Maritain and the Revitalization of Meta History: Bergson vs. Positivism

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Despite a consensus among modern philosophers claiming large-scale histories to be unduly ambitious, universal histories continue to be read and produced. Spengler and, especially, Toynbee retain a modest readership. "Order and History," a multi-volume universal history by Eric Voegelin, was recently completed (Voegelin, 1987). How does one explain this ongoing effort by professional historians to "unlock history's meaning"?

If human intelligence grasps no metaphysical depths -- as Kant and his successors are said to have shown -- there is no accounting for our perennial aspiration to penetrate through historical facts to the meaning they may unfold. Call this aspiration vain, a groping beyond reason's competence. Yet if our desire to make sense of time, to see a larger picture, is futile, so is philosophy. Modern philosophers may condemn metaphysical ambitions, but they have failed to still the voices of realism, now resurgent in Europe and America (Bhaskar, 1991). [1]

The currents of anti-realist philosophy have been various, yet all flow in a single river tracing the boundaries of a territory - the land where sense data alone is the referent of science. Here, all but knowledge based on “empirical facts” is outlawed. Today, however, many are traveling beyond these
scientistic confines. Among them are some who have lived beyond empiricist ground since long before Kant staked out his territory; these are Thomist philosophers. What follows is an examination of one Thomist's response to the Kantian scientistic tradition within the discipline of history. This tradition goes by the name of "historicism." The Thomist we put forward as spokesman for metaphysical realism is Jacques Maritain. The procedure shall be to a) review historicism's content as effectively advanced by Langlois and Seignobos in their "Introduction to the Study of History," (Langlois, 1899) [2] a text that two generations of historians studied during their formative years in graduate schools; b) review Henri Bergson's critique of the scientism which was the foundation of Langlois' and Seignobos' highly influential work; and finally, c) we evaluate Bergson's work in the light of Jacques Maritain's realist metaphysics.

Our aim is to show how Bergson, despite the brilliance of his vitalist philosophy and even his explicit respect for science so long as it keeps within its proper confines, overreacted against the methods of science. Maritain, a longtime student and admirer of Bergson, sought to balance an appreciation for empirical methodology with an acute awareness of its limits. To accomplish this, Maritain reformulated Bergson's evolutionary metaphysics, a task he undertook in "Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism," published in 1954 (Maritain, 1954). Here Maritain opened up a perspective which remains respectful of scientific rigor in historical narration while, at the same time, allowing for the construction of a universal history. Langlois and Seignobos – The Introduction to the Study of History

As the critical method for the writing of history was increasingly used and university education for historians expanded, a need arose for a manual to instruct students and scholars in the new critical procedures. To fill this need, Langlois and Seignobos wrote their “Introduction to the Study of History," published in 1897. This book became a classic work of the critical historical method for several generations of French historians. As professor of history at the Sorbonne and later as Director of
National Archives of France, Charles-Victor Langlois (1863-1919) was an outstanding exponent of the scientific method in historiography. Langlois contributed studies on the history of institutions, French civilization, and society from the end of the twelfth to the middle of the fourteenth century, concentrating on the age of Saint Louis and his immediate successors.

Charles Seignobos, professor of historical pedagogy at the Sorbonne, taught research in recent and contemporary history, especially that of nineteenth century France. He applied his historical methodology to the social sciences in his La Méthode historique appliquée aux sciences sociales (1901). Here he points out shortcomings of the historian who allows aesthetic feelings to sully his work, neglecting scientific objectivity. Asserting a conflict between subjective feeling and science, he avoided any literary flavor in his own books and adhered to the tradition of his generation by setting objectivity as his goal.

In their widely accepted Introduction to the Study of History, Langlois and Seignobos laid out the method that French positivist historians were to follow for several generations. This book reveals the central ideas of positivist thought that informed historicist theory. Langlois and Seignobos argued that the search for a complete collection of documents is more important to the historian’s craft than an erstwhile theory on what these documents may mean. The progress of history is evaluated on the basis of numbers of primary texts made available to scholars. “The scholars and historians of today, standing, as they do in other respects on an equality with their predecessors of the last few centuries, are only enabled to surpass them by their possession of more abundant means of information” (Langlois, 1899). The authors, in both statement and practice, encouraged young historians to turn their emphasis away from interpretation to criticism of source materials.

