

Forward to Past Realities: Non-dualism and History

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> Problem · The paper's main focus is on the question of whether Mitterer's non-dualising philosophy is able to show a way out of the antagonistic opposition of fact and fiction, realism and constructivism. In addition, since Mitterer's philosophy has hardly been discussed so far in historiography and theory of history, I also examine the question of whether his approach can provide new theoretical insights in these disciplines. **> Method** · I follow a close reading of Mitterer's texts and relate them to the propositions of a variety of publications from the field of theory of history. **> Results** · Mitterer's arguments show, on the one hand, how to expel the idea of creation from our historical thinking as there is no authenticity waiting behind our world of descriptions. On the other hand, they make clear that historiography no longer has to decide between realism and relativism. Rather, it is a relationist approach that shows a way to research the many entanglements and complexities between past realities and their descriptions. A different way to write history becomes visible: a history of realities. **> Implications** · The discussion of Mitterer's non-dualism not only shows how historical research might benefit from this philosophy (in leaving behind some dualistic foundations of the discipline or the search for historical origins) but also how non-dualism might profit from the insights of history (with regard to power, processuality, and temporality). **> Key words** · Josef Mitterer, theory of history, reality of the past, history of realities.

Introduction

The starting point of Josef Mitterer's non-dualistic philosophy is a refusal: it no longer wants to refer to traditions of thought that operate with fundamental oppositions and it does not want to separate the world from our descriptions of the world. Instead, it tries to think of the relationship of reality and our descriptions of reality as inseparably intertwined. It is not surprising that Mitterer encounters some misunderstanding, since such an approach rejects a well-established consensus about the world and our thinking about it. What Mitterer does not offer is a new solution to this dilemma. Instead he offers the refusal, i.e., not to follow this pattern anymore. This can be confusing because he wants us to leave established paths of thinking. He does not want us to go new ways instead but to learn a completely new kind of walking/thinking. If he indicates that he does not want to join the "inner-dualistic debate" (Mitterer 2001: 9) between realists and constructivists, what kind of discussion does he intend to lead? Mitterer's approach is explicitly not about solving well-established problems but about making new problems attractive, namely to enquire into the preconditions of dualistic thinking (Mit-

terer 2001: §21; Schmidt 2003: 27f). Mitterer himself explains this and why such an attitude can lead to lasting confusion. He makes clear that all of us went through a socialisation of dualistic thinking. This mode of thinking might be optional, but we are not asked if we want to accept it. The dualistic attitude dominates Western intellectual history. Thus, a new way of thinking must seem unreasonable when it is so fundamentally different that it falls out of the frame of reference in which we form and apply our ideas (Mitterer 2001: §27).

This refusal awakens associations with one of the biggest naysayers of literary history: Herman Melville's *Bartleby* is characterised by denial, and this attitude makes him one of the most intensively treated characters in literary studies and philosophy in recent decades (Agamben 1998; Deleuze 1989). This fictional character is particularly attractive because the way he acts does not restrict itself to the famous formula "I would prefer not to." His behaviour goes beyond a non-attitude and offers an alternative – an alternative that would, however, demand a different kind of life from his environment, even demand a different existence. But the world is obviously not prepared to accept *Bartleby's* challenge, which leads to his

downfall. *Bartleby* follows the "potential of the non," as Giorgio Agamben has called it, to its last and logical consequence (Agamben 1998: 13).

Although I do not want to overburden the parallels between Mitterer and *Bartleby*, I think there is more to this than just the standard reference Melville's story has become in the humanities. For the understanding of Mitterer, *Bartleby* is not only instructive because of his refusal and his exploration of the potential of the non, but mostly because he calls our preconditions into question. One example: after the narrator in "*Bartleby*" has first praised himself for asking the scrivener – who preferred neither to work nor to leave the office any more – finally to leave his job and the office-dwelling, doubts come slowly to his mind. At first he is certain that he has done everything right, that he has taken the right measures and has hit the right tone. But after congratulating himself on the appropriate decisions, he realizes that all this only makes sense under his own preconditions, not for *Bartleby*:

