

THE CRISIS OF NEO-KANTIANISM AND THE REASSESSMENT OF KANT AFTER WORLD WAR I: PRELIMINARY REMARK

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The papers to be presented at this conference deal with a decisive turning point in the understanding of Immanuel Kant in the first half of the 20th century. What we can observe is an increasingly radical transformation, not only with respect to the interpretation of Kant but also concerning the attitude toward Critical Philosophy, that is, Kantianism in general. My remarks will try to throw some light on this turn or divide, which in the minds of those involved was sometimes referred to as the divide between the old and the new way of thinking. I have decided to focus on two issues. First of all, I want to look at the stakes of this conference. Why is it important to reexamine the turn in Kant studies in the early 20th century? Second, I want to look briefly at five thinkers to show what is involved in the challenge to and the break with the Kant orthodoxy of the prewar era. My examples will be Georg Lukács, Rudolf Carnap, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and finally Max Horkheimer. In discussing these authors, I will focus more on the moment of redefining the approach to Kant without fully exploring the history of their prior involvement with Kant or the neo-Kantians. The result of this method is potentially an overemphasis on the moment of opposition and critique while aspects of continuity are mentioned but not stressed.¹ It would not be difficult for instance to show the continued influence of neo-Kantianism in the German academy of the 1920s. Especially at universities, the neo-Kantians could still exert significant influence on the philosophical discourse. Bruno Bauch for instance, a student of Heinrich Rickert, taught from 1911 until his death in 1942 at the University of Jena, while Jonas Cohn, who received his Habilitation under

¹ This point is also emphasized by Lucien Goldmann when he states “that between 1910 and 1925 a true philosophical turning-point occurred, which resulted in the creation of existentialism and contemporary dialectical materialism”. Lucien Goldmann, *Lukács and Heidegger: Towards a New Philosophy*, trans. William Q. Boelhower (London: Routledge & Jegam Paul, 1977) 4.

the supervision of Rickert in 1897, had a position at the University of Freiburg until 1933 when he was dismissed by the Nazis. He shared this fate with the most visible of the neo-Kantians, Ernst Cassirer, who had a chair at the University of Hamburg from 1919 until 1933. However, with the exception of Cassirer, the writings of these philosophers were not reintegrated into the postwar philosophical discourse in Germany, not to mention other countries. While a history of neo-Kantianism would have to account for their role and academic influence, my observations will mostly disregard these developments and focus instead on the philosophical challenges to the core of neo-Kantian theory. Yet I will not limit myself to a mere reconstruction of the ideas and arguments; rather, I will also pay attention to the dialectic between philosophical positions and the larger social field in which they functioned.

What are the stakes? From a narrowly defined philosophical point of view, a historical approach is always doubtful. Why should it be significant for the contemporary philosophical discourse to investigate the reception of Kant in the 1920s and 1930s? Would it not be more relevant to go back to Kant's writings either with an eye on their truth content or at least with a focus on the contemporary Kant reception? From a sociohistorical perspective, on the other hand, the question arises as to how important the debates about Kant in the interwar years actually were for an assessment of the general historical process. Can one argue that specific controversial appropriations of Kant left significant traces in the radical political transformations that occurred in 1918/19 and 1933? Political and social historians would be inclined to give these debates a fairly low priority. (In Hans-Ulrich Wehler's massive social history of Germany for instance, with two volumes devoted to the Second Empire and the first half of the 20th century, there is no reference to the neo-Kantians, not to mention the Davos debate.²) For the most part, these discussions were too academic to matter if we want to understand the fate of the Weimar Republic and of the Third Reich in political and social terms. Why, then, do we want to focus on the legacy of Kant?

Here we have to note a marked difference between the first conference on the legacy of Kant and this one.³ In the case of the neo-Kantians, one can indeed, as Andrew Chignell has done,⁴ raise questions about the philosophical relevance of these mostly forgotten 19th-century philosophers for the present. Their program to

² Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, vols. 3 and 4 (Munich: H. C. Beck, 1995 and 2001).

³ The first conference on the legacy of Kant took place in September 2007 at Cornell University. The papers were published in *The Philosophical Forum* 39, 2 (2008).

⁴ Andrew Chignell, "Introduction: On Going Back to Kant," *The Philosophical Forum* 39, 2 (2008): 109–124, esp. 121–24.

return to Kant after the gradual decline of objective idealism after 1850 is to a large extent, although by no means exclusively, of historical interest. The thinkers we are dealing with in this conference, on the other hand, are very much part of today's philosophical discussion. For this reason alone, their position toward Kant is not only interesting but also relevant on more than one level. There is, first of all, the conventional question of influence, frequently mediated through the interpretation and use of Kant by the neo-Kantians. Second, and more importantly, we find the act of appropriation, the moment of self-positioning vis-à-vis Kant in the form of affirmation or critique and polemic. There is no reason to understand the legacy of Kant exclusively in affirmative terms. In fact, I will argue that critical or negative stances played a much more important role in the 1920s. What is foregrounded on this level is the dynamic element of the historical process, the refusal to accept the authority of Kant's philosophy, the return to open questions in Kant's work under different historical circumstances, questions that had been either neglected or misunderstood. This aspect can be called: philosophy as a struggle with past philosophy. But finally, there is another level where a different set of problems has to be addressed. I would suggest that what appears to be a strong interest in Kant (with either a positive or a negative emphasis) also discloses something more fundamental about the role of philosophy in the first half of the 20th century. In the wake of Fredric Jameson, it could be called the social unconscious of philosophy, which hides in seemingly technical disputes that the general public ignores. It is mostly in the 1920s that the existential, non-academic use and function of philosophy becomes more apparent and in the early 1930s that its potential political meaning and significance becomes recognizable.

In the following remarks, I will attempt to provide something like a snapshot of the complex process of appropriating Kant: the moment of reconstructing and reinterpreting Kant, positioning his work within the context of the current field of philosophy, or using Kant for specific intellectual and cultural programs, to mention just a few possible directions. In all instances, however, the act of approaching Kant was already complicated by the presence of the contemporary neo-Kantians. In fact, in most cases, it was not the historical Kant but the reconstructed Kant that was at the center of the debates. This is precisely the reason why the stakes were high. The struggle was about the role of Kantianism, that is, Critical Philosophy [*Kritizismus*], in the early 20th century.

