1

Introduction

AVIEZER TUCKER

Editing is never simple, easy, or innocent. I had to make a number of choices at the outset: like editors of other Companions in the series, I had to decide which topics to cover, which entries to include, and who are the best available scholars to present them to a popular readership. But the still fluid and contested state of the philosophies of historiography and history forced me to make fundamental editorial decisions about the very nature of the philosophy of historiography that comparable editors were spared, most notably about what is the scope of this sub-field of philosophy and which terminology is appropriate for analyzing its problems.

In comparison with other meta-disciplinary philosophies, the task of defining the philosophies of historiography and history is particularly challenging. "What is the philosophy of science?" Asks W. H. Newton-Smith in his Introduction to *A Companion to the Philosophy of Science* (2000: 2). Dividing the question in half, Newton-Smith concluded that asking what is philosophy is one of the less fruitful philosophical occupations. Science, as well, has no essence, though philosophers tend to agree on core examples, "deciding just how far to extend the word 'science' will not be a substantial matter" (2002). Newton-Smith suggested then looking at what people who call themselves philosophers of science actually care about and do, acknowledging that "[t]here is no hiding the fact hat they are an eclectic lot who do a diverse range of things, some of them strange" (2002: 3). It was quite easy though for Newton-Smith to draw a general map of the terrain covered by people who consider themselves philosophers of science and set the scope and details of the companion he edited on that basis.

In the philosophy of historiography, who is a philosopher of historiography is not only contested among philosophers of historiography who wish to exclude philosophers with whom they disagree, as in other philosophic fields, but some philosophers of historiography do not recognize their own contributions to the field, their vocation, and calling. Some philosophers of historiography consider themselves epistemologists, or philosophers of science, or metaphysicians, or philosophers of literature. Even a few of the contributors to this companion had to be told they were philosophers of historiography (who write prose), whether or not they were aware of it.

Still, by far, the greatest challenge was terminological. In the philosophy of science the terminology is entrenched, widely accepted, clear, and distinct. Though philosophers dispute what are "philosophy" and "science," they can usually agree on proper

and improper use of the word "science." They can communicate on the basis of shared meanings and mutual interpretations. Most fundamentally, they agree on the distinction between the concepts of science and nature. By contrast, in the philosophies of historiography and history there are no such wide agreements on the uses of words that allow undistorted or at least minimally distorted communication. Even the basic distinction between the events of the past and their representations is difficult to express and comprehend since often the same word, "history," is used to mean both the events of the past and the texts that historians write about them. In a philosophical context, where we discuss issues concerning the relation between the past, our beliefs about it, our knowledge of it, and how we represent and justify our beliefs and knowledge, using "history" to mean all of the above would have led inevitably to one incredible mess! This is an even greater problem in the English language than, say, in German, which can create easily different new meanings through compounding existing words. In German, *Geschichte* is as ambiguous as *history*. But to distinguish clearly the representation of the past from the past proper, one simply writes *Geschichtswissenschaft*, the science or rigorous discipline of history. To distinguish research about the past from writing about the past in narrative form, one may resort to the distinction between *Geschichtsforschung* (historical research) performed by a *Geschichtsforscher* from *Geschichtsschreibung* (history writing) written by a *Geschichtsschreiber*. The only remaining ambiguity then for the German speaker is that of *Geschichtsphilosophie* that may involve the philosophical analysis of *Geschichtsforschung* or of *Geschichtsschreibung.* To avoid an incredible mess and confusions heaped upon each other, my first task was to introduce a standardized terminology. I attempted, though, to keep terminological innovation to the necessary minimum.

I restricted the use of *history* to refer to past events and processes, thus using the word in a narrower sense than the vague English everyday use. By contrast, I use *historiography* to mean the results of inquiries about history, written accounts of the past. This use of the word *historiography* preserves its standard English use. *The Merriam–Webster Unabridged Dictionary* (3rd edn., 2003) defines *historiography* as "a. The writing of history; *especially* the writing of history based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particulars from the authentic materials, and the synthesis of particulars into a narrative that will stand the test of the critical method. b. the principles, theory, and history of historical writing." The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (5th edn., 2002) defines *historiography* as "the writing of history; written history; the study of history writing." In accordance with these already established uses of *historiography* I reserve its use here for writings about the past that result from *historiographic research* (*Geschichtsforschung*). The people who produce historiography are historians. *Historiographic narrative* (*Geschichtsschreibung*) is the textbook result of historiographic research.

Another common ambiguity in the ordinary uses of *history* and *historiography* is in their scopes. In a narrow sense, the scope of history is that of literate human civilization and the scope of historiography is the study of documentary evidence generated by such civilizations to infer descriptions of their past and evolution. This narrow sense is closely linked with the Rankean research program in historiography, the inference of historiography from documents. In a broader sense, the scope of history is all of the past: societies have a history, but so do rocks, languages, species, and indeed the

universe. Historiography in this broader sense attempts then to infer descriptions of the histories of everything.