"It was truly a beautiful thought to have assumed *Bartleby's* departure; but, after all, that assumption was simply my own, and none of *Bartleby's*. The great point was, not whether I had

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assumed that he would quit me, but whether he would prefer so to do. He was more a man of preferences than assumptions.” (Melville 1985: 45)

With his formula of refusal, Bartleby fundamentally calls into question the assumptions and preconditions of his surroundings. Because of this attitude of refusal, not only the narrator of the story but everybody is asked to reflect on her and his preconditions – but obviously that does not happen. Instead, Bartleby is described as irrational and insane, he is threatened with physical violence, he is taken away by the police, he is imprisoned, and finally starves in jail.

Maybe it would be a possibility to present Mitterer's non-dualism in the way of a story and thus to show its scope and its potential – but also the misunderstandings that appear in connection with this kind of philosophical refusal. For, according to Mitterer's afterword to the new edition of *Das Jenseits der Philosophie* (Mitterer 2011), the forms of resistance and disapproval that have been caused by his rejection of dualistic thinking and his questioning of philosophical premises are significant. Since I lack not only numerous and necessary information to treat Mitterer's non-dualism as a story, but also, above all, the necessary literary talent, I have to be humble in my plan. Therefore, I will not do much more than offer some suggestions and speculations about the historical context in which Mitterer's approach emerged and was finally published. Furthermore, one can ask questions that cannot (and are not meant to) sum up to a history of non-dualism but that can raise awareness of the problem of how history can be written in a different way with the help of non-dualistic thinking. But if we ask how historians might benefit from non-dualistic philosophy, we also have to ask the reverse question: What opportunities would arise if non-dualism became involved with historical knowledge?

The two

A first result of the cooperation of non-dualism and history might be the historical contextualization of Mitterer's approach. It might be part of my professional defor-

mation as a historian to see Mitterer's philosophy as a reaction to the history of the twentieth century. But without drifting into too nebulous speculation, one can see some clear connections that can be considered as an invitation to reflect further on the relationship between Mitterer and history.

To encircle the historical context of Mitterer's non-dualism more closely, one can initially stay inside the philosophical circles. Although Alain Badiou might not have too much in common with Mitterer, in his book *The Century* he has drawn attention to an issue that is of general importance by identifying a generally shared law of the world in the twentieth century: “the two” (Badiou 2010: 51). There was no harmonious, all-unifying power in this century, no God anymore who would have installed “the one” as an overarching principle. Nor was it possible to adopt “the manifold” as a principle and to achieve a balance of power. No, “the two” was the dominant principle, which excluded the possibility of a unanimous submission as well as that of a combinatorial equilibrium. The two, in fact, requires a decision. The antagonism is the omnipresent reality of the twentieth century, omnipresent in (hot and cold) wars, racism, ideology, or power blocs. The aim of such opposites is always the victory and the transformation of the two into one – which does not, however, succeed (Badiou 2010: 51f, 75f).

There is no need at this point to bring forward a vast amount of historical evidence to make that aspect plausible (Hobsbawm 1994). Of course, the history of the twentieth century cannot be reduced in a one-dimensional way to a dualistic antagonism. Life is too complex for simplifications like these. But that the two, as mentioned by Badiou, had a very significant role in this period, is only too obvious. The long shadow of Hegel and Marx is reflected in corresponding ideological disputes. Racist theories lived on the definition of an opposition between “we” and “the other.” The struggle between colonisers and colonised seemed to open as a dualistic opposition, just like the Cold War, which for decades demonstrated this dualism.

