
HISTORY AND METAHISTORY IN THE CONTEXT OF METAPHILOSOPHY

DANIEL YAN E. L.
(Republic of Armenia, Yerevan)

A fundamental idea of history - the story about the human past - is the general concept pervading through centuries. The basic criterion of historic writing is the truthfulness. The Armenian historian of the 5th century Movses Khorenatsi, selected for his book “what was truthful of many writings...”¹. This is the founding idea of Armenian historiography in the following centuries. Armenian historiography, created in the Armenian Highland - the cradle of the Armenian people, belongs to those historiographies which originated on the national basis, in their native language.

In the course of time the nature of knowledge about the past has become an object of philosophical discussion. Early in the 20th century the concept of metatheory burst upon the scene of philosophy. *Meta-*, being taken out of the domain of metaphysics, has become a widespread determinative for alternative thinking in almost all fields of science, giving birth to notions and branches of research - metatheory, metamathematics, metaphilosophy, metahistory, etc.

An adherent of philosophy of history Benedetto Croce, propounding the idea of “contemporary history”, wrote: “The practical requirements which underline every historical judgment give to all history the character of “contemporary history,” because, however remote in time events thus recounted may seem to be, the history in reality refers to present needs and present situations wherein those events vibrate”².

Robin Collingwood held that “the past which a historian studies is not a dead past, but a past which in some sense is still living in the present,” hence he concluded: “all history is the history of thought” and “the history is the re-enactment in the historian’s mind of the thought whose history he is studying”³. Michael Oakeshott, who to some extent shared Collingwood’s views, went further: “History is the historian’s

¹ Մովսես Խորենացի, Պատմութիւն Հայոց, Ե., 1991, էջ 22 (Movses Khorenatsi, *History of Armenia*, Yerevan, 1991, p. 22, in the classical Armenian language-grabar).

² Croce Benedetto, *History as the Story of Liberty*, London, 1941, p. 19.

³ G. Collingwood Robin, *The Idea of History*, London, 1946.

experience. It is “made” by nobody save the historian: to write history is the only way of making it”⁴.

Edward Carr expressing a critical attitude towards Collingwood’s view of history, noted: “the emphasis on the role of the historian in the making of history tends, if pressed to its logical conclusion, to rule out any objective history at all...The historian and the facts of history are necessary to one another. The historian without his facts is rootless and futile; the facts without their historian are dead and meaningless. My first answer to the question, what is history? is that it is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past”⁵.

The 20th century Western historical pessimism⁶ imbued with speculations about the end of history resulted in a revival of the question, what is history?, looking for an answer in “metahistory”.

The most cited author on the problem of “metahistory”, Hayden White, declining the efforts of those historians who try to write about the past or present as it actually happens, mentions a type of historian who considers history as writing “[narratives](#)”. The philosophical approach of Hayden White’s [system](#) is expressed in his intention to de-mystify histories, historians, etc. Hayden White writes: “the best grounds for choosing one perspective on history rather than another are ultimately aesthetical or moral rather than epistemological”⁷. According to Hayden White’s thesis, each historian operates with “metahistory,” a set of commitments that structures his historical narratives and “historical facts emerge only once we bring a larger narrative to bear, a narrative which determines which facts are significant”⁸.

Philosophy of history was developed by Hegel on the basis of his metaphysics⁹. According to Hegel: “It is the aim of the investigator to

⁴ Oakeshott Michael, *Experience and its Modes*, Cambridge, 1933, p. 99.

⁵ Carr Edward H., *What is History?*, Toronto, 1961, p. 24-35.

⁶ Fukuyama Francis, *The End of History*, New York, 1992, p. 3-12.

⁷ White Hayden, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*, Baltimore, 1973, p. xii.

⁸ Levisohn J. A., *Stories about Stories about History: White Hayden, Historiography and History Education*. – Philosophy of Education Society, Levisohn J. A., *Stories about Stories about History: White Hayden, Historiography and History Education*. – Philosophy of Education Society, Urbana – Champaign: PES, 2002, p. 466. It is noted: “Levisohn largely ignores other discussions in the field of epistemology and philosophy of science, which are relevant to his questions and problems” (Vanderstraeten Raf, *History, Metahistory and Autology*, PES, p. 474).

