

1-1-2010

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I. NEO-KANTIANISM IN GERMANY

“Neo-Kantianism” is the name for a broad philosophical movement that sought to revive Kant’s philosophy in a radically changed philosophical and, more broadly, cultural landscape.¹ It flourished especially in Germany, but also in France and, to a lesser extent, in Italy and a few other European countries (including Eastern Europe). It reached its apex between 1880 and 1920. In Germany, it grew out of a decidedly academic context – as opposed to “renegade” writers such as Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, who disdained academic philosophy – although its origins lie, in part, in sociopolitical discourses stemming from the societal problems posed by the Industrial Revolution and the worker question (*Arbeiterfrage*). The other background is the challenge posed to philosophy by the impressively and quickly progressing natural sciences in the era of positivism. Both of these tendencies arose around the middle of the nineteenth century, in a time when, as was often noted, Hegel’s system had “collapsed.” In both cases, to be elucidated below, the call was issued, “*Back to Kant!*”²

1. Sebastian Luft is primarily responsible for the sections dealing with neo-Kantianism in Germany, while Fabien Capeillères is the primary author of the sections dealing with neo-Kantianism in France.

2. For a historical account of the origins of neo-Kantianism, see Klaus Christian Köhnke, *Entstehung und Aufstieg des Neukantianismus: Die Deutsche Universitätsphilosophie zwischen Idealismus und Positivismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), abridged English translation, *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism: German Academic Philosophy Between Idealism and Positivism*, R. J. Hollingdale (trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and Thomas Willey, *Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860–1914*

The term “neo-Kantianism” was not used until the late 1880s, and then in a polemical fashion by its critics. The neo-Kantian movement, however, was (with the possible exception of the Marburg School), far from unitary and cohesive, as evidenced by the alternative names for this movement: (neo-)Criticism and neo-Fichteanism, among others. But around 1900, “neo-Kantianism” stuck. The demarcations concerning who belongs to this movement and who does not are to this day contested. Although it was a very broad movement, thinkers who might well be counted among its members – Nicolai Hartmann, Wilhelm Dilthey, or Edmund Husserl, for instance – are rarely included. In Germany, the neo-Kantian movement crystallized around the two “power centers”: the “Marburg School” in Marburg, a small university town in the state of Hesse north of Frankfurt, and the “Southwest School” at the universities of Freiburg and Heidelberg.

Given its academic location – all the neo-Kantians were university professors or professional academics – the neo-Kantian movement is also a history of successful university politics: neo-Kantianism in Germany soon exerted its power over nearly all German-speaking universities (including Switzerland and Austria), and its representatives were heavily involved in shaping hiring policies and academic curricula. Around the turn of nineteenth century, neo-Kantianism had attained what Jürgen Habermas once called an “imperial stance” that lasted until its near collapse after the First World War and its total disintegration in Nazi Germany as of 1933. But its dissolution was in itself part of the legacy of neo-Kantianism: many of the leading neo-Kantians were Jews and, not surprisingly, prosecuted by Hitler’s fascist regime. The removal of the main neo-Kantian philosophers from academia and from German culture – most of them were left-wing liberals anchoring the Weimar Republic in the values of the Enlightenment – was a consequence that reflected more than just official anti-Semitic policies. To many contemporaries, and Heidegger is here a good example of this attitude, the neo-Kantians represented not only a dated model of philosophy; in addition, their liberal politics, also diffusely associated with “Jewishness,” reflected a politics whose time had passed. When Heidegger, in a letter from 1929, railed against the “Jewification of the German spirit” (*Verjudung des deutschen Geistes*),

(Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1978). Brief overviews of the neo-Kantian movement can be found in Hans-Ludwig Ollig, *Der Neukantianismus* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1979), and Manfred Pascher, *Einführung in den Neukantianismus* (Munich: UTB, 1997). A full-scale account of the neo-Kantian movement does not exist to this day, although certain thinkers or schools have been covered in greater detail. For work on the Marburg School, for example, cf. the important works by Holzhey (see bibliography), and for an historical account, cf. Ulrich Sieg, *Aufstieg und Niedergang des Marburger Neukantianismus: Die Geschichte einer philosophischen Schulgemeinschaft* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1994). The account here is indebted to and draws from all of these sources.

we see that "to be Jewish" was more than a creed; it was a philosophical as well as a political "lifestyle."³

Due to their dominant position between 1890 and 1914, the neo-Kantians were harshly attacked by nearly all the other philosophical movements that emerged after the First World War, including phenomenology, *Lebensphilosophie*, existentialism (Jaspers, the early Heidegger), and logical positivism. This critique of what was perceived as the dominant philosophical school in Germany became so much a part of the self-definition of these new tendencies that many, if not most, new philosophical movements and ideas cannot be understood without at least a basic knowledge of the neo-Kantian paradigms and theories that they argued against. Defining one's own project *vis-à-vis* the neo-Kantians became almost the *modus operandi* in many a philosopher's work, and we see this in Husserl's transcendental-eidetic phenomenology, Scheler's value ethics, Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity, and Carnap's and the Vienna School's attempt at a "truly" scientific philosophy.

In short, the history of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century philosophy cannot be adequately assessed without knowledge of neo-Kantianism. It is curious, then, to note that for over forty years (essentially after the Second World War), neo-Kantianism has been largely ignored by scholarship. As of the 1980s, however, increasing attention in Europe has been directed toward the work of the neo-Kantians and the importance of neo-Kantianism has also been brought to the fore by some scholars in North America. It is to be anticipated that neo-Kantianism will also become a widely discussed field of research in the next decade in North America for scholars working in the history of philosophy, history and philosophy of science, philosophy of culture, and "continental philosophy," broadly construed. This revival is evidenced by a good number of international conferences held in the past decade not only in Germany, France, and Italy, but also in the United States.

Despite the important role of neo-Kantianism in the philosophical landscape of the time, it is, ironically, hard to point to any seminal works by any of the major figures. Of these major figures, Hermann Cohen, Paul Natorp, Wilhelm Windelband, and Heinrich Rickert were the most famous, along with Ernst Cassirer, whose writings were widely received and translated. This is not to say that the literary output was not most impressive: all of these philosophers wrote books at the rate at which most academics today write articles. Nevertheless, some of the systematic approaches of the neo-Kantians have to be pieced together through a synopsis of several works. This dearth of "seminal works" also has philosophical reasons; it has to do with the nature of the neo-Kantian movement itself

3. Quoted in Peter E. Gordon, "Neo-Kantianism and the Politics of Enlightenment," *The Philosophical Forum* 39(2) (2008), 235.

and the type of work that it did and promoted – despite all differences of outlook and emphasis. Hence, to understand the distinct character of the neo-Kantian movement, let us return to its origins in the then-contemporary *political thought* and *natural science*.

Friedrich Albert Lange (1828–75) and Otto Liebmann (1840–1912) might both be considered “fathers” of neo-Kantianism. Lange published two works in 1865, which became defining works for the nascent movement, *Die Arbeiterfrage* (The worker question) and *Geschichte des Materialismus* (History of Materialism), while Liebmann’s *Kant und die Epigonen* (1865) was very popular at the time. Both of Lange’s books tackle the issue of the modern *conditio humana* and the problems arising from humankind’s situation in the industrial age, which posed many new and hitherto unknown challenges (mass society, the problem of the working class, etc.). Lange also participated in the *Vereinstag Deutscher Arbeitervereine*, the German Workers’ Association, an ancestor of the German Social Democratic Party (the SPD). However, as the title *Geschichte des Materialismus* indicates, Lange attempted to place these concrete problems into a larger philosophical context. The problem was, in his opinion, “materialism” and its disdain of human spirit and “idealistic” values in a broadly conceived sense of the term, along with materialism’s tendency to reduce humans to functioning wheels in the machinery of modern industrial society. Hence, a decidedly political sense of “idealism” runs through neo-Kantianism. This tendency led to interesting and – judging from political debate among social democrats worldwide – still valid social-democratic ideas, which took hold especially in the Marburg School. Both Hermann Cohen and Natorp, for example, promoted what they called “social idealism” as an explicit rejection of a socialism stemming from the Marxist tradition. Thus, in reconstructing the origins of neo-Kantianism, one needs to keep in mind this political background and the societal context that the neo-Kantians attempted to address in a Kantian vein, while Marxist ideas were developing in elsewhere in Germany, England, and Russia.

The other origin, which connects more directly to Kant and hence constitutes the general alliance with the Sage of Königsberg and “Kantianism” in a broader sense, came, interestingly enough, from within the *natural sciences*. Here scientists confronted the problems that arose once natural science became “scientific” in the modern sense of the term, and the speculative *Naturphilosophie* of the German Idealists and the Romantics, especially Schelling,⁴ became an object of ridicule. It was in fact a scientist – Hermann von Helmholtz (1821–94) – who, in his physical and optical experiments, discovered the influence of the observer on that which was being observed. In his famous speech *Über das*

*4. For a discussion of Schelling, see the essay by Joseph P. Lawrence in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 1*.

Sehen des Menschen (On man's seeing, 1855), he attempted to formulate these ideas in Kantian terms, claiming that "all cognition of reality must be derived from experience." In this manner, he thought that his study of the physiology of the senses had confirmed in a scientific manner Kant's "organization of the mind," namely "that the manner of our perceptions is equally determined by the nature of our senses as through external objects."⁵ Hence, experimental natural science seemed to confirm Kant's transcendental turn, without, however, the idealist baggage that burdened both Kant and his idealist aftermath. Early neo-Kantian philosophers such as Cohen soon took up this challenge and placed Helmholtz's ideas on a firmer philosophical foundation. While they welcomed the fact that an experimental scientist had made the way "back to Kant," they felt that this move took place in the (problematic) spirit of naturalism. As a result, the scientists' return to Kant received an enthusiastic reception on the part of philosophers of the Kantian stripe, but the neo-Kantians also felt that this scientific return to Kant needed to be monitored carefully. The close connections to the sciences became one of the trademarks of neo-Kantianism. In an unfavorable reading, which, however, became popular (and which one still finds quoted today), neo-Kantianism was criticized in this vein for reducing philosophy to the "handmaiden of the sciences." While this description is, as we shall see, unfair, it is true that the proximity to scientific endeavors and a reflection on the status and nature of the sciences – both the natural and the human sciences – became a dominant characteristic that defined and popularized neo-Kantian ideas.

Helmholtz's work exemplifies the rehabilitation of Kantian philosophy that emerged from discussions within the sciences and the philosophy of science. The call to return to Kant was soon taken up by philosophers or those – such as Cohen, who started out as an experimental psychologist – who turned to philosophy under this influence. Yet, once Kant had become re-established as an eminent philosophical figure with whom to approach epistemological questions in the sciences, another field of activity emerged that also helped to strengthen the overall stance of the neo-Kantian movement within Germany, namely *Kant philology* and *Kant scholarship*. With the development of rigorous philology in the nineteenth century and new editorial techniques arose the inauguration of critical Kant editions that adhered to these new standards. "Complete Works" editions had up to then either not existed or were, for example, in the notorious case of Hegel, not philologically sound in the light of contemporary editorial practices. Under the influence of Wilhelm Dilthey, the Kant edition initiated by the Berlin Academy of the Sciences, begun in 1900 and staffed by philosophers in the neo-Kantian vicinity – Erich Adickes, Benno Erdmann, and others – stands (for the

5. Quoted in Helmut Holzhey, "Der Neukantianismus," in *Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 12, H. Holzhey and W. Rödl (eds) (Munich: Beck, 2004), 31.

most part) the test of modern editorial philology. The importance of this editorial work for the dissemination of Kant's philosophy cannot be overemphasized.

