Inhalt / Contents / Sommaire

Aufsätze / Articles

Maria Chriti: Ammonius’ Commentary on Aristotle’s De Interpretatione. Language is both by nature and by convention .............................................. 1

Miguel González Pereira: Raíces históricas de la delimitación entre signo léxico y signo gramatical ................................................... 25

Michela Tardella: Un approccio comparato alle origini della fonetica occidentale. Girolamo Fabrici d’Acquapendente ........................................ 37

Arnaud Fournet: Quelques éléments historiographiques concernant la famille uralienne aux XVII et XVIII siècles ........................ 55

Elsa Coppoletta: Zur Normierung des Okzitanischen durch das Dictionnaire français-occitanien von Louis Piat ......................... 65

Claudine Normand: Antoine Culioli — Emile Benveniste : une filiation ? ................ 85

Oana Boc: La linguistique d’Eugenio Coseriu et les possibilités de la reconstruction conceptuelle de la poétique .............................. 99


José Horta Nunes: Les exemples dans le Vocabulário na Língua Brasílica ............. 117

Rezensionen / Reviews / Comptes rendus

H. Walter Schmitz: Archiv und Anthologie der Signifik — in einem einzigen Band? .... 127

Bart Karstens: Recursion, Rhythm and Rhizome. Searching for patterns in the history of the humanities ........................................ 153

Kurzrezensionen / Short Reviews / Notes de lecture ...................... 163

ISSN 0939-2815
Bart Karstens

Recursion, Rhythm and Rhizome
Searching for patterns in the history of the humanities*

With De Vergeten Wetenschappen a groundbreaking study has appeared. It has no less an aim than to cover the history of almost all of the disciplines of the humanities from Antiquity onwards and runs in some cases well into the 21st century. Obviously there is a lot of historiography of the selected disciplines separately, such as the historiography of linguistics. But a history that covers the whole of the humanities has never been produced. For the natural sciences an abundance of such histories is available, for example Anthony M. Alito A History of Western Science (1992) or in Dutch Rienk Vermij, Kleine Geschiedenis van de Wetenschap (2005). One can find such broad overviews of the history of science in ‘classic’ works such as E. J. Dijksterhuis, The Mechanization of the World Picture (1950) but also in the more popular genre like Bill Bryson, A Short History of Nearly Everything (2003). Perhaps only Hans Joachim Störig, Kleine Weltgeschichte der Wissenschaft (1953) does not only cover the natural sciences but the humanities as well. The author thus operates almost from scratch. At the same time he approaches his subject in a rather uncommon way. Bod constantly makes comparisons between what he finds in the separate disciplines and in different times. With the analysis these comparisons yield he aims to create an integrated picture of the development of the humanities.

The result is a truly impressive volume written in a highly accessible style. There are however more compelling reasons why the historian of linguistics should be interested in this book. First the study of language occupies a central role in the development of the whole of the humanities. The historian of linguistics may thus find something valuable in most of the chapters. Second the historiography of linguistics largely operates on its own. De Vergeten Wetenschappen offers many points of contact with other disciplines which can be taken up by historians of linguistics and offer fresh directions for further research. Third the use of broader perspectives can perhaps help the historian of linguistics to gain himself a broader audience. If we confine ourselves to the


Reviews / Comptes rendus
The second group of choices concerns the way the selected fields are studied. Bod has given central focus to empirical material. In the humanities products of the human mind are studied. These products, such as spoken and written languages, theatre plays, logical schemes, works of art including architecture, musical plays etc., provide clear empirical material for the humanistic scholar. Now the main interest of the author is in the way scholars have tried to find regularities in these empirically identifiable products of the human mind. In every era he sums up which patterns were discerned in the available empirical material. Simultaneously the methodological principles with which these patterns have been uncovered are addressed. The main message is that sophisticated and far reaching regularities can be found in the humanities. These do not have to be strict laws as in the natural sciences but come surprisingly close in several cases. To take the establishment of patterns in data as the central concern of the humanities is backed by the argument that the human brain is fitted out to see patterns ‘everywhere’. When it comes to scientific aspirations the trick is obviously to distinguish the significant patterns from the non-significant ones. Bod’s main claim is that in the humanities, very much like the sciences, a process of sifting out significant patterns has taken place and this can be demonstrated by an historical narrative.

