

STUDIES
IN
NEO-KANTIANISM
8

The Neo-Kantian Reception of Schiller

Edited by Chiara Russo Krauss

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STUDIES IN NEO-KANTIANISM/8

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Introduction.

Schiller through the Prism of Neo-Kantianism

CHIARA RUSSO KRAUSS

Since the premiere of his debut work, *Die Räuber* (*The Robbers*), in 1781, Schiller has been a central figure in German literature. In the years that followed the great success of his play, studying his works, attending stagings of his dramas, and quoting verses from his poems became an integral part of *Deutschtum* – the German way of life. Nevertheless, it was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that the philosophical writings of Schiller began to be considered not only as a means of shedding light on his literary work, but also as theoretical endeavors worthy of consideration in their own right¹.

The rediscovery of Schiller's philosophy began around 1859, the year of the *Schillerfest* (or *Schillerfeier*), which was held from November 8 to 10 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Friedrich Schiller's birth. The event was celebrated in German schools and universities nationwide, as well as through commemorative publications, open-air readings, torchlight processions, public speeches and literary competitions. For Germany, it was the first major celebration in honor of a poet, as the centenary of Goethe's birth in 1849 had passed relatively ignored, largely due to the political and social climate of the time, which was still affected by the 1848 uprisings. For this reason, the *Schillerfest* was intended to be, and actually was, an event of cultural and political significance². Ten years after the conflicts of 1848, it aimed to unite the country and the German people around the figure of the 'national poet' Schiller. As Rudolf Haym wrote: "It was primarily a national celebration. The German nation showed that, however torn apart it may be on the outside, it is indestructible on the inside and that the symbols of its unity are its most cherished possession"³.

A pivotal work in the rediscovery of Schiller's philosophy was published already one year before the *Schillerfest*: though not a neo-Kantian in the strict sense,

¹ L. Sharpe, *Schiller's Aesthetic Essays. Two Centuries of Criticism*, Camden House, Columbia, 1995, pp. 20 ff.; G. Pinna, *Introduzione a Schiller*, Laterza, Bari, 2012, pp. 156 ff.

² See Th. Logge, *Zur medialen Konstruktion des Nationalen: die Schillerfeiern 1859 in Europa und Nordamerika*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2014.

³ R. Haym, "Schiller an seinem hundertjährigen Jubiläum", in *Preussische Jahrbücher*, 4, 1859, pp. 516-544, 626-664; later published in Id., *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Weidmann, Berlin, 1903, pp. 49-120, p. 118.

Kuno Fischer not only helped reignite the study of Kant's philosophy and spark the neo-Kantian movement⁴, he also authored the first book to attempt an organic reconstruction of Schiller's thought, significantly titled *Schiller als Philosoph* (Schiller as a philosopher, 1858). The following year, on the occasion of the *Schillerfest*, the Vienna Academy of Sciences held a competition with the theme "Schiller's Relationship with Science", which prompted a series of publications investigating Schiller's thought, including the winning essay by jurist Karl Twesten, as well as essays by literary historian Karl Tomaschek, and philosopher Friedrich Ueberweg⁵.

Fisher's book and the Centenary marked the beginning of a renewed interest in Schiller's philosophical ideas, which continued to grow over the following decades. This process of rediscovering Schiller's thought intersected with and was encouraged by the concurrent rise of the neo-Kantian movement. The call to go "Back to Kant" aimed to correct the erroneous path that idealist thinkers had mapped out from Kantian philosophy. In this context, Schiller was seen as a potential alternative interpretation of Kant's ideas, one that prioritized anthropological interests, was more grounded in real life, and substituted metaphysics with poetry, making him a potential counter to the errors of idealist philosophy. At the same time, the neo-Kantian movement developed not only in opposition to idealist philosophy, but also out of a desire to find a third way in the *Materialismstreit* (Materialism controversy), between advocates of a materialist worldview and defenders of old Christian metaphysics⁶. In this regard, too, Schiller was seen as someone who could point to this third way, since he had managed to combine his scientific interest in the natural and even physiological aspects of human beings with an urge to protect the ideal and spiritual dimensions of humanity.

For these reasons, in the second half of the nineteenth century, several neo-Kantian thinkers, belonging to different schools and trends within this complex and multifaceted movement, took an interest in Schiller, thus contributing to his establishment as not only a poet and dramatist, but also as a philosopher in his own right. The intertwining of the development of neo-Kantianism and the rediscovery of Schiller's thought reached its zenith in 1905, the centenary of Schiller's death. On this occasion, the journal *Kant-Studien* – one of the main voices of the neo-Kantian movement – published a special issue titled *Schiller als Philosoph und seine Beziehungen zu Kant* (Schiller as a philosopher and his relationship to Kant). Even though none of the representatives of the Marburg School of neo-Kantianism – Hermann Cohen, Paul Natorp and Ernst Cassirer – were featured in the volume, the list of

⁴ On the topic see the chapter on Fischer in F. Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism. 1796–1880*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014, pp. 221 ff., aptly titled "Kuno Fischer, Hegelian Neo-Kantian".

⁵ K. Twesten, *Schiller in seinem Verhältnis zur Wissenschaft*, Guttentag, Berlin, 1863; K. Tomaschek, *Schiller in seinem Verhältnisse zur Wissenschaft*, Gerold, Wien, 1858; F. Ueberweg, *Schiller als Historiker und Philosoph*, ed. by M. Brasch, Reißner, Leipzig, 1884.

⁶ On the topic see K. C. Köhnke, *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism: German Academic Philosophy between Idealism and Positivism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, op. cit., pp. 95–96.

contributors was impressive, with prominent figures in the neo-Kantian movement, including Hans Vaihinger (who was also the editor of the journal), Otto Liebmann, Jonas Cohn, Bruno Bauch, Wilhelm Windelband, and Rudolf Eucken (who would win the Nobel Prize for Literature three years later, in 1908).

Despite the importance of this connection for understanding both Schiller's legacy and the history of neo-Kantianism, there has been a lack of studies on the neo-Kantian reception of Schiller. Although scholars of Schiller have emphasized the role of neo-Kantian thinkers as the first to recognize Schiller as a philosopher⁷, no comprehensive work has attempted to reconstruct this process in all its facets. This book is a result of the research project *The neo-Kantian reception of Schiller between Platonism and Kantianism*, which was conceived with the aim of filling this gap in scholarship.

The main inspiration for the project was the final chapter of Frederick Beiser's book, *Schiller as Philosopher. A Re-Examination*, which is devoted precisely to "The Neo-Kantian Interpretation of Schiller". As the Principal Investigator of the project, I am therefore indebted to Prof. Beiser's book for bringing this subject to my attention and laying the groundwork for the project. Nevertheless, even though the project followed in Beiser's footsteps, it also introduced a significant shift in the line of research. Beiser emphasizes the contrast between the (neo)Kantian and Platonic interpretations of Schiller – not because he believes them to be in opposition, but because these are the two paradigmatic readings of Schiller found in literature. The Kantian interpretation regards his thought "as a creative transformation of Kant, one that both cancels and preserves, corrects and develops, the Kantian legacy"; while the Platonic interpretation argues that Schiller "reinjects Plato's metaphysics back into Kant's philosophy" with "his apparent 'indifference to epistemology'", "his silence regarding the thing-in-itself and his lax observance of Kant's critical limits"⁸. Although the project aimed to reconstruct the neo-Kantian reception of Schiller, it was also based on the hypothesis that the neo-Kantians themselves did not necessarily view Schiller's Kantianism as conflicting with his Platonism, nor did they downplay the Platonic elements within his philosophy. One reason for this assumption is that neo-Kantian thinkers – especially those of the Marburg School – oftentimes aimed to provide a Kantian reading of Plato himself. Therefore, one of the goals of the project was to demonstrate that the neo-Kantian interpretations of Schiller may incorporate Kantian and Platonic elements together, or – to be more precise – that they tend to bring together Schiller, Plato and, thus, Schiller's Platonism, all within a Kantian framework.

This book includes the essays presented at the final event of the project, the international conference "The Neo-Kantian Reception of Schiller", held at the University of Naples Federico II from September 24 to 26, 2025. It is thanks to the authors'

⁷ L. Sharpe, *Schiller's Aesthetic Essays*, op. cit.; G. Pinna, *Introduzione a Schiller*, Laterza, Bari, 2012, pp. 156 ff.

⁸ F. Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher. A Re-Examination*, Clarendon, Oxford, 2005, pp. 268-269.

contributions that we now have a comprehensive overview of the multifaceted – and sometimes nearly contradictory – ways in which the neo-Kantians embraced and reworked Schiller’s philosophy. This overview encompasses not only the two primary schools of thought within the movement – the Marburg school (Cohen, Natorp, and Cassirer) and the Southwestern school (Rickert, Windelband, Bauch, Cohn, and Weber) – but also other pivotal and harder-to-categorize thinkers who belong to this tradition in varying degrees, such as Kuno Fischer, Friedrich Albert Lange, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Hans Vaihinger.

In fact, the research project was based on a definition of neo-Kantianism that extends beyond the aforementioned schools and is intentionally loose and flexible. As Beiser points out “Though all neo-Kantians were intent, in one way or another, on the rehabilitation of Kant’s philosophy, none were strict disciples of Kant. All were severely critical of Kant, and all used him for their own ends”⁹. For this reason, providing a strict definition of neo-Kantianism or a definitive list of its representatives is particularly difficult. Thus, it is better to adopt an inclusive and broad interpretation of the boundaries of this movement. Accordingly, the initial plan was to include discussions of even more neo-Kantian thinkers in this volume, such as Friedrich Paulsen, Karl Vorländer, Johannes Volkelt, and Leonard Nelson, to name a few. However, this proved difficult in part due to the constraints of the conference and collection, and in part due to the lack of scholars working on these authors. Therefore, while this volume fills a significant gap in the literature on the neo-Kantian reception of Schiller, it is neither exhaustive nor could it be.

When organizing the content of this volume, I chose not to divide the contributions into distinct sections, in order to remain consistent with the view of neo-Kantianism as a multifaceted and nuanced movement. Nevertheless, the table of contents is still structured in a way that suggests a potential itinerary.

Frederick Beiser is featured first not only to highlight his role as the inspirer of the project, but also because his essay revisits the question of whether Schiller was a proper philosopher or if his aesthetic writings should be read as the work of a poet interested in the requirements for good art. By criticizing postmodernist analyses of Schiller that support the latter thesis, Beiser introduces us to Schiller the philosopher and explains how Schiller himself interpreted his role as such.

Next, we have three contributions dealing with the early phases of neo-Kantianism. Sabato Danzilli examines Kuno Fischer’s (1824-1907) seminal work on *Schiller as a philosopher*, highlighting its role in establishing the interpretation that positions the great poet as an intermediate step in the historical development from Kant to German idealism. While Fischer did not uphold speculative determinism, his Hegelian approach led him to view Schiller’s philosophy as a dialectical reconciliation of ethics and aesthetics, sense and reason, that surpassed Kant and paved the way for later idealist philosophy. The essays by Paolo Pecere and me both deal with Friedrich Albert Lange (1828-1875) and illustrate how – despite being considered a

⁹ F. Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism*, op. cit., p. 8.

proponent of ‘physiological neo-Kantianism’ – he drew from Schiller’s Kantianism to oppose the materialist worldview and assert the crucial role of “Ideals” in the theory of knowledge, ethics, aesthetics, and politics.

The subsequent series of essays explores various figures associated with the Southwestern School of neo-Kantianism, including its founder, Wilhelm Windelband (1848-1915), Heinrich Rickert (1863-1936), Emil Lask (1875-1915), Jonas Cohn (1869-1947), and Bruno Bauch (1877-1942). Gerald Hartung analyzes the significance of Windelband’s article “Schillers Transzendentaler Idealismus” within his body of work and attempts to reconstruct its potential role within Windelband’s planned, yet never properly realized, philosophical system. Roberto Redaelli searches for a common thread in how Rickert, Lask, and Windelband engaged with Schiller’s work, finding it in the concept of ‘the whole man’ (*der ganze Mensch*). In fact, Schiller played a central role in the Southwestern School, which prioritized the philosophy of culture and anthropology, because he embodied a holistic interest in the fullness of the living experience and in all aspects of the human existence. Giovanni Morrone reveals the downside of Windelband and the Southwestern School’s reception of Schiller: by linking Schiller’s status as a philosopher to his status as a *Kantian* philosopher, they disregarded his early philosophical interests, that predated his reading of Kant, and thereby failed to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of his thought. Domenico Spinosa analyzes the essay for the special issue of *Kant-Studien* written by Cohn, who was the first representative of Southwestern neo-Kantianism to undertake a more in-depth study of aesthetics. Once again, Schiller’s significance as a philosopher is associated with his Kantianism and, in this case, with his role as the conduit through which Goethe became acquainted with Kantian philosophy. Christian Krijnen offers a reconstruction of how Bauch used Schiller in his philosophy of values, as a means of correcting Kant’s formalism and describing how freedom and validity can be actualized, thus transforming the abstract categorical imperative into the more concrete “imperative of culture”. The essay by Stefan Klingner and Rudolf Meer ties up the section on Southwestern neo-Kantianism by tying it back to the beginning of the discussion, as it connects Fischer and Bauch, pointing out that they both supported the thesis that, in Schiller’s philosophy, the rupture with Kant’s writings predominated over the continuity. In this way, the essay addresses a fundamental question that remains relevant today, namely, to what extent can Schiller’s aesthetic foundation of ethics be considered a continuation of Kant’s practical philosophy, and to what extent can it be considered a criticism of it (moreover based on a fundamental misunderstanding of it).

Next, there is a series of essays covering the leading figures of the Marburg School of neo-Kantianism: Hermann Cohen (1848-1918), Paul Natorp (1854-1924), and Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945). Gian Paolo Cammarota, Ezio Gamba, and Scott Edgar each engage with Cohen from a different perspective. Cammarota explains why Cohen believed that Schiller embodied his notion that true philosophy is idealism and that true idealism is realism, thus sharing the same line of reasoning as Plato and Kant. Edgar shows how Cohen follows Schiller’s concept of “play drive”

in order to find in the aesthetic dimension a means to unify theoretical and moral consciousness (the will), as well as phenomenal actions and noumenal selves. Gamba presents a survey of Schiller's presence throughout Cohen's intellectual life, identifying three distinct periods; the first in which Schiller's aesthetics is criticized from the *völkerpsychologisch* point of view adopted by Cohen; the second in which Schiller is regarded as the disciple of Kant who best carried forward Kantian aesthetics; and the third in which Cohen points out the Romantic elements within Schiller's thought, as he inaugurated the tendency to place art and aesthetics above other human domains. Mattia Papa's essay focuses on Natorp, who placed Schiller alongside Kant and Plato in the history of transcendental philosophy. For Natorp, in particular, Schiller's focus on the aesthetic domain could provide a unifying principle for the fields of objectivity – namely, the theoretical domain of knowledge and the practical domain of ethics – such that aesthetic judgment becomes the mechanism through which the ultimate unity of reality is established. Luigi Laino maps Schiller's traces within Cassirer's corpus and argues that Schiller appears in Cassirer's theory of knowledge in connection to two issues: the definitive rejection of the copy theory of knowledge, and the adoption of a form of holism resulting from reason's spontaneous construction of reality.

Finally, we have three contributions about figures belonging to the neo-Kantian milieu, though not the two major neo-Kantian schools: Wilhelm Dilthey, who participated in one of the major discussions of neo-Kantianism, namely that concerning the relationship between the natural sciences and the *Geisteswissenschaften* (spiritual sciences); Hans Vaihinger, the founder of the Kant-inspired philosophy of 'as if' or fictionalism; and Max Weber, whose philosophical ideas stemmed directly from his acquaintance with Southwestern neo-Kantianism, though he developed them in original ways and toward new territories. Giuseppe Guastamacchia suggests that Schiller's concept of the unified, creative, organic human being inspired Dilthey's project to develop descriptive psychology as a means of countering the scientific-mathematical view of the human spirit that was prevalent at the time. Francesco Pisano argues that Schiller influenced Vaihinger by providing a blueprint for viewing idealization as an actual, empirically rooted psychological process tied to the subject's ethical character. Lastly, Massimilla offers a twofold contribution. First, he revisits the debate over the alleged connection between Weber's *Entzäuberung der Welt* (disenchantment of the world) and Schiller's *Entgötterung der Natur* (disgoddling of nature), and then he tracks Schiller's traces in Weber's work.

As one makes their way through the contributions of this book, it becomes clear that the neo-Kantian reception of Schiller reveals a multifaceted, even kaleidoscopic, appearance. Schiller himself is a complex figure. His philosophical interests range from the empiricist, physiological, and anthropological orientation he absorbed during his formative years at the *Karlsschule*, to the Kantian approach he developed after encountering Kant's writings – not to mention the many different stimuli he received from other thinkers of the era, with whom he often had personal bonds (suffice it to name Goethe and Humboldt). Furthermore, Schiller's ideas are

not only found in his treatises but also interwoven throughout his literary works, including his poems and dramas. On the other hand, we have the multidimensional phenomenon of neo-Kantianism. Even Kant's reception within this movement is far from cohesive, as its proponents were not merely interested in reviving Kantian orthodoxy, but rather in developing the framework he laid out in new and original directions, according to the times' new issues and their own priorities. In light of this, it should come as no surprise that this fragmentariness is further heightened in the neo-Kantian reception of Schiller. In fact, we see neo-Kantian thinkers pull Schiller in different and even opposite directions. For some, Schiller brings Kantian philosophy back down to earth by reminding us to acknowledge the natural, sensual person, the whole human being. Others see him as the poet of the ideal, urging us to spread the wings of our aesthetic imagination and fly toward the ideal realm of forms. Some engage with his philosophical treatises; some regard his poems as the summa of his philosophy; and others turn to his dramas as stagings of his anthropological views. Moreover, Schiller's ideas penetrate in all the fields in which neo-Kantians theorize, from epistemology, to ethics, aesthetics, and the philosophy of culture.

In summary, one could say that Schiller's multifaceted nature is reflected in the multifaceted nature of neo-Kantianism. This introduction is titled "Schiller through the Prism of Neo-Kantianism", but it could also have been phrased the opposite way: "Neo-Kantianism through the Prism of Schiller". Nevertheless, it is still possible to argue that the neo-Kantian reception of Schiller had some common ground. In fact, although these thinkers arrived at philosophy and Kant through different personal paths, they all encountered Schiller in a similar way. Since Schiller had already become a staple of the German educational system by the nineteenth century, they all grew up immersed in his poems and dramas. This background knowledge of Schiller's *literary works* already contained the dormant seeds of his *ideas*. When these thinkers (each in their own way) developed philosophical interests later on, the seeds sprouted, prompting them to return to Schiller's work with new eyes. This time, they recognized its theoretical merits and Kantian themes and found in it conceptual images and intellectual tools that they could use to enrich, integrate, and develop Kant's philosophy, as well as their own.

Schiller versus Post-Modernism

FREDERICK C. BEISER

1. *Philosophy versus Poetry*

Schiller's major aesthetic writings – his *Kallias Briefe*, *Anmut und Würde*, *Aesthetische Briefe* and *Ueber naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung* – have been a source of inspiration and controversy for more than two centuries now. The essays were written over a very short period – from January 1793 to September 1795 – but the two years for their composition have been overshadowed by the two centuries of their interpretation, which have never reached a conclusion or consensus. How are we to interpret these writings? They have raised the most troublesome questions, some of them very basic. Perhaps the most fraught of all is whether they are works of philosophy or of literature. Should we read them as technical treatises of philosophy? Or, perhaps more charitably, as literary manifestos about the requirements for good art?

There is nothing wrong in principle, of course, with a poetic or rhetorical approach to Schiller's aesthetic writings. Schiller's rhetoric is as legitimate an object of interest and investigation as his philosophy. Indeed, some recent work has shed much light on the importance of the rhetorical tradition for Schiller's program of aesthetic education¹. However, this approach goes astray when it claims priority over, or attempts to replace, a close philosophical examination of the texts. We can claim that Schiller's writings are primarily rhetorical only if first show that they fail as philosophy; but we can show that they fail as philosophy only if we first examine them philosophically.

For many, the best clue for the interpretation of Schiller's aesthetic writings is the kind of man who wrote them. Was he a philosopher or a poet? Schiller himself leaves us no doubt about how he would answer this question. He conceived himself first and foremost as a poet. In early 1795, while finishing the *Aesthetische Briefe*, Schiller expressed his longing to return to drama and poetry. He would complain bitterly to Goethe about how trying and artificial philosophy could be; then, at the

¹ See G. Ueding, *Schillers Rhetorik: Idealistische Wirkungsästhetik und rhetorische Tradition*, Niemeyer, Tübingen, 1971, pp. 10-50; and D. Borchmeyer, *Tragödie und Öffentlichkeit: Schillers Dramaturgie im Zusammenhang seiner ästhetische-politischen Theorie und die rhetorische Tradition*, Fink, Munich, 1973, pp. 125-136.

end of that year, he finally declared, with a sigh of relief, how it was “hightime to close his philosophical shop”². And so, in early 1796, Schiller happily returned to poetry and drama, never to return to philosophy.

For many scholars, Schiller’s self-conception as a poet, and his short interlude as a philosopher, are sufficient grounds not to take his aesthetic writings too seriously as philosophy. Their artificial structure, their sketchy reasoning, their obscure concepts, their tentative conclusions, all betray the poet who wrote them. If we approach Schiller’s aesthetic writings charitably, if we consider the kind of man who wrote them, then it would seem we have to lay aside the strict standards of philosophy and to treat them according to the kinder and more liberal standards of poetry.

These considerations about Schiller the man, about Schiller the committed poet and reluctant philosopher, have been, for many years, the chief rationale for the poetic or literary interpretation of the aesthetic writings. The recent post-modern interpretation of these writings has begun from the same starting point. The hallmark of the post-modern approach to Schiller’s aesthetic writings is its emphasis upon their poetic or rhetorical dimension³. According to this approach, the essential purpose and structure behind these writings is poetic, stylistic and rhetorical rather than philosophical, logical and systematic. Because of their rhetorical and poetic language, and because of the author’s confession as a poet, we are warned against understanding Schiller as a systematic philosopher or rigorous thinker. The ambiguities, inconsistencies and vagueness of these writings, we are told, are the product of a philosophical amateur and a self-confessed poet.

We run into a serious problem, however, if we take Schiller’s self-conception as a poet as the major reason for a poetic interpretation of his aesthetic writings. There are other factors about Schiller the man that dampen, mitigate and qualify his poetic identity. The most important of these factors – one the post-modernists have entirely ignored – is Schiller’s education in the *Karlschule*. The *Karlschule* was unique in German education of the period in that its curriculum emphasized philosophy over religion and classics⁴. More than fifteen hours a week were devoted to philosophy. Students learned logic, metaphysics and ethics; and they read modern philosophers,

² See Schiller to Goethe, January 7, 1795, NA XXVII, p. 116; and December 17, 1795, NA XVIII, 132. All references to Schiller’s writings are to *Werke*, Nationalausgabe, 42 vols. ed. by L. Blumenthal and B. von Wiese, Böhlau Nachfolger, Weimar, 1943-1967. This edition is abbreviated NA.

³ See S. S. Kerry, *Schiller’s Writings on Aesthetics*, University of Manchester Press, Manchester, 1961; H. Meyer, “Schillers philosophische Rhetorik”, in Id., *Zarte Empirie. Studien zur Literaturgeschichte*, Metzler, Stuttgart, 1963; E. Wilkinson, “Zur Sprache und Struktur der Ästhetische Briefe”, *Akzente*, 5, 1959, pp. 389-418; P. de Man, “Kant and Schiller”, in A. Warminski (ed.), *Aesthetic Ideology*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996, pp. 129-162; and T. C. Kontje, *Constructing Reality: A Rhetorical Analysis of Friedrich Schillers Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Lang, New York, 1987.

⁴ On the philosophical curriculum of the *Karlschule*, see E. Müller, *Der Herzog und das Genie: Friedrich Schillers Jugendjahre*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 1953, pp. 36, 48, 91; P.-A. Alt, *Schiller*, Beck, Munich, 2009, vol. I, pp. 113-135; and W. Riedel, *Die Anthropologie des jungen Schiller*, Königshausen und Neumann, Würzburg, 1985, pp. 11-37.

among them Moses Mendelssohn, Ernst Platner and Christian Garve. They also studied, in German translation, the central figures of the Scottish Enlightenment: Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, Francis Hutcheson and David Hume; and they read in the French original the French materialists: La Mettrie, d'Holbach, and Helvétius. Their lectures introduced them to some of the latest thinking in aesthetics, especially the writings of Herder, Winckelmann, Sulzer, Lessing and Batteux. The *Karlschüler* were encouraged not only to acquire historical knowledge of past thinkers but they were also trained to think for themselves. Students were given much practice in writing: they had to compose essays, defend theses, and submit dissertations. In effect, this meant that Schiller was educated as a philosopher; indeed he became a philosopher before a poet.

If, then, we are to regard facts about Schiller the man as the deciding factor in the interpretation of his aesthetic writings, we are as justified in interpreting them philosophically as well as poetically. For Schiller's past shows that he was a philosopher before a poet, and that he had received more than the rudiments of a philosophical education. We have every reason, therefore, to expect and apply philosophical standards to Schiller's aesthetic writings.

Although Schiller saw himself first and foremost as a poet, there can still be no doubt that he saw his aesthetic writings as attempts at serious philosophy. Under the influence of Kant and Reinhold, Schiller stressed in these writings the importance of system, the need for clear conceptual distinctions, and the value of derivation from first principles. While he was not so confident or naïve to believe that he had fully attained these goals, he still insisted that it is necessary for every serious thinker to strive to approach them. All the major early aesthetic writings – *Kallias Briefe*, *Anmut und Würde*, *Aesthetische Briefe*, *Ueber naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung* – are efforts to find the first principles of aesthetics and to provide a system for them. While Schiller abandoned his effort in the *Kallias Briefe* to provide the first principle of aesthetics, he never abandoned the foundationalist program itself; indeed, he would make another attempt to provide aesthetics with a systematic foundation in Letters XI-XV of the *Aesthetische Briefe*, *Ueber naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung*.

So severe was Schiller's demand for clarity, rigor and system that it led to his sharp censure of some of his more lax philosophical contemporaries, among them F.W. von Ramdohr, J.G. Schlosser and, last but not least, Friedrich Schlegel. Since he found their writings vague, uncritical and shallow, he could not bear to read, publish or review them. When the thinking got tough, Schiller complained, they resorted to metaphors and appeals to feeling. One could not, as he grumbled to Goethe about Schlosser, "simply smell and feel one's way through metaphysics"⁵.

