Introduction: The Study of Ancient Philosophy

Ancient philosophy can be studied in many ways.[1] The thoughts of ancient philosophers are of great interest not just as philosophical thoughts. Many of them, in one way or another, are also of great historical importance. They help to explain a great many historical facts, not just in the history of philosophy, but in many other histories, e.g., the history of theology, the history of political theory, even the history of literature. Or they are reflections of some historical development we may be interested in; again, this may be a development in the history of philosophy or in some other history, even one that at first may seem to have very little to do with philosophy, e.g., the rise of literacy. In historical accounts of ancient life there are few aspects of that life which do not involve some reference to the fact that some philosopher had a certain view and many aspects of that life into which philosophy enters quite substantially, e.g., Roman law. Equally, there is hardly a facet of ancient life that does not find its reflection in ancient philosophy, and there are many aspects of that life which seem to have a substantial influence on the thought of philosophers. Thus there are many approaches to the thought of ancient philosophers, all of which contribute to a better understanding of it. One can pursue each of the many histories in which ancient philosophy, either as a whole or in part, plays a role and try to determine what this role is in a manner appropriate for the history in question. One reason why the study of ancient philosophy is so attractive and so lively is that it allows for so many interests and approaches. Clearly it would be a mistake to think that there is only one way to study ancient philosophy.

It would be as great a mistake to think that one could fruitfully study the subject in any way one cared to. The different approaches have to be carefully distinguished and kept distinct. Different approaches are appropriate for different interests, and the results one obtains are relative to this interest and to the approach chosen. Thus one might well imagine that one could explain the thought of a political philosopher on the distribution of goods in terms of the history of

that philosopher's society and social status in it, if this is the kind of history one is interested in and if one chooses this approach to the thought of the philosopher in question. But it would be a mistake to think that the explanation one found was the only possible explanation. For the philosopher may have had very good reasons for his views on the distribution of goods, reasons that we find so convincing that we feel the need to explain why not everybody in his society adopted them. Moreover, we may have no reason to doubt that it was for these reasons that he adopted the view in question. Thus, depending on the way we approach his thought, we account for his thought in two quite different ways. This does not mean there is anything wrong with either of these explanations or that we have to declare one of them illegitimate. All this does show is that the fact that someone had a philosophical view is an extraordinarily complex fact, and that, if we want to capture some of its complexity, we have to allow for a wide variety of approaches to it and resist the temptation to declare one of these approaches the only legitimate one.

In principle one can look at a philosophical view that someone has held in two different ways. One can look at it primarily as a philosophical view that someone might entertain; one may wonder whether or not it is true, for what kinds of reasons one might want to take this view, what its implications are, and entirely disregard, as irrelevant to one's purposes, the fact that it is a view that has actually been taken by a certain person under certain circumstances. To consider a view in this way is to consider it philosophically. But one can also look at this view primarily as one that was actually held, be interested in the fact that it was the view of a certain person under certain circumstances, and try to understand it as such. Now, presumably, one is not interested in understanding the fact that someone had a certain philosophical view quite independently of who had the view and what the view was. We are interested in understanding the fact that someone had a certain philosophical view only if we think this fact has some significance, is in some way revealing. The fact that someone held a certain philosophical view has some significance, is somehow revealing, if the view intrinsically is of philosophical interest or if it has considerable historical influence, either in the history of philosophy or in some other history; or it might be revealing in a number of other ways, e.g., because it shows how considerations or events that form part of some other history influence the thought of philosophers, or how the influence of certain events and changes was so pervasive that it was reflected even in the thought of philosophers. I will call facts about the past that have this significance, that are revealing, historical facts. One might, of course, call all facts about the past historical facts. But it seems important to emphasize that history in the sense in which the historian is concerned with it is not the whole of the past, but some abstractions from it into which only some facts about the past enter, namely those we find interesting or important or those that we have to refer to account for those facts that we deem interesting

or important. To do justice to this it seems preferable to restrict the notion of a historical fact to those facts about the past that enter into a history. To understand the historical fact that someone took a certain philosophical view is to be able to explain it in the way in which one explains historical facts.

Now if the historical fact is the fact that a certain agent performed a certain action, we try to explain it in the way in which we normally try to explain why someone did something. We first ask ourselves whether the agent had good reason to do what he did, and if we see that he did, we think we have understood his action. By "good reason" I mean here and throughout what we ourselves would regard as good reason. It is, of course, quite true, that the agent in question may have a different view of what constitutes a good reason and may act on what he considers to be good reasons. But in this case his behavior would not be readily and immediately intelligible to us, precisely because we would first have to realize that he acted on a different conception of what constitutes a good reason, and then we would have to understand why he had this different conception. In the end we have no alternative but to understand what others did or thought in terms of our notion of what constitutes a good reason, though in trying to understand others we may come to realize that it is our notion of what counts as a good reason that needs to be changed and that stands in the way of understanding them. But we may also come to the conclusion that the person, even given his own conception, did not have a good reason to do what he did. And in this case, we have to try to find a more complicated explanation that will explain why the agent did what he did, though he had no good reason for it. Now, what is true of action seems also to be true of taking a philosophical view. If we think that a philosopher had a good reason to adopt a certain view, we think we understand why he held this view. It may take us some time to find out that he had a good reason. It may be that the reason we do not readily understand the thought of a philosopher is that at first we fail to see that he in fact did have a good reason to adopt his view; it may take us some time to change our own views and possibly even our notion of what constitutes a good reason before we can realize that he had a good reason for holding his views. One reason we study the thought of great philosophers with such care would seem to be precisely this, that we trust that in many cases they had good reason to say what they did, although, because of limitations in our understanding, we do not readily understand it. These limitations are one of the things we hope to remove by studying the great philosophers of the past. We may, of course, in some cases come to the conclusion that the philosopher, after all, had no good reason to adopt the view in question.

