

HISTORY OF IDEA

This class defines the history of ideas, and its near-synonym intellectual history, as a branch of historical studies centering on (mainly) textual and public considerations and debates of broad philosophical, political and social issues. The 'prehistory' of the history of ideas prior to the twentieth century is sketched, looking at its origins, parent disciplines, near neighbors and inspirations. The modern canon of the history of ideas is explored through three seminal representatives, Lovejoy, Cassirer, and Berlin. A discussion of major recent approaches (linguistic contextualism, Begriffsgeschichte, and others) is followed by an overview of the main issues at stake, prevalent controversies, and their links with interdisciplinary bearings on intellectual history.

Taking the cue from Lovejoy's dictum that "the history of ideas is no subject of highly departmentalized minds" (Lovejoy, 1964), it would be professionally parochial and scholarly unhelpful to prescribe a series of criteria or, worse, rules enabling to identify true intellectual history from fake ones. Perhaps, less arrogantly but more usefully, one could point to some – nonexclusive nor exhaustive – traits that inform the practice of intellectual historians now

working on varied topics from a plurality of perspectives. To do so might dispel some of the confusion that often shrouds all attempt at drawing intellectual history's (very mobile) borders. It might also provide an idea of future research directions likely to be taken by a large number of those who to the question opening this article would be brave enough to answer 'I do intellectual history'.

Rigorous analysis of texts and critical examination of their content combined with close attention to the material conditions of their production and literary forms; their cultural and socio-political contexts; and their assumption about, e.g., gender, race, and identity.

Interdisciplinarity and cross disciplinarity.

Focus on the linguistic behavior of agents in the past.

Insistence on the contextual dimension of ideas.

. Analysis of locutionary and illocutionary acts (the doings of the agents when performing linguistically), which involves a good degree of attention to the web of meanings, which gave a particular utterance or text their contemporary significance (importance of historical distance in that one deals with assumptions, opinions, references that are not his/her own).

. Equal relevance to failed ideas just as much as to

successful and coherent ones. Intellectual history studies wrong principles and does not seek truth in the same way as it is often pursued by philosophers.

- Study of the (long-term) consequences, implications, and legacy of ideas, which, in turn, leads to concentrate on their being distorted, manipulated, or simply adjusted to new epochs and/or cultural milieus.