to draw direct correspondences between the Homeric epics and the gospels. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are oral poetry in metrical language. The gospels are prose narratives with a heavy oral substratum, but in themselves something other than transcribed orality. (78)

If the difference between the gospel of Mark and the *Iliad* is that significant, and orality figures so little in the gospel, then how is it that Kelber can claim that we should read it as a case of “resistance to oral drives, norms, and authorities”? A tension enters the argument here, if not a contradiction. This is further aggravated by Kelber’s uncritical adoption of the thesis of what he calls ‘the Anglo-American oralist school.’ There exist serious problems with the works of some of these thinkers. To take Havelock’s *Preface to Plato* as an example, many of his suggestions have failed to win support (e.g., his belief in a late-fifth-century intellectual revolution in Greece), and his notion of oral cognition screams out for epistemological clarification. Kelber’s conclusion may be attractive, but his argumentation has inherited some serious difficulties.

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*The Columbia History of Western Philosophy*

RICHARD H. POPKIN, ed.

Richard Popkin’s accomplishments in the history of philosophy are considerable and deserving of praise. He is the founding director of the International Archives of the History of Ideas and president emeritus and founding editor of the *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. He has authored countless papers and numerous books, and is perhaps best known for his groundbreaking work in the history of skepticism. A reader might therefore expect that *The Columbia History of Western Philosophy* would be characterized by the same kind of meticulous scholarship and critical insight that placed *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought* and *The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* on the required reading list for the subject. Unfortunately, it is not, and this failing of the text points to what we should perhaps recognize as a fundamental hermeneutic principle of authorship: A proper history demands a unity of vision that cannot be provided by a plurality of authors. Or to state it less formally: A many-
authored history is about as insightful as a many-authored diary. I'll return to the discussion of this principle after a few more particular comments on the text.

The text comprises nine chapters, two epilogues, an index of names and an index of subjects. Seven of the chapters contain several (between twelve and eighteen) separate articles written by almost as many separate authors. Curiously, two of the chapters contain articles written by only one person: the eight articles comprising Chapter 3, 'Medieval Christian Philosophy,' were all written by Stephen F. Brown, and the nine articles comprising Chapter 8, 'Twentieth-Century Analytic Philosophy,' were all written by Avrum Stroll. This might lead the reader to speculate on the editor's own view of these two 'periods.' At least as curious, and inspiring similar speculation, is the result of a comparison of the numbers of articles devoted to various periods. For example, fifteen articles are devoted to 'Seventeenth-Century Philosophy' (chapter 5) alone, whereas 'The Renaissance' (chapter 4) — the entire Renaissance — is allotted only 5 articles. The editor's discussion in this regard is enlightening (xvi):

Following this [chapter on Medieval Christian Philosophy], we deal with Renaissance philosophy, which is too often just skipped over as if nothing serious took place in the history of philosophy between the late medieval Christian thinkers such as John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham and the rise of modern philosophy in the seventeenth century, starting with René Descartes. It seems prima facie improbable that a period of such tremendous artistic and literary activity should have produced no interesting philosophy.

The philosophy it produced couldn't have been all that interesting if it warrants only five articles. Surely this constitutes damning with faint praise. Moreover, these articles (one of which is in fact only a two-page introduction) are without exception general, survey-type articles. None of them is devoted to critical analysis or discussion of the interpretation or scholarly reception of the figures and schools that are mentioned. This passage from Brian P. Copenhaver — who singly contributed three of the five articles and co-authored the fourth — is typical of all of the articles in this chapter (from 'Doubt and Innovation,' 317):

Some Platonists of the sixteenth century — Francesco Giorgi, Agostino Steuc, and Jacopo Mazzoni — stuck to the conciliatory program of their Italian exemplars, while
others took the polemical stance of the learned Byzantines, George Gemistos Pletho and George of Trebizond. The most important Platonist of this period was Francesco Patrizi of Cherso, whose considerable expertise in history and philology drew on the many decades of scholarship — now widely available in print — that Bruni and Ficino had inaugurated. As usual, Patrizi’s early education in philosophy at Padua was Aristotelian, but Ficino’s *Platonic Theology* not only converted him to Plato but also turned him fiercely against Aristotle.

