

1-1-2015

Philosophical Historiography in Marburg Neo-Kantianism: The Example of Cassirer's *Erkenntnisproblem*

Sebastian Luft

Marquette University, sebastian.luft@marquette.edu

Published version. "Philosophical Historiography in Marburg Neo-Kantianism: The Example of Cassirer's *Erkenntnisproblem*", in *From Hegel to Windelband*, Eds. Gerald Hartung and Valentin Pluder. Boston : De Gruyter, 2015: 181-205. [Publisher Link](#). © 2015 Walter De Gruyter. Used with permission.

Sebastian Luft

Philosophical Historiography in Marburg Neo-Kantianism: The Example of Cassirer's *Erkenntnisproblem*

I Introduction: Philosophical Historiography as Problem-History. Windelband as Paradigm

We can think that “problem-history”¹ is exclusively a name for one way of philosophical historiography among others. As such it is a method that recounts the history of philosophy in terms of its problems, and not in terms of philosophical personalities or cultural epochs. In this understanding, problem-history proceeds with the naïve assumption that problems exist “in themselves”, that they are merely repeated and manifested differently in different epochs. Plainly stated, this sounds both trivial and problematic. And if this reading is true then it is no wonder that problem-history is accorded little interest today, despite the fact that the classical authors of problem-history writing are still readily consulted. Apart from the fact that such writers are still being constantly exploited for research purposes in the present, their works are granted no independent philosophical value. This applies equally to the authors of these works: they are not considered as independent philosophers but “only” as historians. Generally speaking, whosoever dedicates one’s philosophical existence to philosophical history, turned backwards and naïvely engaged in the history of problems, actually just carries on a desperate retreating battle because a sense of the actual business of philosophy has become lost. On this view, only someone who has forgotten what the authentic domain of philosophy is concerns himself with the history of philosophy. As a much-appreciated colleague once disparagingly put it: “Someone who has no new ideas will retreat into the history of philosophy.”

¹ “Problem-history” here translates the standard term *Problemgeschichte*, which is sometimes translated as “history of problems”, presumably in analogy to other coinages, such as *Wirkungsgeschichte* (“history of effects”, but also “effective history”). In English, there is the fairly recent coinage “intellectual history” (introduced and popularized by Isaiah Berlin), which may be an apt translation for *Problemgeschichte*. Nonetheless, the term has been translated here as “problem-history” to acknowledge the proximity to “intellectual history”, while also retaining the peculiar character of the German term and its history.

Such a judgment could be expected from a “classical” analytical philosopher. That such a judgment is, for its part, naïve in manifold respects is hopefully clear to all true historians of philosophy, even if it was an unquestioned dogma for a long time in analytic philosophy. But by now philosophical history has become a problem for analytic philosophy too, albeit one characterized by a real perplexity or helplessness concerning how best to proceed. Even when it explicitly concerns itself with the history of philosophy, analytic philosophy finds itself faced with the dilemma that Rorty so strikingly formulated: “Either we anachronistically impose enough of our problems and vocabulary on the dead to make them conversational partners, or we confine our interpretive activity to making their falsehoods look less silly by placing them in the context of the benighted times in which they were written”². In the following it should become clear, through the consideration of neo-Kantian philosophical historiography as an exemplar, why precisely this dilemma need not exist in the first place. The dilemma is, on its part, the result of a naivety in the face of the history of philosophy, which is considered—if one is to follow Rorty here—merely as a quarry for one’s own ideas or as a self-serving doxographical finger exercise without any independent systematic value.

But in fact anyone who, like the neo-Kantians, has a good look at the history of philosophy with systematic intent will find this dilemma absurd. Nevertheless, philosophical historians feel obliged to defend themselves in the face of such attitudes towards their work. When one looks at the great philosophical-historical works of the so-called age of historicism in the 19th century, one quickly discovers that the motive for this devotion to the history of the discipline was altogether different to that of the historical-antiquarian approach and also was not an unquestioned end-in-itself. Rather they turn to it as the source from which originate the highest and most compelling systematic questions, and ultimately the central question of what in actual fact philosophy *itself* is. The dimension of history, a dimension that since Hegel has become essential to philosophy, becomes recognised as a systematic problem and ranked among the traditional “central problems” of philosophy. In this case, it takes the shape of the central question regarding the historicity of philosophy itself. It may well be that such a question is already a symptom of a crisis as well as an indication of the dissolution of traditional conceptions. In the second half of the 19th century this was undoubtedly the case. But, as is well-known, crises always do philosophy good, and more good and in a wholly differently way than could be said about the sciences. And the question has a renewed significance today in the

² Rorty (1984), 49.

light of the fact that the separation of ahistorical analytic philosophy and historically-orientated Continental philosophy has itself been superseded. With regard to the overcoming of this stalemate, the question of the historicity of philosophy and accordingly of the history of philosophy itself can be posed anew. As such, the question of the method of writing the history of philosophy is once again highly relevant.

The question of the way one should approach the study of the history of philosophy is intimately bound up with the question of what philosophy itself is. We owe this insight to the neo-Kantians, themselves under the influence of Hegel. An inquiry into this debate is particularly relevant for our contemporary situation, in that the role of philosophy in the framework of culture in general, and particularly inside university curricula is no longer self-evident. Philosophy finds itself, as consequence, either drawn back into an ivory tower of highly abstract questions or it dissolves itself in empirical research or—a third new possibility recently considered by Höhle—it lapses into a feuilleton-style popular philosophy.³ None of these alternatives were feasible for either school of neo-Kantianism. On the contrary, they maintained, philosophy must remain in existence but it must itself always work out anew its “what” and “how”. Philosophy is not a sublime body of thought that can naively insist on being continued in its “ancient form”. It is, on the contrary, a task to be accomplished within the framework of cultural work. However, as is obvious, this self-positioning becomes possible only through reflection upon the history of the discipline.

Thus, the neo-Kantian treatment of philosophical history as problem-history is, in principle and transcending the differences between its schools, fundamentally the attempt to appropriate history with a forward regard, not in order to drive forward a steady progress (in this it differs from Hegel’s teleology), but out of the insight into the historicity of philosophy itself. Anyone who desires to “scientifically assess and evaluate our contemporary world and human life” will have to understand the development of these principles “in the course of historical movement”.⁴ Accordingly, only someone who studies the history of philosophy can philosophize properly. This is the considered view of Windelband, and with this intention in mind, the history of philosophy is to be regarded as “*the history of problems and concepts*”.⁵ The great philosophical historical works of neo-Kantianism adhere to this paradigm. One can legitimately characterize them as “problem-histories”.

³ See Höhle (2013), 308.

⁴ Windelband (1957), VII, italics added.

⁵ Windelband (1957), VII.