In this context it is highly instructive to compare Schiller with his romantic progeny, especially Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel. The post-modern reading of Schiller has its source, I would suggest, in a common confusion: the conflation of Schiller with his progeny, as if he held the views developed by his disciples. All too

⁵ See Schiller to Goethe, February 9, 1798, NA XXIX, p. 202.

often Schiller is classified as a romantic, as if there were no differences in principle between them. In the late 1790s, when Schiller had already laid down his philosophical pen, the young Novalis and Schlegel reacted against the foundationalist program that had once inspired Schiller. Unlike Schiller, they rejected the possibility of finding first principles in philosophy; and they were skeptical of all definitions and infallible criteria. The purpose of poetry, in their view, is to transcend the limits of discursivity, to attain an intuition or insight into the wholeness and unity of things which cannot be captured by the analytical intellect. We must be careful, however, not to read this later romantic doctrine back into Schiller. For all Schiller's influence on the romantics, he was much more critical about the claims of poetry, much more skeptical about its pretensions to provide a kind of immediate knowledge inaccessible to philosophy. In his insistence on first principles and systematicity, Schiller shows himself to be still loyal to the legacy of the *Aufklärung*, which had always attempted to provide a solid foundation for criticism.

2. *Kinds of Exposition*

How did Schiller conceive his own aesthetic writings? Did he see them as strictly philosophical? Or did he regard them mainly as poetic and rhetorical? The best clue for an answer to these questions comes from a short essay Schiller wrote for the *Horen* in 1795, "Ueber die nothwendigen Grenzen beim Gebrauch schöner Formen"⁶. Here Schiller himself poses the question of the proper limits of poetry and its role in philosophical discourse. The occasion for his doing so was Fichte's charge that his work, by relying too heavily upon the use of images, confused the boundaries between philosophy and poetry. To Fichte, it seemed as if Schiller was all too often allowing his argument to rest upon mere metaphor and suggestion rather than evidence and reasoning. Since Fichte's criticism impugned his philosophical integrity, Schiller could not allow it to go unanswered. His response to Fichte's challenge was that his aesthetic writings are indeed philosophical, though not entirely in the conventional sense Fichte had in mind.

The core of Schiller's essay is a distinction between three kinds of exposition or style: the popular, the scientific or philosophical, and the aesthetic or beautiful. A popular exposition appeals directly to our imagination, showing how concepts apply to specific examples in experience; it does not investigate, however, the grounds or reasoning behind these concepts. A scientific or philosophical exposition addresses our intellect alone, following the logical structure of the reasoning behind an investigation. An aesthetic exposition is the combination of the scientific and popular expositions: it follows the reasoning behind the concepts and it uses examples to appeal to the imagination of the reader. Following Kant's categories of modality, Schiller then classifies these forms of exposition according to whether they establish

⁶ NA XXI, pp. 3-27.

the possibility, reality or necessity of their subject matter (pp. 10-11). A scientific exposition attempts to demonstrate the necessity of its subject matter; an aesthetic exposition attempts to demonstrate its possibility or desirability; and a popular exposition attempts to show its reality. Which form we chose, Schiller says, depends on our purposes and audience. The scientific form is the best from the didactic point of view because it shows the reasons for the central theses; the popular or aesthetic forms are best where the aim is to convince people of the results of an investigation without going into the reasons for them (p. 11).

The crucial question is what form of exposition does Schiller attribute to his aesthetic writings? Remarkably, Schiller is not entirely explicit, leaving his readers to draw their own conclusions. Some have taken Schiller's ideal to be the aesthetic form of exposition, and so they have stressed the poetic and rhetorical dimension of the aesthetic writings⁷. This is indeed the basic premise behind the rhetorical approach. Upon closer inspection, however, the central and characteristic features of aesthetic exposition cannot be attributed to Schiller's aesthetic writings. For it was never Schiller's aim to present his results in pleasing form; he also wanted to demonstrate them, to show the reasons for them. And it was never his intention simply to show the possibility and desirability of his central ideas; he was also keen to show their necessity. All the close reasoning and systematic theorizing of *Kallias Briefe*, *Anmut und Würde*, *Aesthetische Briefe* and *Ueber naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* would be pointless if they were only instances of aesthetic exposition.

If only by elimination, then, it is clear that the only form of exposition that applies to Schiller's aesthetic writings is the scientific or philosophical. The crucial exposition then becomes: What *kind* of scientific or philosophical exposition? In a few dense pages Schiller sketches his own ideal (pp. 14-15). It is not, of course, the geometric method of Spinoza, still less the staid numbered paragraphs characteristic of Wolff and the German academic tradition. Schiller had something completely different in mind, something going back to the Platonic tradition⁸. His ideal philosophical method is reminiscent of the Platonic dialectic: it not only analyzes a whole into its parts but it also synthesizes the parts into a living whole. It appeals to not only our understanding, whose function is to analyze a whole into its parts, but also to our imagination, whose task is to reunify parts into a whole. Although Schiller gives no specific name to this method, he calls the writer who proceeds according to it "*der darstellende Schriftsteller*".

But at this point the post-modernist will still not admit defeat. He or she will still insist that though Schiller intends his work to be philosophy – although he wants it to be evaluated by standards of logical rigor – the fact remains that he fails to reach these standards. It is for just this reason, he or she will say, that we should

⁷ Th. Meyer, "Schillers philosophische Rhetorik", op. cit., pp. 386-389.

⁸ This point was stressed long ago by Ernst Cassirer, "Die Methodik des Idealismus in Schiller philosophischen Schriften", in Id., *Idee und Gestalt. Goethe / Schiller / Hölderlin / Kleist. Fünf Aufsätze*, Bruno Cassirer, Berlin, 1924, pp. 83-111, pp. 108-109.

appreciate his aesthetic writings only as poetry and rhetoric; for this alone explains their lack of coherence and rigour.

Yet this reply shows only the limitations of any purely rhetorical analysis of Schiller's texts. It demonstrates that a rhetorical analysis cannot replace but that it must follow a philosophical examination; for it is only when we have shown that the text really is incoherent and ambiguous that we can resort to rhetoric and poetry as an explanation for its incoherence and ambiguity. Are the texts really incoherent and ambiguous? This cannot be the starting assumption without simply begging the question; we can show that they are incoherent and ambiguous – in need of poetry and rhetoric as an explanation – only as a result of the *philosophical* analysis of the text. The rhetorical or poetic approach is therefore trumped by the philosophical. This approach has its place only *after* a proper philosophical examination, only after we show how Schiller fails to match his own standards of rigor and systematicity.

3. *An Objective Aesthetics*

Schiller clashes with post-modernism on much more than matters of exposition and style. He is also at odds with the post-modernists regarding the very basics of aesthetics. This is evident from Schiller's project in the *Kallias Briefe* to establish a science of aesthetics. Schiller was convinced that it is possible to formulate "an objective principle of taste", a concept of beauty which could serve as the criterion to judge impartially all matters of taste. It was Schiller's mission to rebuild aesthetics on a new critical foundation, just as Kant had done for metaphysics in the first *Kritik* and for ethics in the second *Kritik*.

Although Schiller modeled his project on the example of Kant, it was ironically Kant himself who had declared such a project to be impossible. In the third *Kritik* Kant had steadfastly maintained that there cannot be a science of aesthetics. Although he insisted that judgments of taste must be universalizable, he doubted that there could be objective principles to assess such judgments. He likened the search for such principles to the quest for "the philosopher's stone".

Schiller, however, could not reconcile himself to Kant's skepticism, which, he believed, stemmed from his limited experience with art. Schiller's quest for an objective aesthetic began from his dissatisfaction with Kant's account of aesthetic judgment in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Like many readers of Kant, Schiller had difficulty in squaring two aspects of Kant's analysis: first, his claim that aesthetic experience consists in only a feeling of pleasure, which "designates nothing whatsoever in the object (§1); and, second, his insistence that aesthetic judgment demands universal assent (§§6-8, pp. 32-33). The first point seems to undermine the second. For if an aesthetic judgement concerns only the feelings of the perceiver, which refer to nothing at all in the object, it is impossible to provide any justification or reason for it; and it is then difficult, if not impossible, to secure agreement or universal assent. If one perceiver finds an object beautiful and another sees it as ugly, they can resolve

their disagreement only by giving grounds for their judgments; and such grounds ultimately involve reference to some features of the object itself. It is necessary to identify, for example, the harmony of the design, the interplay of colors, the expressiveness of its lines, and so on. We need to know *what* makes the object beautiful. We cannot secure agreement simply by describing the feelings elicited by the objects. The point behind a criterion of beauty is then to determine the general nature of those objective features that make an object appear beautiful.

We can reformulate the rationale behind Schiller's project along these lines: there must be some *sufficient reason* within the object itself to justify the claim that it, rather than an object with different or opposing characteristics, is the source of pleasure. If the pleasure were completely independent of the object, then two persons could have the same pleasure from completely different objects, or they could have completely different pleasures from the same object. But if this is the case, in what sense could judgments of taste be universalizable? The universalizability of aesthetic judgment consists in not simply everyone liking a specific kind of experience, for reasons unknown to themselves, but also in everyone taking pleasure in the same kind of objects. Judgements of taste do not simply report pleasant feelings, but they also evaluate the merits and qualities of specific objects. The point behind a criterion of taste is to determine what these qualities have in common.

Whatever its ultimate merits, Schiller's claim that there must be some perceptual features of the object itself to serve as the basis for aesthetic judgment articulates one of the central beliefs of classical aesthetics. We might formulate this belief as follows: that if A is an object of art and A* is not an object of art, then there must be some *perceptual feature* of A that A* does not have. This perceptual feature serves as the sufficient reason for the judgement about A.

What does all this have to do with post-modernism? – you might ask. Well, this belief of classical aesthetics, as defended by Schiller, runs counter to the fundamental principle of aesthetic post-modernism as formulated by its high priest, Arthur Danto.⁹ This principle states that of two perceptually identical objects, one can be an object of art (Warhol's Brillo Box) and the other not be (the Brillo Box on the supermarket shelf). The problem with this principle, Schiller would say, is that it undermines all reason or justification of aesthetic judgment. For if an aesthetic judgment makes no reference to perceptual features of the object itself, how could one justify it? How could one expect others to feel the same? To appeal to the philosophy of the art world or its institutions, as Danto does, is only to take the judgment outside the sphere of aesthetic experience entirely.

⁹ A. Danto, "The Artworld", *Journal of Philosophy*, 61, 1964, pp. 571-584. See also his *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1981, pp. 1-5, 33-39, 90-91, 120-123, 136-139.

4. *The Aesthetic State*

I would like to challenge the post-modernist reading of Schiller on one final point. This concerns the interpretation of Schiller's culminating ideal at the close of his *Aesthetische Briefe*, the aesthetic state. The aesthetic state represents Schiller's utopia, his ideal of what society and the state should be when people realize their full humanity. Because it is both popular and prevalent, the post-modernist criticism of this ideal has to be challenged.

Schiller's aesthetic state is comprehensible only through his contrast with two other types of state, the *dynamic* state and the *ethical* state. The dynamic state treats humans simply as *physical* beings, who join society simply from self-interest or physical need. The ethical state regards humans as *rational* beings, who enter society because it is a moral law, prescribed by reason, to treat all human beings as ends-in-themselves. The aesthetic state regards humans as *whole* beings, who are both rational and sensible, who act morally not only because it is rational but also because it gives them pleasure. The citizens of the aesthetic state are the beautiful souls of Schiller's *Anmut und Würde*, who have so internalized the moral law that they do their duty not against inclination but from it (*Pflicht aus Neigung*).

Schiller's concept of the aesthetic state has been charged with having irrationalist and totalitarian implications. This criticism was first made by Adorno, but it has been adopted by post-modernists, specifically Paul de Man¹⁰. The chief premise for this interpretation is that in his ideal of the aesthetic state Schiller makes sentiment or feeling the basis of social bonds. The problem with making sentiment or feeling that basis of the state, we are told, is that they can be manipulated and controlled by unscrupulous politicians. Hence Schiller's aesthetic state can justify, or ultimately lead to, the fascist state.

Such criticism is unfounded, and for two basic reasons. First, it commits the common mistake of interpreting Schiller's sentiments and feelings as natural and pathological rather than acquired and practical. It fails to see, in other words, that the sentiments of Schiller's beautiful soul – the citizen of the aesthetic state – arise from internalizing and habitualizing moral laws, whose ultimate basis lies in reason. It is important to see that Schiller thinks that affection or sentiment should not replace but support reason as the foundation of the state. Second, it confuses the reason or justification of the laws with the impulse or incentive for executing them. Schiller made this distinction in Letter VIII of the *Aesthetische Briefe* when he declared that reason is necessary to discover and establish the law while feeling is necessary to execute it. We confuse this distinction, however, if we assume, wrongly, that Schiller holds feeling to be a sufficient justification for the law.

¹⁰ See P. de Man, "Kant and Schiller", op. cit., pp. 154-155; and Th. Adorno, *Aesthetische Theorie*, in Id., *Gesammelte Schriften*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1998, vol. VII, pp. 469-470.

In sum, I can only regard the encounter of Schiller scholarship with post-modernism as unfortunate. It has been fine insofar as post-modernism claims only to understand Schiller's place in the rhetorical tradition; but insofar as it tries to supersede a philosophical understanding of his writings it goes beyond its limits. The bottom line is that Schiller's aesthetic writings are philosophical in intention and have to be evaluated as such.

Perhaps this conclusion seems self-evident and old fashioned. But that is only because the fortunes of post-modernism are now receding and that the fashion for it has waned. That is very fortunate. For we can now approach Schiller anew and with fresh eyes, without the fear of being out of fashion.

Kuno Fischer: Schiller as a Bridge between *Kritizismus* and *Romantik*

SABATO DANZILLI

1. *Introduction*

The neo-Kantian movement profoundly reshaped the German philosophical landscape in the mid-nineteenth century. Yet, the early phase of neo-Kantianism followed a trajectory far more complex than the linear narratives of standard historiography often suggest. While Schiller had long been celebrated as one of the greatest German poets, his theoretical writings became the object of renewed attention in the context of neo-Kantianism's historical and systematic reappraisal of Kant and his legacy. Half a century after Schiller's death, the eminent German scholars Kuno Fischer and Friedrich Ueberweg, in 1858 and 1859 respectively, argued for a comprehensive approach that would integrate Schiller's philosophical, historical, and poetic writings. Alongside Friedrich Albert Lange, one of the formative figures of the Kantian revival, they played a pivotal role in this reappraisal. Fischer's *Schiller als Philosoph* (1858) stands among the earliest milestones of this renewed interest in the poet-philosopher, anticipating by a year the centennial celebration of his birth¹. This work preceded Fischer's celebrated lecture on *Kant and the Problem of Knowledge* by two years (1860), a milestone in the neo-Kantian revival (see Harrelson 2015). It not only offered a comprehensive interpretation of Schiller's aesthetic-philosophical theory but also positioned Schiller as the pivotal link through which German philosophy progressed, arguing that without him, "a gap would have opened up between the aesthetic principles of the critical school and those of the romantic school [...] between Kant and Schelling"².

Fischer's interpretation is significant in that it assigns a functional and integrative role to Schiller's philosophical writings, viewing them as the moment in which ethical and aesthetic dimensions fully converge to shape the totality of his *Weltanschauung*. The following discussion aims to demonstrate that this holistic vision finds

¹ As Köhnke observes, this commemorative event, alongside the 1862 centennial of Fichte's birth, was instrumental in defining the contours of the nineteenth-century German cultural landscape (Köhnke 1993, pp. 188-189).

² "Schiller der Erste war, der Kants Entdeckungen im ästhetischen Gebiet weiterführte [...] ohne ihn eine Kluft [...] zwischen Kant und Schelling" (Fischer 1858, p. vi).

its centre in the concept of *Bildung*, understood, in Fischer's reading, as the process that enables the harmonious unity of sensuous and rational impulses. Only to the educated man can we apply the notorious quote: "man should only play with beauty, and it is only with beauty that he should play because he is completely a man only when he plays" (Fischer 1858, p. 90). This achieves a state of "complete humanity" (*vollkommene Menschheit*), a resolution that can be seen as prefiguring the post-Kantian ideal of a unity of freedom and necessity (Fischer 1858, pp. 99–101).

In the substantially expanded second edition of *Schiller als Philosoph* (1892), a work of more than four hundred pages, Kuno Fischer will deepen his systematic effort to situate Schiller within the canon of German Idealist philosophy, treating his aesthetic and ethical concepts as the outcome of a continuous and coherent philosophical development. Through a meticulous examination of Schiller's early intellectual formation and education, Fischer will demonstrate how the young Schiller, initially influenced by materialism and a youthful skepticism, gradually moves beyond Wolffian eclecticism and the philosophy of common sense to embrace and re-interpret Kantian Idealism. Schiller's distinctive synthesis – most notably articulated in the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* – will be shown to mediate between ethical rationalism and aesthetic theory, establishing his thought as an indispensable link in the modern evolution of German Idealism. In this edition, too, Schiller appears as a creative innovator who actively contributes to the progression from Kant to later thinkers such as Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel.

The present paper develops Fischer's interpretation along two main axes: first, his conceptualisation of *Bildung* as a dialectical integration of ethical and aesthetic dimensions, understood as an ontological transformation of the self; second, his account of the play drive as the operative mechanism of this integration. While Fischer does not mention Hegel, his framework of resolving opposition into harmony offers a compelling similarity to Hegel's dialectical notion of reconciliation (*Versöhnung*)³. These two aspects, I will argue, reveal how Fischer redefines Schiller's place in the history of German philosophy and why his reading can be understood as the forger case of the neo-Kantian appropriation of Schiller.

³ The normative ideal of Schiller's 'play drive' (*Spieltrieb*), which he introduces in Letters XIV and XV of *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* follows a Kantian scheme – specifically, a transcendental argument – to mediate between the "sensuous drive" (*Stofftrieb*) and the "form drive" (*Formtrieb*). However, the specific teleological interpretation of this drive, which posits its ultimate *telos* as the achievement of a perfected "aesthetic state" (*der ästhetische Zustand*), is distinctly Fischerian. Kuno Fischer, in his foundational 1858 lecture *Schiller als Philosoph*, defines this goal not merely as a psychological bridge but as the fulfilment of human potential. Fischer (1858, pp. 91–93) describes this aesthetic state as the "point of indifference" between the two drives, an "equilibrium" that achieves "freedom of determination" (*Freiheit der Bestimmung*) and restores humanity to its "virgin, inviolate, unused predisposition". Fischer's interpretation of Hegel (see Fischer 1852 and [1899–1901] 1911) offers a model to which is possible compare the historical account of Schiller.

2. Historical and Intellectual Context

Within the broader framework of neo-Kantianism, Fischer occupies a distinctive position. Whereas later representatives of the Baden school, such as Windelband, emphasized the *Geltung* or normative validity of cultural and aesthetic values as timeless principles, Fischer shifted the focus toward the ontological dimension of aesthetic experience. In his interpretation of Schiller, beauty is not merely a vehicle of value. Still, it is the form through which freedom attains sensuous reality, and sensuousness itself is spiritualized, embodying an existential condition in which the individual partakes in the self-revelation of his fullness (Fischer 1858, p. 100). This speculative accent, inherited from his Hegelian background, coexists with a neo-Kantian sensitivity to the autonomy of the aesthetic sphere; it is precisely this synthesis of Idealist aspiration with critical discipline that gives Fischer's historiography its characteristic tone.

Historically, Fischer stands at the threshold of the neo-Kantian revival. As Köhnke (1993, pp. 195-211) shows, his work in the 1850s and 1860s helped reopen Kantian philosophy to systematic reconstruction after the decline of Hegelian orthodoxy. In this light, *Schiller als Philosoph* can be seen as an early and influential exercise in the neo-Kantian reevaluation of aesthetics: a work that recasts a poet's reflections on beauty into a decisive chapter in the philosophy of freedom, and in so doing, exemplifies the aspiration to recover the unity of systematic philosophy without abandoning the critical discipline of Kant's method (see Beiser 2005).

When Fischer delivered his lecture on Schiller at the 'Rose' in Jena on March 1858, 10th, the city already occupied a symbolic place in the intellectual biography of both Idealist and post-Idealist thought⁴. It was here that Schiller himself had engaged in his most intensive philosophical activity during the 1790s. According to Fischer, it was precisely these aesthetic writings, developed during his time in Jena, that enabled Schiller's "ascent to the classic heights of poetry". This philosophical period marks the decisive transition from his earlier works, like *Don Carlos*, to the "poetic mastery" (Fischer 1858, p. 5) of his classical dramas, beginning with *Wallenstein*⁵. Fischer frames Schiller's Jena period as a distinct "philosophical phase" (1858, p. 12) bounded chronologically by *Don Carlos* and *Wallenstein* but defined even more precisely on an intrinsic level by two didactic poems: *The Artists* at its beginning and *The Ideal and Life* at its end. As Fischer notes, in the first poem Schiller "de-poeticized himself to philosophize, whereas in the second, he de-philosophized himself to poeticize again". This period, according to Fischer, is not an interlude in Schiller's career but an essential stage in his artistic development: "A path that leads so surely to such a goal in so short a time cannot have been a lost one, nor even a detour" (1858, p. 6). By situating Schiller in this mediating role, Fischer decisively distances him from a merely Kantian framework. He acknowledges that Kant's *Critique*

⁴ The *Vorrede* is dated June 1858, 24th.

⁵ Fischer 1858, p. 10.

of *Judgment* deeply marked Schiller's philosophical formation. Still, he insists that Schiller "carried forward" Kant's aesthetic discoveries in a manner that addressed "the unresolved oppositions of the critical philosophy" (Fischer 1858, p. vi). Chief among these, in Fischer's reconstruction, is the tension between *Pflicht* (duty) and *Neigung* (inclination), which Fischer describes as a "harsh and inexorable opposition" in Kant's thought, where virtue demands nothing less than the "sacrifice of individual inclination". Schiller's innovation, as Fischer presents it, lies in refusing to suppress inclination and instead integrating it into the moral life through aesthetic education.

He finds the first evidence of this in Schiller's concept of "grace" (*Anmut*), which he defines as the moment when "the moral soul becomes a beautiful soul", where duty has become so natural that it acts as a second nature. The structure of the 1858 book, with the aesthetics 'below', 'besides', and 'above' morality, is not a mere explanatory artifice. It is the mapping of a philosophical evolution that Fischer identifies as Schiller's direct response to the most significant political trauma of his time: the Terror of the French Revolution. Such an analysis enables us to connect the three elements (Fischer's structure, Schiller's Aesthetic Letters, and the French Revolution) profoundly. Schiller himself, in *Grace and Dignity*, articulates the idea of the "beautiful soul" (*schöne Seele*), in whom "duty and inclination coincide" (Schiller [1793] 2005, p. 152), thereby already engaging with the moral dualism of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and proposing its aesthetic reconciliation. Likewise, in the *Letters*, the mediation of the sensuous and rational impulses is not merely an anthropological or pedagogical motif, but a deliberate philosophical intervention within the post-Kantian discourse on freedom and nature, in a context in which authors like Jacobi, Reinhold, or Fichte operated. What Fischer does is to systematise and historicise this intervention: he makes Schiller stand "in a mobile middle" between Kant and Goethe, traversing the "intellectual space" that separates them (Fischer 1858, p. 8), and transforming Schiller's aesthetic project into a decisive moment in the historical development of German philosophy.

In his *Vorrede*, Fischer makes clear that Schiller's philosophical writings deserve "a separate, monographic presentation" precisely because they unite two distinct values: the historical, for the development of German philosophy after Kant, and the poetic, for the self-understanding of the poet himself (1858, p. vii). Fischer frames Schiller's entire philosophical enterprise as the bond required to "bridge the spiritual distance" between Kant's critical dissections and the vital fullness of Goethe's poetry. This tension is evident in Fischer's analysis of Schiller's essays. *Grace and Dignity* is presented as Schiller's attempt to place himself "halfway between the two", seeking a balance between Kant's ethical rigor and Goethe's aesthetic naturalism. Fischer points out that this work, in its attempt at mediation, ended up displeasing both: Kant found it "too much bound to the senses", while Goethe judged it "too moralizing" (Fischer 1858, pp. 74-75). The *Letters on Aesthetic Education*, on the contrary, represent the successful synthesis. Fischer notes that Goethe, unlike his reaction to *Grace and Dignity*, found himself in complete agreement with the *Let-*

ters. This is because the *Letters* (which represent the “aesthetic standpoint above the moral”) finally managed to provide the philosophical scaffolding for what Goethe already naively embodied. They integrate Kant’s transcendental discoveries with the lived and classical ideal that Fischer identifies with Goethe (pp. 96-97). This point is by no means, for Fischer, a softening of Kantian rigorism, but an advancement. Fischer argues that Schiller intuits a higher form of morality where the conflict is not merely won by duty but dissolved into harmony⁶.

Fischer places the writing of *the Letters on Aesthetic Education* in a precise historical context. The French Revolution, like Fischer reports, was the catastrophic attempt to impose the “state of reason” (the pure moral ideal, the *Kantian telos* of freedom) directly on the “state of necessity” (the sensible and crude reality of the masses). The result was barbarism. Fischer (and Schiller) are explicit: this attempt failed because the “small generation” was not ready for that “great historical moment”. The revolutionaries tried to make a somersault, ignoring the “unbridgeable abyss” that separated the ideal from reality, an abyss that the Revolution “tried in vain to fill with corpses”.

Why did the jump fail? Because, in the political equation, there was no middle term.

- 1) The State of Necessity (the raw people) is sub-moral.
- 2) The State of Reason (the ideal of the “Republic of Virtue”) is purely moral.

The attempt to impose morality on non-morality by force (the Terror) does not elevate the people but corrupts morality itself. This is where Fischer’s triadic structure comes into play. It describes not only Schiller’s books, but the *discovery* of this missing link:

- 1) Aesthetics “Under” Morals (Chap. IV): This is the starting point. Art is a tool to educate us in morality. Tragedy (the pathetic) teaches us the moral sublime, that is, the ability to sacrifice the inclination to duty. This is the standard Kantian model, but, as the Revolution has shown, it is insufficient.
- 2) Aesthetics “Alongside” Morals (Chap. VI): It is the phase of balance. Schiller, with Grace and Dignity, discovers that the ideal is not only the sublime (victory over the sensible), but also grace (harmony with the sensible). Morality (Dignity) and Aesthetics (Grace) become equal partners. But this still does not resolve the political conflict; it only creates a dualism.
- 3) Aesthetics “Above” Morals (Chap. VII): It is the radical solution of the *Letters*. Fischer shows that Schiller overturns the hierarchy. To heal the historical fracture, man must not first become moral and then enjoy art. On the contrary: “You have to become aesthetic before you can become moral”. The “Aesthetic State” – that state of “perfect balance” and “freedom of determination” – is the only bridge that can close the chasm between the State of Necessity and the State of Reason.

