disciplines entered the work of intellectual historians and expanded the history of ideas into wider spheres of social and cultural life. The historical attempt to understand how people have defined their knowledge, institutions, social worlds, and personal lives has always required an exceptional openness to interdisciplinary methods and insights because, as Kelley stresses, neither philosophy nor "any of the human sciences have the power to assimilate the whole process of human history—or indeed to make sense of every human

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creation" (p. 243). The inevitable limits of all specific philosophies and human sciences suggest why intellectual historians are forever crossing the boundaries of academic disciplines and trying to connect opposing "schools" of philosophy, literary theory, or psychology.

Although Kelley stresses that intellectual history draws on widely diverse scholarly traditions, he also notes that the new hermeneutic criticism in nineteenth-century Germany had an especially significant influence on the historical study of ideas. Hermeneutic critics—Friedrich Schleiermacher, J. G. Droysen, and Wilhelm Dilthey, for example—argued that "no human being, not even a philosopher" could escape "the limitations of human horizons and points of view," which meant that the hermeneutic understanding of an author's ideas must include analysis of how the author was embedded in a specific cultural context and language (p. 137). The historian, in other words, should study the "spirit" and patterns of a culture (because they limit how a person thinks), much as a scientist studies the structures and patterns of nature (because they limit how objects or living things exist in the world). Of course, the later interpreters of past cultures are also limited by their own positions within specific cultures and languages, but the hermeneutic historian can nevertheless learn enough about other cultures and historical eras to understand how past thinkers assimilated, challenged, or interacted with the cultures in which they lived. Beginning with the assumption that everyone is situated within cultural and linguistic systems, hermeneutic critics sought to explain how imaginative writers and intellectuals used or transformed these systems to interpret their world and promote their ideas. "This was the mission of intellectual and cultural history," Kelley explains, "a system of scholarly inquiry which joined forces with hermeneutics in the reading of the great book of culture—following the 'descent of ideas' into a context accessible to intellectual and cultural historians" (p. 140).

This systematic study of the "'descent of ideas' into a context" becomes for Kelley the most distinctive feature of intellectual history. In contrast to other important intellectual traditions and aspirations in philosophy, theology, the arts, and the sciences, intellectual historians insist that ideas always represent some kind of interaction or exchange with the language and cultural world in which they are expressed. It is therefore impossible to establish a purely "internal" essence or reality for ideas because "external" cultural systems and interpreters always mediate the meanings that ideas convey. Kelley concedes without apology that this insistence on the shaping historical context of all human thought has never pleased philosophers—who from Plato to Descartes to Heidegger have attempted to locate philosophical truths beyond the reach of history or culture. As Kelley notes in a discussion of Descartes, the philosophers believed that "ideas were placed above the vagaries of opinion and the forces of history. In effect, 'ideas'

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were taken off the agenda of criticism, out of the world of discourse and textual analysis, and beyond the reach of history. Like the world of 'spirit' of which they were a part, they were not subject to the mutability of the sublunar world" (p. 115). Philosophers worried that the historical emphasis on contexts would reduce ideas to the level of mere opinion, and so they resisted historical methods that moved from the internal logic of ideas into the external world of cultural traditions, social forces, and individual lives. They sought instead to define and defend clear boundaries between the "inside" and the "outside" of ideas because they assumed that ideas "were born without any significant social, political, cultural, or gender attributes" (p. 116). And few philosophers welcomed the early modern scholarship (beginning in the Renaissance) that approached philosophical language as simply a specific cultural form of literature, argumentation, and rhetorical conventions.

A similar desire to place essential ideas beyond history or language has also appeared in theological views of a radically transcendent God, in aesthetic descriptions of great art as an expression of a transcendent, ideal beauty, and in "internalist" conceptions of the pure scientific knowledge that scientific geniuses discover in moments of inspired insight. Despite the obvious differences in these cultural traditions, they all have transcendent themes or aspirations that strive to place their greatest insights beyond the realm of history and cultural contexts. Yet the typical intellectual historian, as Kelley reminds us, sees the aspiration for transcendent ideas as an impossible dream. Given the impossibility of placing ideas securely in a transcendent realm, intellectual historians situate even the most abstract or transcendent beliefs within the historical play of human experience and culture. "Historians, if not philosophers, cannot help being atheists," Kelley explains (p. 313)—by which he suggests that they cannot understand or describe the meaning of human ideas and beliefs without an explanatory "descent" into the complex world of human languages, conflicts, interests, and history.

