Sandra Bihlmaier

Ars et methodus

Philipp Melanchthon's Humanist concept of philosophy



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1. Introduction

The present study inquires into Philipp Melanchthon's concept of philosophy and its underlying universal concept of method (*methodus*).[1] Melanchthon reinterprets concepts taken from the rhetorical-dialectical tradition of the Renaissance and merges them with Ciceronian and Stoic assumptions on logic and theological pressupositions in his endeavor to elaborate a method which can integrate all branches of human knowledge into one philosophical discipline. This study will focus on Melanchthon's elaboration of a universal methodical precept throughout his subsequent works of dialectic and rhetoric. It shows how doctrines of formal logic, dialectical argumentation, and rhetoric status theory are integrated into a pedagogical and philosophical project of developing a method of appropriate interpretation and of knowledge organization, applicable to all fields of knowledge. It provides a detailed account of how this concept has emerged and how it shaped Melanchthon's understanding of philosophy.

1.1 Reading the Renaissance Text

In his *Oration on Philosophy* (1536), Melanchthon writes:

> I have set up an oration in which I shall demonstrate that the Church has need of liberal education, and not only of knowledge of grammar but also of the skill of many other

1 To avoid ambiguities, in this chapter, I will refer to Melanchthon's concept of method, specifically to the hermeneutical instrument Melancththon had developed for the reading and generating of spoken and written discourse. Critical reasoning and the defiance of authority have contributed to what I call modern philosophical "method" and which, thus, claims to depart from the Melanchthonian notion of *methodus* which is dependent on Ancient authorities. I use the notion of methodology to refer to the manner in which Renaissance and early-modern texts are to be read, and how concepts employed in them, like "philosophy", "method", "truth" employed in them are to be understood. I have rendered all Greek words in Latin transcription for the sake of simplicity, by also omitting all diacritical signs. I have reproduced the Greek *Ypsilon* by "u" or "y", depending on the Latin loan words containing these letters.

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> arts and of philosophy. Since we have established this, even if other subjects present themselves for discussion, good minds must nevertheless give attention mainly and most zealously to the purpose of applying their studies to supporting and honoring the Church. […] This reason must encourage and incite us most to strive, with the greatest exertion of our minds, for perfect knowledge, from which some benefit of the state or the Church may derive. Indeed, for us professors no oration on another subject is worthier […]. Therefore I said that one kind of philosophy has to be chosen which has as little as possible of sophistry and which preserves the true method; the teaching of Aristotle is of that kind.[2]

The cited fragment offers a glimpse into Philipp Melanchthon's self-understanding and his view on the nature and the scope of philosophical study. The theological and political relevance of philosophy and the important part the professor plays in conveying this discipline are stated rather straight-forwardly. Clarity and order are singled out as properties of the philosophy to be taught ("little as possible of sophistry and which preserves true method"). At the face of it, there is no difficulty in understanding what Melanchthon believes that philosophy, as a discipline, should aim at and, if only briefly stated above, how it should be taught. From a modern point of view, however, endowed with the benefit of hindsight regarding the development of philosophical traditions and a different concept of philosophy and rules of philosophical reflection, this fragment raises questions considering Melanchthon's (from today's standpoint) rather unfamiliar view on philosophy. It is common knowledge that modernity has claimed the right to autonomous philosophizing[3] and denied the role played by philosophy as the handmaiden of theology. Also, it claimed to having burst the institutionalized teaching tradition and having renewed the practice of philosophy from without. Modern philosophers might agree with the contention that philosophy is to be practiced by means of true "method". However, modern philosophical inquiry, claims to be everything but Aristotelian. In fact, the modern endeavor is to replace Aristotelianism, or any other philosophical tradition relying on authority with the "method of reason", i. e., critical reflection and reasoning.[4] If at all, Melanchthon's view on philosophy seems pre-modern,

2 *De Phil.*, 126–130.

3 The reflections of Descartes are, of course, singled out as representative for this "turn towards modernity": *Disc.*, 119: "Thus, it is custom and example that persuade us, rather than any certain knowledge. And yet a majority vote is worthless as a proof of truths that are at all difficult to discover; for a single man is much more likely to hit upon them than a group of people. I was, then, unable to choose anyone whose opinions struck me as preferable to those of all others, and I found myself as it were forced to become my own guide."

4 Descartes aims to replace the doctrine of the syllogism and logic in general (he refers to the Ars Magna of Raymond Lull) with a set of simple rules guiding his reasoning in the examinations of subject matters and determining his reasoning only to accept what appears most clear and distinct and deduce afterwards all other matters from these. See *Disc.*, 119–122.

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deeply entrenched into theological and pedagogical tradition and committed to the authority of Aristotle.

Thus, some difficulties arise as result of a first reading of the brief excerpt cited above.