In addition to the Berlin edition, the late nineteenth century saw an impressive proliferation of *commentaries* on Kant's works. Some of the classical Kant scholarship produced then – commentaries by Cassirer, Cohen, Hans Vaihinger, and others – are to this day classics of Kant research. These basic readings defined the main avenues in which Kant would subsequently be read. In other words, what the neo-Kantians achieved, actively and conscientiously, was a *canonization* of Kant as he is perceived today: as the towering figure in modern philosophy. This is not to say that this status is not due to Kant's philosophy itself; however, a writer needs a functioning "transmission belt" that conveys one's thoughts to the readers. This is what the neo-Kantians achieved in an exemplary manner. While this might seem tangential to the actual *philosophical* importance of neo-Kantianism, it is indeed not to be dismissed, as it established both Kant in the position seen today and, in turn, the neo-Kantians as the "true" heirs of this seminal figure in the history of Western philosophy.

Since the neo-Kantian movement is anything but a unified school, we shall now turn to the Marburg School and the Southwestern School, respectively, to discuss their mutual contributions to modern philosophy. This short historical overview will have to confine itself to these two main groups.⁶

The Marburg School: Hermann Cohen, Paul Natorp, Ernst Cassirer

The Marburg School is the most "compact" group within neo-Kantianism, judging from its self-understanding and outward projection. This unity is due to the *method* that its founder, Hermann Cohen (1842–1918), developed out of his Kant interpretation. This method is called the *Transcendental Method*, in recognition of Kant's method, although the term is itself not to be found in Kant's *oeuvre*. This focus on method has led some to accuse the Marburg School of a "methodological fanaticism,"⁷ although we shall see that the method itself plays a crucial role in the Marburg School's epistemological paradigm. Surrounded by a very

6. As mentioned, most philosophy departments in Germany and Austria were dominated by neo-Kantians and to do justice to this movement as a whole one would have to discuss figures whose names can merely be listed here: the largely independent Richard Hönlswald (1875–1947) in Breslau (Gadamer's first teacher there), later Munich; the critical realist Alois Riehl in Graz (1844–1924); the philosopher of law Leonard Nelson (1882–1927); Jonas Cohn (1869–1947) in Freiburg; Bruno Bauch (1877–1942), the editor of *Kant Studien*; and for the youngest generation of neo-Kantians after the Second World War, sometimes referred to as "neo-neo-Kantians" (a somewhat excessive title), Richard Zocher (1887–1976), Hans Wagner (1917–2000), and Wolfgang Cramer (1901–74), father of Konrad Cramer (1933–).

7. Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Paul Natorp," in Paul Natorp, *Philosophische Systematik* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2000).

wide, national as well as international, circle of pupils and adherents, the main figures of this group are Hermann Cohen, Paul Natorp (1854–1924) and Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945). Cassirer is sometimes not counted as belonging to the Marburg School, although he is acknowledged to be one of the most significant philosophers who emerged from the neo-Kantian tradition as a whole. Unlike Cohen and Natorp, who were professorial colleagues at the University of Marburg and formed a unique coalition of great influence both within and outside the university, Cassirer was a generation younger and never actually taught in Marburg. The offspring of a rich Jewish family with relatives in Berlin, Munich, and Vienna, Cassirer rather disliked small-town life such as that of Marburg, a city with a population of some 30,000 at the time. Still, for reasons to be discussed, he deserves to be counted among the Marburg School and its method.

Cohen was by all accounts the dominant figure of this school; being also a charismatic and irritable character,⁸ he was the main attraction for students who, after his arrival in Marburg in 1873, soon flocked around him. His ally Natorp was initially one of them, but soon secured his own position at the university, first as a librarian, then later, with Cohen's mentorship, as a professor. Cohen taught in Marburg until his retirement in 1912. He spent his last years living in Berlin teaching at the *Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Academy for the Science of Judaism), where he taught mainly on Judaism and the philosophy of religion and was influential on a newer generation of thinkers such as Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber.⁹

Cohen first made a name for himself through his influential commentaries on Kant's three Critiques. The commentary on the First Critique, entitled *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (Kant's theory of experience), became especially influential for Kant scholarship as well as for the popularization of the "Marburg Method." Once these three voluminous commentaries were completed (1912), Cohen turned to composing his own "System of Philosophy" in three volumes analogous to Kant's Critiques – *Logik der Reinen Erkenntnis* (Logic of pure

8. As will become evident below in the treatment of Cohen's closest collaborator, Natorp, they seemed to have, as eyewitnesses report, polar opposite characters. Whereas Natorp was generally perceived as solid and reliable, Cohen seemed to have a choleric temper, which he did not even attempt to keep under wraps and which was directed at different people and peoples. To give just one example, Cohen, who discovered his Jewish roots after the Dreyfus affair, despised assimilated Jews and did not hold back judgment. One person whom he vilified in this way was, for instance, Husserl; see quotations from Cohen's correspondence with Natorp in Sebastian Luft, "Reconstruction and Reduction: Natorp and Husserl on Method and the Question of Subjectivity," in *Neo-Kantianism in Contemporary Philosophy*, Sebastian Luft and Rudolf Makkreel (eds) (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 84–5 n.3.

9. For a historical account of Cohen's interesting life, see Helmut Holzhey, "Cohen and the Marburg School in Context," in *Hermann Cohen's Critical Idealism*, Reinier Munk (ed.) (Dordrecht: Springer, 2004).

cognition), *Ethik des Reinen Willens* (Ethics of pure willing), and *Ästhetik des Reinen Gefühls* (Aesthetic of pure sentiment) – which appeared between 1902 and 1912. A transitional work, but from a developmental standpoint crucial, since it allowed Cohen to explicitly formulate his “transcendental method” (the centerpiece of the Marburg School), was the small study *Das Prinzip der Infinitesimal-Methode und seine Geschichte* (The principle of the infinitesimal method and its history). Cohen’s system was supposed to be rounded off by a fourth part, a psychology explicating the “unity of cultural consciousness,” but Cohen passed away before beginning it. Shortly before his death, Cohen completed his late manuscript on religion, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* (Religion of reason out of the sources of Judaism), which was published posthumously and recently has attracted considerable attention in the philosophy of religion and Jewish studies.

To understand Cohen’s original approach culminating in the “transcendental method,” one must first assess his Kant interpretation. The thesis that Cohen boldly puts forth claims that with his Copernican turn Kant founded nothing less than a new concept of *experience*. Experience is not mere perception or intuition, but establishes *laws* about that which is experienced. In other words, according to Cohen, the experience Kant is talking about is that of the *scientist*. Cohen famously declares that Kant conceived his revolutionary Copernican turn as he meditated on Newton’s *Principia Mathematica*. “Not the stars in the heavens,” he writes, “are the phenomena, but the astronomical data that the scientist establishes, these are the contents of experience.”¹⁰ The experience of the scientist, in establishing laws of nature, thereby *constructs* nature as a mathematical universe. For Kant, Newtonian physics *exists* and, because of its mathematical method, is able to give rise to synthetic judgments *a priori*. In Cohen’s interpretation, Kant’s question concerning the transcendental condition of the possibility of *a priori* cognition is really concerned with the question of how those *a priori* truths established in natural (physical) science become possible and how they can be justified. The accepted cornerstone – which Kant called the *factum* – that philosophy has to clarify is the “factum of the sciences” (*das Faktum der Wissenschaften*) in which reality is constructed. Taking cues from the analytic method Kant pursues in the *Prolegomena*, this entails that philosophy’s job is to *reconstruct* the conditions of possibility through which this *factum* comes about.

The manner in which Cohen recasts Kant’s transcendental turn is, essentially, by rejecting the two stems doctrine (concepts and intuitions). His solution is Hegelian, as he grounds all knowledge and experience of reality in *a priori* concepts. Reality as experienced is *constructed* through and through, and

10. Hermann Cohen, *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (New York: Olms, [1871] 1987), 20–21. All translations from the German are my own.

this construction occurs through the use of *concepts* that are applied to what is experienced. Cohen grounds this premise on the discovery of the infinitesimal in mathematics, according to which all entities are constructed in thought on the basis of the category of the infinitesimally small.¹¹ Since these concepts are *a priori* (Cohen prefers the word “pure”), reality as we encounter it is *constructed in pure thought*. The task of philosophy is to lay the foundations of objective knowledge in pure thought, but the laying of these foundations is modified by scientific progress. That is, scientific progress makes new concepts necessary, and since all scientific cognition is in principle falsifiable, the foundations themselves are subject to constant re-evaluation and scrutiny. Philosophy is no longer a science of ultimate foundations (*Grundlagenwissenschaft*) – the traditional task of metaphysics prior to Kant’s transcendental turn – but is a science of *laying foundations* (*Grundlegungswissenschaft*) in “pure thought.”

Cohen’s transcendental method grounds all knowledge of the world in pure thought. But Cohen’s restatement of Kant’s transcendental idealism operates on the basis of an unacknowledged Hegelian influence. This influence consists in the notion that the system of categories is not a “static” table of concepts, established once and for all, but something that evolves over time. This evolution, now departing from Hegelian idealism, is not that of absolute spirit but of scientific progress “on the ground.” Theoretical philosophy becomes a logic of categories that have their origin in pure thought, and epistemology is recast as a “logic of origin” (*Ursprungslogik*), in which self-generated categories in thought (as their origin) become constituted as functional (not substantial) categories, forming a web of relations as a matrix for orientation in thought. This is to say that what Cassirer later formulated in his reconstruction of the shift from ancient to modern science – the move from a substance to a functional ontology – in effect already takes place in Cohen’s logic. Cohen’s late philosophy in his logic of origin differs from Hegel’s, accordingly, in that thought categories lay the foundations for *scientific* thought. This logic is not, in other words, a “self-constructing path,” as Hegel calls his method, but an *a priori* foundation of scientific thinking in an *a priori* category system that is itself dynamic and ever-evolving. For Cohen, philosophy is the justification of the *factum* that is already established (the mathematical sciences) and *reconstructs* their constructive activity, thereby *justifying* the knowledge claims of the scientist.

This abbreviated discussion of Cohen’s philosophical system – his ethics, aesthetics, and political philosophy have been passed over¹² – has focused on

11. See Hermann Cohen, *Das Prinzip der Infinitesimal-Methode und seine Geschichte* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1883).

12. For more elaboration of his system, see Andrea Poma, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997); Geert Edel, *Von der Vernunftkritik zur Erkenntnislogik*

the transcendental method that forms the nodal point around which the other two significant thinkers of the Marburg School constructed their systems. The principle of human beings' *construction of reality* provides the crucial element for understanding this school. Reality, insofar as it is entirely constructed by the activities of the human spirit, of which scientific thought is merely one, albeit its most dignified, application, is the reality of humanity's *cultural* activities. The Marburg School is in this sense unified as outlining an encompassing transcendental philosophy of *culture*.¹³ In the Marburg reading, to quote Cassirer, Kant's critique of reason is recast as a "critique of culture."

