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Ian Hacking

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*IAN HACKING**
**'STYLE' FOR HISTORIANS AND
PHILOSOPHERS¹**

RELATIONS between the history and the philosophy of the sciences are often debated and sometimes contested. My interest here is collaboration. I shall describe a new analytical tool that can be used by historians and by philosophers for different purposes. It is a specialized, indeed technical, version of an idea often used or abused elsewhere: 'style'. The historian of science A. C.

Crombie has been writing about 'styles of scientific thinking in the European tradition' since the mid-1970s, and his work has now come to fruition.² I heard him lecture on the topic in 1978, and adapted the idea to metaphysics and epistemology, changing the name slightly to 'styles of reasoning'.³ The two uses are complementary but to some extent asymmetric. The historian may conclude that the philosopher's use of the tool is bunk, irrelevant to understanding the past. But the philosopher needs the history, for if the tool does not provide a coherent and enlightening ordering of the record, then it has no more place in sound philosophy than any other phantasy.

Crombie's idea is less about the content of the sciences than about their methods. The focus is on how we find out, not on what we find out. It is out of step with present fashion, which teaches us so much about the intricate details of incidents and relationships. It derives from a conception of the entire Western scientific tradition; we cannot help but recall that Spengler too spoke of the 'Western style'.⁴ Crombie's ambitious analysis should remind us more,

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²Developed from a paper for the conference 'Recent Trends in the Historiography of Science', Corfu, 27-31 May, 1991. I have to thank Alistair Crombie for advice on this, my most recent, adaptation of his ideas.

³The talk was published as A. C. Crombie, 'Philosophical Perspectives and Shifting Interpretations of Galileo', in J. Hintikka *et al.* (eds), *Theory Change, Ancient Axiomatics and Galileo's Methodology: Proceedings of the 1978 Pisa Conference on the History and Philosophy of Science* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1981), pp. 271-286. His book is *Styles of Scientific Thinking in the European Tradition: The History of Argument and Explanation Especially in the Mathematical and Biomedical Sciences and Arts* (3 vols, London: Duckworth, forthcoming).

⁴Ian Hacking, 'Language, Truth and Reason', in M. Hollis and S. Lukes (eds), *Rationality and Relativism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), pp. 48-66.

⁵Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (2 vols, Munich: Beck, 1918); translated by C. F. Atkinson as *The Decline of the West, Form and Actuality* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1926). Spengler's use of the word *Stil* is so generous that the translator says 'The word "Stil" will therefore not necessarily be always rendered "style"' (1926, vol. 1, p. 108, n. 2). Be prepared for surprises, e.g. 'die Expansionskraft der abendländischen Stile' (1918, vol. 2, p. 55, unchanged in the revised edition) is translated as 'the expansion-power of the Western Soul' (1926, vol. 2, p. 46).

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