1. First of all, there is the problem of the text itself. The fragment seems rather straight-forward but does not itself reveal, e. g., why it takes for granted that philosophy should serve theological and political affairs. Second, it implies a disciplinary status of philosophy which is not further explained. Third, it employs a concept of "method" seemingly familiar but claims to extract it from the works of Aristotle.
2. Second, familiarity with the texts themselves and their genre (orations on various disciplines in the humanist tradition of the sixteenth century) does not immediately disclose the relevance and role of this text in the time's cultural setting and its philosophical value, especially if the modern reader is deeply entrenched into her own views on philosophy. A degree of strangeness seems to characterize the text above which requires further contextual information, different from just the acknowledgment of the customariness of this genre of writing.
3. Third, the reading and the interpretation of the text will implicitly affect the exposition of the views which it allegedly purports. So, the modern reader tends to dismiss it as un-philosophical and pre-modern if she wants to interpret it by comparison with the contemporary understanding of philosophy and by assuming it to be the "advanced" one.

The current study aims at adopting a manner of reading and interpretation which tries to understand the views of the various works it draws on, on their own terms. As will become clear from the following, this does not mean that I have found a way to dismiss the bias that inevitably infuse every confrontation with unfamiliar texts. Rather, the present work represents a historical anatomy which complements the argumentative (taken in the broadest sense possible) analysis of the textual corpus and its different narratives. That is why I believe it is important to briefly summarize the current debate which concerns the way one should read and analyze early modern texts. There is no actual thematization taking place about the interpretation of Renaissance texts. The methodological observations are mainly concerned with early modern textual material. The difficulty in reading Renaissance works has often been emphasized without any attempt to suggest helpful interpretative precepts. I nevertheless think that there is a lot to gain from the current debates of early modern scholars in the reading of Renaissance texts. I will show below what and how I am integrating some of their suggestions in my own reading and interpretation of Philipp Melanchthon's *opera philosophica.*

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In the third part of the chapter I refer directly to scholars who have regarded Melanchthon as philosopher (not just as a theologian or Humanist teacher) and on which current scholarship is building on again. I suggest that it is crucial that a valuable literature which concerns particular historical, philosophical, pedagogical and theological aspects of Melanchthon's works be brought to the attention of the current debate, despite the fact that the authors of this literature have worked within a different methodological paradigm. This does not relativize their research. It rather offers great opportunities to inquire into the presuppositions for the doctrines they are attributing to Philipp Melanchthon. Thus, it complements their perspectives. I also show that rereading Melanchthon's and Renaissance texts altogether determines a rethinking of what philosophy means (as discipline, method and practice) as well as an understanding of what previous thinkers thought a philosopher was to do. Thus, I briefly compare two different ways of approaching philosophy of the (distant) past: one that tries to do justice to the comprehension of the historical figure, the other that is deeply influenced by recent developments in the history of philosophy. At the end of the chapter I give an outline of the methodological precepts I am drawing on in the current analysis. I will also summarize the structure of the study by briefly pointing to the main thematic aspects of the chapters.

1.2 Historians of philosophy and their methodologies

The current debate concerning the methodology employed in early modern philosophy focuses on overcoming the dichotomy between two approaches to philosophical texts of the past defended by early modern scholars. The rational reconstruction of past texts with the purpose of coming to terms with contemporary philosophical problems is contrasted with the specifically historical inquiry into the contexts of philosophical discourses, which attempts to achieve an interpretation of the texts closest to their actual meaning and purpose, independent of their usefulness for present-day philosophical issues. These two tendencies belong to what the authors of the Volume *Philosophy and Its History* edited by Morgen Laerke, Justin E. Smith and Eric Schliesser and published 2013 call the "appropriationist" and the "contextualist" approach to past philosophical texts.[5] A third genre, aware of the historicity of philosophical theories and called the "heritagist" stance by Stefan Hessbrüggen-Walter, does not focus on recovering the past philosopher's own world, but uses the past theory to make sense of the present state of affairs, in a way that resembles "appropriationism". Although the aim of the volume is to gather different methodological approaches

5 Laerke, Smith and Schliesser, 2013.

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and to put them into a "critical conversation with each other", it merely revives, to a great extent, the problems that have already been put forward by Rorty, Schneewind and Skinner in their coedited volume: *History in Philosophy*, published in 1984. However, by reiterating those problems that have been preoccupying historians of philosophy for the past 50 years, the editors point to a central and persistent concern of the philosopher of early modern thought: the search for the most appropriate instruments that do justice to both the historical context as well as to the relevance of historical arguments for problems in philosophy characterized by their historical continuity. Richard Rorty had assigned this assumption of continuity to the genre of *Geistesgeschichte*, the genre which indicates which questions are to be regarded as philosophical, giving philosophy its honorific use by constructing and changing canons of philosophical figures and problems. Geistesgeschichte can be identified with what has been called above the "heritagist" approach. It synthesizes, according to Rorty, the historical and the rational reconstructive approaches (the "appropriationist" and the "contextualist") being both self-justificatory and self-conscious. In Rorty's words:

> Geistesgeschichte wants to keep us aware of the fact that we are still en route – that the dramatic narrative it offers us is to be continued by our descendants. When it is fully self-conscious it wonders whether all the issues discussed so far may not have been part of the contingent arrangement of earlier times.[6]

I don't think that we can doubt the fact that in a way, we definitely are "en route": the history of the transmission of concepts, doctrines and practices and their continuous transformations evinces the continuity of our "story". But more often than not, external elements constitute the fundamental developing framework for particular ideas which sprout and develop or remain rather unfruitful until later reconsiderations or complete extinction. These elements shape the way ideas are transmitted, thus offering manifold possibilities for the form and the method of manifestations of such ideas. An inquiry into these elements is advocated by the "contextualist" approach.

