

Frederick C. Beiser. *After Hegel: German Philosophy, 1840–1900.* Princeton University Press 2014. 248 pp. \$29.95 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780691163093); \$24.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9780691173719).

The received view, against which Beiser's book is directed, depicts the history of German philosophy in the nineteenth century as a brief period of intense philosophical production during the first three decades, followed by a long lacuna. Even though philosophy never ceased to be an academic discipline during the century, its representatives were, as Beiser summarizes this narrative, either 'idealist epigones, who were not original, or [...] materialists, who were not really philosophers at all' (2). The sheer volume of such forgotten biographies and neglected oeuvres itself would, I think, warrant scholarly attention, but Beiser makes a convincing case that the latter longer part of the century is just as interesting as the glorious decades of Classical German Idealism that suddenly collapsed within one decade of Hegel's premature death in 1831. As a matter of fact, Beiser points out, it was the second disrespected part of the century when philosophy was revolutionary, rather than resembling the normal working of sciences, insofar as philosophers after the demise of German Idealism 'asked themselves the most basic questions about their discipline: What is philosophy? How does it differ from empirical science? Why should we do philosophy?' (3). Taking into consideration another novelty of the period, namely that these questions 'were reinterpreted in completely secular terms' at the first time, one wonders how the achievements of this 'rich and revolutionary age' (6) could have been overlooked at all?

The Manichaeian view of nineteenth-century German philosophy is, of course, an artificial construct by its contemporaneous participants. Beiser emphasises Hegel's deliberate exclusion of his contenders, which led to a subterranean 'lost tradition' (10) of German idealism that actually lasted until the end of the century (cf. also his 'Two Traditions of Idealism.' In *From Hegel to Windelband: Historiography of Philosophy in the 19th Century*, edited by Gerald Hartung and Valentin Pluder), as well as Karl Löwith's influential narrative that transformed the history of nineteenth-century post-Hegelian philosophy into the prehistory of twentieth-century Marxism and existentialism. In fact, the rise and fall of philosophy was a topos widely employed as early the 1870s: 'In the first decades of our century the lecture halls of German philosophers were packed, in recent times the flood is followed upon by a deep low tide,' Franz Brentano declared in his inaugural lecture at the University of Vienna in 1874 (*Ueber die Gründe der Entmuthigung auf philosophischem Gebiete*, Wilhelm Braumüller: 1874, 4), echoing the complaints of Eduard Zeller in his inaugural lecture in the capital of Germany two years earlier (*Vorträge und Abhandlungen. Zweite Sammlung*, Fues: 1877, 467–468). The contemporaneous Anglophone readers were not uninformed either: 'the decline of the speculative systems so long prevailing,' Wilhelm Wundt informed the readers of the *Mind*, was 'followed by the rise of no new theory of the universe obtaining a similar general acceptance. [...] Metaphysic is treated historically and critically in the succession of philosophical systems, as a science, so to speak, that has passed away' ('Philosophy in Germany.' *Mind* 2 (8), 1877: 493–518; 494–496).

Wundt's statements, together with the fact that he has meanwhile been reassigned to the history of psychology as an empirical science, already delineate many of the key themes—philosophy's pluralisation and its contested relation to positive sciences, the rise of historicism, etc.—that a historian of post-Hegelian German philosophy should address, and Beiser fulfils this task with the aid of an original and rewarding historiographic methodology. His book is not organised

thematically or in a strictly chronological manner, but rather it is structured along contemporaneous *controversies*, i.e., such ‘issues, which are still of interest today’ but which were ‘also important to contemporaries themselves’ (13). This innovative historiographic principle helps him navigate the *via media* between the Scylla of anachronistic *Problemgeschichte* and the Charybdis of writing an anachronistic and boring *Lives of Eminent Post-Hegelian Philosophers* in the doxographic manner epitomized by Diogenes Laertius. Beiser’s protagonists are not dealt with in separate sections, but repeatedly re-emerge during the investigations of the controversies they were engaged in. An additional benefit of the methodology adopted by Beiser is that his history is attentive to the so-called minor figures who had actually participated in those controversies but subsequently fallen into oblivion and were excluded from the classical grand narratives.