The demarcating choices thus facilitate the general aim of the book which is to draw a continuous line of development in the humanities up to the present. It deals in separate chapters with Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Early Modern Period and Modernity. The chapters first describe the findings per discipline and at the end of each chapter, in a synopsis, the found patterns and principles are listed and compared to each other. Bod did not only focus on (Western) Europe and the USA but has included sources from Africa and Asia in his comparisons too. At the end of the book he further compares all the results found in the previous chapters and draws general conclusions. In the following discussion of these results focus will be on the found patterns and regularities and less on the methodological principles involved.

Bod has collected a wide variety of interesting patterns and regularities, for example Pythagoras’ theory of consonant intervals, various patterns, both cyclical and structural, in history, illusionism (Plinius) and the sublime (Longinus) in art theory etc. etc. Sometimes such patterns create a strong impression, especially if you have never heard of them. The book is also full of other interesting observations such as the depiction of developments in early modern musical theory as an important link in the scientific revolution. Bod notes that Galileo, Beeckman, Descartes, Huygens, Euler and others all devoted attention to the study of consonance and dissonance. They did not succeed in finding a universal law covering the phenomena but in the process a ‘synergy’ between theory and empirical information was formed which influenced other areas of

1) In De Bont/Wils (2008) a similar plea for more attention to the history of the humanities can be found.
natural investigation. The book is full of such ‘surprises’ and since most of us have restricted backgrounds there is something to discover in it for almost anyone.

The patterns that stand out for the study of language are more familiar to the readers of this journal and the treatment of them will presumably interest them most. Bod distinguishes several grammars such as Panini’s formal grammar, medieval example based grammar, the first ideas in medieval times of a Universal Grammar, 20th century generative grammar and logical grammar (term rewriting). Other patterns related to the study of language are analogist comparison of word forms, resemblances between logical and rhetorical arguments, rule systems for rhymed poems, the invention of a logical calculus, Lachmann’s stemmatology, Grimm’s Law of sound change, Schleicher’s Stammbaumtheorie and the different structures of various literary genres.

At first I was a bit skeptical about the use of ‘patterns’ and ‘principles’ as analytical tools. These categories are in itself not very discriminatory and regularities can obviously be found everywhere. But the author has given the approach extra bite in two ways. First he discriminates between procedural rule-systems, declarative rule-systems and example based approaches and also mentions possible combinations between them, thereby significantly increasing the analytical discrimination of the sort of patterns that have been postulated in the past. Second the chosen focus has given him the means to speak about progress in the humanities. To this end a comparative notion of progress is used. One can speak of progress in a given humanistic field when with the introduction of a new theory the problem solving capacity improves compared to existing theories. If some method leads to seeing more or sharper patterns in a given set of empirical data and if with these patterns more research questions can be answered, the author argues we have a clear measure of progress in a field of study at hand.

This is certainly not a new way of thinking about progress. Bod refers to Kuhn’s idea of problem solving during periods of normal science but the comparative notion of measuring progress resembles others more closely. In the philosophy of science Larry Laudan (1977, 1984) has put forward an account of progress in science in terms of theory comparison with respect to problem solving capacity. In the history of science Nicholas Jardine (1991) has indicated that a problem oriented historiography of science can put the idea of problem solving capacity to establish progress to good use. Jardine’s ideas about progress did not find much resonance among historians. Maybe Bod’s account of the humanities is one of the first attempts in the historiography of science to put these ideas to work on a grand scale.

