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Reseñas y debates

On a recent Italian edition of Voltaire's Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations[1]

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Most readers at once associate Voltaire's name with the noble figure of the paladin of tolerance, author of the *Traité sur la Tolérance*, and with the image of the brilliant narrator and inimitable stylist with his cutting irony, inventor of that literary genre called *conte philosophique* and characters who have become part of the *pantheon* of world literature, such as Candide and Zadig. But all too often the average reader's knowledge is reduced to this. The rest of Voltaire's immense production (which includes verse tragedies and comedies, epic poems, poetry of all kinds, educational treatises on science, philosophical texts, historical works, all sorts of pamphlets, and an immense correspondence) remains a heritage open to a small coterie of experts on 18th-century French literature. Voltaire's posthumous fame has distorted his image or, at the very least, has shed light only on some aspects of his complex personality and, what is worse, his multifaceted work.

Actually, after tragic theater, which was his primary passion for more than half a century (from his early debut in 1718 with a version of *Œdipe roi*, until his death at the age of eighty-four in 1778), throughout his life Voltaire was most interested in studying history. The first work that reveals his abiding attention to history is certainly his *Essay on the Civil Wars of France*, written in English during his years of exile (in 1727) and published as an introduction to the *Henriade*, the epic whose hero is Henry IV and which narrates the fierce religious wars that bloodied France in the second half of the 16th century, and which the famous Edict of Nantes, decreed by Henri in 1598, helped to quell. But once again, the fame of a masterpiece of Enlightenment historiography such as *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, published in Berlin [2] in 1751, ended up eclipsing countless other works on historical subjects to which Voltaire never ceased to devote his efforts, from the biography of the Swedish King Charles XII, published in 1731, to the *Annales de l'Empire*, a compilation work that made its first appearance in 1753, to the *Histoire de l'Empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand* (1759), not to mention all his other more occasional historical writings, such as the *Histoire de la guerre de 1741*, written in his role as *historiographe de France*, an office Voltaire held from 1745 to

1750 (and which he gave up when he went to the court of Frederick II of Prussia). But above all, his *Siècle*, by virtue of its originality and elegant style, has obscured what can rightfully be considered Voltaire's most challenging and innovative historical work: his *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*.

To limit ourselves to the fame in Italy, throughout the 20th century, of this vast work of synthesis that embraces the (not just European) history *depuis Charlemagne jusqu'à Louis XIII*, till now there existed only one integral translation, published moreover in a limited edition among the Edizioni del Club del Libro di Novara in 1966-1967, edited by Marco Minerbi (in four volumes) [3] . Yet it is no exaggeration to say that the *Essai* was for at least twenty years, from the mid-1740s to the mid-1760s, the work into which, in continuous reworkings and additions, Voltaire poured most of his historical knowledge, putting into practice the methodological principles of his concept of history. The first fragments of this enormous enterprise appeared in the "Mercure de France" as early as 1745, under different titles, all very ambitious, such as *Nouveau plan d'une histoire de l'esprit humain, Histoire de l'esprit humain* or *Histoire universelle*. In the next two decades, Voltaire returned cyclically to this project, until, in 1769, what can be considered the first complete (though not definitive) edition of the work was published, with the title: *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations, et sur les princeux faits de l'histoire, depuis Charlemagne jusqu'à Louis XIII*. Other editions followed before Voltaire's death, and he very rarely refrained from making variants.

The 1769 edition remains however the most important, because in it, for the first time, there appeared, as a general introduction to the work, the *Philosophie de l'histoire*, published four years earlier, and which an authoritative critic has defined as "la pièce maîtresse de la doctrine de Voltaire." [4] The main importance of this text lies in the meaning that Voltaire attributed to the expression "philosophy of history," which he first coined and introduced into use, and which, as is well known, would become a byword during the 19th century: not a metaphysics or a teleology of history, but, more modestly, history reconsidered from the viewpoint of "philosophy," which, in turn, must be understood in its 18th century acception, in which ethical and anthropological interests, rather than metaphysical, ontological or gnoseological ones, predominated. History, as Voltaire conceived it, involved the study of the "spirit of nations," the habits and customs of peoples, the civil and political institutions that govern their social life and religious beliefs.