Hence, Cassirer's work *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit* was—rightly—regarded as a monumental work of problem-history orientated philosophical historiography. If it is true that Cassirer's philosophical historical work should be classified as problem-history, then it is first of all important to develop an understanding of philosophical problem-history. This will occur in the first part of this essay, in which I discuss Windelband's theory of problem-orientated philosophical historiography. At this very juncture, I will show that Gadamer's critique (among others) that problem-history is a "bastard of historicism" (Gadamer's famous phrase) does not apply to Windelband and *a fortiori* neither does it apply to Cassirer. In truth this method of philosophical historiography is a highly reflective and subtle procedure which thematizes systematically the history of the discipline in connection with the development of the sciences. The programme of problem-history should be distinguished from Gadamer's caricature.

If Cassirer takes over the paradigm of problem-history from Windelband, however, he does not do so without reflection. For Cassirer combines the problem-historical paradigm with the method of the Marburg School, the transcendental method. The application of the method that actually is supposed to serve the critique of knowledge is on first sight highly surprising but on second sight quite original. In this respect, Cassirer also pursues his own interests, which in the end remain critical towards Windelband and point ahead towards his own systematic ambitions. Similarly to critiquing Windelband's distinction between nomothetic and idiographic sciences, philosophical historiography, as a discipline for the humanities, is to Cassirer, properly speaking, not an idiographic science, diagnosing particulars, but instead strives towards universal knowledge. But how should the universal be ascertainable if it is subject to historical change? That philosophical problems can be reduced to the epoch of their occurrence, is the problem of relativism, which here appears in the form of historicism. Cassirer has clearly seen this problem. His procedure in his philosophical historiography, as can be seen in the *Erkenntnisproblem*, is, although orientated towards problem-history, a response to the danger of historicism. The answer is seen in the conception of the *a priori* as *historical*. In this he shows, as against Windelband, a heightened sensitivity for the historical dimension of philosophy, a dimension that in spite of its historicity must come forth as *transcendental*. A presentation of problem-history, as carried out in the Marburg School, specifically in Cassirer's work in which it finds its apex, thus simultaneously throws a light on the philosophical standpoint of this entire school. Hence, Cassirer's achievement can only adequately be appreciated as a narrowing of the distance between historical and systematic research. When this achievement is overlooked, one judges neither the historical nor the systematic purpose of his

work correctly. Thus, in conclusion, from the example of problem-history a view of Cassirer's whole system becomes possible. Problem-historical philosophical historiography in the Marburg School illuminates the profile of this school in general and on Cassirer in particular.

II Windelband's Definition of Problem-History and the Three Factors of Philosophical Historiography

Windelband's works in philosophical historiography are, as was already stated, not ends in themselves, but are instead directed by a systematic problem, namely the question of what philosophy itself is. Just a glance at the history of Western philosophy, to which Windelband consciously restricts himself, shows that this tradition does not allow for a unified definition of philosophy (and how much more precarious the problem would be if non-Western traditions were to be included). The respective conceptions and definitions of philosophy are too divergent and the attitudes of humanity towards it change over the course of history. Windelband rejects a unified formula, because in the face of this heterogeneity, this "many-coloured diversity"⁶ it is simply impossible to put one together. A generally valid conception of philosophy cannot be given either in terms of content or in terms of method and as such it is "not advisable to venture to obtain a general concept of philosophy through historical comparison".⁷

Windelband, though, is not satisfied with a scepticism or agnosticism towards the decisive question of how to define philosophy. And the only way to progress with this matter is a look at the *history* of philosophy itself, at that which has actually been thought and which one has characterized as philosophy.⁸ Consequently, it

⁶ Windelband (1957), 7.

⁷ Windelband (1957), 3.

⁸ To be best of my knowledge, Windelband has not reflected on the problem that many thinkers have become regarded by us today as philosophers who were not so regarded in their own time, or inversely, that they were once seen as philosophers but are no longer seen as such according to our contemporary judgment. On the other hand his minimalistic concept of philosophy makes possible, in this regard, a relatively *laissez-faire* attitude regarding this issue because his historical considerations are in the end orientated towards the present, and that is why our judgment on previous thinkers is presumably more interesting for him than anything else. One must also add that this relaxed attitude that is appropriate when approaching philosophical history does not apply to his own opinion on what philosophy is. As he makes clear in several texts from the *Präludien* (for instance "Kritische und genetische Methode" and "Was ist Philosophie?"), for

must be borne in mind in advance that an interest in the history of the discipline, which is no more than tangentially relevant in other disciplines, originates out of the dilemma that a definition of philosophy is impossible in the face of its different historical forms. The study of the history of discipline is as it were a makeshift solution, in order to escape the fact that every definition of philosophy can be revised in later times. Accordingly, what is searched for cannot be a substantial definition that is timelessly valid. The insight into the historicity of philosophy is at the same time the refusal of the question of what philosophy is “in itself” *is, because there is no supratemporal “in itself”*.

Windelband's procedure for determining what philosophy is can be characterized as pragmatic, insofar he rejects, or at least does not consider, nobler or more majestic concepts of what philosophy is, such as “love of wisdom”. Such definition was never universally valid for the Greeks. To the latter, philosophy was already present in terms of an unbridgeable dualism between the search for generally valid knowledge as science and the search for the right direction in life, between what we today characterize as theoretical and practical philosophy. The only thing that the depictions of philosophy in the course of Western history have in common is the name, and this too is a contingent construction. Windelband also rejects—as against for instance Hegel—the idea of progress or “a gradual approach” to a cognitive ideal, something which is absolutely the case in other sciences which from their “rhapsodical beginnings have won methodological security”.⁹

Thus, the only thing that the different efforts on the part of philosophers have in common is equally modestly expressed in their “*common achievement* which was brought about in spite of all differences of content and purpose in their occupation”.¹⁰ To formulate it in a wholly prosaic way, this is what has been brought forth by those who have characterized themselves as philosophers as against scientists and other cultural creators: written works. But this is not meant trivially, rather it has an accurately defined meaning. No matter how philosophy understood itself and positioned itself vis-à-vis other cultural activities,

whether it took as its point of departure the project of a general world knowledge which it wanted to obtain either as a total science or as a general synopsis of the results of the particular sciences or whether it sought for an insight into life, giving a conclusive expression to the high-

Windelband *a priori* philosophy is alone genuine philosophy, all others result in empiricism and finally in scepticism. This discrepancy in Windelband's concept of philosophy is therefore paradoxical on first glance but becomes understandable in this way: Windelband obviously separates his work on the history philosophy from his own understanding of philosophy “proper”.

⁹ Windelband (1957), 8.

