

Kant and the Historical Turn

Philosophy as Critical Interpretation

KARL AMERIKS

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Introduction: On the Very Notion of a Historical Turn in Philosophy

Plainly put: the idea of science is research; that of philosophy is interpretation [*Deutung*]. In this remains the great, perhaps the eternal paradox: philosophy, ever and always and with the claim of truth, must proceed interpretively without ever possessing a key to interpretation: nothing more is given to it than fleeting, disappearing traces within the ciphers [*Rätselfiguren*] of what is and their wondrous entwinings. The history of philosophy is nothing other than the history of such entwinings. That is why it reaches so few 'results', why it must always begin anew, and why it cannot do without the slightest thread which earlier times have spun, and which perhaps completes the literature that might transform the ciphers into a text.¹

I. BACKGROUND

1. An Old Dichotomy on History

The steady growth of interest in historical development, and in the historical dimension of philosophy in particular, is a phenomenon that calls for explanation. Even more than the exact sciences, philosophy has generally striven to be a discipline that escapes the contingencies of time, or at least the limitations of particular historical frameworks and empirical disciplines. This is true not only of ancient and medieval philosophy but also of the modern philosophical systems that came with the rise of the 'new physics' in the era of Galileo, Descartes, and Newton. Very much the same kind of commitment to ahistorical procedures and indubitable first truths can be found at the beginning of each of the main phases of modern philosophy: in the programs of the rationalists and empiricists, of the

¹ Theodor Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), i. 334. Cited in Fred Rush, 'Conceptual Foundations of Early Critical Theory', in Fred Rush (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 33.

Kantians and the post-Kantian German Idealists, and of the first positivists, phenomenologists, and analytic philosophers.²

In the second half of the eighteenth century, however, there arose a very different perspective, a historicist position that was generated in large part by a popular interest in the radical diversity of cultures and a growing sense of the limitations of modernity. This perspective began to affect philosophy in a fundamental way through the idea that the history of thought is too diverse to be regarded as exhibiting either a linear and quasi-providential pattern of progress or a structure that simply parallels social and geographical differences (which might merely reflect an eternal cycle of limited options). This historicist perspective was largely shaped by the work of figures such as Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), who stressed the notion of a ‘spirit of the age’ and the idea that philosophy should begin from the recognition that history takes the form of a sequence of ‘spirits’, each expressing the thought of its own distinctive era. According to this perspective, earlier ‘ages’ in history are especially valuable precisely because they can be very much unlike current times. They are not to be understood ‘whiggishly’ as mere anticipations of the present age, and yet it is also important to recognize that they may have influenced later thought in a variety of underappreciated ways. On this view, the main value of philosophy turns out to lie not in the discovery of ‘eternal truths’ or a path toward a quasi-scientific convergence on one natural system, but in the appreciation and display of a sequentially related multiplicity of highly varied and often incommensurable insights.

In principle, the descriptive belief that there is a wide variety in the history of thought might be accompanied by a normative belief in a set of underlying substantive standards that could still make it relatively easy to explain and evaluate philosophical changes throughout the different ages leading up to our own time. In practice, however, the modern philosophical emphasis on history has come to be understood largely in terms of the historicist view that the more we learn about the past, the more sensible it seems to give up any confidence that there are substantive standards by which we can judge (and build our own philosophy on the basis of) the most remarkable intellectual achievements of earlier cultures—with respect to either their own time or their complex, and often subterranean, long-term effects. Even if, for many modern readers, writers such as Locke or Voltaire, for example, may seem obviously superior to Old Testament ‘authors’ or ‘pre-Socratic philosophers’, for a typical historicist a comparison like this may not even make much sense. This view can lead to a relativistic attitude across the board. Our own favorite philosophy (aside from its purely formal elements) can appear to be little more than the expression of a particular age, an age that is dependent on others in countless hidden ways and is but one of

² ‘Idealism’ will be capitalized in references specifically to the movement of German Idealism; similarly, ‘Critical’ in references to the Critical philosophy of Kant, and ‘Romanticism’ in references to German Romanticism.

numerous ‘equally valid’ ages. One then might even begin to wonder why, if one is to be consistent, any special weight should be given to the very historicism that largely defines our own age’s perspective. But even if historicists cannot find an Archimedean point from which to resolve this question, they can still reply that they cannot help but hold on to their own historicism, for it is simply a fact that they do not see how they can commit themselves to any positive alternative.

2. A New Post-Kantian Option

The positions on history noted so far might seem to exhaust the main options on the table since the eighteenth century, including the era of German philosophy from Kant through Hegel. On this issue, this period is in fact generally approached in terms of two directly opposed positions: the classical and largely ahistorical tradition, which culminates in Kant’s (1724–1804) system of ‘pure reason’, and the post-Kantian tradition, which is defined by an insistence (for example, in Schelling, Hegel, and Friedrich Schlegel) on very close attention to history and the limitations of so-called pure reason. This stark contrast, however, covers over a nest of highly relevant complications.

For example, although a merely chronological perspective might seem to make Kant (who was Herder’s teacher) the obvious starting point here, the culmination of Kant’s Critical work and most of his writings concerning history were in fact preceded in an important way by Herder’s publications. Kant entered the controversy at a relatively late date, through a review in which he expressed a sharply negative reaction to the first installment of Herder’s ‘non-scientific’ *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784), a work that had been prefigured by earlier writings by Herder such as ‘This, Too, a Philosophy of History’ (1774).³ These publications reflect the fact that from early on Herder’s career was remarkably open to many different traditions. From Kant’s early lectures in Königsberg (1762–4), Herder learned the largely scholastic and ahistorical philosophy of the Leibnizian tradition (as expressed in the texts of Wolff and Baumgarten), but his early career also revealed to him a very different side of the world. Unlike Kant, Herder ventured to other lands, and during his early stay in Riga (1764–9)

³ For a review of the controversy, see Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 291–301, and cf. 129–30, 208–9, and 223–4. The November 1784 *Berlinsche Monatschrift* published an article by Kant entitled ‘Idea [rather than Ideas] for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View’, trans. in *Kant on History*, ed. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 11–26. The controversy began, however, after Kant’s reading of Herder’s *Ideas* resulted in his harsh reviews of the book in the January and November 1785 *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* (Jena), translated as ‘Reviews of Herder’s *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind*’, in *Kant on History*, 27–52. In an anonymous article, ‘Schreiben des Pfarrers zu *** an den Herausgeber des T.M. über eine Recension von Herders “Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie der Menschheit”’, *Der Teutsche Merkur*, 2 (Feb. 1785), 148–73, Reinhold defended Herder (who had presided at his wedding) against Kant’s first review, but soon thereafter he converted to Kant’s philosophy.

he was deeply impressed by the astounding variety of the ancient folksongs of the local Latvian population and by the philosophical significance of the phenomenon of folk culture in general. He moved on to become directly familiar with French culture, and by the time he had befriended Goethe and settled in Weimar he was thoroughly steeped in the cosmopolitan and historical strand of Enlightenment thought expressed in works such as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's (1729–81) *The Education of the Human Race* (1778).

These points are a reminder of a significant fact, namely that by the time that Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* first became a significant influence—right after Reinhold's *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* of 1786–7 but before the first writings of Hegel and his generation in the mid-1790s—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 relativist readings of work by Lessing, Herder, and others fascinated by newly discovered complexities in the development of classical and Judeo-Christian culture.⁴ Both these orientations left some mark on every great thinker of the time. Kant was influenced not only by Newton and the seemingly apodictic results of the scientific revolution but also by Rousseau's writings (for example, *Emile* (1762)) on the interrelation of morality, culture, and education. Although the notion of an eternal and transparent moral law 'within' pure reason itself defines the most fundamental layer of Kant's practical thought, influences such as Rousseau's call for a new world of political freedom, the rise of the Enlightenment in Germany, and the enduring tradition of 'salvation history' all combined to give Kant's final system a shape that resembled Lessing's in several ways.⁵ For both thinkers, the chief interest of humanity requires for its fulfillment a long and painful development through several specific stages of culture, morality, and religion. On the one hand, these stages increasingly satisfy the inherent rational potential of human nature; on the other hand, their actual development requires working through a sequence of events and conflicts that cannot be fully experienced or properly explained by reason alone.

Hegel and the other main figures in the German Idealist tradition all picked up on attractive features common to the views of Rousseau, Lessing, Herder, and Kant, and they each in their own way worked out a philosophy oriented

⁴ See Jan Assman, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). Assman investigates the general notion that 'we are what we remember', and he stresses eighteenth-century uses of history, especially by figures such as Reinhold, who emphasized traces of rational religion even in the earliest mystical strands of 'Western' thought. Cf. Sabine Roehr, 'Reinholds Hybräische Mysterien oder die älteste religiöse Freimauerey: Eine Apologie des Freimauertums', in Martin Bondeli and Alessandro Lazzari (eds.), *Philosophie ohne Beynamen. System, Freiheit und Geschichte im Denken Karl Leonhard Reinholds* (Basle: Schwabe, 2004), 147–65.