There are two theoretical reasons for upholding the earlier narrower scope of the terms: First, according to the original Rankean research program, reliable historiography, knowledge of the human past, can be inferred only from documents that were not written for posterity, but have been preserved usually in archives. This limitation of the evidential base has become obsolete since historians developed methods for reliable inference of information about the past from material remains, artefacts, shapes of landscapes, genetic analysis of present and fossil DNA, works of art, and so on. Second, some philosophical approaches to historiography consider it special for having a human subject matter. Forms of description, understanding, and explanation in historiography are allegedly different because of this special subject matter. From this perspective, *history* would refer then exclusively to the human past and *historiography* would describe exclusively the human past, though it would not be limited to the inference of descriptions of the past from documentary evidence. Historiography would be limited only by the evidence available for historical forms of the human mind, usually documents and artefacts. Accepting such a limited scope for the terms "history" and "historiography," would have implied a commitment to the tenets of this particular school of philosophy of historiography. Alternative philosophical approaches argue that there are some common and unique features to all the sciences of the past, sciences that are concerned with the inference of unobservable token events from their traces in the present. To avoid commitment to one school or the other and encourage debate and exchange between them, the terms history and historiography are used here in their broadest and most inclusive scope, as all the past and all that can be known about it respectively.

Sometimes, it is necessary in this philosophical context to distinguish particular realms of history or sub-fields of historiography. On such occasions the terms history and historiography are compounded, as in *natural history* that refers exclusively to non-human history, and the *historiography of nature* that refers exclusively to descriptions of natural history; similarly, social or cultural historiography describe social or cultural history and, and so on. Occasionally, authors refer to academic schools that include a social group of historians, the historiographic theoretical and methodological approach that unites them, and the historical realm to which they apply their historiographic approaches. For example, "Social Science History" has an established use as referring to a school of historians who attempt to use the methods and tools of the social sciences such as statistics to produce a historiography that is quantitative and "scientific." Terms that refer to a school of historians appear then either capitalized or in quotation marks, or both.

Most significantly, and this is a distinction that does not quite exist in any natural language or philosophic jargon, it was necessary to distinguish the *philosophy of historiography* from the *philosophy of history*. Existing philosophical jargon distinguishes *critical* or *analytic* philosophy of history from *substantive* or *speculative* philosophy of history. This terminology is unsatisfactory because it is too vague and value laden and reflects obsolete philosophical positions and distinctions, rather than the simple distinction in subject matter between the past and knowledge or descriptions of it. The project of *critical* philosophy is closely connected with the Kantian project of examining the

conditions of knowledge. While the philosophy of historiography is certainly interested in the conditions of knowledge of history, there is much more to it than this Kantian project. Likewise, *analytic* philosophy of history, the analysis of the language of historiography and the elucidation of the concepts historians use is certainly part of the philosophy of historiography. But the philosophy of historiography, like the philosophy of science, does much more than the analysis of language and concepts, it examines the epistemology of our knowledge of history, the relation between evidence and historiography, the reliability of the methods historians use to infer beliefs about the past, and so on, beyond the analysis of language. Philosophers of historiography are arguably as synthetic as they are analytic. After Quine, the very distinction between analytic and synthetic has collapsed. *Substantive* philosophy of history implies that its alternatives are ephemeral, while not saying much about what this substantiality actually means. *Speculative* philosophy is essentially a term of abuse.

Instead, philosophy of historiography is simply the philosophical examination of all the aspects of our descriptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the past. The philosophy of historiography parallels other philosophical meta-disciplinary sub-fields such as the philosophy of science or the philosophy of economics. By contrast, the philosophy of history is the direct philosophical examination of history. The philosophy of history examines questions about history such as whether it is necessary or contingent, whether it has a direction or whether it is coincidental, and if it has a direction, what it is, and how and why it is unfolding. The philosophy of history parallels then sub-fields of metaphysics that examine the ultimate constituent parts of everything, such as the philosophy of nature. The distinction between the philosophy of historiography and the philosophy of history is clearer than existing distinctions, descriptive rather than value laden, and parallels terms that designate existing sub-fields of philosophy such as the philosophies of science and nature.

As editor, I ensured that all the entries adhere to this unified terminology, and so the reader can safely assume that terms in different entries have the same meanings. Obviously, I could not interfere with the terminology used by quoted sources. Quotations may use then the ambiguous existing terminology regarding "history," "philosophy of history," and so on, and may use the same words to convey different meanings. I hope that the contexts of the quotations will help clarify their meanings. This is as good a solution to the terminological challenge that could be hoped for without violating the sanctity of quoted phrases.