I confess frankly that, as far as Mitterer's biography is concerned, I have only the information that can be found in blurbs, prefaces, and epilogues of books. Thus, I

cannot tell in which way these historical constellations might have been of relevance to his thinking. But it seems to me, at least, not entirely coincidental that Mitterer's non-dualism emerged at a time when the social and political (and philosophical) reality was profoundly influenced by dualisms. Another indication in this direction might be the release date of his first book, *Das Jenseits der Philosophie*. Mitterer states that the book was written in the years 1973–1978, but was only published in 1992 (Mitterer 2011: 15). This gap is certainly caused by an intellectual maturation that Mitterer also claims with reference to Wittgenstein, and certainly the philosophical landscape had changed in the meantime, as Mitterer states with reference to Richard Rorty, Paul Feyerabend, Jean-François Lyotard, Nelson Goodman, and radical constructivism (Mitterer 2011: 16). But at the same time it is very likely that the world was not ready for this kind of thinking before the early 1990s. It is almost self-evident that Mitterer's ideas could be received in a different way after the epochal years 1989–1991. Even if a dualistic thinking had previously been unsatisfactory, the fatal consequences of the dualisms of the twentieth century were now very tangible for all. It became obvious that they were completely inadequate to describe the new historical situation. Not only had Mitterer's non-dualism matured in this time, but the world was now ripe for non-dualism.

On the use of non-dualism for history

The history of non-dualistic thinking must still be told. But if this route of a historical narration is blocked, one can raise the reverse question, i.e., what advantages and possibilities (or what dangers?) does the non-dualistic thinking hold for historical scholarship. If one agrees with Mitterer's refusal and no longer tries to find supposedly new solutions to problems that persistently defy a solution – at least for the somewhat reasonable time period since the ancient Greeks (and not only in philosophy but also in historiography) – does this then open up new possibilities in the examination of the past? At least one can see that many of the difficulties Mitterer identifies for philo-

sophical discourse can be attributed quite directly to the historical realm.

Let me be so presumptuous for a moment as to make Mitterer's refusal my own. What would a historiography look like that focused primarily on what it is not and that preferred not to do certain things anymore (Veyne 1984; Daniel 2001: 7–25)? Assistance for this purpose can be found, for instance, in William H. Gass' novel *The Tunnel*, in which an almost Mephistophelean history professor named Magus Tabor plays a central role. This character expresses in one of his lectures his ideas about history:

“The study of history, gentlemen, he said, smiling sadly as he broke the news, the study of history is not the study of people and events, forces and movements, wars and revolutions, the reigns of kings and princes. [...] It is not – I am sorry – but it is not the study of the past. How can we study the past? There is nothing – no indeed – there is nothing to study. Tabor really regrets this. [...] We have no choice, he'd say. The study of history must be the study of documents and records, of recipes and regulations so to speak, of laws and lists, speeches and plays, paintings and maps ... of remains – whatever remains.” (Gass 2007: 260f)

History is whatever remains and is left over. And that is not too much.

If we take this insight seriously, it implies some consequences that reveal the fundamental dualism of the historical undertaking up to the present day. This dualism not only determines the everyday understanding of “history,” but also dominates, to a large extent, the self-conception of history as an academic discipline. If one refuses, therefore, the founding dualism of the European-Western understanding of “history” then one has to state in all clarity that this “history” has nothing to do with the past (Veyne 1984; Goertz 1995: 80–94). Past realities cannot be raised from the dead in any form, let alone the idea that one could – as an often chosen wording suggests – empathise with the past. History is not a time machine. But it is precisely this precondition that many historical interpretations carry around with them: they assume that they would deal with the present from a particular aspect of the past. That is not only dualistic (there the “reality” of the past and here our (hopefully) “true” historical description of it), but it is

also fundamentally wrong. Historiography is not a science of the past, because on the one hand it can only ask questions from the perspective of its own present and it reasonably believes that the historical dimension may – one way or another – contribute to these present problems. On the other hand, historiography has to do with traditions, with all the things that have remained – for whatever intentional or accidental circumstances – and that are available to us in the present. These things are left over from the past, but they are not the past.

The situation of the historian is therefore similar to that of an astronomer looking through his telescope. One could say that he observes the stars; in fact, he observes the light that was sent out by the stars and that needed millions of light years to find its way to him, and he is well aware of the fact that the star, whose light he can see now, may no longer exist (Kubler 1962: 19f).