To be sure, most intellectual historians emphasize that our knowledge of historical contexts depends on surviving texts and on a process of linguistic reconstruction; and they would deny that contexts have a single foundation or essence. But Kelley argues that all intellectual historians (even "internalists" such as Arthur Lovejoy) accept the "historicist" assumption that ideas ultimately express the concerns and debates of a specific historical era (pp. 280–81). The intellectual historian's emphasis on "the historical character of human knowledge" has therefore "continued to challenge philosophy for hegemony" in an ongoing disciplinary debate about the nature of human thought and truths (pp. 287–8). This debate can be placed in a more explicit philosophical framework by noting simply that intellectual history remains firmly anti-Platonic, even when it examines Plato, Neoplatonic theorists, or any other philosophical tradition in the history of human cultures.

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Kelley's exceptional knowledge of the Western intellectual tradition offers important, comparative insights into unexpected connections between recent approaches to intellectual history and numerous cultural precedents in Renaissance literary studies, early modern rhetorical theories, and nineteenth-century eclecticism. His account of the recent past, however, yields fewer historical surprises or original insights, perhaps because the contemporary intellectual context is our own cultural milieu. We often hear about the influence of cultural anthropology, post-modern literary theory, and the "linguistic turn" in intellectual history, for example, but we are less likely (in the current context) to hear about the cultural legacy of Diogenes Laertius, J. J. Brucker, or Victor Cousin.

The most notable historical "absence" in Kelley's "history of intellectual history" comes from his lack of critical interest in the specific social and institutional context that has influenced the development of intellectual history over the last several decades. He has more to say about the early modern "republic of letters" than about the institutional system of rewards, hierarchies, and academic careers that currently shapes the field of intellectual history. His "descent of ideas," in short, does not descend far enough into the modern institutional and cultural system that produces and sustains intellectual historians (but also provides few jobs for would-be specialists in this subdiscipline). No single book, however, can analyze every contextual or cultural aspect of an intellectual discipline. In fact, Kelley's erudite survey of how eclecticism, hermeneutics, historicism, and the modern human sciences shaped the distinctive field of intellectual history offers as much information and insight as one can reasonably expect from one historian; and his articulate defense of the contextualist themes in intellectual history becomes all the more persuasive when it is compared with Mark Bevir's philosophical method in *The Logic of the History of Ideas*.

Bevir teaches political theory, but he has written numerous articles on modern debates about the philosophy of history.[2] His book extends the themes of these

2 Bevir's earlier publications on the history of ideas include "The Errors of Linguistic Contextualism," *History and Theory* 31 (1992), 276–98; "Objectivity in History," *History and Theory* 33 (1994), 328–44; "Ideology as Distorted Belief," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 1 (1996), 107–22; and "Mind and Method in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 36 (1997), 167–89. He is also the co-editor (with Frank Trentmann) of a recent book, *Critiques of Capital in Modern Britain and America: Transatlantic Exchanges, 1800 to the Present Day* (New York, 2002). Bevir's own essay in this edited collection ("British Socialism and American Romanticism," pp. 73–97) moves away from the philosophical method in *The Logic of the History of Ideas* and comes closer to the methods and style of a contextualizing intellectual history. Bevir has been a Reader in Political Theory at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and is now a professor in the Political Science department at the University of California, Berkeley.

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earlier publications into a more detailed analysis of how the history of ideas relies on a specific logic to produce reliable knowledge. This epistemological problem, however, does not lead Bevir into social contexts or the long history of historians that interests Kelley. On the contrary, he dislikes "contextualism" because he believes that it produces a misguided understanding of ideas and reduces the autonomy of individual thinkers. His own approach to the history of ideas therefore examines the disciplinary logic and internal reasoning that give coherence to the discipline and support its truth claims. "The logic of an academic discipline," Bevir writes, "consists of an analysis of the forms of reasoning appropriate to it" (p. 7), and the study of this logic can ignore the institutional or social contexts in which historians of ideas actually work. Indeed, he explains, "when we investigate the logic of the history of ideas our concern must be with the way historians of ideas reason about historical data, not with historical data itself" (p. 8).