To facilitate comparisons with respect to progress it is necessary to identify key problems in the humanities that can be found in every era. The author in-

- 156 –

Rezensionen

The patterns that stand out for the study of language are more familiar to the readers of this journal and the treatment of them will presumably interest them most. Bod distinguishes several grammars such as Panini’s formal grammar, medieval example based grammar, the first ideas in medieval times of a Universal Grammar, 20th century generative grammar and logical grammar (term rewriting). Other patterns related to the study of language are analogist comparison of word forms, resemblances between logical and rhetorical arguments, rule systems for rhymed poems, the invention of a logical calculus, Lachmann’s stemmatology, Grimm’s Law of sound change, Schleicher’s Stammbaumtheorie and the different structures of various literary genres.

At first I was a bit skeptical about the use of ‘patterns’ and ‘principles’ as analytical tools. These categories are in itself not very discriminatory and regularities can obviously be found everywhere. But the author has given the approach extra bite in two ways. First he discriminates between procedural rule-systems, declarative rule-systems and example based approaches and also mentions possible combinations between them, thereby significantly increasing the analytical discrimination of the sort of patterns that have been postulated in the past. Second the chosen focus has given him the means to speak about progress in the humanities. To this end a comparative notion of progress is used. One can speak of progress in a given humanistic field when with the introduction of a new theory the problem solving capacity improves compared to existing theories. If some method leads to seeing more or sharper patterns in a given set of empirical data and if with these patterns more research questions can be answered, the author argues we have a clear measure of progress in a field of study at hand.

This is certainly not a new way of thinking about progress. Bod refers to Kuhn’s idea of problem solving during periods of normal science but the comparative notion of measuring progress resembles others more closely. In the philosophy of science Larry Laudan (1977, 1984) has put forward an account of progress in science in terms of theory comparison with respect to problem solving capacity. In the history of science Nicholas Jardine (1991) has indicated that a problem oriented historiography of science can put the idea of problem solving capacity to establish progress to good use. Jardine’s ideas about progress did not find much resonance among historians. Maybe Bod’s account of the humanities is one of the first attempts in the historiography of science to put these ideas to work on a grand scale.

To facilitate comparisons with respect to progress it is necessary to identify key problems in the humanities that can be found in every era. The author in-

- 157 –

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Bod refers to Kuhn’s idea of problem solving during periods of normal science but the comparative notion of measuring progress resembles others more closely. In the philosophy of science Larry Laudan (1977, 1984) has put forward an account of progress in science in terms of theory comparison with respect to problem solving capacity. In the history of science Nicholas Jardine (1991) has indicated that a problem oriented historiography of science can put the idea of problem solving capacity to establish progress to good use. Jardine’s ideas about progress did not find much resonance among historians. Maybe Bod’s account of the humanities is one of the first attempts in the historiography of science to put these ideas to work on a grand scale.

To facilitate comparisons with respect to progress it is necessary to identify key problems in the humanities that can be found in every era. The author in-

- 157 –

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Bod refers to Kuhn’s idea of problem solving during periods of normal science but the comparative notion of measuring progress resembles others more closely. In the philosophy of science Larry Laudan (1977, 1984) has put forward an account of progress in science in terms of theory comparison with respect to problem solving capacity. In the history of science Nicholas Jardine (1991) has indicated that a problem oriented historiography of science can put the idea of problem solving capacity to establish progress to good use. Jardine’s ideas about progress did not find much resonance among historians. Maybe Bod’s account of the humanities is one of the first attempts in the historiography of science to put these ideas to work on a grand scale.

To facilitate comparisons with respect to progress it is necessary to identify key problems in the humanities that can be found in every era. The author in-

- 157 –

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Bod refers to Kuhn’s idea of problem solving during periods of normal science but the comparative notion of measuring progress resembles others more closely. In the philosophy of science Larry Laudan (1977, 1984) has put forward an account of progress in science in terms of theory comparison with respect to problem solving capacity. In the history of science Nicholas Jardine (1991) has indicated that a problem oriented historiography of science can put the idea of problem solving capacity to establish progress to good use. Jardine’s ideas about progress did not find much resonance among historians. Maybe Bod’s account of the humanities is one of the first attempts in the historiography of science to put these ideas to work on a grand scale.