It is, perhaps, worth pointing out that it often is not easy to come to this conclusion. For to claim that someone did not have a good reason to think what he did is to claim that it is not owing to our lack of understanding that we find it difficult to understand why the person held this view—a claim not easily made

in the case of philosophers whose peer power of intellect and depth of insight generally far exceeds our own. Still, we may feel sufficiently confident that the philosopher had no good reason to think what he did. In this case, we think we have to look for a more complex explanation of why he took the view, in spite of the fact that he had no good reason to do so. If this is correct, it is apparent that a full historical understanding of the fact that somebody held a certain view will always involve a philosophical understanding of the view itself. For how is one to judge whether someone had a good reason to hold a view, unless one has a philosophical understanding of that view by virtue of which one knows what it is to have a good reason for holding it? Even if the philosopher did not have good reason for holding the view, the explanation of why he held it will have to make some reference to the fact that it was not for a good reason that he adopted it. It is an explanation of why the philosopher held the view, in spite of the fact that he had no good reason for doing so. For instance, merely to cite the bad reason he had will not satisfactorily explain the fact that he held the belief, though it was, in fact, for this reason that he held it. We would still not understand why he held the belief for this reason, unless something were added that made us understand why he held the belief, though his reasons for doing so were bad.

But even in the case where we have come to the conclusion that the philosopher held his view for no good reason, there are two quite different kinds of explanation that might account for the fact that he held it. In one kind of case we can explain why the philosopher held the view he did by providing him with a set of assumptions and a line of reasoning such that we can understand how someone who made these assumptions and argued in this way could think that the inadequate reasons he offered for adopting his view did constitute a good reason to do so. We would not share these assumptions or we would find fault with the argument, or both, but we might be able to understand how even one of us might make these assumptions or use an argument of this kind. We might, e.g., decide that the author had fallen victim to a simple fallacy, the kind of fallacy we can see ourselves committing, and this might explain why he thought what in fact are bad reasons to constitute a good reason to adopt the view. Hence we have an explanation for why he adopted the view, though he had no good reason for doing so.

In another kind of case, though, no explanation of this kind may be available. However hard we try, there is no set of assumptions and no line of philosophical argument that we could easily see ourselves adopting and that would explain why the philosopher thought his bad reasons good reasons. It is in these cases that we think we have to appeal to some historical context from which we can explain why the philosopher held the view. Thus, we might discover that all of the philosopher's contemporaries made certain assumptions, which, although none of us would make them, readily explain why the philosopher in question took his reasons to be good reasons to adopt his view.

Now all the explanations we have considered so far are explanations of a historical fact, and in that sense one might call all these explanations historical explanations. But these explanations are of two radically different kinds in that only the last kind of explanation tries to explain the historical fact from its historical context. It may be useful, then, to make a distinction between these two kinds of explanation by reserving the term "historical explanation" for the kind of explanation that must appeal to a particular historical context to explain the fact that someone held a certain philosophical view.

How, then, do we explain historically the historical fact that someone held a certain philosophical view, if he had no good for reason for doing so, and if we cannot find some line of reasoning and certain assumptions that we can easily imagine ourselves using? We consider the historical context of the thought to see whether there is some history that will help explain why someone, given his historical situation, would come to hold this view.

But at this point it is, perhaps, worthwhile to note the fact that it does not follow from the fact that someone held a philosophical view which has to be explained historically that it has to be explained in terms of the history of philosophy, by the historian of philosophy. Perhaps we can avoid some confusion if we distinguish between ancient philosophy, or quite generally the philosophy of the past, on the one hand, and the study of this philosophy, on the other. There is an object, ancient philosophy, and this object allows for a certain kind of study. Often one uses the expression "the history of ancient philosophy" to refer to the object as a whole, but to avoid confusion we may prefer to reserve the term "history of philosophy" for a certain kind of study of this object and for the aspect of the object that is studied this way, namely the kind of study that tries to do philosophical justice to ancient philosophy.

The reason I think it is useful to make this distinction is this: it is not the task of the historian of philosophy to explain whatever philosophical view someone may have had, even if it is a historical fact, i.e., a fact of some significance, that a certain person held this view. Nor is it the task of the historian of philosophy to find some explanation or other for such a historical fact. It is, rather, his task to find a certain kind of explanation for the view in question, namely the kind of explanation that is appropriate for the history of philosophy, rather than, say, the history of morals. Thus it may be a historical fact of great significance that a certain politician held certain philosophical views, and this fact may admit only of a historical explanation. But this may be a fact of no significance for the history of philosophy. The thought may not be remarkable as a philosophical thought, it may shed no light on the thought of earlier philosophers, and it may be of no help in understanding the thought of later philosophers. It may even be that it is an important historical fact that a philosopher held certain philosophical views, but this in itself does not guarantee him a place in the history of philosophy, since the only reason his views were so important may have

been that he was the friend of an important politican whose politics were very much influenced by his philosophical views.