While the contemporaries did not have the insights that are available to us on the basis of historical records, they had a certain sense of a major divide in philosophy after World War I. This is clearly expressed in 1923 by the young Max Horkheimer in an essay in honor of his teacher Hans Cornelius. "A society, full of philosophical pseudo-problems, scholastic concepts, and dogmatic opinions like hardly any other society before, a society whose helplessness found its manifestation in cultural chaos, faces the most pressing questions of theoretical and

practical philosophy in dreadful confusion.”⁵ Yet in this essay, the neo-Kantian Cornelius is still praised as the answer to the confusion. Another symptomatic example would be Karl Sternberg’s essay “Der Neukantionismus und die Forderungen der Gegenwart” published in *Kant-Studien* in 1920.⁶ The author focuses on what he considers a major cultural divide defined by the end of World War I, a divide that finds its expression in philosophy as well. Working from the premise that philosophy as the theoretical expression of its time is always grounded in the historical condition of its epoch, Sternberg claims that the philosophy of the historical period that had come to an end was neo-Kantianism. He perceives a transition for which he uses the term “revolution.” But while he rightly stresses the hegemonic nature of neo-Kantianism in the prewar era, he is much less certain of the precise character of the philosophical revolution, in part because his own sympathies are still with neo-Kantian positions, in part, however, because it is obviously difficult for him to recognize and articulate the new tendencies. What he does recognize are the vulnerable aspects of neo-Kantianism, among them “Logismus,” the understanding of philosophy as epistemology [*Erkenntnistheorie*], and an aversion to metaphysics. Although Sternberg himself does not postulate a return to metaphysics, he observes a strong current in the contemporary philosophical discourse, in Germany at least, that emphasizes the importance of metaphysics as a vital part of philosophy. But where precisely can it be found? Sternberg’s assessment focuses primarily on the revival of Hegel’s objective idealism as potential rival to neo-Kantianism.

It is worth noting that in Sternberg’s essay, there is no mention of *Lebensphilosophie* (Dilthey, Simmel) or phenomenology (Husserl, Scheler) as new paradigms that are in conflict with the neo-Kantians, not to mention a Marxist critique of Kant as it was articulated a few years later in Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness* (1923). In other words, the divide between prewar and postwar philosophy, a division that as a binary opposition was problematic to begin with, cannot be reduced to a shift from neo-Kantianism to objective idealism, or to a shift from critical philosophy to existentialism (i.e., Heidegger), as Pierre Bourdieu suggests.⁷ Bourdieu argues that Heidegger’s *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (1929), a forceful new reading of Kant, challenged the hegemonic philosophical position of his time; however, as Hans Sluga rightly points out, by 1929, neo-Kantianism was already in full retreat. Serious critiques

⁵ Max Horkheimer, “Hans Cornelius zu seinem 60. Geburtstag,” Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1987) 149.

⁶ Kurt Sternberg, “Der Neukantianismus und die Forderung der Gegenwart,” *Kantstudien* 25 (1920): 396–410.

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, trans. Peter Collier, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

had been developed on various fronts.⁸ Yet Sluga overshoots the mark when he altogether questions the political connotations of Heidegger's challenge in the highly charged intellectual atmosphere of the late Weimar Republic. However, Sluga is correct to assert that the neo-Kantians were not only criticized by Heidegger but from a number of philosophical positions, among them phenomenology, neo-positivism, and Marxism. It would transcend the scope of an introduction to unfold the diverse philosophical force field of the 1920s and 1930.⁹ Therefore, I will limit myself to five examples to characterize different aspects of the turn.

My first example is Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923). Here the critique of Kant is developed as part of the famous chapter on reification that influenced much of Western Marxism, including the Frankfurt School. For Lukács, modern philosophy, including Kant, articulates a reified consciousness defined in terms of Marxist theory. Lukács derives the concept of reification from the analysis of capitalist production and especially the concepts of commodity and commodity fetishism. As Marx argues, in a capitalist economy, human beings do not recognize commodities as the products of their own labor. By emphasizing the division of labor in the modern world, Lukács recognizes not only hardened social structures but also the element of reification in the consciousness of social classes, that is, specific limitations of the worldview propagated by a class in a particular historical situation. In this context, Kant's philosophy functions as the most radical and advanced consciousness of the early bourgeoisie,¹⁰ a reading that Horkheimer will pick up and modify in his engagement with Kant in the 1930s. Kant's writings as a form of modern rationalism articulate both the awareness of the philosophical problems of the modern age and the limit of the horizon that the early liberal capitalist society can reach.

Kant's philosophy, both its epistemology and its ethics, is treated in the second part of the reification chapter. After explaining the phenomenon of reification [*Verdinglichung*], Lukács turns to modern philosophy and especially Kant in the part "The Antinomies of Bourgeois Thought." The general thesis is that modern European philosophy exemplifies the structure of reified thought. But what does it

⁸ Hans Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis. Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁹ See Helmut Fahrenbach, "Die Weimarer Zeit im Spiegel der Philosophie," *Religions- und Geistesgeschichte der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Hubert Cancik (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1982) 230–59.

¹⁰ "For Lukács, Kant is the classic bourgeois philosopher because his system exhibits and makes explicit with an utmost consistency all the antinomies which necessarily issue once one accepts the social-historical objectivity [. . .] created by capitalist society as the untranscendable form of 'our thinking' in general." György Markus, "'Ideology' and its ideologies. Lukács and Goldmann on Kant," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 8, 2 (1981): 140.

consist of? The parallel between the development of the exact modern sciences and the rise of modern philosophy, which Lukács underlines, does not by itself define reification. This increase in rationality, however, Lukács argues, finds its limits in the ultimate irrationality of the system of knowledge. For Kant, there is an ultimate limit and barrier that the subject has to accept but also to explain and account for. Now Lukács argues that Kant's thought is ultimately unable to account for the fundamental question: namely, the "content of those forms with the aid of which 'we' know and are able to know the world because we have created it ourselves." And even more vexing is "the problem of the whole and the ultimate substance of knowledge."¹¹ How does human rationality grasp totality, a "system of the perfectly understood world"? Obviously, the way Lukács frames these questions is not based on an orthodox intrinsic reading of the first critique where Kant denies the very possibility of total knowledge. Lukács's critique relies on a Hegelian and ultimately Marxian perspective to demonstrate the shortcomings of Kant. From this vantage point, the rigidity of Kantian thought comes into the foreground through its self-imposed limits that reflect the limits of the new social order of the bourgeoisie. With respect to modern philosophy, Lukács therefore states: "Thus the attempt to universalise rationalism necessarily issues in the demand for a system but, at the same time, as soon as one reflects upon the conditions in which a universal system is possible [. . .] it is seen that such a demand is incapable of fulfilment."¹²

When Lukács draws attention to the ultimate problem of German idealism by pointing to the insuperable obstacles within philosophy itself, he still adheres to the notion of an internal critical process that moves from older form of metaphysics (Leibniz) to *Kritizismus* and beyond. But the concept of reification requires another important step. It has to relate the history of philosophy to the history of the social process at large; Lukács does this by pointing to the abstract self-reliance of philosophy, its inability to grasp the problems of the new social reality. He argues that "the concrete problems of society and the concrete solutions to them cannot be seen."¹³ If reification is the inability of the subject to recognize the objects as the products of its own labor, the reification of Kantian *Kritizismus* consists of the inability to account for the facticity of the phenomena at hand and the role of the *Ding an sich*. In Lukács's language, it is the problem of the ultimate irrationality of the philosophy of the subject. For Lukács, Kant's thought articulates the individualism of the new class subject. This would also apply to Kant's

¹¹ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971) 115.

¹² *Ibid*: 116f.

