



CON-TEXTOS KANTIANOS.
International Journal of Philosophy
N.º 12, December 2020, pp. 614-621
ISSN: 2386-7655
Doi: 10.5281/zenodo.4304155

Revisiting Kant's Legacy in Continental Philosophy

ZACHARY VEREB*

University of Mississippi, USA

Review of: Sorin Baiasu and Alberto Vanzo (eds.), *Kant and the Continental Tradition: Sensibility, Nature and Religion*. Milton, Routledge, 2020, 255 pp. 978-1138503748.

It is well known that Kant had an immense influence on the history and development of continental philosophy. At the same time, there is a curious lack of work today putting Kant in dialogue with the continentals. This is precisely the task of *Kant and the Continental Tradition*, where Kantian themes in the continental tradition, including their continuities, tensions, transformations, and ruptures, are addressed by eleven authors. This exciting collection is important for a variety of reasons. Perhaps most significantly, its focus is not just on how continental philosophers such as Heidegger, Derrida, Irigaray, and Arendt saw Kant. That would be too easy. The true value of this work lies with its ability to show us what those interpretations can still teach us today about Kant's legacy.

Besides filling out literature gaps, *Kant and the Continental Tradition* offers a variety of perspectives, avoiding the usual tunnel vision of specialist debates.¹ In this sense, this work—with its polished writing, rigorous analysis, and historical contextualization—is

* Visiting Assistant Professor of Public Policy Leadership, University of Mississippi. Contact: ztvereb@olemiss.edu.

¹ We might place this collection alongside Cutrofello (1994) and Hengehold (2007), though these works focus more on Foucauldian, post-structuralist connections than the wider scope of the present volume. It may be more appropriately placed alongside, as Sorin and Vanzo note (2020, p. 20), volume 1 of *The History of Continental Philosophy*, edited by Schrift (2010).

unique. It touches on contentious topics relevant to Kant scholars, but will also interest scholars and critics of continental philosophy. It may even interest students of both. *Kant and the Continental Tradition* is geared to continentals and literary critics through its comparative engagement with the continental appropriation of Kant. We receive a clue, for instance, why Heidegger favored the A-Deduction and Schematism in the *Critique*, or how Lyotard, like Hegel, saw its key value in the Antinomies. This work will, of course, be a welcome addition for Kant scholars; in addition to its consideration of contemporary debates in Kant scholarship, such as the unity of Kant's critical philosophy, this collection touches on, in one way or another, nearly all flavors of Kant's works. This includes elements from the three *Critiques*, the political works, the pre-critical works, and even a lesser known work on religion.

Kant and the Continental Tradition is comprised of eight original essays, plus an introduction and postscript that function as conceptual bookends. The collection is unified thematically around three familiar Kantian themes: sensibility, nature, and religion, with their corresponding obverses of reason, freedom, and philosophy. Some essays highlight interpretative issues in Kant relevant to the continentals, while others put post-Kantian ideas in dialogue with the critical philosophy, viewed through a self-reflective, contextual lens. Regardless of approach, all essays in this collection are oriented with an eye to the legacy of Kant and the philosophical appropriation of his philosophy. A main lesson this collection succeeds in teaching, we should note, is the import of this Kantian legacy. Indeed, Kant's legacy informed (and continues to inform)—whether reactively or creatively, dismissively or critically—the bulk of the continental philosophical trajectory, from Nietzsche to Deleuze.

Structurally, the collection is interesting in that each essay sets the stage for the next. For instance, Dermot Moran's essay tracing Kantian intuition from Leibniz and Kant to Eberhard and Husserl clears ground for Roxana Baiasu's essay on Heidegger's schematism (Baiasu and Vanzo 2020, p. 5). We not only have a collection of distinct essays on Kant and the continentals, but one that is thematically and structurally unified despite its diversity of content. In short, each essay flows to the next in a way that makes sense. This is not typical for a multi-authored collection covering figures as dissimilar as Kant, Hegel,

Heidegger, Derrida, Lyotard, and Irigaray. Finally, each essay critically engages with the work of pioneer Gary Banham, for whom the volume is dedicated.