Natorp, after wavering between pursuing a career as a classical philologist, musician, or philosopher, finally came to focus on philosophy and moved to Marburg to study under Cohen. Cohen soon incorporated him into his growing group of collaborators. An avid student of the natural sciences and mathematics, Natorp was probably the most erudite member of this school. He wrote on ancient philosophy, ancient and modern science, social and political philosophy, and, last but not least – since his Chair was also dedicated to pedagogy – pedagogical philosophy, especially that of Heinrich Pestalozzi. A more agreeable character¹⁴ and also a lucid writer – Cohen's writings were considered dense and difficult – Natorp helped the Marburg School gain a broader acceptance and popularity than Cohen himself would have been able to achieve. Given the openly anti-Semitic sentiment in large parts of German society and especially German academia, it is likely that, without Natorp on his side, Cohen, clearly the most innovative neo-Kantian, would have remained isolated and far less influential in the academic landscape of his time. The Marburg School must be seen as constituted by both individuals: Cohen, sometimes referred to as "minister of the exterior," and Natorp, dubbed "minister of the interior." Together they formed a powerful alliance and a functioning collaboration that lasted more than a quarter century.¹⁵

In addition to his writings on figures in the history of philosophy – most notably Plato – and on special problems in the philosophy of science, Natorp

(Freiburg and Munich: Alber, 1988); and the contributions in *Hermann Cohen's Critical Idealism*, Reinier Munk (ed.) (Dordrecht: Springer, 2004).

13. See Ursula Renz, *Die Rationalität der Kultur: Zur Kulturphilosophie und ihrer transzendentalen Begründung bei Cohen, Natorp und Cassirer* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2002).

14. Cf. footnote 8 above for an illustration of Cohen's character. For an example of Natorp's greater effect on the scientific community of his day, one can point out that nearly all statements of the Marburg School that were received in the philosophical and wider public stemmed from Natorp's pen; for the logical method of the Marburg School, for example his *Die logischen Grundlagen der exakten Wissenschaften* (actually Cohen's domain), and for a general, and popular, expression of the Marburg School as a whole, one should note that Natorp's *Philosophie: Ihr Problem und ihre Probleme* (discussed in the main text above), was first published in 1911 and was re-edited four times during Natorp's lifetime.

15. Cf. Sieg, *Aufstieg und Niedergang des Marburger Neukantianismus*.

was also the only notable neo-Kantian who was able to write an unusually brief (150 pages) and bestselling treatise: *Philosophie: Ihr Problem und Ihre Probleme* (Philosophy: its problem and its problems). This text, which is a lucid “mission statement” of Marburg neo-Kantianism, has perhaps rightfully been considered the *Programmschrift* of the entire neo-Kantian movement. Yet Natorp’s initial fame was based on his influential 1903 work on Plato: *Platos Ideenlehre: Eine Einführung in den Idealismus* (Plato’s theory of ideas: an introduction to idealism). As the title indicates, Natorp’s peculiar interpretation concerning Plato’s theory of the Forms is that it is really an epistemological position – idealism – rather than a metaphysical one. More specifically, Natorp claims, Plato’s ideas are nothing but natural laws that govern physical entities. Laws are that which make things what they are, what is “valid” about them. Soon after its publication, this bold thesis was harshly criticized, since it seems to read Newtonian physics and Kant’s transcendental turn back into Plato’s premodern thought; but given the close alliance with modern science, this reading is perhaps less surprising stemming from a Marburger than it first appears. In this sense, Natorp’s *Plato* is less a work of Plato exegesis than a restatement of the type of idealism professed in the Marburg School.¹⁶

Natorp’s most substantial philosophical contribution to the Marburg School was his psychology and concomitant theory of subjectivity. Dismissed by Cohen – although not openly – Natorp’s idea of a philosophical psychology started out as a side project when he published in 1888 his short *Einleitung in die Psychologie nach Kritischer Methode* (Introduction to psychology according to critical method). This later turned into a full-fledged, yet ultimately abandoned, project when he published the “second edition” *Allgemeine Psychologie nach Kritischer Methode* (General psychology according to critical method), which had grown to 350 pages, more than three times its original size. In 1887, he published the influential article “Ueber Objective und Subjective Begründung der Erkenntniss” (On objective and subjective grounding of cognition), where he systematically laid out his idea of a *philosophical* – not experimental, as in the Brentano and Wundt Schools – psychology.

Natorp’s psychology grew directly out of problems that he saw with the transcendental method. If the latter is about constructing reality, all that this method accounts for philosophically are the finished “products” such as scientific theories; these are the “outcome” of humanity’s creative activity. In other words, all

16. It is interesting to note that Natorp somewhat recanted his earlier reading in a “Metacritical Appendix” of the second edition in 1921; cf. *Plato’s Theory of Ideas: an Introduction to Idealism*, Vasilis Politis and John Connolly (trans.) (Sankt Augustin: Academia, 2004). For Natorp’s Plato interpretation and its importance for the Marburg School, cf. Karl-Heinz Lembeck, *Platon in Marburg: Platon-Rezeption und Philosophiegeschichtsphilosophie bei Cohen und Natorp* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1994).

that philosophy was to do was justify *after the fact* what the sciences were “always already” doing. What was missing was an account of the creative, subjective life that creates these cultural products. This should be, Natorp asserted, the task of a critical psychology. Its purpose was, more precisely, to recover this creative, subjective life by going in the *opposite* direction of the transcendental, constructive method. That is to say, it should proceed *reconstructively* from the finished products back to the creative life that was involved in their constructive processes. Metaphorically, Natorp described the psychological, reconstructive method as a “minus” *vis-à-vis* a “plus” direction on one and the same line. What was to be regained would be this active, dynamic life that had come to a standstill once cultural products had been formed. This method should remain faithful to the essentially dynamic life of consciousness. All other psychological approaches treated consciousness with objectifying methods; when reading accounts of consciousness, Natorp complains, he feels as though he is walking through a morgue instead of studying bodies filled with life.¹⁷ The reconstructive method was the method to finally overcome this problem. At the same time, given the metaphor of the plus and minus directions, it is clear that the reconstructive method is entirely dependent on the transcendental method; Natorp calls it its “inverse” application. That is, the reconstructive method of psychology serves a transcendental–philosophical function within the overall Marburg Method that was to account for subjectivity in all of its dimensions – in its cultural products and in its dynamic *status nascendi* – hence, psychology “according to critical method.” Natorp’s intention was not that this should replace or be in competition with experimental psychologies, but that it was intended to add a piece within the overall transcendental epistemology that the Marburg School had taken over from Kant, but which would remain incomplete unless this “subjective” part was supplied.

The subjective life, once it had been discovered through reconstruction, Natorp frames in terms of what he calls “conscious-ity” (*Bewusstheit*). Through this neologism he attempted to capture the very fact of “being conscious” of conscious life, with its conscious contents. Moreover, his reconstructive method would proceed *genetically*, that is, it would provide not static laws (of objectifying science), but genetic accounts of the dynamic life of consciousness, going down to the origins of consciousness where one cannot even speak of “consciousness” any longer. In his late work, Natorp simply calls it “life.” Other than these principal philosophical insights, however, the actual results of Natorp’s psychology were meager and Natorp himself abandoned the opposition between objective

17. Paul Natorp, *Allgemeine Psychologie nach Kritischer Methode* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1912), 16, 31. As Natorp explains there, an example of such “objectivist” treatment is the application of the mechanistic model of natural causality to the sphere of the psyche.

and subjective methods in favor of a more deeply grounded "all-method" that synthesized both subjectivist and objectivist methods. In his somewhat idiosyncratic late philosophical system, Natorp was seen to have departed from his Marburg roots (as some critics, clearly under the influence of Heidegger, have remarked),¹⁸ and given this verdict, Natorp's late system has been vastly underappreciated. Challenging the fundamental assumptions of Kant's philosophy as well as that of the Marburg School as a whole, the question as to how one should ultimately interpret this school turns on the issue of whether it represents the final fulfillment of Kant's intentions if one spells out the implications of transcendental philosophy, or whether it is a radical departure from the Kantian paradigms. At any rate, his psychological method and his account of subjectivity have had significant impact on other theories, including Husserl's phenomenology and Heidegger's fundamental ontology of Dasein.

Cohen and Natorp formed such a close alliance that differences between them tended to remain subdued and unarticulated (either in public or even between them).¹⁹ When Cohen left Marburg for Berlin in 1912, Natorp, who remained in Marburg until his death in 1924, experienced something of a renaissance. In his lectures he developed his original philosophical system, which he worked on until his last days. In his late thought he wanted to form an all-encompassing method, incorporating mystical elements into a totalizing philosophical system. The manuscript, which was prepared for publication by Natorp himself, remained unpublished until 1954. There has been some speculation that the publication was discouraged at the time by Heidegger, who was professor in Marburg as of 1921 and who was familiar with Natorp's latest developments.²⁰ In fact, Natorp's last intuitions, which focused on the simple and original fact of being simply being – the basic factum of the "*es gibt*" – bear some resemblance to Heidegger's *Seinsfrage*.

The most important and also most influential individual for twentieth-century philosophy stemming from the Marburg School was undoubtedly Ernst Cassirer. He ingeniously picked up the main lines from his teachers Cohen and Natorp, weaving them into his own philosophical system, while incorporating

18. Cf., for example, Christoph Von Wolzogen, *Die Autonome Relation: Zum Problem der Beziehung im Spätwerk Paul Natorps; Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Theorien der Relation* (Würzburg and Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1984), who also lists examples of such readings (von Wolzogen himself reads Natorp in this Heideggerian manner as well).

19. Helmut Holzhey's *Cohen und Natorp* (Basel and Stuttgart: Schwabe, 1986) does an excellent job at showing where the differences between Cohen and Natorp lay.

20. Cf. von Wolzogen, *Die Autonome Relation*, who lists some quotations from Heidegger's correspondence in support of this hypothesis. It would be, ironically, Gadamer, pupil of both Natorp and Heidegger, who later favored the publication of this text, as witnessed by his laudatory introduction "Paul Natorp," in Natorp, *Philosophische Systematik*, xi–xviii.

influences from such diverse fields as linguistics, anthropology, and other ("hard") sciences, such as contemporary physics. He was the most original and also most prolific offspring of the Marburg School. Coming from a wealthy family, he neither aspired to be a university professor, nor were his chances as a Jew ever very good in German academia at the time. Nevertheless, he was considered one of the strongest of his generation, earning his first recognition as a historian of philosophy through his studies on Leibniz and Renaissance and early modern thought. He was also involved in new editions of the works of Leibniz and Kant. His monograph, *Kant's Leben und Lehre* (*Kant's Life and Thought*), originally intended as the introductory essay to the Kant edition but not published until after the First World War, has become a classic in Kant scholarship, while his four-volume *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der Neueren Zeit* (The problem of knowledge in modern philosophy and science) is an excellent example of neo-Kantian *Problemgeschichte*.²¹ One would, however, not do justice to his philosophical originality – which unfortunately has sometimes been the case – were he to be restricted to his early work on the history of philosophy.