Langlois and Seignobos subscribed, of course, to the positivist philosophy of science. For them, the science of history is based on the positivist cannon that knowledge can only be derived from the
observation of data: "The practice of established sciences teaches us the conditions of an exact knowledge of facts. There is only one scientific procedure for gaining knowledge of fact, namely, observation. . ." (Langlois, 1899)

Since, for Langlois and Seignobos, historical facts are only indirectly known, they felt that history contains no true facts, only a procedure, for arriving at facts: Now the peculiarity of historical facts is this, that they are only known indirectly by the help of their traces. Historical knowledge is essentially indirect knowledge. The methods of historical science ought, therefore, to be radically different from those of the direct sciences ... which are founded on direct observation. Historical science ... is not a science of observation at all. (1899)

This separation between history and the sciences of direct observation increases after the historian reaches his goal of discovering facts, because the sciences only begin their inquiries with factual discoveries: "In the sciences of observation, it is the fact itself observed directly which is the starting point” (Langlois, 1899). From this starting point, natural scientists seek laws. However, the erection of laws is, as the authors view it, no part of the historian's work. Keeping his inquiring nose to the grindstone of brute facts - as far as one may discover them indirectly - is the historian's vocation.

But how does one get to the brute facts? Langlois and Seignobos answer: when the scholar is examining a written document, he is viewing the mental image of a witness. The witness has provided " . . a psychological trace which is purely symbolic: it is not the facts themselves: it is not even the immediate impression made by the fact upon the witness' mind, but only a conventional symbol of that impression” (Langlois, 1899). Referring to the written document as a conventional symbol, Langlois and Seignobos argue that the document does not represent the writer's image of an observation, but provides only a symbolic reference to what he perceived. As a result, the historian must develop inferences from this symbol as they are derived from the witness who testifies to an event.
We now learn where our authors lead us: "Historical analysis is not more real than is the vision of historical facts; it is an abstract process, a purely intellectual operation. The analysis of a document consists in a mental search for the items of information it contains . . . It (historical analysis) is not an objective method which aims at detecting those abstract elements which compose our impressions. From the very nature of its materials history is a subjective science" (Langlois, 1899). The consequences of this subjectivism are notable. Historians - nearly all of them unconsciously, and under the impression that they are observing realities - are occupied solely with images. Historical materials require a researcher to enter both the mind of the writer of a document, and of the individual about whom the document reports, in order to infer from images, using the historian's imagination, different mental states. The historian's task is thus so complicated as to demand a simplifying procedure; scholars must specialize. Some scholars should perform external criticism; others should devote themselves to higher criticism involving reconstruction. This division of labor would improve historical study, in the authors' opinions, for “ . . . the progress of the historical sciences corresponds to the narrower and narrower specialization of the workers” (Langlois, 1899). Since the main lines of our past are already known, the progress of historical investigation must now look away from general outlines of previous times and focus on "a more precise treatment of details ... any further advance must be by dint of such analyses of such depth as none but specialists are capable of" (Langlois, 1899).

By thus reserving serious historical study to specialists, the ordinary, educated "amateur" is debarred from gaining fresh insights into past events. History as a genuine concern of all men about how a community’s present may be better understood in the light of its past - the view of Thucydides or Polybius - is consigned to the dust bin of an outmoded historiography. History has been professionalized, made the preserve of an elite scholarship incorporating the rigors of the scientific method. At the heart of this view lie the assumptions of positivism: sense data subjected to the
mathematizing procedures of observation, of the testing of hypotheses for their power to explain the phenomena observed, are the beginning and end of human knowledge. Up From Positivism

Because of its stature as a widely used manual for training graduate students in history, we take Langlois and Seignobos' work as representative of positivist historiography itself. It is far from dead today. But, as noted above, universal histories, going far beyond the specialist's purview and the rules of positivist historiography, continue to be written. These writers of macrohistory are unwilling to accept the confinements mandated for them by their positivist colleagues. The expansive approach to history, despite continuing positivist misgivings, owes much to Bergson's attack on the scientism of his day.