Although it was not the bearer of a transcendent and meta-historical meaning, nor realizes the designs of a Providence as taught by the *Histoire Universelle* that Bossuet had written for the Dauphin of France in 1681 [5] , history nevertheless had always had, for Voltaire, the task of illustrating the path – bumpy and uncertain – traversed over the centuries by human reason, that is, the *bon sens* of men, from their intellectual demands of truth and criticism, their moral sentiment of fairness and justice, in short what for Voltaire was *civilisation*, as opposed to the benightedness of ignorance. The idea that history should teach us "our duties and our

rights" [6] was implicitly based on this rationalist prejudice which Voltaire was never able to, or knew how to, or wanted to renounce, not even in his by no means rare moments of disheartened pessimism. So what he called "philosophy of history" meant investigating the past to find traces of this germination of reason (the metaphor is his own). And, according to Voltaire, a historical skepticism was associated with it, which he called "the Pyrronism of history," and which should be systematically exercised on the alleged certainties transmitted by tradition, on which the decrepit institutions of the Ancien Régime still claimed to be founded. We may therefore suggest that, ultimately, the two formulas coined by Voltaire, "philosophy of history" and "history's Pyrronism," designated the same critical function attributed to historical knowledge, considered from two different but converging points of view. There are numerous textual places that could be used as evidence of this critical function that Voltaire attributed to history.

The primary function of Voltaire's historical Pyrronism consisted, first of all, of pruning "the tedious details and revolting lies" that made history a "chaos, a pile of useless facts, most of them false and badly formulated" [7] (this was also the aspect of historical knowledge that irritated the rationalism of Madame du Châtelet, to whom, in a short text of 1754, Voltaire attributed the following words on the "great modern histories" composed by contemporary historians: "I see in them only confusion, a number of small events without relations or connections" [8]). The skeptical method recommended (and practiced) by Voltaire came down, on the one hand, to a practical, cautious rule: always begin the study of any historical topic by questioning the reliability of the sources, whether these are documents, ancient chronicles, or perhaps such "monuments" as medals or coins; that is, stated more succinctly: the historian must avoid making "slipups" (*bévues*) [9] . On the other hand, his method merely obeyed a simple principle of economics, which consisted of skimming off the superfluities of historical erudition, which too often was a mere antiquarian history (made up of chronologies, genealogies, dynastic histories, or reports of battles that "did not resolve anything" and from which it was not even possible to learn "what weapons were used to slaughter one another" [10]). In any case, Voltaire's historical method operated essentially by way of negation and, so to speak, "thinning out."

What is more important, from a theoretical point of view, is the fact that this skeptical method contributed decisively to creating a new "objective" of historical knowledge. This new objective was no longer factual – in other words, it did not concern what today is customarily called "a factual history" – but was essentially "cultural": from the mid-1740s, as we have seen, Voltaire did not hesitate to define it as "history of the human spirit." [11] This was the main objective of investigation of Voltaire's historical works from the 1750s on, such as the *Siècle de Louis XIV* and, above all, the *Essai sur les mœurs et de l'esprit des nations*. According to Cassirer, Voltaire's notion of *esprit*, when used in a historical context such as the one being discussed, "includes the whole

of its internal events, the whole of the changes through which humanity must pass, before it can attain to a knowledge and a true consciousness of itself." [12] Cassirer's language was not at all Voltairean, but what matters most here is to point out how clearly he defines the nature of Voltaire's historiographical subject, stressing its novelty with respect to what, until then, historians had assumed as such. Voltaire was fully aware of this and briefly described the purpose of his future historical research as early as 1745: "My main idea is to find out as much as possible about the customs of men and the vicissitudes [*révolutions*] of the human spirit"; and again, in 1753, he insisted: "My main purpose was to follow the revolutions [*révolutions*] of the human spirit through those of its governments" [13] – or, stated in more modern terms, the objective of Voltaire's history was *civilisation*, (in the singular), understood as an ongoing civilizing process [14].

Hence Voltaire's historiographical method functioned to constitute a kind of historical knowledge that was, for him, the "philosophy of history." In essence, with this expression Voltaire merely intended to state that the study of history should be conducted *en philosophe*; and, in the mid-18th century, in the eyes of a *philosophe*, the *mœurs des hommes* and the *révolutions de l'esprit humain* were obviously more interesting and significant objects of reflection than any chronicle of conspiracies, wars and battles "without relationship or connection." Extending in 1754 his imaginary dialogue with his lover, the by then defunct Mme du Châtelet, who had been an enthusiastic scholar of geometry, in order to induce her to take an interest in the study of history, Voltaire summarized in a clearly rhetorical question what were – or should be – the methods, subjects and ends proper to a philosophy of history as he conceived it: "if among so many brutish and shapeless materials, you chose to make of them a building for your use; whether by winnowing it of all its details of wars, boring as much as inaccurate, of all the trifling negotiations that were merely useless cunning, of all the particular events that stifle great events; if by keeping those that paint its customs, you will make of this chaos a general, well-structured [*bien arrêté*] picture; if you tried to discern from the events the history of the human spirit, would you still believe you had wasted your time?" [15] The new task he assigned to historical science, as a philosophy of history, meant in short delineating a "painting of the ages" (*tableau des siècles*) [16], which ultimately would portray nothing more than a "history of the human spirit."