⁶ “[Man] must learn to desire more nobly so that he does not need to will sublimely” (Fischer 1858, p. 88).

Fischer's structure is not a mere taxonomy, but above all a prognosis. It is the demonstration that the role of aesthetics for the political life, too, for Schiller, is not a luxury, but a political and historical necessity in a State after the French Revolution. The failure of the French Revolution was, in fact, not a failure of the ideal (Reason), but a *methodological* failure. It was the attempt to reach the 'above' (morality), starting from the 'below' (necessity), without going through the 'next' (aesthetic balance). Only by educating humanity through beauty (aesthetics) can a citizen be formed who is naturally moral, thus making the guillotine (moral rigorism imposed by force) not only barbaric, but superfluous.

This, however, should not be understood as a purely Fischerian or an aleatory projection. As Beiser (2005, p. 268) has argued, Fischer's conception nevertheless smooths over conceptual ruptures in favor of a continuous narrative of progress, attempting to reconcile systematic analysis and historical sensitivity. Fischer's *Schiller als Philosoph*, as the coeval works of Ueberweg or Lange, does not merely portray a poet engaging with Kantian aesthetics but constructs Schiller as a neo-Kantian. In addition, if we consider the very conception of Idealism by Fischer, according to him from Kant to Hegel, that is a strictly syncretic view, Schiller's philosophy is the proper bridge through which critical philosophy is transformed into philosophy of identity, and through which the dualisms of the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* are reinterpreted as stages within an historical logic of integration – and further, as a proper mediation in the oeuvre of Schiller self. From this standpoint, Schiller is a crucial figure in the teleology of German philosophy, and the Schiller-Schriften constitute a central point in Fischer's academic life. His role, in Fischer's neo-Kantian narrative, is to affect a passage from the dualisms of the critical system to the integrated vision of freedom and nature that later Idealism would articulate.

3. *Bildung as dialectical integration of ethics and aesthetics*

A central theme in Fischer's interpretation of Schiller is the concept of *Bildung* (formation or education), understood not simply as intellectual cultivation but as the process through which humanity attains its full and harmonious realization. In *Schiller als Philosoph*, Fischer repeatedly emphasises that Schiller's notion of *Bildung* – which he employs in place of *Erziehung* – designates the formative process by which the sensuous and rational dimensions of human nature are brought into harmony, resulting in a unified self in which ethical and aesthetic capacities are inextricably intertwined (Fischer 1858, pp. 32-33, 110-113). Although Fischer himself does not formulate an explicit opposition between *Bildung* and *Kultur*, we could infer that his emphasis on inward, organic self-formation anticipates the later neo-Kantian distinction between formative subjectivity and the objective realm of culture. In this respect, as Hammermeister (2002, p. 51) notes, "Aesthetic man, in turn, is considered to mediate between natural and ideal man. This latter transition is further developed in Schiller's theory of drives, which is based on Fichte's model

of impulses. In the context of his moral philosophy, Fichte had stated that the natural drive and the drive of freedom, the 'pure drive', must be united in a third drive, namely that of morality. Schiller adopts this basic model, yet he makes decisive changes when working out his own conception of the three drives, most notably in respect to the third, contrasting with Fischer's lecture, which assigns a limited role to Fichte in Schiller's legacy (Fischer 1858, pp. 164-165).

Whereas *Kultur* refers to the external achievements of civilisation – its institutions, arts, and sciences – Fischer's interest lies in the inward dynamic of self-formation that underlies them: *Bildung* as the living process through which the very culture itself becomes possible. Fischer's focus is not on the cultural artifacts Schiller inherited or produced, but on the inner mechanism of his genius and the philosophical logic of his self-cultivation. Thus, we can maintain that *Bildung* emerges for Fischer as the most adequate term to express this intimate yet world-historical process of becoming, in other words, a process that fuses the ethical and the aesthetic in a single movement of spiritual development.

In Kuno Fischer's 1858 intellectual landscape, the preference for *Bildung* over *Kultur* looks like a deliberate philosophical choice steeped in the legacy of German Idealism insofar Fischer's concept of *Bildung* aligns less with Humboldt's liberal individualism than with the Idealist tradition of Goethe and Hegel, more as a figure of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, for whom formation signifies the organic self-realisation of spirit. It is the dynamic unfolding of an individual's innate potential toward a harmonious whole, a spiritual and moral journey. Upon closer examination, Fischer's entire monograph is structured as an *Entwicklung* (development), tracing Schiller's own path as the very embodiment of this philosophical-historical process—a personal struggle and intellectual ascent that has universal significance.

Fischer's normative understanding of *Bildung* stems from his reading of Schiller's progression from Kant's moral rigorism to a more integrative vision of ethics and aesthetics. While Kant grounded morality in pure reason and demanded the subordination of inclination to duty, Schiller reintroduced inclination into the moral life, a step Fischer deems both philosophically justified and historically essential. For Schiller, aesthetic education precedes moral freedom.

In Fischer's account, *ästhetische Bildung* possesses a dual scope: it is both the cultivation of the individual and the developmental process of humanity at large. On the individual level, *Bildung transforms* "the empirical man, held captive by the power of sensuous desire and the darkness of mere representation" into "the moral man" (Fischer 1858, pp. 44-45). On the historical level, Fischer maps this transformation onto a progression: from the *Notstaat* (State of Need), governed by necessity and utility, through the *Ästhetischer Staat* (Aesthetic State), in which the harmonising power of beauty reconciles nature and freedom, to the *Vernunftstaat* (State of Reason), where moral law reigns without coercion (Fischer 1858, pp. 91-93). What makes Schiller historically relevant as a philosopher, too, lies in showing why the middle term, the Aesthetic State, is not just a passage, but the very foundation of the final stage.

As Fischer vividly puts it, the French Revolution, a direct attempt to leap from the State of Need to the State of Reason, failed catastrophically because it tried to build a rational state on the foundation of “raw, wild instincts of the masses” (Fischer 1858, p. 81). Only aesthetic education can bridge this chasm by ennobling the senses and purifying emotions, making citizens who desire the good rather than being merely commanded by it. Thus, the aesthetic is not preparatory to the moral; it is its very condition of possibility. Surely it is possible to infer that Schiller considers the idea of revolution firstly as inner reform, similar to Luther’s Reform and his role in the very inner of the soul of a Christian⁷. As Frederick Beiser observes, Schiller aims to establish a politics of aesthetics that can prepare the cultural and psychological conditions for freedom. In this sense, culture – and not just the law – becomes the architectural principle of human progress⁸. An editor of the *Letters* affirms that Schiller has here a ‘quasi-Burkean’ conception⁹.

Here, it is essential to distinguish Fischer’s synthesis from Schiller’s own. In the *Aesthetic Letters*, Schiller indeed describes the “State of Need” and the “State of Reason”, and famously inserts the “Aesthetic State” as the indispensable mediation between the two (Schiller [1795] 2016, Letters 4-9). For Schiller, this triad is primarily a normative schema, an account of how humanity *should* progress if it is to harmonise its sensuous and rational natures. Fischer, however, employing his characteristic *Entwicklungsgeschichte* model, reinterprets this schema as a historical teleology. For Fischer, the aesthetic state transcends mere idealism to become a necessary historical phase in the actual cultural development of humankind. This teleological interpretation has far-reaching implications. For Fischer, *Bildung* is no longer an exclusively individual undertaking, and this may well explain his deliberate choice of *Bildung* rather than *Erziehung*. Instead, it becomes the individual’s inherent participation within a collective historical trajectory aiming for a higher synthesis, wherein the moral and the aesthetic are inseparably integrated through the dialectical unfolding of history itself. Fischer explicitly links this progression to Schiller’s response to the French Revolution, viewing the aesthetic phase as the indispensable educational step omitted by the revolutionaries in their failed ‘direct jump’ to a purely rational state (Cf. 1858, p. 81).

However, it is vital, as Heuer (2005, p. 76) cautions, not to over-Hegelianize Schiller’s own position. Schiller, aligned more closely with Kant in this respect, emphasizes the receptivity inherent in aesthetic experience. It involves an openness to fulfilment and a ‘lingering’ with appearance (*Schein*) that allows for experiencing unity, without necessarily translating into the active self-determination characteristic of Fichtean or Hegelian idealism. This focus on receptive harmony, rather than dialectical self-positing through negation, marks a crucial dividing line, separating

⁷ Cf. Bornkamm 1955, in particular pp. 11-27.

⁸ Cf. Beiser 2005, pp. 73-74, on the idea of a “politics of the aesthetic” aimed at preparing the cultural and inner conditions of freedom.

⁹ Schmidt 2017, p. 15.

Kant and Schiller from the more activist conceptions found later in German Idealism. For Schiller, the aesthetic encounter offers a unique mode of experiencing human wholeness that does not demand the immediate sublation (*Aufhebung*) into rational certainty or self-conscious spirit.

Fischer's emphasis also discloses a profound historical and normative distinction. Composing his work in post-Hegelian yet pre-unified Germany, Fischer sought to reconcile historical consciousness with philosophical normativity, narrating progress without succumbing to speculative determinism. In this framework, *Bildung* acquires a prescriptive force that *Kultur* lacks: it is not a record of what humanity is, but an imperative of what it ought to become. If this reading is sound, *Schiller als Philosoph* already participates in the neo-Kantian problematic, translating Schiller's aesthetic education into a teleological passage from the state of necessity to that of reason.

Kultur can be static, fragmented, or even decadent, but *Bildung* is, by its very nature, a movement toward the improvement of self. In the context of the 1850s, with the grand systems of idealism in decline, refocusing on the individual's capacity for *Bildung* offered a powerful humanistic anchor, grounding philosophical progress not in an abstract World Spirit, but in the concrete, lived potential for aesthetic and moral harmony that Fischer saw perfectly realized in Schiller.

Fischer's shift is evident in the analysis of Schiller's theory of tragedy. In the chapter on *Art under the moral standpoint*, Fischer notes that Schiller deliberately rejects the Aristotelian order (*phobos + eleos*) and breaks with the Aristotelian tradition by excluding fear (*phobos*) and focusing the tragic effect solely on compassion (*Mitleid*). Fischer explains this momentous shift by arguing that for Aristotle, the object of fear was destiny, as a gigantic, external force (*gigantisches Schicksal*). Schiller, however, internalizes the conflict: the tragic struggle is no longer against destiny but is a battle of the moral will against the sensuous inclination. In Schiller's framework, Fischer argues, "the moral law has taken the place of destiny", thus making fear of an external power obsolete¹⁰. This moralization of tragedy, where greatness is measured by the hero's self-sacrifice for an ethical end, is for Fischer a prime example of Schiller's unique position: he translates the core concerns of Kantian morality into a new aesthetic form.

4. *The Spieltrieb as a mechanism of reconciliation*

If *Bildung* is the process, the *Spieltrieb* (play drive) is the key mechanism by which the reconciliation of reason and sense is achieved. Drawing closely on Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Fischer describes the *Spieltrieb* as the

¹⁰ For the overall architecture, refer to section "IX. Poetik oder Theorie der Dichtkunst" (Fischer 1858, p. 115), while on the sense of *phobos* see ivi the Fischer's reference to the interpretation of Aristotle by Bernays ([1853-1857] 1880).

drive that “harmonises the sensuous impulse (*Stofftrieb*) with the formal impulse (*Formtrieb*), allowing the individual to experience freedom in and through the sensuous” (Fischer 1858, pp. 88-90).

The *Spieltrieb* is not merely a psychological phenomenon, but the fundamental drive through which human nature achieves its completion. It creates what Fischer calls a “determinable calm that we perceive as freedom”. He explains this equilibrium with a striking physical analogy: when two opposing forces act with equal energy on a single subject, that subject is placed in a state of ‘perfect rest’ and ‘total indifference’. This indifference, Fischer argues, is precisely the aesthetic state, a ‘removal of necessity’ that constitutes true freedom. (Fischer 1858, pp. 104-105).

From a historiographical standpoint, Fischer’s elevation of the *Spieltrieb* must be read as a symptom of mid-nineteenth-century philosophy’s struggle to reconcile critical epistemology with the lost unity of speculative reason. In *Schiller als Philosoph*, the *Spieltrieb* becomes the conceptual instrument through which the post-Hegelian demand for synthesis could survive under Kantian auspices: not a metaphysical process, but a “critical” development (*kritische Entwicklung*). This transformation discloses the methodological horizon of Fischer’s generation: the attempt to reintroduce normativity into history without falling back into a speculative system. In this sense, the reception of *Spieltrieb* operates as a historiographical cipher as well: it encodes the neo-Kantian effort to translate the dialectic into a theory of cultural values, marking the moment when German philosophy shifted from system to history without renouncing the totality.

Fischer’s revival of Schiller can be seen as a reflective counterpart to the function that Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* fulfilled in the post-Terror intellectual landscape. In both contexts (the 1790s and the 1850s), the aesthetic emerges as a surrogate of moral and political restoration: a means to reconcile freedom with order once revolutionary transcendence had collapsed into violence or disillusion. Post-1848 Germany, much like Thermidorian France, faced the exhaustion of its emancipatory promise; Fischer’s interpretation of Schiller thus converts aesthetic education into a program for cultural self-discipline, a way of translating political failure into ethical formation. The *Spieltrieb* becomes, in this light, the philosophical analogue of post-revolutionary moderation: a critical substitute for metaphysics and a pedagogical remedy for freedom’s excess. Fischer’s interpretation transforms Schiller’s concept into a philosophical hinge, preserving the critical rigor of Kantian epistemology while recuperating, in a purified form, the integrative dynamism of Hegel’s logic of development. And without the *Aufhebung*. Fischer, it is worth repeating, was in fact a liminal figure – trained in a Young Hegelian milieu but a promoter of the neo-Kantian revival – who effectively reinterpreted the dialectical movement as a “critical” development, suitable for a culture seeking both historical continuity and epistemological legitimacy (see Beiser 2014). The *Letters*, depicted as the found equilibrium between Goethian organicism and Kantian criticism, become emblematic and forerunners of the broader shift within the Baden school, away from Kant’s epistemological strictures toward a more expansive con-

ception of reason's scope (Beiser 2005, p. 282). Schiller's aesthetic state, mediated by the play drive, is recast as a necessary moment in the teleology of freedom: not a contingent aesthetic relaxation, but a constitutive stage in the unfolding of spirit in a fully cultivated form. Fischer's historical narrative thus embeds the *Spieltrieb* within a cultural logic akin to Windelband's later insistence on the *Kulturwissenschaften* as immanent to the history (see *Schillers transzendentaler Idealismus*).

However, Fischer speaks in post-1848 Germany, and therefore, he should imagine freedom as culturally achieved rather than politically given. What appears in Schiller as the timeless play of *Bildung* thus, in Fischer's reading, turns into the temporal logic of cultural self-redemption. Fischer's interpretive move – anticipating the Baden programme of integrating value-logic with a philosophy of history – turns the 'aesthetical education' into a pivot category: it is both an intra-personal principle of harmony and a transpersonal mechanism of historical development. In this respect, Fischer's Schiller parallels the Baden neo-Kantian reinterpretation of Hegel: the substantial *Geist* of the *Phänomenologie* is transposed into a transcendental, normative function, no longer a concrete historical substance but a condition of intelligibility for history itself.

Thus, in Fischer's synthesis, Schiller's aesthetic theory becomes a central chapter in the philosophy of freedom, a chapter in which play is the very mode in which humanity rehearses and realises the reconciliation of necessity and liberty. This recasting reveals the deep structural affinities between Schiller's work and the Baden school's ideal of a cultural reason (*kulturelle Vernunft*). This reason is historical in its genesis yet normative in its claims (see Windelband's account of Critical and Genetical Method). In the nineteenth-century German context, this must be read as a cultural-political project: to restore a unifying horizon to a fragmented intellectual landscape without lapsing into the metaphysical totalizations the age had learned to distrust.

Kuno Fischer's compelling argument for Schiller as a philosophical bridge culminates in his analysis of Schiller's pivotal essay, *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*. Fischer posits this distinction not merely as a literary classification but as the diagnostic key to modernity itself (Fischer 1858, p. 116).

According to Fischer's reading, the 'naive' poet, exemplified by Homer and Shakespeare, represents nature and reality directly, inhabiting an unproblematic unity because he is nature, creating objective representations without self-reflection. The 'sentimental' poet, conversely, emerges precisely from the loss of this primordial unity. He does not possess nature but consciously seeks it as an ideal, acutely aware of the contrast between the flawed reality he inhabits and the lost harmony he desires (1858, p. 119).

This framework allows Fischer to identify Schiller himself as the quintessential 'sentimental' poet. Fischer argues that Schiller's entire artistic and philosophical project is born from this awareness of the rupture between the real and the ideal. This is a division which Fischer explicitly links to the post-Kantian condition, where sensibility and reason are no longer naively unified. Schiller's philosophy, particu-

larly his aesthetic theory, which developed after he grappled with Kant, provides the intellectual tools for his poetic mission. His sentimental poetry thus becomes a conscious, reflective attempt to heal this division aesthetically, striving to build a bridge back towards harmony, albeit on a higher, self-conscious level than that of the naive poet. Schiller embodies the bridge precisely because he is a sentimental poet, whose work consciously mediates the dualisms that the naive artist never even perceived (1858, pp. 105-106).

5. *Cultural reason (kulturelle Vernunft) and the Schiller–Fischer–neo-Kantian nexus*

Fischer's historical framing is emphatic from the outset: by "carrying forward Kant's results" (Fischer 1858, p. vi) into a vision of beauty as the living unity of form and life. What makes this connexion truly decisive for Fischer is that it is not only thematic but methodological. Schiller's contribution preserves the critical distinctions, acknowledging the specificity of aesthetic judgment, but locates within aesthetic experience the *real possibility* of their higher synthesis. The aesthetic state is that condition in which man is at once determined and determining, free from every determination yet open to all (1858, p. 104), a formulation that both guards Kant's autonomy of reason and opens toward the Romantic vision of unity.

This mediating function safeguards the Romantic aspiration to unity from degenerating into monism. This is a lesson for the neo-Kantians, which they found philosophically untenable, while also preventing Kant's critical system from ossifying into a static dualism. In the arc that runs from Kant to Hegel, Schiller occupies the pivotal middle position: the point at which the ethical and the aesthetic are integrated in a way that transforms both, yet without sacrificing the formality of the critical standpoint. His thought offers a model of integration that is both historically situated in the post-Kantian ferment and philosophically resonant in Fischer's late-nineteenth-century context, when the neo-Kantian project sought to reconcile the demands of critical rigor with the lived richness of cultural and historical life.

To situate Fischer's interpretation of Friedrich Schiller within a broader framework, it is fruitful to invoke the notion of *kulturelle Vernunft*. I understand this as an interpretative paradigm derived from transcendental and cultural idealism, formulated by Wilhelm Windelband, which conceives of culture as a 'mediation' between reason and cultural goods, or, more precisely, as reason realised and articulated through the norms of culture. This concept offers a significant scheme through which to understand Fischer's appropriation of Schiller. For the thinkers of South-Western neo-Kantianism, such as Windelband and Rickert, values are not confined to the theoretical sphere but are manifested in the creation, preservation, and interpretation of cultural artefacts. Fischer's reading of Schiller can thus be seen as an early anticipation of this view: the aesthetic faculty is not a mere adjunct to cognition or morality, but a fundamental expression of reason's cultural actuality, a mediating link between the validity of values and the concrete unfolding of history.

In Fischer's hands, Schiller's *Aesthetic State* becomes the paradigm of *kulturelle Vernunft* in action. The play drive mediates between sensuous impulse and formal law, but its significance is not exhausted at the level of individual psychology; it represents the mode by which a culture integrates its empirical life-forms with its normative ideals. This is where Fischer extends Schiller beyond his formulations. In the *Aesthetic Letters*, Schiller's "beautiful soul" and *Aesthetic State* remain primarily individual and normative ideals; nevertheless, they are aimed at forming citizens capable of freedom. The *Letters* fully accomplish the abstractive constitution of *Grace and Dignity*. Considering the aesthetic point of view alongside the moral one is a 'culturalization' of morality, which opens up to the ethics of Idealism.

This reframing aligns Schiller with the Baden conception of the 'sciences of the individual', in which works of art, moral codes, and institutions are all bearers of objective values. Schiller is crucial for neo-Kantianism because he embodies the perfect model of that 'objective Spirit' without the Hegelian Dialectic, which informs the wholeness of the neo-Kantian movement (see Gigliotti 2019). Fischer's account of aesthetics anticipates the neo-Kantian thesis that such values possess a kind of *Geltung* independent of their empirical occurrence, yet require cultural-historical embodiment to be realized. Thus, Fischer's Schiller must be read not just as the philosopher of harmony between nature and freedom, but the herald of a *cultural reason* that becomes central to neo-Kantian philosophy at the turn of the century, as Windelband 1905 will make clear.

6. Conclusion

The concept of *Entwicklung* is the structural key to Fischer's historiography, revealing how he navigates between the legacies of Kant and Hegel. For Kant, the architectonic of reason is static and ahistorical, regarding the possibility of human cognition and moral life in general. Hegel, by contrast, embeds reason in a dialectical process, where truth unfolds historically through the self-mediation of spirit. Fischer's *Entwicklung* appropriates Hegel's dynamic without accepting his speculative metaphysics.

In *Schiller als Philosoph*, the concept of *Entwicklung* can be understood as a narrative of progressive integration: Kant's critical separation of the faculties is retained as an indispensable methodological achievement, yet it is embedded within a teleological movement striving toward their higher unity. Schiller's appropriation of Kant's philosophy thus constitutes the first decisive stage in this developmental trajectory. Then Schiller returns to poetry. This conception of *Entwicklung* enabled Fischer to present a comprehensive narrative of German philosophy, linking Kant to Hegel. It also provided the neo-Kantian revival with a model for integrating historical consciousness into the critical project: the idea that philosophy must both respect the a priori structures of reason and account for their concrete historical realizations.

For Fischer, Schiller's decisive philosophical phase runs from 1792 to 1796, during his Jena years, "from *Don Carlos* to *Wallenstein*, from Kant to Goethe" (1858,

p. 8), when the poet engages in a systematic exploration of *Bildung* and the harmonisation of *Stofftrieb* and *Formtrieb* through the mediating *Spieltrieb*. This triadic structure culminates in the *Aesthetic State*. Fischer's reading of *Anmut und Würde* and the *Aesthetic Letters* emphasises the ontological scope of this reconciliation: beauty is not a mere adornment to life but the very form in which freedom becomes sensuous and sensuousness becomes free. His treatment of Schiller's theory of tragedy underscores the same shift – away from Aristotle's *eleos* and *phobos* grounded in fate, towards a moral pathos rooted in “the hero's self-sacrificing freedom” (1858, p. 165), where the tragic is no longer dictated by blind necessity but by the ethical autonomy of the will.

Kuno Fischer's *Schiller als Philosoph* constructs its argument on a tripartite progression: art is situated under, alongside, and above the moral point of view. Yet this structure also encodes a broader philosophical historiography: the ascent from the moral to the aesthetic reproduces, in miniature, the evolution of German thought from Kant's ethical formalism to the Romantic ideal of synthesis. By interpreting *Bildung* as the dialectical mediation of these spheres, and the *Spieltrieb* as its operative principle, Fischer transforms Schiller's theory of aesthetic education into a model for philosophy's self-development after Kant, a ‘critical dialectic’ that substitutes historical formation for speculative system. This reading has three significant implications for the neo-Kantian reception of Schiller. First, it elevates Schiller's philosophical writings to a central place in the history of ideas, challenging the view that they are ancillary to his poetry. Second, it frames aesthetic experience as an ontological event, a transformation of the self in which freedom and necessity, individuality and universality, are reconciled. Third, it reaffirms the historical continuity between Kant's critical project and Romantic metaphysics, a continuity that neo-Kantianism sought to preserve and reinterpret in the context of late nineteenth-century debates.

Ultimately, Fischer presents a version of Schiller who, having completed his philosophical journey, fully understands his own vocation. He is the poet who, when Jupiter divides the world among men, is absent because he was contemplating the divine. Fischer concludes his entire analysis with this image, citing Schiller's poem *The Partition of the Earth*. When the poet is asked where he was, he replies:

‘I was’, spoke the poet, ‘with you’... Forgive the spirit who, intoxicated by your light, lost the earthly!¹¹

For Fischer, this is Schiller's ultimate self-confession: the poet who sacrifices the empirical world to grasp the ideal, and in doing so, builds a bridge for all humanity to a higher, aesthetic reality.

¹¹ From Fischer 1858, p. 170.

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Materialism, Ideals and Political Myths. Friedrich Lange's Interpretation of Schiller and its Legacy

PAOLO PECERE

I. Friedrich Lange's original development of Kantianism in *The History of Materialism and Critique of Its Present Importance* has long been interpreted through the historiographical category of "physiological neo-Kantianism"¹. This notion has led to the mistaken view that Lange *reduced* Kantian idealism to physiological concepts. Moreover, focusing on physiology as the defining element of Lange's neo-Kantianism downplays its fundamental aesthetic, moral, and political dimensions. An examination of Lange's interpretation of Schiller is revealing in this regard, beginning with his striking statement that "among all the Kantians, the one who comes closest to my view is none other than Schiller" (GdM¹, p. v).

Although Lange had several other models for his theoretical reframing of Kantian idealism, Schiller's poetry proved exemplary for the shaping of Lange's original ideas on freedom and religion. Lange's view was to reconceive historically changing ideals – including religious representations – in aesthetic and poetic terms, independently of their illusory theoretical value, as a fundamental factor that must accompany and support social and political change. These ideas were formulated in the final section of the *History of Materialism*, "The Standpoint of the Ideal", which commentators have notably considered obscure and problematic. As we will see, the same ideas resurfaced in Lange's posthumously published *Introduction and Commentary to Schiller's Philosophical Poems* (1897)². A parallel reading of these works, I will argue, sheds light on Lange's conception of Schiller's work as a model for improving Kantianism.

II. Lange believed that Schiller's insight genuinely helped to correct "mistakes" in Kant's "deductions": "Above all, Schiller grasped the very core of his teachings

¹ This notion was established by Hermann Cohen's critical interpretation of Lange's view, as based on a "mistake": "He puts the apriority in the 'psycho-physical organization' of human beings and does not recognize the possibility of experience as the starting point of transcendental investigations" (Cohen 1871, p. 208). This contrast between a "physiological direction (Helmholtz, Lange)" of Neo-Kantianism and the "logical [*logizistische*] Kantianism (Cohen, Natorp, Cassirer– the Marburg school)" was reprised by Friedrich Ueberweg (1923, p. 417) and became a historiographic standard, with the former view usually described as "unorthodox" (Lanier Anderson 2005, p. 306), if not untenable. For a critical outline see Kuehn 2010; Pecere 2021.