¹⁰ Windelband (1957), 8.

est values of willing and feeling or whether it sought reason's self-knowledge with clear restriction as its goal—it always succeeded in working towards a conscious expression of the necessary forms and content of the human activity of reason and freeing them from their original frames of ideology, emotions, and drives, transforming them into the frame of concepts. *The history of philosophy is the process through which European humanity has set down its conception of the world and its assessment of life in scientific terms.*¹¹

The work of philosophy is therefore to find concepts for that which worries and moves humanity. It is, in good Hegelian fashion, work with concepts, *Arbeit am Begriff*. Its problem is that which afflicts humanity. This is brought to concepts in philosophy which act as a "formal indication" of the problems, of the problematic matter itself. Hence, the concrete work of problem-history is work on concepts and their history: it is a concept-history (*Begriffsgeschichte*). Concepts are *signs* or *indications* of problems. As such they do not refer to problems that philosophers simply make up but are expressions of the soul and the value judgments of humanity in different epochs, insofar as these have been subjected to rationality and transformed into concepts. However, this determination must also be applied to philosophy itself insofar as something like "reason" cannot be allowed to be anything other than a concept that indicates a problem. Otherwise put, it was the achievement of philosophers in the course of history to bring lifeworldly affairs to abstract conceptuality. To put it phenomenologically, philosophy reflects the lifeworld and is never independent of it. This proposition should certainly also be understood normatively.

Problems arise in these lifeworldly relations. What are the problems that problem-history dedicates itself to? In the course of describing the method of philosophical history, Windelband now distinguishes three "factors", as he calls them, only one of which—this has to be mentioned right away—is problem-history. The three factors are irreducible to one another which is, as the following will show, particularly relevant with regard to the later critiques of problem-history. The two others shall be mentioned first (problem-history is the second factor in Windelband's order, and in this presentation I deviate from his). One factor is *cultural history*, because "philosophy receives its problems as well as the material for its resolution from the ideas of the general consciousness of its time and from the requirements of society".¹² In some circumstances "a philosophical system [can] be like the self-knowledge of a determinate age", although the opposite is also possible, that is to say, philosophy can position itself against its age; and this need not necessarily be a Hegelian scenario, that is,

11 Windelband (1957), 8.

12 Windelband (1957), 11.

in any profound sense of dialectics. But in any case philosophy is never independent of its time.

The *third* factor, which in Windelband's discussion is the first mentioned, is the individual. The philosophical-historical process is only "carried out in the thinking of individual personalities".¹³ And insofar as it is a creation of individuals a philosophical system thus shows a similarity with artistic works. This factor too is neither reducible nor trivial. It is therefore no accident that one finds the knowledge of respective authors and their peculiarities, of their personal motivations and their place in life, of philosophical interest. As against an abstract conception of philosophy, according to which neither its history nor its actors are relevant, this conception of philosophical-historical processes should be remembered. Of course, it can be grasped in a Hegelian fashion as the progress of the spirit. But at the same time it insists that the spirit consists of flesh and blood, must be fed and possesses passions, values and ideological leanings. No passionless spirit philosophizes. One must not be ashamed of an interest in the human-all-too-human side of philosophy. Who knows, perhaps such propositions as "Aristotle lived, worked, died" apply more to the speaker of these words and are even said on his own behalf? If you like, this is the recognition of the existentialist moment in all representations of philosophy.

Now, the third irreducible factor, which Windelband characterized as the "pragmatic factor" is actual problem-history insofar as it is to be "understood through the inner necessity of thought and through the "logic of the matters" [*durch die "Logik der Dinge"*]"¹⁴ Again, insofar as it starts out from the manner of givenness of the matters, this sounds quite phenomenological inasmuch as Windelband characterizes as a problem that which the "logic of the matters" present to us of themselves, that is, what gives itself as a problem on its own accord, disregarding our access to it. But what are these problems? Here, Windelband applies formulations which can lead, and in fact have led, to misunderstandings. Let us look at exactly what he writes:

The problems of philosophy, then, are in essence given, and thus it becomes clear that in the historical course of thinking they continuously recur as the "ancient enigmas of existence"¹⁵ and always imperiously demand the solution which is never completely achieved. They emerge, as it is, from the insufficiency and contradictory imbalance of the content of

¹³ Windelband (1957), 12.

¹⁴ Windelband (1957), 10.

¹⁵ According to Beiser's indication this formulation, and also the anti-historical attitude itself, stems from Schopenhauer. The quotation marks could therefore also signify a reference to the well-known quotation of the pessimist. It could not be ascertained where this formulation is to be found in Schopenhauer.

imagination underlying philosophical contemplation. Hence, the problems of philosophy [are] inescapable tasks for the human spirit.¹⁶

These formulations have led people to interpret Windelband's idea of problem-history as a process in which certain timeless problems are always refashioned in new robes over the course of philosophical history. We will have to return to this criticism.¹⁷ However, this superficial reading is rendered implausible by two things. In explicating these we will gain a complete picture of problem-history. First of all it should be pointed out that Windelband himself puts the formulation "ancient enigmas of existence" in quotation marks, thus ironizing it. The idea that these "ancient enigmas", which "continuously return", are supratemporal, is already refuted by their temporal definition as "ancient or primordial". And because of this it is not at all implied that the same thing is asked again and again. Problems pose themselves always anew, but as what and how is left open.

This reading is reinforced by a highly interesting suggestion in a footnote at this point in the discussion, where Windelband suggests "historically and systematically extending" Kant's antinomy of pure reason.¹⁸ I understand these comments to imply that, as little as there are "ancient enigmas of existence" *in themselves*, there is no antinomy of reason correlative to it, which always again gets entangled in *the same* contradictions (as Kant claims) and thus never exceeds its antinomical status. That the antinomy of reason is to be historically and systematically extended can only mean, that what *gives* itself as antinomy of reason is historically alterable and can systematically take different forms, *generating* wholly new *kinds* of antinomies, not just the ones Kant identifies as static.

The problems are therefore that which gives itself from the matters in their intricate logic, which we initially do not understand, and which therefore appear to us as a problem which demands a solution, but appears as such always differently and in a historically changeable manner. Whether all that poses itself to us as a problem thus originates out of the "womb" of such ancient enigmas is in any case empty speculation. Therefore, problems are that which appears to humanity as tasks in a historically contingent and systematically changeable manner. Phi-

¹⁶ Windelband (1957), 10.

¹⁷ Compare Gadamer (1924) and (1990). Windelband was also defended against Gadamer's critique in Hofer's depiction in a manner similar to the above, although without relating itself to phenomenology (cf. Hofer (1997)).