¹³ *Ibid*: 121.

moral philosophy, for Kant's concept of freedom is "an empty freedom, to evade the abyss of fatalism."¹⁴

Kant's attempt to bring philosophy so to speak up to speed by making it compatible with the theoretical standards of the most advanced natural sciences ultimately works against him because it implicates philosophy in the process of reification, the loss of the concrete and the rule of abstract laws of nature. Hence Lukács claims: "What is important is to recognise clearly that all human relations (viewed as the objects of social activity) assume increasingly the objective forms of the abstract elements of the conceptual systems of natural science and of the abstract substrata of the laws of nature."¹⁵ In the social realm, the result is the loss of substantive freedom. The actors of capitalism, seemingly free in their individual decisions, are in reality only following the demands of the economic laws. Their freedom therefore is no more "than the correct observation and calculation of the objective working out of natural laws of society."¹⁶ The philosophical solution to this problem, Lukács claims, cannot be found in Kant. One has to look at the later idealists, for instance Schiller and Hegel, and finally at the Marxian critique of idealism.

We have to remind ourselves that the young Lukács did not discover Kant only in his early Marxist phase. His first encounter with Kant goes back to his appropriation of the Königsberg philosopher under the influence of the neo-Kantians and passes through a number of phases. The work of the Baden School, among them Heinrich Rickert and especially Emil Lask, whom Lukács met in Heidelberg in 1912 when he became part of the Weber circle, was of considerable significance for Lukács. While their influence was never exclusive, it was important enough for some critics to call the early Lukács a neo-Kantian in the broader sense.¹⁷ The problem with this definition is that it excludes Lukács's simultaneous engagement with Fichte, Hegel, and even Marx, not to mention Simmel and Max Weber. However, the neo-Kantian strand has to be taken seriously and may be the reason why Lukács explicitly returned to Kant in *History and Class Consciousness*. What made especially Lask attractive was the fact that his work included non-Kantian categories and questions. As Rosshoff suggests, one could, without difficulties, discover the structures of Lask's object concepts [*Gegenstandsbegriffe*] in the definitions that Lukács used to outline his own conception of the philosophy of history, that is, the question of the transcendental "Ort" in his *Theory of the Novel*.¹⁸ There is clearly an affinity to the thought of Lask, but this affinity does not

¹⁴ Ibid: 133.

¹⁵ Ibid: 131.

¹⁶ Ibid: 133.

¹⁷ See for instance Hartmut Rosshoff, *Emil Lask als Lehrer von Georg Lukács* (Bonn: Bouvier) 1975.

¹⁸ Ibid: 22f.

exclude other affinities and possible links. In other words, in the pre-Marxist phase of Lukács, Kant is but one strain among others. Moreover, the deeper problematic of *Soul and Form* (1911) and *Theory of the Novel* cannot be translated into a neo-Kantian program. The yearning for wholeness and the lost totality of life (once present in ancient Greek culture) cannot be satisfied with Kant's epistemology and moral philosophy. In terms of its "given historico-philosophical realities (*Gegebenheiten*)," Kant's philosophy belongs to the modern world, the world of the novel where the "extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem."¹⁹ Yet even in the modern novel and modern philosophy, there is still an awareness of totality. One can say therefore about Kant what Lukács says about the modern novel: It cannot offer reconciliation between the individual and the world. The world remains in the state of imperfection. Thus, the *Theory of the Novel* already outlines the limits and deficiencies of modernity that Lukács will later examine in his criticism of Kant on *History and Class Consciousness*. An anti-Kantian impetus is already in evidence, although the rigorous philosophical arguments are not yet developed. It makes sense therefore that Lukács in his 1962 preface to the second edition of *The Theory of the Novel* describes this work as his transition from Kant to Hegel, that is, as a transition from a dualistic to a dialectical method.²⁰

The philosophically most serious encounter with Kant before *History and Class Consciousness* actually occurred in Lukács's fragmentary *Heidelberg Aesthetic*, on which he worked from 1912 until 1914 and then again from 1916 until 1918.²¹ Here the point of departure was undoubtedly Kant's third critique, especially the realm [*Geltungsbereich*] of aesthetics, but with a decisive and ultimately non-Kantian twist. Where Kant had posed the question "How can aesthetic judgments be possible?," Lukács asked "How are artworks possible?" The major debt to Kant however does not include the obligation to remain faithful to Kant's position. Instead, Lukács, in his emphasis on the artwork (and not on its creator or recipient), calls for a leap from the empirical reality (ordinary life) to the aesthetic sphere, creating a divide between them far more radical than Kant's third critique would suggest. Against the Kantian method of an aesthetic judgment applied to the artwork, Lukács insists on the artwork as the decisive aesthetic reality. While Lukács holds on to Kant's demonstration of the autonomy of the aesthetic sphere,

¹⁹ Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971) 56.

²⁰ Unlike Bourdieu, who wants to stress the difference between Heidegger and the Marxist tradition, Goldmann foregrounds the similarities with regard to the break with the neo-Kantian tradition and the formulation of a new project. While he insists on the conceptual difference, he also insists on the compatibility of Lukács's dialectical materialism and Heidegger's existentialism. Their language is translatable. See Goldmann (1977): 1–39.

²¹ Georg Lukács, *Heidelberger Ästhetik*, eds. György Markus and Frank Benseler (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1974).

he arrives at a sharply distinct position because he does not focus on the judgment of taste but on the artwork. The work of art presents itself as a windowless monad that is not in touch with other works. “Ironically, the Lukácsian ‘phenomenology’ of the artwork begins on the note of the complete autonomy of the sphere and it results in an equally complete isolation and solipsism of its grounding entities.”²² This move fulfils precisely the pattern of reified thought that Lukács would later critique in *History and Class Consciousness*. The Heidelberg philosophy of art that ultimately calls for a mystical redemption through the artwork turned out to be only a relatively short phase in Lukács’s development.

We have to be clear about the goal of this critique. Lukács does not challenge Kant by proving him wrong. Instead, the reading of Kant’s first critique tries to demonstrate the historically conditioned shortcomings of Kant’s rationalism. This rationalism, he suggests, was the most advanced and therefore appropriate articulation of its own era but was insufficient for the contemporary theoretical and, by extension, political discourse, which means that the call of the neo-Kantians “back to Kant” was ultimately a fundamental error. For Lukács, the task would be to transcend Kant by moving to Hegel and from there to Marx. His own engagement with neo-Kantianism therefore takes up precisely those elements that question the neo-Kantian orthodoxy.²³ On the other hand, we also have to note that *History and Class Consciousness* makes generous use of neo-Kantians such as Rickert or Cassirer. In 1923, the fundamental challenge does not yet exclude a philosophical dialogue on the part of Lukács with the other side.

My second example would be the logical positivism of Rudolf Carnap whose philosophical training was supervised by Bruno Bauch, a neo-Kantian and student of Rickert. Looking back at his own philosophical development from a much later vantage point, Carnap underlines the impact of Kant’s work and the neo-Kantians (Natorp and Cassirer) on his understanding of space.²⁴ As Michael Friedman explains, Carnap’s break with neo-Kantianism was a gradual process that occurred between 1922 and 1925 without open hostility. In *The Logical Structure of the World* (1928), however, the conversion to positivism has been completed, as the introduction states when he speaks of a “renunciation of the old philosophy” and describes the new program as a form of close cooperation between philosophy

²² Ferenc Fehér, “The Transformation of the Kantian Question in Lukács’ *Heidelberg Philosophy of Art*”, *Graduate Faculty Philosophical Journal* 16 (November 1993): 331–44, 343.