Following the terminology, I had to select the scope of topics to be covered. The main dilemmas were how broad to conceive this field of philosophic research and whether to concentrate exclusively on contemporary research or also pay attention to the history of the field, its major historical traditions, and figures. My approach here has been to be the most inclusive and comprehensive. I interpreted the scope of philosophies of historiography and history most liberally to encompass all significant philosophic topics within the broadest scope of interpretation. The longer first four entries outline the major sub-fields that are covered. In addition to the obvious entries for philosophy of historiography and philosophy of history, there are entries for the philosophy of natural history and its historiography, stressing the inclusion of natural history and historiography within the scope of the philosophies of historiography and history. Since this Companion is intended for historians just as much as for philosophers, the fourth

entry, by a historian, covers the philosophical issues that are particularly relevant for historians.

The second and longest part covers the main problems of the philosophies of historiography and history, evidence, confirmation, causation, counterfactuals, contingency and necessity, explanation and understanding, objectivity, realism, ethics, and narrative. Though the entries are written by philosophers with diverse and indeed opposing approaches to these problems, all the entries in the second part assume that the distinct problems of the philosophy of historiography are deeply intertwined with other areas of philosophy. To borrow Arthur Danto's vivid metaphor, the philosophy of historiography does not exist on some remote atoll where forlorn Second World War soldiers continue fighting an obsolete long extinguished war, oblivious of the results and indeed end of the war elsewhere. Rather, the major problems of the philosophy of historiography from causation to evidence and confirmation to objectivity are connected in their formulations, assumptions, and mooted solutions to similar problems in other philosophical fields, most notably though not exclusively, epistemology, philosophy of science, and metaphysics.

Further, since the philosophy of historiography is a constantly changing dynamic program of research, the entries in the second part of this Companion are strictly up-to-date presentations of the current state of research on the problems they cover. There is more, much more, to the philosophy of historiography than the old debates about the covering law model or *Verstehen*. This Companion demonstrates the breadth as well as the contemporary relevance of philosophy of historiography for other branches of philosophy and general philosophic discussions of causation, evidence, confirmation, origins, laws, explanation and so on. Such general discussions are parochial unless they consider the application of general theories to the special cases of historiography and history. Conversely, philosophies of historiography and history must consider general discussions of the problems they consider to avoid intellectual provincialism, to benefit from the immense strides epistemology, philosophy of science, and metaphysics have made in our understanding of philosophical problems and how to solve them.

The third part examines specific philosophic issues in particular sub-fields of historiography and history such as the historiography and history of science or phylogeny. This part is particularly relevant for historians. The fourth and last part covers schools, traditions, and figures from the history of the philosophies of historiography and history. True to the liberal broad scope of this companion, this part covers Darwin as well as Ranke, phenomenology as well as logical-positivism, Marx as well as Fukuyama.

This companion was conceived with philosophers as well as historians (of nature as well as of humanity) in mind. The entries do not assume prior familiarity with their topics. Students of philosophy and history would likewise find this Companion highly accessible. I hope that this companion will be most useful for spurring research in the philosophies of historiography and history. Each one of the entries and their bibliographies can serve as a springboard for research, for pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge. This is particularly true of the entries where authors interpreted sometimes for the first time the implications of contemporary debated in philosophy in general, epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of science for the philosophies of historiography and history. The philosophies of historiography and history are still very

much a philosophical *terra incognita* for research. I am certain that many of the seeds of successful programs of research can be found throughout this companion.

The significance and importance of the philosophies of historiography and history for philosophy and historiography cannot be overestimated. At the very least, the philosophy of historiography may assist historians and philosophers in avoiding making common mistakes. Historians, who read the entries in this companion, should be able to avoid logical fallacies, confirm better their hypotheses using evidence, have a firmer grasp of the nature of causation and explanation in historiography, and be aware of possible uses of counterfactuals. In other words, historians could improve their methods, inferences, and assumption by becoming aware of best historiographic practice elucidated philosophically. Conversely, philosophers could benefit from avoiding false generalizations and anachronisms by understanding the nature of history and historiography. Philosophers who have been quite innocent of historiography and history have been making patently false generalizations about causation, explanation, counterfactuals, laws, science, understanding, necessity and contingency, and so on that could have been avoided had they taken them into account

We live in a civilization that too often either ignores the past, or takes it for granted. Either way, the result is temporal provincialism, the assumption that the past looked pretty much like the present and so has nothing to teach us. Philosophers who are embedded in this culture compound ignoring the past in favor of false universal statements that are founded on a belief in the eternity of the present, with taking the past for granted, ignoring the epistemic issues involved in our knowledge of the past. Even when philosophers do read historiography and attempt to consider its philosophically relevant results, they too often take it for granted, almost as if it offered pure observation sentences of the past, unmarred by varying degrees of reliability, underdetermination, value ladenness, and narrative construction. Conversely, some philosophers dismiss historiography altogether as a source of knowledge, believing somehow that the only proper science for philosophers to study is physics, which of course has no history . . . Such presumptions can only be based on ignorance of the epistemology of historiography and the history of physics. This companion would fulfil its proper role if it awakens both groups from their dogmatic slumber.