It is worth noting the ease with which Voltaire did not hesitate to renounce any aspiration to exhaustiveness of historical information, upholding instead the selective nature of his historiographical method: every element of Voltaire's historical discourse was consciously chosen (discarded or preserved) on the basis of how coherent and functional the "philosophical" project was that presided over his work as a historian. On this point, expressing himself with his usual panache, Voltaire left no room for misunderstanding: "I therefore thought much less to gather a huge multitude of facts, which cancel each other out [*qui s'effacent tous*

les uns par les autres], than to collect the main and most certified [*avérés*] ones, which may serve as a guide to the reader and allow him to judge for himself on the extinction [*extinction*], rebirth [*renaissance*] and progress of the human spirit." [17] Hence, for the historian it becomes of primary importance to "thin out," to lighten the mass of available material by making a choice that reduces that erudite proliferation of details which prevents us from grasping the main elements of the "tableau": "the small facts – Voltaire writes – must be part of this plan only when they give rise to major events"; after all, the proverbial question of Cleopatra's nose, of which Pascal spoke: "details that lead nowhere – Voltaire goes on to say – are in history as baggage is for an army, *impedimenta*." [18] In keeping with his nature, Voltaire tended to dismiss the whole question with an impatient gesture: "*Malheur au détail*" is the exclamation of intolerance we already read in a letter to the Abbot Dubos, dating back to the late 1730s. [19]

In other words, for Voltaire it was a question of giving to history and, in particular, to its "tableau des siècles" a rational structure and a homogeneity, constructing it, as Roberto Finzi says, "along a theoretical axis" [20] ; consequently, Voltaire could afford to neglect those factors of disorder, those "useless" or "accidental" elements that – such as legendary tales, apocryphal documents or the proliferation of details and "small facts" – contribute, with their uncertainty , falsehood or absurdity, to increase that impression of "chaos" that so irritated Mme du Châtelet's geometrical mindset in the presence of the spectacle of history and the histories that historians made from it. To satisfy this requirement of coherence, the skeptical method, that is to say Pyrronism applied to historical knowledge, was not enough: it could (and had to) constitute the *pars destruens* of a historian's work, but these should also follow a positive selective criterion, in order to be able to determine which facts were useful and which useless, which events should be deemed important and which irrelevant, and for what reason. With an honesty that today appears to us rather impudent, once again addressing Mme du Châtelet, Voltaire declared, with regard to the countless chronicles and annals in which the particular history of "almost every city" and every monastic Order was preserved: "Among all these immense collections, which it is impossible to know in full [*qu'on ne peut embrasser*], one must limit oneself and choose. It is a vast warehouse from which you will take what is useful for you [*à votre usage*]." [21] The criterion of relevance adopted by Voltaire was therefore just a criterion of usefulness, determined, it goes without saying, by common sense, an idea of level-headed reason. This was the criterion that enabled him to construct his history of the human spirit with homogeneous and congruent elements, by discarding unrelated details, making it a "tableau" marked by coherence, order and unity.

Hence, while it is not surprising that Voltaire recommended admitting into the historical context only "what is highly probable," just as "in physics we admit only what is proven," [22] it is amazing that he, as a