It is easy to see that some philosophical thoughts do not enter the history of philosophy because they lack historical significance. It is also easy enough to see that some philosophical thoughts do not enter the history of philosophy because they are of no significance for this history. It is not so easy to say positively that a philosophical thought is to be considered a part of the history of philosophy. Ultimately this will depend on the conception one has of the history of philosophy. But it does seem safe to say that we want those philosophical thoughts to be part of the history of philosophy that had a considerable philosophical influence on later philosophical thought. A thought may have philosophical influence on later thought in any number of ways: it may make the philosophical problem at issue appear different, it may suggest other views one could take on this problem, it may open up new ways to argue for a given view, it may reveal the limitations of a line of argument that had been accepted thus far. If a good deal of later philosophical thought can be seen to depend on some earlier philosophical thought in this way, the earlier thought no doubt forms part of the history of philosophy. And the more the thoughts that are influenced by earlier thought in turn are philosophically influential, the clearer it will be that the original thought should be part of a history of philosophy.

Now, to say that a philosophical thought has been philosophically influential is to say that there are philosophical thoughts that somehow depend on it, that in some way have to be explained in terms of it. But a thought may depend on an earlier thought in several ways. The simplest case would seem to be one in which a later philosopher adopts a view for a good reason, but the view and the reason are sufficiently complex so that one assumes that his taking this view for this reason was facilitated, or even made possible, by the fact that an earlier philosopher had taken this view for this reason. More complex cases are those in which a later philosopher adopts a view for reasons that do not constitute good reasons because he has convinced himself that some earlier philosopher who adopted the view for these reasons had good reasons to adopt it, or, more generally cases in which a later philosopher adopts a view for reasons that do not constitute good reasons because he has been persuaded by the thought of some earlier philosopher that what he regards as reasons to adopt the view are good reasons. Almost all philosophical thought depends on earlier thought in this way. What this reflects is simply the fact that we always do philosophy against the background of the philosophical views and the philosophical reasoning of at least our immediate predecessors, that we cannot, at least to begin with, see the problems except in terms of the views and the reasons of our predecessors, and that however much we free ourselves from their views and reasons, there will always be some dependence on them. And, in general, even in the case of highly original philosophers,

this dependence seems to be overwhelming. If early modern philosophy seems or even at times pretends to stand on its own feet, it can do so only as long as we know very little about the history of Hellenistic and late Medieval philosophy. So what the history of philosophy in the narrower sense seems to be made up of are those philosophical thoughts which are influential in this way.

Nor is it the task of the historian of philosophy to find some explanation or other for the philosophical thoughts that enter the history of philosophy. The historian of philosophy will, rather, go on the assumption that philosophical views are usually set forth for philosophical reasons. He recognizes that sometimes philosophical views are put forth by philosophers who are quite aware that they do not have a good reason to hold them, but the historian of philosophy, nevertheless, and often rightly, thinks that it would be worthwhile to consider these views. More may be gained by this than by considering uninteresting or boring views for which excellent reasons have been offered. But the paradigm is that of a philosopher who adopts a view because he thinks he has a good reason to do so. The historian of philosophy will try to identify the reasons for which he adopts the view and will see whether they constitute a good reason for doing so. Failing this, he will see whether he can reconstruct some line of reasoning that would make it intelligble why the philosopher thought his reasons constituted good reasons and hence adopted the view, a philosophical line of reasoning that even one of us might still avail himself of. Only if this also fails will the historian of philosophy resort to a historical explanation in terms of the history of philosophy. But he will still insist that it is because the philosopher had reasons for holding a certain view and that there must be some philosophical considerations that will explain why the philosopher in question took these reasons to be adequate reasons, except that now these philosophical considerations are dated; only someone in the historical situation of the philosopher in question could avail himself of such considerations. They are the kinds of considerations we would expect someone who is dependent on the thoughts of those predecessors to take seriously. We ourselves can imagine that if we were in those circumstances there would be nothing remarkable, noteworthy, surprising, or astonishing, if we examined these considerations and concluded that the reasons we had for the view in question constituted good reasons to adopt it. It is at this point in particular that the historian of philosophy will have to display all his historical learning and his philosophical ingenuity. For he will have (i) to try to reconstruct some philosophical line of reasoning that would explain why the author in question thought his reasons for holding the belief adequate, and (ii) to make a case for saying that it was, indeed, because of such a line of reasoning that the author thought his reasons adequate. To do the first often requires much philosophical resoucefulness; to do the second requires a firm grasp on what kind of reasoning, which kinds of philosophical considerations were available at the time.

Nevertheless, however successful we may be in reconstructing a line of reasoning that we can imagine ourselves espousing in this historical context, and that we have reason to think the philosopher adopted, or at least might have adopted, it will still be a flawed line of reasoning. It must rely on assumptions that not only are unwarranted, but that one can plausibly make only in such a historical context. Or it will rely on a mode of reasoning that is inconclusive, and that could be found acceptable only in such a historical context. And we must be able to identify these flaws or mistakes. For we do want to say that the author came to hold his view because he made these mistakes and that it was because of these mistakes, understandable as they may be, that he thought that his reasons for holding his view were adequate.