⁵ See Henry E. Allison, *Lessing and the Enlightenment: his Philosophy of Religion and its Relation to Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), and Allen W. Wood, *Kant* (Malden, MA/Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), ch. 6.

towards the notion of a fulfillment of 'reason in history'. Despite the complexities of this notion, however, and the many deep similarities in some kind of commitment to it in all the German Idealist philosophies, there remain understandable grounds for ultimately contrasting Kant and the post-Kantians on the issue of history. Kant and his orthodox followers are generally understood as oriented toward what is still a primarily ahistorical and optimistic vision of reason and philosophy (albeit one that extends its ultimate rational optimism to the structure of history as well), whereas post-Kantians (such as especially Hegel and his main followers) are usually read as oriented toward what is ultimately a much more historical conception of reason and philosophy, one that can *seem* to have become ever more popular precisely to the extent that it resembled a form of historicism.⁶ Although a few 'orthodox' Hegelians may have maintained a heavy stress on reason 'over' history, Hegel's most influential followers have done the opposite, especially when they have become advocates of radical versions of movements such as socialism and pragmatism. The most interesting philosophers among them have usually had little sympathy for Hegel's *Logic* and those aspects of his thought that seem to be defined by an underlying ahistorical system of metaphysical concepts, one that appears to leave only an incidental or largely symbolic role for all talk of contingencies and radically alternative developments in spirit.⁷

For these reasons it might seem that most of the significant ideas concerning history that contemporary philosophers have tended to associate with Hegel and the Hegelian tradition might just as well be identified with the historicist views suggested by the work of earlier figures such as Herder.⁸ Nonetheless, and without in any way minimizing Herder's significance,⁹ I believe it is important

⁶ See, e.g., Theodore Ziolkowski, *Clio the Romantic Muse: Historicizing the Faculties in Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

⁷ For a helpful reconstruction and evaluation of historical elements in Hegel's presentation of his system, see Robert Brandom, 'Sketch of a Program for a Critical Reading of Hegel: Comparing Empirical and Logical Concepts', *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus/International Yearbook of German Idealism*, 3 (2005), 131–61, and 'Responses to Pippin, Macbeth and Hauge-land', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 13 (2005), 432. For other Hegelian perspectives on this issue, see Robert B. Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), ch. 2; and George di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and his Immediate Successors: The Vocation of Humankind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 296: 'he [Hegel] is in fact operating with Reinhold's explanation of the genesis of the idealistic model of experience.'

⁸ For an extremely sympathetic discussion of Herder's significance, see Michael Forster, 'Introduction', in Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). See also John Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002); and Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), ch. 5.

⁹ To some extent, it may be largely an accident of history that, for those in Anglophone philosophy who are interested in historical considerations, Hegel's work has dominated discussion at Herder's expense. Before their resuscitation by writers such as Charles Taylor, Herder's ideas were acknowledged by major philosophers only implicitly if at all. See Taylor, 'The Importance of Herder', in Edna Margalit and Arishai Margalit (eds.), *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 40–63. Herder's work may have been left in relative obscurity

to distinguish (what I take to be) the kind of historicism often associated with Herder from the *non-historicist* but genuinely philosophical kind of deep interest in history that arose somewhat later with Reinhold and Hegel—and *immediately after* the effect of Kant's highly systematic Critical philosophy (which had no effect on Herder). More generally, I am proposing a fundamental contrast between historicism as such—as a radical new way of thinking that ultimately undermines the whole notion of systematic philosophy as a distinctive and progressive enterprise—and a more complex and moderate invocation of historical considerations, a 'historical turn' that involves drastically modifying philosophy with respect to the style of its expression while still leaving room for a permanent and non-relative value in many of its systematic claims.

To be more precise, there are at least four different kinds of phenomena, all playing an especially significant role in late-eighteenth-century German thought, that must be kept distinct: (*a*) a growing and detailed *interest in historical facts* as such, but one that may leave no mark on philosophy other than to provide incidental examples for illustrating various ideas; (*b*) a *strongly optimistic view* that history functions in philosophy largely as in science and therefore (given a fairly simple model of scientific progress) has a transparent progressive form whose core rational content could be adequately expressed even without direct recourse to historical considerations; (*c*) a relativistic use of history for philosophical purposes, that is, *historicism*; and (*d*) the complex presumption of a *historical turn*—that is, a philosophical position that goes beyond (*a*) and (*b*), but holds back from (*c*), in stressing that historical considerations are a crucial part of the effective presentation of at least some arguments central to philosophy as a developing systematic discipline.

3. Reinhold's Role

Even with all these distinctions in hand, it is by no means easy to explain exactly what it is about post-Kantian philosophy in general that allows it to be defined in this way—that is, as involving a historical turn that is philosophically fruitful and not a mere bundle of contradictory tendencies. This is a problem with implications for understanding not only the first generation of post-Kantian thought but also the whole broad sweep of its influence throughout the work of left-wing Hegelians, Nietzsche, Dilthey, Heidegger, and all their French and Anglophone followers into the present era. Does their kind of intense concern with history define a position that ultimately has to amount to a kind of anti-philosophy, or can it have roots in a position that instead allows for (and may even require) a

in English because to some readers it seemed tainted with proto-fascist irrationalism and was difficult to classify in traditional systematic terms, whereas Hegel's work at least had a clearly philosophical form and a direct connection with progressive movements such as Marxism. See Isaiah Berlin's influential work on the so-called Counter-Enlightenment, e.g., *Vico and Herder* (London: Hogarth, 1976).

genuinely productive combination of historical and non-historical philosophical considerations?

I believe that a significant new angle on this question can be found by considering the highly influential but relatively forgotten writings of Kant's first major interpreter, Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1757–1823). Reinhold was not only responsible for turning the *Critique of Pure Reason* into a surprising popular sensation (and for turning Jena into the birthplace of German Idealism); he was also a writer who became obsessed, especially during the period of his interaction with Kant, with overcoming the threat of historicism precisely by developing a style requiring 'a productive combination of historical and non-historical philosophical considerations'.

There is a reason why this style needed to be developed at this time. The first edition of the *Critique* in 1781 was the major intellectual event of its day, but it completely perplexed even its best-prepared readers—until the appearance in 1786–7 of Reinhold's *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* in the well-known Weimar journal *Der Teutsche Merkur*. Reinhold succeeded in making the main 'results' of the *Critique*, namely its hint of a moral proof of God and immortality, seem understandable and highly relevant to an extraordinarily wide-ranging audience. Reinhold ignored most of the body of Kant's very long book and simply presented the *Critique* as a positive resolution to the long history of religious conflicts that he took to be the defining factor of the 'spirit of the age'.¹⁰ By focusing effectively on the sketchy but appealing practical doctrines discussed briefly at the end of the *Critique*, Reinhold succeeded in arousing a keen interest in the Critical system in both popular and academic circles. This success, however, came at a significant cost: it was only by forgoing any attempt to explain the complex details of the theoretical 'grounds' of the Critical system that Reinhold's *Letters* managed to make Kant's philosophy appear so easily comprehensible and historically relevant. Moreover, when Reinhold eventually turned in detail to theoretical philosophy as such, he at first expressed himself in terms of a questionable but highly influential foundationalist 'theory of the faculty of representation' that deviated in several ways from Kant's own system. Reinhold originally introduced his foundationalist modifications without significant revisionist intentions and simply because he believed that they would make a universal acceptance of the 'spirit' of the Critical philosophy all the easier (and more stable), given the historical character of the modern 'age', which called for readily graspable concepts. To the annoyance of Kant and orthodox Kantians, something very unexpected happened instead: a whole generation of philosophers soon began to leave Kant's work itself behind. A succession of remarkable Jena professors immediately devoted themselves to extensive disputes

¹⁰ See Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, ch. 8, and my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), ch. 2.

with Reinhold and one another about ever new ways to justify post-Kantian systems of their own by showing how they did an even better job of satisfying the ‘needs of the age’.

The astoundingly productive chaos of interpretive conflicts that ensued in German philosophy in the 1790s, even after the *Letters*, surprised Reinhold as much as anyone else. He had long prided himself on his work as a clear synthesizer and mediator, and he had hoped to bring about a quick consensus. Reinhold was an ally of groups such as the Illuminati, and he had long been devoted to a radical Enlightenment program that aimed at thoroughly altering European culture by finally reconciling its popular and ruling classes. After reading the *Critique*, Reinhold believed he had found the ideal instrument for accomplishing this project, an apodictic systematic philosophy that could be universally administered by a new class of enlightened educators. The extensive social and political dimensions of this project have become fairly well exposed by historical research.¹¹ What has not been adequately appreciated so far, however, is the fact that Reinhold was especially well prepared for this project because his own work, *prior* to his encountering Kant’s philosophy, was distinctive in being deeply rooted in *both* of the two philosophical traditions discussed earlier. From Leibniz, and the ‘scholastic’ tradition in general (which he studied while training as a priest, before turning against Catholicism), Reinhold learned the importance of dissecting and ‘clearing up’ (a phrase that in German signifies *Aufklärung*, Enlightenment) key terms, and hence, unlike Herder, he was deeply attracted to the belief that philosophical analysis could systematically resolve disputes—outside as well as inside the university. From Herder, however, Reinhold learned that human development had gone through a wide variety of historical stages, and that, looking back, philosophers must pay very close attention to the specific ‘spirit of the age’ at each step, for this is the crucial precondition for the creation and reception of significant philosophical work even of an analytic kind. Hence, in both his initial confident presentation of Kant’s system as well as his later frustrated accounts of its ‘fate’ of being repeatedly misunderstood (even after, as well as before, Reinhold’s own efforts), Reinhold’s work took on a highly distinctive dual form. He maintained an underlying systematic and ‘suprahistorical’ optimism even in his constant focus on the historical task of uncovering the decisive underlying human ‘need’ at each stage of philosophical development, for these needs determined what could count as a proper acceptance or crucial misunderstanding of rational philosophy in a particular context. (It is typical that Kant speaks of a single fundamental and eternal ‘need’ of pure practical reason, whereas Herder, Reinhold, and Hegel stress the notion of basic but plural historical needs of reason.) Reinhold’s focus