historian, did not hesitate to refer to the notion of verisimilitude as a criterion for the selection of historical facts, taking as valid that "in terms of history, all that goes against verisimilitude is almost always also against truth." [23] Here Voltaire seems to turn on its head the logical order between what is true and what is plausible; the admissibility of what is plausible is no longer measured by its resemblance to the truth, so that it is credible as if it were true: it is the truth that, vice versa, is assessed on the basis of its credibility or verisimilitude. Therefore, for Voltaire what conforms to reasonableness and common sense is credible, and these, in turn, are identified with "nature": "What is not in nature [*dans la nature*] is never true." [24] It follows that, in order to construct his own "tableau" of the history of the human spirit, he was always inclined to choose, from among the mass of facts and customs we have news of, the most "plausible" ones, that is, those that confirmed his idea of "nature" and that his common sense could therefore accept as "natural," that is, believe possible. So, in his *Essai sur les mœurs*, one comes across such arguments as the following: apropos of the news, reported by some unspecified traveler, who in some remote Asian country (Cochin) it was not the king's son who inherited the throne, but his nephew, the son of the king's sister, Voltaire comments: "Such a rule contradicts nature too much; no man would wish to exclude his own child from his inheritance." And he very reasonably suggests, to resolve what to his common sense seems an incomprehensible contradiction, that is an implausible custom, one which, consequently, cannot be accepted as true: "It is plausible [*vraisemblable*] that a cunning nephew got the better of a badly aided and ill-advised child, or that a prince, having left children at a young age, has appointed his nephew as his successor, and that a traveler has taken this chance event as a fundamental law [of that country]. A hundred writers will have copied from this traveler, and the error will be accredited." [25]

Concerning historical facts that contradicted his criteria of reasonableness (and plausibility), but whose truthfulness could not be denied because attested by indisputably reliable sources, Voltaire was willing to admit them, only to add them as evidence of the "bornes de l'esprit humain" [26], or the barbarity or stupidity which the human spirit is capable of – and thus became evidence that confirmed his pessimistic and essentially anti-historical concept of man. This is the history that Voltaire was urged to tell: "In a history conceived in this way, mistakes and prejudices can be seen to succeed one another and to dispel truth and reason. We see the clever and fortunate enchain the feckless and crush the unfortunate; and yet, even these clever and fortunate ones are themselves at the mercy of fortune as much as the slaves they rule over. In the end, men can be enlightened a little thanks to the portrayal [*tableau*] of their misfortunes and their nonsense. Societies come with time to rectify their ideas; men learn to think." [27] The materials that Voltaire drew on from the "vast warehouses" that previous historians had made available to him were hence those useful for constructing this "tableau," whose "subject [is] the history of the human spirit, and not the details of

almost always distorted [*défigurés*] facts"; to retrace this history, it was not pertinent, or even necessary, to ascertain, for example, what family "M. de Puiset or M. de Montlhéry, who waged war on some kings of France, belonged to" but the stages (the *degrés*) we have gone through to get "from the barbaric rudeness of those times to the civilization [*politesse*] of our own." [28] For Voltaire (and not just for him), in the second half of 18th century Europe, this evolution appeared as the de facto acknowledgment of a very concrete historical phenomenon; the progress of *civilisation*and *politesse* could be observed and verified empirically, without implicating any metaphysical hypothesis about the existence of an occult teleology that regulated historical evolution.

The lesson, full of common sense, that Voltaire was convinced of being able to draw from the study of history was therefore this: the progress of civilization, even without involving either a providential design or the idea of an infinite perfectibility of man, was a goal that should and could be pursued in this world, "up to the highest level established by nature." [29] That is, as Roberto Finzi observes, history, to all evidence, "shows that man is perfectible but, as Voltaire saw it, within precise limits." [30] Without renouncing his fundamental pessimism regarding human nature, made up of selfishness, ignorance and violence, Voltaire also found in the study of the past and the remotest cultures (first of all [31] Chinese culture, to which he devoted words of great admiration [32]) traces of another history: these demonstrate that, "within precise limits," man can develop gifts and talents that "nature" has given him, namely, in short, that reasonableness and moral sense which only a monster is wholly devoid of. The "limits of the human intellect" will then be able to counteract this tendency: Voltaire therefore admitted the possibility of a regression, since history, if studied *en philosophe*, offers abundant examples of such regressions, which must not be forgotten or underestimated. For this reason, Voltaire's *tableau des siècles* is not a *Tableau philosophique des progrès successifs de l'esprit humain*, like Turgot's of 1750, nor a *Tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, like that of which Condorcet would write the *esquisse* in his months in hiding during the Terror. For Voltaire, "progress" remains an incontestable episode in the history of the human spirit in the 18th century (at least in a part of Europe), as had been, in their day, the four "*âges heureux*" of which he speaks in his introduction to the *Siècle de Louis XIV*, but he did not deduce a general and continuous teleological tendency inscribed in the unfolding of history, because therein "everything is contradictory, and we sail in a vessel constantly shaken by opposing winds." [33]