By discrediting empirical method as incapable of grasping DURATION, Bergson opened a way for historians to react against the rigidities of Langlois and Seignobos' historiography. But, while Bergson's work emboldened many to free themselves from positivist restrictions, Bergson's analysis was flawed by its over-reaction against the paths of science. We turn now to an examination of Bergson's thought as it impacts the issues raised by positivism for the study of history.

Bergson and the Study of History

The essential Bergsonian philosophy is well known and we do not detail it here. The reader will recall Bergson's insistence on intuition as the sole ENTRÉ to reality; analysis, on the other hand, goes round its objects, reducing them to dead symbols incapable of touching life's flow, the ÉLAN VITAL. Bergson, of course was no enemy of science. He rejected just the claim of science to possess the only key to the realm of knowledge; science, the work of the intellect, merits praise for the utility so apparent in the technologies it gives us. Only INTUITION, however, takes us beyond the external faces of things into their depths. This carries Bergson outside the territory occupied by Kant and his successors. An intuition grasping the core of things, inimical to Kantian reason, is the central feature of Bergson's philosophy (Maritain, 1954).[3]
The power to penetrate the barriers circumscribing all empirical analysis places the human knower in the stream of DURATION. By its agency, we gather up a vibrant past growing through the present toward the future. This "lived time" is the inner life of the self exercising its memory. Through memory, the self evolves toward ever new possibilities. Annealing into unity the stream of previous experience, memory allows us to thrust beyond the present moment into a future undetermined by its past. Here is human freedom. By unrolling "like a thread on a ball...our past follows us and swells incessantly with the present that it picks up on its way" (Bergson, 1911). History, therefore, is an unfolding of human consciousness, "a continual recording of duration, a persistence of the past in the present" (Bergson, 1911).

Bergson on Positivist History

Bergson's essential views, as traced above, allow us to articulate a Bergsonian analysis of scientific historiography as epitomized by Langlois and Seignobos. Bergson would not likely deny all value to Langlois and Seignobos' work, but he would find in it the merest husk of historical reality. The empirical method mandated by the two French historiographers condemns them and their numerous pupils to an analysis of a dead past. Their scientific prescriptions for uncovering historical facts must leave their practitioners forever outside that DURATION that is history's very soul. Their insistence on documentation, on collaborating evidence, weighing of historical claims against degrees of credibility on the part of witnesses; all this, while unobjectionable, is beside the point: time is a growth grasped only from within by its participants through intuition. It follows that the historian need not remain outside past events as a depersonalized observer. He may enter the past extending into his own present; history is now, and it lives in him. The deeds of others, even in their inmost reality, are thus open to him, restored to life through memory.
This confidence in memory's power to resurrect the past energized generations of historians. Camille Jullian insisted that "history is the science of remembrance" (Grenier, 1944:260). Elie Halévy, likewise, emphasizes the inner aspect of man's experience, following Bergson's "conscious letting go" of the intellect. Halévy's constant aim was to gain sympathetic insight into the intentions and emotions moving the players in history's drama (Halévy, 1913). R. L. Collingwood would later praise this strain in French historiography while crediting Bergson's impact:

The French historian seeks, following Bergson's well-known rule, s'installer dans le mouvement, to work himself into the movement of the history he is studying, and to feel that movement as something that goes on within himself. Recapturing the rhythm of this movement by an act of imaginative sympathy, he can express it with extraordinary brilliance and fidelity. (Collingwood, 1994)

As felicitous as Bergson's influence on the writing of history may have been, practitioners of "imaginative sympathy" are not without their detractors. Among these detractors, of course, are the positivist historians - trained according to Langlois and Seignobos' prescriptions - who see in work like that of Jullian or Halévy mere opinionated forms of literary history (Canary, 1978).[4] In the end, any historical narrative resorting to Bergsonian intuition will exact positivist scorn, since positivism itself rejects any metaphysical grasp of reality. Historicism, then, which is the mantel of the positivist historian, opposes "literary history" at the level of epistemology. Human intelligence, walled off from absolute truth and inscribed totally within the circle of sense data, must relativize all that it knows. Grasping an historical event as it "really was"-- historical objectivity -- becomes impossible: the always limited perspective of the historian means he shall never extricate himself from his "value judgments." (McCullah, 1984)

