

History Beyond Epistemology

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Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism, by Charles R. Bambach, *Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995. xii + 297 pp. \$18.95.*

"CHARLES BAMBACH IS Associate Professor of History of Ideas/Philosophy." The author's job description is suggestive of what's exciting and what's problematic about his project. "The Crisis of Historicism" is, for Bambach, not merely the cause for which the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (epochal figure in the subsequent history of modern and post-modern thought) is the effect; it is the "occasion" for "retrieval" of Heidegger in his "genuine" relationship to history. In the process of explaining how Heidegger transmutes an epistemological problem in turn-of-the-century German philosophy of history into a defining crisis in the history of philosophy, Bambach creates for himself the opportunity to read philosophy as the history of ideas, and to read the history of ideas as (hermeneutical) etymology. Does his pre-history of Heidegger's "linguistic turn" beyond "epistemology" adequately serve to anchor this "event" in both the history of philosophy and the history of ideas? Does he, in the process, realize his effort "to situate Heidegger's work within this narrative [of the German academic scene during this period], with an eye toward understanding the Weimar

crisis of historicism as part of a generational leitmotif"?

Bambach's introduction to German intellectual history from 1880 to 1930 is ambitious. His discussion aims "to provide a way of thinking about historicism which links it to an explicitly philosophical reading of modernity and not merely an academic crisis about historiographical method." He gives credit, at the outset, to the modern historiographers Georg Iggers and Jörn Rüsen for "laying bare the ideological presuppositions and political loyalties in historicist thought."

Of most particular significance for the task at hand, according to Bambach, is the work of Peter Reill, Michael Ermath, Host Walter Blanke, and Friedrich Jaeger: work which shows how, contrary to contemporary assumptions about the fundamental opposition between Enlightenment and historicist thinking, "historicism was completely dependent on ideals of scientific thinking from the early modern era, ideals dominated by Cartesian-Kantian notions of rationality, consciousness, methodological access to truth, and philosophical certitude."

That the implications of thinking about historical methodology are not, for Bambach, restricted to historiographical issues is clear from the outset. The author does an excellent job of presenting the epistemological issues which are uppermost in Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert's reflections on the nature of historical knowledge. Both of these philosophers confronted the question of how, with reference to history, truth can be derived from "merely arbitrary and conditioned experience of individual perception." Windelband's distinction between "nomothetic" natural sciences, and "idiographic" cultural sciences was based on his demonstration that

the sciences of nature, whatever their object of research...invariably share a

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common aim: the discovery of laws of phenomena. The sciences of mind, on the other hand...seek to uncover the unique (*einmalig*) element of reality.... The crucial difference between these two approaches, Windelband argued, is formal-logical rather than substantive-empirical.

Windelband's student and colleague, Heinrich Rickert, addressed the ethical danger of relativism inherent in a "historicist" method which set out, in conscious contradistinction to the law-giving natural sciences, to know unique human events in their singularity. Starting from a transcendental theory of values, and from the formal principles of knowledge and "concept-formation," Rickert concluded that historical investigation could provide knowledge of religion, art, the state, the community, economic organization, and ethical precepts as expressions of those values. Rickert certainly drew a tighter connection than had Windelband between history and idealist philosophy. But Rickert's conclusions about those transcendental values which were the only possible ground of historical knowledge rendered temporality and historicity devoid of any epistemological significance whatsoever.

That these neo-Kantian meditations on historical knowledge could not overcome the distinction between noumena and phenomena was, according to Bambach, the least of their problems. Of more immediate significance was the profoundly un-historical character of their thinking; and of even more profound significance were their underlying assumptions about the subject/object metaphysics of scientific thought.

The list of turn-of-the-century German thinkers who joined in the criticism of Rickert for his neglect of the actual circumstances of historical practice included, among others, Georg Simmel, Friedrich Meinecke, and Ernst Troeltsch.

But it is Wilhelm Dilthey who (unlike Windelband or Rickert) appears next to Heidegger in Bambach's title. The author's simultaneous focus on the history of philosophy and the history of ideas seems entirely justified when he discusses Dilthey's recognition, derived from his reading of the Historical School of German historiography (Ranke *et al.*), of the historicity of humans and of the entire social order. Bambach explains how Dilthey drew out the epistemological implications of this perspective into a theory of world views (*Weltanschauungslehre*): "history... opens itself up to us in a way that we understand because we are already involved in it. Its structures are hermeneutical; that is, it is open to us through the process of interpretation." Here, the author notes, Dilthey not only transcended the limited philosophical vision of the historians of the Historical School; he also challenged the Kantian formulation of knowledge-grounded "pure" or absolute consciousness.