This approach has been recently revived not only by means of the fruitful articles of the volume *Philosophy and Its History*, mentioned above, but also by Conal Condren, Ian Hunter and Stephen Gaukroger in their volume *The Philosopher in Early Modern Europe*[7], published in 2006. Their methodology, which is briefly summarized in the introduction of the volume, is taken up and extensively explicated in Ian Hunter's paper: "The History of Philosophy and the Persona of the Philosopher"[8]. Hunter's central thesis is that accounts of past

6 Rorty, 1984, 61.
7 See Condren, Gaukroger and Hunter "Introduction", 2006, 1–16.
8 Hunter, 2007, 571–600.

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philosophies should be treated as objects of historical investigation and not, as current practice dictates, as manifestations of human knowledge which is based on quasi-transcedental structures and which only a philosophical method is able to recover. He charges Rorty, Skinner and MacIntyre with only replacing the concept of historical context with concepts like "paradigm", "knowledge communities", "speech acts", "social practices" etc.[9] Hunter claims, all of the mentioned authors continue to treat these concepts as a feature of quasi-transcendent structures of human reason which become intelligible only with the aid of philosophical-historical mediation. Thus, Hunter highlights the difficulties which arise with a particular employment of the notion of context. Instead of approaching philosophical texts with a philosophical method, assuming that philosophy, as expression of reason, must always inform the method of description itself, Hunter intends to develop a less philosophical and more historical conception of philosophical contexts, "not as quasi-transcendent structures with internal objects, but as ensembles of cognitive and ethical arts maintained in particular institutional settings"[10]. The assumption is that philosophies share no essential or continuously evolving form and must be described instead of terms of the cultivation of diverse philosophical arts, methods, cognitive techniques, ethical exercises, in particular historical contexts and that they are tied to interests and objectives arising in particular historical circumstances.[11] Condren's, Gaukroger and Hunter's proposal consists of the possibility that philosophy might be identical to the activities that have been deemed philosophical by their authors

9 Hunter emphasizes the importance of the author's intention, as argued by Quentin Skinner in his programmatic article "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas" (1969). The paper was published afterwards in "Vision of Politics" (2002), as part of an extensive engagement with adjunct arguments, responses to various objection and supplementary explanations concerning the "contextualism" Skinner is advocating. There, Skinner gives a fine-grained presentation of his integration of Austin's speech act theory into the interpretation of early modern texts: "I have been arguing that texts are acts, so that the process of understanding them requires us, as in the case of all voluntary acts, to recover the intentions embodies in their performance. But this is not the mysterious empathetic process that old-fashioned hermeneutics may lead us to believe. For acts are in turn texts: they embody inter-subjective meanings that we can hope to read off." (120). In contrast to Skinner, Hunter's methodological concept of the "philosophical Persona" does not focus on linguistic performatives, interpreted as conditions of beliefs that belong to a network of beliefs and which can be interpreted holistically. The "Philosophical Persona" represents a specific kind of self, pedagogically holding together an ensemble of rather loose assemblages of intellectual arts (doctrines, modes of proof, logico-rhetorical techniques, ethico-cognitive exercises, experimental apparatus *and* also speech-acts). The persona is introduced in opposition to the philosophical concept of the subject of knowledge. (Hunter, 2007, 583)

10 Hunter, 2007, 574.

11 Ibid., 575.

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> regardless of whether to modern eyes these activities resemble post-Kantian epistemology and regardless of whether they look more like theology, poetry polemics or natural sciences.[12]

As observed above, all the presented methodological positions mainly focus on early modern philosophy which, as the canon has it, begins at the earliest with Francis Bacon and Galileo Galilei. By doing so, they of course question the fact that past theories can be employed unproblematically in buttressing present philosophical solutions to present philosophical problems. However, as Hessbrüggen-Walter has pointed out, even when trying to break methodological and interpretative boundaries by allowing disciplines like history, archeology or anthropology to productively infuse reflections on how to read past texts best, authors seem to always rely on what they regard as early modern philosophy. Thus, the only way of raising awareness about this inherited selection of authors and problems is to insist, as Richard Rorty had already pointed out and as Vermeir puts it, on

> the full richness of the practice of philosophy as a subject matter, including practices of philosophizing (writing, reading, acting, philosophical engagement in the world) institutions, social structures, material culture.[13]

Of course, the rather vague character of such a concept as "context" remains a problem since there is, as Walter-Hessbrüggen has observed, an intrinsic decisionistic element in picking out what exactly should be treated as context and how it is argued that it has made an impact on specific texts, practices and habits of past figures.[14] I do not believe that any appropriate approach can avoid the endeavor of considering the contextual dimension of the way concepts and theories are formed and transmitted. This endeavor cannot be ignored if the intention of the historian of philosophy is to better understand the texts he is dealing with. By context I mean both historical and social aspects as well as intentional and programmatic elements which, are interconnected, and which give a more thorough account of why and how philosophy has been conceived, discussed and transmitted in the Renaissance and early modern period. This likely applies to all philosophies no matter the century they were conceived in.