After the First World War, Cassirer did receive a call as professor (*Ordinarius*) to the newly founded university of Hamburg, where he became Rektor (president) in 1929–30, the highest academic position that any Jew ever occupied in Germany. Quickly reading the signs of the times, he and his extended family left Nazi Germany in 1933. Cassirer emigrated first to England, then to Sweden, where he fled from the Nazis anew as they invaded that country in 1941. He was then invited to a visiting professorship at Yale, where he stayed for three years. In 1944, he assumed another visiting appointment at Columbia. Already in failing health and highly distressed by the war reports, he died of a heart attack on the streets of New York in 1945, shortly before the end of the Second World War. It has been speculated that his influence, especially in the US, would have been considerably stronger had he lived to see his original work, published in German and only slowly becoming translated, come to fruition in the New World.²²

Sometimes referred to as a watershed event in twentieth-century philosophy, the famous encounter between Cassirer and Heidegger in the Swiss town of Davos in 1929 must be mentioned.²³ During the annually held *Hochschultage*

21. See the section on *Problemgeschichte* below.

22. Cf. Michael Friedman, "Ernst Cassirer," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2004 (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cassirer>).

23. There is a smattering of literature on this event, beginning – at least in recent scholarship – with Michael Friedman, *A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer, and Heidegger* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2000) Cf. also the recent article by Gordon, "Neo-Kantianism and the Politics of Enlightenment."

devoted to intellectual topics – in 1929, Kant’s philosophy and its interpretation – Heidegger and Cassirer conducted a well-attended dispute regarding their different interpretations of Kant’s philosophy. In truth, it amounted to a showdown between the two most prominent philosophers of the time: Heidegger, who had just published his groundbreaking *Being and Time* (1927); and Cassirer, who had just published the third volume of his philosophical system, the voluminous *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. While formally centering on the interpretation of Kant, the dispute was really about what, according to each, ought be considered the main purpose and intention of philosophy at large: for Cassirer, liberating the human being from his confinement in primitive and un-enlightened existence; for Heidegger, bringing human Dasein back into the “harshness and hardness of fate.” Given the events that would ensue in Germany in 1933, Heidegger’s role in them, and the fascist ideology the German people came to embrace – the country of the *Dichter und Denker* – it is not hard to see the wider and more profound implications of this encounter.²⁴ This is not to say that these implications were clear at the time to those in the audience. However, in hindsight, this encounter bears an almost eerie premonition of what was to come. The reasons why contemporaries believed that Cassirer had been so thoroughly bested by Heidegger cannot be spelled out straightforwardly either, but can perhaps best be described as “atmospherical.” While the participants of the conference spent all day indoors debating, and dressed formally for the evening reception, Heidegger spent the days (presumably when he was not part of the program) skiing and showed up at the reception in his ski overalls, in total disregard of social etiquette. The “hardness of being” of the young and energetic Heidegger clashed against the bourgeois Cassirer, who seemed to be “in agreement with everything,”²⁵ implying weak compromises reminiscent of the politics of the Weimar Republic, which compromised itself out of existence.

Regarding Cassirer’s character, it has been described as conciliatory and “Olympian,” which extends to his writings. These display a remarkable lucidity and, at the same time, philosophical modesty. At times the philosophical core of his argument can be lost in the wealth of historical erudition that accompanies

24. This dispute is published as “Davos Disputation Between Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger,” in Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Richard Taft (trans.) (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997). For important essays on this encounter, see Dominic Kaegi and Enno Rudolph (eds), *Cassirer-Heidegger: 70 Jahre Davoser Disputation* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2000). Among those who travelled to Davos to witness this encounter were Rudolf Carnap, Eugen Fink, Herbert Marcuse, Joachim Ritter, Leo Strauss, Leon Brunschvicg, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean Cavaillès, and Maurice de Gandillac.

25. In a telling anecdote, reported in Gordon, “Neo-Kantianism and the Politics of Enlightenment,” 223ff., students put on a mock debate between Heidegger and Cassirer one evening. Cassirer was played by the young Levinas, who supposedly let flour (= dust) trickle out of his sleeves, repeating the phrase “Ich bin mit allem einverstanden” (I agree with everything).

his accounts. Most of his writings focus on other thinkers and their theories, and he is content to raise philosophical issues in those contexts. Cassirer's first original contribution to critical philosophy, which came fairly late in this young shooting star's career, was his *Substanz- und Funktionsbegriff* (*Substance and Function*),²⁶ which appears to discuss a seemingly remote problem in scientific concept formation, but in fact raises an issue that will be the cornerstone of his philosophical systematic: the distinction between a substantial and functional ontology and its epistemological implications. This basic insight, stemming from the groundwork laid by Cohen, was cashed out in his three-volume *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. In addition to these substantial tomes, Cassirer wrote the four-volume study *The Problem of Knowledge in Modern Philosophy* and a wide array of articles and smaller studies on mythology, linguistics, modern physics, and intellectual history. Once in the United States, he summarized his system in the popular book *An Essay on Man* (written in English). His last work, *The Myth of the State*, offers a penetrating critique of modern fascism based on his interpretation of the role of myth in the hierarchy of cultural achievements and its relation to modern totalitarianism.

Returning to his first systematic work, *Substance and Function*, Cassirer, taking his cue from Cohen's paradigm of *construction*, traced the constructive activity of the human mind in the distinction between substantive and functional concepts in scientific nomenclature. Opposed to a substantial paradigm in which, following Aristotle's substance ontology, concepts mirror things as substances, a new type of concept formation has taken hold in modernity: that of functional concepts. Functional concepts place the objects that they mirror into a *function*, as in mathematical functions ($f(x)$). What functional concepts mirror, then, are not substantial things, but functions, that is relations. Being a function means that the functional concept formation actually *constructs* the object of a particular scientific endeavor. Hence, Cassirer discovered Cohen's constructive principle at the heart of scientific concept formation itself.

Whereas *Substance and Function* is largely a historical and programmatic work, drawing on critical reflections on late-nineteenth-century physics and mathematics by Richard Dedekind (1831–1916), Pierre Duhem (1861–1916), Hermann von Helmholtz (1821–94), and Heinrich Hertz (1857–94) as evidence for the core theme of functional concept formation, Cassirer subsequently wrote two monographs analyzing the revolutionary physical theories of the first half of the twentieth century – general relativity and quantum mechanics – as manifestations of this new mode of concept formation. *Zur Einstein'schen*

26. Published in English with a translation of his *Zur Einstein'schen Relativitätstheorie*, in *Substance and Function and Einstein's Theory of Relativity*, William Curtis Swabey & Marie Collins Swabey (eds) (New York: Dover, 1953).

Relativitätstheorie (1920; published in English as “On Einstein’s Theory of Relativity: Considered from the Epistemological Standpoint” as a supplement to *Substance and Function*) identified the postulate of general covariance – that the laws of physics are the same in all reference frames, hence that the objects of fundamental physics must be represented as tensor expressions, valid in all coordinate systems – as a novel principle of objectifying unity, a significant further step away from anthropomorphic thing concepts toward an abstract and purely geometrical concept of object. Cassirer’s epistemological examination of quantum mechanics, *Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern Physics*, written while in exile in Sweden in 1936, points to Heisenberg’s uncertainty relations and quantum statistics as even more striking transformations of the concept of object, where the old classical notions of physical state and individual identity are transformed, acquiring functional form. The thrust of each of these two works is an insistence that the concept of object in physics is subordinate to that of physical law, and accordingly that “objectivity or objective reality, is attained only because and insofar as there is conformity to law – not vice versa.”²⁷

But this was only Cassirer’s first step. For, Cassirer asserted, such a constructive activity is not present just in scientific concept formation – an activity of the human spirit, to be sure – but in *all* cultural activities. Construction is, in other words, a form of *interpretation* of something that could be completely different depending on the manner in which it is constructed. The sine curve (Cassirer’s example) in the mathematical context is, in an artistic manner of seeing, an ornament, and may represent any number of other contexts. Prior to such an interpretation – *any* interpretation – the thing is simply nothing for us. What a thing is depends on its context, and the context is something *constructed* through the human mind. Cassirer calls the agent of this activity *spirit*. That which is constructed, or the medium of construction, he calls, nodding to Kant’s “Transcendental Aesthetic,” a *form*. There is no simple object given (as a substance or substratum) that *then* receives a supervening interpretation, but there are only objects-in-contexts. There is no “raw” datum. The term for such an object within a form Cassirer takes over from his favorite author, Goethe, in calling it a *symbol*. Cassirer therefore calls his system that of *symbolic forms*. They are the forms of manifestation into which human spirit’s activity becomes

27. Ernst Cassirer, *Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern Physics: Historical and Systematic Studies of the Problem of Causality*, O. Theodor Benfey (trans.) (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, [1936] 1956), 132. By showing that there is continuous progress toward pure signification in the process of objectification in physics, this book also rebuked the Nazis’ characterization of relativity and quantum physics as “Jewish” and “degenerate” science. The authors would like to thank Thomas Ryckman for his suggestions on how to treat this issue. Interested readers should consult Ryckman’s *The Reign of Relativity: Philosophy in Physics 1915–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

filled. Indeed, we live in a plurality of meaningful “contexts.” The three symbolic forms that Cassirer discusses in his *magnum opus* are language, myth, and scientific cognition. They are products of human spirit’s productive–constructive activity. His adaptation of the transcendental method traces the manner of construction in each form, respectively, while breaking with Cohen’s exclusively scientific–logistic paradigm. The modes of construction in each form are more freely described as different “logics” inhering in them. Cassirer’s system can also be described as a methodology of symbolic formation; thus, he is decidedly a methodological pluralist. But his methodological pluralism is incomprehensible without the fundamental constructive paradigm that is the signature of the “Marburg Method.”

Owing to his systematizing work in describing symbolic formation in different cultural contexts, his writings have become influential for several sciences, both human (anthropology, linguistics, aesthetics) and natural (such as physics). Before leaving Cassirer, a brief comment on his interpretation of fascism is in order. *The Myth of the State* rivals other classical texts dealing with fascism in the twentieth century. In his interpretation of the rise of fascism in the twentieth century, he argues that the phenomenon of fascism is the result of political propaganda that has allowed myth to re-enter the political arena, making porous the borders between responsible, rational action and mythical power. Myth, once overcome by Greek enlightenment, raises its ugly head once political discourse has become corrupted in a manner that allows mythical elements – Hitler, the “divine *Führer*,” the myth of the superior “Aryan Race,” and so on – to dominate political, democratic discourse.