We are brought back to our opening remarks. This face-off between historicism and Bergson-inspired historical writing grows directly from Kant's opposition to metaphysics. Can we escape from
the impasse of positivism's flat negation, over against Bergson's flat assertion, of metaphysical intuition?
The generations of philosophers who have dealt with the question seem no closer to a resolution now than when it first was posed. Nor do we pretend to resolve it here. Rather, as promised above, we offer Maritain's reinterpretation of Bergsonian metaphysics. We see Maritain's NeoThomism as prologue to a philosophy of history embracing large-scale historical accounts even while welcoming critical methods of historical inquiry.

Maritain's Critique

A charge of irrationalism against Bergson has often been made (Alexander, 1957). His intuition of duration, the sense of oneself enduring through time's vital passage, though it may strike a chord in Heraclitus' "silent ones who hear," is a feeling state. It is beneath logic. For Bergson, as all existence streams to an unknowable future, individual existents are pushed into an amorphous background. Being melds into beings; the one becomes the many. All is caught up in a fervor of becoming. We have returned to the ancient philosophy of flux.

Is this Bergsonian intuition the remedy for the positivist refusal of final objectivity - truth - regarding anything that is? Maritain thinks not. Rather, instead of appealing to duration and our intuition of it as THE truth-revealing experience, Bergson should have deferred to the compelling presence of BEING which - as Aristotle insisted - is the sole intelligible basis for change and time.

"Instead of directing itself toward being and instead of opening out into a metaphysical intuition of being, the Bergsonian experience of duration took a wrong direction" (Maritain, 1954). In short, Bergson reified time, wrongly ascribed to it an IN SE existence as the object of the intuition revealing it. In fact, time as a flood of succession is about beings which, because they lack a full grasp of their own limited existence, succeed each other. So, for Bergson, time substitutes for being (Maritain, 1954), whereas in truth, being - as in a physical thing - is what endures and, thus, what is measured by time. Time, indeed,
is of things which endure through moments; time is not a DING AN SICH. Therefore, despite its
metaphysical significance as qualifying the very being of physical things, time possesses no such
metaphysical density as Bergson ascribes to it. This error of ascribing to time a substantiality only
temporal things can have results in a second and graver error: intelligence, conceived as an analytic tool,
cannot grasp duration and so is cut off from reality. Intellection is thus consigned to a static realm of
concepts and serves only to reduce living wholes to their abstract parts. Here, the human mind is made
a mathematizing force that "goes around" realities but never penetrates them. This denial of
intellectual power to get at the core of things has another grave consequence: truth is attained only on a
plane beneath conscious thought, at the level of feeling. Bergsonian intuition is an irrational act
(Maritain, 1954). It is not supraintellectual, but sub-intellectual (Maritain, 1954).[5] By thus rejecting
the light of the mind in favor of the darkness of feeling, Bergson reveals his misconception of the mind
itself.

In his zeal to recognize a faculty of intuition outside the abstractive powers of the mind, Bergson,
having already identified intelligence with its abstractive, analytic apparatus, overlooks the mind itself as
a fount of intuition. Maritain insists, to the contrary, that human intelligence does more than abstract
and analyze. It also intuits and synthesizes. Barring the mind from reality while granting access to
sensible intuition errs by ascribing to the intellect less than its deserts. For, in truth, it is the same faculty
that "grasps from without" and "grasps from within." When it acts in the first way, the mind practices
science; when it acts in the second way, it practices metaphysics. This latter knowledge, according to
Maritain, is open to everyone through an "intuition of being" - a direct, intellectual grasp of existence.
This intuition of being, as Maritain sees it, was what Bergson was groping for; but Bergson did so from
within a philosophy that prevented him from reaching it. Bergson identified the analytic power of the
mind with the mind in its entirety.
Although he finds Bergson's intuition deficient, Maritain hastens to praise it. Bergsonian intuition, writes Maritain, expresses "views which are profoundly true on the supremely vital act of the intellect, on that which in the intellect is more valid than [analytic] reason (Maritain, 1954). This "supremely vital act," which Bergson denied to an intellect given solely to analysis, is, according to Maritain "the metaphysical intuition of being." This intuition ushers into existence the "first philosophy" that Aristotle called metaphysics, the science which, because it studies being as being, assumes that being can be grasped. Bergson's intuition, an instinctual grasp of becoming at the level of sensation, should have been rooted in the "non-discursive" intellect, i.e., in the mind's power to know first principles particularly the principle of being itself. Had Bergson proceeded in this way, his intuition would have scaled the horizon of becoming to center itself in being. This existential centering could not be accomplished in a doctrine repudiating concepts as dead artifacts of reality. A philosophy handicapped in this way was the inheritance of the very positivism Bergson reacted so strongly against. His assault on positivism failed by conceding to empirical science its own flawed definition of the intellect: a tool and nothing but a tool for analysis.

