



## BOOK REVIEW

Luigi Filieri, *Sintesi e Giudizio. Studio su Kant e Jakob Sigismund Beck* Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2020 Pp. 342 ISBN 9788846758699 (pbk) €30.00

‘There is an Italian proverb: May God protect us especially from our friends, for we shall manage to watch out for our enemies ourselves’ (12: 371; Kant 1999: 560). Kant refers to this popular adage in his 1799 *Public Declaration concerning Fichte’s Wissenschaftslehre*, but this maxim seems well suited to a situation in which he found himself with some frequency when the spread of the Critical philosophy brought about conflicting reactions. Indeed, beside open controversies such as those with Feder and Garve, or Eberhard, there were in fact much more insidious situations, when some scholars, united by their claim to have grasped the deepest meaning of the Critical philosophy, tried to convey it as clearly as possible for the benefit of the general public. One might consider K. L. Reinhold in this context, as he reads the first *Critique* essentially as a unitary system of transcendental philosophy, disregarding Kant’s repeatedly expressed intention of merely providing with this work a propaedeutic to the system. It is also true that Kant himself, in the years shortly after the publication of Reinhold’s works, would radically retract this position – to the consternation of even contemporary interpreters – when confronted with the texts on which Fichte based his claim to a true exposition of transcendental idealism.

Even with regard to Reinhold’s best intentions, Kant did not fail to express a certain reticence, not least because the target of the sceptical criticism that rained down on the first *Critique* often ended up being the image offered by Reinhold rather than Kant’s own theses. In this respect, we encounter the figure at the centre of Luigi Filieri’s fine book, namely J. S. Beck. In the early 1790s, he was chosen by Kant, of whom he had been a direct pupil, as a possible editor of the Latin compendium of the three *Critiques*, planned by the publisher Hartknoch in Riga.

Beck refused this task, precisely by proposing a critical essay against Reinhold’s reading. However, in order to avoid an open polemic with Reinhold, Kant recommended caution, suggesting instead an exegetical work which ultimately saw the light of day in three volumes published between 1793 and 1796, under the title *Erläuternder Auszug aus den kritischen Schriften des Herrn Prof. Kant*. The subtitle (*‘auf Anrathen desselben’*) is particularly interesting: ‘in consultation with the same [i.e., Kant]’. Beck chooses this subtitle because the text benefits from an exchange of correspondence with Kant. Despite this dense exchange, however, Beck remains perplexed about certain aspects, which emerge especially in the third volume of his *Erläuternder Auszug*, the subtitle of which reads *Dritter Band, welcher den Standpunkt darstellt, aus welchem die kritische Philosophie zu beurteilen ist* (1796). Kant avoided speaking out against this exposition of his own thought, which nonetheless did not leave him satisfied.

In light of these elements, Filieri moves forward from the *Standpunkt* with a threefold and ambitious goal. In the first part of the text, the author carefully reconstructs the (unfortunately incomplete) Kant-Beck correspondence to show, on

the one hand, the depth and radicality of Beck's interpretative problems and, on the other, the superficiality and hastiness of Kant's answers, an attitude that is said to have contributed to fuelling some misunderstandings in his pupil. The second, more interpretative part deals with Beck's own views, which matured through his efforts at commenting on the first *Critique*. In the third and last part, the author presents his own position, by assuming Kant's role in responding more accurately than Kant himself did to Beck's objections, thereby seeking to achieve Beck's goal, namely to reach the 'only possible standpoint' for an authentic understanding of the Critical philosophy.

The reconstruction of the epistolary exchange reveals two keywords in Beck's reading: *indistinction* and *underestimation*. The former feature is realised in Beck's disregarding of Kant's instead crucial distinction between 'object-reference' (in intuition) and objectivity (in understanding), which in Kant's project are to be understood as different levels of 'objectuality'. According to Beck, at the intuitive level, one cannot strictly speak of an object but only of a manifold, which in order to be effectively thought must be unified in the form of an empirical concept, that is, with the intervention of the intelligible component. Actually, for Beck, it does not even make sense to speak of an intelligible 'component' of knowledge, since only the Transcendental Logic proves the possibility of objective representations. On the same wavelength as this indistinction, and partially consequential, is Beck's imperviousness to the distinction between 'necessity' and 'necessity of a possibility' in relation to B131's celebrated formulation that the *I think* 'must be able to accompany all my representations'. Beck collapses this formulation into the necessity of an actual accompaniment of the subject's representations by the *I think*.