Bevir situates his own project in the intellectual tradition of analytic philosophy, suggesting that he wants to build upon the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Donald Davidson, and other modern philosophers who have examined epistemological problems with far more logical precision than historians typically bring to this task. "When philosophers analyse the logic of any discipline, they outline the conceptual form and content of an ideal type of reasoning. They do not describe the historical, social, or psychological processes involved in an actual type of reasoning." In contrast to the philosophers, historians who write about historical thinking (he specifically mentions R. G. Collingwood and Hayden White) often "muddle phenomenological and metahistorical issues with logical ones" (p. 9), which means that their works lack the logical rigor of a strong philosophical argument. Bevir therefore follows the philosophical method of exploring "the grammar of our concepts" in order to establish the logical reasoning that should inform a rigorous history of ideas.

Few cultural or intellectual historians share Bevir's preoccupation with the internal "logic" of historical explanation or his interest in a philosophical method that makes no reference to the lives and historical experiences of specific persons and social groups. If they are willing to follow Bevir into his highly abstract argument for the logic of the history of ideas, however, they will find that earlier philosophical discussion of these issues has repeatedly generated opposing "schools" of thought. Each group seems to defend only one side of remarkably precise philosophical dichotomies, but, as Bevir describes them, the arguments of both sides are logically flawed. Bevir thus addresses a specific epistemological issue in each chapter of his book (e.g. meaning, objectivity, belief, synchronic explanations), summarizes the opposing philosophical views of the issue, and then defines his own (and the correct) position somewhere between these alternative views.

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Some historians of ideas, for example, assume that authors were able to express their own personal intentions with complete clarity when they wrote about their ideas, so the historian's task is simply to uncover and explain this "strong intentionality." Other historians, however, assume that authors have never been able to express unique personal intentions because they were inevitably forced to think and write within the linguistic and cultural constraints that shape all texts. From this contextual perspective, "intentionality" expresses a cultural system, discourse, or ideology rather than an individual's own ideas, and the historian's task is to show how the works of past thinkers exemplified the discourse of a pervasive cultural system. Bevir analyzes these radically opposing views and then stakes out a middle position—"weak intentionality"—which argues that intentions can change as someone actually speaks, writes, or responds to a specific situation, but that ultimately the intentions of an individual writer can be recognized as a distinctive utterance. The method of a good, logical history of ideas, in short, finds the middle position between the extremes of a "strong," individual intentionalism and a culturally determined intentionalism, thereby accounting for both the autonomy of individuals and the often unexpected outcomes of their arguments.

Similar dichotomies and philosophical resolutions reappear in every section of Bevir's book, so it is impossible to describe all of the contending dichotomies and logical middle positions in a concise summary. Suffice it to say that each dichotomy returns in some way to the opposing views of what he calls "atomistic individualism" and "radical structuralism" (this dichotomy appears implicitly, for example, in the analysis of intentionality). Bevir's logical middle position in all of the debates between "individualists" and "structuralists" calls for a more balanced "procedural individualism," which recognizes the shaping influence of traditions and "webs of belief," but also insists that individuals can move beyond these traditions and develop new ideas.

The philosophical logic that Bevir brings to issues such as authorial intentions or the intellectual processes of "procedural individualism" provides some useful insights for intellectual historians who are willing to make their way through his abstract epistemological arguments. Intellectual historians could in fact resort to their penchant for "eclecticism" and use Bevir's work as a philosophical justification for much of what they are already inclined to do. The "middle" philosophical position between, say, radical individualism and radical structuralism is a sensible, logical position that most historians would support—if they were asked to locate themselves among the various philosophical alternatives that Bevir describes. Kelley's account of past intellectual historians and their cultural contexts, for example, never claims that the shaping influence of these contexts destroyed all individual agency or intentionality; like most intellectual historians Kelley sees a dialectical interaction between individuals

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and cultural structures that might well resemble what Bevir calls "procedural individualism." Even if historians wander away from Bevir's rigorous logic and analytical categories, they will therefore probably agree with his claim that specific individuals (rather than cultural structures or social categories) must express and act upon ideas. No idea can have meaning or historical significance unless someone promotes or defends it. More generally, Bevir reminds historians that the systematic study of past ideas requires self-conscious thought about our own assumptions and a rigorous engagement with what people in the past actually said or intended to say when they expressed their ideas.