²³ See for instance *History and Class Consciousness*, 118, note 13 on the relevance of Lask. The importance of Lask is also underlined by the extensive posthumous essay “Emil Lask. Ein Nachruf” in *Kant-Studien* (1918): 349–70. This essay focuses exclusively on Lask’s achievements as a philosopher deliberately however without developing a critique.

²⁴ Michael Friedman, *A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer, and Heidegger* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2000) 65.

and the sciences (mathematics and physics). The programmatic statement of the preface emphasizes the need for a new and different type of philosophical discourse where the old ties to non-rational forms of thought and knowledge will be broken. Moreover, Carnap conceives of this discourse as a collective enterprise in which individual contributions will ultimately form a whole. In his view, philosophy becomes an open-ended task to which numerous generations of thinkers will contribute. Although Kant is not mentioned, the perspective of his famous essay on the Enlightenment is reproduced in the belief that social progress through philosophical thought can be achieved. Carnap talks about an approach that first and foremost demands clarity [*Klarheit*]. More specifically, he argues that the demand for scientific rigor would lead to a complete ban on metaphysics in the field of philosophy. This program includes the removal of Kant's metaphysics, but not of all of Kant and the neo-Kantians. As Friedman argues, "Carnap by no means intends simply to supplant neo-Kantianism by 'positivism' in the *Aufbau*. On the contrary, he still hopes [. . .] to retain the insights of *both* views."²⁵ Especially the engagement with Cassirer's *Substance and Function* (1910) turned out to be fruitful. When Carnap examines fundamental questions of epistemology in *Logical Structure*, he does not follow, as one might expect, the path of empiricism, which would start out with sense data, but holds on to a neo-Kantian conception of knowledge by showing that the object of knowledge is constituted by the pure forms of thought.²⁶ In other words, even our sense experiences are constituted within purely formal structures. In this respect therefore, Carnap remains closer to the position of the Marburg school than the preface would let us believe. In short, one can describe Carnap's attitude toward Kant and the neo-Kantians as a strategy of adaptation in which the old paradigm is still considered as partially useful and valuable for working out specific problems. Thus, the difference between the old and the new thinking is acknowledged but not emphasized because Carnap thinks of philosophy as a continuous process of rational thought and argument. The gesture of distance was actually more directed against the type of metaphysics proposed by Heidegger.

It is my sense that one could make a similar argument for Edmund Husserl, my third example, although in this case the long engagement and ultimate critique of Kant is preceded by an early period of radical opposition to Kant because of the strong influence of Brentano on Husserl. Husserl's own philosophical development, beginning with his *Logische Untersuchungen*, although always separate from the two major schools of neo-Kantianism, brought him in touch with leading representatives of *Kritizismus*, among them Alois Riehl, Paul Natorp, Heinrich

²⁵ Ibid: 71.

²⁶ Ibid: 74.

Rickert, and Ernst Cassirer. In this exchange of ideas and arguments, Husserl could stress either his sense of affinity to or his disagreement with Kant. By and large, the critical proximity would increase during the 1920s. In his 1927 essay “Kant und die Idee der Transzendentalphilosophie,” Husserl emphasized the importance of Kant for phenomenology. At the same time, he did not want to be understood as a neo-Kantian, notwithstanding his close collegial relationship to Paul Natorp during these years.²⁷ Still, the task was not to adjust his own thinking to the thought of Kant but to rediscover Kant in light of the problems raised by the unfolding of phenomenology. In Husserl’s late work, we can observe an explicit but critical return to Kant and the idea of a transcendental philosophy. By retracing the historical development of the theory of modern science from the 17th century to Hume and Kant, Husserl wants to demonstrate in *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phanomenologie* (1936) that this conception from the very beginning contained the tendency to a reductive, positivistic understanding of the structure and function of the sciences. The sciences fall short of their initial promise since they have, as Husserl reminds us, nothing to say to us when we examine fundamental existential questions. When it comes to the problem of basic decisions about the value of life, the results of the sciences are not helpful. Obviously, this assessment picks up the critique coming from contemporary (anti-Kantian) existentialism. But this hiatus between the needs of the individual subject and the objective knowledge of the sciences also applies to the humanities [*Geisteswissenschaften*] as long as they understand themselves as indebted to the ideal of scientific objectivity borrowed from the positive natural sciences. If it is true that “positivism, in a manner of speaking, decapitates philosophy,”²⁸ then the real task is to recuperate philosophy in such a way that it overcomes its scientific-positivistic self-understanding. But for Husserl, the crisis that he means to confront is much older than the turbulences after World War I. It goes back to the inception of modern philosophy and theory.

It characterizes Husserl’s approach that he believes that pure philosophy is in a position to overcome the crisis from the inside, without the help of traditional forms of metaphysics such as theology or religious worldviews. It is in this context that Kant’s transcendental concept of philosophy is recuperated to overcome the empty and positivistic concept of theory. However, this would not be the Kant of the neo-Kantians. Explicitly, Husserl argues that Kant’s revolutionary turn must not be understood as restricted to the idea of an objective universal science

²⁷ This positive outlook is confirmed by a letter to Ernst Cassirer of 1925 in which Husserl expressed his growing sense of indebtedness to Kant. See Ivo Kern, *Husserl und Kant. Eine Untersuchung über Husserls Verhältnis zu Kant und zum Neukantianismus* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1964) 39.

²⁸ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970) 9.

(*Universalwissenschaft*). While Kant, according to Husserl, never quite reached the radical degree of doubt demonstrated in Descartes' meditations, he was, as a critical student of Leibniz and Wolff, on the way to a transcendental philosophy, a philosophy that is "in accord with the formal, general sense of a transcendental philosophy in our definition."²⁹ As Husserl explicates, by transcendental philosophy he means "the motif of inquiring back into the ultimate source of all the formations of knowledge, the motif of the knowing subject's reflecting upon himself and his knowing life,"³⁰ a philosophy "which, in opposition to prescientific and scientific objectivism, goes back to knowing subjectivity as the primal locus of all objective formations of sense and ontic validities."³¹ Kant is credited with establishing a clear distinction between scientific knowledge and philosophical truth. Moreover, the transcendental path chosen by Kant, Husserl claims, provides the sciences with the foundation that they themselves are unable to build. Still, it is important to note that in the final analysis, against Kant and the neo-Kantians, Husserl insists that phenomenology offers a new and distinct paradigm. This is the point where Jürgen Habermas will pick up the debate a generation later by charging that Husserl, despite his insightful critique of positivism, remained attached to a traditional concept of theory and philosophy.³² Husserl's phenomenology failed to recognize the intertwining of theory and practice articulated in the idea of a fundamental threefold human interest (technical, practical, and critical).