² On this book see Russo Krauss 2025.

with divinatory power and purified them of scholastic slag” (GdM², p. 416). The mistaken element corresponded to Kant’s rational idea of the moral law as a necessary principle of morals, which, in turn, was grounded in the doctrine of freedom as a kind of noumenal causality. Lange made clear that he intended to amend Kant’s system already in the first edition of the *History of Materialism*, where he summarizes the “core” of Kant’s philosophy in three propositions:

The phenomenal world results from our concepts: this is precisely why it is the most important and most rewarding object of our knowledge. Only a relative truth is accessible to us, and this lies only in experience.

Ideas do not give us knowledge but lead us into an imaginary world; precisely therein lies their usefulness. We deceive ourselves if we want to expand our knowledge through them; we enrich ourselves if we make them the basis of our actions.

The only absolute that man has is the moral law, and from this firm point an order is to be brought into the fluctuating world of ideas just as securely as it is already given for the intellectual world by the arrangement of our mind (GdM¹, p. 277).

As Lange puts it: “The first two contain the permanent [element]; the third the subjective and contingent” (ibid.). Kant’s mistake lay in the counterfactual belief in the timelessness of the moral law, whose foundation through the postulates of pure reason restored a spurious metaphysical element to critical philosophy. Lange’s philosophical project was to reconceive the Absolute as a “picture”, notably a “symbol” (GdM¹, p. 539).

This replacement of a rational with an aesthetic notion immediately evokes Schiller’s work. Since the *Philosophy of Physiology* (1779), Schiller had engaged with the rising physiological materialism, dealing with the connection among the sensory organs, nerves and the “organ of thought [*Denkorgan*]“, and especially the foundation of “morality in humans”, arguing that the beautiful morally improves individuals (Schiller 1869-1870). These topics resurfaced in the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), where Schiller famously challenged Kant’s sharp opposition between morals and sensibility, arguing:

It is therefore one of the most important tasks of culture to subordinate man to form even in his mere physical life, and to make him aesthetic as far as the realm of beauty can ever reach, because only from the aesthetic, rather than from the physical state, can the moral develop (Schiller [1795] 2000, p. 92, my translation).

Lange pointed out that Schiller’s investigation of the physical, aesthetic and moral dimension of human beings ran parallel to Kant’s; but what he valued most was Schiller’s transition from philosophy to poetry, which he considered a more radical departure from academic Kantianism. In poems such as “Das Ideal und das Leben” and “Die Spaziergang”, Lange found the “ripened fruit” of Schiller’s philosophical engagement with Kant (EKS, p. 26).

Despite these parallels and references, Lange’s idea of a “corrected Kantianism” drew on other sources. It is important to consider these sources as a background for the peculiar role of Schiller’s poetry in Lange’s philosophical project.

III. In the section of the *History of Materialism* devoted to contemporary natural science, Lange included a long examination of the physiology of sense organs, introduced by Johannes Müller and completed by Hermann von Helmholtz, arguing that the latter was the “developed and corrected Kantianism” (GdM¹, p. 482). According to Lange, a proper understanding of this single scientific theory made it possible to establish the separation between the phenomena of matter – whose properties are conditioned in general by the human sensory “organization” and belong to the domain of knowledge – and the world in itself, which cannot be an object of knowledge. This result, achieved through natural science rather than through a metaphysical deduction, served to accommodate features of experience such as the quality of sensations and aesthetic values within the domain of neurophysiology, avoiding both reductive materialism (of the kind advocated by Karl Vogt and other 19th century “scientific materialists”) and metaphysical claims³.

The connection between this scientific field and Kantianism was established by Helmholtz in his speech “On Human Vision” (1855), where he maintained that Kant’s philosophy investigated “the contribution of our particular innate laws of the mind, as it were, of the organization of our mind [*Organisation des Geistes*], to our representations” (Helmholtz 1884, p. 379). Lange similarly argued that “our whole experience is conditioned by a mental organization which constrains us to experience as we experience, to think as we think, while to another organization the same objects may appear quite different” (GdM¹, p. 236). However, Lange’s interpretation of this notion differed from Helmholtz’s. In his later works, Helmholtz incorporated ideas of transcendental philosophy, arguing that space is indeed a “form of intuition” and that causality is “a law of our thought, preceding all experience”, i.e. a condition of unconscious inferences that establish perception. These were epistemological conditions with no metaphysical implications, whether materialist or idealist. The domain for investigating these non-empirical conditions of experience – “the laws and nature of mental activities” – was called “pure psychology” (Helmholtz 1867, p. 427).

In contrast with this reformed view of a priori conditions, Lange conceived a more naturalistic project based on the idea that materialism is correct as a method for scientific investigation, although it is mistaken as a metaphysical claim about the world. In this regard, he coined the expression “materialism of the phenomenon” (GdM², p. 702) Hence the organization of the mind included all kinds of conditions of human experience, such as space and intellectual categories, ruling out any reference to the “supersensible” in the Kantian style. As Lange put it: “we are still using the materialistic method to explain the alleged supersensible, thought, from the sensible” (GdM¹, p. 492). On this project, “the highest functions of reason”, including Helmholtz’s unconscious inferences, were consistent with materialist explanations (*Erklärungen*) (GdM¹, p. 496).

³ On the 19th century German “materialism controversy” (*Materialismusstreit*) see Gregory 1977, Bayertz, Gerhard, Jaeschke 2007, Beiser 2014, pp. 53-69; Morel 2017, Pecere 2024.

In Lange's view, Kant's highest condition of experience, the unity of synthesis, was no longer associated with the I, and there was no "pure thinking", only "connection". In this respect, the mediating role of the subject is "superfluous" (GdM¹, p. 490). The justification of phenomenalism was achieved through the physiology of perception and did not rely on transcendental concepts⁴. A parallel shift concerned logical and aesthetic values: while Kant had defended the autonomy of judgment through pure principles – whether of logic, morals or aesthetic judgement – Lange developed a different view. He abandoned a priori arguments and granted that every kind of value was entirely based on neurophysiological processes: "Even the most abstract concept is hardly anything other than a sum of an infinite number of very intricately connected nerve impulses in the subject who thinks it" (GdM¹, p. 457). Nevertheless, he maintained that spiritual values cannot be described merely in terms of neurophysiological processes:

As far as the *spiritual value* of the sensory content is concerned, this too cannot be completely separated from the *physical phenomenon* [...] we therefore have not the slightest reason to look for the *spiritually meaningful, the artistically formed sensation or the meaningful thought* outside the ordinary sensory processes. But of course, we must not proceed like a person who wants to discover the melodies that an organ can play in the individual pipes" (ibid.).

In this and other passages, Lange hinted – using the terms of today's philosophy of mind – at a theory of supervenience and emergence. This theory echoes similar non-reductive attempts by scientists and philosophers that were dealing with the physicalist foundation of psychological and scientific processes, such as Emil du Bois-Reymond and Wilhelm Wundt⁵. A logical foundation for such non-reductive view of values had been notably attempted by John Stuart Mill in the perspective of associationist psychology. According to Mill, "complex ideas" (e.g. moral ideas) cannot be considered the "sum" of the effects of the concurring causes and may be of a different kind from those effects (Mill 1843, II, p. 502). According to Lange, in general, Mill "asserts the rights of psychology [...] against the strictly materialistic view" (GdM², p. 701)⁶. This parallel with Mill is instructive for our purposes. Lange's rejection of the I and the a priori led commentators to characterize his phi-

⁴ "Given that there is a physical mechanism in the body which produces the inferences of the mind and the senses, we are immediately faced with the questions: What is the body? What is matter? What is the physical? And modern physiology, as well as philosophy, must answer to these questions that all these are only our representations" (GdM¹, 500).

⁵ On du Bois-Reymond see Tennant 2007, Finkelstein 2013 and Pecere 2020. On Wundt see Araujo 2016.

⁶ Cf. Mill 1843, II, pp. 590-591: "Further, that every mental state has a nervous state for its immediate antecedent and proximate cause, though extremely probable, cannot hitherto be said to be proved [...] and even were it certain, yet every one must admit that we are wholly ignorant of the characteristics of these nervous states [...] The successions, therefore, which obtain among mental phenomena do not admit of being deduced from the physiological laws of our nervous organization [...] Since, therefore, the order of our mental phenomena must be studied in those phenomena, and

losophy as “naturalist” or a “skeptic” rather than Kantian⁷. Nevertheless, Lange’s dissatisfaction with some of Mill’s views is revealing. He criticizes Mill’s empiricism for denying the “necessity” of empirical inferences, which he takes to be grounded on our organisation (GdM¹, p. 249). As regards morals and aesthetics, he points to the absence of the Ideal in Mill’s views. Mill, he argues, “fails to recognize in his “utilitarianism” the ideal, form-creating element that underlies this striving for harmony in the moral world as well as the aspirations of art” (GdM¹, p. 523). Here Lange diverges from all the above-mentioned thinkers and takes an original turn – one that leads toward the model of Schiller’s poetry.

IV. As we have seen, Lange’s reshaping of Kantian philosophy is driven by a firm anti-metaphysical stance. However, his sharp rejection of metaphysics as a cognitive enterprise – aimed at the supersensible and the transcendent – introduces a shift to an entirely new concept of metaphysics, defined as the “edifying art of conceptualization” (GdM¹, p. 266). In the *Introduction and Commentary to Schiller’s Philosophical Poems*, he speaks of “fictitious truth” (*Erdichtete Wahrheit*). This notion does not concern scientific truth, which stands in its validity, but remains limited to the alleged knowledge of the Absolute. In this respect, Lange concludes: “We can only poetize about absolute truth [*Eine absolute Wahrheit können wir nur noch dichten*]“ (EKS, pp. 9-10).

Commentators have often lamented the obscurity of this part of Lange’s philosophy (see e.g. Köhnke 1991, p. 160). It is arguably clear that, by conceiving metaphysics as “art”, Lange sought to articulate his own alternative path in philosophy – one that, as we will see, could develop into a political-cultural project. First, he intended to deny any truth-value to metaphysics, turning it into a historically contingent and relative worldview, thereby disposing of the alleged speculative knowledge of post Kantian idealists. On the other hand, he aimed to reaffirm his anti-reductive claims against materialism.

But if our thoughts and actions generate and demand ideas that lie beyond all experience, then at least no materialistic metaphysics can sit in judgment on them. There is no truth that can exercise absolute dominion in the realm of the beautiful and the good. Even if one were ever to arrive at a complete explanation of the emergence of an idea from psychological and physiological conditions, the idea itself would neither be explained nor judged. The sculptor can make use of anatomy and physiology; but he will never make his judgment of the beauty of the human body dependent on an insight into its physical conditions (GdM¹, p. 276).

Overall, art remained for Lange the way to freely and creatively explore the field of the unknown and the ideal – territories that had traditionally been assigned to dogmatic metaphysics. Precisely because artistic and poetic fictions make no claim

not inferred from the laws of any phenomena more general, there is a distinct and separate Science of Mind”.

⁷ Köhnke 1991, pp. 161-167; Beiser 2014b, pp. 356-397, in part. pp. 358, 386; Edgar 2016, p. 113n.; Hussain, Patton 2021.

to absolute truth, they are protected from any confutation: “Art is free, even in the field of concepts. Who wants to refute a movement by Beethoven, and who wants to accuse Raphael’s Madonna of error?” (GdM¹, p. 269).

It also appears evident that Lange considered this view a way out of the misguided claims to universality of Kant’s moral philosophy. As he writes, following the passage just quoted on art and materialism:

But the right which Kant attributed to his moral philosophy is likewise due to every other moral philosophy, and if Kant believed that he had proved his own absolutely, he was only committing the common error of all metaphysicians (GdM¹, p. 277).

Of course, on this view metaphysical ideas appear divorced from rational argument, which is philosophically problematic – especially since Lange, as we will see, introduced this view as a means for realizing his cultural project. I will return to this issue in the final section. To be sure, Lange was perfectly aware that he was advocating the value of a contingent and non-demonstrative form of expression, reviving a connection between art and religion that had been extensively investigated in early nineteenth-century German philosophy.

Religion has therefore always been *inseparable from art* in times that unite a certain degree of education and piety. There the true value of ideas lies in the form, as it were in the *style* of the architecture of ideas and in the *impression* of this architecture of ideas on the mind (GdM¹, p. 539, my italics).

This emphasis on “style” and on the “impression” made upon the mind (*Gemüth, animus*) immediately evokes the semantic field of rhetoric. The same is true of the notion of “symbol”. This conceptual shift can read interpreted against the background of German idealism. Any reader of Kant’s Third Critique could recall the aesthetic use of “symbol” in § 59, where Kant’s entire discussion of “hypotyposes” relied on the language of rhetoric: “schemes” exhibit concepts, “symbols” exhibit ideas – notably, “the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good” (Kant 1900 ff., V, pp. 351-353). Now, once the field of the supersensible is reduced to a fiction and no longer serves to make room for the ideas of reason, the Absolute itself can become a symbol. If we consider at how Hegel reworked this constellation of notions in the Philosophy of Spirit – one more background presence here – we may understand Lange as rejecting Hegel’s return to philosophy as a science of the absolute and his claim that religion stands over art. The result is a “symbolic” art understood as the production of historically changing ideas (and ideals) that, being art, shares with rhetoric the power to move feelings.

This latter point is explicitly mentioned in the book on Schiller, where Lange characterizes the “task” of philosophical poems:

We would almost like to say that the task of the poems of the philosophical genre is the reverse of that of the prose writings, namely to create a certain sacred awe by revealing their full depth” (EKS, p. xiv).

We are now in the position to characterize more precisely how Lange understood Schiller's poems as models for a poetic replacement of metaphysics and religion.

V. Lange clearly spelled out the great historical-philosophical importance he attributed to Schiller's poetry in the second edition of the *History of Materialism*, juxtaposing the poet with Kant and Plato. The crucial point, once again, was the transformation of metaphysics into poetry, now endowed with the specific function of counteracting the pessimism that can arise from the unilateral contemplation of effective reality.

Kant did not want to recognize what Plato did not want to recognize: that *the "intelligible world" is a world of poetry* and that its *value* and dignity rest precisely on this. For poetry in the high and comprehensive sense [...] is a necessary birth of the spirit, bursting forth from the innermost life roots of the species, the source of all that is high and holy, and a fully valid counterweight to the *pessimism* that springs from a one-sided dwelling in reality (GdM², 415, my italics).

The implicit criticism of Kant's merely rational, Platonic intelligible world, taken as a psychologically ineffective representation, detached from reality and thus potentially conducive to pessimism, is key to understanding why Lange favored Schiller's poems over his essays. The point is not longer, as in the *Letters*, to provide an aesthetic bridge from the abstract rational rigor of morality to the sensible life of the individual, for morality is no longer separated from historically contingent values embodied in cultural objects and practices. Hence, in Lange's view, Schiller's poems are not merely aesthetically inspiring representations of a rationally defined ideal; rather, they are the actual source of the ideal. From this perspective, Lange takes poetry as a modern reprise of Plato's mythology:

Schiller rightly made the intelligible world vivid by treating it as a poet, and in doing so he *followed in the footsteps of Plato*, who, in contradiction to his own dialectic, created the highest when he made the supersensible sensual in myth [...] Schiller, the 'poet of freedom', was allowed to dare to place freedom openly in the 'realm of dreams' and in the 'realm of shadows', for under his hand dreams and shadows become the ideal (GdM², pp. 415-416, my italics).

Lange's reference to Plato's myths suggests the political dimension that his interpretation eventually takes. Ideals, as we will see, are not merely models for the moral behavior of the individual. The definition of Schiller as the "poet of freedom" can be referred to both moral and political freedom, and his poetic gift is admired for its capacity to endow "dreams" and "shadows" – contrary to standard Platonic metaphorology, where they stand for delusions as the merely unreal – with the dignity of pictures of ideals that can direct the human will.

In theoretical terms, the transition from Kant-critique to mythology had been a much-debated topic in the circle of Jena. The "religion of art" of the ancient Greeks was already debated by Wilhelm von Humboldt, with reference to Schiller's 1788 poem "The Gods of Greece", in his 1789 *Discourse on Religion* (Humboldt 1903, p.

65). While Humboldt believed that the State should not shape morality and religion, the need for a “new mythology” in the framework of modern political communities was formulated in the fragment *The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism*, drafted in 1796/1797 by Hegel, who has been attributed to Hegel himself, Schelling or Hölderlin⁸. These ideas echoed Herder’s contemporary critique of the view of history as a progress or rationality: in *Iduna* (1796) Herder argued that reason itself “is formed through fictions”, hence he emphasized the historical importance of mythical imagination (Herder [1877] 1913, XVIII, p. 485). In the *Discourse on mythology* (1795), Friedrich Schlegel – elaborating on Schiller’s *Letters* – spoke of a “new mythology” that “must be formed out of the deepest depths of the spirit; it must be the most artificial of all works of art, for it must embrace all others”, and arguing that “poetry and mythology are one, and inseparable”⁹. In this context, Wilhelm von Humboldt was among the first to recognize the philosophical value of Schiller’s *poetry*, claiming that Schiller achieved a “transition from metaphysics to poetry” (August 4, 1795, in Humboldt, Schiller 1830, p. 119). Schiller indeed held that “poetry” (*Dichtkunst*) uniquely “unif[ies] the disjointed powers of the soul” and he was already aware of a difficulty that Lange would later highlight in the reevaluation of his poems: that of bridging the “tremendous abyss” between highly educated readers and uneducated masses¹⁰.

Against this background, Lange’s view of Schiller’s poems as expression of moral and religious ideals appears historically well-rooted and not particularly original. What is characteristic of Lange’s view is that he emphasizes – besides Schiller’s poetic transformation of abstract ideals into sensory elements – their eliciting, conversely, a flight from the limited world of the senses towards the ideals. This point is emphasized in both editions of the *History of Materialism*:

What religion and morality only ever cherish as good cannot be portrayed more purely and powerfully than in that immortal hymn that concludes with the ascension of the tortured son of the gods. Here *the escape from the barriers of the senses into the intelligible world* is embodied. We follow the God who “flamingly separates himself from man” and now dream and truth change roles (GdM¹, p. 416, my italics).

In Schiller’s philosophical poems we have before us an achievement which *combines the highest elevation above reality with the noblest rigor of thought, and which gives the ideal an overwhelming power by placing it openly and unreservedly in the realm of the imagination* (GdM², 828, my italics).

I think this motif must be related to the German “materialism controversy”. The declared objective of the *History of Materialism* was to provide a “definitive solution

⁸ See Jamme, Schneider 1984. On this topic see Frank 1982.

⁹ Schlegel [1795] 1967, II, pp. 311-312. Schlegel’s ideas were mentioned by Karl Tomaschek’s in a book on Schiller that Lange takes into careful consideration (Tomaschek 1862, p. 451).

¹⁰ See Pinna 2018, p. 153. Pinna aptly connects Schiller’s worries with the problem of unifying Kantian universalism and historical contingency (ibid, p. 161).

to certain cardinal points in the controversy on materialism” (GdM¹, p. v), and these arguably included not only the theoretical issue of scientific materialism as a mistaken interpretation of natural science, but also the ethical, religious and political dimension of materialism – dimensions closely tied to the hopes and pessimism that followed the revolutions of 1848.

VI. One of the boldest claims of the “Standpoint of the Ideal” was Lange’s theory of a replacement of traditional religion. To understand this debated section – the culmination of Lange’s book – and its connection to his interpretation of Schiller’s poems, we must consider the broader framework of the political and cultural situation of post-1848 Germany, a period of wars and political turmoil marked by clashes between conservative forces and revolutionary and workers’ movements. Lange participated in the 1848 revolutions; their failure forced him to migrate to Switzerland, and he later shifted to non-violent political activity. He was particularly supportive of the worker’s movement and of its economic background, to which he devoted *The Labour Question* (1865)¹¹. Against this background, Lange envisioned the replacement of traditional religion with secular forms capable of inspiring political action.

He mentions Schiller’s poetry in this perspective. After reiterating that “free poetry” can leave the ground of effective reality and become a new mythology, he writes that “In his ‘Realm of Shadows’ [*Reich der Schatten*], Schiller generalized the Christian doctrine of redemption into the idea of an aesthetic redemption” (GdM², pp. 829-830). To understand this connection between the work of a contemporary poet and a millennia-old religion, we must consider two further contextual elements. First, Schiller was a celebrated figure who played a pivotal role in shaping German national identity and the education system. Lange’s unfinished book on Schiller, in fact, responded to a series of publications devoted to the poet’s centennial anniversary. Second, the Christian Church represented a deeply conservative force which, from Lange’s point of view, had lost its original function of embodying the ideal against political power:

Certainly, as long as religion is cultivated in closed church communities by priests who present themselves to the people as privileged dispensers of divine mysteries, the *standpoint of the ideal* in religion will never be able to emerge purely (GdM², p. 838).

Lange’s recourse to Schiller thus belongs to a broader belief in the political potential of idealism. For example, he celebrated the “poetic elevation” of Fichte’s revolutionary speeches (GdM², p. 835). More generally, he held that inspiring ideas and social activism were inseparable conditions for raising the condition of the oppressed masses:

If a new age is to come into being and the old to pass away, two great things must be combined: a world-inflaming ethical idea and a social effort powerful enough to lift the

¹¹ On this side of Lange’s activity and thought see Chiara Russo Krauss’ essay in the present collection.

depressed masses up a great step. This will not be achieved by sober reason, by artificial systems [...] Only a great ideal will achieve victory over fragmenting egoism (GdM², p. 840).

Lange's political-cultural perspective is thus clearly formulated and firmly partisan. At this point, we must return to the problem of the historically contingent content of ideals, which Lange himself connects to relativism. In the *Introduction and Commentary to Schiller's Philosophical Poems*, he reformulates the shift from Kantian systematic idealism to the relativity of systems. According to Lange, Kant was mistaken in believing in a single "architectonic of human knowledge" (by which he means any systematic organization and justification of ideas). The validity of a system is like a "style" in architecture. This shift from the rhetoric to the aesthetic notion of style illustrates the intrinsic historicity of systems of knowledge and of their validity: "Strictly speaking, any system can only have its full meaning for the individual who creates it, and the *objective validity* of the system can only be *relative*" (EKS, p. 7, my italics).

In Lange's description of the subject matter of an ideal poem, he includes the "logical relativity of all our concepts", only to remark that the recognition of the limits of intellectual endeavours drives toward the ideal:

The subject matter of the poem would be the annihilation of all metaphysics, the proof of the *logical relativity of all our concepts*; the purpose, on the other hand, which becomes more and more firmly and insistently expressed in each such negative part, could be expressed in the words: 'So escape the vain musings of the mind, and *when the mechanism of the world of appearances oppresses you, rescue your mind into the realm of ideas*' (EKS, p. 15, my italics).

However obscure or counterintuitive these claims may appear, they can be connected to Lange's philosophical-political views. On the one hand, he rejected all forms of metaphysical rationalization of the present, as conducive to inaction and resignation (examples include religious providentialism, the Hegelian rationalization of the Real, and even Marxist dialectics conceived as a historical mechanism). On the other hand, his analysis of society convinced him of the need to support the oppressed masses. The empirical investigation of economy and welfare may have been provided Lange with a means of scientifically justifying a historically contingent ideal without abandoning his thesis of relativity: the ideal in question was indeed relative to a specific historical moment.

In any case, Lange certainly formulated these views in response to the critical historical conditions of contemporary Europe, where the "flag of a great idea" could decisively shape the future. The "social question" was

a question in whose broad field all the revolutionary elements of science, religion and politics seem to have found their *battleground* for a great *decisive battle*. Be it that this battle remains an unbloody battle of wits, be it that it throws the ruins of a past world-period thunderously into the dust like an earthquake and buries millions under the rubble: certainly *the new age will not triumph unless under the banner of a great idea*

which sweeps away egoism and sets human perfection in human fellowship as a new goal in place of restless toil which almost exclusively focuses on personal gain (GdM¹, p. 557, my italics).

VII. I have tried to show how Lange's ideas about a new mythology for socialism related to the historical-political context and were consistent with his estimation of Schiller's poems as an example of how poetic language can move the masses. I have also suggested how these ideas could be compatible with Lange's thesis of the relativity of all systems of values. Nevertheless, the legacy of this constellation of views was both controversial and diverse.

On the one hand, neo-Kantian thinkers developed different theories of ethical values. Hermann Cohen, who took over Lange's chair in Marburg, rejected Lange's "organization of the mind" and "Standpoint of the Ideal", driving a turn back to transcendentalism and systematic philosophy. Although a socialist himself, Cohen thus departed from Lange's philosophical-political views. Baden neo-Kantianism developed a theory of values that responded indeed to Lange's account but abstracted from its political framework (see Russo Krauss 2023).

A different legacy characterized non-Kantian thinkers. Nietzsche famously admitted his huge debt to Lange's *History of Materialism* and his pragmatic theory of truth and values mirrors some of Lange's formulations, e.g. in his famous definition of truth as "a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished" (Nietzsche [1873] 1999)¹². Of course, Nietzsche's view of ideals was different from Lange's and very distant from socialism, showing the plasticity of relativism.

A particularly interesting case concerns socialist thinkers. Eduard Bernstein notably invoked a return to Lange as a model for his socialist revisionist challenge to dialectical materialism (Barker 1986). Thus Lange's work continued to circulate in socialist circles. A suggestive hypothesis is that his ideas about new myths – directly, or possibly through Nietzsche – could have inspired George Sorel. As is well known, Sorel theorized the need for new secular myths for socialism, taking as an example the "syndacalistic 'general strike' and Marx's catastrophic revolution" (Sorel 1915, p. 22). As is equally well known, his ideas eventually influenced Mussolini. As shown by Carlo Ginzburg, the idea of political myths in the early twentieth century engaged socialist and communist intellectuals and eventually characterized the rise of fascism (Ginzburg 2001 and 2023, pp. 41-96). The return to political myths was already connected to totalitarianism and to the legacy of Plato by the last representative of Marburg neo-Kantianism, Ernst Cassirer, in *The Myth of the State*. To Cassirer, this political and cultural development was entirely and violently opposed to the legacy of the Enlightenment represented by Kant and Schiller (Cassirer [1946] 1961).

¹² On Lange and Nietzsche, see Stack 1983 and Eibl 2001.

Lange's hope that collective, poetically shaped ideals could lead the masses to free themselves from oppression stands in sharp contrast to these later interpretations. To be sure, it is not clear whether Lange inspired Sorel, and hence had any cultural connection to these developments, although a passage of Sorel's *Reflections on violence* (1908) echoes Lange's words and suggests that the power of political myths, detached from rationality, could hardly be guided by libertarian ideas.