¹¹ See above, n. 4, and ‘Further Reading’ in Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, ed. Karl Ameriks, trans. James Hebbeler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. xxxix–xlii.

on history in this way was unusual and especially significant because, especially after he had studied Kant, it was not the result of any attachment to historicism but was rather part of a very well-thought-out attempt to maintain the ideal of a universally valid systematic philosophy even while vividly emphasizing the significance of the development of a host of competing traditions and schools.¹²

These points help explain the remarkable fact that Reinhold was the first to devote an essay to a genuinely modern and philosophical treatment of the nature of the history of philosophy itself. They also explain the enormously influential style of Reinhold's writing, especially once he became entangled in ever intensifying battles over what he called the 'fate' and true 'spirit' of the Critical philosophy. Instead of writing merely in the popular Enlightenment mode of an analytic 'Leibnizian' (focused merely on the clarification of common concepts), or in the technical mode of a theoretical philosopher laying down a rigorous foundation for a new deductive system, or even in the historicist mode of a colorful weaver of narratives, 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. It is the emphasis on this particular *style* of writing, as initiated and exemplified by Reinhold's work at this time, that I mean to signify above all by the phrase 'the historical turn in philosophy'.

4. Some Preconditions of the Historical Turn

At first, it can seem trivial and self-evident that philosophers should present their work in a way that shows how it seriously addresses the sequence of discussions that other philosophers have offered. Aristotle, Kant, and others proceed in a fashion that can certainly look as though it has this kind of historical form. This appearance, however, is deceiving. It is not at all clear that before the Reinholdian period there was anything very like the 'history of philosophy' in our contemporary sense,¹³ let alone the extremely unusual and influential style of philosophical writing that arose with the late-eighteenth-century historical turn

¹² Cf. Marion Heinz, 'Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von Geschichte und System der Philosophie in Reinholds Fundamentschrift', in Bondeli and Lazzari (eds.), *Philosophie ohne Beynamen*, 334–46; cf. Martin Bondeli, 'Von Herder zu Kant, zwischen Kant und Herder, nach Kant gegen Herder—Karl Leonhard Reinhold', in Marion Heinz (ed.), *Herder und die Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus, Fichte-Studien Supplementa*, 8 (1997), 203–34.

¹³ See Ulrich Johannes Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes: Eine Archäologie der Philosophiegeschichte* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990), and *Philosophie und Universität: Historisierung der Vernunft im 19. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2000); and my 'Response to Ulrich Johannes Schneider', in J. B. Schneewind (ed.), *Teaching New Histories of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton Center for the Study of Human Values, 2004), 295–305, 383–5. Cf. Frederick Beiser's helpful overview, 'Introduction to the Bison Book Edition', in *Lectures on the History of Philosophy/Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel*, vol. 1, trans. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson (Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. xi–xl.

in Jena. After starting from an engagement in the extensive debates over interpreting Kant's extraordinarily difficult Critical work, writers in the Reinholdian period moved on quickly to deal in the very same way with their own immediate predecessors and then the whole course of the history of philosophy.¹⁴ Even when their later writings did not always rehearse these debates, a narrative style that at least implicitly incorporated an understanding of them continued to dominate their thought. Hence, it is no accident, for example, that to this day the broadly historical structure of Hegel's early works, and especially his *Phenomenology*, is used as the main road into his system, as the ladder that is never thrown away, no matter what the later 'encyclopedic' writings might suggest.¹⁵

A precondition of this development was the fact of the near incomprehensibility of Kant's own presentation of his complex Critical system and its remarkable claims—for example, to introduce a philosophy that is revolutionary and yet, at the same time, a matter of 'simple acts of reason' (A xiv).¹⁶ For a highly motivated and sympathetic reader such as Reinhold, a natural way to respond to the initial very strong resistance to Kant's system was to point out—as Reinhold repeatedly did—the intricate way in which the *Critique* had to overcome a whole sequence of entrenched philosophical confusions. Explaining this situation truly effectively required expository talents that went beyond Kant's own considerable capacities at that time. One key difference, therefore, between work in the Reinholdian period and work of the earlier modern period is simply the fact that, prior to the *Critique*, there was no equally pressing occasion for a recognition of the distinctive difficulty and significance of the historical form of philosophical works—that is, of the fact of their existing within a complex struggle of historically conflicting interpretations. When Aristotle and Kant review their predecessors, they are 'condescending' in an obvious way; they clearly believe that the grand validity of their own secure and eternal results would be ill served by stooping to distract readers by offering a *detailed* account of the specific arguments of earlier thinkers, and of how the historical details of these early arguments form a tight chain leading to the present day. (There is a short 'history of reason' at the end of the *Critique*, but few readers manage to make it through the 700 pages leading

¹⁴ For an indication of the immense magnitude of the early literature devoted to interpreting Kant, see Erich Adickes, *German Kant Bibliography* (Würzburg: Liebing, 1968). I am focusing almost entirely on the German philosophical scene, but it should be noted that in Britain historical considerations (in the sense of a truly detailed refutation of a sequence of earlier positions) did play a role at the end of the modern period in Thomas Reid (see below, Ch. 5), and also earlier in Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe: The First Part, Wherein All the Reason and Philosophy of Atheism is Confuted and its Impossibility Demonstrated* (London, 1678; 2nd edn., London, 1743).

¹⁵ On the continuing systematic relevance of Hegel's historical considerations, see Bill Bristow, 'Bildung and the Critique of Modern Skepticism in McDowell and Hegel', *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus/International Yearbook of German Idealism*, 3 (2005), 179–207.

¹⁶ References with 'A' and/or 'B' are to the first and/or second edition of Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Riga: Hartknoch, 1781, 1787). Unless otherwise indicated, translations are from the Norman Kemp Smith edition (London: Macmillan, 1929).

up to this section, and it remains dominated by abstract stereotypes rather than detailed engagements with particular writers.) The underlying assumptions of pre-Reinholdian writers is still basically either Leibnizian or Herderian. That is, their guiding thought is that either an ahistorical presentation in terms of basic eternal options should be adequate by itself, or that the full variety of historical detail can be attended to, but that hope should then be abandoned of finding any genuinely convincing universal results in this manner.

There is another possible strategy, however, one that holds that there is a 'pathway of spirit' that is crucial to philosophy and is fundamentally historical and rational at once. This is the 1790s Reinholdian option, developed immediately, and with many remarkable innovations, by Hegel, Schelling, and their followers. In a sense, the 'success' of this option was so overwhelming that not only was its initiator soon forgotten but also the very innovativeness of its approach came to be taken for granted. After a meteoric rise, however, this option quickly lost popularity with the mid-nineteenth-century collapse of German Idealism and the rise of movements such as positivism. Nonetheless, by the end of the twentieth century, the Reinholdian option surprisingly recovered a very prominent place as a major position in many mainline branches of philosophy. Even though the original historical turn did become, for a long while, a 'merely historical' phenomenon, in our own time it has returned as an option that is more influential than ever before, capturing advocates who descend from the very schools that had intended to put its first version away forever.

On the Reinholdian option, what distinguishes most of philosophy and its history is a structure that manifests neither timeless clarity nor sheer chaos, but rather a complex kind of hermeneutical progress, one wherein each generation has a chance of genuinely advancing from previous philosophical discussions by enriching them with concrete improvements that are introduced through an *explicit* reconsideration of their precise relation to a sequence of actual past alternatives. As in a legal or historical debate (the disciplines of art history and the history of biblical interpretation are especially relevant here, both as catalysts for philosophy in the late eighteenth century, and, at least indirectly, as structural models for the philosophy of the future), these discussions are genuinely argumentative and progressive. They proceed in a manner that is extremely difficult to specify except by example, but they clearly aim to avoid sophistry and dogmatic intuition, even though they lack the comfort provided by anything like typical experimental procedures in science. In paying close attention to constructing a tight argumentative narrative, these discussions display their own latest interpretation of a philosophical issue in as compelling a way as possible in light of a detailed new account of the development of prior alternatives. To be sure, at first these kinds of narratives were introduced by Reinhold and the early Hegel with disturbing immodesty and a presumptive air of finality. One can look beyond the irritating incidental details of the language and content of their systems, however, and still acknowledge that they introduced a very useful new turn in

philosophy. Their work provided an especially vivid and influential paradigm, revealing a way in which (at least a large part of) philosophy can thrive not as a literal 'rigorous science' but as a rationally convincing set of detailed advances over previous systems and their latest interpretations.¹⁷ Whatever their own substantive disagreements, more and more contemporary philosophers are following in the footsteps of the original Idealists by showing that there is something deeply rewarding and uniquely philosophical in the process of rationally determining one's own intellectual situation in precisely this way, even without any guarantee of certainty or 'approximation' to a close endpoint.