Often, though, not even this kind of explanation is available to us. For, however hard we try, we are not able to find a set of philosophical considerations we ourselves might have used in this historical situation on purely philosophical grounds. Even given the thought of the relevant predecessors, we cannot see ourselves making these assumptions or finding these arguments acceptable. In purely philosophical terms and in terms of the history of philosophy in the narrow sense, there is something remarkable, noteworthy, surprising, astonishing about the flaws and the mistakes that led the philosopher to take his reasons to be good reasons for his view. It is at this point that we have to look for a historical explanation outside the history of philosophy, an explanation in terms of some other historical context, some other history. Thus we might conclude that the only way to understand why the philosopher came to avail himself of a certain line of reasoning is by assuming that he found it difficult to avail himself of certain lines of reasoning that would have been preferable on philosophical grounds because of his religious convictions, the religious convictions of the time, and because of the way in which such convictions were encouraged and conflicting views were discouraged.

One may note, first, that in actual practice it is quite difficult to determine in a particular case how far one should go in trying to provide a philosopher with a line of reasoning that is intelligble at least in the light of the history of philosophy, and when one should just give up and look at an explanation in terms of some other history. Naturally enough, historians of philosophy try to take the philosophers of the past seriously as philosophers and hence go as far as they possibly can to explain their thought in terms of purely philosophical considerations.

Secondly, we may assume that the selectivity with which the historian of philosophy deals with the philosophy of the past results in much philosophical thought that stands in need of a historical explanation in terms of some history other than the history of philosophy being dropped from consideration. Philosophers who adopt philosophical views for reasons that could not make much philosophical sense even to their contemporaries tend to have little

philosophical influence and hence to disappear from the history of philosophy. It seems that the philosophers who play a crucial role in the history of philosophy are in general those whose thought we can explain without having to refer to some other history. But however narrowly we conceive of the history of philosophy, it will still be the case that some of the thought it deals with will have to be understood in terms of some other history.

So though the historian of philosophy usually explains those philosophical views of the past that enter into the history of philosophy in terms of philosophical considerations, it is obvious for the reasons given above that this will often not suffice to understand the fact that a philosopher took a certain view, because it will not suffice to explain the mistakes he made. And unless these mistakes are trivial because they are the kinds of mistakes any of us occasionally make, they need an explanation in terms of some other history. We might, e.g., think that the fact that a philosopher availed himself of a certain line of reasoning could be understood only in terms of something in the history of his life that suggested this line of reasoning to him, which made it tempting for him to think of a particular matter in a certain way, which made it difficult for him to think of it otherwise. We might come to the conclusion that the fact that a philosopher availed himself of a certain line of reasoning had to be understood in terms of the history of the social structure of his society, which made it very difficult for him to think of certain matters other than as he did. We may suspect that the reason he was inclined toward a certain line of philosophical reasoning has something to do with the history of religion and that this will also explain why it was rather difficult to adopt certain lines of philosophical reasoning, though on purely philosophical grounds they may have seemed preferable even then. Neither last nor least, it might occur to one that the purusit of philosophy is also a social institution, with its history in terms of which we can explain that students have views resembling the views of their teachers, and that at times it would have been quite difficult to have views different from the views of one's teachers or one's school. There are any number of ways in which some history other than the history of philosophy may interfere with the thought of a philosopher in such a way that it no longer is intelligible just on philosophical grounds, not even on the philosophical grounds available at that point in the history of philosophy.

Now, though I think that one should conceive of the history of philosophy in this way, I also think that thinking of it in this way involves an enormous abstraction and idealization. One goes on the assumption that, in general, philosophers adopted certain views because they had certain philosophical reasons for doing so. But, in fact, it seems that philosophical views grow on one in a highly complex manner, of which our philosophical reasons and our philosophical considerations form only a part. We have seen that even in the case in which a philosopher has a good reason for adopting the view he does and no doubt holds

it for this reason, we may, nevertheless, think that he depends for his view on some earlier philosopher from whom he has learned to see the matter correctly and without whom, we might think, he would never come to hold the right view for the right reasons; and this, in turn, is perfectly compatible with the further assumption that our philosopher, given his nonphilosophical, e.g., moral, concerns, could under these historical circumstances, e.g., these social conditions, hardly fail to avail himself of this line of reasoning and adopt the view in question. We will never understand the origins of Greek philosophy by looking only at the philosophical considerations that led Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes to their philosophical views, unless we understand enough about the history of Greek society to understand why at this point this society needed something like philosophy, and how this influenced the thoughts of the first philosophers. That philosophers hold their views for philosophical reasons is perfectly compatible with the assumption that there are many other histories influencing their thought. This is most apparent when their thought gets derailed in such a way that we can no longer understand it in terms of purely philosophical considerations. But the same kinds of influences that reveal themselves in this case are also operative even when the philosopher adopts a view for purely philosophical reasons.

