**Leo Catana, 'Philosophical problems in the history of philosophy
What are they?'**

Catana, Leo

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1. Introduction

In the Introduction to the 1984 publication *Philosophy in History*, edited by Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner, the three editors distinguish between history of philosophy and intellectual history: the former seeks “philosophical truth” and outlines how past philosophers have reasoned about various philosophical problems; the latter seeks “historical truth” and the “meaning” of past utterances. The history of philosophy is thus a problem-based discipline, whereas intellectual history is a contextual discipline. The editors contend that contemporary analytic philosophers in America and Britain perpetuate this division in their analysis of the history of philosophy: they are, the editors claim, exclusively interested in philosophical questions, not in their historical contexts. The editors argue that what is outside the sphere of philosophical problems, that is, historical truth and the contingency of historical contexts, should be discovered and presented by intellectual historians, not by historians of philosophy; the method of the latter, and their followers in analytic philosophy, is ill-suited to uncover such historical contexts. Hence the editors endorse a division of labor in which both the history of philosophy and intellectual history are recognized as mutually beneficial. The purpose of the Introduction is clearly to establish

some sort of peaceful interaction between the two disciplines. In this chapter I reexamine the definitions of the history of philosophy and intellectual history assumed in the bifurcation noted earlier. I argue that the contextual task assigned to intellectual history must also be assigned to the history of philosophy, if it is going to be *history* of philosophy at all.

I see at least three problems in the bifurcation. First, it presupposes questionable assumptions about the methodological cores of the two disciplines, especially the concept of a “philosophical problem,” a theme to which I return later.

Second, the desired institutional effect of the publication—to make use of the results of intellectual history for the benefit of the history of philosophy—remains to be seen. The bifurcation justifies intellectual history as contextual and history of philosophy as problem-based. Although the intended purpose was to establish some sort of mutual exchange between the two disciplines, the division of labor can also be seen as an argument in favor of a status quo. The bifurcation is thus conservative in regard to the method practiced by historians of philosophy; it is nothing but an open invitation, which historians of philosophy may easily ignore. The bifurcation is also conservative in the sense that it carries on Lovejoy’s distinction from 1936 between history of philosophy, dedicated to the history of philosophical systems, and history of ideas, dedicated to the various philosophical and non-philosophical contexts in which certain unit-ideas manifest themselves in the course of history; Lovejoy’s “history of ideas” was nominally and methodologically transformed into “intellectual history” in the 1960s and 1970s by Skinner and others.

Third, many historians of philosophy seem to remain unaffected by intellectual historians’ excavations of the historical contingencies and illocutionary meanings surrounding certain texts of the past: the former may not recognize the philosophical relevance of the uncovered contexts, nor even of the texts thus contextualized by intellectual historians, since both appear irrelevant to those problems and questions accepted as fundamental to

philosophy. Or historians of philosophy may think that the locutionary meaning (not the illocutionary) of applied terms is more relevant to their enterprise, since it has direct relevance to the philosophical problems and arguments examined. Or, finally, they may feel alienated when confronted with the linguistic, historical, and contextual method practiced by intellectual historians.