

Kant and the Historical Turn: Philosophy as Critical Interpretation, by Karl Ameriks. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Pp. vi + 335. H/b £55.00, P/b £22.00.

Kant and the Historical Turn collects thirteen essays by Karl Ameriks which appeared between 2000 and 2006. Three were originally only available in German, all have been revised, references updated and formats standardized, and a substantial introduction has been added. Thus the volume is most welcome.

The common theme of several of the essays is the idea of an 'historical turn', which Ameriks sees in Reinhold and which he connects with 'constellation research' and 'a new ... way of conceptualizing autonomy' (p. 300). Karl Leonard Reinhold (1757–1823) wrote a series of (invented) 'Letters on the Kantian

Philosophy' which appeared in 1786–7 in the journal *Teutscher Merkur* and which served to popularize Kant's first *Critique*. Reinhold was extremely successful in doing this. Kant expressed his thanks, and Reinhold became famous overnight. What Ameriks calls the historical turn in these letters is a way of combining systematic and historical considerations and being attentive to the need and spirit of one's age. When the Letters appeared, 'German philosophical readers were already familiar with two very different orientations: the largely ahistorical and systematic orientation of modern metaphysics from Descartes and Leibniz through Kant, and the new historicist orientation arising from relativistic readings of work by Lessing, Herder, and others' (p. 4). Reinhold was 'obsessed ... with overcoming the threat of historicism ... by developing a style requiring "a productive combination of historical and non-historical philosophical considerations"' (p. 7). In Kant's first *Critique* he saw a way to overcome the pantheism dispute of his time and to open the way for a moral proof of God. 'Reinhold began to make more and more clear that it is crucial to the very nature and future success of philosophy that it present itself explicitly as the solution to a systematically comprehended sequence of prior (and often deeply misunderstood) philosophical developments, and especially those of the main works of the most recent period' (p. 9). This then is the method of the 'historical turn', and Ameriks recommends it also for our time.

Ameriks's recommendation leads the reader to ask whether his discussion of Beiser's view of German Idealism (Ch. 11) and of van Cleve's reading of Kant (Ch. 3: 'Idealism from Kant to Berkeley') is written in this style and uses the method of the historical turn. The answer is 'yes' in so far as Ameriks discusses and criticizes contemporary interpretations and reveals misunderstandings, and 'no' in so far as it is all too historical: Reinhold wrote at the time of Kant, but we do not. Philosophy has moved on. We do not live at the time of the pantheism dispute. Instead, new problems and fields of study have arisen, such as globalization, quantum theory, genetics, and neuroscience. Should we study Kant and his time if we really want to adopt Reinhold's style? Something more seems needed.

Chapter eight is about Hegel's *Differenzschrift* and plays a 'pivotal' role. Ameriks writes: 'It gives the most concrete account of what I mean by the phenomenon of the historical turn and my grounds for tracing its origins back to Reinhold's distinctively historical reaction to Kant' (p. 11). Indeed, Hegel writes about Fichte and Schelling with reference to Reinhold, and he was their contemporary. The Letters and the *Differenzschrift* combine historical and systematic considerations of the time and we thus can take them as exemplary for the style of the 'historical turn'. But it seems to me that in our time, we must take a second step, into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, if we want to be good Reinholdians.

There are two issues Ameriks connects with this 'historical turn': (a) the method of constellation research and the 'Copernican vertigo' it can lead to, and (b) the task of finding oneself, one's own 'true self'. Both connections are not without problems.