To facilitate comparisons with respect to progress it is necessary to identify key problems in the humanities that can be found in every era. The author in-
Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft. 21 (2011) – 158 –

Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft. 21 (2011) – 159 –

that the meaning of the term whiggism has suffered from inflation and the threat of being labelled as a Whig has had inhibiting effects on historians of science, unnecessarily restraining their scope of research and consequently their output. While that might well be true, the characteristics one usually associates with whiggism: presentism, triumphalism, judgmentalism and anachronism are nevertheless abundantly present in the book. The author’s attempt to pre-empt the criticism of being labelled as a Whig is therefore in my opinion not very convincing.

An interesting parallel with the high tone of the book can be made with Steven Shapin’s assessment of the beginning of the historiography of science as a separate academic discipline in first decades of the 20th century. According to Shapin, in order to gain itself a legitimate place in the academic system, the first generation of professional historians of science, and most forcefully George Sarton, expressed themselves in a high tone. This explains the reference to geniuses, brilliant discoveries etc. and the stress on the unique and at the same time essential character of science for modern society. The high achievements of the past were a good selling point. When the history of science had become a recognized discipline in the university system there was no need for exaggeration anymore and a process of ‘lowering the tone’ could begin.²

The parallel seems obvious: one of the driving motives behind Bod’s work is to present the history of the humanities as an important field that has a right to be studied, if not in the form of a separate discipline, then certainly as a valid subfield of the history of science. In order to make a compelling case Bod has put stress on important discoveries, great thinkers etc. with the message that these cannot be overlooked. Perhaps if the history of the humanities has gained more widespread recognition, a thing we can only hope for, this will be accompanied by a similar process of ‘lowering the tone’.

This observation brings us to concluding general remarks about the status of the humanities. A few peculiarities about this status require further consideration. One may wonder why all products of the human mind should be capturable in patterns. The author recognizes that apart from a pattern seeking tradition there has also always been a pattern rejecting tradition in the humanities. His sympathy is clearly with the pattern seeking tradition. His notion of progress is built on it and where the pattern rejecting tradition is discussed, for example with hermeneutics or the anomalistic tradition in philology, this is done briefly and without much approval.

The picture of the humanities we get in this way is that they are very much like the sciences. This is why Bod rejects Dilthey’s and Windelband’s distinc-

²) Cf. ‘Lowering the tone in the history of science’ (Shapin 2010: 3–14).
that in the humanities regularities and patterns can be found and that a continuous line of development from Antiquity onwards can be drawn. Similarly one can also point to significant patterns of the humanities which Bod has left out of the book such as Chomsky’s idea of language acquisition by children which follows a clear pattern of development consisting of various critical phases of learning. Such comments are valuable but naturally only strengthen the general claims made in the book. Moreover the author has opened a website with a blog attached to it. Everyone can post his or her comments on the blog and the author is willing to check the comments made and improve his book if necessary. Thus the second print differs from the first at various points and no doubt the English translation will also differ from the Dutch prints. This continuous updating might well become the new form of authorship in the 21st century. Perhaps if we have switched fully to e-books then the books we are reading at time t are no longer the same as they are at time t’. Books might even change while we are reading them! Reading such constantly revised books would then almost be like being involved in scientific research itself.