The following paragraphs outline *Kant and the Continental Tradition*'s essays to highlight this structural coherence. The reader should by no means infer that less words on an essay mean less content: quite the contrary. Space is limited and so is time—especially in a review. Heidegger would agree. Highlighting essay themes can at the very least showcase this collection's variety of content and coherence.

To begin, Moran disentangles the various meanings of intuition for Kant, and to do so traces early modern views at the basis of his historical achievement. What we get here, then, is a careful overview of Kantian intuition, meant to re-orient our reading of Kant in contemporary debates. Moran's analysis reveals the "complexities, ambiguities and fissures" in Kant's account of intuition (Moran 2020, p. 24), and this estrangement from the rationalist tradition allow us to prefigure how continental philosophers—from the phenomenologists to the post-structuralists—have interpreted him in their philosophies of difference. Moran's critical discussion of the many, seemingly incompatible roles intuition takes for Kant—conceptual, psychological, intentional—anticipate the subsequent essay on Heidegger, especially with its passing remarks about Husserl's provocation. This essay also provides excellent material for students of Kant who wish to appreciate the complexity of his epistemological starting-point, and how it could have tempted the early phenomenologists in their later investigations.

Roxana Baiasu's continues this intuitive thread by considering Heidegger's reading of Kantian schematism. She views Heidegger's admittedly "violent" interpretation of this obscure part of the *Critique* as "the climax of a turning point in the history of philosophy," and indeed as one that conditions Heidegger's own phenomenological development (Baiasu 2020, p. 61). Though often unappreciated outside Heidegger circles, Heidegger lectured extensively on Kant during the year of *Being and Time*'s publication, and his own mentor Rickert was a prominent neo-Kantian. In many ways, Heidegger appropriated several Kantian insights for his fundamental ontology, all the while remaining critical of Kant's emphasis on time as the form of inner sense, and its superficiality with regard to lived human experience (Baiasu 2020, p. 71). This essay is a welcome and succinct

contribution for hearing what is unspoken in Kant, and it will help us connect the dots with the broader continental tradition following in Heidegger's footsteps.

In the collection's final essay on sensibility, Andrea Rehberg analyzes the third *Critique's sensus communis*. Surprising to those who view Kant as the arch-rationalist *par excellence*, Rehberg argues that if we view the *sensus communis* as a key pivot point of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment, we find in Kant an important precursor to the well-known continental emphasis on affectivity and lived experience. Accordingly, this essay can be useful for tracing the anti-Platonic movement from Nietzsche to Heidegger, Arendt, and Lyotard.

Just as Moran's reading on Kantian intuition prefigures the essays on sensibility, Christian Onof's essay provides one interpretative framework for two essays on the (dis)unity of nature in post-Kantian continental philosophy. On its own, this nuanced look into constitutive and regulative principles will likely not be of interest to continental scholars and students. Yet in the broader context of this collection, Onof's essay marks an important conceptual bridge between essays and is therefore quite helpful.

Keith Crome's comparative essay on Kant and Lyotard is another valuable addition. It stresses the latter's entanglement with the first *Critique*, rather than the typical attention to sublimity received in the literature. Here, Lyotard's work *The Differend* is appreciated alongside Kant's "critical enterprise—as a tribunal in which philosophical reason calls itself to count. It is, in this sense, a repetition of the Kantian project" (Crome 2020, p. 132). Crome showcases Lyotard's rejection of the Kantian view vis-à-vis the concept of nature and his break with the canonical tradition despite maintaining Kant's "combative, critical spirit" from the antinomies (Crome 2020, p. 134). This essay is valuable because it shows how new insights can be sourced from the wellspring of Kant's thought. Such a wellspring can even shed light on our understanding of Kant today, and so has a pedagogical value.

Rachel Jones's essay is exceptional in that it not only integrates a discussion of Kant with Hegel, but does so through the lens of continental philosopher Luce Irigaray. The result is another "violent" yet productive interpretation, this time on Hegel's attempt to mediate teleology with mechanism (Jones 2020 p. 166). This bold essay covers a lot of ground. It explores the gendered dualisms that Hegel inherits from Kant; the former cannot accommodate a certain feminine remainder, and Jones suggests that Irigaray is better poised

to help us here. This refreshing addition moves beyond the phenomenological and postmodern continental approaches of prior essays to more linguistic, feminist, and psychoanalytic ones, with the famous student of Lacan, Irigaray.

