AFTERWORD
Unsocial Sociability

David Armitage

Intellectual historians seem prone to collective mood swings. They move from confidence to self-questioning and, if not quite from agony to ecstasy, then from agonizing to ennui. Forty years ago, in the anglophone world at least, there was much wailing and gnashing of teeth about the prospects for the field, as intellectual history seemed to be threatened from without and increasingly riven within.[1] Some feared that social history was sweeping all before it; intellectual historians appeared so out of step with the times—as constrained, elitist and marginal—that they grew defensive and embattled. "Often remembered as agonistic and acrimonious," Judith Surkis reminds us here, "the apparent 'crisis' of intellectual history since the 1970s was nonetheless epistemologically and politically productive." By what we might call Newton's third law of academic motion, action led to reaction: within a couple of generations, intellectual historians regrouped, retooled and energetically resuscitated their field. In the early part of the new century, journals were founded or refreshed, monograph series flourished and proliferated and an explosion of creative scholarship indicated greatly revived morale. Historians of ideas had apparently recovered confidence in their craft. They increasingly repaired relations with adjacent scholarly communities. Sunny optimism prevailed.

Nevertheless, some feared that camaraderie might spawn complacency. "Everyone seems to be getting along these days," remarked two well-placed observers in 2014: "intellectual historians with other kinds of historians, and intellectual historians with one another." Might such collegiality have a cost, they wondered? "The situation is comfortable.... the absence of self-reflection and theoretical contest—which were once compulsory, and arguably taken to excess—risks devolving into a celebration of eclecticism under a large and cozy tent."[2] What its authors called an "interim" judgement on intellectual history is now a decade old. In the meantime, a host of collective volumes has surveyed the prospects for intellectual history in multiple national, transnational, global and gendered frames.[3] Now might be a good moment to judge if those earlier fears about coziness were justified or simply misplaced.

The book you hold in your hands—or, more likely, read on your screen—is not just the latest of these enterprises: it is the most ambitious collection in the field. It decisively rebuts concerns about complacency by presenting the benefits of theoretical and methodological

contestation. The notion that friction can be fertile was perhaps the most challenging proposition made by Immanuel Kant—one of the godfathers of intellectual history—in his "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim" (1784). Kant agreed with Michel de Montaigne that humans are at once egoistic loners and companionable collaborators: "Il n'est rien si dissociable et sociable que l'homme: l'un par son vice, l'autre par sa nature," as Montaigne put it.[4] With two centuries' further discussion of human nature behind him, Kant argued that antagonistic humans are interdependent as well as competitive. Improvement emerges through that "antagonism in society" he calls *ungesellige Geselligkeit*: literally "unsociable sociability," but often translated into English as "unsocial sociability."[5] A similar mix of individualism and interaction characterizes the human sciences: we might therefore apply Kant's term to determine how productive unsocial sociability has been for intellectual history. Does progress in the history of ideas proceed from the interaction of opposites? Has "antagonism in society" among intellectual historians yielded positive results? This mighty *Handbook in the History and Sociology of Ideas* suggests the answer is "yes" on all counts.

Amid the avalanche of recent collections, this *Handbook* stands out for facilitating forward movement through creative engagement, especially by bringing together two groups of scholars who should have been in longer and more continuous dialogue: historians of ideas and intellectual sociologists. This marks a significant change from what Johan Heilbron here calls "the sparse and conflictual relations between intellectual history and sociology" in the recent past. Intellectual histories of sociology still outnumber sociological studies of intellectual history: more sustained dialogue and exchange of tools might redress that imbalance.[6] The sociology of sociologists is well advanced; contextualizing the contextualists has barely begun.[7] The enquiring subject must become the object of enquiry and that demands a humility and openness to inspection that has been comparatively rare among historians of ideas. That, in turn, could be one foundation for a reinvigorated "social history of ideas," including but extending beyond the specifically political ideas Frédérique Matonti discusses. The apprehension that the original call for a social history of ideas, by Roger Chartier, Robert Darnton and others, fell on stony ground has now been succeeded by efforts to revisit that programme in light of developments in adjacent fields such as the new history of capitalism.[8] Scholarship along these lines will surely reveal "how central a role the sociology of knowledge can be allowed to play in a field traditionally defined by hermeneutics," as Elsie Cohen and Anne Schult argue in their chapter here.