In fact, one may become quite impressed by how firmly embedded the thought of philosophers is in the life of their societies and even in their own lives. I have been struck for a long time by how autobiographical, as it were, the thought of philosophers is. It does not take much reflection to see that it is not surprising that the topics philosophers concentrate on, the general approach they take to their topics, the way they argue, the way they set forth their views, and often even the questions they consider are very much a reflection of their life and their personality. And it is no less surprising that the thought of philosophers should closely reflect the life, the history, and the character of the societies they live in. One cannot understand why friendship plays such an important role in ancient moral philosophy that Aristotle devotes two books of his *Ethics* to it unless one understands the enormous role friendship played as a social institution in classical Greece. One cannot understand why Plato and Aristotle subordinate ethics to politics unless one recognizes that the relation between the individual and the political community was very different in classical Greece from what it is now and, correspondingly, that it was conceived of rather differently. It is difficult to understand on purely philosophical grounds why almost the whole philosophy of late antiquity should be some form of Platonism; obviously, there is a connection between the dominance of Platonism and the new religions that conquered the Roman Empire. But it would be a mistake to be so impressed by this thought to think that the reasons philosophers offer for their views, or the philosophical considerations the historian of philosophy attributes to them, are mere rationalizations of views that they, in fact, held for other rea-

sons. To think this is to underrate the intellectual power, ingenuity, resourcefulness, and honesty of certain philosophers who would have been ready to transform, modify, or, if necessary, give up any of their views, to arrive at a set of beliefs for which they could have produced satisfactory reasons, even though they might have started out by trying to justify a view they were inclined toward on other grounds. And it is in terms of these reasons that we have to try to understand their views, unless we want to think that there is something misguided about the whole enterprise of philosophy that allows us to discount the philosophers' claim to hold philosophical views for philosophical reasons. Moreover, we have to keep in mind that even if we came to believe that the philosophical reasons given frequently are mere rationalizations, they nonetheless are reasons that have to be considered as such, and that they might turn out to be perfectly good reasons, in spite of the fact that they may have been espoused for other reasons. What is more, the way they influence this history of philosophy is not as rationalizations, but as reasons, as good or bad, plausible or implausible reasons. It is because of this that the history of philosophy tries to explain the views of philosophers, as far as this is possible, on purely philosophical grounds.

But even if we think of the history of philosophy in this way, we may, for the reasons given, also want to insist that the thought of philosophers is tied to various histories, several of which may help to explain why a certain philosopher held a certain philosophical view, even if it was for philosophical reasons, or even good philosophical reasons, that he held it. What is more, these histories often help to shape philosophical thought, namely when its precise form and content is no longer determined by purely philosophical considerations. Moreover, we have to keep in mind that philosophical thought itself helps to shape many other histories.

Thus, if we regard ancient philosophy an an object, this object, either as a whole or in part, enters into many histories. It is because of this that it can be pursued in many different ways, all of which have something to contribute to a fuller understanding of this object. To consider the philosophical thoughts of ancient philosophers only as such, will provide one with a very partial understanding of ancient philosophy. The history of philosophy goes further than this. But it, too, does not provide us with more than an abstract, general understanding of ancient philosophy. To understand it, as much as possible, in its concrete, complex detail, one has also to look at all the other histories to which it is tied by an intricate web of causal connections which run both ways.

Hence, if I were asked whether my interest in ancient philosophy was primarily an interest in philosophy or an interest in the history of philosophy, I would say neither, since I am primarily interested in ancient philosophy itself, as it turns up in the various histories into which it enters, and in the way it actually enters these various histories.

It is because I conceive of my interest in ancient philosophy in this way that I have taken an interest in the whole history of ancient philosophy. For if, as I believe, a good deal of ancient philosophical thought cannot be understood in terms of reasons we might avail ourselves of, and if even what can be understood in this way is more fully understood if we also understand it in terms of the history of ancient philosophy, then an understanding of the history of ancient philosophy is crucial. But one does not arrive at a full understanding of a history by looking at just a few parts of it, especially if these parts are not selected with a view to what is important in terms of this history, but, rather, in terms, e.g., of our current philosophical interests and tastes. One cannot hope to understand the history of ancient philosophy by looking at just its beginnings, for obviously how the history is to be constructed depends crucially on how it continues and how it ends. This is just another way of saying that we can understand a philosophical view only in terms of the history of philosophy, that is, only if we see how it fits into this history as a whole, that is, if we understand not just what leads up to it, but also how it leads up to what follows. If we try to understand Aristotle's *Ethics,* we are not only greatly helped by seeing it against the background of Plato's moral philosophy, but also by considering what became of it as it was passed down in the Peripatetic school and by considering how Stoics, Epicureans, and Skeptics reacted to it and transformed it.

Hence, a large part of my work has been devoted to Hellenistic philosophy, in particular to the Stoics and the Skeptics, because until fairly recently we had very little understanding of this part of ancient philosophy. One reason for this was that Hellenistic philosophers were regarded as second- or third-rate philosophers, of little or no philosophical interest. As we come to have a better understanding of them, we increasingly realize three things: (i) Hellenistic philosophers are extremely interesting philosophically, once we do the tedious work of the historian to restore and reconstruct their actual views, instead of just believing what philosophers have been telling us about them since the beginning of modern times; (ii) We will understand early modern philosophy from Descartes to Kant much better once we fully realize how enormous the debt of early modern philosophy to Hellenistic philosophy is; (iii) Pre-Hellenistic ancient philosophy begins to appear in a different and better perspective. Hence, it is not surprising that the last ten years have seen an enormous increase in the interest in Hellenistic philosophy.

I very much hope, though, that one will soon be able to say the same about the philosophy of late antiquity. The objection is that it is philosophically boring, if not repellent. Again, the judgment is not based on careful study of the evidence, but on what has been commonly said about the philosophy of late antiquity. It seems clear to me (i) that Plotinus is extremely interesting philosophically, (ii) that we will never be able to understand medieval philosophy in its various traditions (the traditions of Byzantine philosophy, Islamic philosophy,

and the Latin West) unless we understand the philosophy of late antiquity, and (iii) that the philosophy of late antiquity sheds a greal deal of light on the history of Hellenistic philosophy and classical philosophy. One can learn much more from Plotinus about Aristotle than from most modern accounts of the Stagirite. Thus, I am confident that the near future will bring us a renaissance of studies of late ancient philosophy.