Nicola J. Grayson builds the last exegetical bridge-essay in *Kant and the Continental Tradition* using the blueprint of hypotyposis in Kant; this bridge leads us to our collection's final terrain: Kantian influences on continental takes on religion. Here, we understand the *Religion's* "schematism of analogy" with the figure of Christ as that elusive practical link between humanity and divinity. This essay on Kant leads naturally to Dennis Schulting's penultimate essay on religious tropes in Kant and Derrida, though it might as easily take us back to Plato, showing us how the essays in this collection have a bidirectional historical worth.

Schulting addresses the deadlocks of religion and philosophy, faith and reason. Surprisingly, he teases out these tensions not by looking into Kant's *Religion*, but through consideration of a separate and oft neglected Kantian work: *Of a Recently Adopted Exalted Tone in Philosophy* (1796). Derrida himself offered a commentary on this work in 1983, and Schulting puts them in dialogue. By analyzing and criticizing Derrida's "hyper-Kantian" critique of Kant as "fanatical" yet self-consistent, Schulting presents a masterful essay fitting for this collection (Schulting 2020, pp. 209-10). And, in making oblique connections to other philosophers in *Kant and the Continental Tradition*, including Heidegger and Hegel, Schulting's essay will surely be of interest to both Kant scholars and continental thinkers, Derridean or not.

Our final essay is actually a postscript, and it functions as a coda for harmonizing the preceding. In each essay, our authors engage with the late Gary Banham. Joanna Hodge concludes with reflections on several continental themes—genealogy of the Nietzschean strain, critique that follows Kant through Husserl, Heidegger, Marx, and Derrida, and more—set in the context of Banham's work. As a tribute, *Kant and the Continental Tradition's* coda sounds a nostalgic tone, one that represents nicely the tonal trajectory from Kant to continental philosophy; many of these reflections are as it were detuned and transformed, as in Derrida, and yet others echo the boundaries of new worlds, as in Heidegger. We would do well to listen.

Before concluding, it is worth mentioning potential concerns for the present collection. Editors Sorin Baiasu and Alberto Vanzo spend much space in the introduction defending the structural and thematic unity of these essays. This may present to some an initial suspicion about the unity of the book, and for the merits of a return to Kant vis-à-vis the continental tradition. If the essays are unified, why should we need an elaborate explanation of this? Why not let the essays speak for themselves? Luckily, the essays and their interconnections indeed *do* speak well by themselves and so justify their inclusion, rendering this concern a superficial one. More importantly, our editors illuminate the philosophical convergence between Kant and continental philosophy; many canonical continental philosophers in this volume try to distance themselves from Kant by emphasizing becoming over substance, lived experience over abstraction, and so on. Yet, all the while, as our editors show us and as the essays speak, they cannot escape the orbit of Kant's immense philosophical legacy.

Though space does not permit critical engagement with each essay, there are at least two elements of the volume that invite criticism since these also reflect the motivations of the text as a whole. These include a certain boldness of scope in some essays—unsurprising given the continental spirit—and a possible lack of balance between the essays themselves. For the former, we might point to Jones's essay on Kant, Hegel, and Irigaray as one instance. For many casual readers, Jones's essay may seem unsuccessful given that the scope of its aim is too large. Adequate treatment of these topics and philosophers would require, it seems, something on the order of a monograph. At the same time, we receive a philosophically exciting paper that brings something refreshing to the collection as a whole. In an odd way, the boldness of some of the essays in this collection reflects the spirit of the continental reaction to Kant's legacy.

The last concern of this volume is a potential lack of balance. We all know that an unbalanced blade cannot fulfil its purpose properly. Accordingly, we may worry that the present volume weighs, at times, too heavily on Kant. Indeed, a handful of essays concern conceptual problems in Kant scholarship, such as the status of intuition or regulative judgment. Though no problem for those of the Kantian inclination, this choice may turn off continental readers who would otherwise find an enticing collection of essays on one of their key philosophical forefathers. This questionable footing can, at times, undermine our

expectations for a genuine dialogue (or dance, if we wish to put on our theatrical Nietzschean hats) between Kant and the continentals advertised by the book's title.