The *Handbook* models such richly engaged collaboration between sociologists of knowledge and intellectual historians. It is also unique, and uniquely welcome, for bringing together scholars of different generations as well as researchers from both sides of the Atlantic, notably in the co-authored chapters by Brahimi and Leperlier, Manbeck and Pacouret, Aubert and Langstaff, Caomhánach and Lemerle, Chahsiche and Raimo, Fondu and Houwink ten Cate, and Cohen and Schult. Intellectual historians, at least, have tended to be soloists rather than ensemble players. Joint ventures like those contained in this *Handbook* can teach them—or, as a card-carrying intellectual historian, I should say teach *us*—the profits and pleasures of cooperation, as more broadly can the collaborative practices prevalent in intellectual sociology. Collaboration brings distinct skills and methods to bear on common problems, such as the role of quantitative methods in intellectual history (treated here by Brahimi and Leperlier) or the benefits of the history of the book (exemplified by Chahsiche and Raimo). Co-authorship can be a particularly effective form of the sociability Fondu and Houwink ten Cate here term "agonistic agency": agonistic, because it brings strong

individual interests into competition, but informed by agency as each party freely contributes to producing a common argument. The individualism of humanistic scholarship breeds isolation at best and competitiveness at worst. As so many of the chapters in the *Handbook* demonstrate, energies that are generative rather than destructive are more likely to spring from the collegial methods of the social sciences.

The *Handbook* does this by opening ample space for productive disagreement. For example, there is no consensus among the contributors even on the appropriate subject matter of intellectual history itself. One traditional answer is that intellectual history is the history of intellectuals. That seemingly pleonastic definition has the benefits of isolating the producers of ideas, distinguishing them from their contemporaries and exposing their empirical characteristics for aggregation and evaluation. Yet, the category of the intellectual also brings problems. It only emerged in the wake of the Dreyfus affair, first as an insult and later as a self-identification, under novel conditions of liberalization (as Aubert and Langstaff argue) that might associate it too narrowly with one particular strand of modernity. An intellectual history of intellectuals *stricto sensu* would confine intellectual history to little more than the last century or so.[9] Intellectuals deal with ideas: they generate, debate and transmit them, so that self-styled historians of ideas might prefer those ideas rather than time-bound intellectuals to be the centre of scholarly analysis. The *Handbook* provides ample evidence for the usefulness of this approach, especially when the history of concepts (*Begriffsgeschichte*) joins the history of ideas, for example, in the treatments of publicness, normativity, "economic theology" and the historical meaning of emotions in the respective chapters by Sebastian Veg, Giuseppe Bianco, Charly Coleman and Jonas Knatz. Their essays avoid the notorious weaknesses of the originary strain of the history of ideas, associated with Arthur Lovejoy and his followers—decontextualization; abstraction; the hypostatization of "ideas" as quasi-Platonic forms—by depicting ideas as the groundwork of arguments and as dynamic causes of dispute. This understanding, implicit in each of these chapters but most evident in Bianco's, resembles the agonistic model of intellectual history associated with the so-called "Cambridge School" of intellectual history inspired by J. L. Austin and Ludwig Wittgenstein, in which words are weapons, the struggle never ceases and the historian's first task is to pierce the fog of war. With this methodology in mind, it is hardly necessary to convert all intellectual history as the history of controversies, to be studied with a specific "controversialist method."[10] Contention over the proper subject of intellectual history—intellectuals or ideas; concepts or arguments; ideologies or representations—may provide rich material for a reflexive historical analysis. Likewise, disagreement over basic approaches—hermeneutic *versus* aggregative; text-based *versus* data-driven; close reading *versus* "distant" reading—will continue to animate engagement between sociologists and historians of ideas.