Beiser’s introductory first chapter is both an exposition of the metaphilosophical landscape and a set of thematic demarcations in disguise. Philosophy’s challenged role was to be restored either by conceiving it as a first-order science—anticipated by one aspect of Trendelenburg’s ambiguous organic teleological idealism and explicated by Hartmann’s deliberate conception of ‘philosophy as the metaphysics of the natural sciences’ (45)—or a second-order enterprise that is not a direct contender to positive sciences: Sciences ‘always deal with some aspect of the world, whereas the philosopher analyzes discourse about that world’ (37). The latter role was first assumed by the left-wing Hegelians, declared by Trendelenburg and perfected by the neo-Kantians. The success of the latter option cannot be overestimated. It ‘ensured philosophy against obsolescence at the hands of the sciences’ (38) up to the point of turning philosophy into a rigorous science. A different metaphilosophical option is manifest in the subliminal hermeneutical tradition of early post-Hegelian philosophy that, at the same time, avoids the too narrow focus on theoretical philosophy by (some) neo-Kantians. Beiser explores Schopenhauer’s aim ‘to decipher appearances’ (quoted at 35) behind his practical metaphysics and puts an emphasis on Dilthey’s indebtedness to Schopenhauer (see 49, n. 61). In this chapter, Beiser also introduces a number of clever thematic demarcations. His reason for not focusing on left-wing Hegelianism is its incapacity to become aligned with institutional forms of philosophizing (cf. 27-28), and, similarly, Beiser’s exposition of the inherent tensions of the neo-Kantian definition of philosophy could be regarded as a rationale for not choosing it as the guiding line of his investigations.

The idea that the nineteenth-century post-Hegelian was underpinned by a series of major controversies was recently articulated by Kurt Bayert *et al.*, who published a set of volumes consisting of primary sources and interpretative essays entitled ‘*Der Materialismus-Streit*,’ ‘*Der Darwinismus-Streit*,’ and ‘*Der Ignorabimus-Streit*.’ Beiser proposes a different classification of these controversies, insofar as he includes the first and the last, adds the ‘Pessimism Controversy,’ as well a chapter on the rise of historicism in which he draws on his previous research in this field (*The German Historicist Tradition*, Oxford University Press: 2011).

Beiser’s treatment of these controversies is simultaneously precise, comprehensive, and accessible, exemplifying the best tradition of Anglophone philosophical historiography. Unlike Klaus Christian Köhnke’s seminal book (*Entstehung und Aufstieg des Neukantianismus: Die deutsche Universitätsphilosophie zwischen Idealismus und Positivismus*, Suhrkamp: 1986) that pioneered the study of post-Hegelian *Universitätsphilosophie*, Beiser also strikes a fortunate balance with regard to the explanatory role of external factors. He, for example, rejects Köhnke’s thesis that political uproar caused by the assassination attempt on the Kaiser occasioned the radical

transformation of the neo-Kantian conception of philosophy (404 ff.; recently reinforced by Ulrich Sieg: *Geist und Gewalt. Deutsche Philosophen zwischen Kaiserreich und Nationalsozialismus*, Hanser: 2013, 14 ff.). On the other hand, Beiser seems to agree with Bayertz *et al.* ('Einleitung der Herausgeber.' In *Der Ignorabimus-Streit*, edited by Kurt Bayertz, Myriam Gerhard, and Walter Jaeschke) that du Bois-Reymond's privileged position in the contemporaneous networks of natural sciences explains why du Bois-Reymond's admittedly philosophically unoriginal apology of the intrinsic limits of scientific knowledge could have ignited the Ignorabimus Debate: 'from the mouth of the devil, came a *mea culpa*' (98, cf. 102).

Despite his justified concern for the contemporary relevance of his historical subject-matter, Beiser rightly warns against the hasty identification of today's analytical philosopher with its closest post-Hegelian counterpart, the 'neo-Kantian of the 1860s' who 'was a very different animal' (51). There is, however, another current of contemporary philosophy, namely phenomenology, the roots of which lie precisely in the period investigated by Beiser. A considerable amount of historical and philosophical lessons are sacrificed by Beiser's exclusion of Early Phenomenology (i.e., the School of Brentano, the early Husserl, the Göttingen and München circles of phenomenology, and, maybe, the pre-1916 Heidegger). There are, I think, intrinsic reasons for Beiser to include them in his coverage. Unlike his simultaneously published monumental study of the origins of neo-Kantianism (*The Genesis of neo-Kantianism, 1796 – 1880*, Oxford UP: 2014), the present book has no natural ending. The long nineteenth century, as a period of German cultural and intellectual history, obviously did not end until September 1914. In particular, there is no reason for the omission of the psychologism controversy, the origins of which definitely antedated the turn of the century (contra ix). It was not only the topos of the rise and fall of philosophy that was shared by Brentano and the subsequent early phenomenologists. Many of the protagonists of Beiser's 'lost tradition' of idealism and psychological Kantianism also figured in the intellectual formation of Husserl—first and foremost Herbart, the official philosopher of Husserl's native Austro-Hungary. On the city map of Berlin, '*Herbartstraße*' is equally a side street to the old and new '*Kantstraße*.'

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