¹⁸ Windelband, (1957), 10, note 46: "The result of Kant's investigations into the "antinomy of pure reason" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Dialectics, second Main Part) would need to be, in this manner, expanded historically as well as systematically."

losophy is obliged to grasp these problems conceptually and therewith to make them amenable to rational treatment. Accordingly, the business of philosophical historiography is both “philological-historical” inasmuch as these problems must be both (1.) *ascertained* and (2.) *genetically* elucidated, and it is also “critical-philosophical”, inasmuch as (3.) these problems must be *assessed*. Genetic considerations are, naturally, focused on the question of how to make “understandable the partial dependence of every philosopher’s theories on those of their predecessors”,¹⁹ hence, in this regard a certain continuity of different problems and constellations can be ascertained. But this consideration is, in the sense of the three irreducible factors, only one element among others, such as the dependence on the “general ideas of time” (the cultural-historical factor) as well as the “own nature and course of education”²⁰ of the individual philosophers (the individual factor).

Problem-history is therefore only one of three factors in the treatment of philosophical history. Further problems are not supratemporal ideas but are that which gives itself to us from out of the logic of the matters, each time differently and in different constellations. We, as humans, respond to these problems with the means at our disposal. Philosophy provides or works out the conceptual instruments for this response, instruments which the person on the street would not be immediately familiar with. Thus philosophy is not only the handmaiden of the sciences but of the whole of cultural activity. Hence, there is no general human nature which gets repeatedly caught up in the same general antinomies or seeks to answer each time anew ancient enigmas of humanity. Rather, what philosophy is, gives itself from out of the problems that the current cultural epoch and its representatives have to face. The work of philosophy exists in the effort “to bring to conceptualization” (“*auf den Begriff bringen*”) these problems.

But this work is not purely arbitrary. For the mark of “good” philosophical work is, then, to provide the problematic *du jour* of the lifeworld with the right conceptuality, insofar as “many philosophers have battled with questions that have lacked natural justification, so that all of the effort of their thought was in vain, and on the other hand also with the solution of real problems unhappy attempts at conceptual construction have occurred, which have formed obstacles rather than furthering the resolution of the matter”.²¹ The errors that might occur thus go in both directions, that of the concretion of the lifeworld and the abstraction of philosophical concepts.

¹⁹ Windelband (1957), 13.

²⁰ Windelband (1957), 13.

²¹ Windelband (1957), 13.

The bottom line is that the "history of philosophy [is] the noblest organon of philosophy itself and belongs as an integral part of its system. For in its totality it constitutes the most extensive and most conclusive development of the problems of philosophy itself".²² However, I would like to emphasise that the concept "system" here is not to be understood substantially, either. The system of philosophy is nothing other than the historical development of problems that philosophy adopts. That is why the history of philosophy exists in the service of philosophy itself and that is why philosophy is only graspable in terms of its historical development. A philosophy without history is just as absurd as a philosophical reduction of problems to their epoch (the absurdity of historicism). The honest philosophical historian is able to see the *genuine* problem, and so to see the facts of the matter from the point of view of the person for whom it is a problem instead of seeing it from the position of an absolute spirit examining it from above, for whom nothing is a real problem because all is resolved in absolute spirit. The absolute spirit, like a divine mind, is no longer bothered by any problems. The philosophical historian, who recognizes problems as problems, is accordingly the authentic philosopher. Whoever, from the history of Western thought, can show a problem as a problem, has already successfully accomplished the hermeneutic leap into the present.

As such, access to the history of philosophy as problem-history is a recollection of the problems, insofar as they were problems. It is a repositioning of the present self into the situation of those *for whom* these problems posed themselves. And these actors are not in the first place vocational philosophers but were those who, including scientists, were involved in the cultural formation of their time. The procedure is hermeneutic in that a leap of understanding has to be performed to enter another cultural horizon (in Windelband's terms, another cultural epoch or another philosopher). But for Windelband such an act is never antiquarian and backward-looking but instead always has a systematic interest. It tells us of the discussion of a problem from a different era of philosophy itself and this discussion is essentially contemporary with us. To anticipate Cassirer, the identification of a problem as common to an epoch already throws a light on this epoch. This is a view which only a philosopher can open up. And naturally the view that we presently take on an epoch says something about us. The identification of such a problem is already an interpretation that is only possible *ex post* and which understands an author better than he himself was capable of doing.

²² Windelband (1957), 13.

For these reasons, Gadamer's critique of problem-history should be conclusively rejected. As we recall, Gadamer had accused problem-history of accepting the "identity of problems" over time, problems which were merely answered differently in different epochs, whereas such an identity is an "empty abstraction".²³ As Gadamer puts it "[t]here is no standpoint outside history from which the identity of the problem over and above the changes in the historical attempts at its solution could be thought." If problem-history could be so understood, it could in fact be described as the "bastard of historicism" and it would be necessary to "destroy the illusion that problems are given like the stars in the heavens."²⁴ However, after what has been said it must be clear that this depiction and subsequent critique of Windelband's conception of problems and of history is not accurate. On the contrary his concept of problems is so unassuming that his standpoint, as I said, could best be described as pragmatic. What a problem is, is nothing other than what is unclearly given to us at a certain point in time from out of the logic of the matter at hand, the *Sache*. The identification of something as a problem is the authentic philosophical-historical achievement, an achievement in which the philosophical historian can never hope to free himself of his own time and leave it behind him either for an absolute or for a different historical standpoint, at least not by a leap that would separate him from the present. The preoccupation with the history of problems is consequently always motivated by problems of the present.

With this basic characterisation of problem-history in mind, we will now turn to Cassirer's conception thereof.

III Cassirer's Problem-History as an Application of the Transcendental Method. The Historicized *A Priori*

Cassirer does not directly examine Windelband's conception of problem-history. He rather implicitly classifies himself in this tradition when he calls his multi-volume philosophical-historical work *Das Erkenntnisproblem*, which, superficially at least, presents a history of the problem of knowledge. Cassirer never opposed the popular conception of this work as problem-historical. However, Cas-

²³ Gadamer (1990), 381.

²⁴ Gadamer (1990), 382. Note that Gadamer himself is adopting an ahistoricist position when stating this.

sirer was critical of Windelband and Rickert, and specifically of their classification of sciences into idiographic and nomothetic, respectively. In Windelband it is not clear if, on its part, problem-history is a discipline of the humanities and therefore idiographic. According to the above criteria, it is certainly so, at least in part. But it is in fact questionable whether problems such as cultural-historical factors can be ascribed a law-like character and if the individual factor is expressly unlawful and rather radically individual.