The Southwest School: Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert, Emil Lask

The Southwest School is much less cohesive than the Marburg School; even the name “Southwest” indicates that this “movement” (to speak of a school is perhaps exaggerated) was localized in different university towns – Heidelberg and Freiburg im Breisgau, respectively.²⁸ The main representatives were Wilhelm Windelband (1848–1915) and his pupil Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936). An important member of this movement was Emil Lask (1875–1915), arguably the most interesting but also most difficult philosopher of this group and of significant influence for, among others, the young Heidegger. He died prematurely, however, in the trenches during the First World War. His “logic of philosophy” is a metaphilosophical category system for philosophy itself that, while highly

28. The Southwest School is sometimes also referred to as the “Baden School” after the state of Baden, part of the German Empire; the state was incorporated after the Second World War and is now called “Baden-Württemberg.”

original, is arguably a departure from neo-Kantianism in its Southwest mode and will not receive further discussion here.²⁹

The Southwesterners were quite successful at their respective universities and shaped several generations of students. Windelband, for instance, was professor in Zurich, Freiburg, and Strasbourg (then German territory), before settling into Heidelberg, where he lived from 1903 until his death. Rickert became professor in Freiburg in 1896 before receiving a call to Heidelberg in 1916 to succeed Windelband, who had died the year before. Despite a mental illness that prohibited Rickert from making public appearances (he suffered from agoraphobia), he nevertheless exerted a substantial influence through his – often polemical and piercing – writings.³⁰ While more loosely affiliated than the Marburg School, Rickert and Windelband nevertheless worked with certain core ideas that they shared, while not at all times agreeing in all details. Since their philosophical efforts displayed less of a systematic progression than the work of the members of the Marburg School, we shall be presenting the Southwest School in terms of their shared core ideas.³¹

(i) *Writing the history of philosophy as a history of problems (Problemgeschichte)*

Windelband, while best known as a historian of philosophy, is unfairly reduced to a historian insofar as he devised a new way of doing the history of philosophy, namely as the history of *problems*. While this might seem inconsequential today, to understand the history of philosophy as a development of philosophical problems was at the time quite innovative. Windelband's historiological method took the emphasis away from individual philosophers and a quasi-biographical reconstruction of their work and placed that emphasis instead on the rich historical "horizon" that provided a historical-scientific-philosophical setting in which these philosophers worked. This setting is the process in which "European humanity" exposes its view of world and life (*Welt- und Lebensauffassung*). It is not a Hegelian scenario, in which history is the process of increasing knowledge of freedom, but rather a process in which thinkers and scientists communicate and interact. In this historical process, there are relevant factors that need to

29. For an excellent treatment of Lask, see Steven Galt Crowell, *Husserl, Heidegger, and the Space of Meaning: Paths Towards Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001).

30. Rickert's reputation at the time indicates the significance of the acknowledgment given to the phenomenological movement when Husserl received the call to Freiburg in 1916 to succeed Rickert.

31. While the members of the Southwest School were no less respected in German academia than the Marburgers, their philosophical legacy has dwindled to nearly zero insofar as their achievements have become so much a part of the received idea of philosophical work that they can well be considered trivial.

be taken into account: pragmatic, cultural, and individual ones. A *pragmatic* consideration of the history of problems emphasizes that the same philosophical problems re-emerge throughout Western history in changed circumstances. The *cultural* aspect means that culture is the binding continuum that holds together seemingly incoherent scientific or philosophical discussions. And finally, the focus on *individuality* highlights the importance of individual characters in the history of philosophy. While this was the primary focus in earlier philosophical historiography, for the neo-Kantians this consideration now comes at the *end* of this historical reconstruction.³² This type of philosophical historiography – in conjunction with the meticulous work that neo-Kantian philosophers carried out in their editing of the original sources – has become the standard for any historical writings in philosophy. It has also been the target of attempts to provide alternative ways of doing the history of philosophy, and Heidegger's "History of Being" and Gadamer's "History of Effects"³³ – both Heidegger and Gadamer knew this neo-Kantian method intimately – should be seen as direct critiques of the neo-Kantian method of doing history of philosophy.

(ii) *Distinctions in theory of science: idiographic and nomothetic sciences*

Perhaps the most famous legacy of the Southwest School is Windelband's distinction between idiographic and nomothetic sciences, that is, between a science of the individual and singular and a science of the general and lawlike.³⁴ Windelband lays out this influential distinction, at the height of his career, in his famous Presidential Address (*Rektorsrede*) in Strasbourg in 1894.³⁵ His starting-point is a critique of the traditional distinction between rational and empirical sciences. This distinction is no longer satisfactory; indeed, the development of certain sciences – most notoriously psychology and physics – has shown that the true results of these disciplines are neither purely rational nor purely empirical. An overview of the scientific activities of his day reveals a different distinction that seems to better fit the actual status quo, namely that between sciences of nature (*Naturwissenschaften*) and sciences of the human world (*Geisteswissenschaften*, sometimes also translated as "human" or "spiritual sciences," or nowadays simply "humanities"). They are both sciences

32. Cf. Holzhey, "Der Neukantianismus," 59–60.

*33. This aspect of Gadamer's work is discussed in the essay by Wayne J. Froman in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6*.

34. Rickert expanded on this distinction and added some further details, but he was in general agreement with Windelband's line of thought. Although one reads time and again that this idiographic–nomothetic distinction was introduced by Rickert, it is Windelband, however, who conceived it.

35. Windelband, "Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft," in *Präludien: Aufsätze und Reden zur Philosophie und ihrer Geschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, [1884] 1924).

– *Wissenschaften* – peculiar to the English ear, meaning, literally translated, “knowledge-doms.” Such a distinction undercuts that of rational and empirical sciences and is indeed an advance over it. But such a distinction, although widely acknowledged in Windelband’s day, rests on ontological assumptions concerning the ontic regions of nature and spirit that present a problem. The science that reveals the problem with this distinction is psychology: what kind of science is one to group it under? As it has the human psyche as its object, one would be inclined to call it a human science. Yet insofar as its goal is experimentally verifiable general results, it has the character of a natural science.

Here Windelband intervenes with an attempt to undercut this distinction. Arguing that all sciences, insofar as they treat objects of experience, are *empirical*, the only questions are *how* and *as what* to *interpret* these empirically ascertained results. This new distinction between *how* and *as what* is not an ontological one, but – in good Kantian fashion – a methodological one. The focal points of cognition are, generally, the individual or the general. Both are, however, not absolute but merely *relative* terms. Scientific cognition oscillates between these extreme focal points when interpreting its findings. The scientific cognition of something individual Windelband calls *idiographic* (i.e. describing the individual, singular), that of something general, *nomothetic* (i.e. positing the general, lawlike). “The latter are sciences of laws [*Gesetzeswissenschaften*], the former are sciences of events [*Ereigniswissenschaften*]; the latter teach what is always the case, the former what occurred only once.”³⁶ For instance, if one wants to, as a historian, work on the French Revolution, one has to describe the individual characters and individual events that took place, and so on. On the other hand, if one wants to understand, as a chemist, the manner in which certain chemicals react together, one has to find out the general laws by which they function and react – always and in a reliable, repeatable pattern. But neither rests on an ontological premise. Indeed, the nomothetic and idiographic standards can be applied to one and the same ontic field. The classic example for this, according to Windelband, is the science of organic nature:

As systematics, it is of nomothetic character, insofar as it describes the always fixed types of living creatures, which have been experienced within the millennia of human observation as their lawlike form. As developmental history, where it presents the order of earthly organisms as a process of descent and transformation of species [i.e. in evolutionary theory] ... there it is an idiographic discipline.³⁷

36. *Ibid.*, 145.

37. *Ibid.*, 146.

This distinction stakes out a new *type* of science in the wake of the positivistic predicament that was rampant at the end of the nineteenth century, according to which naturalism was *the* method for all sciences. Contrary to the notion that human “disciplines” cannot be *sciences* precisely because they yield no general results, Windelband emphasized that the human sciences can indeed have the character of science with no less dignity than natural science *if* one has a different scientific ideal. The idiographic sciences have no less importance for the understanding of our world; indeed, if by “world” we mean not nature but *culture*, the idiographic sciences are *more* important. Windelband’s distinction was, in effect, an assertion of the importance of a genuine “science of culture” over the reduced notion of science as *Wissenschaft* in the sense of “natural science.”

As plausible as Windelband’s distinction might seem, it was the focus of criticisms from, among others, Dilthey and Husserl, both of whom, albeit for different reasons, rejected this distinction when it came to describing the proper object of the human sciences. For Dilthey, a description of human historical development need not be only idiographic, but instead could posit types of worldviews and typical character forms (i.e. types, not laws), and hence need not have to choose between individual and universal accounts.³⁸ And Husserl’s attempt at an *eidetic science* of subjectivity goes even further, asserting the possibility of a “rigorous” (i.e. *a priori*) science of subjectivity after the transcendental–phenomenological reduction. Finally, Heidegger’s sketch of a hermeneutic of factual Dasein is predicated on a wholesale rejection of the (Platonic) distinction between the individual and the universal that underlies Windelband’s account. Here again we see that the influence of neo-Kantianism on twentieth-century philosophy is *ex negativo*, as the seminal philosophers mentioned here derive their methodological paradigms from a rejection of this Windelbandian distinction.

(iii) Philosophy as value theory

The idea of an idiographic science as the proper method of accessing the life of spirit or human culture was cashed out especially in Rickert’s work. Radicalizing Windelband, instead of seeing idiographic and nomothetic sciences as equally viable methods for cognition, Rickert privileges the idiographic over the nomothetic sciences. Informed by Rudolf Hermann Lotze’s philosophy of value³⁹ – Lotze alleges that Plato’s ideas ought properly to be conceived as valid values – Rickert asserts in his influential work *Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis* (The object

*38. See the discussion of Dilthey in the essay by Eric Sean Nelson in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 2*.

39. Rudolf Hermann Lotze (1817–81) was one of the leading German philosophers of the second half of the nineteenth century. A specialist in logic and philosophy of biology (he completed a medical degree along with his philosophy degree at Leipzig in 1838), he taught at Göttingen for almost forty years, beginning in 1844.

of cognition; first published in 1891 and re-edited six times, each time vastly reworked) that all cognition is in essence a form of *valuing*. Accepting Kant's thesis of the primacy of practical reason, this primacy asserts itself, according to Rickert, already in the field of cognition insofar as cognizing is not a passive apprehending but a *forming* of the object of cognition as something to be integrated into culture, that is, the world of values. At stake, for Rickert, is nothing less than a redefinition of the traditional task of epistemology. The object that is represented in cognition is not something *independent* of its being cognized, but is something that is being *formed* by the subject. Transcendent reality, which to Kant was always mind-independent, is therefore dependent on the culturally creative subject. This, concomitantly, changes the traditional notion of the cognizing subject as "we must form a different notion of the cognizing subject as only *representing* consciousness and, consequently, also a different notion of the object and the measure of cognition as that of a *transcendent reality*."⁴⁰ Given these two poles of cognition, one can approach the problem from both the subjective and objective sides. The subjective path leads to a transcendental psychology, the objective one to a transcendental logic; both are disciplines within transcendental philosophy. However, the empirical approach to the object of cognition remains valid in the empirical sciences; Rickert thus maps Kant's idealism–realism distinction onto that of philosophy and the empirical sciences. This dual approach is Rickert's restatement of Kant's transcendental idealism.

In his second famous work, *Die Grenzen der Naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung* (The limits of concept formation in natural science; first published in 1896), Rickert expands on the epistemological foundations while also drawing from Windelband's idiographic–nomothetic distinction. As the title indicates, concept formation in the natural sciences *has* limitations. It leads, if pursued to its extreme, into a purely naturalistic worldview. Contrary to Windelband, who considered both idiographic and nomothetic forms of scientific research to be on a relative scale (i.e. their difference was only a matter of degree), Rickert emphasizes the fundamental difference between them and goes on to favor the idiographic method. Nomothetic research winds up in a dangerous abstraction that threatens to cover up or make obsolete the historical life of culture (here anticipating Husserl's famous critique of the mathematization of science in *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*). This is the negative part of this work. The positive is Rickert's description of the inner functioning of the human or cultural sciences. What makes them distinctly scientific in their own right is that they establish a relation to supra-individual *values*. Values, to Rickert, are neither physical nor mental, but are

40. Heinrich Rickert, *Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis: Einführung in die Transzendentalphilosophie* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, [1892] 1928), 2.