The history of ideas *qua* ideas, like intellectual history as the history of intellectuals, might still be accused of two persistent failings: immateriality and incorporeality. Immateriality, because it appears to be divorced from the physical forms ideas take and the institutional structures through which they circulate; incorporeality, because it is assumed to spring from minds distinct from the feeling, desiring, hungering and fragile bodies that enclose them. The first lesson intellectual sociology teaches intellectual historians is that ideas are not intangible: they do not circulate autonomously in the ether but identifiable actors select and promote, translate or censor them, always under conditions of opportunity and constraint or various forms of dominance and subordination. "We must always analyze the *conditions of possibility* for their articulation across different contexts," Andrew Sartori

cautions along these lines. As ideas escape from their original contexts—that is, when they are moved beyond the narrow horizons strict contextualists often impose—they enter new contexts, in novel clothing, to constitute histories of reception and circulation that intellectual historians have often ignored but intellectual sociologists have greatly advanced. Tracing those histories of movement across time and space informed the programme Pierre Bourdieu announced in his classic essay, "Les conditions sociales de la circulation internationale des idées" (1990), aspects of which Kapil Raj, Fondu and Houwink ten Cate, Cohen and Schult, and Mathieu Hauchecorne pursue in their respective chapters.[11] Bourdieu's agenda was distinct from the "sociology of texts" announced by historians of the book around the same time but entirely compatible with it.[12] As Chahsiche and Raimo argue, "the book becomes more than a simple, single object" at the intersection of textual sociology and intellectual history: "it proves a collective locus of thought and practice." We might add that it also turns into a mobile locus to be tracked transtemporally and transnationally in its circulations and receptions.

Such an alliance between intellectual sociology and the history of the book protects against assumptions of immateriality and the idea that minds and the ideas they produce are "disincarnated," to use Roger Chartier's term.[13] Where else might the intellectual historian look to prevent falling into incorporeality, of writing what I have called elsewhere "a kind of history from the neck up, dealing with the insubstantial imaginings of disembodied beings from inner space"?[14] One answer lies in the history of the body. If intellectual history long kept a polite distance from social history, it was positively phobic about histories of emotions and of sexuality. An embodied intellectual history would have to encompass both, as Knatz and Todd Shepard argue in their chapters. Recovering past emotions is among the most challenging of historical tasks: reconstructing how those emotions were thought of, where their boundaries were drawn and how distinct feelings were discriminated and defined sits closer to the centre of intellectual history's traditional concerns.

How effective the affective can be recent histories of love and fear, of smiling and weeping, have shown, even beyond the subfield of the history of emotions itself.[15] Texts about emotions and the emotions described in texts are close enough to the traditional concerns of intellectual history to avert the suspicion that they stretch the boundaries of the field beyond breaking point. The same may be true of what Shepard calls "sex talk": that is, "diverse references to sex, sexual morality, deviance, and normalcy in publications, archived documents, and visual sources."[16] Recovering sex *acts* themselves may be another matter. References and representations are one thing and well within the remit of cultural history and even intellectual history; historicizing "sex—what is defined as sexual, which acts are considered sex" may be more contentious, as Shepard himself suggests here when disagreeing with Tracie Matysik's assessment that the displacement of sexuality by intellectual historians has opened up possibilities for research rather than closed them down.[17] It remains to be seen whether Shepard's challenging essay provokes greater attention by "vanilla" historians—intellectual historians among them—to the history of sex acts. For the moment, at least his argument highlights the fact that even intellectuals express desire and that without thinking bodies there would be no ideas.

