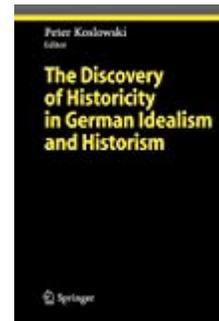




**Peter Koslowski, ed.** *The Discovery of Historicity in German Idealism and Historism.* New York and Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2005. vii + 291 pp. \$129.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-540-24393-9.



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## Reclaiming a German Historiographical Tradition

The volume at hand is the fourth in a series examining the German Historical School.[1] The fourteen contributors to this collection examine its origins, impact and legacy. The book is divided unevenly into three parts: “German Idealism’s Philosophy of History and its Contemporary Critique”; “The Theory of History in German Historism”; and “German Theory and Philosophy of History Today.” Contributors address a variety of issues concerning the theory of history and historiography and the methodology of historical sciences. The first two sections place historism within the context of German idealism and consider how the discovery and absolutizing of the historical manifests itself in a variety of works.

The first and shortest of the three sections includes chapters from Peter L. Oesterreich and Peter Koslowski. Oesterreich’s “Schlegel’s Theory of History and his Critique of Idealistic Reason” maintains that Friedrich Schlegel’s view of history “as a synthesis of criticism, religion and rhetoric” was part of his critique of speculative philosophy (p. 10). Arguing that reason was a form of negative knowledge, capable only of judgment and lacking any creative function, Schlegel advocated a

union of reason and imagination, the positive knowledge that was embedded in faith, through a rhetorical anthropology that united the two and provided the basis for his theory of history. Oesterreich suggests that the union of these three disciplines are at the heart of a Christian universal history that rejects idealist reason.

Peter Koslowski looks at the work of Friedrich Schelling and Franz Baader. Both Hegel and the early Schelling defend a methodological procedure based on the dialectical method as representing the basis of reality, effectively turning a logical structure into an ontological one (p. 24). The later Schelling rejects this view as too abstract, projecting only possibility and not historical fact. Schelling proposes that philosophy must become history and tell the story of becoming. Schelling’s view still posits a knowledge of the absolute and thus remains in the German Idealist tradition. The last section of Koslowski’s chapter explores Baader’s critique of idealism, which rejects the positioning of God within time and history and argues that any philosophy of the absolute has to position itself outside of the absolute in order to comprehend it.

The book's second section, "The Theory of History in German Historicism," includes six chapters that address the impact of the notion of historicity on historical writing in various ways. The three strongest chapters examine individual thinkers and put them into social, educational and cultural context. Helmut Berding notes that Leopold von Ranke's discovery of the particular in history was his great contribution to historical thinking. Berding succinctly shows how this thought was a response to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's philosophy of history and historical empiricism. Ranke rescues the particular from Hegel's teleology by elevating its importance and immediacy to the divine. Through the particular, one can reach the general, but one cannot reach the particular from the general.

Egon Flaig explores Jacob Burckhardt's philosophy of history and theory of historiography, delineating connections between the two and Burckhardt's political position. According to Flaig, Burckhardt identified the key to the success and superiority of occidental culture in its non-utilitarian mindset, an aesthetic disposition. Democracy threatened to end the continuum of this culture because the search for political equality was just a prelude to striving for material equality. If material equality becomes the driving force, then a utilitarian mindset must follow, marking the beginning of the end of occidental culture. Culture was only possible by a people who were willing to make personal sacrifices, not by those driven by material interests. War has an aesthetic value because it provides a great spectacle and calls for people to make personal sacrifices for the common good. For Burckhardt, cultural history becomes the crucial historiographical focus because it can discern the mental disposition of a given society.

Karl Metz offers a sympathetic portrayal of Heinrich von Treitschke in his chapter, "Historiography as Political Activity: Heinrich von Treitschke and the Historical Reconstruction of Politics." Metz maintains that Treitschke's own view of history dictated political involvement. If the particular is important (as Ranke would suggest), then activity in the historical moment was a necessity. But action was always contingent upon circumstances (the essence of *Realpolitik*); there was no eternal or absolutist condition. Metz identifies "the Treitschkean paradox: the ambivalence of an activist undermined by relativity" (p. 101). Political commitment becomes a commitment to life; the historian's public role was to provide historical knowledge that could inspire and guide action (p. 101).

Annette Wittkau-Horgby's contribution compares how Johann Gustav Droysen and Nietzsche responded to the discovery of historicity. Droysen maintained that human nature was essentially historical and that an understanding of one's own historicity was essential to historical understanding. Wittkau-Horgby argues that Droysen's epistemological concept of history as an empirical science was modern, but that it was embedded within a Hegelian philosophy of history (p. 67). Friedrich Nietzsche, in "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life," tries to break the connection between empirical history and a philosophical framework. Hegel's philosophy had the effect of causing people to accept, if not worship, the present state of affairs. Similarly, Wittkau-Horgby claims that Nietzsche saw no use for scientific history at all because it overwhelmed people into inaction. Historicity promoted a relativity that could lead to inaction and discouraged people from taking charge and assuming responsibility for their own lives. Wittkau-Horgby finds in Max Weber a combination of the best of Droysen and Nietzsche. Weber embraces Droysen's empiricism with a Nietzschean recognition that people must develop programs that address present conditions.