My fourth example is Martin Heidegger. Heidegger's early work is closely connected to the Baden School of neo-Kantianism, especially to Rickert. He entered the debate on the status of logic between the Marburg and the Baden Kantians with a dissertation on psychologism in logic and a Habilitation on Duns Scotus seen through the lenses of the contemporary discussion among Rickert, Lask, and Husserl. In subsequent years, however, the attachment to Rickert became weaker, especially when Heidegger, looking for an answer to the question of transcendental psychology, discovered and embraced Husserl's phenomenology. In his university lectures of 1925 and 1926 at Marburg, he already distanced himself sharply from Rickert, leaving no doubt about his new affiliations. With the publication of *Being and Time* (which was dedicated to Husserl) in 1927, he had established himself as a radical new voice in German philosophy since his work combined a rigorous reconstitution of fundamental ontology with a highly abstract response to the contemporary cultural and social crisis of the Weimar Republic.

²⁹ Ibid: 99.

³⁰ Ibid: 97, translation modified.

³¹ Ibid: 99.

³² Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interest*, trans. Jeremy L. Shapiro (Boston, MA: Beacon Press: 1977) 301–17.

Heidegger's existentialist project moved within a short time not only to the center of the philosophical discourse in the German academy, it also influenced the broader intellectual debates of the time. This was not altogether surprising because Heidegger's ontological analysis included the exploration of individual experience that touched the reader at a different, more personal level. In this respect, *Being and Time* at least gestured at a different form of philosophy, namely the presentation of a *Weltanschauung*. Hence, also Heidegger's use of philosophical language differed significantly from that of the neo-Kantians. In *Being and Time*, the wall between philosophy as a rigorous science (Husserl) and the articulation of a worldview became porous.³³ His language forcefully merges the density of rigorous phenomenological analysis and the vocabulary of intense personal commitment.

From the perspective of *Being and Time*, an engagement with Kant could not follow the lines of the neo-Kantian Kant reception.³⁴ Consequently, in the encounter with the neo-Kantians, Heidegger chose a different strategy than Carnap. While Carnap had not stressed the difference between the neo-Kantians and the historical Kant, Heidegger, first in the debate with Ernst Cassirer at Davos in early 1929 and later in his *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, sharply distinguished between Kant's oeuvre and its use by the neo-Kantians. Against the self-understanding of the Marburg School in particular, Heidegger, in a rather confrontational manner (at least in philosophical terms), refused to grant neo-Kantianism the status of an improvement over the historical Kant. On the contrary, he maintains that the Kant interpretation of the neo-Kantians misses the core of Kant's work. The opening statement of his Davos lecture makes this abundantly clear: "Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is a, or rather the first, express ground-laying for metaphysics. (Negatively, and in opposition to the traditional interpretation of neo-Kantianism, that means: it is no theory of mathematical, natural-scientific knowledge—it is not a theory of knowledge at all.)"³⁵ Heidegger's strategy in his confrontation with the neo-Kantians, and especially Cassirer, used the historical Kant against later derivative readings of Kant that accommodated the needs of a modern scientific-industrial society. In a certain way, Cassirer was therefore correct when he

³³ The shift from a pure phenomenology to a philosophical discourse that can articulate a worldview (*Weltanschauung*) was influenced by Heidegger's engagement with Wilhelm Dilthey, first in the preface to his Habilitation and later in *Being and Time*, especially §§72–77, the chapters dealing with temporality and history.

³⁴ How an extensive critique of Kant might look like, can be seen in §63 of *Being and Time* where Heidegger examines Kant's concept of the subject (Ich). While he agrees with Kant's critique of a psychological or substantive grounding of the Ego, he charges that Kant conceives of the Ego (Ich) as an ontological concept and thereby fails to recognize the selfhood of the Ego qua (individual) self (Selbstheit des Ich qua Selbst). See also Heidegger's critique of Kant's critique of idealism in §43.

³⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft, 5th ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997) 191.

interpreted Heidegger's turn as yet another form of neo-Kantianism since Heidegger called again for a radical return to Kant. But, of course, what Heidegger had in mind, the turn toward metaphysics, stood in sharp contrast to the emphasis of the neo-Kantian reconstruction and use of Kant. Heidegger's main thesis reads: "The laying of the ground for metaphysics [is] the point of departure" for the new reading of Kant.³⁶ Heidegger's aim is to reexamine the first critique in light of the need for a fundamental ontology. He suggests at the outset that the return to Kant is framed by the question of reinterpreting the philosophical tradition since "the laying of the ground for traditional metaphysics begins with the question of the inner possibility of ontology as such."³⁷ In other words, the epistemological question posed at the beginning of the first critique has to be understood as part of the larger and more fundamental and more radical ontological question. Hence, Heidegger's ultimate goal is an "unveiling [of] the essence of ontology"³⁸ through a reading of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Because pure reason for Kant refers to the possibility of transcendental knowledge, Heidegger argues that transcendental knowledge aims at the intrinsic possibility of ontology rather than the mere possibility of grounding the natural sciences. Thus for him, the problem of ontology becomes the center of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

What might look like an affirmation of Kant and therefore like another turn of neo-Kantianism, however, is ultimately meant as a questioning of the philosophical tradition. According to Heidegger, Kant's line of questioning arrives at a position that destroys the traditional foundations of Western metaphysics: "destruction of the former foundation of Western metaphysics (spirit, *logos*, reason)."³⁹ In other words, the return to Kant leads us back to Kant's fundamental problem but not to its solution in Kant's thought. Cassirer, as becomes apparent in his extensive review of Heidegger's Kant study,⁴⁰ fully understood this. Deliberately staying away from a polemical response or even an attempt to counter Heidegger's reading of Kant with his own, he acknowledges the force and fruitfulness of this reading, while remaining ultimately unwilling to underwrite Heidegger's project. This becomes clear toward the end of the review when he emphasizes that Heidegger's ontology "is determined by a different stylistic principle from the very beginning,"⁴¹ by which he means a different "Stimmung" (atmosphere, mood) from that of German idealism to which Kant belongs, and continues: "I believe that we have to continue to see [Kant's philosophy] in this

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid: 9.

³⁸ Ibid: 10.

³⁹ Ibid: 192.

⁴⁰ Ernst Cassirer, "Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik. Bemerkungen zu Martin Heideggers Kant-Interpretation," *Kant-Studien* 36 (1931): 1–25.