“located” in an altogether different “third realm,”⁴¹ where entities do not *exist* but *hold valid* (*gelten*). This realm is ontologically distinct from either the physical or the mental insofar as they both are forms of *being*, while the ontological status of values is their *validity*. Cultural scientific judgments, then, are characterized by making reference to this “world” of values. Hence the peculiarity of cultural scientific work is not primarily that it focuses on the individual – this is, as it were, taken for granted – but instead that *in* this individual attention it makes a connection to an independently existing realm of values.⁴² This realm, moreover, is in itself systematically organized. Correct cultural as well as moral judgments can be discerned in their adequacy to the systematic hierarchy and order of values. Cultural or spiritual sciences are expressions of the ideal order of values. Therefore, the task of philosophy is to draft and describe this ideal system of values. In his later years, Rickert drafted a “system of values” based on the distinction of six different fields of values: logic, aesthetics, mysticism, ethics, the erotic, and philosophy of religion.⁴³ The true meaning of transcendental philosophy is thus redeemed in this draft of a system of values. Rickert began composing this sketch in his *System der Philosophie* (System of philosophy), of which only volume one appeared, and which has remained – despite Rickert’s reputation in Germany at the time – largely ignored.⁴⁴

II. NEO-KANTIANISM IN FRANCE

French neo-Kantianism emerged as the result of a conjunction of events including the demise of Victor Cousin’s eclecticism under the “authoritarian” first period of the Second Empire (1851–60) and the development of spiritualism⁴⁵ under the “liberal” second period of the Empire. As a result of a very dense network of friendships, the extreme centralization of political power, and

41. Rickert also calls this realm – much earlier than 1933! – *das Dritte Reich*, the “Third Reich.” I just mention this in order to clear up any confusion on the part of a stumped reader. The term was not exclusively used by the neo-Kantians; for instance, it was also used – in the same sense – by Frege.

42. In connecting the individual human being to the universal realm of values, Rickert is close to Cassirer’s cultural anthropology, which defines the human being as a cultural being precisely in its capacity to lift itself out of the realm of nature and to become part of the world of spirit, which is intersubjective and universal.

43. Cf. Ollig, *Der Neukantianismus*, 63.

44. For a late recognition of Rickert’s systematic philosophy, see Christian Krijnen, *Nachmetaphysischer Sinn: Eine Problemgeschichtliche und Systematische Studie zu den Prinzipien der Wertphilosophie Heinrich Rickerts* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001).

*45. “French Spiritualist Philosophy” is discussed in the essay by F. C. T. Moore in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 2*.

influential universities such as the École Normale Supérieure (ÉNS) and the Sorbonne, neo-Kantianism became the predominant philosophical trend in French academia under Victor Duruy's tenure as minister of education (1863–69). Charles Renouvier (1815–1903) and Jules Lachelier (1832–1918) initiated this trend, establishing two general and distinct forms that were never unified.⁴⁶

Renouvier's works offer a system divided into the classical divisions of general and formal logic, rational psychology, and principles of nature.⁴⁷ In his *Essais de critique générale* (Essays in general critique), he writes: "I frankly confess that I follow in Kant's footsteps."⁴⁸ This Kantian program is described in general terms: "the analysis and the coordination of the principles of knowledge in general, and

46. The best studies of French philosophy between 1850 and 1930 are Isaac Benrubi, *Contemporary Thought of France*, Ernest B. Dicker (trans.) (London: Williams & Norgate, 1926), and Michel Espagne, *En deçà du Rhin: L'Allemagne des philosophes français au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2004). In English, John Alexander Gunn, *Modern French Philosophy: A Study of the Development since Comte* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1922), has some interesting insights but, as Bergson noted, lacks a clear and firm guiding thread. The translation of Benrubi, *Les Sources et les courants de la philosophie contemporaine en France* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1933), seems to be based on a shorter and schematic German version. Gary Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), although interesting, is very partial, uses arguable classifications, and contains many inaccuracies: although different forms of Kantianism are mentioned, there is no analysis of the exchanges with Germany, a conceptually, institutionally, and politically essential point. Renouvier is not a spiritualist, he did not study at the ÉNS with Ravaisson, but was a student at the École Polytechnique, an important element for his scientific background and his relation to positivism, since this is how he met Comte. Hegel was indeed translated before the middle of the twentieth century: Charles Bénard translated the *Lectures on Aesthetics* in 1855, Augusto Vera's translation of the *Encyclopaedia* was published from 1859 to 1869, a fact that should be added to the file regarding Cousin's essential relation to Hegel, as well as Hippolyte Taine's. In *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy: Key Themes and Thinkers* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), Schriff's description of how the French system of education functions is fundamental and unique in English. Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) offers a witty picture of the latter trends in French philosophy (structuralisms, essentially), although the subtlety of the analysis as well as its irony may make it a difficult read for the unadvised reader.

47. On Renouvier, see Laurent Fédi, *Le Problème de la connaissance dans la philosophie de Ch. Renouvier* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999); Octave Hamelin, *Le Système de Renouvier* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1927); William Logue, *Charles Renouvier, Philosopher of Liberty* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1993). For Renouvier's conception of science and use of the hypothesis, cf. Warren Schmaus, "Kant's Reception in France: Theories of the Categories in Academic Philosophy, Psychology and Social Sciences," *Perspective on Science* 11(1) (2003). Schmaus's "Renouvier and the Method of Hypothesis," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 38 (2007), is also interesting concerning the kind of neo-Kantianism that developed in France, and the typically neo-Kantian and phenomenological problem of the *Kategorienlehre* (doctrine of categories).

48. Charles Renouvier, *Essais de critique générale* (Paris: Lagrange, 1854–64), xv. Hereafter quotations from this foreword will be cited parenthetically by page number. Unless otherwise mentioned, all translations from the French are my own.

of those that the established sciences put at their foundations without making them explicit" (xx). The principles to which Renouvier refers are construed as fundamental *a priori* relations that constitute knowledge. Starting with the concept of representation in a very broad sense, Renouvier untangles its elements and the laws ruling knowledge. He is thereby led to rewrite the Kantian system of categories.

The Kantian inspiration is clear, and the influence of the forewords to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in particular that of the second edition, is obvious. The question of the scientificity of philosophy is the guiding thread: "It is impossible to reasonably reject the *Critique*. For it is inspired by the spirit of science; it is that very spirit" (xii). For Renouvier, as for Kant, the *Critique* is opposed to traditional metaphysics, which was informed by theology and cosmology. As will soon be the case for the German neo-Kantians, Renouvier sees the *Critique's* scientific character in its methodological dimension: "If the result of the *Critique* is to formulate a method, to provide a lasting logic, this is indeed very much; it is almost enough for its scientificity" (xiii). But a notable difference between Renouvier and the German neo-Kantians, especially the Marburg School, is that for Renouvier it is not so much that the *Critique as such* is the method (as Kant wrote in the B Foreword); rather, the method is the *result* of the *Critique* (namely, the ensuing Kantian methodologies themselves).

Nevertheless, Renouvier is quite critical of Kant. His last book, *Critique de la doctrine de Kant* (Critique of the Kantian doctrine), offers a systematic deconstruction of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In Renouvier's idealism, as, arguably, in the Marburg School's idealism, the return to Leibniz⁴⁹ is nearly as important as the return to Kant.⁵⁰ But the very essence of Renouvier's concept of the transcendental remains deficient and psychological when compared to that found in more elaborate Kant interpretations, as well as in the main German neo-Kantian schools and Husserl's phenomenology.

Renouvier never taught and was extremely prolific. His influence was felt, however, only after 1867, the year he founded, with his friend François Pillon, the journal *L'Année philosophique* (The philosophical yearbook). At that time

49. In 1899, Renouvier published his *La Nouvelle monadologie*. A Leibnizian reconstruction of Kant relies on a long history, going back to Salomon Maimon's interpretation of Kant's Anticipations of Perception as an unconscious sum of "*petites perceptions*." Cohen's rejection of sensitive intuition relies on a similar conception. It is here important because in French neo-Kantianism, and particularly in the philosophy of mathematics, it will give birth to a strong opposition between the Kantian philosophy of intuition (Boutroux, Poincaré) and the Leibnizian philosophy of the concept (Couturat, Cavaillès).

50. This is a reason, among others, that it caught the attention of Cassirer; cf. Ernst Cassirer, "Das Problem des Unendlichen und Renouviere's 'Gesetz der Zahl,'" in *Philosophische Abhandlungen: Hermann Cohen zum 70. Geburtstag Dargebracht* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1912), and "Review of Ch. Renouvier, *Essais de critique générale*," *Die Geisteswissenschaften* 1 (1914).

he started to have followers: François Evellin, the young Victor Brochard, Jean-Jacques Gourd, and his main disciple, Octave Hamelin.⁵¹ It is also during this period that William James carefully read his work.

If Renouvier's neo-Kantianism can be described as a neocriticism insofar as it submits Kant himself to critique, Lachelier's can be described as a late evolution of spiritualism. His teacher, Félix Ravaisson (1813–1900), established an intellectual and institutional strain that would develop into Bergson's spiritualism as well as Émile Boutroux's neo-Kantianism. Ravaisson favored Schelling over Hegel, a preference that meant, in the French context, leaping over Cousin to return to Maine de Biran. True idealism is a spiritualism grounded in the will. Lachelier depicted, quite accurately, the intellectual situation framed by Ravaisson's *Report* (1868). As he writes in a letter to Paul Janet, on December 8, 1891:

It is Ravaisson, I believe, who taught us all to conceive being not as objective forms of substances or phenomena, but as the subjective form of spiritual action, this action being – in its last resort – thought or will. I think you could find this idea in Bergson, in Ribot even, as well as in Boutroux and myself. It is perhaps the only trait that is common to all of us and that makes for the unity of the philosophical movement of the last twenty years.⁵²

With such a common ground, how can one account for the fragmentation of spiritualism into Christian philosophy, Bergsonism, and neo-Kantianism?

51. Victor Brochard's (1848–1907) doctoral dissertation, *De l'erreur* (Paris, 1879), claims the influence of Kant and Renouvier. This is also the case for François Evellin's (1835–1910) dissertation: *Infini et quantité* (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1880). Jean-Jacques Gourd (1850–1909) was one of Renouvier's followers in Switzerland (see his *Le Phénomène* [Paris: Félix Alcan, 1888]). Octave Hamelin (1856–1907), the most prominent of Renouvier's followers, first exerted his influence by teaching at the University of Bordeaux (1884–1903), at the ÉNS (1903–7), and at the Sorbonne (1905–7). His acclaimed book, *Essai sur les éléments principaux de la représentation* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1907; doctoral thesis), as well as his translation and commentary of Aristotle *Physics* II (complementary dissertation) were published the year of his death. Léon Robin, his student and another of the Sorbonne's major figures, published two thick volumes of Hamelin's lectures: *Le Système de Descartes* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1911; with a foreword by Hamelin's friend Émile Durkheim), and *Le Système d'Aristote* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1920; lectures given at the ÉNS in 1904–5). Indicative of his importance, other courses were later published, including *Le Système de Renouvier* (Sorbonne, 1906–7), *Les Philosophes présocratiques* (Strasbourg: Association des publications de l'université de Strasbourg, 1978; lectures 1905–6), and *Fichte* (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 1988; lectures 1887).