Beck's flattening of intellectual functions to the detriment of any form of unitary organisation of the sensible manifold inevitably depletes the role of mediating functions, such as the schematism and, consequently, the faculty of judgement. This brings us to the second key word of Beck's reading, namely *underestimation*. Beck does indeed reduce judgement to a propositional-explicative function, which moves from a merely subjective unity (that which is realised in the concept) to an objective unity, fixed in the propositional form. He thus fails to grasp the centrality of the transcendental foundation provided by the faculty of judgement to conceptual determinacy.

With progressive reworking and intensification, these problematic commitments form the backbone of the entire work. Such underlying flaws, indirectly encouraged or at least not duly corrected by Kant, lead Beck to paradoxical outcomes, from which Kant can ultimately only disassociate himself, such as the reduction of space to a 'category of intuiting' (p. 62) or, more generally, to a confusion of sensibility and understanding that tends to subjugate the former to the latter. Beck's mathematical training significantly affected his tendency to read the structure of the Critical philosophy as itself based on an original synthetic activity, what Beck calls 'original representing' [*das ursprüngliche Vorstellen*] (cf. p. 112). He furthermore overlooks the fundamental difference between the particular 'matter' that mathematics works with, that is, pure intuitions, which allows it to be constructive in an entirely a priori manner, and the empirical matter to which intellectual concepts must be applied in order for empirical concepts to arise. On Kant's account, the latter matter is nonetheless already 'determined' on the sensible plane of intuition.

Filieri quite carefully assesses the structure of Beck's arguments, emphasising not only the general tendencies of his interpretation but also the differences between those passages in which Beck's conclusions may not be erroneous but the premises via which he reaches them are (pp. 32, 34), as well as those places in which Beck's problem does not concern his understanding of the premises but rather his ability to draw conclusions (p. 57).

The second chapter essentially takes up the theses that Beck sketched in the epistolary exchange with Kant as they are developed in *Standpunkt*, with a clarifying comparison from Reinhold's *Versuch*. The diametrical opposition of the two authors' points of view is immediately apparent from the fact that the enduring question about the foundation of the link between representation and its object, which animates Reinhold's investigation, is totally meaningless when setting out from Beck's notion of 'original representing'. From his own point of view, Beck can easily find out the contradictions of the problematic, and in some respects obscure, Reinholdian conception of the thing-in-itself. The original unity of apperception to which Beck ascribes the 'original representing' cannot quite reconcile with Reinhold's meticulous breakdown of the structure of representation, according to which, in the famous phrase, '[t]he mere representation is that which can be related in consciousness to object and subject, and is distinguished from both' (Reinhold 2003: I, 117; cf. also Reinhold 2011: SVII, 92-93). Filieri considers Beck's criticisms of Reinhold insofar as they contribute to the development of Beck's own position; however, for an author as complex as Reinhold some problems remain. For example, in his criticism of Reinhold, Beck does not limit himself to the *Versuch* but also explicitly addresses the first volume of the *Beiträge* and, indeed, on a crucial point, namely the principle of consciousness. Furthermore, Filieri attributes to Beck a criticism of Reinhold's principle of consciousness based on the assumption that consciousness would be taken by Reinhold as a fact (p. 138), whereas Beck is more faithful to Reinhold's text (although critical of it), and contends that the reason for the primacy of the principle of consciousness would lay in the propositional expression of the fact of consciousness, that is, 'is to be found in the fact that this principle expresses [*aussagt*] nothing more than the fact of consciousness' (Beck 1796: 101).

In the central sections of the second chapter, the author presents the salient features of Beck's 'original representing'. Fundamental to this is the conceptual pair 'synthesis and recognition'. These two terms 'are nothing other than the two sides of the coin that bears the name of original representing' (p. 160), since recognition constitutes that transcendental determination of time immediately operative in original representing. This in a way completes the reduction of Kantian pure a priori intuitions to the conceptual dimension and stresses the superfluousness of mediation functions. In Beck's eyes, there can be nothing before the original representational-cognitive function and this, on the one hand, only confirms the underestimation of the faculty of judgement in favour of an idealistic instance and, on the other, shows how 'the immediate operativity of categorical synthesis is not derived by Beck from the pages of the Deduction, but rather from the Analytic of Principles' (p. 171).