In order to establish the scientific foundation for history thus understood, Dilthey distinguished between "formal categories and life-categories" in terms of their relation to time. "The priority of the present as a way of organizing, synthesizing, and giving meaning to the temporal flow of experiential reality provided Dilthey with the conceptual means of understanding the unity and totality of life as 'temporality.'"

The capstone of Bambach's illuminating history of philosophy is his discussion of Heidegger's appropriation of Dilthey insights into the "temporal" conditions of consciousness. Bambach introduces this "event" with a detailed review of Heidegger's own "linguistic turn," which hinges on his reading of Karl Barth. "In Barth's words, the eschatological message of Paul's epistles revealed the genuine meaning of religion as 'the permanent *Krisis* of the rela-

tion between time and eternity.” According to Bambach, it was the early Christian experience of time (not as chronology or history but as “historicity”) which provided Heidegger with “a model of factual-historical life free from the historicist notion of developmental time and recalcitrant to any scientific-scholarly ‘analysis.’” Barth’s work on Paul’s epistles was, for Heidegger, “a kind of ‘hermeneutical manifesto’ that called for an end to traditional research practices so that the living word could speak in the contemporary situation.”

The task of making the living word speak devolved, for Heidegger, into the etymological work necessary for the “*Destruktion* of the Metaphysics of Presence.”

In his remarkable reading of ancient Greek ontology as “metaphysics of presence,” Heidegger came to grasp the unity of the Western philosophical tradition as a projection on beings of a unidimensional concept of time, namely, the time of the “now”: the eternal present. As Heidegger saw it, metaphysics functions as a kind of glaciation—a freezing of the lived experience of the present into the *nunc stans*, or “standing now,” of eternity. But as always in Heidegger’s thinking, the reading of ancient ontology was conceived within the horizon of early Christian theology.

While Barth and Kierkegaard informed Heidegger’s understanding of the futural character of temporality, it was Dilthey, Bambach argues, who “convinced him about the meaning of the past and of historicity.”

“Dilthey insisted...that human beings experience life temporally.... In the experiencing of factual life, past and future form a synchronic whole with the present, a continuity that is not a succession of moments but a living, vital unity.” But, the problem with Dilthey’s reformulation of historical subjectivity was precisely that it still shared, with the work of the neo-Kantians, a commitment to

the notion of epistemological objectivity. Bambach notes that, for Heidegger, “the genuine experience of history... was not about reconstructing facts but about retrieving the meaning of the past within the situation of the present as a possibility for one’s own future.”

From this perspective, the “Crisis of Historicism” could be understood in its “facticity.” “Nihilistic notions about a crisis... were merely the other side of the abiding faith in classical science.” Bambach demonstrates how, for Heidegger, *crisis* occurred when “genuine science and history” were confronted with a “radical decision”; in this case, “a radical decision between *either* history of philosophy as mere cultural and intellectual history (*Geistesgeschichte*) or the enactment (*Vollzug*) of philosophy within the facticity of contemporary life.”

Bambach has produced a sterling history of philosophy. He has shown us how Heidegger’s “peculiar language” constituted “a general assault on the language of traditional metaphysics,” and he has taken us to the originary moment of the post-modern precept that “any interpretation of *Dasein*, or of science, has to be reconceived in terms of the history of thought and its grammatical-linguistic structures.” And yet, strong as he is on the etymology of “crisis,” Bambach is relatively weak on the history of “crisis.” A major part of his effort “has been to situate Heidegger’s work within this narrative [of the German academic scene during this period], with an eye toward understanding the Weimar crisis of historicism as part of a generational leitmotif.” Can the author who has taken us, in his history of philosophy, beyond the bounds of epistemology, approach this “generational leitmotif” “scientifically,” in any Heideggerian sense? To the extent that Bambach disappoints us here, I would argue, his conception of Heideggerian science, “reconceived in terms of the history of thought and its

grammatical-linguistic structures," is somewhat eviscerated.

This is not to say that the author is in any way squeamish when he states that, towards the end of the Weimar period, as Heidegger radicalized his attempts "to elude historicism—by abandoning moral-anthropological decision making for the 'saving power' of Hölderlin's poetic word—he also exposed the limits of his own thinking." Heidegger's own political decision making after 1933 is associated, for Bambach, with "the ominous possibilities of a too forceful destruction of the Western tradition." The author readily concedes that, "blinded by his own Oedipal filiation to 'the one thing that mattered'—the question of being—, Heidegger failed to see the 'event' of Auschwitz."

