those of a previous age—or the austere Kirk arrayed against Hume in Scotland—read their aesthetics off the tenets of their religion. And this acceptance of humans’ secular natures as something, not necessarily in need of suppression, but as possessing resources for the cultural reinforcement of morality and sociability, provided an agenda in which “Theodicy, morality and taste had been combined into a network of interrelated problems” (Bourke, 156). This is surely a problematic that Burke himself would have recognized and Richard Bourke provides a superb guide to the enlightened, Christian reception of classical aesthetics as the major context in which to read this work.

The essays in this diverse collection are never less than stimulating, and the best will be essential reading for anyone wanting to write on or even approach Burke’s youthful masterpiece.

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The principal focus of Ankersmit’s book will be familiar to readers of his previous work: the nature of historical representation, or the way history is presented in texts. The book moves into new territory by outlining an updated version of historicism, the nineteenth-century conception of history according to which “each historical ‘thing’ (a nation, epoch, civilization, etc.) is argued to possess a historical idea . . . which is not in turn subject to change” (11). Ankersmit’s goal is to relocate this conception of the “historical idea” from the “past itself” (as for the original historicists) to the historian’s language about the past. His account is compelling and original, challenging prevailing dogmas regarding language, reference, meaning, and truth in recent Anglo-American as well as continental thought. The book will thus be of great interest not only for philosophers of history, but for anyone interested in these broader themes.

Ankersmit rejects the starting point in theories of time and narrative common in contemporary debates in the philosophy of history, beginning instead by drawing a central distinction between representation and interpretation. Representation is distinct from interpretation in that its principal object is reality, whereas that of the latter is the text, and it has priority over interpretation in historical accounts. On the basis of this distinction, chapters four through seven develop a novel theory of historical representation. This is the most technical and tightly argued portion of the book. Below is a very brief summary of its major claims.

Representation is a three-place (not two-place) operator in which we can distinguish (1) the representation itself, (2) that aspect of reality which is presented in the representation, and (3) the reality thereby represented. If we examine two portraits of Napoleon, for example, one by David and one by Gillray, we find not only different representations (1) but also that these are representations of different representeds or aspects (2), and not merely accidental differences of detail in the representation of the same real thing, the portrait-sitter Napoleon (3). Ankersmit contends that the difference between (2) and (3) has been problematically ignored in the philosophy of language, since to identify (2) and (3) is “to illegitimately project the structure of the proposition onto representation” (69). Thus any view in the philosophy of language (and Ankersmit finds such views more pervasive than one might expect) that analyzes language primarily in terms of truth-functional propositions and only on this basis in terms of meaning, must be revised: “[W]e cannot simply project the relationship between a true sentence and its referent onto that between a representation [1] and its presented [2]. Reference belongs [only] to true description and not to [prior] representation” (80). The inability of contemporary philosophy of language to adequately account for the historian’s representation of complex past realities can be addressed by
taking representational meaning, and not propositional truth, as primitive and by taking the text as whole to be more basic than the individual statements that comprise it.

Fully aware that this goes against prevailing dogmas about the theory-ladenness of experience and the “myth of the given,” Ankersmit insists this reversal of explanatory priority (representation before interpretation) is the correct model for historical writing since it allows for non-propositional, historical-representational truth, a form of “truth as revelation” he develops through a critical discussion of Heidegger’s _aletheia_. This is truth in the sense in which we say of a realist novelist that her works capture important _truths_ about reality despite their consisting primarily of statements that—considered as individual propositions in reference to a specific present or past reality—are entirely false. Ankersmit’s discussions in this regard are particularly timely as increasing numbers of philosophers turn their attention away from language narrowly construed to the consideration of non-conceptual, affective, or embodied aspects of thinking, meaning, and experience.

The book’s subsequent chapters apply this theory of historical representation to some specific topics central to the philosophy of history (presence, experience, and subjectivity), continuing the detailed discussions of major figures in these debates that are one of the book’s great merits, and culminating in a defense of the historicist claim that politics must be the foremost focus of historical writing. Of particular interest in this portion of the book is a new discussion of “historical experience,” a topic Ankersmit has treated at length in earlier works.

Although Ankersmit’s proposals concerning representation, meaning, and truth will no doubt appear unorthodox to many working in the philosophy of language, he convincingly demonstrates their applicability to problems in the philosophy of history. The relevance of his account beyond this area of inquiry—something Ankersmit also gestures at in the book—is less clear, but it merits closer investigation by any philosopher not content to ignore the role of history in questions of meaning, truth, and reference.

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