A volume doing justice to an extensive range of historical, social and cultural aspects of the activity of philosophizing in the Renaissance is Heinrich C. Kuhn's "Philosophie der Renaissance"[15]. Kuhn organizes his volume in "contexts", entitling the chapters with names of places (cities) in, around, and in relation to

12 Condren, Gaukroger and Hunter, 2006, 5.
13 Vermeir, 2013, 56.
14 Walter-Hessbrüggern, 2013, 144.
15 Kuhn, 2014.

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which philosophical and cultural activities broadly understood developed. Next to the names he places a particular year which serves as terminus a quo for the presented contextual narrative. While he does not offer a detailed inquiry into how philosophers should read philosophical texts, the structure and narratives which he employs to introduce the reader into Renaissance thought testify and buttress Kuhn's project. His aim is to facilitate the transmission of the breadth, richness and diversity and also the contingency of Renaissance Philosophy and to excite the curiosity, interest and enthusiasm of the reader for further research. Kuhn believes that the main obstacle standing in the way of the reader of Renaissance texts is the blatant lack of familiarity of the problems treated in those texts and their reliance on a heritage of traditions which presupposes intensive reading and research in order to be overcome. In his Introduction to the volume he says:

> Viele der philosophischen Texte der Renaissance sind durchaus geprägt davon dass sie Texte in einer und für eine Zeit großer Veränderungen sind, aber sie reagieren auf die Veränderungen ihrer Zeit und sind daher kaum auf Veränderungen unserer Zeit übertragbar.[16]

While we may encounter little problems in reading and understanding Descartes's *Discourse*, Kuhn thinks that texts such as Gregor Reisch's *Margerita Philosophica* confront readers who lack specific background knowledge with insuperable obstacles regarding the understanding of the text. Philipp Melanchthon's works are not less challenging to the modern reader. In the following, I will try to familiarize the reader with the Humanist's writings.

1.3 Melanchthon as philosopher and his conception of philosophy

It has only been in recent years that Philipp Melanchthon has been receiving attention from historians of philosophy from within traditions on either side of the Atlantic. That, is, of course, if we do not take into account the two great German scholars who have singled out important aspects of Melanchthon's philosophical doctrine and practice. Deeply entrenched into the narratives of Geistesgeschichte, both Dilthey and Gadamer emphasize the foundational character of Melanchthon's views, having created two important traditions of thought thereafter: the stoically infused theory of natural right and the rhetorically grounded tradition of hermeneutics. Wilhelm Dilthey's detailed historical documentation into the possible sources of Stoicism in Melanchthon's textbooks and Hans-Georg Gadamer's analysis of his rhetorical works represent the

16 Ibid., 10.

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foundation on which part of recent scholarship has drawn in exploring aspects of Melanchthon's oeuvre in greater detail.

Dilthey's inquiry aims at reconstructing the manner in which Melanchthon sets the stage for subjective understanding of truth, thus confining the criteria of certainty to man's intellectual powers. This is the philosophical turn which places Melanchthon, in Dilthey's view, between the old philosophers and their medieval transmission, and the natural law system of the seventeenth century:

> Verfolgt man die allmähliche Ausbildung der Lehre von einem unveränderlichen natürlichen System von Wahrheiten im Geiste des Menschen, sucht man den alten Schriftsteller, insbesondere der römischen Philosophie und der von ihr bedingten Tradition, in diesem Vorgang festzustellen: so muß man bei Melanchthon verweilen. Denn Melanchthon ist für Deutschland das Mittelglied, welches die alten Philosophen und deren Tradition in den mittelalterlichen Schriftstellern verbindet mit dem natürlichen System des 17. Jahrhunderts.[17]

What Dilthey had started and what has been left dormant for almost a century, Günter Frank has taken up and complemented with a study on the theological presuppositions for such an optimistic view on man. He has shown that Melanchthon's Neoplatonic and Stoic theory of the natural light is complemented by a theological anthropology. The God-likeness of the human intellect allows man to acquire truth by intellectually participating in the mind of God. By uncovering the Pauline theological assumptions of Melanchthon's anthropology which refer directly to the extent of the *similitudo* that man shares with God[18], Frank clearly demonstrates how intertwined theology and philosophy are in Melanchthon's thought. Moreover, Frank's analysis testifies to the philosophical views arising from a productive interplay of Reformed theological and classical philosophical thought. While Frank emphasizes the internal argumentative topics of Melanchthon's view on man, Sachiko Kusukawa stresses the historical presuppositions of the origin and elaboration of Melanchthon's philosophical textbooks, while insisting on the theologico-philosophical doctrine of providence[19]. Her contextualist approach offers valuable insight into the manner in which Melanchthon integrated and distilled Lutheran precepts in his philosophical writings, and his purpose of conceiving them the way he did. I will go into a more detailed analysis of Frank's and Kusukawa's claims in the second and third chapters of this study.