Men who are participating in a great social movement always picture their coming action as a battle in which their cause is certain to triumph [...] This construction of future events, based on no rational analysis, but on the power of myth, is indispensable to their struggle (Sorel 1915, p. 22).

Abbreviations

- EKS F. A. Lange, *Einleitung und Kommentar zu Schillers philosophischen Gedichten*, Velhagen & Klasing, Bielefeld-Leipzig, 1897.
- GdM¹ F. A. Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart*, Baedeker, Iserlohn, 1866.
- GdM² F. A. Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart*, 2 vols., Baedeker, Iserlohn, 2nd ed., 1873-1875, republished in 1887 with an Introduction by H. Cohen.

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Friedrich Albert Lange's Project of Schillerian Kantianism as the Philosophy for the Industrial Revolution

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1. *Introduction*

In his book *Die Arbeiterfrage* (The Workers Question), Friedrich Albert Lange writes that Schiller's concept of 'aesthetic redemption' "is in all probability more closely connected with the solution to the social question than one might initially believe" (Lange [1865] 1875, p. 142). Understanding this puzzling statement means grasping Lange's entire philosophical project, which aimed to develop a form of Schillerian Kantianism in order to establish it as the spiritual backbone of the new industrialized society.

Germany was undergoing rapid change during Lange's time. The Industrial Revolution led to urbanization and an increase in factory workers. Social movements grew bolder in demanding rights, representation, improved living conditions, and national unity. The so called "second scientific revolution" (Kuhn 1977, Watson 2011) sparked the heated *Materialismusstreit* (materialism controversy), raising the question of whether humans are merely cogs in the lawful mechanism of nature (see Gregory 1977, Bayertz et al. 2012).

Lange witnessed these changes from their epicenter in Germany's industrial region of Rhineland, and he foresaw the risk that this seismic shift in the fabric of society could coalesce and solidify in a way that would mean the descent of humanity into a state of spiritual dryness. As Stack pointed out in his book on Lange and Nietzsche, "Although there is nothing in Lange's work corresponding to Nietzsche's meticulous analysis of European nihilism, the confluence of social, economic and theoretical-scientific conflicting forces that Lange describes points to a coming crisis in the Western world that only lacks the designation 'nihilism'" (Stack 1983, p. 18).

In fact, Lange believed that the new conception of man and nature, prompted by the latest advances in science, could merge with the economic system of industrial capitalism, thereby turning scientific materialism into an *ethical materialism* (HM III, p. 233), according to which each individual is nothing but an animal that cares only about self-preservation, maximizing pleasure, and increasing possessions. Physics, physiology, Darwinian biology, and classical economics all seemed to

support this disenchanted view of the world¹, in which human behavior is entirely determined by natural laws and egoistic purposes, whereas free will, purely ethical motives, and religious beliefs are relics of a superstitious past.

According to Lange, countering the “dogmatic egoism” (HM III, p. 248) of ethical materialism was not only a moral duty but also necessary for preserving civilization. Without a sense of unity and communion to guide moral, social, and political action, the Industrial Revolution would increase the disparity between the working class and the wealthy elite. This would weaken the social bond and undermine the stability of national states, putting them at risk of a downfall similar to that following the French Revolution or the fall of the Roman Empire, which would bring a setback on the path of historical progress (HM III, pp. 261 ff.).

To avoid these bleak prospects, Lange believed that German and, more broadly, European culture required a philosophy capable of fostering the spiritual force within man which prompts us towards emancipation from our animality, moral self-improvement, and the development of a sense of community, thereby ensuring real progress. However, Lange was also aware that such a philosophy could not simply reject the latest scientific findings, commit to the dying metaphysics of absolute idealism, or escape into irrationalism. Indeed, Lange aimed to find a middle path between the two opposing fields of philosophical debate at the time. On one side were thinkers who acknowledged the latest scientific progress and believed that philosophy could survive only as a tool to provide foundation and unity to the sciences, which implied the death of philosophy as metaphysics and its resurgence merely as a theory of knowledge. On the other side were thinkers who tried to counter the materialist and positivist arguments by downplaying the implications of recent scientific discoveries and reaffirming the dogmas of the old metaphysical and religious worldview².

For Lange, the only philosophy that could safely guide us along this middle path – being a theory of knowledge for the new sciences, but also *more than that*, in order to support the spiritual dimension of man – was Kantianism. Indeed, unlike the initial proponents of the ‘Back to Kant’ movement, Lange did not view the core of Kant’s thought as consisting only of the transcendental foundation for Newtonian physics and the critique of metaphysics. Rather, he believed that the essence of Kantian philosophy was its ability to provide solid ground for the natural sciences *while also* celebrating the spontaneity of reason and the principle of moral autonomy in the practical realm.

¹ On the Weberian notion of ‘disenchantment of the world’, and its similarities and differences with Schiller’s *Entgotterung der Natur*, see the essay by Edoardo Massimilla in this volume.

² In fact, this attempt to use Kant in order to find a third way between scientific materialism and old religious metaphysics was a defying characteristic of the neo-Kantian movement, as pointed out by Köhnke 1991, pp. 95-96. As Lange belongs to the early phase of neo-Kantianism, it can be argued that the success of his *History of Materialism* was central in establishing a reworking of Kant’s philosophy as this third way.

In the Preface to the first edition of the *History of Materialism*, Lange acknowledges that “Kant has recently gained greater recognition” not only in “the narrow circle of academic philosophy”, but “especially among natural scientists”, to the point that “from a purely *theoretical* point of view, the issues at stake are already clear to many in their full significance” (Lange 1866, iv). At the same time, Lange criticizes the representatives of the resurgence of Kantianism for not having taken seriously Kant’s “rescue of ideas on a practical level [*Rettung der Ideen auf praktischem Wege*]”, and consequently neglecting “an essential element of Kant’s view, namely the sincere [...] *appraisal* [*Werthschätzung*] of the ideas whose theoretical groundlessness Kant demonstrates” (ibid.).

This means that, as early as 1866, Lange regarded the revival of Kant’s theory of knowledge as an achieved goal within the culture of his time. What was still missing was a resurgence of Kant’s *entire project* – a project revolving around the practical domain, in which we find the pillars of man’s moral destination to realize freedom as autonomy in the course of world history. For Lange, reducing Kant’s philosophy to its epistemological content alone would mean losing its deeper, truer meaning as a testament to the dignity of man as a free, moral, and rational being.

However, there was a reason why the early ‘Back to Kant’ movement focused on the theoretical side of Kant’s thought. Indeed, it was precisely Kant’s moral philosophy that harbored the seeds for the return of metaphysics in the years that followed. The practical domain was the field in which Kant reinstated the old metaphysical ideas of free will, immortal soul, and God. Moreover, in Kant’s ethics, pure moral will offers a way to transcend the appearance of phenomena and achieve a point of contact with the noumenal ego, and thus with the realm of things-in-themselves. So, it was not surprising that thinkers such as Schopenhauer – or Fichte and the other idealists who followed him – based their metaphysical systems on the practical domain: they were simply exploiting the loopholes that Kant himself had carved into his otherwise strict critical philosophy (see HM II, p. 231 and EKS, p. 6).

In light of this, if Lange wanted to revive the entire Kantian project, he had to eliminate all metaphysical remnants from Kant’s practical philosophy. In his eyes, this would mean staying true to Kant’s original aim, i.e. demonstrating that it is possible to develop a moral philosophy that is not based on, but compatible with our scientific understanding of man and nature. It was to obtain such metaphysics-free Kantian ethics that Lange turned to Schiller. Indeed, for Lange, it was Schiller, who “with a spiritual divination, seized the core of [Kant’s] doctrines and purified them from scholastic dross” (HM II, p. 232). Therefore, the plan to restore Kant’s philosophy as a whole, so as to serve as a spiritual counterweight to the egoism and materialism of nineteenth-century society, involved a rediscovery of Schiller’s Kantianism. For this reason, in the Preface to the first edition of *History of Materialism*, Lange openly declares that “among all Kantian thinkers, the one who comes closest to my view is none other than Schiller” (Lange 1866, p. v).

In the following paragraphs, I will explain how, according to Lange, Schiller’s work corrected and complemented Kant’s moral philosophy and why Lange believed that this Schillerian Kantianism held the key to solving the social question.

2. Lange's criticism of Kant

At the end of the section on Kant in the *History of Materialism*, Lange summarizes the core of the Kantian lesson in three principles:

[1] The phenomenal world follows from our concepts: for this very reason, it is the most important and worthy object of our knowledge. Only a relative truth is accessible to us, and this lies solely in experience. [2] Ideas do not give us knowledge, but lead us into an imaginary world; therein lies their usefulness. We deceive ourselves when we try to expand our knowledge through them; we enrich ourselves when we make them the basis of our actions. [3] The only absolute thing that man possesses is the moral law, and on this firm foundation it is possible to establish in the fluctuating world of ideas an order just as secure as that which already exists in the world of the intellect thanks to the constitution of our mind (Lange 1866, pp. 277-278).

However, Lange immediately specifies that only the first two points constitute the “lasting” core of Kant’s philosophy – what we must uphold – whereas the third point is the “subjective and transitory” element – what we must overcome³. In particular, the first point is Kant’s theory of knowledge, that – as we have seen – Lange considers already rediscovered by his contemporaries. Therefore, we must focus our attention on the second point, in which Lange summarizes Kant’s practical philosophy.

It is worth noting that, upon closer inspection, Lange’s formulation of the second point already moves away from Kant and closer to the Schiller. Indeed, Lange interprets Kant’s moral philosophy in a way that renders the ideas of reason a product of our *imagination*, that is devoid of truth but has a practical function. The role of imagination becomes even more apparent in the passage in which Lange synthesizes the main tenets of Kant’s view of free will.

In the phenomenal world, everything hangs together as cause and effect. To this the human will is no exception. It is entirely subject to the law of nature. But this law of nature itself, with the whole succession of events, is only phenomenon, and the natural disposition of our reason necessarily leads us to assume besides the world that we perceive with our senses *another imaginary world*. This imaginary world, so far as we form any definite idea of it, is *a world of illusion, a figment of the brain* (HM II, 227, *emph. mine*).

According to Lange, Kant’s fundamental intuition was precisely the distinction between the sphere of knowledge, in which we are concerned with truth and judge on the basis of the principle of cause and effect, and the sphere of practice, in which “we are concerned not to judge as to the will, but to *exercise a moral effect*” (HM II, p. 227, *emph. mine*). Therefore, in the practical domain, whether something is true and real does not matter, because what is imaginary – and even false – might

³ In this paper, I focus on Lange’s criticism of the metaphysical implications of Kant’s ethics. Therefore, I will not consider another aspect of his departure from Kant: the fact that he does not base ethics on *one* universal and eternal law (the categorical imperative), but rather on a *plurality* of historically changing ideals. More details on this can be found in Russo Krauss 2023.

have a stronger and more important effect on our actions than what is empirically grounded.

Consequently, Lange reinterprets Kant's "You ought, therefore you can" as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy (see Sass 1975, pp. 197, 203). If we *correctly* believe that we are constrained by the principle of cause and effect, then we will not act according to our duty, but instead let the surrounding circumstances and sensual inclinations determine our actions. Conversely, if we *imagine* that we are free to fulfil our duty, this thought (whether true or not) will affect our behavior, prompting us to act in accordance with our duty. In this way, we *become* free. Of course, it is not freedom in the sense that we are unbounded by the law of causality; rather, it is freedom in the sense that *thoughts* about duty, morality, and freedom can guide our behavior, diverting it from the direction that sensual inclinations and external circumstances would otherwise dictate. This is what Lange means when he writes:

Just because man *conceives* the unconditional fulfilling of the moral law *as possible*, a conditional *influence* also is exercised *upon its real, and not its merely imaginary, accomplishment*. The conception of the moral law we can only regard as an element of the mental process as matter of experience, which has to struggle with all other elements, with impulses, inclinations, habits, momentary influences, and so on. And this struggle, together with its result – the moral or immoral act – follows in its whole course the universal natural laws to which man in this respect forms no exception. The conception of the unconditional has, therefore, in experience only conditional force; but yet this conditional force is all the stronger, the more purely, clearly, and strongly the man can hear within himself that unconditionally commanding voice (HM II, p. 228, *emph. add.*).

Even though it may seem problematic to ascribe this view to Kant, it is worth remembering that he himself sustains something on this line in the First Critique, when speaking about "freedom in the practical sense", i.e. the capacity to act "independently of sensory impulses, thus through motives that can only be represented by reason" (Kant [1781] 1991, A 802/B 830). In particular, Kant writes that "it is not merely that which stimulates the senses that determines human choice", since our reason has the "capacity to overcome impressions" by using "*representations* of that which is useful or injurious even in a more remote way" (*ibid.*, *emph. add.*). This is also the case when our reason "yields laws that are imperatives, i.e., objective laws of freedom" (*ibid.*). These laws are a *representation* of "what ought to happen", serving as a "precept for conduct" that determines an "action or omission" in a way that contrasts with our sensory inclination yet aligns with our rational demands (*ibid.*). Accordingly, Kant goes as far as saying that

whether in these actions, through which it prescribes laws, reason is not itself determined by further influences, and whether that which with respect to sensory impulses is called freedom might not in turn with regard to higher and more remote efficient causes be nature – in the practical sphere this does not concern us [...] it is rather a merely speculative question, which we can set aside as long as our aim is directed to action or omission (*ibid.*).

Indeed, not only is spontaneity a matter that does not concern us in this field, where the issue is the actual effect on our behavior, but Kant also declares that we “cognize practical freedom through experience *as one of the natural causes*”, that is, as something that is part of the phenomenal causal chain (A 803/B 831).

In light of this, we may assert that Lange accepts Kant’s doctrine of freedom insofar as it is confined to the concept of ‘freedom in the practical sense’ as set out in the First Critique. We have *practical freedom* in the sense that our reason has the capacity to create *representations* that play a role in the empirical *causal* series and thereby determine our actions⁴. These moral representations do not depict reality (what is the case), so they are neither true nor should they be judged on their veracity. Instead, they depict what is not the case (what ought to be), as their practical function is to make us act according to duty.

This concept of ‘freedom in the practical sense’ should not be confused with *transcendental freedom*, that is, the sheer *idea* of an uncaused beginning. However, the two concepts of freedom may be connected in that the *idea* of ‘freedom as absolute spontaneity’ can determine our behavior by presenting us with a *representation* of what we ought to do: we should act as if our will was capable of making spontaneous choices (unaffected by the circumstances and the sensual inclinations) even though this is not actually true.

According to Lange, the problems with Kant’s conception of freedom begin with the *Critique of Practical Reason*, which presents “often untenable constructions” (HM II, p. 221n) and contains some important “deviations from the essential principle” that Kant had drawn in the First Critique (HM II, p. 229n). Indeed, in the Second Critique Kant writes that the concept of practical freedom cannot be the basis of ethics, since even when we act according to “representations” created by our reason, as long as these representations “have the ground of their existence in time and indeed in the antecedent state”, they are governed by the law of causality and not by the subject of the action; therefore, on their basis, “no moral law is possible and no imputation” (Kant [1788] 2015, pp. 5:96-97). This means that Kant now holds that man is a free moral being only insofar as we can assume that *freedom as spontaneity* is an actual *reality* for us, and *not just a transcendental*

⁴ It is important to note that this does not mean that Lange believes freedom to consist in the capacity of mental content to act on the brain and the physical world. In fact, Lange claims that “we can psychologically comprehend the idea as a product of the brain” (HM II, p. 340). He goes further than this by adhering to a conception of mental content as something purely epiphenomenal: “We must quite realize that the law of the conservation of energy can undergo no exception in the interior of the brain without becoming wholly meaningless, and we must rise to the conclusion therefore that the whole activity of man, individuals as well as peoples, might go on, as it actually does go on, without the occurring in any single individual of anything resembling a thought or a sensation” (HM II, pp. 315-316). Therefore, the question of freedom is not whether mental representations are independent of the brain (they are not) or whether they can act on the brain (they cannot). Rather, the point is that we are free insofar as our psychophysiological activity can make us act in ways that change the world for the better.

idea. Consequently, in order to maintain the existence of human freedom, Kant is now forced to admit the possibility that we can grasp our transcendently free noumenal self. As he writes:

The very same subject, *being on the other side conscious of himself as a thing in itself*, also views his existence insofar as it does not stand under conditions of time and himself as determinable only through laws that he gives himself by reason (Kant [1788] 2015, p. 5:97, *emph. add.*).

For Lange, this is Kant's fundamental mistake, because he thereby undermines the entire edifice of critical philosophy by admitting that we have knowledge, or at least some grasp, of the noumenal reality. As Lange writes:

The corner-stone of the critical philosophy – that we do not know even ourselves as we are in ourselves, but only as we appear to ourselves – can no more be overturned by the moral will than by the will in general [...] for we have to do in every moral struggle, not with the will in itself, but with our conception of ourselves and of our will, and this conception remains unavoidably phenomenon (HM II, pp. 230-231).

Since we only inhabit the phenomenal world, practical philosophy too must remain anchored in it. And since this world is governed by the law of causality, we must have a concept of freedom that is compatible with this law – such as the concept of 'practical freedom' from the First Critique – while abandoning any attempt to ascribe reality to the transcendental *idea* of 'freedom as spontaneity' by projecting it onto the noumenal man.

3. *From metaphysics to poetry*

As we have seen, Kant's fundamental mistake was to abandon the concept of 'practical freedom', which applies to the phenomenal domain and is part of the causal chain that determines human behavior, in favor of the concept of 'transcendental freedom qua absolute spontaneity', which can only be established as something that really exists through a metaphysical leap into noumenal reality. Lange's assertion that the root cause of this mistake was that "Kant wished to avoid the obvious contradiction between the Ideal and Life" (HM II, p. 230) already makes it clear that we should turn to Schiller to correct this error, as Lange is referring here to Schiller's poem *Das Ideal und das Leben* (The Ideal and Life). In fact, Lange not only believed that Schiller's poems were more philosophically meaningful than his essays (HM II, pp. 232-233, EKS, pp. 21, 26), but also stated that the "theory [of aesthetic redemption] is presented to us in its most perfect form in *The Ideal and Life*" (EKS, p. 30). Therefore, since we began with the aim of clarifying Lange's statement that the theory of aesthetic redemption is closely connected with the solution to the social question, we should pay particular attention to Lange's interpretation of this poem. And in order to do so, we should first turn to Lange's book, *Einleitung und Kommentar zu Schillers philosophischen Gedichten* (Introduction and commentary to

Schiller's philosophical poems), for a better understanding of Lange's reading of Schiller's poems.

In the book, Lange claims that Kant did not see that the whole "architectonic of ideas" has no "logical necessity [...] but merely the *necessity of art*", which lies only in "our perception of the formal perfection of the whole" (EKS, pp. 8, 10). Therefore, although Kant himself stressed that "only that part of philosophy which relates to the phenomenal world can be science in the pure sense of the word", he did not recognize that "*all speculation from mere ideas is art*" (EKS p. 10). Consequently, Kant still tried to ground his speculation about ideas – such as God and free will – on rational deductions and moral postulates, instead of accepting that they have no truth content but only aesthetic value as artistic creations of our imagination. For Lange, this is precisely the fundamental intuition behind Schiller's "poetry of ideas": by presenting his philosophy in poetic form, Schiller showed that the realm of the suprasensible belongs to art, rather than knowledge.

By placing the ideas of reason within the aesthetic domain, they are not belittled, but secured. As Lange writes: the philosophical poetry of Schiller "lends to the ideal an overpowering force by removing it openly and unhesitatingly into the realm of fantasy" (HM III, p. 343). This is for two reasons. First, when we acknowledge that ideas are products of our imagination with no cognitive value, they become *irrefutable*, as they are placed beyond what is true or false. Second, once we recognize that ideas are products of our imagination with an *aesthetic*, rather than cognitive value, we understand that they should be judged by their *beauty*. This is important because it is precisely the beauty of ideas that gives them *practical force*.

We have seen that Lange agrees with Kant's concept of 'freedom in the practical sense', namely the idea that thoughts that do not depict reality can causally determine our behavior. However, Kant placed emphasis on the thought of 'what *ought* to be', that is, duty. Conversely, following Schiller, Lange removes the central role that the concept of duty played in Kant's practical philosophy and rethinks Kantian ethics by connecting it with aesthetics. In this way, the thoughts that determine our behavior are not simply those that depict 'what is not the case', but rather those that depict 'what we would *like* to be the case' – beautiful images of a not (yet) existing reality, that become the goals and motivations of our actions.

In Kant's theory of duty for duty's sake, it remained unexplained why and how we could adhere to duty and sacrifice our sensible inclinations. Conversely, by building on the Platonic concept of beauty as "the citizen of two worlds" (Schiller [1793] 2005, NA 260) – sensible and supersensible – Schiller was able to develop an ethics in which we aspire to beautiful ideals (such as the idea of the 'beautiful soul') that elevate us to what is supersensible while also appealing to our sensuous pleasure. Unlike Kant's concept of the categorical imperative, beautiful ideals do not appeal to our will against our inclination; rather, they ensure that our inclination pursues morality, by rendering moral goals pleasurable. In other words, while Kant's categorical imperative asks us to sacrifice our sensory pleasure (to the point that we have no motivation to act morally, other than pure duty), the realization of beautiful

ideals is something that man *wants* to do, because he is drawn to them with all his being – both his reason and his senses.

Lange builds on Schiller in that he believes ethics to be based on our capacity to act according to beautiful visions created by our imagination; the more beautiful the vision, the greater its power in the deliberative process. In fact, even the greatness of Kant's ethics lied not in "the false subtleties in his deduction of freedom", but rather in "the loftiness with which he conceived the idea of duty", which "kindled a flame in youthful minds" and "exercised an entrancing influence, as of a heroic song" (HM II, p. 232). In particular, as already quoted, Lange claims that it was Schiller that "with a spiritual divination, seized the core of [Kant's] doctrines and purified them from scholastic dross", in that he had the courage "openly to transpose freedom into the 'Realm of Dreams' and the 'Realm of Shadows'" (HM II, pp. 232-233).

Once again, Lange refers to the poem *The Ideal and Life*, whose first title was *Das Reich der Schatten* (The Realm of Shadows), so let us now see more closely why he regards this poem as the summa of Schiller's philosophy and the most perfect exposition of the theory of aesthetic redemption.

4. *The Ideal and Life*

In the poem, Schiller describes humanity's capacity to escape from reality (Life) and ascend to a realm of all perfection (the Ideal). He illustrates this concept lyrically by contrasting the earthly realm, inhabited by mortals, with the perfect, beautiful realm of the Olympian gods.

*Fate's dark power our bodies claims alone
Nor ought else can ever own.
Form is never bound by time's design.
She the gods' companion, blest and bright
Liveth in eternal realms of light
'Mongst the deities, herself divine.
Wouldst thou on her pinions soar on high,
Throw away the earthly and its woe!
To the ideal realm for refuge fly
From this narrow life below* (Schiller [1804] 1911).

According to Lange, Schiller intuited that freedom is primarily the ability of our reason and imagination to detach from reality by creating a fictional picture of an alternative, better world that is devoid of all the shortcomings of the real one. Man is the only creature that is not bound to accept reality as it is, since he is able to re-imagine it as he would like it to be. This is illustrated in the central section of the poem, consisting of four pairs of stanzas. In each pair, the first stanza begins with the conjunction "*Wenn...*" (When) presenting us with situations encountered in life, in empirical reality, with all its problems, struggles, ugliness and suffering.

Conversely, the second stanza of each pair begins with the adversative conjunction “*Aber...*” (But), introducing an ideal reversal of the situation presented in the first stanza. The first pair contrasts a stanza describing the reality of constant conflict among men with a stanza describing the ideal of free and peaceful union. The second pair contrasts the reality of strenuous work with the ideal of effortless artistic creation. The third pair contrasts the reality of man’s inadequacy in the face of duty with the ideal of graceful adherence to moral law. Finally, the reality of human suffering is contrasted with the ideal of peace of mind.

For the sake of our discourse, let us quote the third pair in full, since it is most relevant because it contrasts a quasi-Kantian, rigorous ethics with Schiller’s aesthetic morality, based on the “overcoming of the law [*Aufhebung des Gesetzes*], of the Kantian imperative” (Letter of Schiller to Goethe from 16th August 1795, in Schiller and Goethe 1845, p. 85, quoted in EKS, pp. 33-34):

*When in helpless nakedness man faces
Law’s keen search, his pride abases;
Guilt e’en to the Holiest draws nigh.
Stoutest virtue quails before truth’s ray;
The ideal unattained and high
Leaves behind deeds of our noblest day.
Mortals all their final goal will miss
For no ferry neither bridge will bear
Over this deep sundering abyss,
And no anchor catches there.*

*But by fleeing from the sense-confined
To the freedom of the mind
The dread specter of our fear hath flown.
Then the deep abyss at once will fill;
When we God receive into our will,
He descendeth from his lordly throne.
Servile minds alone who scorn law’s sway
Need the castigation of its rod,
And with man’s resistance dies away
E’en the sovereignty of God (Schiller [1804] 1911).*

As we can see, Schiller portrays the human ability to escape reality (“the sense-confined”) by imagining a better and more beautiful alternative world; in this case one in which moral duty is not perceived as an imposition – something unattainable looming over us – but is instead undertaken willingly, coming freely from within our hearts.

More generally, by juxtaposing the two stanzas, Schiller shows that human reason has two fundamental functions: it enables us to know reality, and also to rise above it. We know that the world operates in a certain way, yet we also have the ability to say, ‘*But* it should be different’, ‘*But* it should be this way’.

However, the most important thing about this juxtaposition of reality and the ideal is that it is not just an escape into fantasy. As Schiller writes:

*Not to free us from the stress of life,
But to strengthen for new strife,
Are here offered wreaths of victory.
Though we fain would rest, yet stern and strong,
Ruthlessly life carries us along
On the whirlpool of time's restless sea* (Schiller [1804] 1911).

The ability to detach from reality and create in our minds an image of the world as we would like it to be is only the first step on the path to freedom. It is the moment that breaks us free from the dictatorship of reality. True liberation is only achieved through practical work, namely redescending into the real world and changing it according to our ideal models. This is why Schiller ends his poem with the image of Heracles' ascent.

*Heracles in deep humiliation,
Faithful to his destination,
Served the coward in life's footsore path.
Labors huge wrought he, Zeus' noble scion:
He the hydra slew and hugged the lion,
And to free his friends faced Pluto's wrath;
Crossed the Styx in Charon's doleful bark;
Willingly he suffered Hera's hate,
Bore her burdens, grievous care and care
And in all he showed him great,
'Til his course was run, 'til he in fire
Stripped the earthly on the pyre,
'Til a god he breathed empyreal airs.
Blithe he now in new-got power of flight
Upward soars from joyful height to height,
And as an ill dream sink earth's dull cares.
Glory of Olympus him enfoldeth,
'Mongst the gods transfigured standeth he,
From the nectar cup which Hebe holdeth
Drinks he immortality* (Schiller [1804] 1911).