5. Contemporary Options

The option of this kind of a post-Kantian historical turn can be distinguished not only from historicism and classical ahistorical versions of philosophy but also from other historically sensitive but relatively *limited* modifications of philosophical systems after Kant. For example, a contemporary 'orthodox' Kantian might well be tempted by the work of philosophical historians of science, such as Michael Friedman, to substitute for Kant's own ultimately ahistorical system a more flexible successor to the *Critique* that would rely on substituting, with each new 'age of science', the latest basic scientific principles for the specific principles of nature that Kant happened to believe were irreplaceable.¹⁸ In addition, one could make slight amendments to the *Critique* that would be motivated by contemporary 'purely' philosophical developments rather than scientific discoveries such as non-Euclidean geometry. The 'spirit' of Kant's work could then be said to be maintained even after many such changes, as long as some philosophically defended and systematically related set of *constitutive core principles* for different basic types of experience is provided. It can also be argued that there are contemporary philosophies that start from their own original position but are still recognizably Kantian in their broad systematic ambition of reconciling what is best in the historical development of the traditions of both modern empiricism and rationalism. In the twentieth century, Roderick Chisholm and Wilfrid Sellars (and their many students), each in his own way, may have come closest to this kind of an updated 'parallel' to Kant's enterprise even if, in their unusually wide-ranging writings, they did not also extend their work, in the manner that Kant did, to areas such as religion and aesthetics. All these different ways of incorporating *some* attention to history, even while continuing

¹⁷ Cf., e.g., the genealogical 'method' of Husserl's late *Crisis* with his original quasi-mathematical model for philosophy. See David Carr, *Phenomenology and the Problem of History: A Study of Husserl's Transcendental Philosophy* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974); and Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹⁸ See, e.g., Michael Friedman, 'Kantian Themes in Contemporary Philosophy', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp. vol. 72 (1998), 111–29.

the mainline analytic tradition of contemporary philosophy, are clearly worth further exploration. Nonetheless, it should be obvious that all these different contemporary approaches do not involve the kind of *thoroughgoing* historical (but not historicist) orientation that is clearly the main concern in the tightly woven accounts of the 'pathway of spirit' given by philosophers such as Reinhold and Hegel.

In this volume my aim is not to explain these specific accounts in detail but to provide a sympathetic discussion of the distinctive notion of philosophical procedure that lies behind them. In part, this will involve presenting something that is itself a historical investigation, a reconstruction of key stages in the development of the deeply historical but non-historicist approach to philosophy in the post-Kantian tradition, especially at the time of its origin and in the work of the current philosophers who are now most attracted to it. (I also argue, in Part I, that appreciating the value of such a historical approach to philosophy can be valuable in understanding specific philosophical issues that concern relations between Kant and his *predecessors* and not only his successors.) This investigation can be regarded as a positive complement to what might seem to be an overly negative account of post-Kantian developments in my earlier work. My intention all along has not been to rewrite history for the sake of returning to a 'pure Kant', forever valid and complete, once his system has been shorn of illegitimate Idealist accretions. Rather, the aim has been to find a way to avoid distortions of Kant's thought while also uncovering, in the most promising suggestions of the post-Kantians, alternative ways to do justice to Kant's own deepest ideals and especially his overriding concern with autonomy. My underlying worry has been that unease with overly 'Cartesian' versions of Critical philosophy (for example, certain types of Reinholdian or Fichtean foundationalism and their successors) can lead all too quickly to the thought that the only alternative (for those concerned with Kant and post-Kantian philosophy) to orthodox Kantianism must be an ultimately historicist and relativist approach to philosophy in general. To help avoid these extremes and still preserve the ideal of rational self-determination, I believe it is especially useful to explore the phenomenon of the historical turn in those writings of the first post-Kantian philosophers that give the best indication of why and how historical considerations should be given a central place in a philosophy's mode of presentation without making the content of philosophy itself into a matter of mere history.

Whatever its long-term systematic value, a historical exploration of the original historical turn may also shed some light on the peculiarities of our current philosophical situation. Certainly some explanation is needed of how—after decades of intense ahistoricism in philosophy—we could have come to a point where such a diverse range of outstanding late-twentieth-century philosophers as Williams, Rawls, MacIntyre, Taylor, Cavell, Schneewind, Wolterstorff, Darwall, and

Brandom¹⁹ all turned to largely historical investigations without giving up their distinctively philosophical and highly analytic approach. It is a noteworthy fact that, whatever their other primary interests, almost all these philosophers have been concerned with history in a way that has a lot to do with what they see as at least a need to respond specifically to the German tradition. However much the content of their philosophy (for example, Williams's attack on Kant's ethics) may in some cases sharply contrast directly with that of the German philosophies I have been emphasizing, it still appears that the common and striking historical form of their work is anything but incidental and owes much (whether they realize it or not) to the influence of the style of Reinhold, Hegel, and their narrative-oriented successors, from Heine to Nietzsche and Heidegger.

The philosophical project of coming to terms in this way with one's own history can itself be understood as one more way of preserving philosophy as a distinctive and autonomous enterprise. Hence it seems only fitting that this kind of project appears to have received its original impetus from the hectic very first attempts (especially by Reinhold) to interpret the implications of Kant's extraordinarily difficult philosophy of autonomy. Part of the difficulty here comes from the fact that the general Critical interest in autonomy is extremely wide-ranging. It should not be understood as restricted to such familiar themes as the normative meaning of autonomy within politics and ethics, or even to its theoretical and methodological significance in designating a system of philosophy that aims to be based on a rational examination of experience rather than on 'external' sources such as mere sensibility or abstract concepts. Although it is a remarkable feature of Kant's time that the question of the autonomy of philosophy itself became a central issue, this issue must also be understood as closely entwined with other striking new phenomena such as the self-proclaimed autonomy of art and aesthetics, of historical studies, and of writing in general, as well as the explosive development of the movements of German Idealism and Romanticism.²⁰ If the guiding hypothesis of this volume is correct, all these remarkable phenomena need to be explored more closely (and in connection with each other) in relation to the specific difficulties that immediately arose in interpreting

¹⁹ See especially the following already classic books: Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Barbara Herman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought', 1640–1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Robert Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

²⁰ See my 'Introduction: Interpreting German Idealism', in Karl Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1–17.

the significance of Kant's philosophy, and to the historical turn in philosophical method that these difficulties generated at the end of the eighteenth century.

II. OVERVIEW

Analysis and hermeneutics—or rather the 'analytic principle' and the 'hermeneutic principle'—arose in music history (or at least attained historical significance) as opposite ways of unraveling the difficulties posed by the reception of Beethoven.²¹

The chapters that follow are arranged chronologically with respect to the authors that they discuss. They are also sorted into four parts to reflect the four main stages of the historical turn: a stage-setting Kantian prehistory, a two-stage early post-Kantian 'founder's era', and a current stage, which is still spreading throughout the contemporary philosophical world by means of invocations of moves made in the earlier stages. More specifically, Part I focuses on the crucial precondition of the turn, which lies in the numerous interpretive difficulties of Kant's Critical system and its relation to modern philosophy in general. Parts II and III then focus on the historical turn proper, and they trace its origin to the distinctive philosophical methodology that figures such as Reinhold and Hegel created as a way of reacting to (even if not literally 'unraveling') the extraordinary initial 'difficulties posed by the reception of' Kant. The genius of these Jena writers lay not so much in the tactics of their specific Kant interpretations as in their strategy of combining, rather than strictly opposing, 'analytic' and 'hermeneutical' approaches in general, and of practicing a style-setting form of writing that constantly emphasizes the extremely close relation between advancing one's own systematic philosophy and interpreting argumentative sequences within the history of philosophy. This relation has now also become a focus (either explicitly or implicitly) of much of the most interesting work in current philosophy, and especially in the remarkably widespread reappropriation of the classical German tradition; hence Part IV concludes with assessments of examples of some of the most extensive research projects carried out by contemporary advocates of this tradition.

Most of the chapters are devoted to a detailed comparative focus on one specific issue and its treatment by a number of modern philosophers, one of whom is usually Kant. In other chapters (especially Chapters 1, 8, 12, and 13), however, the 'microscopic' focus on first-level issues and individual figures gives way

²¹ Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth Century Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 11. The comparison I am implying with regard to music in the aftermath of Beethoven is not intended to go beyond the fact that about the same time, after Kant, philosophy also divided into 'analytic' and 'hermeneutic' camps.

to more general, ‘macroscopic’ (and, at one point, literally ‘telescopic’) reflections on history and philosophical interpretation. It is primarily these chapters that directly articulate the main theme of the study as a whole, and they might well be read together in sequence. The first and last chapters present the most wide-ranging considerations. Chapter 8 plays a pivotal role and concentrates on Hegel’s early *Differenzschrift*, whose rarely cited full title reveals that it is explicitly designed as a response to Reinhold’s characterization of the philosophical situation at the turn of the nineteenth century.²² Hegel craftily relegates his treatment of Reinhold to an Appendix, to make room for his own *Auseinandersetzung* with Fichte and Schelling, whose Critical ‘advances’ on Kant and Reinhold in the 1790s Hegel means both to exalt and to sublimate by his own new approach. This chapter 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. Chapter 12 and sections of other chapters (especially Chapter 9) discuss two other ‘turns’—the ‘subjective’ and the ‘aesthetic’—that I also believe are central to late modern philosophical writing, especially in the era of German Idealism and the present age. These turns are closely related to the historical turn, and, just like that turn, need to be distinguished from similar-sounding but much more extreme phenomena, such as aestheticism and subjectivism (the natural partners of historicism).