To restore metaphysics to the level of thought it must be lifted above the plane of instinct to which Bergson had banished it. His motive, to save it from death by empiricism, was pure but premised on a wrong remedy. The resurrection of metaphysics demands the revival of an ampler notion of intellect--one which asserts, beyond the mind's power to relate ideas, its ability to "pierce the dome," i.e., to get past the supposed barrier of appearance. This larger view was within Bergson's reach. It is, after all, a patrimony of philosophy itself as she battled with skepticism almost since its inception. That the empirical condition of the human mind does not condemn it to empiricism is witnessed not only in the assertion and reassertion of realist philosophies since the Greek Golden Age; it is attested by what
Aristotle called "first principles." This latter witness, first principles, requires no proof, since these are self–evident (Ross, 1908).[6]

Bergson's intuition brings him to the doorstep of a house of intellect in which humans intuit even as they analyze. So much did Bergson's metaphysics react against mathematizing science that it ended in irrationalism (Maritain, 1954).[7] Had Bergson granted to human knowers a faculty of ontic and not merely durational discernment, the door would have been open for a philosophy at once insightful and analytic. Maritain congratulates Bergson for thus approaching a metaphysics of reason, despite his "approaching truth as if in a dream state paid for by a sort of intellectual nihilism “ (Maritain, 1954).

Here we end our exposition of Maritain’s critique of Bergson.

Fruits of Bergson's Critique

Maritain's was a masterful critique of Bergson. Crediting Bergson as a champion of metaphysics, Maritain nevertheless finds Bergson caught in the very trap he sought to escape: empiricism. A reductionist view of the intellect as an analytic, never a metaphysical power, makes the knowledge of history an exclusively sense-based affair. Science was thereby blocked from contact with historical reality, unable to grasp time except as an abstract sequence of geometrical points.

Maritain's critique opens a way to avoid this disparagement of science so that critical historical methods might be a welcome feature of "literary history." Thus, Langlois and Seignobos' procedures could thrive even in the hands of so "literary" an historian as Winston Churchill; historical objectivity and subjectivity need not be enemies, and should be friends.

Thus, we find in Maritain's work promise of a circumspective history that a) remains true to the empirical prescriptions of Langlois and Seignobos, and b) welcomes, even demands, a search for larger meanings implicit in temporal events. Such a philosophy of history would not warrant the second step (discovery of meaning) until the first (evidence) had been deliberately taken. Yet in this schema, step
“a” is not to be taken so hesitantly as to diminish the historical journey to a jaunt. Local histories would not be disparaged. These could contain such detail as must warm the heart of the fussiest historian. But from these, which are works of the analytic intelligence, macro-history is not made. The larger domain toward which the second step is taken is reached by JUDGMENT. Judgment, in the lexicon of Maritain’s Thomism, is a synthetic act. First, by its abstractive power, the human mind draws meaning from real beings that come to be "intentionally" present within it. The mind then weds this meaning and the subject in which it exists by "predication": THIS IS A ROSE. In this manner, human intelligence gains access to truth. This activity by which thought and things are "adequated" (ADEQUATIO) is more than sense perception which reports only the physical properties of things. Intellection, rather, goes to the "substance" itself that underlies physical properties, gathering these properties into a unity; it goes to the essence of things. The human knower then does more than analyze things into their parts. Before it analyzes, in fact, it synthesizes meanings existing at the heart of realities with those very realities. So, for Maritain, the intellect is not a sensible function as it was for Hobbes, LaMetrie, and their many heirs. Nor is the intellect a disembodied reasoning faculty as it was construed by Descartes, Liebnitz, and their progeny. While of the body, the human mind also operates above it; i.e., in a manner truly immaterial. Therefore it seizes, beyond the unrolling of temporal events, their spiritual significance. Not confined to the valley of sensible experience with its ceaseless change, intelligence ascends to the universal. Here, it surveys a sequence of temporal moments pregnant with their future. Here, the philosopher of history does his work. A story is articulated from its factual contents.

