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1-1-2004

Review of "German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781-1801" by Frederick C. Beiser

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Published version. *Theological Studies,* Vol. 65, No. 1 (2004): 217-218. Permalink: http://www.ts.mu.edu/content/65/65.1/65.1.reviews-notices.pdf. Used with permission.

Catholic leaders to give us the married as well as the celibate diocesan priests we need.

Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles JOHN A. COLEMAN, S.J.

GERMAN IDEALISM: THE STRUGGLE AGAINST SUBJECTIVISM, 1781–1801. By Frederick C. Beiser. Cambridge: Harvard University, 2002. Pp. xvi + 726. $61.50.

Beiser's important earlier studies—*The Fate of Reason* (1987) and *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism* (1992)—placed the trajectory of ideas, issues, and arguments of late 18th- and early 19th-century German philosophy and political thought within an illuminating account of their cultural and political contexts. In this work, B. shifts attention from that larger background and presents, in contrast, a closely focused analysis of the texts of six thinkers—Kant, Fichte, Hölderlin, Novalis, Schlegel, and Schelling—that bear upon "one specific theme: the meaning of idealism itself, and more specifically the reaction against subjectivism" (viii). The analysis is in service of a larger thesis that goes counter to a commonly accepted interpretation of German idealism as "essentially the culmination of the Cartesian tradition," which is usually accompanied by "a seductively simple narrative" that makes it "the gradual and inevitable completion of Kant's 'Copernican Revolution' " (1–2). B. argues instead that it is "more accurate to say the exact opposite: that the development of German idealism is not the *culmination* but the *nemesis* of the Cartesian tradition" (3). He sees Kant marshaling against the truly subjectivist Cartesian "way of ideas" arguments that have within them the structural and normative elements that later provide the framework upon which his successors constructed their objective idealisms. On B.'s reading the trajectory of idealism thus moves from "the 'subjective' or 'formal' idealism of Kant and Fichte, according to which the transcendental subject is the source of the form but not the matter of experience" to an " 'objective' or 'absolute' idealism . . . according to which the forms of experience are self-subsistent and transcend both the subject and object" (11).

For B., a variety of factors contribute to the subjectivist interpretation he seeks to counter. Among the most important has been "a failure [on the part of the subjectivist interpretation] to distinguish between two very different versions or forms of idealism" (6). In the first version, the ideal is indeed the subjective and stands as the mental or spiritual over against the physical or the material; in the second, it is objective and stands as the archetypal or normative over against the ectypical or the substantive. He notes that the idealists are not entirely blameless for such a misreading since they often did not themselves carefully distinguish these two forms. In consequence, an important part of B.'s corrective strategy is to untangle the interplay of these two forms within the texts he examines; this done, he argues that, when properly read, the line of development is "a progressive

desubjectivization of the Kantian legacy" (6) culminating in the objective idealism most notably articulated in Schelling's writings from 1799 to 1801.

B. also considers Hegel's history of philosophy—in which all is prelude to Hegel's own system of absolute idealism—to be an important source of the subjectivist interpretation of idealism. In addition, a key emendation that B. sees Hegel's account needing is the retrieval of the roles that Hölderlin, Novalis, and Schlegel each played in the development of idealism, summed up in the claim that "there is not a single Hegelian theme that cannot be traced back to his predecessors in Jena" and "the fathers of absolute idealism were Hölderlin, Schlegel and Schelling" (10). His treatment of these figures in the last 250 pages does not, however, attempt to confirm that claim by a systematic comparison of their texts with Hegel's. B.'s method throughout is to analyze issues so as to recover how they presented themselves to each of these thinkers and to reconstruct arguments so as to recapture the intelligibility they had for their authors—even in those cases where B. finds the arguments unsuccessful.

This work of philosophical and historical scholarship will be an especially valuable resource for those who need to understand and assess the impact of German idealism on theology. Though such concerns are beyond the careful philosophical focus of B.'s study, his analyses are very useful for gaining a much better sense of the positions and arguments that Kant and these five successors set forth in their texts. B. provides a useful baseline for measuring the extent to which subsequent theological engagement with these thinkers—whether by appropriation or opposition—has itself adequately grasped the philosophical point of their positions. The introductions that B. provides to each of the four main sections of the book provide a concise overview of the main theses he will advance in consequence of his detailed analyses; they offer a useful road map for readers who may not need to journey along every argumentative track that B. traces.

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IL DINAMISMO INTELLETTUALE DAVANTI AL MISTERO: LA QUESTIONE DEL SOPRANNATURALE NEL PERCORSO SPECULATIVO DI J. MARÉCHAL. By Daniele Moretto. Dissertatio Series Romana, vol. 33. Pontificio Seminario Lombardo in Roma. Milan: Edizioni Glossa, 2001. Pp. xx + 399. €23.24.

In his highly significant 1951 study probing the essence of Karl Barth's theology, Hans Urs von Balthasar wielded a double-edged sword, hoping to present a systematic alternative to the conceptualist rationalism of neo-Scholasticism and to the overweening supernaturalism of Barth's occasionalism. To this end, Balthasar adduces throughout his book the philosophy of Joseph Maréchal, who had speculatively adumbrated what Henri de Lubac had historically demonstrated, namely, that the natural order exists only as inscribed within the *unicus ordo supernaturalis*. At least at this point in his career, Balthasar, along with the other *nouveaux théologiens* recently clustered at Lyon-Fourvière, found Maréchal to be a breath of