Bevir's systematic analysis of historical epistemology clearly differs, however, from both the eclecticism and the contextualism that Kelley finds in the disciplinary traditions of intellectual history. Rejecting the contextual, historical emphasis on overlapping cultural *mentalités*, Bevir organizes ideas and "schools" of thought into clear and distinct categories that often intersect or merge in specific historical cultures and social institutions. The eclecticism of intellectual historians puts them on the lookout for the places where competing ideas and intellectuals interact or connect, and intellectual historians themselves tend to merge their categories or methods in eclectic fusions that Bevir would not accept. He argues, for example, that "understanding" a text is different from "explaining" a text, and he criticizes historians who fail to recognize this important dichotomy. "Questions of understanding ask what a work means or what beliefs an individual expressed in a work," he notes in a summary of this methodological distinction. "Questions of explanation ask why a work has the meaning it does or why an individual believed what he did" (p. 174). Unfortunately, as Bevir sees it, contextualists, hermeneutic critics, and others try to understand what texts mean by linking them to a general context or an "episteme" rather than explaining why a text has meaning within a specific author's "web of beliefs." In actual practice, however, most intellectual historians want to understand *and* explain the meaning of past texts as they examine the possible connections between the internal themes of texts and various overlapping contexts. They assume that the meanings of a specific work are always shaped or mediated by the contexts in which it is written and interpreted, so they cannot really separate "what" a text means from "why" it has this meaning. There seems to be little reason to insist on a strict distinction between understanding and explaining because the two forms of analysis usually merge in good intellectual history.

Many of the other sharply defined distinctions in Bevir's book may also strike intellectual historians as insignificant for the actual practice of their research and writing. He draws another dichotomy, for example, between "pro-attitudes," which are the unconsciously held assumptions that people draw from their cultures, and "beliefs," which are the conscious ideas they espouse. Bevir argues that historians of ideas need to explain only the conscious beliefs (p. 141), but

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intellectual historians often want to understand and explain the unconscious cultural assumptions as well as the conscious beliefs of the authors and intellectuals they write about. Indeed, it is precisely the complex connection between widely accepted "pro-attitudes" and explicit personal "beliefs" that intellectual historians seek to analyze when they situate authors and texts in specific historical contexts. This kind of historical research usually uncovers important cultural "pro-attitudes" in even the most self-conscious written texts, thus making Bevir's sharp distinctions highly problematic for intellectual historians.

Bevir also wants to draw a clear (but historically questionable) distinction between "webs of beliefs" or traditions and broader historical contexts. He assumes that individuals hold a particular "web of beliefs," whereas contexts are impersonal social structures or cultural systems that do not actually appear in specific persons. The dichotomy that separates an individual's "web of beliefs" from the social and cultural context raises immediate questions for intellectual historians, however, because an individual's "web of beliefs" is always embedded in cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts. Indeed, it is exceedingly difficult to sustain this distinction between personal "webs of belief" and shared cultural systems—even on the most abstract levels of disciplinary logic. Where exactly does the personal "web" separate from the languages or paradigms of a wider cultural system? Historians find it difficult to draw such clear lines, even as they acknowledge that individuals retain some autonomy within their cultures. Bevir nevertheless insists on the importance of maintaining rather than blurring these dichotomies:

> Whereas contextualists argue that paradigms and epistemes enable historians to understand the meaning of utterances, we have argued that webs of belief and traditions enable historians to provide the beginnings of an explanation of beliefs . . . . Webs of belief and traditions help historians to explain beliefs. They are not part of the meaning of works.
>
> . . . [W]hen the critics equate our concept of a web of beliefs with the paradigms and epistemes of the contextualists, they ignore the reasoning behind our distinction between understanding utterances and explaining beliefs . . . . Thus, whereas we focus on webs of belief conceived as individual viewpoints, contextualists focus on paradigms conceived as social structures. (pp. 215–16)

Both the prose style in this passage and the insistence on sharp categorical demarcations suggest the contrasting disciplinary methods of intellectual historians and philosophers. Most intellectual historians stress the complex entanglement of ideas, individual lives, and social-cultural contexts, but their eclectic fusion of these categories usually bypasses careful philosophical distinctions between concepts such as "webs of belief" and cultural paradigms.

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Philosophers thus have good philosophical reasons to view intellectual historians as imprecise, conjectural, and reductionist. The intellectual historians, for their part, have good historical reasons to believe that the philosophers' distinctions and dichotomies regularly break down in the complex historical world of specific people, texts, and contexts.

