

# Introduction

It is not easy to write a history of contemporary philosophy that is both understandable for people who are new to philosophical studies and at the same time not tediously long, given the complexity of the intellectual currents of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Furthermore, the period addressed in this volume is in some ways a continuation of modern philosophy. The distinction between modern and contemporary philosophy is more a question of how they are taught rather than what they consist of: there is much more continuity than rupture between these two periods. Thus, Romanticism cannot be understood without connecting it to the Enlightenment; German idealism implies a knowledge of the Kantian system; positivism and neo-positivism are ideologically framed by the empirical and Enlightened traditions that emerge in the middle of the modern era. For this reason, we recommend that newcomers to the study of contemporary philosophy review of the roots of modern philosophy. Without this, they may miss out on many elements needed to interpret properly the philosophy of the last two centuries of the second millennium.

While there is a substantial continuity between modern and contemporary philosophy, it should nevertheless be pointed out that the relatively simple outline of philosophical history between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries—in essence, the Renaissance, rationalism, empiricism, the Enlightenment, and the Kantian system—is complicated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: there is a greater diversity of schools and currents, so that a rundown of the panorama of contemporary philosophy may not be as linear and schematic as that of the preceding period. However, we have sought to create a presentation that gives priority to the core concepts around which the various currents revolve, avoiding an overly loose organization.

Thus, we have structured this book in six parts. In the first, we underscore the continuities and ruptures between Romanticism and idealism, on the one hand, and the philosophical

traditions of rationalism, empiricism, and the enlightened world, on the other. Given the importance of idealism and the inherent difficulties in understanding it, we have decided to present it in some detail. The explanation of this current corresponds to the longest part of the book, and a reduction of pages would come at the cost of a better understanding.

Hegel's all-encompassing system left its mark on contemporary philosophy and produced counter-reactions, but even these critiques depended on Hegel's system to a certain extent, at least as a reference point for criticism. In the second part, completely dedicated to the dissolution of Hegelianism, we have given detailed attention to three philosophers who, from very different perspectives, exerted a huge influence in these two Centuries: Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries are marked by sustained scientific and technical progress. This process produced philosophical readings that have had an indelible influence in shaping contemporary culture. In the section titled *The Epistemology and Foundation of Scientific Thought*, we will analyze nineteenth-century positivism, neo-Kantianism, historicism, and the more recent philosophies of science. In this third part we will also address utilitarianism, pragmatism, and the philosophies of language. In these currents, whose proponents belong primarily to the Anglo-Saxon world, we see a great deal of continuity with modern British empiricism, both in its epistemological and ethical variants.

In the fourth part we have grouped together certain currents and schools of thought that are characterized by an integrated vision of man and his openness to transcendence. These are French spiritualism, neo-Thomism, and personalism.

The last two parts are entirely devoted to philosophies of the twentieth century. In the fifth part we discuss phenomenology and existentialism, paying special attention to two great philosophers of the past century: Husserl and Heidegger. The last part presents a panorama of the most recent philosophical trends, those developed in the second half of the last century—critical social theory and hermeneutics—and then wrap up with a few representatives of so-called postmodernity.

At the end of each part we offer a brief bibliography which includes both primary sources and a few books that may serve

as a starting point for further study of the various topics treated here.

The philosophers of the past two centuries, like their modern, medieval, and ancient predecessors, made inquiries into the three major areas of reality and knowledge: man, the world, and God. However, the perspectives that developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries show a remarkable richness and complexity, which make it unrealistic to try to define the philosophy of the contemporary period using hasty or simplistic qualifiers. Their research findings are far from homogenous: this period contains both deterministic systems that deny man's freedom as well as currents that make freedom the essential component of human existence; there are currents based on the ontological transcendence of God and schools that are openly immanentist or atheistic. In the pages that follow, we will highlight the features of each current, which not only distinguished them from each other, but which in some cases come to shape a unique vision of life and the world.

In writing this book we have tried to present the various philosophies of this period in the way a historian would, with the modest objectivity of which man is capable. But we have not limited ourselves to merely sterile exposition; rather, we hope to present, here and there, value judgments on some of the contemporary philosophical conclusions from the standpoint of a transcendent vision of human existence and the awareness of the intrinsic human dignity that we all share.

One of the authors is Argentine; the other, Mexican. In 1976, the Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges published a poem entitled "Mexico," in which he compared Argentina to the nation mentioned in the title. He wrote, *So many things the same! And so many different! So many things eternal!* Those who write these pages have tried to favor the latter issues, the things eternal.

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