(a) A 'constellation' is a 'group of stars forming a pattern' (p. 293), Ameriks quotes from a dictionary. In this context, we see constellations in Tübingen, Homburg, and Jena (p. 289). Dieter Henrich, in historical research conducted over several decades with the help of many assistants, has revealed the minutest details of 'networks of direct contacts, the influence of supposedly peripheral or minor figures, and the impact of informal and unpublished discussions' (p. 289). The achievements of this research are 'incontrovertible' (p. 296), Ameriks writes. It has 'demonstrated in overwhelming detail that key aspects of the motivation and structure of the fundamental philosophical developments of German Idealism need to be understood from a holistic orientation that goes beyond the entire "public" work of its leading individual proponents. An entire conceptual space (*Denkraum*) of previously invisible connections has to be disclosed in order to make understandable how there could have arisen such unprecedented phenomena as the highly complex and rapid philosophical reactions that immediately followed the works of Kant, Reinhold, and Fichte' (p. 289). As historical research, I think this is most useful. Certainly it is good to correct mistakes, in regard, for instance, to who influenced whom (see p. 296 for the case of Hegel and Hölderlin). But reading and living through so many details and so much text, following all those connections, contacts, influences, motivations, and reactions, takes much time, and I wonder if one then will have enough energy left to do philosophy. Can we really combine such constellation research with the method of the historical turn? Will we have enough energy and time left to think on our own and to make connections to our time? And is the topic always suitable for this?

There is also the danger of the three-fold 'Copernican vertigo', which Ameriks points out: we come to realize dependencies on groups, the possibility of misunderstandings, and the continuous danger of distorting the past through our own projections: 'hermeneutical investigators have to acknowledge that their data and their own position are affected by outside agents, shifting evaluations, and inevitably subjective projections' (p. 301). Here arises a postmodern worry that Ameriks is well aware of. Although he notes that constellation research is 'essentially a matter of rational "debates", and not mere "stimuli" and causes' (p. 298), it seems to me that there is the danger that this kind of research slides too much into the latter and into '*Dichtung*' (p. 299).

(b) The second problem I see regards Ameriks's observation about finding oneself and the right concept of autonomy. We can 'still borrow ... from Idealism's more general idea of autonomy as a kind of "homecoming" (*Heimkunft* [Hölderlin]), as a matter of learning how to acknowledge lasting structures that are rooted in one's own past, one's own actual larger self' (p. 304). The idea is that you must look into your own past if you want to know better who you are. Ameriks connects this with constellation research: 'constellation research itself allows us to see through a maze of preconceptions and to become better at "being true to our philosophical origins"' (p. 305). It is our own ancestors whom we must look at. Thus 'a contemporary Jew learns

Hebrew ... as part of a process of identity formation that reveals and realizes basic truths that would otherwise lie dormant' (p. 279). This is 'a way of becoming one's true "self"' (p. 279). In one's own past, one's own 'family' and philosophical origin, one can find 'sacred' 'charges' still to be fulfilled: 'The "higher need" that we are satisfying when we turn to history then is ... to learn ... how much the past can still reveal to us of what we must yet do to know and truly to satisfy our very own selves. This is always in large part a matter of becoming truer to our own philosophical origins—just as any proper descendants may seek best to realize themselves, as well as their ancestors, by uncovering the deepest and most "sacred" "charges" that have not yet been fulfilled by the event of their own "family"' (pp. 280–1). Yes, this is indeed the way people in the West might want to look at the Greeks or the German Idealists. Heidegger recommended this. But what about the Chinese? Maybe they should look at Confucius. But there is more. We live in a global world now. East and West interact and have to coexist without too much misunderstanding and aggression. There is also the South, and there is Islam. What are their 'sacred' 'charges'? We have to learn not only to live with ourselves, our past, and our own culture, but also with foreigners and different cultures. The 'higher need', I would suggest, should reflect this as well.

This realization is crucial, because Ameriks connects his idea of 'becoming one's true self' with a search for a new concept of autonomy. I wonder whether 'Idealism's more general idea of autonomy as a kind of "homecoming"' is not too narrow and general enough. I also doubt whether this idea of 'homecoming' is in the spirit of the Enlightenment. Would Kant have welcomed this idea? I doubt it. We must not only look back, but also right and left! There we might encounter something different and totally new, foreign cultures that are strange to us, and we should be prepared for this. We therefore should have a concept of autonomy that covers such cases and that allows us to cope with such encounters. Globalization, the internet, the world economy, and interaction with different cultures and different histories require more than just looking into one's own past. Westerners must also read about Confucius. Maybe 'homecoming' is no longer feasible in the way Hölderlin thought.

Ameriks writes about 'the historically educated form of autonomy that constellation research cultivates' and asks: 'Now that the "historical turn" has occurred, in what better way can individuals and groups come to govern themselves than by learning how to appropriate the most hidden and influential powers in their own background?' (p. 306). Well, by looking right and left as well, I would suggest. Maybe today we need a concept of autonomy that is more tolerant and open in certain ways.