However, our metaphorical flight above the Valley of Sensible Experience is flawed. The human person, a unity of feeling and thought, molds mute, passing events into a synthesis. But he must stay all the while in the Valley. He must remain there because he is part of the events he witnesses. The historian is a player in the drama he tells. An historical being, he must participate in the historical reality
he narrates. He is no disembodied observer. He cannot tell "the whole story." Enmeshed in time's onrush, a person, so long as he lives, is unfinished as is the time he observes. Since the story is over neither for history nor himself, he must live the tension at the margin where the known shades into the unknown; i.e., the future. This "existential condition of man" is ineluctably historical. No flight to timeless heights will happen, not so long as we are "in the flesh."

But our time-boundedness makes no wall separating us from unchanging truths; a wall would surely exist were we totally submerged as corporeal in this temporal world. Given a humanity without powers above its animal nature, the Sophists of old were correct in identifying human knowledge with sense perception. However, the fact of reflection which makes us aware of our own knowing denies this sophistry. We are feeble reeds in the wind, as Pascal observed, but we are “thinking reeds” with power to grasp timeless truths. We grasp them while our feet stay solidly in the fields of historical experience. This tension of time and the timeless defines us: seekers of eternity in time. Therefore, a genuine knowledge of history--whether on the grand scale or the small scale of our own personal journeys--is a quest no one avoids. Most pursue it informally within the circle of their own place and time. A few seek it formally within the largest possible horizon. The latter are philosophers of history.

Although Maritain fertilized the ground for a philosophy of history, he never cultivated one. A Christian philosopher, he was convinced that history's key lies beyond the reach of reason in the knowledge of faith. Christian belief assures him that history's center, the Atonement, redeems all time and ushers it to its end in a judgment of nations. We assert, nevertheless, that Maritain's Thomism is not only open to a philosophy of history, but demands one. Which one? There are many rooms in the Thomistic mansion. Despite differences, Thomists unanimously recognize our natural desire to discover meaning in history. Whether this desire can be fulfilled by philosophy itself, or whether human reason, in order to find "time's secret," requires the help of a Revelation, has been a bone of contention for a
long while (Wilhelmsen, 1970).[8] We shall not present the palm of victory to either side in this debate. (This is matter for another study.) Our aim is served if we have convinced our reader that Maritain’s appraisal of Bergson’s metaphysics opens it toward a grasp of universal history welcoming empirical scrutiny of facts no less than insight into their meaning. Conclusion

By relativising human knowledge, positivism renders all philosophy of history impossible. With no scaffolding from which to build a sure knowledge of reality, all hope of discovering history’s “truth” is vain. However, the “vanity” of large-scale histories will not be a foregone conclusion if grounds for a metaphysical grasp of existence may be confidently asserted. Bergson claimed such grounds are accessed through his intuition of duration. But in barring these grounds to the “lifeless concepts” of empirical method, Bergson made a wall separating science from metaphysics. Thereby, the prescriptions of positivist historiography, systematically reinforced by Langlois and Seignabos’ work, were made to play a trivial role: lacking any contact with history’s lifeblood, the ÉLAN VITAL, the scientific historian is a formal logician obsessed with a mere consistency of abstractions. But Maritain’s reassessment of Bergson, by restoring to the intellect its role in grasping metaphysical truth gives practitioners of science ENTRÉ to historical reality. The historian may be scientific without being historicist. When renouncing the irrationalism of Bergson’s intuition in favor of an intellectual grasp of being, Maritain also renounces the Kantian platform for positivism.