Dualistic historiography

How much the historical undertaking is dualistic in a fundamental way can still be seen in regard to the almost prototypical process of transforming the past into another world. Up to the present day, there have repeatedly been quite polemical, highly politicised, and, not least, morally inflated debates about “the truth of history,” about factuality of historical evidence, and about the dangers of fictionalisation and constructivism (Evans 1999; Paravicini 2010).

It seems to me that it would be worthwhile for historiography to make Mitterer's considerations its own, so as to get rid of some unnecessary problems and gain a new understanding of its own practice. Historiography seems to be a prototypical case of what Mitterer said in regard to descriptions and the change of descriptions. Because if Peter Janich is correct in his critical remark that non-dualism is effective only where dualistic ways of thinking and reasoning are prevalent (Janich 2011: 48f) and where in addition we are faced with problems of dealing with “reality,” then “history,” along with its everyday understanding and its academic forms of employment, is the ideal playground for non-dualistic thinking.

So if one tries (with Mitterer's help) at least for a moment to leave behind the twofold dualism of the historical undertaking

– the opposition of present versus past and the alleged alternative of factual historical writing versus fictional historical narration – what benefits could this create? A considerable advantage would be that these supposed opposites would collapse. Because if in the historical perspective we do not have to deal with a counterpart, with an already bygone past as the opposite other, then it has to do with descriptions in the sense of Mitterer, descriptions that are updated and changed in the present times. The realisation that the description of the object cannot be separated from the object of the description is no more applicable than to the study of history. But one has to keep in mind the objects we are dealing with. The historical work cannot relate to past events, but only to descriptions of past events – and these descriptions in the form of texts, pictures, witnesses, movies, etc. are the objects of history. On this basis, historiography creates its own descriptions, which in turn serve again as the basis for further descriptions. The historical material we are dealing with is not the entrance to a time tunnel that leads straight to the past. One cannot see *through* the historical material (as the misleading metaphor of the historical “source” suggests, indicating that there is a way back to the historical origins); one only can look *at* the material. The material that is left over keeps the historical view in the present.

The way we “have” history is therefore proof of Mitterer's argument of the indissoluble connection between reality and description. What is perceived in the present as sources from the past is nothing else but leftover descriptions from the past that have been already confronted with other descriptions in their own time and were thus an attempt to describe and thereby change reality. A past reality is changed with every new description. Every time the records of the sea trade of early modern Seville, the U.S. Constitution, or Goebbels' diaries are described, the result is necessarily a different “hi/story,” a varied past reality. This does not mean that history is being invented or that one would have to assume that all of this did not happen. But it does not seem very helpful to provide these varying and constantly changing descriptions of past reality with a truth-value of whatever kind. To designate one of these descriptions as “true” would imply the

end of other historical descriptions and thus the end of history as a whole, given that all the other descriptions must be "false." Such an approach would not only contradict the daily practice of historiography, but would also hardly be desirable for ethical and political reasons. The study of "history" is not only intended to deal with the leftovers, but also to produce consistently new descriptions of past realities; not to arrive at some point (but when?) at the definite version, but to change this past constantly – because in that way we are changing ourselves in our own present.

But do things then not become arbitrary and haphazard? Is the practice of writing history then not dominated by the admissibility of everything, not matter what, possible or impossible, real or false? Can we then not arbitrarily invent pasts at our own will? First, things do not become more arbitrary than they already are (Mitterer 2001: §150). "The true history" does not exist anyway. If it did exist, it would take no more historical scholarship. If we had found "the truth" already, it would be tantamount to the self-abolishment of historiography: all problems would be solved, all questions would be answered, "history" would be told and we could all go home – last one turn off the light. Instead, it does not seem as if history will come to an end. History is constantly being rewritten, it is described in new ways every day – and thus "the reality" of that history changes constantly. Secondly, competing and conflicting descriptions of history exist in parallel to each other in the historical discourse. Mitterer's considerations are therefore no invitation to arbitrariness, they are the existing diversity that exists.

