Introduction

Marco Sgarbi

In a recent publication on the history of the unconscious in the nineteenth-century German culture, Angus Nicholls and Martin Liebscher state that “Immanuel Kant arguably determined the way in which unconscious phenomena were understood in nineteenth-century German thought more than any other philosopher of the eighteenth century”.¹

The present volume aims to assess Kant’s account of the unconscious in its manifold aspects, and to discuss it from various perspectives: psychological, epistemological, anthropological, and moral. We aim to show Kant’s relevance for future discussions on the topic. Kant’s philosophy of the unconscious has for a long time been a neglected topic in Kant scholarship, especially in English language publications. In his Transzendentaler Idealismus, romantische Naturphilosophie, Psychoanalyse, Odo Marquard outlined some seminal ideas on the philosophy of the unconscious in the German intellectual milieu, but he limited his discussion mainly to the Romantic intellectual background and to their reception of Kant’s philosophy.² In Vor Freud: Philosophiegeschichtliche Voraussetzungen der Psychoanalyse, Wilhelm W. Hemecker dealt very briefly with Kant’s notion of the unconscious relating it with the Leibnizian standpoint on petites perceptions.³ The impact of the Leibnizian and Wolffian perspective on the philosophy of Enlightenment has been the subject of Hans Adler’s investigation on Johann Gottfried Herder’s philosophy,⁴ but no parallel researches have been devoted so meticulously to Kant’s philosophy. In Kant and the Mind, Andrew Brook, who is a worldwide expert on Kant and Freud, gives some insightful remarks on Kant’s theory of the unconscious beginning from the Kantian conception of con-

¹ Angus Nicholls and Martin Liebscher. Thinking the Unconscious: Nineteenth-Century German Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 9.
² Odo Marquard, Transzendentaler Idealismus, romantische Naturphilosophie, Psychoanalyse (Köln: Dinter, 1987).
sciousness and self-awareness. In 2005, two important works on the unconscious came out. Micheal B. Buchholz and Günter Gödde edited three volumes on the pre-history of the notion of the “unconscious” from the early modern philosophy, which first and foremost addressed medical and psychoanalytical issues only. Elke Völmicke, in *Das Unbewußte im deutschen Idealismus*, suggested the relevance of Kant’s problematic conception of the unconscious for the post-Kantian scholars such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Schelling, but without a careful examination the Kantian position. Recently, the most important investigation on the unconscious in a broad sense has been carried out by Robert Hanna focusing on the “non-conceptual”. The notion of the “unconscious” still remains a stumbling block of the Kantian scholarship, probably because Kant himself leaves undetermined and unthematized his very idea of it.

If we look at the dictionaries on the Kantian philosophy, just two of them present an entry on the unconscious, which in addition both narrow

---

7 Elke Völmicke, *Das Unbewußte in deutschen Idealismus* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005).
the question to the topic of the obscure representations. But is Kant’s philosophy of the unconscious restricted only to the problem of obscure representation? Did Kant addressed the “unconscious” not also in other ways? Does it or does it not have a prominent position in Kant’s philosophical system?

The purpose of the present volume is to fill a substantial gap in Kant research while offering a comprehensive survey of the topic in different areas of investigation, such as history of philosophy, philosophy of mind, aesthetics, moral philosophy, and anthropology. The essays collected in the volume show that the unconscious raises relevant problems for instance in the theory of knowledge, as non-conceptual contents and obscure representations (Kitcher, Heidemann). In the philosophy of mind, it bears on the topic of the unity of the consciousness and the notion of the transcendental self (Crone, Schulting). It is a key-topic of logic with respect to the distinction between determinate-indeterminate judgments (Lee), and to mental activity (Duque, Rockmore). In aesthetics, the problem of the unconscious appears in connection with the problems of reflective judgments and of the genius (Otabe, Giordanetti). Finally, it is a relevant issue also in anthropology and moral philosophy in defining the irrational aspects of the human being (Pollock, Sánchez Madrid, Tuppini).