The chapters in *Part I* compare and contrast Kant’s philosophy with several of its immediate competitors (Descartes, Berkeley, Hume, Reid, Jacobi, and German Idealism in general), and they repeatedly stress the importance of presenting Kant’s work within its own full historical context. On numerous fundamental systematic issues, this approach leads to sharp contrasts with some of the more anachronistic tendencies in interpretations by twentieth-century philosophers, tendencies that are still very influential in Anglophone contexts. In the course of invoking a variety of often neglected historical details, these chapters also build on and supplement the broadly metaphysical and yet ‘common-sense’ approach to Kant (and much of his era) that I have argued for in earlier work.²³ Although they usually do not engage explicitly with the theme of an historical turn, they are meant to provide case studies of the importance of trying to understand and evaluate philosophical arguments by first placing them in close relation to the often forgotten or misunderstood controversies, options, and key terminological presumptions of their own era.

²² The full—and very rarely cited—title of Hegel’s book is: *Differenz des Fichte’schen und Schelling’schen Systems der Philosophie in Beziehung auf Reinhold’s ‘Beyträge zur leichtern Übersicht des Zustands der Philosophie zu Anfang des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts. 1stes Heft’* (Jena: Seidler, 1801); trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris as *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1977).

²³ See my ‘Introduction: The Common Ground of Kant’s *Critiques*’, in *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 1–48.

Chapter 1 offers a general introductory argument for maintaining an authentically historical perspective on the main issues arising from the key texts of modern philosophy, and for approaching even the briefest subsections of these texts with sensitivity to their full historical context. The occasion for this essay was a conference in Germany that was planned in part as a reaction to serious reservations that had been expressed (by German philosophers themselves) about the continental tendency to teach and discuss philosophical issues within a framework defined almost entirely by traditional texts rather than contemporary systematic questions. Without denying the need for developing some kind of corrective to the overly historical approaches that still dominate continental philosophy, I argue that it is important to counter stereotypical views of Anglophone philosophy and to try to explain why, after decades of neglect, historical considerations have also become central components in the writing of many leading late-twentieth-century analytic philosophers.²⁴

This phenomenon becomes especially clear when one examines developments in the work of highly influential analytic philosophers such as Bernard Williams, whose writing strikingly illustrates (and in part was a significant cause of) the widespread changes that have occurred in our own age in the treatment of the history of philosophy and especially the re-evaluation of modernity. Already in the 1970s, Williams had begun to focus in a new and appreciative way on the ‘bookend’ figures of the modern period, Descartes and Nietzsche. These epoch-defining thinkers rarely received any positive analytic attention in the decades from the 1930s through the 1960s. Soon afterwards, however, they suddenly attracted much more careful treatment from a wide range of contemporary philosophers, as a whole new generation of scholars helped to free these figures from the standard reproach against modern philosophers, that they are irredeemably subjectivist in their orientation.²⁵ Williams’s turn to writing

²⁴ See above, n. 19. It is also striking that top contemporary metaphysicians such as Robert Adams have published extensively on Berkeley and Leibniz, and that some of the best studies of Kant have begun to detail his close relations to the rationalist tradition. See, especially, Paul W. Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); and Eric Watkins, *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁵ On Descartes and Cartesianism, see, e.g., books by Harry G. Frankfurt, *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen: The Defense of Reason in Descartes’s ‘Meditations’* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970); Edwin Curley, *Descartes against the Skeptics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Desmond Clarke, *Descartes’ Philosophy of Science* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982); Lynn Sumida Joy, *Gassendi the Atomist: Advocate of History in an Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Daniel Garber, *Descartes’ Metaphysical Physics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Tad Schmaltz, *Malebranche’s Theory of the Soul: A Cartesian Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); on Nietzsche, see, e.g., Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982); Raymond Geuss, *Morality, Culture, and History: Essays on German Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); John Richardson and Brian Leiter (eds.), *Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Robert B. Pippin, ‘Introduction’, in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ed. Robert B.

about modern philosophy can also be understood as in part an expression of his special interest in challenging the continuing effect of Kant's work,²⁶ which grew considerably in influence when analytic philosophy moved into a new and more systematic phase toward the end of the twentieth century (that is, as it shifted away from the 'linguistic turn' and back toward substantive ethics and traditional metaphysics). I conclude that, however one evaluates Williams's specific criticisms, the ongoing debate about Kant's most basic notions can be regarded, above all, as evidence of the philosophical fertility and continuing value of his work and the broad tradition that it represents. Our difficulties in deciding how to read Kant on autonomy, for example, cannot be reduced to either a strictly historical matter of textual exegesis or a strictly systematic issue in contemporary philosophy, because what we are trying to understand in each one of these contexts is now, more than ever, fundamentally influenced by the other.

Until the 1970s, Descartes's philosophy tended to be read in such an extremely subjectivist and psychological or skeptical manner that in many circles the term 'Cartesianism' became irreversibly (and inaccurately) attached to an entirely negative phenomenon, a dismal trend that supposedly left almost all modern (that is, pre-twentieth-century) philosophy, including Kant's system, hopelessly infected. In *Chapter 2*, I offer an apologetic interpretation of the most basic features of Kant's central doctrine of apperception, and argue that this doctrine reveals that Kant's view of the self is in fact largely the opposite of the so-called Cartesian subjectivism that has been so often ascribed to him. For Kant, the subject of apperception is 'non-Cartesian' in key epistemological as well as ontological senses: its determinate knowledge of itself, as of all other things, depends basically on spatial intuition, and it has no theoretically demonstrable existence as a pure spirit. The project of clarifying Kant's position in this way has much more than a merely exegetical significance, for it also reveals that his ultimate Critical doctrine of the self remains in many ways as worthy of consideration as the best contemporary theories.²⁷ Nonetheless, while some interpreters have been willing to grant that Kant avoids the traditional perils of so-called Cartesianism, they continue to raise extreme worries of another kind: that Kant absurdly denies that the self exists, or that we can know it at all (at least as anything more than a completely

Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), vi–xxxiv. This is, of course, not to deny that there are elements in the thought of Descartes and Nietzsche that can lead to forms of radical subjectivism and some of the problems stressed by interpreters such as Heidegger, Maritain, MacIntyre, and Taylor.

²⁶ The appearance of John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), is obviously the most influential event here. Also significant is the fact that the Festschrift by his students is entitled *Reclaiming the History of Ethics: Essays for John Rawls*, ed. Barbara Herman, Christine Korsgaard, and Christine Andrews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

²⁷ See my 'Postscript: Kant and Mind: Mere Immaterialism', in Ameriks, *Kant's Theory of Mind: An Analysis of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 303–21.

meaningless and entirely ‘noumenal’ entity, or an absurd being that is its own incomprehensible creation). I argue that all these negative interpretations overlook the deep and coherent structure of Kant’s account of the epistemological interconnection of apperception and sensibility (the ‘epistemic subject’) and its relation to the subtleties of his relatively indeterminate but still meaningful Critical metaphysics of the self (the ‘existing subject’).

Chapter 3 critically examines the most common way in which Anglophone philosophers have offered a subjectivist reading of Kant’s own metaphysics—namely, by characterizing it as a system very similar to Berkeley’s phenomenal-ist idealism. Numerous terminological complications, along with the infamous difficulties of Kant’s doctrine of transcendental idealism, make it understandable that many readers would attempt to give at least some kind of familiar meaning to Kant’s thought by interpreting it in terms of other well-known theories, such as Berkeley’s, that at least share the term ‘idealism’. Nonetheless, I argue that there are numerous exegetical and systematic reasons why this popular interpretive move, ‘from Kant to Berkeley’, should be strongly resisted. The fundamental error here, the presumption that Kant, like Berkeley, is committed to an equation of existence and representation, expresses an unfortunate idea that can also be found in Reinhold and was highly influential in post-Kantianism and after. I characterize Reinhold’s approach here in terms of the notion of a ‘short argument to idealism’—that is, one that contends that something becomes ideal simply by being representable at all. This kind of argument bypasses Kant’s express limitation of his idealist metaphysical claims to matters that are determined by very specific features of space and time (and hence not by more general considerations alone, concerning features such as conceptuality, intuitability, activity, or passivity—let alone bare representability). Whatever the influence and appeal of this argument, it severely distorts the course of reasoning in the *Critique*, and it makes incomprehensible Kant’s key notion that there are coherent thoughts of non-ideal things in themselves—for example, the all-important notion of our absolute freedom. Nonetheless, interpretative views with similar consequences were expressed by other highly influential German interpreters, such as Friedrich Jacobi, who contended that, because the Kantian notion of a thing in itself is supposedly altogether incoherent, there is nothing in Kant’s system other than internal (that is, psychological) representations (see also Chapters 5, 6, and 11). I argue that the details of Kant’s discussions of idealism refute these uncharitable views, as well as the efforts of sophisticated neo-Berkeleyan interpreters (such as James Van Cleve) to reconstruct Kant’s ontology, or at least his theory of determinate empirical objects, in strictly phenomenalist terms. Moreover, once it is recalled that one of the most basic aims of the *Critique*’s carefully constructed Paralogisms is the rejection of all assertions of spiritualism (the doctrine that there are theoretical grounds establishing that—leaving God aside—our minds are wholly independent beings), it should be clear that Kant’s philosophy

is properly and fundamentally aimed against Berkeley's system, rather than in agreement with it, despite whatever incidental beliefs they may share.