The pedagogical dimension which, acoording to the view of the historians of philosophy, ultimately leads to a fully-fledged theory of textual interpretation is stressed by Gadamer in a manner which, I believe, has only recently been

17 Dilthey, 1986, 226–227.
18 Frank, 1995, 104–108.
19 Kusukawa, 1995.

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properly acknowledged. What started as an effort to systematize the precepts of eloquence and teach them to the arts faculty student turned into a means not only of producing orations, but above all, of reading and understanding classical texts:

> Noch charakteristischer aber ist, daß Melanchthon den eigentlichen Nutzen der Rhetorik, der klassischen ars bene dicendi, geradezu darin sah, daß die jungen Leute die ars bene legendi, das heißt die Fähigkeit, Reden, längere Disputationen und vor allem Bücher und Texte aufzufassen und zu beurteilen, nicht entbehren können.[20]

Thus, according to Gadamer, Melanchthon turns from rhetorics to hermeneutics without being aware that he becomes the founder of a new tradition which will take on various forms of manifestations in the centuries to come. The kinship between rhetorics and dialectics which Melanchthon professes and which he subordinates to a general concept of rationality hints at the understanding of logic (in a sense comprising all forms of argumentation) a natural, universal human capacity of understanding and discoursing. This, as Gadamer points out, and as Melanchthon and his humanist peers never tired to emphasize:

> […] hat aber eine andere wichtige Seite, die von dem Begriff der Techne aus nicht recht sichtbar wird: die Ablösung der 'reinen Kunst' von den natürlichen und gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen der alltäglichen Praxis ist in beiden Fällen nur im beschränkten Umfang möglich. Im Falle der Rhetorik bedeutet das, daß losgelöst von Naturanlage und natürlicher Übung das bloße Regelwissen als solches und seine Einlernung nicht zu wirklicher Beredsamkeit verhilft, und es heißt auch umgekehrt, daß die bloße Kunstfertigkeit der Rede, wenn sie keinen angemessenen Inhalt besitzt, leere Sophistik bleibt.[21]

Here Gadamer hints at the ethically and politically-oriented character of Humanist literature altogether and the Humanist's stress on the vita activa. This dimension can only be understood if historical and socio-political circumstances are taken into account, besides the intellectual revolution of the "Humanist Learning".

Joachim Knape draws on Gadamer's interpretation and offers a complementary analysis on Melanchthon's early rhetoric which he had written in Tübingen (published in 1519). Knape reconstructs in detail Melanchthon's hermeneutical method of the elaboration of loci communes, which, as Gadamer had remarked, is part of the universal capacity of man to understand and be able to inquire into the written word. Needless to say, while developing this rhetorical method of interpretation and pairing it with the desiderata of universal intelligibility and thus with the art of dialectic and its natural origins, Melanchthon philosophized while elaborating a pedagogically and theologically motivated

20 Gadamer, 1976, 8.
21 Ibid, 17.

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concept of *methodus.* This has been tackled by authors like Gilbert[22], Risse[23], Mack[24], and Kusukawa[25] and will also be the core subject of the present study.

I have singled out some of the recent authors who have dealt with Melanchthon's various philosophical writings and who have acknowledged the works of Dilthey and Gadamer. While the latter did not find it difficult to subordinate Melanchthon's reflections on anthropology, metalogic, dialectic, rhetoric etc. to the tradition of philosophical thought, in the late twentieth century historians of philosophy have rarely included Melanchthon in their philosophical canon. Dilthey's assertion that although Melanchthon had not been a creative thinker he belongs to the most underestimated historical figures has not necessarily determined posterity to give his influence the deserved credit:

> Melanchthon gehört zu den von der Nachwelt meist unterschätzten Personen, welche ohne schöpferischen Vermögen doch eine unermeßliche Wirksamkeit zu entfalten vermocht haben.[26]

The richness and diversity of knowledge which Melanchthon tried to gather together and write about in his life-long teaching career puts philosophically trained readers into a difficult position. Suddenly, as a consequence of the Melanchthonian project, all branches of knowledge, however loosely bound and organized, seem to belong to philosophy. The challenge of doing justice to Melanchthon's universalistic concept of philosophy has been taken up again in recent times. The volume edited by Günter Frank and Felix Mundt, *Der Philosoph Melanchthon*[27] published 2012, is one of the attempts to integrate the various disciplines which have employed Melanchthon's time and engagement. The book brings together enquiries into Melanchthon's understanding and writings on ethics, dialectics, rhetorics, psychology, poetry, and pictorial art. Of the enumerated topics, only ethics seems to directly relate to one of the branches of the discipline we today refer to as philosophy (next to metaphysics and epistemology). Thus, it is reassuring and also helpful that Günter Frank prepares the reader for the volume's thematically focused articles by means of an introduction which displays Melanchthon's understanding of philosophy[28]. Melanchthon holds an encyclopedic view on philosophy as a subject which, as he sees it, is constituted of the seven liberal arts to which poetry and history are added. However unfamiliar this enumeration of different disciplines put together under the concept of

22 Gilbert, 1960.
23 Risse, 1964, 121.
24 Mack, 1993, 320–333.
25 Kusukawa, 1997, 337–354.
26 Dilthey, 1986, 227.
27 Frank and Mundt, 2012.
28 Frank, 2012, 1–10.