⁴¹ Ibid: 24.

light, if we want to understand it in its intellectual greatness and peculiar nature.”⁴² Succinctly stated, Cassirer opts in favor of humanism and against the dark mood of contemporary existentialism.⁴³

My fifth example is *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), coauthored by Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. The study was composed in 1943/44, that is, toward the end of the period we are considering at this conference. They reexamined the fate of Kant at a time when the Western powers, including the United States, confronted Hitler’s armies. One might expect that in this context Kant would serve as an icon for the defense of reason and liberalism. But this is not the case. In the eyes of Horkheimer and Adorno, the Enlightenment and fascism ultimately merge. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the frontal and radical attack on the Enlightenment from its early manifestations in the thought of Bacon to the theoretical reflections of contemporary positivism includes also Immanuel Kant, both his work on epistemology and his ethics. The opening paragraph of the Kant chapter makes this very clear when the authors return to the theme of the first chapter by quoting Kant’s first critique and continue: “Thinking, as understood by the Enlightenment, is the process of establishing a unified, scientific order and of deriving factual knowledge from principles, whether these principles are interpreted as arbitrarily posited axioms, innate ideas, or the highest abstractions.”⁴⁴

As students of Hans Cornelius, both authors were intimately familiar with Kant’s work. Under the supervision of Cornelius Horkheimer wrote both his dissertation and his Habilitation on Kant. In these studies, there is no indication that the author considered the principles of Enlightenment as dangerous and the Kantian concept of teleology as fundamentally problematic. If one compares *Über Kants Kritik der Urteilskraft als Bindeglied zwischen theoretischer und praktischer Philosophie* (1925) and *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, it is difficult to recognize that these two works were written by the same author. What appears as a complete and radical break with Kant in 1944 is the result of a longer process of distancing that begins in the early 1930s, a period when Horkheimer moves closer to Hegel and Marx. While the dissertation and the Habilitation were still written under the umbrella of the neo-Kantian project and remain within the boundaries of textual

⁴² Ibid: 25.

⁴³ For two sharply divergent readings of the Davos debate see Geoffrey Waite, “On Esotericism: Heidegger and/or Cassirer at Davos,” *Political Theory* 26 (1998) 603–51, and Peter E. Gordon, “Neo-Kantianism and the Politics of Enlightenment,” *The Philosophical Forum* 39 (Summer 2008): 223–38. While Waite emphasizes the shortcomings of Cassirer and the neo-Kantian position, Gordon describes the position of Cassirer as a critical defense of the Enlightenment and humanism against the radical politics of Existentialism.

⁴⁴ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) 63.

interpretation, the essays published in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, the journal of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* that Horkheimer directed since 1930, have abandoned the premise that Kant is the answer to the cultural and social crisis mentioned by Horkheimer in 1923. However, already in the conclusion of the second Kant study, which focuses on the *Critique of Judgment*, Horkheimer points to the internal limits of Kant's project and to the positive function of ideas in the realm of practice: "Thus the essential result of the study with regard to the unification of the theoretical and the practical capacity [of the subject] is the following: The specific mark by which the latter is distinguished from the former in the investigation of the *Critique of Judgment*, i.e. the ability to conceive ideas in the sense of systematic units, does not create an insuperable division."⁴⁵ In the work of the 1930s, it is precisely the realm of praxis, its ethical as well as its political aspects, that become Horkheimer's primary concern. This shift implies a stronger involvement with the philosophy of history, as can be seen in the 1930 study *Anfänge der bürgerlichen Geschichtsphilosophie*. This shift also implies a type of argument not yet developed in the early work. Horkheimer begins to make use of ideology critique taken over from the Marxist tradition.

The use of ideology critique as a tool to subvert normative philosophical claims is more pronounced in the 1933 essay "Materialismus und Moral" in which Kant's theory of ethics is exposed to a double critique. On the one hand, Horkheimer wants to show that Kant's theory cannot live up to its own universal claims since it is (unknowingly) the expression of bourgeois interests, on the other, he suggests that Kant's approach contains a utopian element, which needs to be developed and utilized in the context of contemporary materialism.⁴⁶ Horkheimer moves away from the Kantian perspective and argues: "The price that idealist moral philosophy pays for its unconditional rigor is its inability to focus on a specific historical moment. This philosophy does not take sides."⁴⁷ By refusing to admit its historical interests, that is, by claiming to be free of empirical strings, moral idealism cannot recognize and therefore engage the deeper social forces that motivate a powerful rising social class to define the moral problematic in a specific way that was alien to previous social formations. The modern bourgeois individual, that is, Kant's moral subject, operates in a society based on the premise of conflicting interests among its members. The common good remains an abstract notion. "The commitment to the concept of the universal does not allow for an unambiguous relationship to one's own work."⁴⁸ In

⁴⁵ Horkheimer (1987): 146.

⁴⁶ See Ulrich Thiele, *Verwaltete Freiheit. Die normativen Prämissen in Horkheimers Kantkritik* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1996).

⁴⁷ Max Horkheimer, "Materialismus und Moral," Horkheimer, *Kritische Theorie*, vol. 1, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1968) 73.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*: 77.

this environment, Kant's categorical imperative as the essence of a moral norm must remain formal and abstract from the historical conditions in which it is applied and must suppress the material needs of the individual. This critique confronts Kant's approach to ethics with a materialist position derived from the concept of universal social interests [*gesamtgesellschaftliche Interessen*] and the notion of a social totality that should be rationally organized. Unlike Kant's concept of a universally valid moral law, Horkheimer favors an approach where moral norms are developed and formulated in the context of specific material conditions of their time. Hence Horkheimer argues against Kant: "Kant's moral teaching holds on to the problematic concept of an eternal commandment addressed to a free subject, but it also includes tendencies in which the end of morality is anticipated."⁴⁹ Differently put, Kant's moral philosophy is both the expression of bourgeois ideology and the promise of a new society without inequality. Kant's utopianism, as Horkheimer tells us, is conceived in terms of the notion of continuous progress, of a steady approximation to the ideal constitution. For Horkheimer, the utopian drive contains both progressive aspects and serious flaws. On the one hand, this drive transcends the social status quo; on the other, by creating an image of the future perfection, it remains tied to the categories of the existing social order.

In later essays, the balance between critique of ideology and appreciation of the utopian moment in Kant tips in favor of foregrounding the ideological elements. Horkheimer's concept of a critical theory, which is sharply distinguished from the notion of a traditional theory as it is used in scientific research, takes up and continues the Kantian idea of "Kritizismus," but it places Kant's philosophy on the side of traditional theory because all forms of idealism, as Horkheimer argues, cannot overcome the divide between theory and praxis. Although the 1936 essay "Traditional and Critical Theory" is primarily concerned with the structure of modern scientific theory, Horkheimer goes back to early modern philosophy, especially to Descartes, to define the mathematical structure of modern theory and to outline the complex development of modern science including the recognition of the relationship between theory and empirical research. However, he does not stay within the limits of the history of science. Instead, Horkheimer relates the evolution of scientific theory to the history of the mode of production (Marx). In other words, he questions the autonomy of theory and the claims of the theorists who insist on the internal dynamic of theoretical processes. For Horkheimer, the concept of critical theory is grounded in the insight that theory is always already part of the process of human labor determined by the mode of production. In this context, Kant's philosophy becomes part of a stage of modern philosophy determined by "Selbstentfremdung," that is, a form of philosophy that cannot recognize

⁴⁹ Ibid: 83.

the objective reasons for the limits of its epistemology. In particular, Horkheimer claims that Kant is unable to fully grasp the nature of the divide between theory and praxis in his own work. By comparing Kant with Hegel, Horkheimer emphasizes the restrictive enclosure of Kant's theory. "The activity of society thus appears to be a transcendental power, that is, the sum-total of spiritual factors."⁵⁰

Kant uses the term "critical" to distinguish his own approach to the question of knowledge from a traditional concept of philosophy that relies on dogmatic metaphysical foundations. In other words, the term refers to a methodological procedure internal to philosophy. But for Horkheimer, the term "critical" contains more than an epistemological decision. It is a commitment to considering philosophy as part of the broader process of social labor, more specifically as a "dialectical critique of political economy."⁵¹ In this sense, Kantian and neo-Kantian "Kritizismus" remain part of traditional (bourgeois) theory, an assessment that in 1936 does not yet mean that Kant's philosophy is simply "wrong" or outdated. But for Horkheimer, Kant remains precritical in his procedure of creating conceptual structures to arrive at a system and his use of the systematic nature of philosophical thought. "Kritizismus" is precritical because of its very claim to intellectual autonomy.