Chapter 4 contrasts Humean theories of moral motivation with Kant's Critical account. It argues that standard objections to Kant fail to take heed of his general theory of action and the intrinsic difficulties in finding, on any sensible theory, a fully satisfactory 'explanation' of moral motivation. Kant's account of motivation must be understood in the context of his general theory of human subjectivity. Unlike contemporary quasi-Humean accounts, which depend on a two-part theory of belief and desire, Kant's theory presupposes a classical three-part distinction between cognizing, willing, and feeling. Although the second *Critique* is devoted specifically to what is called the faculty of desire (*Begehrungsvermögen*), this faculty is not to be understood simply in terms of feeling, let alone the mere determinations of pleasure and pain. Instead, for Kant this faculty primarily designates the power of choice, which presupposes cognitive and affective components but is distinct from them. The Critical theory implies an irreducible ability to select between alternatives that are rationally understood as such, and it incorporates the thought that our wills can freely opt for even an immoral end. Standard caricatures of Kant have assumed that he holds that all human actions are either necessitated purely by reason, in which case they are moral, or necessitated entirely by sensibility, in which case they are not moral. In fact, Kant takes human action to be in all cases a free process, involving a selection between intentions. This process requires judgmental attitudes that cannot be understood in terms of the non-normative events of mere psychological association that define Humean 'belief' states and responses to such beliefs. In providing an alternative to Hume's mechanistic model—and even while emphasizing the pure, rational, and real content of moral action—Kant can allow that for human beings morality always in fact involves a motivating feeling that mediates between judgment and action. Just as his theory of aesthetic appreciation reserves an ineliminable but ultimately contingent role for the feeling of taste, which depends on but is not the same as proper aesthetic judgment, so his theory of moral evaluation and decision reserves an ineliminable but ultimately contingent role to the feeling of respect, which depends on but is not the same as proper ethical judgment. In this way Kant can avoid the difficulties of overly intellectualist 'internalist' accounts of moral motivation, while not leaving proper moral motivation to be determined by forces that would undermine the strict universality and necessary validity of its core content. This is not to say that Kant's account of action, freedom, and motivation is without its problems, but it does indicate that a proper understanding and assessment of his account needs to begin by approaching him from within his own tradition.

Chapter 5 builds on the contrast between Hume and Kant by showing how the Critical philosophy can be understood as an ally of Reid's critique of empiricism and the whole tradition of the 'way of ideas'. The general 'anti-Cartesian' and realist approach of Reid's common-sense philosophy has

gained many distinguished adherents, but most analytic philosophers have continued to assume that this approach is the very opposite of Kant's. By building on extensive research by Manfred Kuehn on the role of common-sense philosophy in eighteenth-century Germany, I argue that there has been a deep misunderstanding concerning passages that have been repeatedly taken to prove that Kant's philosophy completely opposes Reid's. Moreover, I argue that common sense plays a crucial role in the first stage of Kant's system (in his theoretical and practical philosophy as well as his aesthetics), and that historical research has established that this fact was clearly recognized by a significant circle of early Kantians who worked in Jena right before the full development of German Idealism. This recognition was quickly eclipsed by the meteoric rise of German Idealism, a development that can be explained in part by a sequence of misunderstandings that parallel several of the dismissive interpretive tendencies found in contemporary analytic discussions of Kant. I also document an extensive list of substantive points of agreement between Reid's and Kant's systems. These go beyond the similarities in their critiques of earlier modern philosophers and extend to deep parallels in their accounts of perception as a fundamentally interpretive rather than inferential process. Despite the complexities of Kant's doctrine of transcendental idealism (which I argue is consistent with a general position that most philosophers could now call realist) and the undeniable presence of differences between Kant's transcendental arguments and Reid's procedures, I conclude that there remain fundamental similarities between Kant and Reid. In their final view of the self, and of knowledge in general, both philosophers leave room for processes that cannot be accounted for by reasoning but are nonetheless rationally acceptable and of overriding importance.

Chapter 6 combines an analysis of the structure of Kant's critique of earlier metaphysics with a historical account of how this critique could have had as its fate the remarkable rise of a new kind of metaphysics in the era of German Idealism. I begin with the general observation that the Dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason* does not attempt, let alone accomplish, the kind of complete destruction of metaphysics that many of its readers have supposed. Many traditional transcendent metaphysical ideas are allowed to be not only coherent but also assertable, once the demands of regulative and practical reason are allowed to supplement the thoughts of constitutive theoretical reason. Moreover, the *Critique's* stress on notions such as idealism, things in themselves, and the 'unconditioned' created (as William Hamilton noted) a 'spectre' that 'haunted' and stimulated German Idealism's new metaphysics of the 'absolute'. Although Kant offers a radical critique of all earlier systems of a spiritualist or materialist kind, he also believes that something metaphysical should be affirmed beyond the spatiotemporal features of our experience. I argue that for both Kant and German Idealism this metaphysics is at least not any kind of subjectivism, and it need not present a special threat to most of our common realist beliefs. Kant's view

can be contrasted with many of the Idealist systems that come after him, however, because he denies that our reason can determine an unconditioned being that is a demonstrably necessary and monistic whole, and (contra Jacobi) he also rejects the option of characterizing our affirmation of anything unconditional in terms of non-rational 'faith'. Kant's metaphysics limits itself to affirming only those specific and not empirically derived features of existence that he assumes are found in (or implied by) the core commitments of 'sound common sense'—for example, that there is a given plurality of beings, including persons, with moral and absolutely free characteristics.

The last part of Chapter 6 offers a very brief sketch of the main immediate reactions to Kant, and the chapters that follow it explore in more detail the most influential of these reactions. *Part II* begins with a chapter characterizing the context and content of Reinhold's epochal first version of the *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*. A second chapter explains how Reinhold's long-term dual concern with the notions of popularity and systematicity led him to combine his interest in Kant with a focus on history and, in particular, on the need for philosophers to take a historical turn by writing in a narrative style that shows in detail how only a philosophical system in the Critical 'spirit' can provide genuine rational satisfaction for the latest stage of the truly popular (that is, genuinely universal) needs of humanity.

Chapter 7 explains how Reinhold's *Letters* took the form of a 'short' *Critique* that immediately after its publication was much more influential than the complex details of Kant's lengthy original. In the *Letters* Reinhold simplified matters enormously by not venturing at all into the complexities of the Transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Analytic. He jumped ahead to the moral and historical implications of the end of the Dialectic, arguing that Kant's espousal of a Critical and moral form of rational religion was the ideal solution to the battles between supernaturalism and naturalism that were raging in Germany after Jacobi had ignited the Pantheism Dispute. Jacobi created a sensation by arguing that the development of modern philosophy forces a choice between a theoretical monism that makes individuality and absolute freedom a mere myth, and a non-rational faith-based attitude that reveals one's supernatural being and the divine. Even before reading Kant, Reinhold had been engaged in numerous efforts to show how one might avoid such a choice, and how a proper Enlightenment philosophy could provide a systematic, long-term way to meet the 'popular' but still rational needs of sound common sense. Upon reading Kant, Reinhold believed that he had found the 'new Immanuel' and the perfect system for this project. Reinhold presented the *Critique* as the solution to the Pantheism Dispute and thereby the satisfaction of the most pressing spiritual needs of the era. The dilemma that Jacobi had posed could be escaped by means of the Critical strategy (developed by Kant even before the publication of Jacobi's work) of defending the universal and rational core of common-sense morality on the basis

of a Critical metaphysics that curbs the dogmatic pretensions of both traditional philosophical schools and their ‘anti-philosophical’ opponents. Admitting that he was not yet tracing Kant’s notion of pure practical reason and rational religion back to its ‘grounds’ in the first *Critique*, Reinhold satisfied himself and his audience with the claim that the ‘results’ of the *Critique* met the fundamental ‘need’ of the time (fully to satisfy popular Enlightenment morality through a hope in a ‘highest good’ warranted by rational religion)—just as Jesus had satisfied the ‘common sense’ of his time by turning dogmatic religion into rational morality.