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philosophy might appear from a post-Kantian vantage point, focused on epistemological problems and a critical method of inquiring into the conditions of knowledge, this was a common view shared by most Renaissance authors. Melanchthon, however, in contrast to most of his contemporaries, strikingly excludes one discipline which today belongs to the philosophical canon: metaphysics. He remains faithful to this concept of philosophy throughout his career and dedicates his textbooks to subjects such as ethics, physics, and psychology and to methodical concerns regarding learning and organizing philosophical knowledge. I believe that this has been encountered as a difficulty by historians of philosophy who, as Richard Rorty had remarked over 20 years ago, "like to see the history of our race as a long conversational interchange" in order to reassure themselves of the rational progress that has been made in the course of recorded history and had to confront themselves with writings of Melanchthon or of his contemporaries. The "strangeness" of Melanchthon's view on philosophy does not necessarily deny that he was engaged in important philosophical conversations of his time, but it does testify to our set expectations regarding the nature of rational progress and its historical unfolding. And, to our requirements of how such a conversational interchange should be conducted. A rather unproblematic conversation with Melanchthon seems, at least at times, unfeasible.

The definition and organization of philosophical knowledge is only one peculiar element which seems to deviate from today's understanding of philosophy and its subdivisions. Another is the fact that, as the articles in the volume edited by Frank and Mundt testify, most of the philosophical sources they rely on are pupil-oriented textbooks, orations in praise of various arts and sciences and epistles. They incorporate various ancient, medieval and contemporary doctrines and they instruct with regard to already given theories, fitting them to assumed presuppositions rather than attempting a fully-fledged problematization of the conditions of true knowledge. Even when the texts refer to the conditions of knowledge, the inquiry is everything but critical in a Kantian sense. This authority-dependent and often theologically infused problematization of the self- and its relation to the world- and to God has lead historians of philosophy who rely on a well-defined concept of philosophy to question and ultimately deny any philosophical relevance. Robert Pasnau, who dedicates his thorough analysis to metaphysical themes between the thriteenth and the seventeenth century considers a definite canon of philosophers and of philosophical problems when he remarks:

> Consider for instance the so-called Renaissance humanism. It is perhaps too much to say that there is no philosophy in authors like Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino, but one can at least say that if this sort of work had become the model for post-scholastic thought, then philosophy would have become something very different. The same might be said, a century later, for authors ranging from Giordano

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> Bruno to Michel de Montaigne. Montaigne's *Apology for Raimond Sebond* is a famous landmark for post-scholastic skeptical thought. It is not, however, a work of philosophy. Montaigne, in his free-wheeling way, does from time to time cross over recognizable philosophical ground, but his way of proceeding is utterly unphilosophical, free of any argumentation or conceptual analysis.[29]

His brief assessment to Renaissance humanism and the authors who are categorized as creators of *belle lettres* relies on a definition of philosophy which not only includes rational argumentation and conceptual analysis among other essential features, but is a product of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, despite the fact that figures such as Descartes and Locke having of course been referred to as the forefathers of the purported philosophical concept[30]. Pasnau seems to be aware of the heritage attached to our present conception of philosophy. And he points to its contingency while nevertheless buttressing this specific understanding of philosophy. Thus, Pasnau relies on a canon of philosophical texts, problems and authors which excludes Renaissance authors and their intellectual endeavors. His understanding of philosophy contrasts the one implied by Frank and Mundt in their attempt to do justice to all the aspects of Melanchthonian thought.

The treatises of René Descartes, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz or Immanuel Kant do indeed seem closer to contemporary understanding of how philosophical reflection is undertaken, in part because their works have been presented to us as paradigmatic for an understanding of philosophy which shapes the way we think about it today, and also because the time in which they have done so is nearer to ours. Regarding, however, poetry or rhetoric as part of philosophy is not only at variance with rational, logically guided argumentation, which we today regard as necessary conditions for philosophical reflection, but also with an assumed and integrated disciplinary system which strictly separates the fine arts from philosophy[31]. Thus, an encounter with the writings of a scholar neither sharing our definition of philosophy and its settled branches, nor the methods and ends of philosophical activities, is deemed philosophically unfruitful. His writings might, however, require different methods of interpretation rather than the reading off them our modern understanding of philosophy with the aid of rational reconstruction. His texts might unveil insightful philosophical consid-

29 Pasnau, 2013, 92.

30 On how historical figures are being turned into fathers of philosophical traditions and embedded into great narratives of philosophical family networks in which they figure as the common ancestors see Kolesnik-Antoine's paper on the mechanisms of canon-construction in nineteenth-century France: "Is the History of Philosophy a Family Affair? The examples of Malebranche and Locke in the Cousinian School", 2013, 159–178.