Materiality and embodiment hardly exhaust the conditions that shape the morphology and mobility of intellectuals and their ideas. Among them, law has arguably been almost as marginal as sex to most intellectual historians' interests. Yet without knowledge of, say, the history of copyright law, it is impossible to understand the emergence of the author as a category, the nature of writing—as public good, private property, or form of labour—or

the conditions determining the movement of ideas, as Manbeck and Pacouret and Gisèle Sapiro stress in their essays.[18] Attention to law greatly expands what Surkis here calls the "archive" of intellectual history, to include not just the history of legal thought but also the evidence of intellection found in case-books and legal proceedings. As Manbeck and Pacouret also show, it now increasingly encompasses law beyond the domestic and munici-pal realms to incorporate the history of international law, a field where historically minded lawyers and intellectual historians have lately skirmished over the appropriate methodol-ogy—and implied motivations—for historicizing material over which both stake a scholarly claim.[19] By its nature, law is an adversarial and agonistic practice, a site for the deployment of rhetoric on a sanctioned stage for struggle between competing parties, whether national, international or global in scope.[20] As such, it determines the conditions of intellectual pro-duction and becomes a laboratory of ideas and argument for intellectual history to probe and test.

The arena where intellectuals contest and ideas compete is of course much wider than law courts and actual, as well as metaphorical, laboratories alone. Wider still is what Jür-gen Habermas's English translators inadvertently spatialized by calling a "public sphere," even though Habermas himself was interested in the more abstract condition of *Öffen-tlichkeit*, a harbinger of his later work on communicative rationality originally cast as a historical account of speech in bourgeois modernity. Veg persuasively criticizes how this model was rendered normative and then more recently became inadequate to illuminate "the current breakdown of public rational-critical discourse," a condition Habermas has now confronted in his most recent work on the political implications of the digitaliza-tion of public opinion and its sundering among unmoderated social media platforms.[21] An intellectual history attuned to division, confrontation and the impact of technology on communication will be better equipped to illuminate aspects of the past that speak to current concerns. This would not involve anachronistically projecting our own concerns backwards, as Antoine Lilti, ventriloquizing Lucien Febvre, argues in his chapter: present-ism need not entail anachronism if we maintain the distinction between what Febvre called "their history and ours."[22] That distance itself can create a kind of "connective dimension-ality," as Sartori terms it, but across the dimension of time rather than of space, the usual medium for connected history. This would also accord with Lilti's sense that intellectual history's aim should be closer to that of, say, philosophy in releasing past ideas into the present rather than imprisoning them within their history. Emancipating intellectual history in this way opens up critical dialogue and with it increasing possibilities for the Kantian process of sociable antagonism.

The stage for unsocial sociability ineluctably widens. A decade after writing his "Idea for a History with a Cosmopolitan Aim," Kant extended his own vision of *ungesellige Gesellig-keit* to the entire inhabited surface of the Earth in "Toward Perpetual Peace" (1795). Intel-lectual historians have recently followed Kant in this global turn, leading to the creation in the last decade of the novel field of global intellectual history.[23] The reach of that history now covers every inhabited continent. Some of its subfields parallel Heilbron's call here for a return to the study of national traditions in intellectual history, though most refer to post-colonial nations or non-Western traditions of thought. These dimensions of contem-porary practice, both global and consciously sub-global, lie mostly beyond this *Handbook*'s horizons, with the important exceptions of the chapters by Raj and Sartori. Their essays point to the polycentric history of knowledge formation (Raj) and the shifting valences of connectivity in world history (Sartori) in ways that will necessarily inform future global

intellectual histories. Not all intellectual histories will be global nor should they be, just as only a portion of global history will ever treat the concerns of intellectual history. That said, it seems predictable that, as the human sciences become more diverse in personnel, archives and institutional locations, and in particular as intellectual history is "decolonized," the Euro-Atlantic "West" will necessarily cede the centrality it long enjoyed within the field.[24] As it does so, the methods intellectual sociologists have forged for tracing "the science of international relations with regard to culture," to quote Bourdieu once more, across transnational and global fields will be ever more indispensable.[25] In this regard, the *Handbook* comprises an essential toolkit for the next phase of scholarship in a sociologically informed intellectual history.