Bambach argues that the emergence of Heidegger's crisis-consciousness "should not be understood solely in terms of the European political situation after 1933 or Heidegger's affiliation with National Socialism." Indeed, he deserves credit for making the case that "Heidegger's work of the 1920s is incomprehensible without an understanding of the factual-historical conditions of Weimar in an era of cultural upheaval." Bambach's 'retrieval' of Heidegger is itself, in a sense, good Heideggerian history, where "the genuine character of history was not its unique, unrepeatable singularity but its ability to be repeated or retrieved (*wieder-holt*) for future possibilities of *Dasein*." To wit, "in the historical context of early Weimar, Heidegger's thematization of crisis offered a productive way of rethinking the very foundation of the sciences as they had been defined in the Western tradition since Plato and Aristotle."

But does Bambach's treatment of this historical context provide either the means or the incentive to "read Heidegger against himself"; to read "history of ideas as history of philosophy

becoming the possibilities of *Dasein*?" He engages the work of German philosophers in the period from 1880 to 1930 in order to clarify the relationship between the crisis of historicism and what he sees as the crisis-consciousness that shapes the discourse of modernity. Along the way, he clearly distinguishes Heidegger's crisis-consciousness from contemporary use of "crisis rhetoric [as] a ploy to achieve instant relevance."¹ Should we, then, even attempt to locate the meaning of crisis-consciousness for German science, or for Germany? The author notes, accurately enough, that "the term crisis becomes so familiar in [critical scholarly work on this period] that it functions as part scholarly explanation and part cliché."

Bambach himself is still left to "situate Heidegger's work within this narrative [of the German academic scene during this period], with an eye toward understanding the Weimar crisis of historicism as part of a generational *leitmotif*"; and it is not to bristle at the "grammatical linguistic structures" which he uses to frame that *leitmotif*. "Sixteen million casualties later, the intricacies of Rickert's logic no longer offered the same assurance about the 'meaning' (*Sinn*) of history...." "Most concretely, on the barricades in Berlin and the battlements of Verdun, the bourgeois narrative of order and optimism received a terrible blow." Or: "we might begin to see the experience of World War I less as a cause of crisis-consciousness than as a force of acceleration." Beyond Heidegger's "Oedipal filiation to 'the one thing that mattered' — the question of being" (the history of which is at the core of Bambach's monograph), the "generational *leitmotif*" in science and in Germany reads rather like a set of clichés.

The author might respond here that "the essence of history is not anything 'historical' in the sense of historiography or historical research but lies in the

realm of what it means to be."

But that brings us back to a critical point with regard to the relationship between the history of philosophy and the history of ideas. Heidegger, Bambach notes, was deeply impressed with Nietzsche's genealogy of Western values, where the modern era of science culminated in a nihilistic movement of culture—"the history of an error." But Heidegger proceeded to identify Nietzsche as "the last metaphysician of the West," because "the narrative of this history always ended, for Nietzsche, in a decision regarding the meaning of the narrative for life." While Nietzsche defined this crisis as a struggle over values and power, Heidegger interpreted it as a confrontation between "the predominance of beings and the rule of being."

The author is being perfectly scientific, in Heideggerian terms, when he notes that "being is said in many ways; it can take the form of a system expressed with enduring clarity, or it can withdraw into a silence more powerful than the sayings of philosophers, a silence of absence, and an absent other named only by the name of Auschwitz." After such a 'scientific' observation, this reviewer would like to see Bambach take a closer look at Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, with particular regard to the question of "the meaning of this narrative for life."

1. Paul Forman, "Weimar Culture, Causality, and Quantum Theory," *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences*, Vol. 3 (1971), 58.

To Be One's Self

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What Will You Do for an Encore? And Other Stories, by Robert Drake,
Macon, Georgia: Mercer University
Press, 1996. 149 pp. \$22.95.

WHAT WILL YOU DO FOR AN ENCORE? And Other Stories is Robert Drake's sixth collection of short fiction. These twenty-two stories are very short; some of them, as Drake acknowledges, are informal essays which rely rather heavily on fictional techniques. Almost all of them take the reader to Woodville, a small community in west Tennessee fifty miles from Memphis, a community very much like Ripley where Drake grew up.

The most striking feature of these essay-sketches is the strong presence of the first-person narrative voice. This narrator in all but one sketch ("A Sweet Touch") is a man well into middle age who has been a university professor for many years, has many friends, and has traveled widely; in short, the narrator is not altogether unlike Drake himself. One notices too that there is a Drake Brothers' Store in Woodville, and that a number of other Drakes live in the county. There is a grandfather who was with Lee at Appomattox, though no one in the family seems inclined to claim reflected glory from the Confederate connection, certainly not the narrator nor his parents. But the stories Drake's narrator tells, some of them very likely resem-

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