Claims for an ”intuition of existence“ have not won for Maritain adherents among today’s epistemologists, but the growing ranks of social science realists, such as Roy Bhaskar and his followers (Bhaskar, 1991) will find an ally in Maritain. Thomism's reasoned rejection of the positivist roadblock barring the way for science to grasp ontological truth lends strength to realism's resurgence. When Bhaskar writes, "only the concept of ONTOLOGICAL DEPTH can reveal the actual historical stratification
of the sciences ... as grounded in the multitiered stratification of reality (Bhaskar, 1979), he strikes a
distinct Thomistic chord that reverberates through Maritain’s “Degrees of Knowledge” (Maritain, 1995).
How science and metaphysics shall enrich each other in a post-positivist era is yet to be worked out. But
a richer historiography, including both the painstaking work prescribed by Langlois and Seignobos and a
bold articulation of historical meaning is now in the making.

Notes

1-See, e.g., the series “Harvester Philosophy Now” under the general editorship of Roy Edgley, Professor
of Philosophy, University of Sussex. The series of books is united in its editor’s conviction that “English-
speaking philosophy in particular has submissively dwindled into a humble academic
specialism...isolated from substantive issues..the books in this series are discontent with the state of
affairs, convinced that the analytical movement has spent its momentum.” In the fourteenth volume of
this series, Roy Bhaskar gives us a philosophical critique of the contemporary human sciences from a

Hachette, 1899).

Hereafter, title, quotations and page references cited are from Introduction to the Study of History,

3-In a letter to Jacquez Chevalier, Bergson writes, “You are perfectly right in saying that all the
philosophy I have expounded since my first essay affirms, against Kent, the possibility of a
suprasensible intuition.” (Letter of April , 1920) cited in Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism, Ibid.,
P.312.

Maritain shows here that, despite Bergson’s reference to the possibility of a supra-sensible
intuition, Bergson never reaches it. Bergsonian intuition turns out, in fact, to be a “subintellectual”
activity. See Ibid., P. 312-320.

4-The notion that historical narratives are literary artifacts and, therefore, constructions of the literary
imagination is developed in R.H. Canary and H. Kozicki (eds), The Writing of History: Literary Form and
Historical Understanding (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978). See especially L.O. Mink,
“History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension.” New Literary History, I, in Historical Understanding

5-We noted above (footnote 3) that Bergson conceived the POSSIBILITY of an intellectual intuition, yet
his own intuition if duration turns out to be a purely sensual awareness—this, despite Bergson’s
reference to “life’s transcendence of intellect.”
See “Biology and Philosophy” in Creative Evolution, Op. Cit., P.53 where the intellect is portrayed as an outcropping from “a more extensive power” extruding it from beneath; i.e., biological evolution.

6-Aristotle, Metaphysics, Book T.6, 1011a, 7-14: “Those who demand that a reason shall be given for everything seek a starting-point, and they seek to get this by demonstration...But they seek a reason for things that for which no reason can be given; for the starting point of demonstration is not demonstration.” Works of Aristotle, ed. W.D. Ross, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1908).

7-Concerning Bergson’s tenacious grip on his intuition of duration, Maritain laments the consequences: “Let logic and the principle of identity and all the rational requirements of the intellect perish as they must.” Maritain, Op.Cit., P.313.

8-See, e.g., Frederick D. Wilhelmsen’s attack on Maritain’s claim that a genuine meta-history must be, strictly speaking, a THEOLOGY and not a philosophy of history. Wilhelmsen insists that, within a Thomist metaphysics centered in the act of existence, “man in history” is no less penetrable than is human nature itself which is history-bound: “[Maritain’s] attempt to prevent a metaphysical penetration of history on the ground that History is of the contingent collapses as irrelevant.” “Existence and History” in the Paradoxical Structure of Existence (Irving, Texas: The University of Dallas Press, 1970), P. 148.

Reference