⁹ W. F. Hegel Georg, *The Philosophy of History. With Prefaces by Charles Hegel and the Translator, J. Sibree*, M. A., Ontario, 2001, p. 23.

gain a view of the entire history of a people or a country, or of the world... The workman approaches his task with *his own* spirit... Here a very important consideration will be the principles to which the author refers the bearing and motives of the actions and events which he describes, and those which determine the form of his narrative. Among us Germans this reflective treatment and the display of ingenuity which it occasions assume a manifold variety of phases. Every writer of history proposes to himself an original method. The English and French confess to general principles of historical composition. Their standpoint is more that of cosmopolitan or of national culture. Among us each labors to invent a purely individual point of view. Instead of writing history, we are always beating our brains to discover how history ought to be written. This first kind of Reflective History is most nearly akin to the preceding, when it has no farther aim than to present the annals of a country complete. Such compilations... are, if well performed, highly meritorious. Among the best of the kind may be reckoned such annalists... who give so vivid a transcript of events that the reader may well fancy himself listening to contemporaries and eye- witnesses. But it often happens that the individuality of tone which must characterize a writer belonging to a different culture is not modified in accordance with the periods such a record must traverse. The spirit of the writer is quite other than that of the times of which he treats”¹⁰.

It is obvious that “metahistorians” reversing the Hegelian theory of *philosophy of history*, at the same time use his approaches to characteristic features of historians who reflect their subjectivity on the described events. At the same time, “demystification” of history supposes a certain attitude to speculations about the [teleological](#) end of its development, i.e., possible design, goal, guiding principle, or thoroughness in the processes of human history.

There are different points of view concerning the hypothesis of a finite end of progress. According to one, “Hegel has been rightly condemned for seeing the end of progress in the Prussian monarchy”¹¹. According to another: “Hegel did not believe that the historical process would continue indefinitely, but would come to an end with an achievement of free societies in the real world. There would, in other words, be an *end of history*. When Hegel declared that history had ended after the Battle of Jena in 1806... he was saying that the principles of liberty and equality

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17-18.

¹¹ Carr Edward H., *op. cit.*, p. 151.

underlying the modern liberal state had been discovered and implemented in the most advanced countries...”¹².

Philosophia (Arm. *imastasirutyun*) as a mental and spiritual phenomenon is the sphere of cognition of wisdom and its continuity is conditioned by a potential of overcoming the deadlocks of “finite” formulated concepts. The field of a systematic, methodical treatment of *philosophia* is *philosophy*. It is possible to say that *philosophia* is the core of philosophy and they do not relate to each other as part and entity, but they are a wholeness and the presence of one is conditioned historically by the other. Scientifically, philosophy’s natural inclination is centripetal, tending to its core.

In the 5th century Armenian philosopher David Anhakht (the Invincible) presented the wholeness of *philosophia-philosophy* through the well known definitions (“knowledge of existence”, “knowledge of divine and human things”, “contemplation of death”, “becoming similar to God as far as it is humanly possible”, “the art of arts and the science of sciences”, “love of wisdom”)¹³. David the Invincible had “in mind not to accept one of them and to reject all others, but to show the role of each of them in the process of discovering the multi-character essence of philosophy”¹⁴. Thus, according to David the Invincible, “*Philosophia* has a goal to embellish human souls”¹⁵.

In the course of time the emergence of different branches of philosophy through the theories of various spheres of science on the one hand nourished them with philosophical contemplations and, on the other, philosophy itself has been moving away from its *Philosophian* core.

Accordingly, the word “philosophy” has been in the process of perceptible change throughout history – from antique all-embracing cognitive inquiries to David Hume’s (1711-1776) “skepticism”¹⁶ and modern rejection of intuition as an effective source of knowledge and “anti-philosophy’s” declaration: “Philosophy has been dead since the time of Kant, he being the last of the Philosophers”¹⁷. Such a remark

¹² Fukuyama Francis, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹³ David the Invincible. *Definitions of Philosophy*, Yerevan, 1960, p. 50 (in Old Armenian). According to David the Invincible, the first, second and sixth definitions belong to Pythagoras (they were preserved thanks to his follower Nicomachos’ writings), the third and fourth definitions belong to Plato, and the fifth definition belongs to Aristotle.

¹⁴ Brutian Georg, “Armenology and Metaarmenology” (“Armenian Mind”, vol. IV, N 1, 2000, p. 22).

¹⁵ David the Invincible. *Definitions of Philosophy*, 1960, p. 118 (in Old Armenian).

¹⁶ Russell Bertrand, *A History of Western Philosophy*, New York, 1966, p. 671.

¹⁷ Palomo-Lamarca A., *Anti-Philosophy and its Manifest*. University of Minnesota, <http://serbal.pntic.mec.es/AParteRei/>.

echoes Immanuel Kant's claim that controversy and the lack of agreement in "metaphysics" is a "scandal"¹⁸.

There are certain reasons for looking at a new way of expression of philosophic ideas. Some are rooted there where the approaches of philosophers to philosophy differ from each other. Meanwhile, among philosophers an aspiration to preserve the wholeness of philosophy increases with the increase of the threat of its fragmentation¹⁹.