52. Jules Lachelier, *Lettres*, 1856–1918 (Paris: G. Girard, 1933), 139.

In 1861, Lachelier dissociated himself from Biran and hence from Ravaisson as well.⁵³ His courses on logic and on psychology demonstrate that he had already taken a Kantian position when he began teaching at the ÉNS. He exerted his remarkable influence through his lectures rather than through his – relatively few – publications.

The lectures on logic present a general elucidation of the theoretical principles of knowledge. From the very first lesson, the method is imbued with Kantian elements. "Let me explain: in any science one can differentiate what man knows and the way he knows, in other words, matter and form."⁵⁴ Both in his *Lectures on Logic* and in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant had already made use of this conceptual distinction between logic in general (which is purely formal) and transcendental logic, which is both formal and material. Lachelier's lecture course then pursues a Kantian path. To circumscribe science, Lachelier takes a detour: "instead of saying in a few words what science is, it might be better to review the necessary conditions of science, the degrees spirit covers to reach science."⁵⁵ This path is very significant, for he borrows the conditions for science from the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The first condition for science is that an object is given. Lachelier takes an indirect path to introduce both forms of pure intuition, space and time: "the internal world of the successive states in time, the outside world of the simultaneous objects in space and also the successive states of these same objects in time."⁵⁶ Lachelier notes that space is integrated in time and, when dissociating the internal world from the external, he also intends to make room for that internal world that differs from the internalization of the external. A place is therefore reserved for feeling, desire, faith, and so on, opening the possibility for the fields of morality and religion, while avoiding a reductionist reading of Kant.

Sensation alone does not explain the possibility of science, since it is reduced to an indefinite number of atomistic elements: "impression, in itself, is reduced to an infinity of elementary impressions that is tied together by nothing and in which it vanishes."⁵⁷ Knowledge is constituted by a synthetic act of spirit, an intellectual synthesis that consists in the positing of pure relations. In addition to space and time, pure functions of synthesis are acknowledged as transcendental conditions of science. And when, in the middle of the chapter on induction, Lachelier intends to ground the determinism expressed by scientific law

53. Cf. Gaston Mauchaussat, *L'Idéalisme de Lachelier* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), 16–40.

54. Jules Lachelier, *Cours de logique*, École Normale Supérieure 1866–67 (Paris: Éditions Universitaires de France, 1990), 15.

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*, 16.

and experimental method such as Claude Bernard⁵⁸ conceives it, he again refers to Kant, correcting the subjectivistic interpretation of the idealism:

And, although it is attributed to Kant to have reduced the principles of understanding to a purely subjective value, it is to him that we owe the justification of the principle of determinism. We cannot know a priori things in themselves, but we can assert a priori that the phenomena of nature, which compose the weft of our thoughts, are possible to be thought. And the consciousness of our personal identity is the condition of any thought.⁵⁹

Moving from the syntheses to individual unity, Lachelier again combines the original synthetic unity of apperception, the empirical unity of consciousness, and the paralogue of substantiality into one single thought.

The general method of his reflection, as well as the logical progression within these lectures, produce what one can call a transcendental idealism. They sketch an outline concerning induction that Lachelier's 1871 dissertation, *Du fondement de l'induction* (On the foundation of induction), will further develop; regarding determinism, they draw a frame Boutroux will fill, with a few gaps, in his dissertation, *De la contingence des lois de la nature* (On the contingency of the laws of nature).

Neo-Kantianism reached a preeminent position in French philosophy through Lachelier's teaching for the following reasons: he was a very charismatic professor; he taught at the ÉNS from 1864 to 1875; his lectures were copied and studied by at least twenty promotions of students,⁶⁰ some of whom in turn became the most influential professors of their time – Boutroux, Liard, Paul and Jules Tannery, Janet, Séailles, Brunschvicg.⁶¹ And in addition to his teaching, Lachelier held important official positions such as the presidency of the *Agrégation*, a nationwide competitive examination one needed to take in order to teach in higher education, and the general inspector of public education.

In 1876, not even ten years after Ravaisson's *Rapport*, Désiré Nolen (1838–1904), in his Inaugural Lecture at the University of Montpellier succeeding

58. Claude Bernard (1813–78) was a French physiologist. His *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* (1865) was universally considered as a classic discourse on the scientific method, comparable only to the works of Newton. A professor at the Collège de France from 1847 to 1878, when he died he was given a public funeral, the first man of science to be awarded that honor in France.

59. *Ibid.*, 51; see also 122.

60. Entering classes in the École Normale are referred to as "promotions."

61. Cf. Celestin Bouglé, "Spiritualisme et Kantisme en France, Jules Lachelier," *La Revue de Paris* (May 1, 1934), as well as Léon Brunschvicg, *Préface* to *Œuvres de J. Lachelier* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1933), xix.

Boutroux (another important figure of French neo-Kantianism), remarked that "over the last ten years, it seems that Kant's *Critique* has become the constant and common study of philosophical minds."⁶² This, he continued, sets the stage for a truly European philosophy.⁶³ Boutroux, in his lectures on Kant delivered from 1894 to 1897 and 1900 to 1901 at the Sorbonne, writes:

moreover, we, the French, have today a closer relationship with Kant's philosophy than we had fifty years ago. ... These studies contributed to the awakening of the metaphysical sense in our country Hence, to go back to Kant is not only to act as a scholar, as a historian, as a dilettante; it is to draw useful knowledge and forces us to face the problems imposed on us [today].⁶⁴

Meanwhile Louis Liard (1846–1917),⁶⁵ a noteworthy neo-Kantian, student of Lachelier and friend of Boutroux, had become the director of the Enseignement Supérieur, France's university educational system between 1884 and 1902. Finally, almost half a century after Lachelier started teaching, Brunschvicg, the last great neo-Kantian of that period, concluded: "From 1870 on, a philosophical University has been built in France that should bear the name of Lachelier, just like the Old University bears the name of Victor Cousin."⁶⁶ The main neo-Kantian figures of this new "philosophical university" are Émile Boutroux, Émile Meyerson,⁶⁷ Léon Brunschvicg, and Octave Hamelin.

After Lachelier, Boutroux is the key figure in the development of French neo-Kantianism.⁶⁸ He is at the center of the intellectual and the institutional network

62. Désiré Nolen, *Kant et la philosophie du XIX siècle* (Montpellier: Martel Aîné, 1877), 12.

63. He neglected to mention the important contributions from Italian neo-Kantianism.

64. Émile Boutroux, *La Philosophie de Kant: Cours de M. Émile Boutroux* (Sorbonne 1896–1897) (Paris: Vrin, 1926), 12.

65. Cf. Charles Lyon-Caen, "Notice sur la vie et les travaux de M. Louis Liard," *Séances et travaux de l'Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques* 81 (1921), and Alain Renaut, *Les Révolutions de l'université* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1995), 156ff.

66. Léon Brunschvicg, *Écrits Philosophiques*, 3 vols (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951–58), vol. 2, 206.

67. Émile Meyerson (1859–1933), a Polish chemist who emigrated to Germany, then to France, exerted a strong influence on French philosophy, although, like Renouvier, he was never completely part of the system. His antipositivism, his Kantian and neocritical background as well as his discussion of contemporary science and his participation in discussions with Poincaré, Brunschvicg, and Langevin make him a noteworthy figure worthy of the renewed interest he is attracting.

68. Cf. Fabien Capeillères, "Généalogie d'un Néokantisme Français: à Propos d'Émile Boutroux," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale, Néokantismes* 3 (1997), and "To Reach for Metaphysics: Émile Boutroux's Philosophy of Science," in Luft and Makkreel, *Neo-Kantianism in Contemporary Philosophy*.

constitutive of the French higher education system. His work can be understood as an attempt to carry on the spiritualism of his masters, Ravaisson and Lachelier, in a Kantian guise. The problem around which his thought revolves is the reconciliation of the universal validity of scientific laws (which seems to involve an ontological necessity and therefore determinism), human freedom (the condition for morality), and religion.

This problem is precisely what he calls "Kant's problem": "How is science possible? How is morality possible? How is the reconciliation of science and morality possible?"⁶⁹ And later he states: "Kant's problem is ours. His writings talk about us: *nostra res agitur*."⁷⁰ Despite several themes that can be considered Kantian, Boutroux's solution to the problem is not Kantian, and one cannot but assert that his understanding of the *a priori* and of the transcendental that he rejects is rather weak. One of the main interests is his treatment of science, which is both metaphysical and epistemological, and he is closely related to major scientists of the period such as his own son, Pierre Boutroux, and his brother-in-law, Henri Poincaré.⁷¹ Boutroux's Kantianism has also been considered an influence on Poincaré's contributions to the problem of hypotheses, as well as on his conventionalism.⁷² Within this constellation, the Tannery brothers were also of major importance.

Brunschvicg constitutes the apex of French neo-Kantianism, a status also claimed by Renouvier's heir, Hamelin.⁷³ Brunschvicg's achievement was a strictly methodological understanding of what he calls "the idea of critique." His achievement is deployed via a "wider and richer" use of "the truth of the transcendental method."⁷⁴ The general movement is similar to the "historization" and the "dynamization" of the transcendental operating in German neo-Kantianism, in particular, the Marburg School.

What will be left of the theory of transcendental consciousness, once one recognizes that algebra and geometry, mechanics and physics do not resign themselves to this docile immobility that Kant expected? And what will one

69. Boutroux, *La Philosophie de Kant*, 9; see also 266.

70. *Ibid.*, 11–12. This is a reference to Horace's "Nam tua res agitur, paries cum proximus ardet" (it becomes your concern when your neighbor's wall is on fire).

71. Cf. Mary Jo Nye, "The Boutroux Circle and Poincaré's Conventionalism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1 (1979).

72. Cf. *Les Sources et les courants de la philosophie contemporaine en France* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1933), 351.

73. This is a perspective held for instance by Dominique Parodi; see *La Philosophie contemporaine en France* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1919). Brunschvicg answers in "L'Orientation du rationalisme" (*Écrits Philosophiques*, vol. 2, 25): "we do not find any trace of critical thought in neo-criticism."