Reinhold’s *Letters* leaves only a promissory note backing the claim that Kant’s analysis of the subjective structure of our faculties provides an apodictic grounding for the Critical system. The main hint that the *Letters* gives as to how this note might be redeemed involves an unfortunate suggestion that it rests on Kant’s moral argument for God being ‘as certain’ as the *cogito*. The first half of the *Letters* does not, however, defend this argument in detail, and the second half, with its extensive account of how Kant’s theory of mind avoids the dogmatic epistemological and metaphysical extremes of ancient and modern philosophy, works against the expectation of any kind of ‘Cartesian’ foundation for philosophy. This section clearly displays the tendency toward a historical turn in Reinhold’s methodology, and his optimistic rationalist reformulation of Herder’s notion of a succession of spirits of the age. It does not, however, provide anything like the rigorous ‘Cartesian’ grounding of the Critical philosophy that Reinhold implied could be easily given. And yet, when objections to Kant continued to be raised, Reinhold used the next version of the *Letters* not to retreat from ‘Cartesian’ notions (as I argue, in Chapter 2, that Kant himself did) but to shift attention to a new ‘Elementary-Philosophy’ of his own, which allegedly does provide an absolute foundation for philosophy in a basic ‘faculty of representation’ and an apodictic ‘principle of consciousness’. It is no wonder that, immediately afterwards, numerous post-Kantian systems appeared, one after the other, with criticisms of and substitutes for this principle. It is unfortunate, however, and somewhat surprising, that many of these substitutes continued to involve a search for some kind of quasi-Cartesian foundation rather than a full appreciation of the more modest common-sense strands of Kant’s work. (Reinhold was thus both the catalyst of the ‘Cartesian’, non-historical strands of post-Kantianism, which repeatedly led to a dead end, and the initiator of the non-Cartesian, historical strands of post-Kantianism, which provided a fruitful new paradigm for philosophical writing.)

Chapter 8 explores the way in which the historical turn provided an ever more relevant fallback position for Reinhold as he continued to run into difficulties in accounting for the ‘fate’ of the far from universal acceptance of the Critical philosophy—even after the publication of the *Letters* and his much more systematic Elementary-Philosophy. The first section of this chapter offers an account of the features central to the distinctively historical character of philosophical texts in general, and of how this makes philosophical writing both like and unlike science

and art. In a second section I argue that the specific features of the initial historical turn in philosophy are not to be found very much earlier or later than Reinhold's Critical phase. I also note that, although several systematic features of Reinhold's work can make it appear as if history is a secondary interest for him, this presumption is easily overcome by a closer look at his full career and his deep involvement with radical social change ever since his early years in the Austrian reform movement (prior to his flight from Catholicism and his pursuit of more radical change in Germany). Moreover, in addition to building a lengthy historical component into the first version of his *Letters*, Reinhold soon issued a series of works focusing on topics such as the 'spirit of the age', 'the history of the idea of spirit', 'the correction of previous misunderstandings of philosophers', 'the systematic presentation of all possible prior systems of metaphysics', and 'an overview of the condition of philosophy at the beginning of the nineteenth century'. This list does not even include Reinhold's other major contributions in this area: his path-breaking essay 'On the Concept of the History of Philosophy' (1791), the historical organization of the second volume of his *Letters* (1792), and his contribution to the Academy competition on 'progress in metaphysics' (1796).

All this historical work had an immediate and significant effect. Research has disclosed that Reinhold was an especially strong influence on Schelling's earliest work as a student in Tübingen. It is no surprise that Schelling placed an extraordinary emphasis on history,²⁸ and his early essay 'General Overview of the Latest Philosophical Literature' (1797–8) can be regarded as one of the first significant variations of the genre that Reinhold had invented. Because Schelling's work is still not very well known in English,²⁹ however, the rest of Chapter 8 focuses on Hegel and his response to Reinhold in the *Differenzschrift* (1801). Under the guise of an advocacy of Schelling's position over Fichte's, this early work by Hegel contains numerous very close but unacknowledged methodological parallels to Reinhold's work. Hegel goes so far as to charge Reinhold with a version of historicism that does not appreciate the rational elements hidden in past systems—precisely the position that in fact Reinhold clearly shows himself to have left behind. Rather than presenting a radical alternative to Reinhold's historical turn, Schelling and Hegel develop what is simply a more ambitious version of it, and one that is therefore much more questionable, for they are

²⁸ See Dieter Jähnig, *Schelling: Die Kunst in der Philosophie* (2 vols.; Pfullingen: Neske, 1966–9); Manfred Frank and Gerhard Kurz (eds.), *Materialien zu Schellings philosophischen Anfängen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975); Hartmut Kuhlmann, *Schellings früher Idealismus: Ein kritischer Versuch* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzlar, 1993); and Axel Hutter, *Geschichtliche Vernunft: Die Weiterführung der Kantischen Vernunftkritik in der Spätphilosophie Schellings* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996).

²⁹ See, however, Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1993); Manfred Baum, 'The Beginnings of Schelling's Philosophy of Nature', in Sally Sedgwick (ed.), *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 199–215; Rüdiger Bubner, *The Innovations of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman (eds.), *The New Schelling* (London: Continuum, 2004).

committed to trying to show that the stages of the history of thought parallel stages inherent all at once in consciousness, nature, and logic. I therefore conclude that (despite the limitations at that time of Reinhold's own foundationalist view of mind) the best example from this period of a philosophical approach that makes history central without extravagantly exaggerating our ability to know its ultimate structures with confidence is to be found not in the systems of German Idealism but in Reinhold's relatively modest essay 'On the Concept of the History of Philosophy'.

The two chapters of *Part III* are devoted primarily to Hegel, but, as might be expected in this context, the focus is not so much on his system in its own right as on the issue of how he presented his thought in relation to other philosophers, and on how later philosophers reacted to him in turn. One chapter discusses Hegel's critique of Kantian and Early Romantic aesthetics as overly 'subjective'; the other explains the enduring influence of Hegel's work on the philosophies of later thinkers such as Feuerbach, Kierkegaard, and Marx, and especially on the notion of historical materialism.

Chapter 9 considers Hegel's claim that earlier aesthetic theory was not adequately 'objective', and Jean-Marie Schaeffer's contentions that the differences between Hegel's aesthetics and others in the classical German tradition are relatively insignificant because the tradition as a whole suffers from an overly unified 'speculative' and 'ontological' orientation. I argue that both Hegel and Schaeffer overlook significant and defensible 'objective' strands in the aesthetics and general philosophy of Kant and the Early Romantics. The first step in this argument involves clearing away numerous presumptions (due in large part to Hegel's long-term influence) against German Romanticism as a monolithic, reactionary, and otherworldly movement, as well as misunderstandings of German Idealism as a subjectivist philosophy. Whatever the weaknesses of Late Romanticism, the philosophy of the Jena Circle (von Herbart, Erhard, and Niethammer) and the Early Romantic writing of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg) is marked by starting from a common-sense realist orientation, and it aims to radicalize rather than reverse Kant's philosophy and his commitment to Enlightenment values such as autonomy.³⁰ I argue that German Idealism is also best understood as a form of realism (as the term is usually used in analytic metaphysics), and so the division between the Early Romantics and the Idealists does not concern subjectivism

³⁰ See, e.g., Jane E. Kneller, 'Introduction', in Kneller (ed.), *Novalis: Fichte Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. ix–xxxiv; Frederick Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* (Albany, NY: State University Press of New York, 2004); Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert, *In Media Res: Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006); and Fred Rush, *Irony and Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

on either side. It has to do instead with the fact that the Romantics go beyond even Kant in emphasizing restrictions on how much the structure of reality has a strongly systematic and rational form that we can actually determine.

I build on these points in assessing Hegel's aesthetics, which illustrates the historical turn in its own way by beginning with a criticism of earlier theorists such as Kant and Schlegel, and by offering a 'historical deduction of the true idea of art' in modern philosophy. In his 'deduction', Hegel links these theorists closely to Jena Romanticism in general as well as Fichte's philosophy and the notion of a 'bad infinity'—that is, an abstract and theoretically unfulfilled sense of rationality. Hegel contrasts this notion with the equally one-sided, because merely finite (even if concrete and 'fulfilled'), relation to art and reality that he finds in the beautiful but non-speculative achievements of Weimar classicism. Much of the dispute between Hegel and the others therefore turns on his distinctive but immodest speculative claim to know that the world as a whole (that is, in its intelligible 'true infinity') has a thoroughgoing purposive form, and on his familiar but questionable interpretive presumption that aesthetics in the Kantian tradition must do injustice to both the immediate sensory and underlying conceptual aspects of art and reality. From Hegel's perspective, the 'modest' Kantian and Romantic view of the relation between our mind and reality leads to a sense of fundamental limitation and ignorance that needs to be overcome rather than acknowledged.³¹ I agree that this overly speculative perspective leaves Hegel vulnerable to Schaeffer's critique, but I conclude by noting that the Romantics' more modest view protects them (if not others in the German mainstream) from Schaeffer's objections of ascribing to art a 'compensatory' role—that is, an extravagant 'foundational' and 'salvific' function that does injustice to philosophy and other dimensions of experience.

