

Archives of the abstract

Ray Scott Percival

Review of: *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*

There is nothing more important in the evolution of culture than the evolution of its abstract thought, and philosophical thought dominates all other thought in the long run. It is often the musings of some recluse abstract scribbler that open opportunities for a society or erect its mental prisons.

This is why the history of philosophy is important. To understand a culture is to understand the abstract products of its thought and how that culture interpreted them. But this should not be confused with philosophy itself, which is the attempt to solve some abstract problem.

Unfortunately, there is a tendency to think that the expounding of what a recognised philosopher said is philosophy. When it is not simply confusion, this belief is a sign of intellectual cowardice or professional politeness taken too far.

The *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* publishes articles and reviews on the history of philosophy and related intellectual history from the ancient world to the early decades of the 20th century. The main aim is to promote the understanding of the history of philosophy through the study of philosophical texts in the intellectual, political and social context in which they were created.

An emphasis on context is no doubt fashionable and, arguably, the correct thing to do, but there is no explicit rationale given for it here. It would be helpful if each issue had a statement of purpose and a brief introduction to each paper. The former is a challenge to write, because one does not want to exclude too much from consideration, but one does want neatly to fill an intellectual niche.

The solution, perhaps, is to focus on an interesting problem or set of related problems. Some might think that the question of what precisely any interesting philosopher said to be a little too vague and broad to serve as an inspiring problem. This is especially so when there are already two major international English-language journals on the history of philosophy, *The Journal for the History of Philosophy* and *The Journal for the History of Ideas*. Surely it is of no intellectual consequence that these are not published in the United Kingdom but in the United States. However, it could be argued that competition will lessen the chances of excellent articles being neglected because of a national bias.

Although it focuses on the classics of philosophy, the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* attends also to less major works. This is excellent because we never know what we have overlooked and we can be surprised by the pedigree of ideas. And the journal grapples with non-philosophical disciplines that impinge on the history of philosophy, including political theory, religion and the natural sciences insofar as they illuminate the history of philosophy.

A select team of editorial consultants in philosophy publishing, including M. A. Stewart of [Lancaster University](#), backs the journal. The editorial board is largely taken from the management committee of the British Society for the History of Philosophy.

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