But what do we do – to quote a repeatedly explosive case – with deniers of the Holocaust (Friedländer 1992)? Is it acceptable that their statements should be descriptions just like any others? Can this obvious lie and falsification of historical circumstances gain the merit of an adequate representation of historical reality with the help of non-dualism? It seems to me that when raising these questions, different levels are confused. Mitterer's philosophy cannot and will not give us a precise recommendation of how we can actually capture "the reality" in an appropriate, correct, and therefore "true" way. Rather, it analyses forms of description of

reality, in which both elements (descriptions and reality) are inextricably interrelated. The decision about the success or failure of these descriptions, and also about their admissibility, will be taken in a different arena. Thus, political and moral issues are at stake that cannot be solved by a non-dualistic thinking. Deniers of the Holocaust may repel us, but they would spread their representations in any case. With the help of Mitterer at least the unfortunate circumstance – how and why descriptions that deny the Holocaust are possible and meet with approval (at least in certain circles) – can be analysed. And why such representations fail in the majority of society can be analysed at the same time.

A historiography that would take Mitterer's arguments seriously would not have to decide between the poles of realism and relativism, but rather argue for relationism. To give up all the (often inadequately reflected) attributions of truth in historical representations would not only make it possible to throw all the dualistic principles overboard – principles that cannot be decided anyway, since it is ultimately political aspects that decide who is telling the truth and who is not. (Even the extreme case of the obvious invention of past reality can under certain circumstances be successfully accepted as historical truth, as the example of dictatorships teaches.) Instead of a black-and-white contrast, it would be more helpful to pursue the many entanglements and complexities between reality and its descriptions. Especially in the case of history, it would offer opportunities to submit not only theoretical arguments but also empirical examples.

So it is no longer about the difference between fact and fiction, between realism and constructivism: if we follow Mitterer, these alternatives are arrested in a dualistic thinking. In a non-dualistic approach, language and reality, objects and descriptions, are no longer categorically separated, but related to each other. Accordingly, language and descriptions no longer produce or construct anything (Latour 2004; Abriszewski 2008). Each description will then change the object without having to produce it *ex nihilo* (Mitterer 2011: §71). So it is not about asking the nonsensical question of whether the things of reality really exist. Of course they do. But from the moment at which they have

been described in any form, object and description cannot be separated anymore. And can you talk or even think about anything *before* it has been described (Strasser 2008)?

And herein a reason might be found why historians should bother at all with Mitterer's ideas. Because given the fact that history as an academic discipline tends to keep itself away from basic philosophical discussions, one should not only ask the question of how to work with Mitterer's non-dualism, but more generally why historiography should ever engage in it at all.

The answer is quite easy – and quite fundamental. Mitterer's non-dualism is the attempt to expel the idea of creation from our thinking. It was not God, not man, not society, not culture, and not language that created the world. That is not the question anymore. Instead, we are always involved in descriptions, and there is no way to get beyond or behind these descriptions, there is no non-linguistic or non-cultural identity or authenticity waiting for us after we have overcome this seemingly secondary world of descriptions. Everything that is given to us (and that we give to ourselves) is a world of an inextricable entanglement of objects and descriptions – we should forget about the idea of an original "before" (Mitterer 2011: §§79–82).

On the use of history for non-dualism

Historians could therefore benefit in different ways from a serious discussion of Mitterer's philosophy – even if it might become a painful debate, since they would have to say goodbye to some familiar preconditions. But would it also be possible, vice versa, that non-dualistic thinking might learn something from the approaches of historical scholarship? Are there possibilities of a dialogue both sides might benefit from?

First of all, I am convinced that a historical approach would be needed because certain problems cannot be theorised, they can only be historicised. The inevitably helpless search for an "essential core" of the "real things" existing before every description appears absurd in the historical view. The historical perspective is able to extend Mitterer's theoretical views on an empirical



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basis into the dimensions of time, insofar as it traces the chain of descriptions.