Shared tools do not determine identical outcomes. Contention is the lifeblood of intellectual work: a field without disagreements would be a field without a future. This *Handbook* shows that it is possible to entertain fundamental disputes—about the central questions, the defining subject matter, the legitimate scope and the appropriate methodology for intellectual history—both fruitfully and coherently within a single volume. Basic disagreements like these propel enquiry while preventing stagnation. Sometimes, it can take what Adam Smith called an impartial spectator, an imagined or actual observer, to see ourselves as other see us, whether we are intellectual historians under the scrutiny of sociologists or sociologists examined by historians of ideas. At other moments, we need to learn the languages and even begin to follow the social codes of those in adjacent but distinct disciplinary communities. Such immersion can reveal new objects of enquiry as well as novel angles of approach together with the inevitable misunderstandings and resistances that accompany any intercultural encounter. The political model here may be less Habermas's utopian "public sphere," rational yet non-conflictual, than the more critical conception Nancy Fraser has espoused in which, as Veg notes, "the 'common good' can oftentimes only be worked out by deliberation between conflicting interests."[26] Friction strikes sparks. Collaborative but competitive engagement produces progress, as Kant predicted it would. The *Handbook in the History and Sociology of Ideas*, like any good guide, points the way towards multiple potential destinations without pre-determining the endpoint. Unsocial sociability might yet mark the journey but the struggle will surely be invigorating. *La lutte continue*.

Notes

1 Classically in Robert Darnton, "Intellectual History and Cultural History," in Michael Kammen, ed., *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 327–54.

2 Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn, "Interim Intellectual History," in McMahon and Moyn, eds., *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3, 5.

3 Most notably, Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, eds., *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); McMahon and Moyn, eds., *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*; Keisha N. Blain, Christopher Cameron and Ashley D. Farmer, eds., *New Perspectives on the Black Intellectual Tradition* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018); Raymond Haberski, Jr., and Andrew Hartman, eds., *American Labyrinth: Intellectual History for Complicated Times* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018); Melvin L. Rogers and Jack Turner, eds., *African American Political Thought: A Collected History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020); Gisèle Sapiro, Marco Santoro and Patrick Baert, eds., *Ideas on the Move: The International Circulation of Paradigms and Theories* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler, eds., *Women's International Thought: A New History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

4 Michel de Montaigne, "De la solitude," in Montaigne, *Essais de Michel Montaigne*, ed. André Tournon, 3 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie national éditions), I, 388.

5 Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim" (1784), in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty and James Schmidt, eds., *Kant's Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 13 (8:20); on the translation of *ungesellige Geselligkeit*, see Allen Wood, "Kant's Fourth Proposition: The Unsociable Sociability of Human Nature," ibid., 114–15 n. 2.

6 For example, Wolf Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Johan Heilbron, *The Rise of Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997). More generally, see Didier Fassin and George Steinmetz, eds., *The Social Sciences in the Looking Glass: Studies in the Production of Knowledge* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023).

7 For initial forays, see Emile Perreau-Saussine, "Quentin Skinner in Context," *The Review of Politics* 69 (2007): 106–22; Samuel James, "J. G. A. Pocock and the Idea of the 'Cambridge School' in the History of Political Thought," *History of European Ideas* 45 (2019): 83–98; Takuya Furuta, "Without Laslett to the Lost Worlds: Quentin Skinner's Early Methodology," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 22 (2021): 144–62.

8 Darnton, "Intellectual History and Cultural History," in Kammen, ed., *The Past Before Us*; Roger Chartier, "Intellectual History or Sociocultural History? The French Trajectories," in Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan, eds., *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 13–46; David A. Bell, "For a New Social History of Enlightenment: Authors, Readers, and Commercial Capitalism," *Modern Intellectual History* (2022): doi:10.1017/S1479244322000087.