The problem here is this: Giorgi is only mentioned — that is, the name ‘Giorgi’ is only mentioned — two other times in the text. Steuc’s name is mentioned only one other time, and there is no other mention of Mazzoni. Now, this state of affairs may be fine for a stand-alone article — and indeed, ‘Doubt and Innovation,’ like most of the other articles in the text, generally makes for fun and at least somewhat instructive reading — but this will not do at all for a text that purports to be a history of philosophy. A reader has a right to expect more from a proper history; for example, it would tell the reader who Giorgi, Steuc and Mazzoni were, what schooling they had, what influence they exercised on subsequent thinkers (some detail would here be expected), what particular works they wrote, and so on. A text promising a history of philosophy promises precisely that: a history, not a mere listing of names and dates. This leads me back to that hermeneutic principle I stated above: a proper history demands a unity of vision that cannot be provided by a plurality of authors.

It is simply impossible to imagine a co-authored *History of Herodotus*. What gives the work its brilliance and its charm is provided by the character of Herodotus himself, a character that we can easily gather from the text: insightful and critical, yet so often naive and gullible. The History as a whole leaves its reader with a clear impression of this character. Helpful here is reference to the Greek term *historia* (*ἱστορία*), which means employed the title of Herodotus’ work, ‘written account of one’s inquiries, narrative, history’ (see Liddell & Scott, *ἱστορία*, II). In short, a history is a narrative, and it demands a narrator, a storyteller. One thinks in this regard of Will Durant’s famous *The Story of Philosophy*, which Popkin in fact mentions in the opening paragraph of the ‘Introduction’ to his text as a whole (xv):

There have been many histories of philosophies, but few presented in one large volume for the educated layman. Two such ventures that have endured for many decades, *The Story of Philosophy* by Will Durant and Bertrand Russell’s *A History of Western Philosophy*, are eminently
readable, but cover only the high spots of the field. Durant, who was a very popular lecturer on philosophy at Columbia University, primarily discusses only a few of the great men. Nevertheless, his popularization has been a gateway into philosophy for a great many readers during much of this century. Russell wrote his book hastily out of financial desperation while jobless in New York City at the beginning of World War II. Since Russell was a scholar of very few of the topics he covered, and uninterested or hostile to others, his opus is most engaging as Russelliana but hardly as history of philosophy. Both Durant’s and Russell’s works are still in print and are widely available in paperback editions.

I suspect that there are few who would disagree with Popkin’s assessment of Durant’s and Russell’s ‘histories,’ but what he here fails to note are the reasons for the respective evaluations of these two works. He should have gone on to explain exactly why it is that Durant’s work has continued to be ‘a gateway into philosophy’ for so many people, while Russell’s work continues to be a work that many people should simply avoid. Durant was writing in the role of narrator, and despite the necessarily selective nature of such a popularly directed narration, he was telling one story, drawing from his own considerable experience as a popular lecturer. Russell, on the other hand, was writing with no intention whatsoever to ‘tell the story’ of philosophy—he didn’t know the story and had absolutely no experience in lecturing on it. Indeed, many passages in his text suggest that he resented having even to pretend that knew what he was talking about (see, for example, his uproariously ill-informed chapter on Nietzsche). This points to something else that we find in Durant’s history that is missing from Russell’s: the love of the subject matter. Reading through the text, following the development of the story, the reader senses this love of the material through the gradual recognition of the manner in which the author has attempted to comprehend it all as a whole. Russell’s history couldn’t do this. And neither, unfortunately, can Popkin’s, which also fails to attempt to comprehend the story as a whole.