It is true that Cassirer recognizes the idiographic dimension of historiography that appears in Windelband's second factor as individuality. But he sees this as having a subordinate role: "The psychology of the individual 'subject' is first elucidated through the manner in which we relate it to the overall development of genre".²⁵ In this Cassirer follows Cohen's line of rejecting all psychological explanations. Cassirer's other statements about Windelband go in a similar direction, so it is predictable that Cassirer will grasp the concept of problem-history differently as it is bound with his own systematic interests. Cassirer's theory makes a universal claim, but one that is defined more encompassingly than Windelband's narrower conception of the nomothetic. Fundamentally, although some aspects of Windelband's concept of problem-history are applicable to Cassirer's conception of it, the latter's problem history is, in the end, decisively "Marburgian." In the first part of this section we will see how from Cassirer's theory of problem-history the general philosophical position of the Marburg school can be illustrated. In the second, following from this, I will develop Cassirer's position showing that while it remains fundamentally committed to the approach of the Marburg School he develops it into his own project. Thus, the project of problem-history will receive its proper systematic embedding. In a short conclusion I will sketch how one arrives at Cassirer's system of symbolic forms from problem-history.

To get right to the core of the problem, it should be emphasized, as regards the history of this work, that *Das Erkenntnisproblem* (first volume of four in 1906) appeared in the wake of Cohen's philosophical system, the first volume of which, the *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, was published in 1902. Cassirer also cites Cohen's work at strategic places in the *Erkenntnisproblem*, referring to its thesis of the historical *a priori*, a thesis which makes possible Cassirer's own problem-history. This notion was itself developed by Cohen, though more abstractly than in Cassirer's interpretation. Also, according to Cassirer's self-understanding its concrete application is seen with regard to historical detail rather than Cohen's broad pronouncements. Furthermore, the publication of the first two volumes

²⁵ Cassirer (1994), 7.

(1906 and 1907) and of the third volume (1919) of the *Erkenntnisproblem* was interrupted by Cassirer's first systematic work, which according to his own assessment constituted his breakthrough to independent philosophizing, the 1910 *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff* [Substance and Function]. However, a little over a decade will have passed before the complete formulation of his system in the shape of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Accordingly *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff* formulates and systematically justifies the double tasks of historical and systematic consideration, tasks that for Cassirer are "closely associated".²⁶ This close association is characteristic for Cassirer's work as a whole. In *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff* the "systematization of disciplines of knowledge is placed as a complement to the development of the history of the problem of knowledge".²⁷ This bringing together of historical and systematic tasks is the signature of the Marburg School. The proper classification of philosophical work was first explicated by the Marburg School's systematic position, which in turn leads the presentation of problem-history. For this reason, some basic paradigms of the Marburg School, which put problem-history in the appropriate light, need to be set out first.

First, the Marburg understanding of philosophy itself has to be explained, an understanding which is closely related to Windelband's. For the Marburg School too philosophy actually has no domain of its own but it works with pre-given material, that for the Marburg philosophers is chiefly given from the sciences. This was Cohen's original programme: The *factum* from which philosophy departs, is the *factum* of the sciences, each of which deal with different parts of culture. To put it simply, the task of philosophy is to legitimate these *facta*. Above all the natural sciences are paradigmatic here and it is with regard to these that the Marburg School has exerted the greatest influence. Ideally philosophy should approach all areas of culture through the *factum* of the respective sciences; accordingly it should also approach the regions of ethics and aesthetics in this manner. However, in this the other Marburg philosophers did not exactly follow the master. Therefore, the popular characterization of the Marburg School as being orientated towards a theory of scientific cognition, specifically that of the exact sciences, is quite legitimate. Yet Cassirer's ambition was to present a philosophical theory of *all* cultural regions that was not to be led by the natural-scientific paradigm. This is the mark of his proximity to as well as his distance from the Marburg School.

²⁶ Cassirer (1994), IX.

²⁷ Kreis (2010), 59.

To take as a starting point the *factum* of science means to reconstruct this *factum* in its genesis, that is to say, to elucidate the cognitive conditions of its emergence. However, these conditions are not the psychological processes of thinking, but “pure thought” (“*das reine Denken*”, following Cohen) or the pure conceptual-logical element in knowledge formation, that is to say, concepts (categories) and functions of thinking. Here it is important to see that what stands before us as finished fact of knowing is not simply a “process, in which we bring a reproduction of an existing, ordered and structured reality to consciousness”²⁸, but is the result of conceptual work which, in turn, first of all constructs the object of knowledge. The true object of experience, for Cohen, is the knowledge worked out in science. The true object is thus not so much “the stars in the heavens” but rather the laws to which they are subject and according to which they function.²⁹ Only then can one speak meaningfully of the experience of reality. This reconstruction of what is always already constructed in the sciences is the Marburg “transcendental method.” Philosophy distinguishes itself from Kantian *epistemology* as transcendental exploration of the condition of the possibility of experience and knowledge, to become the critique of knowledge that already exists, whereby experience and knowledge are taken as essentially synonymous. Accordingly, critique of knowledge [*Erkenntniskritik*] is the name for the Marburgian variation of theory of knowledge or epistemology [*Erkenntnistheorie*]. It is a critique of what is already experienced, that is, cognized, in the sciences.

This conception of epistemology as critique of knowledge has two closely related consequences. First: the insight that the objects of experience are formations of thought constructed by the human mind is counter-intuitive to the naïve conception of our ever progressive eliciting of immanent secrets from things in the world. Rather the objects of modern science, as Kant says in his famous image, are in the witness stand and subject to our questions as to their being, questions which we ourselves formulate according to our epistemological interests. And according to Kant, we only recognize of things that which we lay into them based on rational capacities. This theory was conceived by Vico with respect to history.³⁰ It is applied by Kant to the natural sciences. The *being* of things in the world is constructed by our conceptual work on them. The naïve conception, which even scientists tend to subscribe to, hence fails to recognize that these things are nothing other than the “free posittings of the understand-

28 Cassirer (1994), 1.

29 Cf. Cohen (1977), esp. the systematic introduction.

30 Verene has emphasized the significance of Vico on this issue, cf. Verene (1969).

ing". The reality that we perceive as existing in itself is in truth created by us, insofar as we penetrate it using exact scientific methods. We see the human spirit in nature: it, so to speak, finds itself mirrored in nature. This is the continuously emancipating progress of modern sciences, which signifies a reversal of the mirror metaphor which Rorty assigned to modern philosophy. In truth nature is the mirror of the human soul.³¹

In the course of its becoming self-aware scientific progress recognizes that scientific knowledge is not superimposed onto reality as a second reality, but rather that *only through it* do we *have* reality in the first place. What something is depends on the conceptual and theoretical framework in which it is seen. "Science gradually eliminates the illusion which makes us attach our subjective sensations to the objects themselves".³² The *factum*, which we take as our starting point in the naïve view of the world, is in truth a *fieri*: a being-made though conceptual construction. This is an insight that follows from the application of the transcendental method. This insight itself receives its meaning from the Copernican turn, which is here reinterpreted from being a mere standpoint into a concrete research programme. The interpretation of the *factum* as *factum* of science whose meaning is the always provisional, self-modifying result of a *fieri*, can be identified as the first important pillar of the Marburg School.