However, not for this did Voltaire refrain from thinking that history, insofar as *res gestae*, had some structural unity and coherence. And to do so, he knew he had to accept in his own "history of the human spirit" even those facts, events, historical phenomena that contradicted his idea of reasonableness and the rational order of society and politics, and that, as established historical facts, could not be denied and expelled from his "tableau de l'esprit" simply because they were deemed implausible: "I

sought he wrote in 1753 – the way in which many evil men, led by even more evil rulers, have nevertheless, in the long run founded society in which the arts, the sciences and even the virtues have been cultivated," and went on to say that he had studied "the trade routes, which tacitly [*en secret*] remedies the ruins that ferocious conquerors leave behind," had applied himself "to examine, through the price of commodities, the riches or the poverty of a people" and "above all in what way the arts have been able to revive and survive amidst so many devastations." [34] His interpretation of feudal anarchy or the Crusades striking examples, from the perspective of an Enlightenment philosopher, of a barbaric, irrational, violent, unjust and fanatical social organization and politics – manages to turn even such historical phenomena into so many moments that, "en secret" or rather in spite of themselves, contributed to the slow, hesitant process of civilization: "From the general anarchy of Europe, even from its many disasters, the inestimable good of liberty was born, which, little by little, made the imperial cities and many other cities blossom," he wrote about the liberation of the cities and the "bourgeoisie" from the "land taxes" imposed by the feudal overlords, concluding that "thus the chaos of the government began to unravel almost everywhere, due to the very disasters that the excessively anarchic feudal system had brought about everywhere." [35] Likewise, with regard to the Crusades, he observed: "The only good that those enterprises procured was the freedom that many villages gained from their overlords. Municipal government grew a little from the ruins of the feudal owners. Little by little those communities, being able to work and trade for their own interests, practiced the arts and commerce, since slavery was on the way to extinction." [36]

Voltaire never gave up thinking of history as a unitary process, even if not continuous, and full of contradictions, a progress of the "esprit humain," not without regressions and deadlocks, inevitable consequences of its constitutive limits (*bornes*). Perhaps we could speak of Voltaire's concept of history as a paradoxical teleology without *telos*, that is, devoid of that perfective termination toward which history would tend, since, de facto and "within precise limits," for Voltaire history actually revealed a tendency towards *civilisation*. The "tableau des siècles" that Voltaire was portraying over the decades in his *Essai sur les mœurs* presented itself as a totality that embraced past eras and remote cultures – from China to the Barbaric Middle Ages, from pre-Columbian civilizations to the struggles for investiture, from the conquests of Islam to the persecutions of the Inquisition and the Thirty Years' War, until the dawn of the "happy" century of Louis XIV. But this history of splendors and miseries, unlike Bossuet's *Histoire Universelle*, was not written by the hand of Providence. Voltaire's basic pessimism led him to recognize as an indisputable historical fact that the process of civilizing humanity was ephemeral and exposed at every turn to halts and regressions. Yet he felt that this did not undermine the need to continue to reflect upon and study history as a whole, constructing it as a unitary tableau. This, if anything, should have tolled like a warning not to yield to a facile optimism about the irreversibility of the process that led from "barbarous

rudeness to civilization." The aftermath of world history, in the two and a half centuries that separate us from Voltaire, have confirmed its validity.

Notes

1 Voltaire, *Saggio sui costumi e lo spirito delle nazioni*, edited by Domenico Felice, introduction by Roberto Finzi, Turin, Einaudi, 2017, 2 voll., pp. CXXXIX-866 and 964. Traducción de la reseña al inglés por Edward Tosques.

2 See Voltaire, *Il secolo di Luigi XIV*, translation by Umberto Morra, introduction by Ernesto Sestan, Turin, Einaudi, 1951, with several subsequent reprints. For a long time it has been, along with his *Storia di Carlo XII* (Milan, Dall'Oglio, 1968), Voltaire's only historical work available in Italian translation. Now at long last we await the publication of the integral edition of Voltaire's historical works, edited by Domenico Felice, published by Giunti, in the series "Il pensiero occidentale."

3 Even in France, the only modern edition is the one edited by René Pomeau, which came out in 1963, in two volumes by Garnier (and reprinted in 1990), and it is not easy to find. The critical edition, however, has begun to be published only since 2004, under the direction of Bruno Bernard, John Renwick, Nicholas Cronk and Janet Godden, by the Voltaire Foundation of Oxford, in eight volumes (without the Philosophie de l'histoire, which had already appeared in 1969, edited by J.H. Brumfitt; a new edition, edited by Simon Davis, in Les œuvres complètes de Voltaire, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 2007, vol. 67).