All this being said I still believe the work is a positive contribution to the science studies. A strong case is made for the existence of patterns in the history of the humanities. Bod presents no new discoveries but by putting an enormous amount of patterns and regularities together he casts serious doubts on the existence of a strict demarcation between the sciences and the humanities. The history of the humanities certainly deserves more attention than it now receives. A strong asset of the book is the cross disciplinary and comparative form in which the attention to the humanities is poured. This focus enables wider questioning and concluding generalisations than usual and has also led to surprising analytical results. It may also help to overcome the great danger of disciplinary historiography which is that it turns out to be no more than an exercise in self-definition. The study of language has proven to be central in the whole of the humanities. Especially in the Early Modern Period philology with its strong empirical pull and elaborate source criticism is seen as the central discipline relating to and deeply influencing history, poetics, linguistics and many other fields of study. The interrelations of all these disciplines, among themselves but with the natural sciences, the social sciences and the areas of philosophy and theology as well promise to be fruitful directions for future research.

Such research projects can improve on the present one by posing more thorough historical questions to the material and contextualizing most of the patterns. This may not have to lead to a refutation of the general theses of the book at all. On the contrary, the increase of sophistication of the account might as well strengthen its central claims. I believe historians of linguistics should contribute to this kind of research since their profession can only benefit from
it. After all linguistics is the field par excellence in which the humanities and
the natural sciences (and also the social sciences) have often met and interacted
in a huge variety of interesting ways.

Bart Karstens
Leiden University
Institute of Philosophy
Matthias de Vrieshof 4, room106b
NL–2311BZ Leiden
eMail: b.karstens@hum.leidenuniv.nl

References
De Bont, Roland / Wils, K.

Laudan, Larry

Jardine, Nicholas

Shapin, Steven
2010 Never Pure. Historical studies of science as if it was produced by people with bodies, situated in time, space, culture, and society, and struggling for credibility and authority. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Manuskripte und Anfragen erbitten wir an die Redaktion:

Gerda Haßler
Institut für Romanistik
Am Neuen Palais 10 – Haus 19
D-14476 Potsdam-Golm
hassler@rz.uni-potsdam.de
dutz.nodus@t-online.de

Oder an:

David Cram (Jesus College; Oxford, OX1 3DW; U.K.; david.cram@jesus.ox.ac.uk)
Miguel Ángel Esparza Torres (Universidad Rey Juan Carlos; Campus de Fuenlabrada;
Camino del Molino s/n; E–28943 Fuenlabrada, Madrid;
maesparza@cct.urjc.es)
Stefano Gensini (Università degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza"; Facoltà di Filosofia;
Dipartimento di Studi filosofici e epistemologici; Via Carlo Fea 2; I-00161 Roma; stef.gens@libero.it)
Ludger Kaczmarek (Freistraße 2, D–33 829 Borgholzhausen; l.kaczmarek@t-online.de)
Masataka Miyawaki (Senshu University; Room #8412; Higashi-Mita 2–1–1; Tama-ku,
Kawasaki 214–850 Japan; miyawaki@isc.senshu-u.ac.jp)
Jan Noordegraaf (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam; De Boelelaan 1105; NL–1081 HV Amst-
derdam; j.noordegraaf@let.vu.nl)
Jacques-Philippe Saint-Gérard (Université Blaise Pascal; Clermont-Ferrand II; UFR
Lettres, Langues, Sciences Humaines; Laboratoire de Recherches sur le Langage 29, boulevard Gergovia; F–63037 Clermont-Ferrand Cédex 1;
jacques-philippe.saint-gerard@univ-bpclermont.fr)

Die Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft erscheinen zweimal jährlich mit
einem Gesamtumfang von mindestens 360 Seiten. Der Abonnementspreis beträgt zur
Zeit EUR 81,00; das Einzelheft kostet EUR 45,50 (Luftpostzustellung für Afrika,
Amerika, Asien und Australien auf Anfrage).
Mitglieder des SGdS, der Henry Sweet Society und des Werkverband können die Bei-
träge zu einem ermäßigten Sonderpreis beziehen.
Gültige Anzeigenpreisliste: 5/05.

Nodus Publikationen — Wissenschaftlicher Verlag
Postfach 5725 / D–48031 Münster
http://go.to/nodus