Like human beings, Heracles is part earthly creature and part inhabitant of the divine realm, but he can only reach this godly dimension and be liberated from earthly imperfections after completing the labours. Similarly, humanity can be liberated from its suffering and achieve a more perfect world only through the work of its hands.

5. *Aesthetic redemption*

Now we can better understand what Lange meant when he said that *The Ideal and Life* presents the theory of 'aesthetic redemption' in its most perfect form.

According to Lange, 'aesthetic redemption' refers to the liberating power of the beautiful creations of our imagination. This power involves two moments. 1) First, our ability to imagine an alternative, non-existent world liberates us from the constraints

of reality. If our reason only had the capacity to know the world, we would accept reality as something unchangeable, which we can only investigate cognitively in order to discover what is true and real. However, since our reason also has the ability to imagine what is *not* real, and to create an alternative vision of how we would *like* the world to be, we can engage with reality as something that is not absolute and unchangeable, but rather as something that could be different from how it is. 2) The beauty of these imaginary creations appeals to our senses and makes us *want* the world to be different. Contrary to Kant's belief, it is not merely a matter of duty; it is our *desire* for the world to align with the *beauty* of our ideals that drives us to moral action.

This is the true meaning of 'aesthetic redemption': man can only be delivered from the suffering of existence through his own actions and labor, and he is only driven to act and work by the beauty of ideals he creates with his imagination. The ideals free us from passively accepting reality, giving us higher goals and the impetus and motivation to pursue them.

This is the concept of 'aesthetic redemption' that Lange reads into Schiller's *The Ideal and Life*, and he contrasts this with the concept of 'aesthetic redemption' proposed by Schiller in his most prominent work on the topic: *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*.

In the book Schiller addresses the problem that political change seems to be stuck in a vicious cycle: "All improvement in the domain of politics should derive from the refinement of character – but how can character be refined under the influence of a barbaric state order?" (Schiller [1795] 2016, Letter ix). In other words, the political situation can only be improved if men themselves become better, but men can only become better under the influence of an improved political situation. Schiller suggests that the key to breaking out of this vicious cycle is "fine art" (ibid.), as only beauty has the power to reconcile the contrasting impulses in man, i.e. the material (sensuous) one and the formal (rational) one (see Schiller [1795] 2016, Letter xii and xvi). Anticipating potential criticism, Schiller asks "How can it reasonably be expected that beauty be capable of such a great effect as the education of mankind?", especially in the light of "what previous experience teaches about the influence of beauty", i.e. that art usually thrives during periods of cultural and political decline (see Schiller [1795] 2016, Letter x). He answers that "perhaps experience is no sure guide in considering a question like this", which revolves around "a concept of beauty that has a source other than that of experience", the "purely rational concept of beauty" (ibid.).

Lange openly criticizes this passage, labelling it "the most significant case in Schiller's work of a speculative construct that gives itself the appearance of proof" (EKS, p. 21). In other words, since Schiller cannot prove the elevating function of 'fine art' empirically, he resorts to an abstract disquisition about the pure concept of beauty. For Lange, the source of Schiller's mistake is that:

[he] had immersed himself entirely in the idea that the barbaric brutality of our states can only be overcome by cultivating beauty; that we cannot work better toward the future realization of the ideal state than if, *instead of seeking freedom through political means, we work quietly on the aesthetic refinement of the mind* (EKS, p. 21, *emph. mine*).

This means that Schiller's mistake was rooted in his disillusionment with political change, which led him to seek comfort in speculations about pure beauty and fine art. However, Lange immediately adds that "one would search in vain for such a flawed line of reasoning in his philosophical poems" (EKS, p. 21). As we have seen, Lange believes that the true theory of aesthetic redemption is presented in *The Ideal and Life*. If we stay true to the message of this poem, we realize that we cannot expect the change in the social, political and cultural situation to happen thanks to art or beauty *alone*, as if they had an elevating and improving power all by themselves. On the contrary – as Schiller himself illustrates in his poem – art and beauty serve a practical purpose only as long as they motivate us *to act*. Only through our own labour can we achieve redemption. Therefore, nothing can dispense us from the political work that is necessary to achieve a more perfect humanity.

6. Schiller and the solution to the social question

We can now understand why Lange believed that a form of Schiller-corrected Kantianism could remedy the problems of his epoch, and how the theory of 'aesthetic redemption' was to be connected to the solution of the social question.

First, to contrast a materialist worldview that ascribes value only to factual truths and regards humans merely as animals, we need a philosophy that recognizes the validity of the scientific view of the world, while also establishing the rights of the moral domain. This philosophy is Kantianism, as Kant was the first to distinguish clearly between the domain of empirical truth and that of practical ideas. Kant created a system which establishes scientific knowledge and bans metaphysics, but also regards humans as free moral beings possessing a higher spiritual destination. However, in order to relive Kantian philosophy, we need Schiller to correct Kant's tendency to revert to metaphysics. Schiller's poetry of ideas is a reminder that the practical ideals created by our reason have no claim to existence; they belong to the aesthetic domain of art, since they are products of our imagination designed for practical purposes.

Secondly, by expressing Kantian philosophy in poetic form, Schiller not only avoided any relapse into metaphysics, but also conveyed the core message of Kantianism with greater power and reach. Kant's doctrine presented the beautiful idea of humanity progressing throughout history until it reaches a moral and rational state, in which individuals become free citizens who act according to universal principles rather than their own selfish interests. Schiller expressed this beautiful idea in verses that, unlike Kant's prose, could be read and enjoyed by all, and resonated emotionally as well as intellectually.

Moreover, Schiller's call to the idea of humanity is expressed in a less rigoristic and legalistic manner, with a greater emphasis placed on the importance of feelings, such as love and sympathy, but without losing the elevating tension towards the higher spiritual dimension of ideals. As Lange writes, "sympathy is not the same

thing to the Materialist as to the Idealist”, because, for the former, sympathy is limited to the “narrowest circles of common interests”, while:

The Idealist, on the contrary, is at a bound in the universal. The bond which links him to his friend is only the nearest link in an infinite chain, embracing all creatures, “From the rude Mongol”, as Schiller says, “to the starry Greek, Who the fine link between the mortal made, And Heaven’s last Seraph”. The natural feelings which awake in narrower circles are forthwith referred to a universal cause and connected with an idea which claims unconditional validity. The image of an ideal perfection springs up in the soul, and the contemplation of this ideal becomes a guiding star in all his acts (HM III, p. 304, with a quotation of Schiller’s poem *Die Freundschaft*, The friendship, 1786).

In other words, Schiller not only secured the role of practical ideas by establishing them on aesthetic grounds, he also reinforced the fundamental ideas at the heart of Kant’s philosophy – freedom, man’s dignity and humanity – making them more captivating and capable of appealing to our senses.

We may add that – although already Kant regarded the destination towards freedom and morality as a goal that man can only reach over the course of history through political change – Schiller stressed even more that this task can only be achieved by man through his own efforts. In Kant there was still a religious undertone that led him to emphasize the role of providence and the belief of redemption in the afterlife⁵. For Schiller, as he famously wrote in the poem *Resignation* (1786), “*Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*” (World history is the last judgement): there is no divine guarantee that earthly ills will be remedied, since our actions and choices are the only things that are real. This is why Lange considered the poem an embryonic formulation of the theory of aesthetic redemption (EKS, p. 30). The resignation we feel upon discovering that religious promises are false should not lead us to justify hedonistic egoism, but rather to acknowledge our responsibility to uphold the belief in and pursuit of higher ideals. Once we accept that the plane of immanence of historical reality is the only horizon, the aesthetic ascent to the Olympian realm of ideals is still necessary, but only in order to return to Earth. This is because it is only by changing the course of history through our own labor that we can achieve the redemption we aspire to. As we have seen, even though Schiller wavered in his *Letters*, Lange believes that deep down he knew that this was a political labor that could not be delegated to the ennobling function of art alone.

So, how does this Schiller-corrected version of Kantianism help us to solve the social question? The issue at stake here is the role of the Industrial Revolution in world history. For Lange, mankind was at a crossroads, as the unprecedented surge in the capacity to produce goods could be exploited in two opposing ways. It could be used for the benefit of humanity, freeing people from the struggle for existence by ensuring everyone’s basic needs are met, while reducing the working time required to produce what everyone needs. This would allow human beings to rise above an-

⁵ This is particularly true of Kant’s early political writings, such as *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*.

imality and reach their full spiritual development, as they would no longer need to devote their mental energy to survival and would instead have the free time to cultivate themselves. According to Lange, "The struggle against the struggle for existence is identical with the higher spiritual destination of man" (Lange [1866] 1870), because freeing mankind from labor and the necessities of life would mean allowing them to create and pursue more noble ideals. Alternatively, the Industrial Revolution could further increase the economic divide between the majority of workers and the minority of privileged individuals. Workers would be exploited even more and become increasingly dependent on their employers, while the rise in production would primarily benefit the elite through an endless demand for luxury goods⁶.

In other words, the Industrial Revolution could either enable mankind as a whole to achieve freedom and autonomy, or it could further entrench the subjugation of humans by humans. That is why Lange's judgment of the age of industrial progress is ambivalent. On the one hand, he sees it as an epoch in which "the spirit, by perpetual hurrying and scurrying in the service of money-making, loses the capacity for a purer, nobler, and calmly devised enjoyment", and "men involuntarily pursue their recreation also with the feverish haste of acquisition, and pleasure is measured by its cost, and is hurried through as if it were a kind of duty in the days and hours set apart for it" (HM III, p. 238). On the other hand, he writes that "in the present industrial epoch enormous achievements are accomplished, which at a future time may well *serve to make the fruits of a higher culture accessible to the widest circles*" (ibid., emph. add.).

Whether the Industrial Revolution turns out to be a positive or negative force is in the hands of mankind. As Lange writes:

One thing is certain; if the New is to come into existence and the Old is to disappear, two great things must combine – a world-kindling ethical idea and a social influence which is powerful enough to lift the depressed masses a great step forward. Sober reason, artificial systems, cannot do this. The victory over disintegrating egoism and the deadly chilliness of the heart will only be won by a great ideal, which appears amidst the wondering peoples as a "stranger from another world" and, by demanding the im-

⁶ Lange believes that the tendency to accumulate luxury goods can be explained by the principles first intuited by Daniel Bernoulli and subsequently confirmed by Weber and Fechner's discovery of the psychophysical law. According to these principles, the relationship between an increase in economic goods and the satisfaction they provide is logarithmic. Therefore, initially, even a small increase in goods provides significant satisfaction. However, once the curve has plateaued, even the greatest increase in goods can only provide minimal additional satisfaction. According to Lange, this has two consequences. Firstly, wealthy elites require an ever-increasing quantity of luxury goods as they experience diminishing satisfaction from them. Consequently, their insatiable thirst for luxury goods can easily absorb any increase in production granted by the Industrial Revolution. Secondly, significant economic disparities in a society are inefficient because the production of luxury goods provides almost no overall satisfaction compared to using industrial capacity to improve the basic living conditions of most citizens, which would dramatically increase overall satisfaction. See Lange 1866 [1875], 113 ff.

possible, unhinges the reality (HM III, p. 355, with a quotation of Schiller's poem *Die Macht des Gesanges*, 'The power of song', 1796).

This is the role of 'aesthetic redemption': only the power of the imagination to create beautiful ideals has the capacity to 'unhinge reality', as it enables us to consider that the world is not destined to stay the same and inspires us to strive for improvement. Therefore, to ensure that the Industrial Revolution – which is teetering on the brink of progress and decadence – moves towards genuine progress, what is needed first and foremost is a beautiful idea to aspire to. For this reason, the rise of materialism is not merely an academic philosophical dispute; it concerns the universal history of mankind and the moral destination of human beings.

A current of Materialism runs through our modern civilisation, which carries away with it every one who has not somewhere found 'firmer anchorage'. Philosophers and economists, statesmen and business men, agree in *praising the present* and its achievements. With the praise of the present is combined the *cult of actuality* [*Wirklichkeit*]. The ideal has no quotation on our exchanges; what cannot scientifically and historically show its legitimacy is condemned to perish, even though a thousand joys and refreshments for the people depend upon it, for which we no longer care (HM III, p. 332).

As we can see, the main threat of materialism is that it involves a 'praise of the present', a 'cult of actuality', because by dismissing the function of ideals, it leads us to assume that reality cannot be changed. In this way, materialism blocks the path to real progress for humanity⁷.

In passing, it is also worth noting that Lange's view of the political function of 'aesthetic redemption' can be seen as a criticism of Marx's 'scientific socialism' and 'historical materialism'. While Lange acknowledges the value of Marx's economic analysis of the dynamics of exploitation under capitalism (Lange [1865] 1875, p. 248), he rejects the claim that 'scientific' socialism must renounce any utopian tendencies to bring about meaningful historical change. On the contrary, since man is only motivated to act by the power of beautiful ideas, if we want to realize a more perfect humanity, we must present this ideal in a form that appeals to our rational and sensual nature at once. This is what Schiller intuited and realized through his poetic work, which shaped the hearts and minds of generations of Germans.

Therefore, Lange believes that – in order to counteract the rise of ethical materialism, which would allow the Industrial Revolution to increase economic disparities and the subjugation of humans by humans – it is necessary to rediscover the power of ideals. As he reiterates in the final pages of the *History of Materialism*:

the new epoch will not triumph unless it be under the banner of a great idea, which sweeps away egoism and sets human perfection in human fellowship as a new aim, in the place of restless toil, which looks only to the personal gain (HM III, p. 361).

⁷ One could argue that Lange foreshadowed a criticism of what Mark Fisher later termed 'capitalist realism' (Fisher 2009).

For Germany, the rediscovery of the power of ideals also means making Schiller's poetry central to its citizens' education (in the higher meaning of *Bildung*). That is why Lange designed his *Einleitung und Kommentar zu Schillers philosophischen Gedichten* as a textbook for the gymnasium: to make sure that the citizens of tomorrow would continue to be educated by Schiller's word to the Kantian ideals of freedom and humanity. As Lange declared in his speech for the *Schillersfest* of 1859: "Schiller's words are in the hearts of young people, from which the coming epoch is ever being forged: like mother's milk for the spirit of the nation!" (Lange [1859] 2025, p. 40).

Abbreviations

- EKS F. A. Lange, *Einleitung und Kommentar zu Schillers philosophischen Gedichten*, Velhagen & Klasing, Bielefeld and Leipzig, 1897†.
- HM F. A. Lange, *History of Materialism and Criticism of its Present Importance*, 3 vols., En. tr. by E. Ch. Thomas, Kegan Paul, Trench & Trübner, London, [1873-1875] 1892.

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Wilhelm Windelband on Schiller's Transcendental Idealism as a Cultural Philosophy

GERALD HARTUNG

1. Introduction

Wilhelm Windelband was one of the leading university philosophers in German-speaking countries around 1900, as well as being a renowned representative of the neo-Kantian school of thought¹. Although he did not produce a systematic work in the strict sense, he did pen a series of essays titled *Präludien – Aufsätze und Reden zur Philosophie und ihrer Geschichte* (Preludes: Essays and Speeches on Philosophy and its History), first published in 1884 and subsequently issued in nine editions and numerous translations until the 1920s. In this article, I will focus on Windelband's portrayal of Schiller's philosophy as transcendental idealism, which he developed as a cultural philosophy.

Two notes on the *Präludien*:

- 1) In Windelband's time, philosophy had become a specialized discipline. Teaching in universities and schools was based on textbooks and evaluated through examinations. Philosophical societies were founded and specialized journals were established. All of the essays in *Präludien* had an institutional context and were first published elsewhere, either as speeches delivered at institutional events at universities and academies or as contributions to specialized journals, before being collected in *Präludien*².
- 2) The *Präludien* are a collection of essays that, however, transcends the genre of 'Collected Essays'. The title suggests that they are preludes to an emerging philosophical system, or – to put it bluntly, because Windelband was unable to realize his plan for a system of philosophy – they serve as placeholders for a system. This is evident from the table of contents of the *Präludien*, which, in addition to studies on the history of philosophy (Socrates, Spinoza, Kant, Fichte, Hegelian-

¹ F. C. Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism. 1796–1880*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, pp. 492-530. Ch. Krijnen, "Windelband als Schulhaupt der Südwestdeutschen", in Id., *Nachmetaphysischer Sinn. Eine problemgeschichtliche und systematische Studie zu den Prinzipien der Wertphilosophie Heinrich Rickerts*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg, 2001, pp. 100-111.

² W. Windelband, *Präludien. Aufsätze und Reden zur Philosophie und ihrer Geschichte*, edited by J. Bohr and S. Luft, Meiner, Hamburg, 2021.

ism), also includes systematic works on epistemology, logic, psychology, moral philosophy, and the philosophy of religion³.

And also on cultural philosophy. The essay *Schillers transzendentaler Idealismus* (Schiller's transcendental idealism) was not included until the fourth edition of the *Präludien* (1911). It was first published in volume 10 of *Kant-Studien* (1905), which is dedicated to the memory of Schiller, on the centenary of his death, and to his possible relevance to the present. This volume includes prominent representatives of German-speaking philosophy around 1900: in addition to the editor Hans Vaihinger, other contributors include Otto Liebmann, Rudolf Eucken, Jonas Cohn, Bruno Bauch, and Wilhelm Windelband. This was followed in 1906 by a further publication, *Schiller als Philosoph und seine Beziehungen zu Kant – Festgabe der Kantstudien* (Schiller as philosopher and his relationship to Kant), edited by Hans Vaihinger and Bruno Bauch. Here the studies on Schiller's philosophy from the *Kant-Studien* are published as an offprint, in the same order and unchanged⁴.

I have divided my paper into two sections. First, I will analyze the context of Windelband's essay on Schiller. This essay is read differently depending on whether it is encountered in a scholarly journal with many contributors or in a collection of essays – a fragmented monograph by one author.

2. The essay “*Schillers transzendentaler Idealismus*” in the *Kant-Studien* (1905)

The text and context of Windelband's treatise on Schiller in the *Kant-Studien* are remarkable. Apart from Otto Liebmann's self-experiment as a poet in Schiller's style and some notes on Schiller's archival documents, portraits, and busts, the authors of the *Kant-Studien* are by no means idolatrous or antiquarian. In his introductory remarks on the topic, entitled “Was können wir heute aus Schiller gewinnen?” (What can we gain from Schiller today?), Rudolf Eucken actually poses the critical question of whether a memorial day even makes sense⁵. He finds the context too different, for Schiller's optimistic era, driven by the idea of a national future, contrasts with an uncertain and powerless present that has failed to gain anything from achieving national unity. In Eucken's view, the main problem of the present is the disruption of psychological and social life. Against this backdrop, Eucken presents the philosopher Schiller as a counter-figure to modernity: Schiller devoted his entire oeuvre to the idea of a life's work, and his view of his fellow human beings to the idea of humanity. Schiller becomes the figure of a tireless worker who, above all, works on his life and shapes it into a work – and who applies this idea to humanity: matter becomes form, life is justified as a work. Eucken recognizes here a profound moral

³ G. Hartung, *Doxographie*, in *Forschungsgrundlagen Wilhelm Windelband*, op. cit., pp. 115-211.

⁴ J. Bohr and S. Luft, “Einführung”, in W. Windelband, *Präludien*, op. cit., pp. xi-xci; p. xxxv.

⁵ R. Eucken, “Was können wir heute aus Schiller gewinnen? Einleitende Überlegungen”, *Kant-Studien*, 10, 1905, pp. 253-260.

impulse that guides Schiller in his “struggle for a spiritual existence” and leads to the construction of a “true intellectual culture”⁶. In grand, pathos-laden formulas, Eucken declares Schiller to be the therapist of the present: he teaches courage to live, joy in creating, confidence in one’s own strengths, and, overall, great optimism⁷.

Friedrich Alfred Schmid, a student of Rickert and Windelband, outlines Schiller’s development *as a theoretical philosopher* (“Schiller als ein theoretischer Philosoph”)⁸. He, too, is not concerned with details, but rather with describing an outstanding personality in whom “intellectuality and morality [...] coincide in right, energetic personal control”⁹. Schmid is concerned with illuminating Schiller’s personality in its various facets: he is a poet and philosopher, fundamentally a metaphysician¹⁰. The influences of Kant and Fichte on Schiller are secondary, although Schmid notes that Schiller was an “amateur student of Kant”¹¹. But that is not the point. What matters is that Schiller was able to absorb all the contradictions of his time, did not resign himself to the insolubility of life’s theoretical and practical problems, and developed a personality, or rather his personality, as an “act of freedom”¹².

Bruno Bauch reconstructs Schiller’s idea of freedom as the driving creative principle of the artist and genius¹³. For Schiller, freedom is a “Protestant principle”¹⁴. The philosophizing poet bridges the contradictions of reality, for example, that between nature and spirit, and integrates them into a life and worldview¹⁵. Bauch celebrates Schiller as an artistic educator:

His art shows the individual the way to himself, to autonomous inwardness, points out that the ‘most beautiful victory’ he can achieve in the struggle of life is self-determination, self-conquest, and self-mastery, and allows him to seek the stars of destiny within his own breast for the destiny of life¹⁶.

Bauch juxtaposes this pathos of an individual struggle for self-determination with the “national idea”. For him, Schiller is less a fantasist of cosmopolitanism than a realist of the national confinement of individual life plans.

These examples are certainly sufficient to understand the context of Windelband’s treatise. Although we have the *Kant-Studien* in our hands, this is not about Kant research. Instead, it concerns the unity of Schiller’s personality and work, the

⁶ Ibid., p. 258.

⁷ Ibid., p. 260.

⁸ F. A. Schmid, “Schiller als theoretischer Philosoph”, *Kant-Studien*, vol. 10, 1905, pp. 261-285.

⁹ Ibid., p. 274.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 275.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 282.

¹² Ibid., p. 285.

¹³ B. Bauch, “Schiller und die Idee der Freiheit”, *Kant-Studien*, vol. 10, 1905, pp. 346-372.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 352.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 355.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 371.

analysis and critique of modern culture, questions of ‘worldview’, education for a self-determined conduct of life, and national pathos.

It is in this context that we encounter Windelband’s text. Windelband examines Schiller’s influence on the further development of Kantian philosophy and the transformation of philosophical idealism. After the introductory caveat that Schiller did not seek to design or develop a system of philosophy and was free in his use of philosophical motifs from other thinkers (Jacobi, Schelling), Windelband places him among the proponents of a transcendental idealism because he adheres to the fundamental conviction that there is no reality other than that produced by the activity of reason. In this sense, freedom is Schiller’s central concept. The artistic disposition – the creation of the aesthetic world from the artist’s consciousness – makes Schiller a follower of Kant’s teachings. What connects Schiller with Kant is, above all, the search for a point of unity between freedom and necessity. Schiller sees this point in aesthetic life, Kant in moral judgment. Going beyond Kant, as Windelband emphasizes, Schiller asserts an anthropological thesis in his transcendental psychology: aesthetic life is a specifically human form of life¹⁷.

Beauty exists only in the human world. Schiller’s central point, freedom as self-determination, is declared the culmination of aesthetic and moral values. The factual differences between Kant and Schiller become clear in their historical-philosophical views, for Schiller engages in cultural history and places aesthetic life within a historical movement whose goal is a realm of perfect education. Nevertheless, a commonality remains decisive, which can be summarized in a historical-philosophical thesis: history is not a natural event, but an act of freedom¹⁸.

We now see what distinguishes Windelband’s text. It is the factual argumentation that brings Schiller close to Kant (the problem of freedom) and also distances him (the problem of history), the lack of pathos of heroism and national awakening, and a subtle critique of modern culture: the unity of personal life is an aesthetic project. In this respect, the poet and philosopher Schiller becomes a guiding star for Windelband as well.

But let us now go further and read Windelband’s same essay in the context of the *Präludien* to his own philosophy.

3. *The essay “Schillers transzendentaler Idealismus” in the Präludien (1907)*

Windelband has included the treatise “Schillers transzendentaler Idealismus” in the first volume of the *Präludien*. This volume begins programmatically with the essay *Was ist Philosophie?* (What is Philosophy?) and then leads the reader through Socrates, Spinoza, Kant, and Goethe to Schiller. This is followed by contributions

¹⁷ W. Windelband, “Schillers transzendentaler Idealismus”, *Kant-Studien*, vol. 10, 1905, pp. 398-411, p. 406.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

on Hölderlin, Fichte, Hegelianism, and contemporary mysticism. What appears to be unconnected on the surface takes on a striking structure upon closer analysis. The essays lay out a line of argument.

The beginning is about the systematic interweaving of philosophy and history¹⁹. The history of philosophy is a history of the awakening of philosophical validity claims. The result is the constitution of a “normal consciousness” (*Normalbewusstsein*) in which “normativity” and “normality” are equated. The theoretical and practical consciousness of an era is objectively valid. Thus, Socrates is presented as both an individual and an institution²⁰. He represents normal consciousness, namely the fact that the need for truth can be seen in the thinking of every individual. Socrates’ understanding of philosophy is lived idealism, i.e., “philosophy of education”. Spinoza, as Windelband emphasizes, combines mathematical certainty and moral certainty in his thinking²¹. He lived for the truth. Therefore, he is a philosophical role model for all ages. Later on, Kant developed a philosophy that transcends cultural particularity²². His thinking stands for a modern total culture (*Gesamtkultur*). But this total culture is shaped by the difference between science on the one hand and worldview on the other. Kant defined the limits of scientific consciousness and thus assigned a limited sphere to “normal consciousness”, for a justification of the highest values is scientifically impossible. Only after Kant must the desire for a worldview be addressed philosophically, which means that science and life, nature and values must be brought together in a worldview. Alongside scientific knowledge comes historical knowledge, and critical philosophy is supplemented by a “philosophy of values”. Only in this way can philosophy claim to be a theory of the entire reality of human life. Then comes Goethe, who – like Socrates before him – stands for the representation of an individual life that has an intuition of the reality of human life²³. The formula is: self-liberation through self-formation, assimilation of tradition through its overcoming. As an individual, Goethe represents a concrete and historical reality. He is the normal consciousness in a case that integrates science and life.

We see how Windelband’s path in the *Präludien* leads to Schiller. Schiller represents a concept of freedom as a philosophical disposition that believes it is capable of creating an aesthetic world from the artist’s consciousness. Thus, Schiller appears not merely as a follower of Kant’s teachings or as a dilettantish reader, but as someone who, with Kant, thinks beyond Kant. For Windelband, there are two ways to think beyond Kant. One path concerns the theme of historical consciousness, which has as its content the contradiction between freedom and necessity in a dialectical

¹⁹ W. Windelband, “Was ist Philosophie?“, in Id., *Präludien*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 8-54.