Mitterer gives more than just a few hints on how it might be possible to give non-dualism a temporal and historical foundation. On the one hand he speaks of the "pursuit of change" (not the "pursuit of truth") (Mitterer 2011: §97) his philosophy wants to follow; and on the other hand, the specific competence of historiography might be useful to follow the infinite regress Mitterer (2011: §57) identifies with regard to the chain of descriptions of reality. It would be a history read backwards. If we were to reverse the arrow of time (Weber 2011: 20–22), historians might not only be interested in the question "which description *from now on* follows a description *so far*," but then it would also be of special interest to ask "which description *so far* went ahead of the current *status quo*" – and why the result was exactly this description and not any other one. One could follow the thread of the infinite regress in order not only to show that at its end there is no "authenticity" and no "real reality" waiting for us (but only a further description), but also to specify in temporal, spatial and socio-cultural ways how this thread was spun.

This argument, however, does not intend to reduce historiography to the role of an empirical supplier of theoretical insights. If Mitterer claims, for instance, to problematise the non-problematised preconditions of Western philosophy, especially with regard to its epistemological foundations (Mitterer 2011: §11), then historical approaches can contribute to such an endeavour to the extent that they address this problematisation as historicisation. One can, in other words, consider the dualistic way of thinking in a

theoretical or in a historical way. Thus, the fundamental problems of dualistic thinking can be undermined theoretically, but the rise of dualism and its actual impact, however, can only be described historically. Therewith not only arguments against dualism are delivered, but different realities can be made plausible in the historical way.

The dualism Mitterer has identified as the dominating principle in the history of Western thought and that he seeks to confront with his non-dualistic alternative therefore has its counterparts outside the philosophical terrain. Knowledge and logic reveal themselves once more as historical categories. And at least implicitly, Mitterer argues with the help of history (of philosophy). On the one hand he argues for more dynamic concepts of reality when he understands descriptions of reality only as descriptions *so far* that necessarily must be replaced in the course of time by a description *from now on*. On the other hand, his criticism of dualistic thinking rests on the grounds of a historical description of the philosophical discourse. But with this rather subcutaneous historicity, the possibilities of cooperation between history and non-dualism do not seem to be exhausted.

Non-dualism and power

This is evident, for example, in the non-dualistic treatment of the phenomenon of power, which is raised repeatedly by Mitterer (especially in *Die Flucht aus der Beliebtheit*), but which also has to be considered more extensively in a historical perspective. If philosophy is described by Mitterer as a

technique of argumentation that can justify any belief as true and correct; if the fundamental connection between power, truth, and force is emphasised; when education for truth is identified with submission to the truth; and if the vicious circle describes that the alleged possession of the one and only truth almost necessarily requires the use of power to enforce these truth claims (Mitterer 2001: §2, §§74–77, §84, §94) – then without any doubt important aspects are mentioned, which in particular allow for numerous links to the work of Michel Foucault (2000). At the same time one desires not only a historical specification for these arguments, but also their historical-theoretical reflection.

When we combine this analysis of power relations with the constant and continuously changing descriptions of reality, then it must be argued against Mitterer that at a certain point the arbitrariness in the continuation of descriptions is no longer sufficient. Although the historical observation confirms the finding that descriptions of reality are constantly mutable, they are not arbitrarily changeable. Instead, they are subject to many powerful conditions and norms that greatly limit the real possibilities of new descriptions (Grampp 2011: 107f).

This can be illustrated by Mitterer's argument that neutralist descriptions in dualistic thinking gradually tend to become neutral descriptions (Mitterer 2011: §§37–41). It is not just a historical question of the forms of normalisation (Link 2006), but exploration in more detail at a theoretical level is needed of what the conditions are for such processes of neutralisation, if not naturalisation. How do cultural concepts

such as "time," "space," or "life" (to name a few) become so "natural" that their constructive character becomes invisible? In these cases, it is of special importance to investigate the relationship of contingency and concretion. An inadequate historical-theoretical reflection in the context of non-dualism might lead to arguments that are close to nomological necessity in regard to historical processes. Rather, with an adequate historical perspective one would not only ask how processes of neutralisation function, but also how they can be broken and confronted with alternatives.