Some of the most apparent consequences of Beck's reading can be appreciated in relation to his conception of a priori synthetic judgement, which on his account 'coincides in all respects with the transition from original representing to analytical thinking. The a priori synthesis proper is accomplished entirely independently of

judging' (p. 207). The fact that the a priori synthesis is the foundation of the analytic unity of the object would in itself conform to Kant's dictate, but the problem is that 'for Beck the a priori synthetic judgement is not the foundation of the synthetic unity of the object. This is in fact constituted before and apart from the judging' (p. 207). In this framework, Beck understands that categories are not concepts like any other, but he departs from Kant precisely in the consideration of the function they perform: a function whose legitimacy cannot be called into question – as is the case in Kant's crucial Transcendental Deduction – given the original immediacy of the representing that is realised through them. Beck's greatest fault is his silence 'on the fact that the categories are for Kant rules. The normative instance is completely absent from the *Standpunkt*' (p. 209).

The latter remark introduces the final chapter, in which this normative instance is at the core of the author's proposal. Here, Filieri attempts to elaborate answers to Beck that go beyond those provided by Kant himself, thereby looking for a new possible *Standpunkt*. Last but not least, he also engages in dialogue with certain contemporary interpretative trends, such as the debate between conceptualists and non-conceptualists, rightly appraised as 'too polarized' (p. 214n2).

The pivot of this part is a call for mediation precisely between a radical conceptualist reading, as Beck's would be called today (cf. pp. 215, 324), and a non-conceptualist one. The author carefully follows the thread of the normative instance that he sees progressively ascending from intuition, through the synopsis and up to the power of judgement, and then draws the consequences in the final section entitled 'Normativity'. Many insights emerge in these dense passages. For example, with regard to intuition, it would be interesting to dwell on the a priori but non-innate status of space and time in order to understand the particular sense in which the subject can be said to be passive with respect to sensible intuitions. The author seems to feel the issue and touches on its salient chords in a long footnote that spans two pages (pp. 225–6n). Furthermore, the reference to the synopsis, thus, openly to the 'three-synthesis'-structure of the A-Deduction, which has recently been the subject of insistent scholarly attention, is particularly significant.

The progressiveness expressed by these three syntheses, through which the normativity of the Kantian synthesis unfolds, is precisely what Beck's 'original representing' fails to grasp. In this vein, the author claims that central passages of the first *Critique*, such as the one according to which 'the conditions of the possibility of experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience' plainly speak against Beck's reading. From this point of view, judgement can be understood as the 'genesis of the object of experience' because in this faculty the conditions are given for the passage from 'forms' (sensible-intuitive) to 'rules' (intellectual-conceptual) of the synthesis, and thereby a normativity is expressed that is to be understood as 'the set of rules underlying the possibility of a synthetic a priori judgement' (p. 283). On these assumptions, the author can convincingly 'reply to Beck that the object of experience is not the *primum* of a priori synthesis, even less so in an immediate manner, unrelated to the activity of judgement' (p. 284).

Certainly, many intriguing issues remain in the background. First and foremost, right from the introduction of the objectuality-level reached in intuition, the reader is confronted with the problem concerning the ontological status of the material that at

the intuitive level undergoes its first unitary presentation. This is the question urgently posed by Heidegger, especially in the debate with the Marburg Neo-Kantians. The idea that some ‘anticipation’ of the conceptual ‘rules’ must be present at the level and in the manner of the sensible ‘forms’ of the synthesis seems an almost natural option, which would perhaps go in the direction of the middle path taken by the author. Possibly it is just in light of the problems that this debate would open up that Filieri prudently chooses to confine himself to a hint in a footnote (p. 248n43).

In any case, if it is true that ‘we must be grateful to Beck’ (p. 167) for the fecundity of his theoretical provocations, we must be equally grateful to Filieri for having contributed to enlivening a promising trend in recent scholarship, aimed at recovering the originality and depth of a thinker like Beck (1796).

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