²⁰ W. Windelband “Über Sokrates“, in Id., *Präludien*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 55-82.

²¹ Windelband, “Zum Gedächtnis Spinozas“, in Id., *Präludien*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 83-103.

²² Windelband, “Immanuel Kant. Zur Säkularfeier seiner Philosophie“, in Id., *Präludien*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 104-132; “Nach hundert Jahren. Zu Kants hundertjährigem Todestag“, in Id., *Präludien*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 133-150.

²³ W. Windelband, “Aus Goethes Philosophie“, in Id., *Präludien*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 151-170; “Goethes Faust und die Philosophie der Renaissance“, in Id., *Präludien*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 171-189.

interplay of historical, social, and political events; Hegel is the guide on this path. The other path aims at an anthropological determination: modern man cannot theoretically resolve the contradiction between freedom and necessity and must free himself from his moral imperatives; this can only be achieved in aesthetic life, in the free interplay of forces. In this sense, aesthetic life is the specifically human form of life in modernity. The goal is to give form to life in contradictions – necessity and freedom, matter and spirit, nature and value, nature and history, subject and object, being and becoming, etc. This form, as Schiller already knew in his inaugural lecture in Jena, consists essentially in the productive appropriation of the historical dimension (universal history). The presentation of the history of languages, customs, sciences, morality, etc., of “cultural history” as a whole, shows us aesthetic life in historical movement, which has always been and still is driven by the free interplay of forces. Windelband speaks of a “realm of perfect education”, an “aesthetic state”²⁴. This is the external form in which an act of freedom must be embedded.

For the sake of completeness: The treatise on Schiller is followed by contributions on: Hölderlin²⁵ (thesis: Hölderlin as a case of a resigned consciousness, the pathology of normal consciousness); Fichte²⁶ (thesis: Fichte as the incarnation of historical man, who constructs the German people as a “normal people”); Hegel and Hegelianism²⁷ (thesis: the restitution of philosophy as a science by deriving the supra-historical principles of a “normal science” from the historical cosmos) and mysticism²⁸ (thesis: mysticism as an expression of a timeless longing for a spiritual unity of life and as an indication for the abandonment of an objective idealism that combats the most dangerous option of modernity. Meant here is epistemic and moral relativism)²⁹.

We see that the conception of the *Präludien* is entirely programmatic. Windelband begins with the question “What is philosophy?” and offers a series of answers whose basic idea is: normality and normativity must be reconciled in the consciousness of modern civilized man – and, incidentally, also in the institutions of modern cultural life³⁰. To achieve this, cultural history must be conceived as the horizon of humanity’s developing consciousness of freedom. Cultural history has an educa-

²⁴ W. Windelband, “Schillers transzendentaler Idealismus”, in Id., *Präludien*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 190-204; p. 203.

²⁵ W. Windelband, “Über Friedrich Hölderlin und sein Geschick”, in Id., *Präludien*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 205-230.

²⁶ W. Windelband, “Fichtes Geschichtsphilosophie”, in Id., *Präludien*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 231-241.

²⁷ W. Windelband, “Die Erneuerung des Hegelianismus”, in Id., *Präludien*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 242-255.

²⁸ W. Windelband, “Von der Mystik unserer Zeit”, in Id., *Präludien*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 256-264.

²⁹ G. Hartung, “Ein Philosoph korrigiert sich selbst – Wilhelm Windelbands Abkehr vom Relativismus”, in P. König and O. Schlaudt (eds.), *Wilhelm Windelband (1848-1915)*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg, 2018, pp. 45-60; see also the other contributions in this research volume.

³⁰ Beiser rightly speaks of “politics of normativity” with regard to Windelband (F. C. Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism. 1796-1880*, op. cit., pp. 525-530).

tional mission: the stabilization of normal consciousness and the combating of the pathologies of consciousness. Windelband means by this an attitude of resignation with regard to scientific knowledge and moral action, that is, when questions of truth and the right way of life no longer hold any interest. Although Schiller, as a representative of the generation around 1800, could not yet have known the extent of these pathologies, as a personality, as a poet, philosopher, and educator, he demonstrated a path toward what a therapy for the ills of modern culture might look like.

4. *The essay "Schillers transzendentaler Idealismus" in Präludien (1907) as a document of a crisis of modernity*

In summary, we can say that we can see two sides in Windelband's construction of Schiller's personality and work: Windelband is a theorist of modern culture and its critic; he is a representative of political liberalism and a conservative in terms of values; he is an optimist with regard to scientific progress and a pessimist with regard to the dangers of moral and cultural regression.

The ideal of the unity of aesthetic life in modernity is, above all, a signal of resignation. Windelband no longer shares the enthusiasm of the years around 1800. His transcendental idealism is powerless and thus a symptom of his time. The struggle for normal consciousness and its alleged pathologies only seeks to preserve the ways of life and institutions of the 19th century as a bourgeois age.

The fifth edition of the *Präludien* goes to print in the autumn of 1914. These are the first weeks of a Great War in which Windelband's world will perish.

On the Margins of Neo-Kantianism. Schillerian Traces in the Baden School

ROBERTO REDAELLI

1. *On the margins of neo-Kantianism: Schiller and the Baden school*

The influence of Friedrich Schiller's work on the neo-Kantian school of Baden has been the subject of sporadic studies, focusing mainly on Windelband's reception of the poet¹. The secondary literature on this philosophical school offers scant acknowledgment of Schiller's contribution to its development. While this gap is justified on the one hand by the fact that – with the exception of Windelband – the other mayor representatives of this school, namely Emil Lask and Heinrich Rickert, devoted limited attention to Schiller, on the other hand, Schiller's presence in their work is by no means negligible and deserves attention.

In this chapter, we examine Windelband, Rickert and Lask's reception of Schiller from a specific viewpoint. Our study aims to explore lesser-known works by these authors in which Schiller is appreciated not for his interpretation of Kantian philosophy, but for his concept of the 'whole man'. Adopting a Derridean formulation², we propose operating at the margins of the Baden School to critically examine the reception of Schiller within that intellectual tradition, without reducing it to Windelband's neo-Kantian interpretation of Schiller. To this aim, we will begin this investigation with Emil Lask, whose reception of Schiller will serve as an entry point into a theme that becomes significantly richer and more complex in the works of Rickert and, especially, Windelband. In the concluding section, we will offer only a few final remarks on Windelband, given the body of scholarship already devoted to his reception of Schiller.

¹ See, e.g., G. Morrone, "Una 'filosofia della rassegnazione'. Motivi schilleriani nel primo programma filosofico di Wilhelm Windelband", in G. Giannini, P. Marangolo, M. Papa (eds.), *Segni. Studi in ricordo di Riccardo De Biase*, Tab, Roma, 2023, pp. 281-294; F. C. Beiser, "The Neo-Kantians and Schiller's Transcendental Idealism", in A. Falduto and T. Mehigan (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook on the Philosophy of Friedrich Schiller*, Springer Verlag, Cham, 2023, pp. 559-571; on Windelband see pp. 568-571. For the neo-Kantian interpretation of Schiller, see F. C. Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-Examination*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, 4, pp. 268-270.

² J. Derrida, *Margins of philosophy*, En. tr. by A. Bass, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1982.

2. Emil Lask. Schiller and the idea of the whole man

It should be noted from the outset that Schiller's influence on Lask's thought is marginal. His reflections on Schiller are limited to a few scattered notes, posthumously published, and to occasional references found in his correspondence³. In these instances, however, the emphasis lies not so much on Schiller's Kantianism as on a different philosophical notion – namely, the idea of the whole man (*der ganze Mensch*). To clarify the emergence of Lask's interest in Schiller's thought and in this notion, we shall begin by examining the period of Lask's philosophical apprenticeship, focusing on his philosophical readings. This period is thoroughly documented in Lask's correspondence.

Lask's written exchanges reveals that, during his time as a student in Freiburg, he first encountered Schiller's work through the lectures of Richard Weissenfels, a philologist and *Privatdozent* at the University of Freiburg. In fact, in a letter to his parents dating from 1894, Lask lists a series of university courses he was attending at the time, including one by Weissenfels devoted to Schiller⁴. Although Lask does not mention Schiller in this purely informative letter, it is worth noting that he quotes the *Reiterlied* in a subsequent letter dated December 29, 1895. This letter is addressed to Heinrich Rickert. In this epistle, Lask mentions Schiller to express his enthusiasm for philosophical study and the pleasure he derives from spending his time “drinking from the cup of philosophy. ‘And, if tomorrow ‘twill come, then, I say, Drain we the cup of life's joy to-day’”⁵. This quotation from Schiller is particularly significant, as Lask initially enrolled in law school at his father's insistence and only later turned to philosophy following his encounter with Rickert⁶. Nonetheless, despite this quotation from Schiller's *Reiterlied*, it is important to emphasize that Lask, even in this letter, makes no substantive remarks about the poet. Instead, his attention is directed toward Goethe, Plato, and Schopenhauer. We may therefore infer that, although the young Lask read Schiller, he was not as influenced by him as Rickert was.

³ E. Lask. *Die wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz*, ed. by A. Funke, R. Redaelli, and J. Zhao, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2022, p. 53.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55. Here Lask quotes Friedrich Schiller, *Reiterlied*, in *Id.*, *Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1798*, Tübingen, 1798, pp. 137-140, p. 138. We quote the English translation of the verse collected in *Schiller's Dramatic Work. Wallenstein and Wilhelm Tell*, En. tr. by S. T. Coleridge, J. Churchill and M. Theodore, George Bell and Sons, London, 1891, p. 39.

⁶ Regarding Rickert's influence on his decision to study philosophy, Lask writes to his cousin Jenny on December 3, 1896: “Through his encouraging words and confidence-inspiring voice, he gave me the courage to pursue my current studies and the trust to face the future with serenity. Recognising my existing inclinations, he guided me in taking the first step on my academic journey – a step that, in a sense, is the most important – and gave me impulses that will continue to affect me forever” (E. Lask, *Die wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz*, op. cit., p. 66).

In fact, Schiller's name, linked to that of Weissenfels, recurs in a letter written by Rickert to Lask in 1899. In this letter, Rickert first informs Lask of Weissenfels's departure from his academic position in Freiburg, and then significantly notes that courses on Goethe, Schiller, and the Romantics would serve as valuable preparatory exercises for a book Rickert intended to write on Fichte⁷. More precisely, Rickert affirms that these courses would be beneficial both formally and substantively for his work on Fichte, and that they might help him refine his writing style, which he himself considers overly dull. Therefore, for Rickert, as emerges from the letter addressed to Lask, Schiller could play a supporting role in the writing process of his book on Fichte, a book that was never written, while Lask's interest in Schiller does not appear to have developed, as evidenced by the fact that Lask does not mention Schiller in his reply letter to Rickert.

With regard to this initial exchange of letters, which we have attempted to reconstruct in broad terms, it is noteworthy that in 1899 Lask had already planned to write his doctoral dissertation on Fichte and had begun discussing it with Rickert⁸. Yet Lask does not seem to follow his mentor in looking to Schiller as a possible interpretive lens for rethinking Fichte. Given this premise, it should come as no surprise that Schiller plays no role in *Fichtes Idealismus und die Geschichte* (Fichte's idealism and history), Lask's doctoral dissertation on the logic of history developed by Fichte. Indeed, in the doctoral thesis, dating back to 1902, Schiller is mentioned only in passing, in relation to a work by Ottokar Lorenz on history⁹. But, beyond the isolated reference in the Fichte-Buch, Schiller's work had no discernible influence on Lask's first publication, as shown by the complete absence of citations or substantive references to Schiller's writings.

Schiller's name reappears elsewhere in the correspondence, where Lask lists his philosophical reading¹⁰. While Schiller's works are largely absent – except for the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*¹¹ – Lask does include texts about Schiller, most notably Eugen Kühnemann's *Kants und Schillers Begründung der Ästhetik* (Kant's and Schiller's foundation of aesthetics)¹². These readings took place in 1913, when Lask had already published his two main works, *Die Logik der Philosophie und die Kategorienlehre* (The logic of philosophy and the doctrine of categories) in 1911 and *Die Lehre vom Urteil* (The doctrine of judgment) in 1912. In these works, as in his doctoral dissertation, Schiller leaves no significant trace. But it is precisely in 1913 that the few

⁷ "Lectures on Romanticism, Goethe and Schiller would be good preliminary exercises for the Fichte book, both in terms of content and form. This might make my style a little less grey" (ibid., p. 99).

⁸ See Lask's letter to Rickert dated 10 October 1897 (ibid., p. 81).

⁹ O. Lorenz, *Die Geschichtswissenschaft in Hauptrichtungen und Aufgaben*, Wilhelm Herz, Berlin, 2. vol., 1886-1891.

¹⁰ E. Lask. *Die wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz*, op. cit., p. 690.

¹¹ A. Michelsen (ed.), *Briefe von Schiller an Herzog Friedrich Christian von Schleswig-Holstein-Augustenburg über ästhetische Erziehung*, Verlag von Gebrüder Paetel, Berlin, 1876.

¹² E. Kühnemann, *Kants und Schillers Begründung der Ästhetik*, C. H. Beck, Marburg, 1895.

notes Lask left us on Schiller date back to. These notes by Lask were compiled in the posthumously published writings edited by Eugen Herrigel in 1923 and 1924. They appear in the third and final volume of the philosopher's collected works. Notably, references to Schiller are found in the section titled *Zum System der Philosophie* (On the system of philosophy) and in the paragraph *Notizen zum System der Werte* (Notes on the system of values). According to Herrigel, in these passages Lask seeks to reconceptualize the notion of subjectivity by grounding it in the concept of substratum¹³.

Before examining these notes, it seems appropriate to outline, albeit briefly, the more detailed context in which they are placed. In the section of notes and annotations in which Schiller's name appears, Lask reflects on the system of values, which is based on the distinction between the contemplative and the practical life. More precisely, in this part of the notes, Lask seems to criticize the traditional placement of the religious sphere in the contemplative life. In fact, in Lask's view, religion is as much a part of the practical life¹⁴ as it is of the contemplative life. For Lask, only aesthetic and theoretical attitude are exclusively part of the contemplative life, while religion is characterized by both contemplation and activity, as Rickert himself states, perhaps influenced by Lask¹⁵. It is in Lask's reflections, gathered in his notes on the system of values, which encompass aesthetics as an aspect of the contemplative life, that we encounter his remarks dedicated to Schiller.

These notes¹⁶ reveal that, for Lask, Schiller deserves credit for emphasizing the unity of man, of the whole man (*der Ganze Mensch*), and for opposing the destruction of man caused by the differentiation of his activities and faculties¹⁷. In other words, Lask argues that Schiller "wants to save cosmically living personal abundance from

¹³ E. Herrigel, "Vorwort des Herausgebers", in E. Lask, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. by E. Herrigel, Mohr, Tübingen 1923, pp. xvii-xxii, p. xx. On the issue of subjectivity in Lask's later work, see also E. Herrigel, "Emil Lask Wertsystem. Versuch einer Darstellung aus seinem Nachlass", in *Logos*, 12, 1923, pp. 100-122; S. Nachtsheim, *Emil Lasks Grundlehre*, Mohr, Tübingen, 1992; U. B. Glatz, *Emil Lask. Philosophie im Verhältnis zu Weltanschauung, Leben und Erkenntnis*, Königshausen und Neumann, Würzburg, 2001, pp. 189-217; F. Masi, *Emil Lask. Il pathos della forma*, Quodlibet, Macerata, 2010; R. Redaelli, *Emil Lask. Il soggetto e la forma*, Quodlibet, Macerata, 2016; S. Besoli, *Forma categoriale e struttura del giudizio. Sull'incompiutezza del sistema di pensiero di Emil Lask*, Quodlibet, Macerata, 2019; G. Gambaro, *Emil Lask e le matrici neokantiane dell'empirismo trascendentale*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine, 2022, pp. 190-205.

¹⁴ E. Lask, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, ed. by E. Herrigel, Mohr, Tübingen, 1924, p. 175.

¹⁵ On this point, see A. Spinelli, *L'irrazionalità del pensabile. Vita e riflessione nella filosofia di Emil Lask*, CLEUP, Padova, 2019.

¹⁶ The fragmentary nature of the notes does not allow for an unambiguous interpretation of them. Lask addresses different themes in these notes, including the problem of monism in relation to Goethe and Schiller. Here, we propose reading these notes in light of Lask's redefinition of the subject in terms of substratum, as suggested by Herrigel.

¹⁷ In this regard, Lask writes the following note, referring to letter twenty-one on the aesthetic education of man: "The whole person versus individual functions and features [*Ganze Mensch kontra einzelne Funktionen und Leistungen*]" (E. Lask, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, op. cit., p. 197). However, Lask does not seem to appreciate Schiller's tracing of the notion of the whole man back to the aesthetic dimension: "But this is all mistakenly pushed into the realm of aesthetics" (ibid.).

violation”¹⁸ caused by modernity, that is, by the differentiation of human faculties and the division of professional activities. Thanks to Schiller, Lask thus discerns the possibility of conceiving the subject as a living, unified whole – one in which no irreparable separation exists between work and man, and consequently between spirit and nature – as he writes shortly before his notes on Schiller¹⁹. However, in Lask’s view, this does not mean falling into monism, but holding fast to the dualism of the non-sensible and the sensible²⁰, showing their coexistence, which, as Schiller affirms, was harmonious in Greek culture but is no longer so in our age. In fact, Lask writes, referring to the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, and in particular to sixth letter, that “individuals suffer from the universal aim”²¹, that is, from the dispersion caused by modern culture, or, in Schiller’s terms, “the fragmentary cultivation of human powers”²². Lask also states, with reference to Simmel’s Goethe, that “the wholeness of life [is a] greater involvement and consecration of the entire substrate [...] which was what Schiller wanted to achieve through aestheticization!”²³.

At the core of Lask’s final philosophical reflections lies the concept of life as a substrate – the origin of forms, or more precisely, as a primordial form itself – where in the diverse (practical and contemplative) dimensions of the human experience converge. Therefore, through the lens offered by these brief notes dedicated to Schiller, we can observe Lask’s transition to a concrete subjectivity, to a sensible, receptive subjectivity that plays the role of a substrate that embraces values. In conclusion, according to our hypothesis, these notes serve a functional role within Lask’s final project: that of bringing to the fore a notion of concrete subjectivity capable of accounting for the multifaceted nature of the human being. In this regard, Schiller appears to offer Lask valuable insights for rethinking the subject as a living entity, as well as for developing a system of values that considers human nature in its entirety – and, in particular, its substratum²⁴.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 200.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 196.

²⁰ Significantly, in these notes, Lask emphasizes the importance of the sensible substrate for subjectivity, so much so that the philosopher notes that “even the Kantian-dualist moralist *needs* the sensible as substrate!” (ibid., p. 200).

²¹ With regard to the issue of *Arbeitsteilung*, Lask refers to the sixth letter: “the individuals suffer under the curse of the universal aim [*Individuen leiden unter dem Fluch des Weltzwecks*]” (ibid., p. 197).

²² “Thus, however much may be gained for the world as a whole by this fragmentary cultivation of human powers, it is undeniable that the individuals whom it affects suffer under the curse of this universal aim” (F. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, En. tr. by R. Snell, Dover, New York, 2004, p. 44).

²³ “Simmel’s wholeness of life = greater involvement and consecration of the entire substrate; according to my principles, it cannot be anything else! This is now the same thing that Schiller wanted to achieve through aestheticization!” (E. Lask, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, op cit., p. 197).

²⁴ Crucially, Schiller’s theme of the whole man is also addressed, outside the triad of authors we are discussing, by Martin Heidegger. In a 1936 seminar, reflecting on Schiller’s renowned *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Heidegger poses a crucial question: what kind of human

3. Rickert. Rethinking humanity with Schiller

With regard to Rickert's reception of Schiller, it is worth noting that the philosopher devotes more attention to the poet's reflections than Lask does. In this respect, it is sufficient to say that in the winter semester of 1896-1897 Rickert taught a course on Schiller's philosophical poems and in subsequent years offered his audience various seminars entitled *Probleme der Ästhetik* (Problems of aesthetics), in which Schiller was called into question. In fact, Rickert mostly links Schiller's name to aesthetics and to the part of his value system that is, precisely, dedicated to aesthetic values. For instance, in his 1922 lecture notes on the contemplative life, Rickert distinguishes the contemplative attitude of those who devote themselves to knowledge, that is the theoretical attitude, from the aesthetic attitude, referring precisely to Schiller's notion of play²⁵.

Remaining faithful to our intention to explore the margins of neo-Kantianism, we will not examine Rickert's aesthetic reflection here, where Schiller is somehow implicated, but will instead turn our attention to another moment in Rickert's thought in which Schiller is invoked. These considerations on Schiller are collected in the part of Rickert's philosophical system known as philosophical anthropology²⁶, which began to take shape in the early 1930s through his courses on social philosophy and the fundamental problems of philosophy²⁷. Concerning the notes used for these courses, references to Schiller can be found in them. Among these few references, one is particularly significant because it is linked to Schiller's notion of the whole man, to which Lask himself refers. This reference appears in the notes of the 1932 *Sozialphilosophie*²⁸ course.

subject is Schiller referring to? For Heidegger, as for Lask, we could say that Schiller deals with the actual man, the man who actually exists, says Heidegger, which in Lask's terms would be the living subjectivity, the concrete subject. See M. Heidegger, *Übungen für Anfänger. Schillers Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen. Wintersemester 1936/37 (Seminar-Mitschrift von Wilhelm Hallwachs), mit einem Essay von Odo Marquard, hrsg. v. U. von Bülow*, Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, Marbach a. N., 2005, pp. 9-33.

²⁵ H. Rickert, *Philosophie des kontemplativen Lebens. III. Kunst*, Sommer Semester 1922, in Heidelberg Handschriften, 2740 II C – 197, pp. 1-78, p. 74.

²⁶ On philosophical anthropology in Rickert's philosophy, see R. Redaelli, "Heinrich Rickert. Zu einer axiologischen Anthropologie", in *Zeitschrift für Kulturphilosophie*, 16, 2022, pp. 119-134. On Rickert's philosophical system, see C. Krijnen, *Nachmetaphysischer Sinn. Eine problemgeschichtliche und systematische Studie zu den Prinzipien der Wertphilosophie Heinrich Rickerts*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg, 2001.

²⁷ The course notes were then used to compose the book H. Rickert, *Grundprobleme der Philosophie. Methodologie. Ontologie. Anthropologie*, Mohr, Tübingen, 1934.

²⁸ H. Rickert, *Sozialphilosophie (Grundlage der Ethik und Erotik)*, Sommer Semester 1932, in Heidelberg Handschriften, 2740 II C – 140. We believe that an analysis of Rickert's rich *Nachlass* can be helpful not so much in redefining the boundaries of the philosophical system outlined in the philosopher's published works, which remain largely unchanged, but rather in understanding Rickert's position on specific philosophical issues.

In this course, Rickert undertakes to define the subject matter of social philosophy, which in Rickert's mature system is part of philosophical anthropology. It is in defining the subject matter of social philosophy that Rickert refers to Schiller and his 1795 poem *Die Weltweisen* (The worldly wise). In particular, Rickert shares Schiller's criticism of Pufendorf and Feder and their rationalistic view of man. In fact, in this poem, Schiller contrasts the rational and mechanistic view of human nature with his conception of the whole man, guided by both reason and sensibility. This same idea is shared by Rickert, for whom social philosophy, and especially social ethics, should consider the human being in his wholeness, starting from two elements highlighted by Schiller, namely hunger and love. Without these two elementary factors, there can be no social relationship, Rickert asserts in the wake of Schiller, and therefore there can be no social philosophy:

Rather than following the example of the social philosophers Pufendorf and Feder, who were ridiculed by Schiller, let us begin with 'nature'. Hunger and love are two fundamental factors without which human life, including social life, would not exist; indeed, they are the origins of social relationships and social-ethical problems. In our context, we must place 'love' before hunger²⁹.

In our view, this reference to Schiller serves a specific function within Rickert's project: that of liberating his social philosophy from rationalistic perspectives on man and defining, as the object of his reflection, the human being in flesh and blood, the whole human being connected to other human beings. In this case too, as in Lask's brief and enigmatic annotations, the unity of man, his multifaceted nature as opposed to any unilateral or reductionist view of the human, comes to the fore. And it is precisely this human being understood in his entirety³⁰ that is at the centre of Rickert's later anthropological project. Indeed, it is no accident that Rickert, in his lectures in the 1930s and in his book *Grundprobleme der Philosophie* (Fundamental problems of philosophy), includes in his philosophical system an anthropology that has as its object the whole human being – conceived as both a psychic and physical entity – who takes a stance toward the world of which he is a part³¹. In fact, for Rickert, human being should be investigated in his various forms, in various value spheres, taking into account all aspects of his life, from politics to erotics³², from aesthetics to scientific *theorein* to religion. In this sense, according to our hypothesis, Rickert accepts Schiller's call to re-evaluate the human being in his wholeness.

In the context of this re-evaluation of the whole human being, we intend to highlight a salient point of convergence between Schiller and Rickert. First of all, if the problem of all of Schiller's mature research is the connection between the animal

²⁹ H. Rickert, *Social-Philosophie III. Methode, Gebiet und Gliederung der Social-Ethik*, in Heidelberg-er Handschriften, 2740 II C – 140, pp. 28-29. This comment by Rickert follows the quotation of Schiller's entire poem in the philosopher's lecture notes.

³⁰ H. Rickert, *Sozialphilosophie*, op. cit.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³² H. Rickert, "Vom System der Werte", in *Logos*, 4, 1913, pp. 295-327, pp. 313-319.

and spiritual nature of man³³, it should be noted that Rickert himself dealt with this problem from his very earliest works and that he addressed it in the 1930s from an anthropological perspective that brought him drastically closer to Schiller. Thus, by adopting an anthropological perspective, Rickert reinterprets the traditional mind-body problem in new terms, and Schiller assists him in this task, by offering some suggestions, including that of the whole man.

This first point is linked to a second one, which we consider briefly as *possible suggestion* for further investigation. Although Rickert approaches the anthropological problem from an axiological perspective, from the 1930s onwards he also takes into account the bodily dimension of the human being³⁴, as Schiller does. As proof of this re-evaluation of the body, Rickert writes significantly in *Grundprobleme der Philosophie* that “in the family, at work, in the community, the body also participates as a means of expressing meaning, and in this respect it cannot be ontologically ignored”³⁵. In other words, the body plays a specific role in the constitution of society, the role of mediator of social action as *Sinnträger* (bearer of meaning)³⁶. As such, it cannot be disregarded from a philosophical standpoint, particularly within the framework of the social philosophy that Rickert seeks to establish. Here as well, one may discern an indirect influence of Schiller on Rickert’s philosophical anthropology – or, at the very least, on the way Rickert conceptualizes the human being as the central object of his investigation.