Secondly, this interpretation has a decisive consequence for the interpretation of scientific progress. If it is the case that science has gradually undermined the naïve conception of knowledge, such that knowledge is not a discovery of the secrets of things or of "what holds the world together in its innermost being" ("*Was die Welt im Innersten zusammenhält*," Goethe), but is instead a conceptual-logical construction on the part of the scientific subject, then it follows from this that modern science has essentially and without realizing it *already carried out the Copernican turn and is gradually carrying it further*. This insight is first brought about through the philosopher reflecting on this scientific progress in Modernity. Accordingly, the Marburg interpretation of Kant's Copernican turn maintains that with the turn to the knowing subject no new district of metaphysics, as for instance of philosophy *itself*, becomes opened up. Rather Kant's transcendental philosophy is the philosophical *articulation* of the transcendental turn already happening in the *sciences*. The exact sciences are already transcendental, without an explicit knowledge of this, insofar as their achievement is the condition for the possibility of experience, according to Cohen's concept of expe-

31 With regard to Rorty's influential thesis, if Cassirer's hypothesis is correct his *Erkenntnisproblem* would be a general refutation of Rorty's idea that modern philosophy is afflicted by the problem of representationalism, that it could be even adequately grasped by that label.

32 Cassirer (1994), VI.

rience. The philosopher merely reconstructs how knowledge in the sciences is carried out and how it becomes further produced. Thus, the Kantian position of transcendental idealism takes on a concrete research programme, one that henceforth is characterized as “critical idealism” inasmuch as modern natural science has taken the strategic path to idealism that is never—not even in the distant future—going to be possession acquired once and for all. It is rather gradually worked out and continually modified. Idealism is thus the methodological projection of science itself. The objection that philosophy is thus the handmaiden of the sciences is consequently correct. But for the Marburg School this is not a reproach. For on the one hand with the intimate connection to science all metaphysical speculation is prohibited for all future; it is thus metaphysically-critically restrictive. On the other hand, if an experience of that which transcends normal experience cannot exist then there cannot be a domain belonging *inherently* to philosophy *alone*. To demand this is a philosophical dogma, which is finally eliminated.³³ Philosophy has to dwell in the “rich bathos” of experience, which gradually becomes recognized by the sciences.

Against this background it is therefore clear why the problem-historical depiction of philosophical and scientific history and the transcendental method of reconstructing the logical knowledge conditions of scientific work fit like *lock and key*. Because if the appropriate work of the transcendental method is the justification of the sciences’ on-going epistemological work and if science necessarily runs its course historically, then epistemological criticism cannot but progressively work in close relation to this very historical processes. Nor is the choice of the theme of “knowledge as a problem” accidental. The identification of knowledge as the *problem* of the “modern age” is not a thesis forced on from above. Rather it is given by itself through a philosophical meditation on the modern scientific process itself, on precisely how the process of progressive knowledge *problematizes* what knowledge *itself* is and should be. Qualitatively new kinds of knowledge, beyond that yielded by the sciences, do not exist. Identifying something as a problem can thus be understood as the problematization of that which ought to be a problem. It is not a once-established and henceforth definite statement. Knowledge *becomes a problem*. The *factum* is thus again resolved into the *fieri* for the philosopher. Or to say it with another Marburg formulation, that which is a fixed given [*Gabe*] for the scientist becomes the task [*Aufgabe*] of philosophical reconstruction for the philosopher. Cognition and knowledge that, for Kant, were obtained once and remained immutable, in

33 One can see Husserl’s insistence on phenomenology occupying its ownmost region, as true philosophy, as a protest against this hypothesis.

truth develop historically. Thus the reconstruction of the problem of knowledge by way of the historical path is *necessary*.

[T]he illusion of the "Absolute" disappears here ... of itself. By considering the presuppositions of the sciences as having *become*, we recognize that they are *creations* of thought. In that we see clearly their historical *relativity* and conditionality we open for ourselves a perspective into their inexorable progress and their always renewed productivity. Both directions of the consideration here are integrated with each other effortlessly and spontaneously [*zwanglos und ungesucht*]. The systematic structure of basic cognitions and the relations of their inner dependence confronts us once again clearly and comprehensibly in the image of their historical emergence.³⁴

Against this systematic background—that "effortlessly and spontaneously" demands the historical viewpoint and wherein they both reciprocally support each other—we can now move on to the method of problem-history. That the systematic standpoint of the Marburg School also grasps the history of philosophy itself as a method is not surprising:

by virtue of being a science the history of philosophy cannot be a miscellany through which we encounter facts in a colourful sequence; it wants to be a *method*, through which we learn to understand them.³⁵

However, as we shall see, considerable difficulties arise at this point that must be cleared out of the way. The resolution of these difficulties opens the way to for Cassirer's mature system of symbolic forms.

What are these difficulties and how does Cassirer deal with them, then? As a philosophical reconstruction of the problem of knowledge, this reconstruction is guided by the thesis that modern scientific progress is the conceptual-theoretical mastery of reality—here that of nature (thus, it is *pro-Vico* and *anti-Rorty*). In doing this the sciences themselves are not conscious of their actual achievement. They themselves cling to the naïve belief in the being-in-itself of nature and the gradual discovery of its timeless being. However, increasingly the domination of nature is no longer interested in the individual thing in isolation. Guided by the logic of scientific progress, this change was carried out in modern science analogous to the way in which Cassirer observes a paradigm change from the concept of substance to the concept of function in modern concept formation, a shift which emphasises the functional nexus over individual substances:

34 Cassirer (1994), VI f.

35 Cassirer (1994), VIII.

[It is] no longer simply the individual thing, but the demand of internal coherence and internal freedom from contradictions which this thought poses that constitutes hencewith the ultimate archetype by which we measure the truth of our ideas³⁶,

an archetype through which the “primal elements of being itself” henceforth

become understood and reinterpreted as *creations of thought*. The concepts of science appear now no longer as imitations of thingly beings, but as symbols for the orders and functional nexuses within reality.³⁷

With this process the relativity of sensible appearance is to be overcome, but at this very point the scientific process is confronted with a new problem, namely a second-order relativity, so to speak, on the level of science itself. Because those theories and concepts once attained are no Platonic ideas but are themselves in the process of becoming, so that every “given” [*Gabe*] becomes a “task” [*Aufgabe*], every fixed standpoint is dissolved in the course of its development and is swept away by progress. However, this is no defect, because if we cognize only what we put into nature, this cycle of standing still and further advancing is *constitutive* for science.