31 On the historical development of the grouping together of the fine arts and their bestowing with philosophical principles thus guaranteeing their unity see Kristeller, 1980, 119–228.

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erations which do not seem straight-forward when sought after at the level of the meaning of single utterances or fragments. This possibility is directly related to methodological issues involved in reading and interpreting historical texts, especially if these texts have been written against the background of a collection of practices, institutions, social structures and a material culture completely foreign to the reader. Early modern authors like Descartes, Hobbes and Galileo are, as I said above, considered to be closer to us chronologically, and thus easily understandable in their philosophical debates. It is noteworthy, however, that the methodological discussions concerning past philosophers and their works take into consideration especially these authors, which one is inclined to take as vouchsafing our own philosophical commitments. Part of the reason is that, while acknowledging the distance to ancient or medieval philosophy, the reader believes to share the early modern views on how philosophy is thought of and practiced. It has become clear over the last 20 years of intense research in intellectual history that he does not.

I believe that the debate concerning methodology in Renaissance philosophy still has to be properly kindled in order to stimulate fruitful debates on the nature of Renaissance thought and its relation to medieval, early modern or contemporary philosophy. What counts as philosophy and what does not should, in my opinion, take more heed of what has been regarded as such in the circles of the intellectual elites we deal with in our analysis of past philosophical texts. Thus, texts of canonical philosophers can be read as participating in institutional, social and intellectual commitments with lesser known or even unknown actors. The latter might have taken the same or the opposite stance to the philosopher's doctrine. A better knowledge of the "obscure" figures implies a better understanding of both the context as well as of the possible intention and impact of the canonical texts. It must be sufficiently clear by now that contextual analysis, understood in its broadest sense, is a necessary hermeneutic tool in the hand of the historian of early modern and Renaissance philosophy. This means that historians of philosophy take an interest in the way things once hung together, but, it does not mean, in Justin Smith's words, that they should be seen as "relativists". Neither does it mean that they believe that that "anything goes" in the historical investigation of philosophical truth, but only, that they aim at different registers of truths[32]. These truths define the answers to questions like: What did the past philosophers argue against/for? What did they deem philosophy to be? Why did they hold that particular philosophical stance? And how much of what they believed to be philosophy has been transmitted or transformed by their pupils, followers, by generations to come and by the assessment of other, later philosophers? It is, of course, a group of historical truths that allow

32 Smith, 2013, 41.

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us to inquire into the way "things once hung together", about answers, actions and reactions to debates in history that might contain insightful philosophical lessons. There is a story to be told, and I strongly believe with the "contextualist" group that the story has been shaped by the authors and their intentions, transmitted in and by means of institutional settings, social structures and in given historical circumstances. All these contextual elements contributed in turn to the manner of transmission and form of manifestation of the particular philosophical theories and practices, and they should be taken into account if the particular philosophy is to be understood. I also believe that acute inquiry into what past philosophers thought they were doing when practicing philosophy and what they were intending to obtain thereby does not exclude the possibility of displaying their arguments or judging them by professional standards. I think that until we have recovered the meaning of the work, there can only be arguing which ignores the texts rather than focusing on the texts. Challenging Rorty[33] and agreeing with Ursula Goldenbaum[34] I think we have to grasp the meaning of the text before checking its truth. As Julie Klein has pointed out, there is no way of reading texts without already being committed to prior modes of thinking which we have inherited from past philosophers[35]. Texts which do not reflect those modes tend to get easily ignored or assimilated. And the categories of *epochentypische Problemfelder* of the sort Stephan Otto is suggesting for use, and among which he identifies problems like "language, history, ethics, physics, method" are, as I see them, only helpful as long as we do not perceive them as having a transcendent character which defines them as a part of the group of universal problems with a history of their own.

1.4 Method, material and aim of study

My inquiry into Melanchthon's works is only possible because most of his works including some of his letters have been preserved, collected and edited by Karl Brettschneider and Heinrich Bindseil in the Corpus Reformatorum Also my work relies on Robert Stupperich's student editions, Heinz Scheible's critical edition of Melanchthon's letters, as well as on sixteenth century extant prints which have not been integrated into the *Corpus Reformatorum* but are available for reading in the European Melanchhon Academy in Bretten[36]. My interest lies in the his-

33 Rorty, 1984, 53, note 1.
34 Goldenbaum, 2013, 73.
35 Klein, 2013, 157.
36 The first collection of Melanchthonian works was a five volume edition that appeared 1541 in Basel. Afterwards, Caspar Peucer, Melanchthon's son in law, also prompted a completed version of the 1541 edition in the 1560s. The project of a collective edition of Melanchthon's