74. Léon Brunschvicg, "L'Idée critique et le système Kantien," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 31(2) (1924), 153.

make of the fact that, during the nineteenth century, they broke the limits that the "Transcendental Aesthetic," the "Transcendental Analytic," and the *First Metaphysical Principles of the Science of Nature* had commanded them to respect as the final layout?⁷⁵

The answer is somewhat brutal: "we should leave to some neo-Kantians and to Kant himself the postulate of this solidarity between the idea of critique and the table of the forms or the categories, since we know today that this solidarity expresses the most superficial and fragile aspect of the doctrine."⁷⁶ Brunschvicg then proceeds to point to a cleavage in the transcendental method: "The method put to work by the transcendental deduction is a *reflexive analysis*; it starts from science considered as a fact, and goes back to the a priori forms of intuitions and pure concepts of the understanding."⁷⁷ This first moment, reminiscent of Cohen, is legitimate in Brunschvicg's eyes, especially since it reverts to the unity of transcendental apperception, an important element for someone who also wants to claim the spiritualist inheritance. However, when a philosopher considers the system of categories as fixed once and for all, and limits deduction to that of the principles of a determined moment of physics (Newton, for instance), then the progressive synthesis that leads to all the dimensions of spirit will be lacking.

Brunschvicg's understanding of the "idea of critique" will be exercised as "reflexive analysis" on all fields of human knowledge: science, morality, religion, art, and history, in order to produce the system of critical idealism that presents the life of the spirit in all its directions as well as in its unity.

Brunschvicg's enormous influence was at its peak in the 1920s. Setting aside his impressive intellectual stature, we see that he exerted his influence through all dimensions of the French system: he held a key teaching position at the Sorbonne (for thirty years, beginning in 1909), was president of the *Agrégation* (1936–38), for many years was part of the academic-political network that oversaw the philosophy curriculum and the awarding of positions and grants, and was founder of the journal *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* (with Xavier Léon in 1893) and of the Société Française de Philosophie (1901, with Léon and André Lalande).

At the end of the nineteenth century, neo-Kantianism was not only the preeminent philosophy in France, but had also become the *philosophie officielle*. But soon Boutroux left center stage in favor of his most famous student and the true heir of spiritualism, Henri Bergson; Bachelard overshadowed Meyerson; Brunschvicg became the embodiment of the mandarin, confronted by young

75. *Ibid.*, 152.

76. *Ibid.*, 153.

77. *Ibid.*

materialists such as Georges Politzer⁷⁸ and Marxists such as Paul Nizan⁷⁹ or by philosophers such as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. These thinkers found their inspirations in new figures in German philosophy – the early Husserl, Heidegger – and subscribed to their criticisms of Kant.

To take a look at the influence of neo-Kantianism on post-Second World War French intellectual life, one of the most interesting developments of French neo-Kantianism is the role it played in the rise of structuralism. Martial Guérout's (1891–1976) reflections on the Kantian concept of architectonics, his familiarity with the neo-Kantian "quarrel of the system,"⁸⁰ and his reading of Karl Mannheim's *Die Strukturanalyse der Erkenntnistheorie* (The structural analysis of epistemology, 1922), resulted in his highly interesting structural methodology concerning the history of philosophy. Considering all genetic, chronological, and biographical studies merely preliminary steps, he argued that the analysis should proceed to an internal reconstruction of the philosophical work considered as a monument constructed by layers and successions of proofs. The more original rational conditions of the system consist in its transcendental conditions, just as, in Kant, the structure of the idea of pure reason forms a transcendental condition of a system. Victor Goldschmidt followed this path in his work in the history of philosophy.⁸¹ But more important is the affiliation with Jules Vuillemin (1920–2001),⁸² in which the meaning of the concept of structure shifted. It originally

78. See his 1926 attack in *Écrits*, Jacques Debouzy (ed.) (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1969) I, 29.

79. Cf. Paul Nizan, *Les Chiens de garde* (Paris: Rieder, 1932).

80. The quarrel of the system was a fierce debate regarding two issues: (i) Could philosophy fulfill its claim to be a science only through the form of a system? And, given a positive answer to this first question: (ii) What kind of system should it be? Regarding the first claim, Hermann Cohen writes: "The philosophy reaches its concept only as system" (*Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, 3rd ed. [Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1922], 601). Concerning the second claim, Natorp (like Cassirer) has a preference for the concept of a systematic: "Systematic, not system" (in *Philosophische Systematik* [Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1958], 1). Rickert is also quite clear: "Unsystematic thought means unphilosophical thought" (in *Allgemeine Grundlegung der Philosophie* [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1921], 11; see also *Grundprobleme der Philosophie* [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1934], 1–25). He develops the concept of an "open system." What is here at stake is to be systematic without being dogmatic (or Hegelian!). See Christian Krijnen, *Philosophie als System: Prinzipientheoretische Untersuchungen zum Systemgedanken bei Hegel, im Neukantianismus und in der Gegenwartsphilosophie* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2008).

81. Victor Goldschmidt (1914–81) was well known for his application of a structuralist method of reading, inaugurated by Guérout, to ancient philosophy (Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, the Stoics, and so on) as well as to Rousseau. For some reservations, see Jacques Brunschwig, "Goldschmidt and Guérout: Some Facts, Some Enigmas," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 88 (2006).

82. Cf. Joseph Vidal-Rosset, "De Martial Guérout à Jules Vuillemin, analyse d'une Filiation," in *Le Paradigme de la filiation*, Jean Gayon and Jean-Jacques Wunenberger (eds) (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995).

referred to a scientificity gained through systematicity, but systematicity was now understood through logic and mathematical axiomatic. Gilles-Gaston Granger (1920–) played an important role in this transformation. These intellectual affinities (and friendships) resulted in academic appointments: Guérout, who held the Chair of History and Technology of Philosophical Systems at the Collège de France (1951–62), nominated Vuillemin for a Chair of Philosophy of Knowledge (1962–90). And Vuillemin appointed Foucault to succeed him at the University of Clermont-Ferrand, then at the Collège de France (where he held a Chair of History of Systems of Thought, 1970–84); Granger succeeded Foucault in 1986, renaming the Chair “Comparative Epistemology.”⁸³

This logico-mathematical transformation of the concept of structure also impacted the writing of the history of philosophy (as well as history itself), leading, for instance, on the one hand, to the work of Michel Serres and Daniel Parrochia and, on the other, to Althusser’s praxis in his reading of *Capital* and Foucault’s “archeology.”⁸⁴ The end of this story is better known, although often in a very confused fashion owing to the omission of the first episodes: to the mathematical paradigm a linguistic one would be added (Saussure, Benveniste) that in turn would lead, by a complete reversal, to neostructuralism or poststructuralism, while a Heideggerian intellectual background (blended with various proportions of Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud) would come to replace the Kantian paradigm.

Today, neo-Kantianism is still active in France: in epistemology, philosophy of mathematics, and philosophy of physics one might mention the work of Jean Petitot,⁸⁵ Michel Bitbol, Jean Seidengart, and Pierre Kerszberg; Alexis Philonenko in the history of philosophy; Alain Renaut in moral and political philosophy as well as education; and a neo-Kantian, Luc Ferry, became minister of education.

III. CONCLUSION

To summarize, the label “neo-Kantianism” was applied to a variety of tendencies within the philosophical scene in Europe, mainly Germany and France, to a

83. It is also worth noting that Jacques Bouveresse, who presented his 1995 Collège de France Chair of Philosophy of Language and of Knowledge as “in a way succeeding” those of Vuillemin and Granger, devoted his 2007 and 2008 lectures to a question formulated after a title of Vuillemin’s book: “What are philosophical systems?” The lectures not only dealt explicitly with Vuillemin, but also with the tradition coming from Renouvier, Guérout, and Hyppolite.

*84. Serres and Foucault are discussed in essays by Derek Robbins and Timothy O’Leary in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6*.

*85. The work of Jean Petitot is discussed in “The Structuralist Legacy” by Patrice Maniglier in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 7*.

lesser extent Italy and the United Kingdom, at a certain period of time, roughly between 1870 and 1930.⁸⁶ While the peak of this movement can be said to have come to an end after the First World War, the Second World War seemingly sent it into oblivion. In the late 1970s, neo-Kantianism's importance and dominance in its own days began to be rediscovered in scholarship. This led to a philosophical revival, which is now palpable in nearly all fields of philosophical work. For instance, the question of *a priori* knowledge is discussed in contemporary philosophy of mind, epistemology, and philosophy of science. It is also remarkable that this European trend of "continental" philosophy is currently gaining leverage in the US, with the works and the influence of John Rawls in ethics and political philosophy and, for example, Michael Friedman in both philosophy of science and the genesis of analytical philosophy. Today, neo-Kantianism is slowly regaining its status as a major interlocutor with phenomenology and analytical philosophy, a status first exemplified, for instance, by the relations between Husserl and Natorp and its influence on Carnap.

In one sense, then, the term "neo-Kantianism" refers mainly to this period of time. In another sense, the term "neo-Kantian" can be understood in the manner in which philosophers today call themselves "neo-Fregean" or "neo-Pragmatist," by which they mean an alliance to these philosophers, not in the letter or in correct exegesis of the great thinker's true intentions, but in the *spirit* of the philosophers in question. It is in *this* sense that the neo-Kantians discussed here perceived themselves as furthering Kant's true intentions, be it in dismissing some elements in Kant's system for the sake of others or emphasizing those that they perceived to reveal a true kernel in the midst of other problematic intuitions in Kant's thought. In this effort, they not only brought forth highly original avenues of Kant interpretation that are still essentially pursued today, but also produced a range of interesting new systematic approaches and theories that are far from obsolete and deserve to be studied anew.⁸⁷

If one were to summarize in the briefest terms its philosophical importance, one could call neo-Kantianism a philosophy of *culture*, whereby culture is itself the problematic philosophical term, the *terminus ad quem*. Philosophy, then,

86. Regarding Italian neo-Kantianism, see Massimo Ferrari, *Introduzione a il neocriticismo* (Rome: Laterza, 1997) and, more specifically, *I dati dell'esperienza: Il Neokantismo di Felice Tocco nella filosofia Italiana tra ottocento e novecento* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1990). UK neo-Kantianism is more difficult to characterize since it forms components of another complex philosophical movement: British idealism. Philosophers such as T. H. Green (1836–82), Edward Caird (1835–1908), and R. G. Collingwood (1889–1943) are often identified as neo-Kantians.

87. Two recent anthologies will help make neo-Kantianism more accessible for scholarship in the English language: Luft and Makkreel, *Neo-Kantianism in Contemporary Philosophy*, and Dominic Moran and Sebastian Luft (eds), *The Neo-Kantianism Reader* (London: Routledge, 2010).

is placed in the service of human culture in modern society, which values and upholds the fundamental beliefs of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment: reason, equality, freedom. Neo-Kantianism stands, to borrow a phrase from Ursula Renz, for a culture of rationality and the rationality of culture. Whether such an ideal and the consequences following from it will be allowed to survive in the so-called age of postmodernity is another question. Be that as it may, both as a starting-point for understanding the philosophical tendencies that would emerge and define the twentieth century, and as a vast quarry of inspiring ideas and timeless systematic approaches, one will need to reassess the neo-Kantian movement.⁸⁸

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Hermann Cohen

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88. Special thanks go to Celeste Harvey for her help with assembling the bibliographical data and for correcting the grammar and style of this piece.

89. A note on the editions of the major works: As was customary in the days of the neo-Kantians, new editions did not get published without extensive authors' revisions, which not only eliminated typographical errors, but were also intended to capture the new developments the author had made since the first publication of the book in question. For this reason, in cases where there are different editions, we list the last – and presumably the latest and ultimately approved – version, or the critical edition, in the regular bibliography, preceded by the date of the first edition in brackets.

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Ernst Cassirer

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