Bevir's argument for a clear dichotomy between personal "webs of belief" and wider cultural contexts points to perhaps the key difference between the work of philosophers and intellectual historians. His philosophical method gives almost no attention to the lives, material worlds, or changing cultural contexts of the people who have developed the history of ideas as a scholarly tradition. Although intellectual historians are rightly suspicious of simplistic reductions that attribute a thinker's ideas entirely to economic interests, personal neuroses, social status, gender, or race, they are usually unsatisfied with accounts that examine intellectual traditions or a thinker's ideas without any reference to the wider contexts of lives and societies. Bevir seems to fear that the emphasis on contexts weakens the rigorous explanation of ideas and radically reduces or eliminates individual autonomy and creativity. The historical argument, however, stresses the diversity of overlapping contexts (personal, social, economic, political, cultural, etc.), each of which offers or denies various options for individual action and thought. People can challenge or change different components of the many contexts in which they live, but they can never simply leave them to exist outside a specific historical time and place. Intellectual historians thus look for both the cultural limits and the creative spaces that individuals encounter in the *multiple* contexts of their personal and intellectual lives. Philosophers, by contrast, tend to identify the valid claims or flaws in an author's logic and to explain why a past thinker went wrong rather than to examine the historical contexts that would help us understand the origin and influence of a writer's ideas.

Bevir repeatedly shows this proclivity for passing philosophical judgments on the mistakes of earlier thinkers: "Hume's argument fails because of its inadequate characterization of reason" (p. 293); the "Sartrean argument, in both its specific and general forms, actually rests on a confusion" (p. 271); Quentin Skinner "offers us his method as a logic of discovery," but in fact "there cannot be a logic of discovery for the history of ideas" (pp. 82, 85); and both "the idealists and irrationalists are wrong" when they try to "explain webs of belief as the products of self-sufficient traditions" (p. 196). There is a strong philosophical confidence in such pronouncements, but the judgments differ from the (more modest?) approach of the intellectual historian who tries to understand or explain how and why Hume, Sartre, Skinner, or the "irrationalists" developed their ideas through various intellectual debates, political conflicts, and life experiences. Although intellectual historians often provide critical analysis and develop

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some kind of critical "dialogue" with past thinkers, the historian's contextual and analytical methods rarely produce vehement philosophical judgments on a thinker's blindness to the logic of ideas.

Most of the significant differences between intellectual history and the philosophical history of ideas therefore emerge from a comparative reading of Kelley's *Descent of Ideas* and Bevir's *Logic of the History of Ideas*. Kelley traces the history of intellectual history with a method and prose style that commonly appear in the discipline he discusses, and he is sympathetic to both the philosophical eclecticism and historical contextualism that he finds in past historians. Bevir follows another disciplinary path in his quest to establish a philosophically rigorous logic for a history of ideas that rejects much of the "contextualism" that most intellectual historians use to analyze the ideas as well as the significance of influential thinkers and intellectual movements. They both examine the historical study of ideas, but their books provide excellent examples of how different intellectual traditions produce distinctive forms of knowledge and diverse academic identities.

These books might also remind us, however, that the boundaries of academic identity need to be crossed regularly to ensure disciplinary change, creativity, and self-criticism. Disciplines (like nations) do not flourish by building high walls along their borders, and intellectual history's eclecticism has always made this subdiscipline a valuable border crossing for other disciplinary traditions that have entered into modern historical studies. Intellectual historians have long shown strong interdisciplinary interest in the work of philosophers, literary theorists, psychologists, and cultural anthropologists, but, as Kelley shows with specific historical examples, they have always maintained their distinctive disciplinary emphasis on the complex connections between ideas, thinkers, and historical contexts. Skeptical of all allegiances to a single master thinker or intellectual tradition, they seek to understand how widely different historical eras, thinkers, and cultural groups have interpreted human experiences and truths. Equally important, intellectual historians analyze these diverse traditions and people without invoking transcendent truths of their own—except perhaps for the general claim that all ideas, individuals, and texts evolve and gain their meanings in specific historical contexts.

Kelley's account of intellectual history in *The Descent of Ideas* actually gives less attention to specific social and institutional contexts than one might find in most intellectual histories of particular thinkers or cultural groups, but he shows how modern intellectual history has grown out of long-developing cultural traditions and how the intellectual debates of our own historical context shape a continuing evolution of the field. In contrast to Bevir's philosophical approach, Kelley stresses the constant historical exchange between the "inside" and the "outside" of texts, intellectual debates, and personal lives. The careful

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analysis of this complex interaction between texts and contexts gives intellectual history its distinctive, vital role in the development of modern cultural criticism and historical knowledge. Despite its sometimes ambiguous identity and its perennial, eclectic interest in other disciplines, intellectual history clearly remains within the sphere of modern historiography and a valuable source of creative intellectual exchange for all the subdisciplines of contemporary historical scholarship.

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