I am not suggesting here that this failure is typically ‘analytic,’ although there is undeniably a good deal of truth in the suggestion. Nor am I suggesting that success is guaranteed to the ‘continental’ thinker—although I know that many continental thinkers would like to believe this. Reference to an analytic historian will clarify my point. This is from Chapter VI, ‘The Existence of God and the Limits of Explanation,’ of Antony Flew’s An Introduction to Western Philosophy: Ideas and Argument from Plato to Popper (rev. ed.: Thames and Hudson, 1989; p. 190):
The fundamental point made by Kant in this classic and powerful statement [at A568-600/B626-628: 'Being is obviously not a real predicate...'] has since been incorporated as one of the elements of modern logic. For in the symbolism introduced in the *Principia Mathematica* of Bertrand Russell and A.N Whitehead one is required always to distinguish between, on the one hand, existential statements ... and, on the other hand, predicative statements.... It is a curiosity very typical of the history of ideas that Kant himself in this epoch-making passage did not make the distinction, which has since become an important logical commonplace, between the *is* of existence and the *is* of predication (sometimes called the copulative).

The third and last general lesson of the Ontological Argument can be taken from Leibniz. He himself, like Duns Scotus three centuries earlier, believed that the argument provided the basis for a valid proof...

The difference between Flew's passage, which is characteristic of his work as a whole, and that by Copenhaver quoted above is obvious, almost palpable. Flew is making an effort to comprehend the history, to tie the whole story together, in the manner that seems most natural and comfortable to him as story-teller. He's telling the story from his own 'analytic' point of view, consistently stressing those moments of the entire history that are now deemed to have been of the greatest importance for the development of modern analytic philosophy. Unlike Russell's history, Flew's contains no obvious perversions or opinionated caricatures — as with Durant, the reader comes strongly to sense Flew's love of the material.

To return to Popkin, I do not mean to imply that he has no love for the material. But due to the manner in which this material is presented — that is, having been polyvocally narrated — there exists no guiding comprehension of the history as a whole, no appreciation of that historical whole in terms of which the reader might approach a fuller understanding of its parts. Popkin tries to make of this a virtue of this history (xviii): 'No effort has been made to force the different authors into a common expository style or into a common point of view.' It would surely be wrong to 'force' authors to do so were they writing their own works, or collaborating in the production of, say, an edition of *Collected Papers in the History of Philosophy*. But it is by no means self-evident that such a libertarian editorial policy is the proper policy to adopt in the case of a cooperative endeavour that has as its goal the production of a history.
Despite his policy of non-interference, Popkin has nevertheless deemed it appropriate to place ‘connecting passages where I thought it appropriate in order to relate one section to another and to make the narrative as continuous as possible.’ (xviii) The result is a hermeneutic catastrophe in three respects: (1) First, many of these connecting passages often contain statements or discussions that appear in fact to have little to do with the articles they purport to ‘connect’; for example, the lengthy critical discussion, in the introduction to chapter 1, of Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* is informative and provocative — but it in fact seems antithetical to various assumptions made by some of the authors of articles in that chapter. (2) Second, these connecting passages often revolve around statements that appear to be grounded on very shaky foundations, if not simply on ignorance of the relevant history, for example, the passage that is offered as a connection between the ‘Plato’ and ‘Aristotle’ chapters stresses that ‘The Aristotelian corpus, we must remember, is the work of a one-time follower who has turned against his master.... It should also be kept in mind ... that at the very time Aristotle was presumably systematically refuting his teacher....’ (52-53) This view of Aristotle, as a student turning against his master and ‘systematically refuting him,’ has been challenged since antiquity — most compellingly in recent times by Werner Jaeger in his monumental *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development* (first published, in German, in 1923). (3) And third, the general impression that these connecting passages sometimes make upon the reader is that of a pompous and patronizing omniscient narrator who occasionally feels it necessary that he interject his wisdom in order to enlighten both the readers and the authors of the various articles. This interjective style simply cannot succeed in producing a comprehensive narrative, nor can it avoid giving the impression of the editor’s having assumed an air of authority bordering on omniscience. All of the above has been offered as a report on a work that purports to be a ‘history.’ As such a work it fails, for at least the reasons given above. That having been said, however, had the text been entitled something like *Collected Papers in the History of Philosophy*, and had Popkin not fallen to the temptation to interject his ‘connecting passages,’ it would be a fine collection. The articles are for the most part well documented and as a rule make use of the most recent secondary literature, and they offer contemporary, early twenty-first-century interpretations of particular moments of the history of philosophy. As long as readers expect this from the text, and not a proper ‘history,’ they may not be so disappointed after all.

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