Thus the very essence of those logical foundational concepts which science has developed demands that we view these concepts not as separate and detached from one another but instead grasp them in their *historical* sequence and dependency. However, thereby any firm systematic foothold threatens to slip away.³⁸

But why is that a problem? Is the progress of science not self-evident? Yes, but it puts a fundamental assumption of Kant's in question, namely that of the *a priori*. Kant had presumed that the categories identified by him as the constitutive core concepts of the understanding were both fixed and complete. As *a priori*, therefore independent of all experience, they were according to his classical understanding *necessary* and *universally valid*. Newton's scientific paradigm, which operated with these categories, was unsurpassable for Kant. However, this paradigm was, after Kant, overturned and falsified in various ways, thus making way for new paradigms. As Cassirer in particular shows, the Newtonian paradigm itself is the result of a conflict of paradigms, which suggests that Kant himself would have had to grasp his conception of the *a priori* differently. This change of paradigms is in fact the biggest stumbling block in the reception of the Kantian system, but progress in modern

³⁶ Cassirer (1994), 2.

³⁷ Cassirer (1994), 3.

³⁸ Cassirer (1994), 4.

logic has “established full clarity on this point”³⁹, namely that the *a priori* has to be conceived as in a way that moves beyond Kant’s understanding of it. The problem goes as follows: if modern science is supposed to be the confirmation of Kant’s Copernican turn, how then can Kant’s conception of the *a priori*, which is a necessary component of his system (and which Cassirer wants to preserve, as well) be retained? Is it not simpler to go the way of positivism and naturalism and to wholly give up all pretension to the *a priori*?

The Marburg conception of the *a priori* comes to bear on this point. The reason why the *a priori* cannot be dispensed with is that doing so would open the floodgates to relativism. For the sequence of changing scientific paradigms is not relativist in the sense of arbitrariness and does not amount to the denial of truth if one emphasizes that the respective concepts and theories of a scientific epoch—for example that which after Kuhn could be called “*normal science*”—are not arbitrary but were *necessary* for their time and with regard to their means and methods. They are the necessary ways in which at any one time the “*problem of the reciprocal relation between being and thinking [is] formulated anew*”.⁴⁰ What is “*a priori*” would here simply be the fundamental relation between being and thinking—but as a *problem*, insofar as this fundamental relation reveals itself differently in different epochs. Consequently to the problem-historically orientated philosopher the prevailing relations of being and thinking, of world and humanity respectively, are not given but he is tasked with them as a problem, they are to be reconstructed in their “relative absoluteness” inasmuch as *for the point in time of its validity* each standpoint claims and must claim absolute truth. However, in doing so one has precisely not succumbed to a succession of arbitrary paradigms:

that we in [science] always find only a *relative* basis, that consequently we must maintain the *categories*, with which we consider historical processes, themselves changeable and transformable is of course true, but this kind of relativism characterizes not so much the boundary but rather the authentic life of knowledge.⁴¹

These bases are therefore provisional milestones, but nevertheless necessary points, at which clear and determinate categories exist, which, however, first can appear *as necessary at this point in time* through the problem-historical view. So the absolute is manifested as a relative absolute within history.

³⁹ Cassirer (1994), 18.

⁴⁰ Cassirer (1994), 9.

⁴¹ Cassirer (1994), 16.

But if the categories can change to correspond to the current state of science, then what remains as unchanging and therefore *a priori* in the more rigorous sense of the concept?

This is the continuity of the scientific processes itself, the *factum* of science: “the concept of the *history of science* already contains in itself the thought of a *preservation of a general logical structure* throughout the succession of particular conceptual systems”.⁴² That is the first “insight into the genuine “*a priori*” of history”.⁴³ Strictly speaking one must divide the *a priori* again, distinguishing between a rigorous and a less rigorous notion of it. The continuity of scientific progress is unchanging and certain basic convictions inside science are unchanging such as

the idea of the “unity of nature”, that is to say, “the lawfulness of experience in general”, ... but how this idea currently specifies particular principles and presuppositions: for me this, too, only reveals itself in the progress of scientific experience.⁴⁴

Moreover, the fact that nature can only become known through the categories of pure thinking is unchanging, but as Cohen says “*new problems will bring new categories*.”⁴⁵ But whatever evolves, they will be *categories*, having originated from pure thinking.

In good Marburg manner scientific progress is not a given [*Gabe*], but a task [*Aufgabe*]; it is a “postulate”⁴⁶ for seeing the unity of the history of science in its apparently haphazard succession. One must not, subversively, celebrate chaos and brilliant creativity, but rather one is called, precisely in the face of chaos, to detect from out of this the logical structure of the historical sequence. Accordingly, the problem-history of modern science itself has a systematic intent and without this systematic positioning of problems each problem-historical consideration would be futile. Historical consideration itself is a necessary contribution to reconstruction of what which knowledge in modern western thinking in general is.

Only with this conception of the historical *a priori* one can begin to practice problem-history in the true sense, insofar as one can explain only now the logic of the succession of scientific *a prioris* (in the plural).⁴⁷ This explanation is now

⁴² Cassirer (1994), 16.

⁴³ Cassirer (1994), 17.

⁴⁴ Cassirer (2009), 51: Letter to Schlick of October 10th, 1920.

⁴⁵ Cohen (1977), 398.

⁴⁶ Cassirer (1994), 18.

⁴⁷ As already indicated, Cohen believed an *a priori* like that of the exact natural sciences could be demonstrable for all cultural givens. Cassirer does not subscribe to this conception: all symbolic forms in their *respective* meanings are the condition for the possibility of world experience.

expressis verbis construction as re-construction of the prevailing logics and their sequence. Construction cannot occur in a deductive-speculative manner. It is nevertheless a dialectic but not one that is a “steady growth” to an absolute, unsurpassable standpoint, rather “in the truly critical epochs of knowledge the manifold basic positions oppose each other in the sharpest dialectic contradiction”.⁴⁸ “Dialectic” is in this case not a high-minded concept for the Hegelian threefold development of the spirit (of thesis, antithesis and synthesis), but the problematization of what was taken as self-evident in the old paradigm (of the dominant *a priori*) through the new paradigm, which thereby formulates its new *a priori* (and so on). Accordingly, it is the critical gaze of the problem-historical philosophers which ascertains what the “actual critical epochs” are. Finally, regarding knowledge in the present, it also can never be the last word, but the constant and unchangeable can only be the law of eternal becoming; that, so long as human beings “live and strive” (as says Goethe’s *Faust*), their search for knowledge will not be complete, even if this search is only a part and a very specific development of cultural life as a whole. Although scientific knowledge surpasses other cultural achievements in its precision and its methodological rigour, it is, with regard to cultural life as a whole, a cultural form next to others which stand in productive competition, in shaping and experiencing reality.