After these descriptions and critical comments on Ameriks's ideas of the historical turn, constellation research, and autonomy, I will give some brief accounts of the other essays that are less concerned with those themes.

In the chapter 'Kantian Apperception and the Non-Cartesian Subject', Ameriks distinguishes between inner sense, sense data, the given and the pre-

judgemental on the one side, and apperception, necessary truth and judgement on the other. The general problem is that there must be a 'give' and 'take' (between perception and cognition, or in perception already) and that the two levels must somehow meet and fit each other. There must, Ameriks suggests, be an 'intermediate level' (p. 56) of some sort. A 'simple act of attention' (p. 56) might be a case for such a level. Something might be 'in my mind' without being something 'for me' (p. 58). Only the latter is intentional and presupposes apperception. Ameriks's discussion is lucid and important, as there is now much discussion of non-conceptual content. It seems to me, though, that any introduction of an intermediate level, or even of a first level for that matter, does not, in the end, solve the problem, that is, it does not explain the mutual fitting of what is given and of what is taken. The problem will not go away. (See my 'Spielen nach Kant die Kategorien schon bei der Wahrnehmung eine Rolle? Peter Rohs und John McDowell', *Kant-Studien*, 96, 2005, pp. 407–27, especially pp. 412–6 and pp. 424–6.) It seems to me that in the end, at least within the Kantian conceptual framework, the categories must go 'all the way out' (John McDowell, *Mind and World*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 69) or 'all the way down' (*bis herunter zu den Erscheinungen*, Kant, A 125); also outside this Kantian framework, the problem of how to talk about perception remains a deep conceptual and philosophical problem.

In 'Idealism from Kant to Berkeley', Ameriks explains the differences between two well-known but often conflated kinds of idealism. Berkeley's idealism relies, negatively, on the general nature of (mind-dependent) representations. Kant by contrast builds, positively, on the specific nature of space and time. Ameriks presents the views of some contemporaries of Kant, such as Eberhard, Garve and Jacobi, and discusses van Cleve's recent reading, which he shows to be problematic, if not mistaken. I would have liked to see a comparison of Allison's and Guyer's general views on the nature of transcendental idealism and transcendental realism in this context, especially after Allison's much enlarged 2004 edition of his 1983 book *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).

The chapter 'Kant, Hume, and the Problem of Moral Motivation', discusses desire and moral belief, the question of which comes first, and in what sense it does so. Humeans see desires as basic and moral belief as the result. Kantians see things differently from the start. Ameriks first draws several distinctions from a Kantian perspective, such as between two kinds of desire, one parasitic on thought and the other less than thought; and a distinction between two kinds of determination, one as cause, the other as reason. Then he offers a four-step account of 'value experience' (p. 104) in defense of Kant. It seems to me that it is crucial that already the first step 'the perception of a principle of form that appears as having more than a merely accidental validity' is not just a 'matter of mere belief or thought', but involves sensitivity, feeling, and desire of some sort (p. 104). The second step involves a feeling that is the consequence and even 'effect' of the proper judgement (p. 105). There are thus two kinds of

feeling, and they must not be confused. Ameriks points out that a similar problem can be found in matters of taste (see para. 9 of the third *Critique*).

The Kantian 'thing in itself' is discussed at several places, in particular in 'The Structure and Fate of Kant's Dialectic'. There Ameriks shows how Kant's idealism, in particular the transcendental nature of time and space, makes certain relations between the phenomenal and the noumenal at the level of non-schematized categories possible. Ameriks argues against the 'anodyne' reading and discusses several reactions to Kant's notion of the unconditioned.

Despite the reservations I expressed above regarding the 'historical turn', it must be said that detailed and specialized historical studies can be helpful and that Ameriks offers a wealth of useful material related to Kant. The secondary literature mentioned and commented on is immense; Ameriks offers detailed insights into current German scholarship to the English speaking world.

National Chi Nan University
FLLD
Puli, Nantou 545
Taiwan
wenzelchristian@yahoo.com
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CHRISTIAN HELMUT WENZEL