

Editorial

Back to the Now

Another Now, the title of this new journal in the history of ideas, is itself an idea with a history. The expression first appeared in 1960, when, in a discussion of Eugenio Garin's historiographical work, Giulio Preti (1976, 2: 287) wrote: "The past that is the object of historical inquiry is not our past, but another now". It was later adopted as the title of one of Paolo Rossi's books, *Un altro presente: Saggi sulla storia della filosofia* (1999). Our title deliberately echoes Rossi's approach.

The journal is situated within a scholarly tradition that can be traced back to the work of Arthur O. Lovejoy and to his vision of replacing an idealized history of theories and concepts with a concrete history of ideas – ideas that are often indeterminate, ambiguous, and profoundly shaped by their contexts. As Rossi (1982, 7) emphasized, theories, worldviews, and "isms" contain ideas that are constantly changing, interacting with one another and with culture, common sense, and emotions. In its essential meaning – or what he once jokingly called its "weak" sense – the history of ideas is something that "cannot be identified with a 'philosophical' or 'epistemological' history" and is concerned "more with the shuffling of the cards (ideas) than with the structure of the games (theories)" (Rossi 1991, 9).

Treating the past as another present rather than simply as our own past shifts the focus away from ourselves and toward those who lived, acted, and thought within it. It also awakens curiosity about the different, the unfamiliar, and the foreign. Placing ourselves in that other present compels us to view its intellectual life as open to a future that was still unknown; it draws us away from the presumption of judging it by our own standards and, above all, reminds us of the provisional and artificial character of disciplinary divisions – and of those standards themselves. When they do their work well, historians uncover new paths that lead to unknown destinations, showing that the past can be as unpredictable as the future.

To further clarify the purpose of this new journal, the cover image draws on a metaphor developed by George Boas (1969, viii), according

to which ideas “are quicksilver in the way they roll about and turn up in places where logic would never have pushed them”. Historians of ideas, he added, “must have a kind of curiosity about the human mind and its workings that is not common” and “must also poke about in odd corners”, or, as Walter Pagen (1945) put it, rummage through the rubbish of the past, treating with the same care and attention even ideas that their own time regards as obsolete or superstitious.

Despite the criticisms – more or less justified – directed at the history of ideas from multiple quarters since the 1960s, its approach to intellectual problems cannot simply be dispensed with. This is especially true today, when our present asserts itself as if it were without history and the past is too often read in terms of “genealogies” and “unmaskings”, with history reduced to relations of power, rhetorical performances, or mechanisms of victimization. As for the issue of specialization, the historian Darrin McMahan (2014, 24) has recently argued that, since the merits and beauties of historiographical “pointillism” have been amply demonstrated, “perhaps it is time again for some to try to paint with a broader brush, and to do so in the recognition that if the past is another country, it needn’t always be conceived as a particular hamlet locked away in time”. Exploring that distant or unfamiliar country, in fact, does not mean only understanding and respecting its historical specificity; it also means trying to disentangle and illuminate the roots of our present.

We believe that the conceptions of the history of ideas to which we have referred are still valid and productive, and we are convinced that engaging in this kind of inquiry continues to represent a particularly virtuous way of practicing the historian’s craft. We also believe that it is important to grasp concretely the historical impact of ideas – that is, their capacity to transform ways of thinking and living, and to shape behavior. Through the history of ideas, we come to understand with unexpected clarity that core values such as rationality, logical rigor, and the public character of methods and results are “neither eternal categories of the spirit nor enduring facts in the history of mankind but historical achievements which, like all achievements, can by definition be lost or reversed” (Rossi 2001, 229).

The journal welcomes contributions that do not merely trace the long-term development or “migration” of one or more ideas across history, in keeping with the classical approach, but that also focus on specific historical problems, addressing them in their contexts and beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. Space is given not only to professional historians, but also to scholars who – regardless of their disciplinary background – bring a historical sensibility that enables them to map and clarify the major questions and shifts in perspective that run through their fields and shape relations with other domains of knowledge.

In this issue, alongside the articles, readers will also find a section titled *Echoes*, devoted to the republication of texts that are now difficult to access, as well as to previously unpublished materials of historical interest. *Reviews* and *New Books* complete the issue, with the latter devoted to concise notices of recent publications.

Among its many contributions, the history of ideas helps us make sense of the origins of our ways of thinking. “If that is not of importance, one wonders what is”, wrote George Boas more than half a century ago (1969, viii). It was important then, and it is perhaps even more important today, in a world shaped by globalization and by the entanglement – not always peaceful – of cultures and ways of living and thinking.

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