

Hans-Jörg Rheinberger. *Historische Epistemologie zur Einführung.* 155 pp., bibl., index. Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 2007. €12.90 (paper).

Historicizing epistemology is the major, if polymorphic, development of twentieth-century epistemology—or so Hans-Jörg Rheinberger suggests in *Historische Epistemologie zur Einführung* (p. 11). Guided by what he calls the French use of the term “epistemology” (as the reflection on the historical conditions according to, and by means of which, things are turned into objects of knowledge that launch and sustain the process of scientific cognition; see p. 11), Rheinberger argues that historicizing epistemology yielded a coming together of the contexts of justification and of discovery, the idea of science as process rather than as a system and of the sciences as nonreducible to one master science.

The reader is invited to follow the historicizing of epistemology in chronological order, beginning with the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the physiologist Emil Du Bois-Reymond’s famous 1872 *Ignoramus* speech. Du Bois-Reymond’s argument that the mechanical paradigm of science ultimately cannot justify its own basic concepts serves Rheinberger as the exemplar of the nineteenth-century discussion of the fictitious (but useful), conventional, and historical character of science (pp. 16 ff.). To this end, Chapter 1 introduces the philosophies of Ernst Mach and Henri Poincaré. Chapter 2 moves to the 1920s, focusing on Ludwik Fleck and Gaston Bachelard as offering the first programmatic attempts at historicizing epistemology in the twentieth century. In a tour de force, Chapter 3 adds to these interwar perspectives the positions of Ernst Cassirer, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, and Karl Popper. In Chapter 4, post World War II, the historicizing of epistemology has largely moved to North America. Rheinberger turns to Alexandre Koyré (in the United States since 1941), Thomas Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend (from 1958 a professor in Berkeley), and Stephen Toulmin (permanently working in the United States since 1965). Yet, not only the historicizing spirit had moved across the Atlantic—so too had thinkers such as Rudolf Carnap, a teacher of Willard Van Orman Quine. While these philosophers more or less defined the “received” views on epistemology in post-World War II Anglo-Saxon academic philosophy, their (“dissenting”) voices are practically absent from this introduction. Chapter 5 returns to Europe and the French philosophical tradition, notably Georges Canguilhem’s and Michel Foucault’s work on the epistemological dimension of the history of the life and social

sciences, as well as a brief account of Louis Althusser’s theory of knowledge as a production process and Jacques Derrida’s concept of historicity. Chapter 6 turns to work in progress, the positions of Ian Hacking and Bruno Latour. A brief conclusion reexamines the main theses regarding the historicity and plurality of the sciences.

This introduction offers an erudite account of important developments in French, German, and American philosophy; it insightfully juxtaposes authors that are rarely discussed together; and in spite of all the inherent complexity the book is brief and reads well. But there is no doubt that Rheinberger’s self-avowed “idiosyncracies” (p. 10) raise a number of questions. Rheinberger does not explicitly argue for his philosophical position but, rather, assumes a specific understanding of epistemology from the outset; his main thesis is in this sense conceptually implied and there is no discussion of alternative views. Historiographically, there is a noteworthy absence of the philosopher who coined the (“French”) term “historical epistemology” (Dominique Lecourt, in a thesis on Bachelard supervised by Canguilhem) and of others who have *explicitly* contributed to the discussion of historical epistemology (with the exception of Hacking). Perhaps as a result, this insightful rereading of twentieth-century science and philosophy is at its most abstract where historical epistemology itself is concerned. The concept, for example, appears to refer to both Bachelard’s concept of a contingent recurrence (p. 45) and Husserl’s phenomenology, which includes a universal teleology of reason (p. 67). While this account of historical epistemology thus seems almost overly inclusive, it does not address the Socratic concern with epistemology as justified true belief, as a question concerning “you and me.” Epistemology so understood appears to have been swept away by the imperial power of twentieth-century disciplinary sciences. Yet, in an age of climate change science and “science for policy,” it could at the very least be asked whether historical epistemology has any implications for our understanding of the relations between the sciences and citizens.

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Brian Rotman. *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts, and Distributed Human Being.* Foreword by **Timothy Lenoir.** xxxiv + 177 pp., index. Durham, N.C./London: Duke University Press, 2008. \$21.95 (paper).

Becoming Beside Ourselves has all the brilliance we have come to expect from Brian Rotman,