Because it seemed to me that one has a chance to understand the fact that someone took a certain view only if one fully understands that view, I chose to study the ancient history of one subject-matter, namely logic. Since we now seem to have a particularly clear understanding of the subject-matter, it is relatively easy for us to attain an unusually high level of understanding of views of logic held in the past. And, indeed, the enormous advances logic has made in the course of the last century have had the effect that we now have vastly better accounts of ancient logic. But this case also shows that a mere understanding of the subject-matter is not sufficient. To explain the reasons for which views were held, we also have to know which lines of reasoning were available and which not. Modern accounts of ancient logic almost invariably suffer from anachronism, and often grossly so.

Moreover, it seemed to me a good thing to take particular views or complexes of views and to follow them through history, to see how they were interpreted and reinterpreted, what was made of them in which context. A treatise like Aristotle's *Categories* offers a unique opportunity to do this, since it is one of the two or three philosophical texts that have been studied continuously throughout the history of philosophy, there are commentaries on it from all periods, it has had an enormous influence on the history of philosophy, and its contents were diffused at all levels of learning through compendia. Hence, a good deal of my work has centered on this treatise, in particular its metaphysics with its doctrine of substance.

Given that I am interested in the way in which ancient philosophy fits into the life of antiquity in general, I have not only tried to come to some understanding of ancient philosophy in terms of the history of ancient philosophy as a whole, but I have also taken an interest in some of the other histories in which parts of ancient philosophy play an important role. In particular I have been interested in the connections between philosophy and other branches of learning, e.g., grammar, medicine, and rhetoric.

Grammar seemed to me to be a particularly interesting case for the following reason. In school I had great difficulty understanding traditional grammar, whether Greek, Latin, or German. Later I learned from modern linguists that traditional grammar is utterly confused. Part of the reason for this confusion, though, seems to me not to have been properly understood. Traditional grammar was heavily influenced first by Stoic philosophy and later by Peripatetic philosophy. But, of course, the quite substantial philosophical assumptions that explain

many of the features of traditional grammar were no longer accepted, understood, or even acknowledged when the subject had gained a life of its own and was pursued by scholars who knew little more of Stoic philosophy than its name. Hence, crucial features of the theory were no longer understood by those who were supposed to teach, revise, and expand the theory. In this one can see how far and in what disguise philosophical ideas can travel and what damage they can do if they go unrecognized.

Ancient medicine is of particular interest because here we have a case where there is a close connection on different levels which goes in both directions. There is not just a close connection between philosophical theory and medical theory, owing to the fact that both philosophers and doctors are interested in physiology and even pathology. There is also a connection between philosophical views concerning the nature of human knowledge, the sciences and arts, and the way doctors conceive of their art. In fact, doctors develop quite elaborate philosophical theories concerning their expertise and expert knowledge in general, which in turn influence philosophers. Moreover, one might at least think that these philosophical views that are of great concern for ancient doctors might significantly affect their medical practice. One can observe that they did, but it is more interesting to notice how principles, based on philosophical considerations, which one might imagine would lead to wide divergences in practice in the end are supplemented by further principles, so that differences in medical practice between adherents of different schools were greatly reduced, if not abolished.

The case of medicine is also of interest in this context because ancient doctors had their own tradition of philosophical thought, they, as it were, insisted on their own philosophy which is rich enough to have its own history, closely interwoven with the history of philosophy of the philosophers, but not part of it, rather parallel to it. To make things more complicated, some ancient doctors, like Asclepiades of Bithyma, Menodotus, Sextus Empiricus, and Galen, were also philosophers of sufficient stature to secure themselves a place in the history of philosophy. But it is the history of philosophy within medicine, as it were, which has been my particular concern. For, naturally enough, historians of philosophy have not taken much interest in it, and historians of medicine, equally naturally, have been reluctant to deal with philosophical matters.

So I have tried to study ancient philosophy in these various ways in the hope of getting as complex an understanding as possible of its complex reality. It seems to me that all these are perfectly good ways to study ancient philosophy, to shed light on the subject. Sometimes, though, philosophers talk as if there were only one way to study ancient philosophy and the philosophy of the past in general. And sometimes they talk as if it were not really worthwhile to study ancient philosophy and the philosophy of the past in general, obviously assuming that there is this one way to study the philosophy of the past, but that not much

profit is to be gained by studying it this way. I am sure that no one really means this, but some comments on the matter may at least clarify my view.