In the Kant chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which was most likely drafted by Horkheimer,⁵² the emphasis is placed upon epistemology, especially the conditions of the possibility of knowing the empirical phenomena, and the systematic character of philosophical thought in general. The Kantian concept of rationality implies the search for systematic knowledge guaranteed by formal rules rather than by specific goals defined in terms of content. The Kantian definition of the Copernican Revolution in philosophy, that is, the demand that philosophical inquiry must not begin with the object at hand but start with the transcendental question, is clearly acknowledged, yet it is not treated as the positive revolutionary breakthrough that would overcome the limits of older forms of metaphysics. Rather, Horkheimer and Adorno read the Kantian approach as a serious and dangerous loss; dangerous because its consequences are by no means limited to questions of epistemology. The authors want to underline that Kant's philosophy has ultimately radical social and political implications (to be sure, not foreseen by Kant himself) that can be recognized in the disaster of the contemporary world, the conflict of World War II.

It is worth noting that in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in contrast for instance to Adorno's later writings on Kant, the Königsberg philosopher is seen as the very

⁵⁰ Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972) 203.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*: 206.

⁵² See the postscript of the editor of the critical Horkheimer edition: Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1987) 427, 429.

embodiment of the European Enlightenment. The specificity of Kant's thought, the moment of critique vis-à-vis the earlier Enlightenment and the emphasis on the limitations of human knowledge, is not stressed. In fact, the interpretation moves back and forth between the characterization of Kant's philosophy on the one hand and a reconstruction of the general principles of Enlightenment thought on the other. In this movement, Kant is brought into close contact with the concept of the Enlightenment as it was presented in the first chapter. Here, the emphasis is placed on modern thought as a form of human control over nature. This reading turns Kant into a technocrat *avant la lettre* who is theoretically engaged in social and political engineering. In this approach, Kant's schematism concept is ultimately connected to the organizational principles of the modern industrial world. In short, the aim of the radical interpretation is not a reconstruction of the historical Kant or even an evaluation of relevant philosophical problems. Instead, in 1944, Horkheimer and Adorno focus on the historical trajectory of modernity that resulted in a totalitarian political order in Germany and Russia. The reading of Kant's ethics in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, picking up on and radicalizing Horkheimer's 1933 essay "Materialismus und Moral," ultimately leads to the same point. Whatever Kant thought about the stakes of his moral philosophy and the specific position that he developed (concept of freedom), for the authors, the objective historical function points in a different direction: namely, the evolution of a modern bourgeois society that uses the concept of freedom for domination and repression. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Kant therefore is a moment in a long historical process in which progress turns into its opposite.

As we have seen, in the 1920s, the neo-Kantians, who had dominated German philosophy for two generations, became the *Sündenböcke* (as Cassirer put it) of the new thinking. Why did this happen? Why had this work, a continuous process of refined and complex interpretations and systematic engagement with Kant's philosophy, lost its punch? The unspoken premise of this work was the promise that Kant's philosophy provides the basis for future philosophy, the preparation of a set of given questions and problems that could be worked out. The continuous improvement of Kant would be the improvement of philosophy *tout court*. It was, in other words, the promise of continuity. It was also assumed that the field of philosophy was clearly marked and relatively autonomous vis-à-vis other fields of knowledge as well as social practices. Obviously, the severe social, political, and cultural turbulences in Germany after the Great War, the profound sense of loss in terms of power, prestige, and territory, subverted this sense of continuity and stability.⁵³

⁵³ For a detailed account of these turbulences see Ernst Troeltsch, *Spektator-Briefe. Aufsätze über die deutsche Revolution und die Weltpolitik 1918/22*, ed. H. Baron (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1924).

When reexamining the Kant discussions of the 1920s and 1930s, we have to keep in mind that they played against a background that sharply differed from the prewar era. This is easily forgotten when one focuses exclusively on the history of neo-Kantianism. German philosophers were seriously involved in the ideological support of the German position in World War I. (The same, of course, was true of French and British philosophers.) In the “ideas of 1914,” German philosophers such as Rudolf Eucken and Paul Natorp came to the defense of the fatherland by emphasizing the priority of the Spirit (*Geist*) over material concerns and the need of connecting the idea with life. The material facts of the war are turned into a special experience of spiritual renewal and commitment of the individual to the nation. The war offered the opportunity to overcome the shallowness of life in a materialistic society, the lack of authentic interiority (*Innerlichkeit*) through collective sacrifice. In philosophical terms, then, in the war, the German people, as Eucken claims, defend the soul of humanity. In other words, the real aim of the war is not military victory; it is the spread of ideas (of culture and life). Paul Natorp propagated the neo-Kantian version of the war philosophy in numerous essays and monographs. Here the special spiritual mission of the German people is celebrated and the war interpreted as a hard but necessary process of collective healing. The return to idealism, especially Fichte, becomes the means to organize what he calls an “Aufbruch” of the young generation. For Natorp, the deeper task of the war was the creation of a German form of socialism based on idealism that would replace the stage of market democracy (England).

These examples demonstrate that with the outbreak of the war, German philosophy became militant by supporting national goals. This shift would have important consequences for the philosophical discourse after the war, although clearly we cannot speak of a mere continuation of the ideas of 1914. Rather, these ideas had to be reframed and adjusted to the fact that Germany had lost the war and was stained by Western intellectuals as a nation of barbarians. The hopes connected with the ideas of 1914, the unique cultural mission of Germany, turned out to be an illusion that left a bad taste, but some of the themes and topoi remained in circulation. By and large, however, these ideas did not support the new political regime of the Weimar Republic. Rightly, Hermann Lübbe speaks of a turn to an existentialist form (*Existentialisierung*) of philosophy.⁵⁴ Here, the philosophical discourse has radically transcended traditional boundaries of academic debates.