9 Christophe Charle, *Birth of the Intellectuals: 1880–1900*, trans. David Fernbach and G. M. Goshgarian (Cambridge: Polity, 2005).

10 Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 23 *et passim*; Anthony La Vopa, "A New Intellectual History? Jonathan Israel's Enlightenment," *The Historical Journal* 52 (2009): 717–38. For a different approach to the history of controversy, see Jean-Louis Fabiani, "Disputes, polémiques et controverses dans les mondes intellectuels: Vers une sociologie historique des formes de débat agonistique," *Mil neuf cent* 25 (2007): 45–60.

11 Pierre Bourdieu, "Les conditions sociales de la circulation internationale des idées" (1990), in Bourdieu, *Impérialismes: circulation internationale des idées et luttes pour l'universel*, ed. Jérôme Bourdieu, Franck Poupeau and Gisèle Sapiro (Paris: Raisons d'agir, 2023), 67–81; Eng. trans., Bourdieu, "The Social Conditions of the International Circulation of Ideas," *Actes de recherche en sciences sociales* 145, 2 (2002): 3–8.

12 D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts (The Panizzi Lectures, 1985)* (London: The British Library, 1986).

13 Chartier, "Intellectual History or Sociocultural History?," in LaCapra and Kaplan, eds., *Modern European Intellectual History*, 17.

14 David Armitage, "The International Turn in Intellectual History," in McMahon and Moyn, eds., *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, 233.

15 For example, Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Love: Victorians to Moderns* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2005); Colin Jones, *The Smile Revolution in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

16 Quoting Todd Shepard, *Sex, France, and Arab Men, 1962–1979* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 1–3.

17 Tracie Matysik, "Decentering Sex: Reflections on Freud, Foucault and Subjectivity in Intellectual History," in McMahon and Moyn, eds., *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, 173–92.

18 See also Gisèle Sapiro and Boris Gobille, "Literary Property Owners or Intellectual Workers? French Writers in Search of a Status," *Le Mouvement Social* 214 (2006): 113–39.

19 Andrew Fitzmaurice, "Context in the History of International Law," *Journal of the History of International Law* 20 (2018): 5–30; Lauren Benton, "Beyond Anachronism: Histories of

International Law and Global Legal Politics," *Journal of the History of International Law* 21 (2019): 7–40; Anne Orford, *International Law and the Politics of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

20 David Armitage, "Home and the World: The Legal Imagination of Martti Koskenniemi," *International Relations* 37 (2023): [1–19].

21 Jürgen Habermas, *Ein neuer Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit und die deliberative Politik* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2022).

22 Lucien Febvre, "Leur histoire et la nôtre," in Febvre, *Vivre l'histoire* (Paris: Laffont, 2009), 238–44; compare David Armitage, "In Defense of Presentism," in Darrin M. McMahon, ed., *History and Human Flourishing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 44–69.

23 Moyn and Sartori, eds., *Global Intellectual History*; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Global Intellectual History beyond Hegel and Marx," *History and Theory* 54 (2015): 126–37.

24 Milinda Banerjee, "Decolonize Intellectual History! An Agenda for the Capitalocene," *Journal of the History of Ideas* Blog (19 May 2021): https://jhiblog.org/2021/05/19/decolonize-intellectual-history/ (accessed March 1, 2023); Adom Getachew and Karuna Mantena, "Anticolonialism and the Decolonization of Political Theory," *Critical Times* 4 (2021): 359–88.

25 Bourdieu, "La circulation international des idées," in Bourdieu, *Impérialismes*, 67; see also Gisèle Sapiro, Tristan Leperlier and Mohamed Amine Brahimi, "Qu'est-ce qu'un champ intellectuel transnational?," *Actes de recherche en sciences sociales* 224, 4 (2018): 4–11.

26 Nancy Fraser, et al., *Transnationalizing the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).