This proportional imbalance is nonetheless counterbalanced through the collection's narrative. The Kantian choreography, as mentioned, sets the stage for later, more elaborate continental dances. For instance, Moran alludes to Husserl, reluctant to draw deeper connections, yet these allusions nicely foreshadow Baiasu on Heidegger. Still, the collection could have benefited from additional discussions on Arendt and Kantian aesthetics vis-à-vis politics, or on Husserl and Kantian anticipations of phenomenology. Just as Rehberg begins an exciting critical reading of Arendt's lectures on Kant (the only Arendt in the collection), it is cut short. Despite this, the structural balance of the collection offsets the bulk of this proportionality concern.

One final limitation of this collection, following this remark, is a curious absence of other prominent figures in the continental tradition. These include Gadamer (whose doctoral adviser Natorp was also a neo-Kantian), Deleuze (who wrote his own creative commentary on the unity of Kant's philosophy), or even Badiou (who fuses continental and analytic approaches, not unlike Kant's prefiguration of both schools). Surprisingly, Nietzsche is only considered in the postscript of the book. These omissions are understandable, however, since critical engagement with them would require space exceeding the limits of any reasonable volume. We should find little reason to complain, since we instead get illuminating studies on less appreciated figures such as Luce Irigaray.

At the end of the day, *Kant and the Continental Tradition* will be a welcome addition for any scholar or student of Kant, continental philosophy, or even the history of philosophy. It not only adds to the rather slim collection of comparative works of this sort, especially with its focus on the topics sensibility, nature, and religion. No, even more than that, it interacts with multiple schools of thought in a careful and thoughtful way. The holistic, untamed topical excesses unique to continental philosophy are masterfully tempered by the analytical methods we come to expect of Kant scholarship. This makes for a work on continental philosophy accessible for Kant scholars (and even those more analytically-oriented), yet broad enough to appeal to postmodern thinkers, cultural critics, and continental commentators. And, by returning to perennial topics of philosophy, such as the

unity of nature or the coherency of religion, *Kant and the Continental Tradition* shows us how a canonical thinker of the past—like Kant—can still have something to teach us today. In this way, the collection succeeds. It therefore merits our attention.

References

Baiasu, R. (2020), “Heidegger’s Interpretation of Kant’s Transcendental Schematism”, in S. Baiasu and A. Vanzo (eds.), *Kant and the Continental Tradition: Sensibility, Nature and Religion*. Milton, Routledge, pp. 61-78.

Baiasu, S. and Vanzo, A. (2020), “Kant and the Continental Tradition”, in S. Baiasu and A. Vanzo (eds.), *Kant and the Continental Tradition: Sensibility, Nature and Religion*. Milton, Routledge, pp. 3-20.

Crome, K. (2020), “Disputing Critique: Lyotard’s Kantian Differend”, in S. Baiasu and A. Vanzo (eds.), *Kant and the Continental Tradition: Sensibility, Nature and Religion*. Milton, Routledge, pp. 131-145.

Cutrofello, A. (1994), *Discipline and Critique: Kant, Poststructuralism, and the Problem of Resistance*. Albany: New York, State University of New York Press.

Hengehold, L. (2007), *The Body Problematic: Political Imagination in Kant and Foucault*. Pennsylvania Park, Pennsylvania State University Press.

Jones, R. (2020), “Kant, Hegel and Irigaray: From ‘Chemism’ to the Elemental”, in S. Baiasu and A. Vanzo (eds.), *Kant and the Continental Tradition: Sensibility, Nature and Religion*. Milton, Routledge, pp. 146-170.

Moran, D. (2020), “Kant on Intuition”, in S. Baiasu and A. Vanzo (eds.), *Kant and the Continental Tradition: Sensibility, Nature and Religion*. Milton, Routledge, pp. 23-60.

Schrift, A. D. (ed.), (2020), *Kant, Kantianism, and Idealism: The Origins of Continental Philosophy* (8 vols.). Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Schulting, D. (2020), “The ‘Proper’ Tone of Critical Philosophy: Kant and Derrida on Metaphilosophy and the Use of Religious Tropes”, in S. Baiasu and A. Vanzo (eds.), *Kant and the Continental Tradition: Sensibility, Nature and Religion*. Milton, Routledge, pp. 194-221.