4 R. Pomeau, La religion de Voltaire, Paris, Nizet, 1969 [I ed. 1956], p. 350.

5 And in which Voltaire's Essai sur les mœurs was intended to be a continuation and, at the same time, a reversal and a confutation.

6 Voltaire, "Storia," sez. II, in Dizionario filosofico integrale, edited by Domenico Felice and Riccardo Campi, Milan, Bompiani, 2013, p. 1879.

7 Voltaire, Note supplementari all'«Essai sur les mœurs», Prima nota, in Saggio sui costumi e lo spirito delle nazioni, cit., vol. II, p. 719.

8 Voltaire, Prefazione per il tomo III dell'edizione Walther, in ibid., vol. II, p. 708.

9 It is the term Voltaire regularly uses (see, for instance, chapts. 29, 34, 35 and 42 of Le pyrrhonisme de l'histoire, cit.).

10 Voltaire, Prefazione per il tomo III dell'edizione Walther, cit., p. 708.

11 Voltaire, Nuovo schema di una storia dello spirito umano, in Saggio sui costumi, cit., vol. II, p. 661.

12 E. Cassirer, Filosofia dell'illuminismo [1933], Florence, La Nuova Italia, 1935 [rist. an. 1989], p. 305.

13 Voltaire, Lettera di V*** a ***, professore di storia, in Saggio sui costumi, cit., vol. II, p. 695. The letter was originally published at the beginning of his Annales de l'Empire, which appeared in 1753.

14 It is well to point out that Voltaire's approach to the history of civilisation never led him to write a "history of mentalities." Although it is undeniably "cosmopolitical" and not limited to European civilization, but opens up to Asian and Amerindian civilizations, it cannot for reason be called pluralist and interested in the diversity of other cultures as such, i.e. in the ethnological sense.

15 Voltaire, Prefazione per il tomo III dell'edizione Walther, cit., p. 708.

16 Ibid., p. 711.

17 Voltaire, Note supplementari all'«Essai sur les mœurs», Terza nota, cit., p. 723.

18 Voltaire, Prefazione per il tomo III dell'edizione Walther, in ibid., p. 712.

19 Letter to the abbé Dubos, 30 october 1738, in Voltaire, Correspondance, Paris, Gallimard, "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade," 1977, vol. I, p. 1278. See

R. Campi, Voltaire et le bon usage de l'anecdote, in Conte et histoire (1690-1800), edited by M. Hersant and R. Jomand-Baudry, Paris, Garnier, 2018, particularly pp. 345-347.

20 Cfr. R. Finzi, Introduzione a Voltaire, Saggio sui costumi, cit., vol. I, p. XL.

21 Voltaire, Prefazione al Saggio sui costumi, cit., vol. I, p. 176.

22 Ibid., p. 181.

23 Voltaire, Prefazione per il tomo III dell'edizione Walther, in ibid., vol. II, p. 709.

24 Voltaire, La filosofia della storia, chap. 11, in ibid., vol. I, p. 37.

25 Voltaire, "Sull'India di qua e di là dal Gange," chap. 143, ibid., vol. II, p. 260.

26 See Voltaire, "Limiti dell'intelletto umano," in Dizionario filosofico integrale, cit., pp. 736-739.

27 Voltaire, Note supplementari all'«Essai sur les mœurs», Terza nota, in Saggio sui costumi, cit., vol. II, pp. 722-723.

28 Voltaire, Note supplementari all'«Essai sur les mœurs», Seconda nota, in ibid., p. 722.

29 Voltaire, "Sui selvaggi," chap. 7, La filosofia della storia, in ibid., vol. I, p. 22.

30 R. Finzi, Introduzione, in Saggio sui costumi, cit., vol. I, p. XLVI.

31 See Voltaire, "Sulla Cina" e "Sulla religione della Cina," chapts. 1 and 2, in ibid., vol. I, pp. 182-196.

32 See Voltaire, "Limiti dell'intelletto umano," in Dizionario filosofico integrale, cit., pp. 736-739.

33 Voltaire, Note supplementari all'«Essai sur les mœurs», Diciassettesima nota, cit., p. 743.

34 Voltaire, Lettera di V*** a ***, professore di storia, cit., p. 695.

35 Voltaire, "Affrancamenti, privilegi delle città e Stati Generali" (chap. 83), Saggio sui costumi, cit., vol. I, pp. 637 and 639.

36 Voltaire, "Su San Luigi" (chap. 58), ibid., vol. I, p. 497.