Chapter 10 explores the impact of Hegel's work in relation to three influential successors—Feuerbach, Marx, and Kierkegaard—who accept much of his general story of the stages of the history of philosophy but believe, for different reasons, that it has an all too idealistic shape. Feuerbach feels a need to stress the importance of sensory experience, and he goes into much more psychological detail than Hegel in explaining the structures of the phenomenon of unhappy consciousness—that is, alienated religiosity, especially in dogmatic Christianity. Insofar as he develops an original philosophical perspective, however, Feuerbach's major contribution probably lies not in new epistemological or metaphysical insights, but in his historical presumption that, if philosophy has already moved through the stages that Hegel has outlined, then the 'philosophy of the future' should not take the form of a redundant philosophical refutation of the religious dogmas of the past but instead should offer a concrete

³¹ For an argument that Hegel's aesthetics suffers from an inadequate appreciation of history, see Gregg Horowitz, 'The Residue of History: Dark Play in Schiller and Hegel', in *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus/International Yearbook of German Idealism*, 4 (forthcoming).

anthropological diagnosis of the modern loss of conviction as a natural step in humanity's return to itself from the projection of its own 'species being' onto the idea of a transcendent power.

Hegel's and Feuerbach's notion of alienation is thematized by Marx in terms of the concrete economic (capitalist) phenomenon of our forfeiting our 'species being'—that is, our capacity for acts of unfettered production for the sake of humanity as a whole. The early Marx gives an impression of turning Hegel 'upside down' by claiming to explain errors in the history of thought through distorting pressures in the concrete social history of humans as natural and economic beings, rather than vice versa. It is not clear, however, that Hegel denies the dependence of the 'superstructure' of human institutions and the development of particular forms of thought on the 'basis' of more concrete natural forces. The crucial question is how we can have confidence now in claiming to know the most fundamental structures here, and especially the specific nature of historical development. Although Marx emphasizes that at this point he turns to 'real science' and economics rather than the fanciful laws of philosophy, his own account of the fundamental features of historical materialism bears such an uncanny resemblance to the fundamentals of Hegel's metaphysical system that the differences between the two approaches appear to concern not general philosophical principles but rather the evaluation of contingent (albeit very important) aspects of the effectiveness of concrete contemporary institutions. Hegel, Feuerbach, and Marx all appear to agree on a fundamental historical turn in philosophy, even if they may differ on what particular phenomena are to be emphasized now in the expression of this turn.

Kierkegaard seems implicitly willing to accept much of the historical and teleological story that Hegel has to tell about traditional philosophy as such, but he is most interested in something that this story leaves out: the concern with individual freedom and the possibility of a relationship to a personal God that dominates traditional Christianity and the work of figures such as Kant, Hamann, Jacobi, and the later Schelling (whose final lectures Kierkegaard briefly attended in Berlin). Nonetheless, even if Kierkegaard does not provide a standard example of the historical turn by presenting a philosophy that takes its main calling to be a systematic historical comprehension of its predecessors, he still does incorporate in his own way most of the specific stages and dimensions of Hegel's narrative of spirit. He turns Hegel's dimensions of 'objective' and 'absolute' spirit into the main theme of his philosophical writings, the dialectical account of the 'stages on life's way' that each individual has to confront, while insisting that the ultimate religious stage include an irreducible appreciation of the event of revelation as such. In this way, Kierkegaard—like later thinkers such as Nietzsche, Rosenzweig and Heidegger—goes much further back than modern philosophy in an attempt to find something primordial in history and interpretation that contemporary subjects have to respond to above all else: the paradoxical claim of literally sacrosanct texts.

Part IV contains assessments of the work of three scholars who have presented some of the most detailed research on the whole period of the historical turn. *Chapter 11*, a brief discussion of Frederick Beiser's massive *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism 1781–1801*, focuses mainly on the treatment of Kant and concerns about subjectivism. I agree with Beiser that, contrary to still common presumptions, the philosophy of Kant and the later Idealists is primarily oriented against, rather than toward, a position of subjectivism. I go somewhat further than Beiser, however, by arguing that, rather than speaking of a 'diminishing role' of subjectivism in this era, it can be held that with Kant the era was solidly anti-subjectivist from the start (see Chapters 2 and 3). Hence, I dissent from Beiser's largely neo-Hegelian account of the period, which (in its own version of something like the notion of a historical turn) credits the later Idealists with making philosophical progress precisely through a heroic 'de-subjectivizing' of allegedly subjectivist elements in Kant himself (which is not to deny that he has a basic interest in the phenomenon of subjectivity). I conclude by arguing that the Hegelian dismissal of the notion of a 'thing in itself' actually threatens a new 'quasi-subjectivism' of its own, for it seems to rule out even the possibility of any reality that is unlike what is determinable through the specific sensory and determined forms of our experience. In this way, it can become too 'Promethean' in implying that the human subject in general is the absolute measure of what is. Here Kant and the Romantics seem open to a more defensible realist position.

Chapter 12 concerns Manfred Frank's work, and especially his recent study *Selbstgefühl*. With its very careful systematic and historical focus on the peculiar phenomenon of immediate self-awareness, this work is a paradigm of the kind of detailed reconstruction of early phases of the Idealist era for which Frank is especially well known. The phenomenon of this kind of awareness suddenly became a main topic in the late eighteenth century, and now it has become a center of attention throughout continental philosophy and contemporary analytic philosophy as well. Although it has several epistemological and metaphysical peculiarities, it also has an obvious special connection with aesthetic experience. It typically concerns matters of inner feeling that can become expressed aesthetically in a particular style that reflects one's distinctive individuality. For this reason, I characterize the ever-growing philosophical literature that emphasizes these features for their own sake—and especially apart from traditional moral, religious, and scientific agendas—as involving both a 'subjective turn' and an 'aesthetic turn'. I take these turns to be distinct but closely related movements, and to define a major feature of modernity's 'spirit', especially in the period immediately after Kant and in the strong revival of post-Kantian approaches in contemporary philosophy. After distinguishing these turns from the extreme positions of subjectivism and aestheticism, I argue that their growing significance can be connected with the continuing phenomenon of the historical turn, which, not coincidentally, began in the same era. It is only natural that at precisely the time that philosophy seemed to be becoming an increasingly autonomous form

of writing, not beholden to other fields such as theology, natural science, or mere *belles-lettres*, it needed to secure its own special subject matter and style. Philosophical writers began more and more to fulfill themselves distinctively by accepting the need to be convincing in a broadly aesthetic (that is, as opposed to moral, scientific, religious, sophistic, and so on) manner, a manner that expresses their individual style and concerns general features of subjectivity not properly treated anywhere else (consider not only the focus of Frank's work but also that of the best of figures such as Schleiermacher, Sartre, Beckett, Foucault, the Deconstructionists, Cavell, and so on). Given the abundant mysteries of its own earlier tradition, and the need for its writing to avoid descending into mere expressionism, and hence to maintain a progressive cognitive character, it is not surprising that so much philosophical writing, especially after Kant, took on a hermeneutical and historical style of this type. This is not to rule out the possibility that many parts of the discipline of philosophy—or, some day, perhaps even the whole of it—may instead finally take on the form of something very much like the rigorous science that Kant had projected. If one looks at the actual practice of the most interesting philosophers of our own time, however, it surely appears that this day is very far off. For now, there is much to celebrate in the fact that current philosophers are productively repeating, in a myriad of creative and insightful ways, the subjective, aesthetic, and historical turns that started in the era of German philosophy immediately after Kant.

Given the argument of Chapter 12, it is no wonder that writers within this stream of contemporary philosophy have given renewed attention to the task of making sense of the main developments of the 'founding' era of Idealism in late-eighteenth-century Jena. In *Chapter 13* I discuss methodological issues concerning the most extensive research on this era, the massive 'Jena Project' directed by Dieter Henrich (who, along with Hans-Georg Gadamer, was one of Manfred Frank's teachers). After decades of very productive traditional scholarship on Kant and Hegel, Henrich turned to devoting most of his energy to guiding a detailed exploration of the various 'constellations' out of which the best-known German philosophies developed. Historical research has revealed that, in addition to relatively prominent writers such as Jacobi, Reinhold, Hölderlin, and Novalis, there are numerous obscure figures such as Diez, Leutwein, Sinclair, and Schmid who played a major role in these constellations. The methodology of the Jena Project reflects three central features of the study of constellations in general: it emphasizes groups, rather than isolated individuals, it works to identify stars of enduring significance, and it aims to discern patterns that are at first hidden.

The Jena Project not only studies the historical turn within its original Jena setting but it also aims at a philosophical 'reactivation of Idealism' in our own time, and thus at a reinforcement of German Idealism's commitment to combining systematic studies of subjectivity with a style of philosophical writing that is fundamentally historical and in many ways aesthetic. Through learning about and reactualizing its own history, the Jena Project also aims to strengthen, and

not merely examine, Idealism's substantive commitment to autonomy. At this point, however, some of the distinctive features of its method—for example, its emphasis on hidden group influences—can threaten to encourage the historicist thought that the very aim to be self-determining in this way (which brings along with it the growing realization that philosophical developments may be affected by countless non-rational influences) can itself create a kind of self-undermining 'Copernican vertigo'.

I conclude by arguing that, once an appropriately moderate understanding of autonomy is introduced, the Jena Project—and the historical turn in general—can meet this threat, and thus can serve to reinforce rather than to jeopardize what is best in the original ideals of Jena. In this way, even though Kant himself was not a participant within what I define as the historical turn, his overall modest Critical conception of philosophy remains relevant to the proper appreciation of the work in the turn that came after him.