The last two chapters focus less on particular thinkers and more on particular theoretical approaches. Daniel Fulda applies the epistemological tools of literary criticism to history and the historical narrative. The position articulated here will be familiar to anyone who has read Fulda's earlier work, or that of Hayden White.[2] Mario Signore's "Social and Philosophical Theory in Nineteenth-Century German Thought" traces the impact of historicism on "the development of the social-historical" (p. 134). Tracing the impact of this thought through Wilhelm Dilthey, Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert and Alfred Schütz, Signore explores what he calls "the hermeneutic opening" that encourages an understanding of sociological theory that is aware of its theoretical structures.

The last section explores contemporary discussions about the philosophy of history. An essay by the late Hans Michael Baumgartner, "Philosophy of History after the End of Formative Substantial Philosophy of History: Remarks on the Present State of the Philosophy of History," frames the issues for the section. The rest of the chapters in this section either directly or indirectly address questions delineated by Baumgartner. The essay maps the rise and decline of the philosophy of history as a crucial component in the field of philosophy. The consequences of this decline leave the philosophy of history as little more than an epistemology of historical reason

that explains the logic behind our knowledge of history, but has no predictive power.

Three of the contributors to this section—Herta Nagl-Docekal, Matthias Lutz-Bachmann and Heinz Dieter Kittsteiner—turn to Immanuel Kant, suggesting in various fashions that many of the critiques of the philosophy of history do not apply to Kant. Nagl-Docekal argues that the presentation of Kant’s view of history as progress is a one-sided view that does not note the possibility of contingency in Kant’s work. Kant’s philosophy of history demonstrates that progress is possible, not a necessity. Lutz-Bachmann turns to Kant to answer Michel Foucault’s and Frank R. Ankersmit’s criticisms of history and the idea of “single histories.” Lutz-Bachmann suggests that Kant’s view has a greater degree of contingency and a better understanding of the historical than either of the two later critics. Kittsteiner also emphasizes Kant’s “epistemic modesty” (p. 274) as a way to combat accusations of absolute knowledge, and looks to cultural history as a pursuit that can revitalize the philosophy of history—albeit more modestly than its nineteenth-century champions.

Johannes Rohbeck attempts to rehabilitate the philosophy of history through technology. He argues that since the Enlightenment, the philosophy of history has focused on the emerging of the modern. What Rohbeck calls the “process of civilization” forms the basis for the idea of history as progress that simply cannot be questioned (p. 189). On an empirical level, scientific and technological advancement cannot be challenged; even such critics of these developments (we think of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno) indirectly acknowledge the accomplishments of “technological civilization.” Rohbeck wants to develop a philosophy of history that is “both methodologically reflective and, at the same time, material” (p. 192). Rohbeck believes that this task can be accomplished by focusing on a culture of technological civilization.[3]

Horst Walter Blanke’s contribution may be the single most useful article in this collection. After providing a brief overview of the types and functions of the history of historiography, he examines various criticisms of historiographical approaches. He summarizes two multi-volume group efforts to re-examine and re-invigorate historical theory: *Theorie der Geschichte. Beiträge zur Historik* and *Geschichtsdiskurs*. [4] The article provides a solid overview of both projects and weighs their strengths and weaknesses. It could serve graduate students as an excellent introduction to the state of historical methodology in Germany.

As a whole, the collection is interesting and useful. Most of the chapters would serve as good starting points for their respective topics, if only to point the student or researcher to the larger monographs from which several were taken. Unfortunately, it is a rather expensive book and may not find as large an audience as it might merit at a time when smaller college libraries are facing budget constraints. From a production standpoint, there are enough inconsistencies that it merits mentioning. No uniform style was used in the documentation and translation of various passages in individual chapters; moreover, a number of chapters needed closer copy editing, as numerous typographical and typesetting errors were made.

#### Notes

[1]. The volume is part of a project, “The Historical School: Economics, Economic Ethics, Theory and Philosophy of History, Law and Political Science in the German Human and Social Sciences Tradition,” supported by the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung. The other volumes in the series, also edited by Koslowski and published by Springer, are: *The Theory of Ethical Economy in the Historical School: Wilhelm Roscher, Lorenz von Stein, Gustav Schmoller, Wilhelm Dilthey and Contemporary Theory* (1995), *Methodology of the Social Sciences, Ethics and Economics in the Newer Historical School: From Max Weber and Rickert to Sombart and Rothacker* (1997), and *The Historicity of Economics: Continuities and Discontinuities of Historical Thought in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Economics* (2002).

[2]. See Fulda’s *Wissenschaft als Kunst. Die Entstehung der modernen deutschen Geschichtsschreibung 1760-1860* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1999); and “Die Texte der Geschichte. Zur Poetik modernen historischen Denkens,” *Poetica* 21 (1999): pp. 29-60; Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

[3]. Rohbeck has explored these issues more fully in earlier works. See his *Die Fortschrittstheorie der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 1987) and *Technologische Urteilskraft. Zu einer Ethik technischen Handelns* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1993).

[4]. The first series is published with various editors as *Theorie der Geschichte. Beiträge zur Historik*, 6 vols. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1977-1990); Wolfgang Kuettler, ed., *Geschichtsdiskurs*, 5 vols. (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1993-1999).

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