To start with, it is merely an institutional fact that ancient philosophy is mainly studied in philosophy departments by philosophers. There is no separate profession of students of ancient philosophy. And this is all for the better, since to understand ancient philosophical thought one first of all has to understand it philosophically. It does cause a noticeable problem, though, for classicists, ancient historians, Roman lawyers, historians of medicine, historians of science, historians of theology, and a great many others, who may get the feeling that they are supposed to approach the subject in the way philosophers tend to approach it, when they, in fact, have their own legitimate approaches to it. For philosophers naturally want to study ancient philosophy in such a way as to understand it philosophically and to benefit philosophically from this understanding. It goes without saying, or rather apparently it does not, that this is not everyone else's ultimate aim in studying ancient philosophical thought. The one great history of ancient philosophy was written by a theologian, E. Zeller, whose primary interests in writing this history were in theology and the history of theology. But the philosophers are encouraged in their attitude toward the study of the philosophy of the past by a historical accident, namely the accident that ancient philosophy and the philosophy of the past in general came to be a subject of research and teaching by philosophers for a certain reason. It seems that the philosophy of the past came to be studied and taught by philosophers at the end of the eighteenth and in the course of the nineteenth century to complement or supplement the systematic study of philosophy. It seems that it was thought that the great philosophers could serve as models of what it is to do philosophy, that they had raised certain questions in an exemplary way and that they had formulated classical answers to them, from the study of which one could greatly benefit, even if one disagreed with their views, because they were exemplary even in their mistakes.

This attitude toward the great philosophers of the past had, of course, a long tradition. The tradition of studying great philosophers as philosophical classics goes back to antiquity. At the end of the second and in the first century B.C. certain figures in the history of philosophy, primarily Plato and Aristotle, were singled out as classical philosophers, just as one singled out classical historians, classical orators, classical dramatists, authors who were supposed to serve as a model for, and in a way to define, a genre. Within another two centuries the study of philosophy was reduced to the study of these classical philosophers. Philosophy was taught by commenting on the texts of these historical authors. Much historical and philological learning went into their study: reliable editions for these authors had to be prepared, authentic writings had to be distinguished from inauthentic ones, numerous historical allusions in the text had to be clarified. To understand what Plato and Aristotle say, one often has to know that

they are addressing certain long-forgotten philosophical views. In short, men like Alexander of Aphrodisias and Porphyry were men of vast historical learning, but there is no reason to suppose they had an interest in the history of philosophy as such. They just learned what it took to determine Plato's and Aristotle's thought and to understand it philosophically. For their purposes it was an accident that Plato and Aristotle were figures of the past, historical figures.

Obviously, this way of teaching and studying philosophy by studying classical texts was no longer acceptable in modern times. It had been a strain already in antiquity, and in the Middle Ages literary forms were developed that allowed one to formally comment on a text when, in fact, one was systematically expounding one's own views, e.g., the questiones commentary. Once one started to study and to teach philosophy by setting forth systematically one's own views or by teaching from a contemporary textbook, another problem arose. The views of earlier philosophers may have been outdated, but one could not fail to realize that there was a noticeable difference between Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Hume, and oneself or the author of the textbook one used. There is something strange in the notion that Baumgarten, Reimar, Cruse, Knutzen should take the place of these earlier philosophers, and there is something incongruous in the idea that Kant should teach philosophy by commenting on these authors. In any case, it is easy enough to see why it could be thought that the systematic study of philosophy should be supplemented by a study of the great philosophers of the past as philosophical models, to be understood and appreciated as philosophers. And this kind of study came to be called the study of the history of philosophy, since it was after all a study of the philosophy of the past and since it could involve some, or even a great deal of, historical learning, as we saw above in the cases of Alexander and of Porphyry. Hence, it is only natural that philosophers to the present day should think of the study of the history of philosophy in this way and decide that it should be abandoned if it no longer benefited us philosophically. After all, it was introduced for this purpose, and if it no longer serves it, it has lost its rationale.

But, clearly, there is an equivocation here. The study of the history of philosophy as a subject as I described it, i.e., as a systematic historical discipline is quite a different enterprise from the study of the philosophy of the past as it has been practiced by philosophers from the nineteenth century onward and continues to be practiced by them to the present day, though both come under the title of "history of philosophy." The historian of philosophy wants to understand the history of philosophy, and he wants to explain philosophical views of the past in terms of this history. He is not, at least as such, concerned to fully appreciate how past philosophers have managed to think or fail to think the way we think or the way one ought to think.

This switch in approach to past thought and the resulting equivocation may have been obscured for a long time by a certain conception of the history of phi-

losophy in the historian's sense of history. If one conceives of the history of philosophy as essentially a process in which certain questions that define the philosophical enterprise are seen and understood ever more clearly and in which the answers to these questions become more and more apparent, if it is perhaps even assumed that there is some mechanism or force that guarantees this kind of progress and in terms of which the history of philosophy, therefore, has to be understood, the two appraoches to the philosophical past might easily seem to coincide. For now the philosophical classics will serve to show a certain understanding of the philosophical problems, but also the limitations of this past understanding and the necessity to overcome these limitations by the progress later thinkers have made. This seems to be the spirit in which the first detailed histories of philosophy were written at the end of the eighteenth century. But, surely, it was a mistake to think that the proper way to understand and to explain Aristotle's thought was to see it as a crucial step forward in the direction of Kantianism, or some other philosophical view. The nineteenth century abounded in views that explained why philosophy, along with the culture of which it is a part, was set on a steady path of progress, in which the steps could be understood, almost teleologically, in terms of the position they led up to. But if the history of philosophy is as much a history of failure where success was possible, as of achievement where failure was possible or almost guaranteed, what reason do we have to think that there is something that guarantees philosophical progress such that we have to understand the history of philosophy in terms of it?