In general, what is at stake here is the processuality and dynamics of non-dualistic thinking (Schmidt 2003). Wherever Mitterer suggests progressions and changes, historiography must not take the position of providing empirical evidence, but must contribute alternative descriptions, clarifications, and extensions of non-dualistic thinking from its own perspective. Here again, the reversal of time's arrow can be mentioned. Because if non-dualism claims such an altered temporalisation for itself, insofar as it is particularly interested in the descriptions *from now on*, then this reversal of time's arrow must be turned against non-dualism itself. It is not only important for the historical perspective, but also for the further development of non-dualism, to find out which description *so far* must be given so that a certain (and no other) description *from now on* can follow.

And still another form of temporality plays a role for the historical perspective, but is not yet sufficiently reflected in non-dualism: the standstill. Again, the aspect of power comes back into play, combined with the importance of repetition. One has to examine critically how Mitterer deals with descriptions of reality that are predominantly repetitious. What if a description does not actually change the object but repeats a former description? What is the purpose of such descriptions that just add nothing new to descriptions *so far* (Mitterer 2011: §21)? Isn't it necessary for realities to be stabilised through such repetitive descriptions (Deleuze 1994; Landwehr 2010)? Maybe it can be seen especially in times of stability how important and powerful dualisms are, because stability itself depends on the dichotomy of an opponent.

If we bring all this together, namely the options at hand from non-dualistic thinking for historiography, and the offerings that can be made by historical considerations for non-dualism, then the result is certainly not a scientific revolution (and it certainly does not lead to the proclamation of a "turn" of whatever kind). In the best case, it shows us "only" the route towards a more reflective way of working and studying, accompanied by a slight shift in the angle of view (but sometimes such a slight movement already shows things in a different light).

With the help of Mitterer, one could therefore aim for a history of realities that combines different things in itself. First, such a history of realities would be about the ways societies of the past have described their own realities – a question that has been at the centre of recent cultural history for some time now (Landwehr 2009). Second, it should be the aim to investigate the constantly changing descriptions of these realities – and thus of the realities themselves. A point of reference could be Mitterer's very pertinent definition of reality when he says that reality is nothing more than the latest state of affairs, nothing else but the conceptions that are represented right at this time (Mitterer 2011: §98; 2001: §153). Third, in particular with such an approach, the forms of infinite regress can be investigated: the fact that descriptions always refer to earlier descriptions. Historically interesting is how and why the fundamental contingency of such descriptions transforms into historical concretion, why a particular description *so far* is continued by a particular description *from now on* – and not by any other. Fourth, such a history of realities must always include a self-reflective moment about the reality of history (in our own present times). Why do we write these histories, why do we describe pasts in this (and not in any other) way, and what kind of relevance do these histories have to our here and now?

To my knowledge, such a history of realities has not been formulated yet, so its outlines must still remain sketchy. What kind of form might it have? Let me answer with the quotation of the one hundredth (and simultaneously shortest) thesis from Mitterer's *Die Flucht aus der Beliebigkeit*: "We will see" (Mitterer 2001: §100).

Conclusion

So far, a dialogue between historiography and non-dualistic philosophy in Mitterer's sense does not exist at all. With the exception of very few examples, the name of Mitterer does not appear in the works of historians. One might say that is no problem because non-dualism does not address the problems of historical knowledge specifically – so why bother? I think historians should bother about Mitterer for two reasons at least. First Mitterer shows the way out of an unfruitful discussion that has dominated historiography for decades, if not for the last two centuries, because one no longer has to ask if historical descriptions speak "the truth" about the past or match with the past "reality." Rather, historians might find new ways of producing and creating history if they accept that their descriptions cannot be separated from their objects. Second, Mitterer's outlines of a non-dualistic philosophy still leave enough space for historical expertise. I think that non-dualism needs an additional historical level to specify and problematise central aspects such as the evolution of descriptions so far or the relevance of power. This discussion between non-dualism and historiography has barely begun. We should make a start.

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Note: All translations from German are made by the author.

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