Nowadays the idea of the further [progress](#) in philosophy is interrelated with assumptions about the nature of philosophy and the criteria of progress. Today the prefix "meta-", following the term *metaphysics*²⁰, is applied to almost all branches of sciences (metascience, metatheory, metamathematics, metalogic, metalinguistics, metabiology and other metasciences) covering the whole theoretical spectrum of world cognition. According to G. Brutian's opinion: "It is possible to have a metascience for any science, for any study, except philosophy. It is impossible to create metaphilosophy for philosophy because there are no concepts of larger extension than the concepts which we use in philosophy. That is why philosophy is both theory and metatheory at the same time"²¹.

Other philosophers' interpretations arise from the basic question for metaphilosophy "What is philosophy?" attempting "to understand the alternative conceptions of the nature of philosophy, as well as its available reasoning tools and their limits". They define *metaphilosophy* as the "philosophy of philosophy". They insist that many philosophers have written on metaphilosophy. The tradition goes back to [Plato](#), whose dialogues are directly concerned with ethics, but constantly raise questions concerning the nature of philosophy and its methods, the value and proper aims of philosophy, the proper relationship between philosophical criticism and everyday life²².

The idea of progress sounds quite optimistic in philosophy connecting it with "metaphilosophy" and arguing that "we are better placed today

¹⁸ **Kant Immanuel**, *Critique of the Pure Reason* (Hong Kong: The MacMillan Press, 1978) p. 29ff (Bxxxiv); (A832, B860). For a discussion see: **M. E. Orellana Benado, Andrés Bobenrieth, Carlos Verdugo**, *Metaphilosophical Pluralism and Paraconsistency: From Orientative to Multi-level Pluralism*, Universidad de Valparaíso, Chile, Abobenri@rdc.cl.

¹⁹ **Suber Peter**, *Is Philosophy Dead?* (*The Earlamite*, 112, 2 (Winter 1993) 12-14. [Copyright](#) © 1993).

²⁰ **Asmus V.**, *The Metaphysics of Aristotle*: in *Aristotle. The Works*, vol. I, M., 1976, p. 5 (in Russian).

²¹ **Brutian Georg**, "Philosophy and Metaphilosophy" (*"The Questions of Philosophy"*, 1985, N 9, p. 85-90 (in Russian), G. Brutian, "Armenology and Metaarmenology", p. 7.

²² Retrieved from "<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metaphilosophy>."

than the Greeks were to understand what philosophy is... In the West, human beings have been doing philosophy for roughly 2,500 years. Eastern traditions are, perhaps, even older. What can we learn about philosophy itself through this experience and practice? This is the initial question of metaphilosophy, the body of discourse that collects and articulates our observations and reflections about philosophy as a human activity”²³.

Unlike metaphilosophy (its metatheoretical methodology draws its notions from philosophy) metahistory supposes rather “purification” through “distillation” of basic constituting elements of history writing, than reconstruction of the historic past through a critical analysis of historic sources.

At present two trends are observed in the development of metahistorical thinking. One generalized by Hayden White as a “de-mystified narrative” developed into a perception that “only history includes the historical discourse about history, that is to say, metahistory”²⁴. Another trend is “declared” as “a path toward the future beyond history, a world free from enslavement to unexamined beliefs...”²⁵.

The study of early medieval historiographical and philosophical developments of Armenia may help to understand that while discussing the term “metahistory” there is no need to relegate any of the constituent parts of history. It is necessary to take into account all available data in their entity including transcendental perception. The spiritual nature of philosophia has defined David the Invincible as “knowledge of divine and human things” and “becoming similar to God as far as it is humanly possible” and philosophy needs them as much as history needs spiritual layers, thus history ceases to be history by “metahistoric demystification”.

The whole essence of the divine and cosmic and by their reflection the interrelationship of what is common to all mankind and national were perceived in the historical and philosophical Weltanschauungs of David the Invincible and Movses Khorenatsi. The great philosopher expostulating about cognition and nature in relation with the essence defines

²³ Orellana Benado M. E., Andrés Bobenrieth, Carlos Verdugo, *op. cit.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Metahistory Quest* Copyright 2002 - 2004 The Marion Institute. According to Anatoli Abrashkin (*The Secrets of the Trojan War*, M., 2006, p. 105, in Russian), metahistory comes the next after history, all-embracing phase of comprehending of the mankind's past” by including data from other spheres of knowledge and first of all – mythology and linguistics”
. Լրացվել է 1-5

“What comes into being constantly is confined by neither nature nor cognition”²⁶. It may follow from such an understanding that in infinity time transforms into chronology by history and thus becomes a criterion of truthfulness. According to Movses Khorenatsi, “History is not true without chronology”²⁷.

ՊԱՏՄՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ԵՎ ՄԵՏԱՊԱՏՄՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ՄԵՏԱՓԻԼՍՈՓԱՅՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՀԱՄԱՏԵՔՍՈՒՄ

ԴԱՆԻԵԼՅԱՆ Է. Լ.

(Հայաստանի Հանրապետություն, ք. Երան)

Ամփոփում

Ըստ Մովսես Խորենացու (V դ.)՝ պատմական շարադրանքի հիմնական չափանիշը «գիտաստիճանն որչափ կարացեալ ի բազմացն ընտրեալ բանից...»: V դարում Դավիթ Անհաղթը ներկայացրել է իմաստասիրության և փիլիսոփայության ամբողջությունը հայտնի սահմանումների («գիտություն գոյիցն», «գիտություն աստուածայնոց», «խոյուն մահու», «նմանություն Աստուծոյ ըստ կարողութեան մարդկան», «արհեստ արհեստից և մակացություն մակացութեանց», «սիրելություն իմաստութեան») միջոցով:

XX դ. մետա-ն, դուրս բերվելով մետաֆիզիկայի տիրույթից, դարձավ լայնորեն կիրառվող որոշիչ՝ գիտության համարյա բոլոր տեսական ասպարեզներում այլընտրանքային մտածողության համար և սկզբնավորեց այնպիսի հասկացություններ և հետազոտության բնագավառներ, ինչպիսիք են՝ մետատեսություն, մետամաթեմատիկա, մետափիլիսոփայություն, մետապատմություն և այլն:

Իմաստասիրությունը, որպես մտավոր և հոգևոր երևույթ, իմաստության ճանաչողության ոլորտ է, և դրա շարունակականությունը պայմանավորված է փերզնականապես ձևակերպված հասկացությունների փակուղիների հաղթահարման հնարավորությունով:

Մետապատմությունը ենթադրում է պատմական շարադրանքի «մաքրում»՝ դրա հիմնական տարրերի «գտման» միջոցով, քան պատմական սկզբնաղբյուրների քննական վերլուծությամբ պատմական անցյալի վերականգնում:

Հայաստանի վաղ միջնադարյան պատմագիտական և փիլիսոփայական զարգացումների ուսումնասիրությունը օգնում է հասկանալու, որ «մետապատմություն» տերմինը քննարկելիս կարիք չկա ստորադասել պատմության որևէ բաղկացուցիչ մասը: Անհրաժեշտ է հաշվի առնել փաստական նյութը ամբողջության մեջ, ներառյալ՝ անդրանցական (տրանսցենդենտալ) ընկալումները:

Աստվածայինի և տիեզերականի ողջ էությունը և դրանց արտացոլմամբ՝ համամարդկայինի և ազգայինի փոխկապվածությունը ընկալվել են Դավիթ Անհաղթի և Մովսես Խորենացու պատմական և փիլիսոփայական աշխարհայացքներում:

²⁶ David Anhakht, *The Analysis of Porphyry's "Prolegomena"*, Yerevan, 1976, p. 96 (in Armenian).

²⁷ Movses Khorenatsi, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

ИСТОРИЯ И МЕТАИСТОРИЯ В КОНТЕКСТЕ МЕТАФИЛОСОФИИ

ДАНИЕЛЯН Э. Л.

(Республика Армения, г. Ереван)

Резюме

Согласно Мовсесу Хоренаци (V в.), основным критерием изложения истории является отбор “по мере возможности, достоверного из многих повествований”. В V в. Давид Непобедимый представил целостность философии следующими определениями – “наука о сущем, как таковом”, “наука о божественных и человеческих вещах”, “забота о смерти”, “уподобление богу в меру человеческих возможностей”, “искусство искусств и наука наук”, “любовь к мудрости”.

С начала XX в. понятие *мета* из сферы *метафизики* перешло почти во все теоретические области науки, тем самым положив начало таким понятиям альтернативного мышления и методологии исследования, как *метатеория*, *метаматематика*, *метафилософия*, *метаистория* и др.

Философия, как интеллектуальное и духовное целое, является сферой познания мудрости и ее континуум обусловлен возможностями преодоления тупиков, порождаемых “окончательно” сформированными понятиями.

Метаистория скорее всего предполагает “фильтрацию” основных элементов исторического повествования, нежели выявление исторического прошлого посредством критического анализа источников.

Изучение развития исторической науки и философии раннесредневековой Армении помогает понять, что при обсуждении термина “метаистория” необходимо рассматривать фактический материал в целом, включая также трансцендентальные восприятия.

Вся сущность божественного и вселенского – взаимообусловленность общечеловеческого и национального нашли отражение в историческом и философском мировоззрении Давида Непобедимого и Мовсеса Хоренаци.