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torical and systematical development of the Melanchthonian concept of method and its relevance for his understanding of philosophy. Thus, the reconstruction of these views presupposes a familiarity with the Melanchthonian philosophy, as a project of institutional, pedagogical and conceptual reform. This project is entrenched in a particular historical and social context and dependent on a series of assumptions, prejudices, inherited intellectual frameworks, and subjected to continuous revisions and elaborations. My own analysis assumes a series of historical presuppositions and relies on precious historical research undertaken by Renaissance and Reformation Scholars for the general setting of the Melanchthonian project. While it takes for granted the results of this historical research which constitutes the background against which the Melanchthonian project has been developed, it does not lose sight of the connection of the pedagogical and philosophical reform Melanchton is undertaking to the actual historical and institutional stetting. Melanchthon's works, which are all meant for a broad public of pupils, teachers, politicians, and only to a lesser extent for the erudite "outsiders", can only be read against this broad institutional and socio-historical background. A great obstacle to be overcome in this endeavour is that of paying attention to as many works of the German Humanist as possible. Since his oeuvre is hardly an easily assessable in one, I hope that, by inquiring in

works has only been resumed by the preliminary studies of Georg Theodor Strobel and Johannes Dretzer in the nineteenth century. The latter only managed to edit the first volume, the *Loci Theologici summa cura ac diligentia postremum recogniti et aucti, item Appendix disputationis de coniugio ad editionem per Joan. Oporinum Basileae an. MDLXI factam denuo editi, ab J. A. D.* Erlangen 1828. A year later, Friedrich August Koethe announced an edition of *Melanchthons Werke* in six volumes. The Church administrator Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider was asked for advice concerning editorial aspects of some of Luther's works by publisher Carl August Schwetschke from Halle, in 1827. As a response, Brettschneider elaborated a detailed plan for a collective edition of the works and letters of Luther, Melanchthon, Calvin and Zwingli. Thus the first volume of the *Corpus Reformatorum* (CR) appeared in 1848 and after Brettschneider died, the Halle librarian, Heinrich Ernest Bindseil continued the general superintendent's work. He kept up the publication of the *Corpus Reformatorum* starting with the sixteenth volume and finalizing the edition on the three-hunderth anniversary of Melanchthon (1860). The *Corpus Reformatorum* is, however, not complete. Various Melanchthonian works were not included and the plan of the Society of Reformation History (of the *Supplementa Melanchthoniana*), meant to add some of Melanchthon's works to the *Corpus Reformatorum*, also failed at the beginning of the twentieth century when the project was denied necessary funding. Robert Stupperich edited an independent student edition consisting of nine volumes and some of the works not extant in the *Corpus Reformatorum*. The only critical edition of Melanchthonian works that takes heed of the necessary hermeneutic and historiographical requirements is, however, that of Melanchthon's correspondence, edited and commented by Heinz Scheible. I am thankful to Professor Günter Frank for this valuable information about the history of the various publications of Melanchthon's works which was a part of the preliminary work on a planned edition of Melanchthon's philosophical works. I have not been able to find any other detailed research on this topic in recent scholarship.

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greater detail into his editions of dialectic and rhetoric, as well as by looking at his philosophical works, I can provide a more thorough insight into the features of Melanchthon's understanding of dialectic, rhetoric, method and philosophy and the conceptual transformations which this understanding entails. The material which I have selected for this limited undertaking are the three most important editions of his dialectic and rhetoric respectively; I am also considering his late works on ethics, psychology and natural philosophy, as well as some of the orations he writes on the need to reform the liberal arts studies, on the praise of eloquence, and on philosophy. My study aims at complementing Günter Frank's detailed analysis of the theological and metaphysical pressupositions of Melanchthon's philosophy. It works out the relevance of Melanchthon's method which I believe to be the key instrument in shaping a particular concept of philosophy as incorporating universal knowledge. These reflections on the essential constituents of philosophical knowledge present a peculiar ideal of the philosopher, or, as Hunter puts it, of the "philosophical persona": the persona of the polymath. Thus, the second chapter of this study scans the the traditions which have influenced Melanchthon's own doctrines most. Since the *Praeceptor Germaniae* has read and wrote more than I could possibly have done in the past three years of my research, the main strands of thought that he has integrated and reinterpreted in his textbooks can only be illustrated briefly and by means of a meager outline. I will, nevertheless, point to the doctrines which I believe to represent the pivots of his notion of man, philosophical knowledge, and method. The third chapter constitutes the core of the present study. It takes under close considerations the reinterpretations and reconceptualization that Melanchthon has undertaken of notions like *dialectic*, *rhetoric*, *demonstration*, *method* and *topos.* By giving an elaborate description and reconstruction of each of Melanchthon's textbooks on dialectic and rhetoric. I show that he selects central concepts of ancient and medieval logic as well as essential tenets of Humanist dialectic, and that he merges them in an attempt to construct a rigorous and all-encompassing instrument of textual interpretation and knowledge-organization. I will refute some historiographical and systematical claims and endorse others, thus aiming at presenting a more detailed and thorough interpretation of the Melanchthonian reform of the trivial arts. The fourth chapter will inquire into the fundamental role that Melanchthonian method plays for other branches of philosophy, like moral and natural philosophy. I will re-emphasize here the philosophical presuppositions which Melanchthon adds to his elaboration of *dialectic-as-method* and argue that they represent the basic principles on which all branches of human knowledge are systematically structured. My conclusions will, finally, entail a brief summary of the presented and argued topics.

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