Orthodox Neo-Kantianism was waning not only because of a generational shift (many of the leading figures were either dead or retired by the early 1920s) but also, and more importantly, because of its understanding of the project of philosophy essentially as a continuation of the prewar era. This understanding was

⁵⁴ Hermann Lübbe, “Die philosophischen Ideen von 1914,” *Politische Philosophie in Deutschland*, ed. Hermann Lübbe (Basel and Stuttgart: Schwabe & Co, 1963) 173–237, 186.

clearly expressed for instance in Cassirer's definition of his own postwar work as a continuation of the achievements of Hermann Cohen. It is tempting therefore to describe the self-definition of younger thinkers such as Lukács, Carnap, Heidegger, Horkheimer, and Adorno as a generational break with the neo-Kantians or even as a hostile rejection of Kant, which we find in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, but this description would significantly reduce the complexity of the transition. Even in their opposition to the neo-Kantian program, Lukács and Carnap continued their dialogue with individual neo-Kantians, and Heidegger articulated his sharp critique of the neo-Kantian program by rediscovering Kant's metaphysics for his own work.

My five snapshots are clearly not sufficient to draw a complete map of the turn in German philosophy, but one can at least draw a few lines between the figures I discussed and can look at a tentative picture. The link between Lukács and Horkheimer/Adorno is not too difficult to recognize. The latter made clearly use of Lukács's method, namely a historical dialectic that is indebted to Hegel and Marx. Although the concept of reification is not specifically thematized in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, it is a category that impacts their reading of the European Enlightenment as well as that of Kant. At the same time, we have to note a remarkable shift of the framework and the rhetoric. Where Lukács focused on the modern age in the context of the rise of capitalism, in 1944, Horkheimer and Adorno went back to the early documents of Greek culture (Homer) to demonstrate the double-edged working of the Enlightenment process. Furthermore, their rhetoric is much more strident and the opposition to Kant more explicit. It is no longer clear whether Kant or Neo-Kantianism is the real opponent,⁵⁵ a distinction that was crucial for Heidegger.

Another, much more tentative line could be drawn from Heidegger to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, although clearly not as a reference to the way in which these authors positioned themselves after 1933 vis-à-vis National Socialism. The line would pay attention to the challenge to the tradition of Western rationalism and the shared insistence on reconfiguring the task of thought. In this constellation, the common opponent would not only be the neo-Kantians but also logical positivism. It is not accidental therefore that Carnap, even after moving into the camp of logical positivism, retained an affinity to some of the neo-Kantians. The bridge connecting them was the understanding of philosophy as a systematic and methodologically rigorous scientific enterprise. It is also not accidental therefore that Carnap later developed a sharp critique of Heidegger's language. Finally, an even more tentative line could be drawn between Carnap and Horkheimer/Adorno,

⁵⁵ The emphasis of the first chapter, however, which foregrounds the role of modern science as the core of the Enlightenment, suggests that their principle target might have been the neo-Kantian tradition, especially where it shows its affinities to neo-positivism.

although the latter openly rejected logical positivism as a scientific reduction of the task of philosophy. This line would foreground the moment of critique internal to philosophy and the rejection of ontology in the manner of Heidegger. In biographical terms, there was no place for either of them in Germany after 1933, while Heidegger moved to the center of the new political regime.

In my concluding remarks, I want to return to the initial question: Why would it be relevant to examine the Kant reception of the interwar years? This academic formulation of the question of course conceals the ultimately non-academic nature of the problem. In the case of Lukács and Horkheimer/Adorno, the non-academic character of their engagement with Kant was and is apparent. In different ways, they transferred Kant into the sociopolitical realm by reading the history of philosophy (including Kant) in general as a political project. Their critiques therefore crossed the boundaries of established academic philosophy. It seems to me that this is ultimately also true for Heidegger, although it was not obvious in 1929. The language of *Sein und Zeit* questions and subverts the clear distinction between rigorous academic (scientific) terminology and a more popular language that draws on religious and theological resources. However, by attacking Cassirer's humanism, Heidegger also attacked (and this was understood by his audience) the cultural self-definition of the Weimar Republic. Through his position on Kant, Heidegger let it be known that he was not a friend of liberal democracy. More importantly, Heidegger's claim to recognize in Kant the end of traditional metaphysics and thereby the end of reason and *Logos* had philosophical implications far beyond a critique of neo-Kantianism as the formerly dominant position in German philosophy.

This apparent violation of academic rules and conventions that normally determine philosophical discourse deserves closer scrutiny. If one emphasizes the strict autonomy of philosophy, much of the use of Kant in the interwar years may strike us as problematic if not as illegitimate. (Husserl's late work is a heroic attempt to prevent the intrusion of "non-philosophical" approaches.) Since some of the participants in the discourse on Kant fundamentally subverted Kant orthodoxy (by which I mean that Kant has to be read and explicated exclusively in terms of the questions he raised in his writings), the debates of the 1920s and 1930s are no longer firmly located in the field of philosophy. But the insistence on this restriction overlooks the way philosophy as a discipline of knowledge relates to other arenas including social practices. Lukács and Horkheimer/Adorno made use of the concept of totality taken from Hegel to uncover and explicate this connection.

More recently, Bourdieu, in his study of Heidegger, has proposed a different methodology, which operates with a structuralist-sociological framework.⁵⁶ He

⁵⁶ Bourdieu (1991): ch. 4 and 5.

asserts that the language of the philosopher always has to be read and understood in more than one register. Philosophy functions on more than one level and thereby reaches more than the field of philosophy, whether the philosopher is aware of this or not. Bourdieu therefore distinguishes between a primary philosophical meaning and a secondary, frequently hidden political meaning. His case is Heidegger's technically complex struggle with, and polemic against, neo-Kantianism, which he interprets as an intervention in the politics of the late Weimar Republic where Heidegger stood in close alignment with radical theorists such as Ernst Jünger and Carl Schmitt on the Right. Bourdieu uses this argument in two different ways. On the one hand, he maintains that Heidegger's language in the Kant debate does not disclose its more radical political meaning, on the other, he assumes that there is a structural homology between Heidegger's philosophical and his political intervention, which is working objectively and is not dependent on Heidegger's intentions. (I will not address the tension between these two approaches here.) While Bourdieu asserts in principle the autonomy of the field of philosophy and therefore argues against a biographical interpretation or a reading that looks at Heidegger's social background (against Adorno), he also asserts the relatedness of different fields and the possibility of exchange through linguistic translation. The technical language of philosophy, he argues, has to be translated into the more general linguistic medium of politics, for instance, to operate in the public arena.

In the context of this conference, I am less interested in Bourdieu's position on Heidegger, that is, in the question if his political analysis of Heidegger's writings is correct, than in the theoretical issue of disciplinary openness or closure. This question, I feel, is relevant for a serious approach to the legacy of Kant. If one takes a narrow view and focuses exclusively or even primarily on the use of Kant within the parameters of Kantian language (as the neo-Kantians did), much of what we examine at this conference must be perceived as outside of an acceptable definition of Kant's legacy. If one opts, on the other hand, for the openness of the philosophical discourse, the issues that Bourdieu addresses in dealing with Heidegger and Kant would be important in more general terms. It would mean that the legacy of Kant could be legitimately located also outside the field of professional philosophy and it would mean that we have to take into account interventions coming from other arenas and their subfields that the historical Kant might not have recognized as proper responses to his work.

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