IV Conclusion and Further Considerations: From Problem-History to Symbolic Forms

It now remains to briefly indicate how one can reconstruct Cassirer’s entire system from this point, as it becomes executed in the philosophy of symbolic forms, even though here, too, the problem-historical insight must be applied to this philosophy itself such that any systematic programme of philosophy cannot in principle be brought to a finish, insofar as it is carried out by humans conceived as cultural beings and not as purely rational creatures. The problem-historical approach is in fact never given up by Cassirer. One can see the latter in his reoccurring tendency to approach a problem in question through the history of science with respect to it. Present-day philosophy has little patience for such extravagant panorama paintings, but what has been said makes clear that this method of approaching systematic problems historically is itself guided by systematic insight. Accordingly one does not do justice to Cassirer’s philosophy itself, either, if one strips of it of its historical robes.

⁴⁸ Cassirer (1994), 5.

The simple thought, which frees Cassirer from Cohen's rigorous logicism, is that the *factum* of science is only *one* manifestation of the human spirit. Cohen's idea that one must take one's point of departure from the fact of the respective science in every form of culture and not just in science is too restrictive for Cassirer. Cassirer understands every cultural form including myth, speech and religion, according to the replacement of the substance paradigm with the function paradigm, as functional contexts of meaning. In this respect, it is the work of philosophy in the context of the study of the respective culture to describe the functional structures that determine a cultural form. Of these, the purely logical reconstruction of the sciences reveals only one structure of meaning among others. Every cultural form is a way of constructing reality: each is, in Cassirer's words, symbolic. Transcendental idealism thus becomes symbolic idealism, insofar as we never have direct access to the world, but this access is always mediated through the constructions and the perspective of the spirit, which at any one time constitutes different structural forms. Accordingly, Cassirer furthermore even understands the *a priori* as plural, as a valid functional series for a respective context of meaning. Cassirer calls such a functional series or context a symbolic form.

Like science every cultural form is subject to historical change. As such the task of the philosophy of symbolic forms is not merely to statically describe the prevailing symbolic forms but also to reconstruct their origin and development. These two can only go hand in hand. History itself is no symbolic form but is the element in which symbolic forms and we as *animalia symbolica* live. If thus the history of science is considered according to its problem, that of knowledge, then other symbolic forms are to be considered in terms of the history of their constitutive elements, which cannot be adequately determined as knowledge, as for example religion, insofar as its problem cannot demand a solution through knowledge. "Knowledge" is perhaps not an adequate category for religion or it perhaps has, as a category, another meaning than exact knowledge. Applied to the totality of symbolic forms, problem-history becomes symbolic history insofar as the prevailing symbolic form cannot be understood without understanding the history of its development.

If then symbolic forms as a whole are subject to historical change, then it is also valid to say of these that a prevailing *a priori* can only be understood historically. As a result of this, many of the criticisms levelled at Cassirer's work become untenable. For instance Cassirer's enumeration of the symbolic forms just listed has been accused of being rhapsodic and unsystematic. But a look at the history of a symbol may well show that it once appeared as necessary, just as for example the Christian religion in the Middle Ages was constitutive for the human and world understanding of humanity in that period, but that it necessarily lost its standing in most parts of Western society in an age of secularization. Whereas

another symbolic form is probably always going to be constitutive for what it is to be a human: language. It is likewise subjected to a change of its function as becomes apparent in the age of new (virtual) social interactions, but it will in all likelihood not disappear as a symbolic function for world-disclosure. And so one can finally explain the emergence of new forms from out of the changing relations between humanity and the world, if one wants to thus describe Cassirer's *a priori* as correlational.

Thus, it becomes clear that problem-history, as Cassirer exemplifies in the reconstruction of modern science, is a narrower form of historiography, which should be written for *all* symbolic forms. Every symbolic form has its *own* history and therewith its own historicity, and the respective historiography focuses, accordingly, on different kinds of problems and categories. Thus, problem-history and the Marburg School theory of science have been demonstrated as being particular forms of a wider historicity and a construction of the human spirit in its symbolic universality. In this manner, the contours of Cassirer's distinctive system of symbolic idealism, as a philosophical reconstruction and justification of all cultural forms, has been indicated. To put it formulaically, the critique of reason thus becomes a critique of culture. However, this critique of culture also and necessarily includes in its reflections the dimension of history while maintaining—as against Windelband and Dilthey's empiricist undersellings—its status as a transcendental theory.⁴⁹

Bibliography

- Bast (2000): Rainer A. Bast, *Problem, Geschichte, Form. Das Verhältnis von Philosophie und Geschichte bei Ernst Cassirer im historischen Kontext*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.
- Cassirer (1994): Ernst Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*, vol. 1, reprint of the original edition, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Cassirer (2009): Ernst Cassirer, *Briefe. Ausgewählter wissenschaftlicher Briefwechsel*, in: Ernst Cassirer, *Nachgelassene Manuskripte und Texte*, ed. by John Michael Krois, Hamburg: Meiner.
- Cohen (1977): Hermann Cohen, *Logik des reinen Denkens*, Hildesheim: Olms.
- Gadamer (1924): Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Zur Systemidee in der Philosophie", in: Ernst Cassirer (Ed.), *Festschrift für Paul Natorp zum 70. Geburtstag*, Berlin/Leipzig: De Gruyter, 55–75.

⁴⁹ I would like to thank Rochus Sowa and Frederick Beiser for their critical but helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay.

- Gadamer (1990): Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck.
- Hofer (1997): Roger Hofer, *Gegenstand und Methode. Untersuchungen zur frühen Wissenschaftslehre Emil Lasks*, Würzburg: K&N.
- Hösle (2013): Vittorio Hösle, *Eine kurze Geschichte der deutschen Philosophie*, München: Beck.
- Kreis (2010): Guido Kreis, *Cassirer und die Formen des Geistes*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.
- Krüger (1984): Lorenz Krüger, "Why Do We Study the History of Philosophy?", in: R. Rorty, J. B. Schneewind and Q. Skinner (Eds.), *Philosophy in History. Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 77–101.
- Rorty (1984): Richard Rorty, "The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres", in: R. Rorty, J. B. Schneewind and Q. Skinner (Eds.), *Philosophy in History. Essays on the historiography of philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 49–75.
- Verene (1969): Donald P. Verene, "Kant, Hegel, and Cassirer: The Origins of the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms", in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 30, 33–46.
- Windelband (1924): Wilhelm Windelband, *Präludien. Studien und Aufsätze zur Philosophie*, 5th edition, Tübingen: Mohr.
- Windelband (1957): Wilhelm Windelband, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 15th edition, Neuauflage mit einem Zusatz ed. by Heinz Heimsoeth, Tübingen: Mohr.