Thus, it seems to me that there is no reason to suppose that the study of the great philosophers of the past as models of philosophical thought and the study of the history of philosophy in the historian's sense will somehow amount to the same thing. And, hence, I think that the question whether the study of the great philosophers of the past as philosophical models is philosophically profitable is quite different from the question whether the study of the history of philosophy is philosophically profitable. In both cases I find it difficult to believe that the answer should not be positive. It is difficult not to see, even without any historical learning, that Kant is a much better philosopher than the famous Kruse, not to mention any of our contemporaries, and that much is to be learned from the complexity of his thought. It is equally difficult to see how one would not benefit philosophically when, in doing the history of philosophy, one tries to find as good a philosophical reason as possible to take the most diverse, if not perverse, philosophical views. What better way could there be to expand one's repertoire of philosophical lines of reasoning than to find one for almost any conceivable philosophical position? What better way is there to learn to see things in fundamentally different ways and to appreciate the merits and the defects of the different positions one could take?

In all this it should not be forgotten, either, that the philosophical views of contemporary philosophers are as much a part of the history of philosophy in

the wider sense as the philosophical views of the past. If, then, by chance, we should be interested not just in some contemporary philosophical view, but also in the question why a certain philosopher holds it, we will try to get the kind of answer we are looking for when we do the history of philosophy, or, more generally, study the philosophical thought of the past. One would expect that the answer one gets is the kind of answer one gets throughout the history of philosophy, an answer that will show how much the view depends on earlier views, at least as likely as not there is no good reason to hold the view, but there are considerations that allow one to understand why the philosopher does think that he has a good reason to hold the belief. One thing, though, that will almost never happen is that we come to think that the philosophical considerations we attribute to the author are dated, are the kinds of considerations we would no longer avail ourselves of, and, hence, have to be explained in terms of the history of philosophy. This must be part of the reason why some philosophers seem to think that contemporary philosophy does not depend on its history. For one can, indeed, understand contemporary philosophical thought, at least in general, without reference to the history of philosophy, because the kinds of philosophical considerations contemporary philosophers avail themselves of are the kinds of considerations in terms of which we can understand any philosophical view, whether present or past, without having to have recourse to the history of philosophy. But, of course, it does not follow from the fact that one can explain someone's having a philosophical view without recourse to the history of philosophy that it does not depend on the history of philosophy. In fact, it might depend so heavily on it that in the future one will no longer be able to understand it except in terms of the history of philosophy. This is just obscured from us by the fact that we have little idea which contemporary considerations in the future will appear dated.

Now if one does not take the view that the history of philosophy by its very nature is a history of increasingly rational and philosophically satisfactory answers to a set of pernennial problems, but, rather, a history of achievements and failures, where the failures often had more influence than the achievements, and if one believes that philosophical thought does heavily depend on the history of philosophy, there might be something to be learned philosophically from the history of philosophy as described above. If we were able to get a good enough grasp on the actual history of philosophy, we should be able to see ever more clearly how our own philosophical thought depends on the philosophical failures of the past. As long as the history of philosophy is seen primarily as a series of achievements that did not go far enough and, hence, naturally invited further achievements that would take the matter a step further, it seems that not much is to be learned philosophically from the realization that one's thought is indebted to one's predecessors. But it is exactly because the historian of philosophy tries to take the philosophers of the past seriously as philosophers that he might come

to the conclusion that the history of philosophy at crucial junctures has gone in the wrong direction.

If this were a fact, it would be difficult for us to see. For we would have to make such judgments in terms of what we think of as good reasons or at least as considerations in the light of which someone might take something to be good reasons. Given that these are matters conditioned by the history of philosophy, they are likely to be conditioned by the very failures we want to diagnose in their terms. Obviously, this will be a difficult task. For to the extent that our notions and assumption of what is rational and reasonable are conditioned by the history of philosophy, they will make that history appear rational and reasonable, a history of achievements rather than of failures.

Fortunately, the historian of philosophy has more to rely on than contemporary philosophical views. His work, ideally, would have taught him new views that one could take, new reasons for or against old views; he may have discovered there was good reason for views which at first seemed unreasonable. All this work may have substantially changed his notions and his assumptions of what constitutes good reason and of what at least is reasonable. Hence, the historian of philosophy might very well be in a position to diagnose a development in the history of philosophy as an aberration, when, from the point of view of contemporary philosophy, this development seems entirely reasonable. The difficulty, of course, is that the historian of philosophy should be able to persuade philosophers that this is so on purely philosophical grounds.

But if one studies the philosophy of the past not just as a historian of philosophy, but in all its aspects, one has further resouces to fall back on. It may be that at some of the junctures in the history of philosophy where the historian of philosophy believes he has to diagnose a failure, the failure may be the result of thoughts which themselves are to be explained in good part in terms of some other history. One may even be able to show that this other history interfered with the "natural" development of philosophical thought at this point, however philosophically reasonable this development may now seem to us.

Once one asked questions such as "What is philosophy?" A way to answer this question is to look at the thought of the past, to study ancient philosophy, e.g., in the way I propose to do, not just by studying ancient philosophers as paradigms, nor by just trying to fit them into the history of philosophy, but by looking at all the histories in which they occur, to see by their example, as concretely as possible, what it actually means and amounts to when one does philosophy. One thing one can learn from this is that to be a philosopher in antiquity was something rather different from what it is today. There is no doubt that the *Lives and Views of the Philosophers* of a Diogenes Laertius are bad history of philosophy, but perhaps they do capture an aspect of ancient philosophy that the scholarly history of philosophy, given its aims, passes over, but that, nonetheless, is real and of interest.