4. *Some concluding remarks on Windelband’s reception of Schiller*

From the standpoint of the concept of the whole man, we may now turn to Windelband’s reception of Schiller. While significant scholarship has already addressed this reception – primarily focusing on Windelband’s 1905 essay *Schillers transzendentaler Idealismus* (Schillers transcendental idealism)³⁷ and the speech *Schiller und die Gegenwart* (Schiller and the present)³⁸ – our aim is to explore two alternative sources. These sources shed light not so much on Schiller’s reworking of Kantian

³³ See C. Sini, *Il problema antropologico nel pensiero di Schiller*, Università degli studi dell’Aquila, Dispensa, CTCA, A. A. 1973-1974.

³⁴ Signore clearly highlights how *Leiblichkeit* in Rickert plays the role of mediator of social action as *Sinnträger* (see M. Signore, “I modi d’essere del mondo. Problemi di ontologia”, in M. Signore, ed., *Rickert tra storicismo e ontologia*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 1989, pp. 81-93, pp. 89-90). In this vein, Signore rightly recognizes in Rickert’s latest works a reevaluation of the bodily dimension. In this regard, Rickert himself states that “a *rehabilitation of the corporeal world* as a carrier of meaning [is] necessary” (see, H. Rickert, *Grundprobleme der Philosophie*, op. cit., p. 90).

³⁵ H. Rickert, *Grundprobleme der Philosophie*, op. cit., p. 90.

³⁶ M. Signore, “I modi d’essere del mondo”, op. cit., p. 89.

³⁷ W. Windelband, “Schillers transzendentaler Idealismus”, in *Kant-Studien*, 10, 1905, pp. 398-411.

³⁸ W. Windelband, *Schiller und die Gegenwart: Rede zur Gedächtnisfeier bei der hundertjährigen Wiederkehr seines Todestages an der Universität Heidelberg*, Carl Winter, Heidelberg, 1905.

ideas, but rather on his ability to reconcile Goethe and Kant, thereby offering a philosophical vision of the whole human being.

Windelband addresses the issue of the whole man in a course he taught in 1895-1896 on Goethe and Schiller³⁹, and above all in his *Die Geschichte der neueren Philosophie in ihrem Zusammenhange mit der allgemeinen Kultur und den besonderen Wissenschaften* (The history of modern philosophy in its connection with general culture and the special sciences). In the latter, Windelband devotes a chapter to Schiller entitled *Der ästhetische Idealismus. Schiller und die Romantiker* (Aesthetic idealism. Schiller and the Romantics), where the theme of the whole man takes on a cultural dimension. With regard to these sources, we would like to draw attention to a particular aspect of Windelband's reception of Schiller that, in our view, deserves attention. As already mentioned, Windelband not only shows the fecundity of Kantianism in Schillerian thought, but also emphasizes, especially in the volume dedicated to the history of philosophy and in the course on Goethe and Schiller, Schiller's ability to unite Kant and Goethe, rationality and sensibility, morality and aesthetic life, in a vision that engages the human being in their entirety.

On this point, Windelband writes significantly that "if one call the former the Goethean ideal and the latter the Kantian ideal, we can say that Schiller's spirit responded to both so sympathetically and was so equally imbued with both that throughout his entire career as a writer, from beginning to end, we can trace these two elements. [...] This struggle between the two elements ends neither with the victory of one over the other, nor with a complete and all-round reconciliation between them [...] he always made new attempts to reach an agreement"⁴⁰. In other words, Windelband explains that, for Schiller, on the one hand, only submission to Kantian *Rigorismus* is moral, but, on the other hand, if we consider man in his development, we must take into account man as a sensible-supersensible being⁴¹, who finds support for his moral realisation in his sensible nature. Because of this tension, Schiller's work takes on a paradigmatic value in Windelband's philosophy, because in it Windelband recognises the ideal of the highest culture, which is realised by Schiller through the reconciliation, albeit never definitive, between Kantian philosophy and Goethe's artistic spirit, which leads Schiller to consider the whole man from a philosophical point of view.

Based on these brief considerations, it may be observed that even in Windelband's thought, the question of the whole human being – though approached with certain reservations regarding anthropology – occupies a non-negligible role. In this sense, it can be noted, in conclusion, that Windelband, Rickert and, albeit to a lesser

³⁹ W. Windelband, *Goethe und Schiller in ihren Beziehungen zur Philosophie*, Winter Semester 1895-1896 (Vorlesungsmitschrift von Heinrich Rickert), in Heidelberg Handschriften, 2740 II A – 38.

⁴⁰ W. Windelband, *Die Geschichte der neueren Philosophie in ihrem Zusammenhange mit der allgemeinen Kultur und den besonderen Wissenschaften – Die Blüthezeit der deutschen Philosophie*, Breitkopf und Härtel, Leipzig, 1880, pp. 249-250.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

extent, Lask, are inspired by Schiller's idea of man understood in his multifaceted nature, in his life that is both multiplicity and unity. In their view, Schiller deserves the merit of attempting to reconcile sensibility and rationality, nature and culture, without however falling into forms of monism. His reconciliation preserves the productive tension of an irreducible dualism – or perhaps more accurately, a pluralism – which Schiller eloquently articulates in the following lines from *Über Bürgers Gedichte* (1789):

In the isolation and fragmented activity of our mental powers, made necessary by the broadened scope of knowledge and the specialization of the professions, the art of poetry is almost alone in being able to unite once again the divided forces of the spirit. Poetry occupies head and heart, perspicacity and wit, reason and imagination in harmonious fellowship, and recreates, as it were, the whole man within us⁴².

⁴² F. Schiller, *Über Bürgers Gedichte* [1791], in *Schillers Werke*, Nationalausgabe, vol. 22, *Vermischte Schriften*, ed. by H. Meyer, Böhlau, Weimar, 1958, pp. 245-264, p. 256.

A “Disciple of Kant”? On the Strategies and Limits of the Baden Neo-Kantian Appropriation of Schiller

GIOVANNI MORRONE

1. *Persistences of Schillerian models of Kulturkritik in the early Windelband*

The reception of Schiller within neo-Kantianism at the beginning of the twentieth century responded to the need to give substance to the *kulturphilosophisch* and *weltanschaulich* turn of a philosophical current that had originally arisen under the banner of the theory of knowledge and had, over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, become intertwined with physiological and psychological approaches, a development later regarded as suspect. Schiller, as a symbol of the national culture to be refounded through the idealistic elaboration of the problem of freedom, thus became functional to this broadening of horizons and to the definition of the neo-Kantian political-cultural and even pedagogical program¹.

The development of neo-Kantianism ‘from the theory of knowledge to the philosophy of culture’ has been widely reconstructed², often emphasizing the points of rupture at the expense of the evident elements of continuity³. I have dwelt on these elements of continuity on several occasions in order to support, instead, the thesis of an originally *kulturphilosophisch* inspiration in Wilhelm Windelband’s philosoph-

¹ For a survey of the neo-Kantian reception of Schiller, I refer to the recent study by F. Pisano, “*Tutta la natura è solo sintesi, mentre tutta la filosofia è antitesi*”. *La figura di Schiller nel dibattito tedesco sulla funzione della metafisica (1859–1905)*, Giannini, Napoli, 2025.

² For further reference, see the extensive reconstruction by K. C. Köhnke, *Entstehung und Aufstieg des Neukantianismus. Die deutsche Universitätsphilosophie zwischen Idealismus und Positivismus*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1986. See also W. Windelband’s 1908 account of this *kulturphilosophisch* turn of neo-Kantianism: W. Windelband, “Kulturphilosophie und transzendentaler Idealismus”, in Id., *Präludien. Aufsätze und Reden zur Philosophie und ihrer Geschichte*, 2 vols., Mohr, Tübingen, 1915⁵, vol. 2, pp. 279–294.

³ Köhnke’s “dualistic” interpretation of Windelband – which portrays him as moving from an early psychologistic relativism to the critical normativism of his later philosophy – is well known. See Köhnke, *Entstehung*, pp. 421 ff. On this topic see also the more recent studies by G. Hartung, “Ein Philosoph korrigiert sich selbst: Wilhelm Windelbands Abkehr vom Relativismus”, in P. König and O. Schlaudt (eds.), *Wilhelm Windelband (1848–1915)*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg, 2018; and K. Kinzel, “Wilhelm Windelband and the problem of relativism”, in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 25 (2017), pp. 84–107.

ical program⁴. This, on the one hand, makes possible a different assessment of the neo-Hegelian outcomes of his thought⁵, and, on the other hand, allows us to recognize within it an early presence of Schillerian *kulturkritisch* devices.

The presence of such frameworks is particularly evident in the lecture *Über Friedrich Hölderlin und sein Geschick* (Friedrich Holderlin and his fate)⁶, in which Windelband outlines his own philosophical project, clarifying both its aims and its socio-cultural horizon of reference. In this brilliant *Vortrag*, two distinct yet deeply interconnected argumentative levels can be discerned: first, the moment of diagnosis of modern culture, presented as a “*zerrissene Kultur*” (“fragmented culture”); second, the specifically programmatic moment, which has the task of a post-metaphysical recomposition of the unity of *Kultur* through the critical doctrine of values. It is precisely in the diagnosis of modernity as an epoch of *Zerrissenheit* (fragmentariness) that well-established *kulturkritisch* patterns come into play, which can be easily traceable to the Schillerian reading of modernity through the neoclassicistic critical framework⁷. Windelband

⁴ I refer here to the following studies: G. Morrone, “La filosofia della cultura di Wilhelm Windelband”, in *Atti dell’Accademia di Scienze Morali e Politiche*, CXXVII (2017), pp. 131-158; G. Morrone, “Una ‘filosofia della rassegnazione’. Motivi schilleriani nel primo programma filosofico di Wilhelm Windelband”, in G. Giannini, P. Marangolo, and M. Papa (eds.), *Segni. Studi in ricordo di Riccardo De Biase*, Tab, Rome, pp. 281-294; G. Morrone, “Socrate e Kant. Genealogie della ragione neokantiana”, in C. Cappiello and G. Morrone (eds.), *Ragione e antiragione nella cultura filosofica europea. Studi per Domenico Conte*, Bibliopolis, Napoli, 2025, pp. 331-346. In these essays I distance myself from the thesis of a sharp discontinuity between a psychologistic-relativistic phase and a *wertphilosophisch* phase in Windelband’s philosophical development. I maintain that one may speak of a strong theoretical continuity in that, while elaborating themes undoubtedly internal to a certain psychologistic neo-Kantianism, Windelband remains faithful from the outset to the distinction between ‘norms’ and ‘laws of nature’ and to the demand to identify a valuative and normative element of knowledge. From this perspective, the ‘genetic method’ and the ‘critical method’ are not only rigorously distinguished, but also grounded in their autonomous epistemic legitimacy as well as in their fruitful heuristic relationality. This heuristic significance of the relationship between genetic inquiry and the philosophical-critical method is the basis for Windelband’s methodological openness to history (the thesis of “history as the organ of philosophy”) and his never-abandoned interest in psychology. On this latter aspect, see H. Gundlach, *Windelband und die Psychologie. Das Fach Philosophie und die Wissenschaft Psychologie im Deutschen Kaiserreich*, Heidelberg University Publishing, Heidelberg, 2017.

⁵ On this topic, see the doctoral dissertation by S. Danzilli, *Tra criticismo e dialettica. Studio sulla logica della conoscenza storica nel neokantismo di Wilhelm Windelband*, University of Catania and University of Heidelberg, academic year 2024/25. Although I do not share Danzilli’s overall approach, it is evident that his work allows a continuity of Windelband’s philosophical and logical motifs, mediated by the reception of Fischer, to emerge – a continuity that cannot be entirely reduced to the idea of an original psychologistic relativism. On this subject, further confirmation can also be found in the recent monograph by J. Páez Bonifaci, *Wilhelm Windelband’s Historical Philosophy. The Path from Neo-Kantianism to Neo-Hegelianism*, Olms, Baden-Baden, 2024.

⁶ W. Windelband, “Über Friedrich Hölderlin und sein Geschick”, in Id., *Präludien*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 230-259.

⁷ There is an extensive body of literature on Schiller as a critic of culture. Cf. G. Bollenbeck, *Eine Geschichte der Kulturkritik. Von J. J. Rousseau bis G. Anders*, Beck, München, 2007; see in particular

contrasts the organic, harmonious, and complete structure of Greek culture – “the felicitous identity of individual and general cultivation”, with the split nature of modern culture⁸. It is precisely the tendency toward differentiation among the cultural spheres, knowledge, and the domains of human activity that makes it impossible to reconstruct a fulfilled relation between the individual and the totality of *Kultur*. The fragmentation of knowledge, the atomization of social relations, and the specialization of professions constitute the hallmark of modernity. The fragmentation of *Kultur* goes hand in hand with the decomposition of the social order, which, according to Windelband, is threatened by the phenomena of massification and political “*dilettantism*”, intimately connected to the parliamentary system and its populist degenerations⁹.

Modern culture thus appears to Windelband as marked by a structural defectiveness. The idea of a cultural *Vollkommenheit*, imagined in Greek antiquity, now proves untenable – not because of contingent circumstances, but due to an internal dynamic of the very cultural process itself, which renders any reactivation of a universalistic *Bildung* or of a metaphysical-dialectical programme impracticable. The modern individual is ‘condemned’ to the split between the impulse toward completeness and the unfulfillment of his striving¹⁰. To this condition one must resign oneself: “*das moderne Individuum ist das resignierende* (The modern individual is the resigned one)”; and from this very resignation a philosophical programme must arise¹¹.

chap. II: “Mit der Aufklärung gegen die Aufklärung: Rousseau und Schiller”; R. Konersmann, *Kulturkritik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M., 2008; Id., *Kulturphilosophie zur Einführung*, Junius, Hamburg, 2010, esp. pp. 54–58 on Schiller. Cf. also C. Henning, *Theorie der Entfremdung*, Junius, Hamburg, 2nd expanded ed., 2020; on Schiller see pp. 62–71. Cf. G. Pinna, P. Montani, A. Ardovino (eds.), *Schiller e il progetto della modernità*, Carocci, Roma, 2006. I would also like to refer to my own contributions: G. Morrone, “Schiller e la critica della cultura moderna”, in R. Carbone (ed.), *Modernità e critica*, La Città del Sole, Napoli/Potenza, 2022, pp. 161–184; Id., “Friedrich Schiller zwischen Klassizismus und Kulturkritik”, in C. De Stefani, G. Morrone, C. Pepe (eds.), *Deutschland und Hellas. Wissenschaft und Mythos des Griechentums*, Georg Olms, Baden Baden, 2024, pp. 77–86.

⁸ W. Windelband, “Über Friedrich Hölderlin und sein Geschick”, op. cit., p. 251 (all translations from Windelband are mine).

⁹ Ibid., p. 256. For Windelband, *dilettantism* represents a disordered reaction to the condition of cultural fragmentation characteristic of modernity, a condition that becomes particularly evident in the political sphere. Parliamentarism appears to Windelband as “the political form of dilettantism” (ibid.). It is worth recalling that the question of dilettantism lay at the centre of a joint project by Schiller and Goethe, and of a schematic fragment dating from 1799–1800 – *Über den Dilettantismus* – composed in view of an essay for Goethe’s journal *Die Propyläen*, but published posthumously only in 1841; cf. F. Schiller, “Über den Dilettantismus”, in *Sämtliche Werke, Nationalausgabe*, ed. by J. Petersen et al., Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, Weimar, 1943 ff. [hereafter abbreviated as NA], vol. 21, pp. 60–62.

¹⁰ Such resignation stems from the awareness of the unattainability of the “complete knowledge of the entire cultural heritage [*Kulturgehalt*]” (W. Windelband, “Über Friedrich Hölderlin und sein Geschick”, op. cit., p. 259).

¹¹ Ibid., p. 251. On the Schillerian theme of resignation, it suffices to refer to the celebrated poem *Resignation*: NA 2.I, *Gedichte*, Böhlau, Weimar, 1991, p. 143.

The Schillerian theme of resignation is interpreted by Windelband in the sense of the loss of cultural totality and as a lucid awareness of the irreducible discrepancy between the ideal and the real. The loss of totality and its displacement into Greek antiquity bring about a significant transformation of the concept of culture. The totality of culture can no longer be conceived as the vital immediacy of Greek culture; it can no longer signify the form of a harmonious reconciliation between the individual and humanity, nor the dialectical unity envisaged by Hegel. The idea of the totality of *Kultur*, understood as the ultimate connection among cultural values, must be rethought as a “functional”¹² and regulative unity, as a task to be accomplished within the concrete historical work of culture. Such a cultural ideal thus acquires a guiding function: *Kultur* comes to signify a task whose unending realization within reality ensures the meaningfulness and progressive unfolding of history.

The immediacy of Greek culture and its concrete totality are transformed, by virtue of the same and inevitable cultural process of differentiation, into a split and fragmented culture in which the problem of totality can only be posed in the terms of an ideal of cultural formation. *Bildung* thus proves to be a critical device which, on the one hand, inserts itself with vigilant resignation into the unbridgeable distance that separates the real from the ideal, reality from value; yet, on the other hand, draws precisely from this very discrepancy the energies necessary to heal it – that is, it derives from this distance the stimulus to undertake that unending cultural labour of shaping the real according to the ideal. The *Bildung-Kultur*¹³ dispositive thereby takes on the meaning of an absent totality: it traces the cartography of a lack, which it helps to unmask and denounce through critique, while at the same time outlining strategies for the recomposition of this constitutive defectiveness and constructing frameworks of orientation for concrete historical experience.

This *kulturkritisch* framework contains a diagnosis of the essence of modernity deeply rooted in the Enlightenment, a diagnosis that Schiller receives and reworks through the neoclassicist opposition between the wholeness of Greek humanity and the fragmentariness of modern humanity¹⁴. It is a critical schema that came to enjoy wide currency in German philosophical culture and that cannot be entirely reduced to its dialectical systematizations. Such a *kulturphilosophisch* schema – which Schiller himself translated into *geschichtsphilosophisch* terms in the essay *Über naive und senti-*

¹² W. Windelband, “Über Wesen und Wert der Tradition im Kulturleben” (1908), in Id., *Präudien*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 244-269, p. 266.

¹³ Cf. G. Bollenbeck, *Bildung und Kultur. Glanz und Elend eines deutschen Deutungsmusters*, Insel, Frankfurt am Main, 1994.

¹⁴ Fragmentariness, as opposed to the totality and completeness of Greek culture, is the defining feature of modern culture. This characterization emerges above all in F. Schiller, *Ueber die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen*, in NA 20, ed. by B. von Wiese, Böhlau, Weimar, 1962, pp. 309-412. See in particular the sixth letter, in which the term *Bruchstück* and its derivatives occur frequently (ibid., pp. 321-322). In the same sense, the term *Zerstückelung* is used in reference to the “fragmentation” of the essence of human beings (ibid., p. 326).

mentalische Dichtung (*On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*)¹⁵ – can be traced back to the succession of three necessary moments in the historical-cultural process:

- a) the original stage of wholeness/reconciliation/naivety;
- b) the stage of *Entfremdung* or pathological fragmentation, which is the present condition, the state of modern culture, whose genesis is to be traced back to the dissolution of Greek cultural unity and homogeneity;
- c) the aesthetic stage, which becomes the ideal of a future reconciliation, of a harmony to be regained through aesthetic education and the liberating experience of play.

The idea of Greek's *Vollkommenheit* in Schiller takes on an evident critical function; it allows him to unveil the fragmentary nature of modern man. The fragment of which Schiller speaks in the *Ästhetische Briefe* is not merely the result of the decomposition of an original unity – a unity that could be reconstructed and that, ultimately, would remain virtually present as the whole that comprehends its parts. The essential point that Schiller's critique bequeaths to subsequent reflection is that the totality to be reconstructed through *Bildung* is not the original unity torn apart by the process of culture. The totality to be reconstructed has now migrated into the sphere of non-existent ideality. It is necessarily an incomplete totality, a totality that cannot be fulfilled, because it remains perpetually suspended in the unsteady process of its own realization. If, therefore, *Kultur* is displaced into the unreal dimension of ideality, its totalization – its fulfilment – becomes a constant "to come", a normative ought-to-be. The fragment of which Schiller speaks is not a part of a whole, but a stage in a trajectory in which totality is the horizon that remains constantly visible, yet constantly eludes grasp.

Windelband's *Kulturphilosophie* appropriates this schema only partially, insofar as it translates Schillerian alienation into the fragmentariness of modern culture, while at the same time reconfiguring Schiller's aesthetic redemption into a *wertphilosophisch* recomposition oriented toward the process of reconstituting the ideal totality of a *Kultur* conceived, in anti-intellectualist terms, as an ideal nexus encompassing not only logical and ethical values, but also aesthetic ones. In this way, the aesthetic – which in Schiller had been the domain of reconciliation between sensibility and reason – is reintegrated into the expanded structure of a reason that – after Kant – has overcome Greek intellectualism and is now conceived in the multiplicity of its dimensions¹⁶.

It should be recalled that in Schiller the irreducible opposition between reason and sensibility, as the foundation of his anthropology of the whole human being, has an immediate *geschichtsphilosophisch* resonance. This polarity of human nature determines, in fact, the oscillation – outlined in the *Ästhetische Briefe* (Aesthetic letters) – between *Wildheit* and *Barbarei*: that is, between a condition, the savage state, in

¹⁵ Cf. F. Schiller, *Ueber naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795–1796), in NA 20, pp. 413–503.

¹⁶ See in particular W. Windelband, "Immanuel Kant. Zur Säkularfeier seiner Philosophie" (1881), in Id., *Präludien*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 112–146.

which the human being is entirely dominated by sensuous impulses, and a condition, that of barbarism re-emerging within developed civilization, in which the human being is wholly governed by reason and has lost every organic bond with sensibility¹⁷. Within this polarity to which culture is constantly exposed, the Greeks represent the original and immediate felicitous condition of reconciliation, and thus the ideal of a possible aesthetic re-education of humanity. To them the modern individual, entangled in the forms of Enlightenment rationalism, looks as to a lost paradise – looks, *sentimentally*, to them as the model by which to reconstruct, through the aesthetic state, the ideal of a fulfilled humanity.

In Windelband's reworking of this *kulturphilosophisch* schema, it is not the aesthetic that represents redemption from cultural alienation, but rather reason itself – considered in the complexity of its rational and irrational values – within which the aesthetic finds its own place and systematic articulation. It should be noted, however, that between the late 1870s and the early 1880s – concurrently with his attempt to define neo-Kantianism as a philosophy of values – Windelband's writings display different interpretative models of Greekness, not always compatible with the *neoclassicist* framework. In particular, one can distinguish:

- a) the schema grounded in the clear opposition between Greek intellectualism – with its tendency to render reality in logical terms and to conceive knowledge as a copy (*Abbildung*) of being – and the Kantian awareness of the limits of cognition, which opens the way to a critical consideration of the non-theoretical values of culture. By means of this schema, Windelband can juxtapose Socrates with Kant and regard their philosophies as the only genuine alternative in the history of Western philosophy¹⁸;
- b) the *neoclassicist*-derived schema, which proceeds from an unreflective youthful immediacy of Greek thought, from a vague premonition of a meta-logical beyond that acts unconsciously behind the structures of intellectualism, and which is succeeded by the senile reflectiveness of modern cultural consciousness, expressed in Kantian philosophy¹⁹;
- c) the schema based on the succession – recognizable in Ancient Greece – of a Greek Enlightenment characterized by the corrosive and disintegrative effects of sophistic critique, followed by a Socratic recomposition founded on the recognition of the normative function of reason. This approach is linked to the

¹⁷ “But Man can be at odds with himself in a double fashion: either as savage if his feelings rule his principles, or as barbarian if his principles destroy his feelings. The savage despises Art and recognizes Nature as his sovereign mistress; the barbarian derides and dishonours Nature, but – more contemptible than the savage – he continues frequently enough to become the slave of his slave. The cultured man makes a friend of Nature and respects her freedom while merely curbing her caprice” (F. Schiller, *Ueber die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, Vierter Brief, p. 318; Eng. trans. by R. Snell, Dover Publications, Mineola, NY, 2004, p. 34).

¹⁸ W. Windelband, “Immanuel Kant”, op. cit., p. 117: “If we set aside everything secondary, there have so far been only two philosophical systems: the Greek and the German – Socrates and Kant”.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 146.

conviction, probably of *völkerpsychologisch*²⁰ derivation, that the history of all *Kulturvölker* is characterized by a progression from an original phase of axiological homogeneity to a phase of rebellion and disintegration. This disintegration is at first dominated by attitudes of "practical" and antisocial egoism, and only subsequently expressed in attempts to ground individualizing claims through a theoretical critique of communal foundations. Yet precisely on the basis of such critique and theoretical fragmentation, it becomes possible to reconstruct the sense of a general and shared reason, and the outline of a communal bond that cannot simply be given but must rather be achieved through conscious reflection. Through this schema, Windelband is able to bring his own age closer to that of the Greeks and the mission of Socrates nearer to that of the critical philosophy of values²¹.

There is no need to dwell further on this operation of tracing the persistence of *Kulturkritik* elements of Schillerian origin in the formative phases of Windelband's philosophical programme. The usefulness of such an undertaking must be assessed in terms of its capacity to contribute to identifying the original *kulturphilosophisch* inspiration of Windelband's neo-Kantianism, and thus to determining the overall significance of his philosophical project. Along this argumentative trajectory, the considerations developed thus far allow us to discern, within Windelband's neo-Kantianism, the persistence of those *kulturkritisch* devices mediated by the Kantian tradition, which Schiller had helped to define through the semantic elaboration of the conceptual pair *Bildung-Kultur*. To this regulative and normative idea of culture, and to its historical projection through the idea of cultural formation, Windelband remained faithful, avoiding the translation of the *Kulturbegriff* into the idealistic system of reason.

2. Schiller as an Idealist

On the centenary of Schiller's death, Windelband devoted to the poet a substantial essay entitled "Schillers transzendentaler Idealismus" (Schiller's transcendental idealism), published in the commemorative issue of *Kant-Studien* in 1905 and first collected in the 1911 edition of the *Präludien*²². In this essay, Schiller is presented as one of the most influential among "*Kant's Schüler*" and is situated within the arc of transcendental idealism, in an intermediate theoretical position suspended between

²⁰ According to Windelband, this constitutes a regularity in the history of all *Kulturvölker*, a "law of history": see W. Windelband, "Über Sokrates. Ein Vortrag", in Id., *Präludien*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 55-87, p. 75.

²¹ Cf. *ibid.*

²² W. Windelband, "Schillers transzendentaler Idealismus", in *Kantstudien*, 10, 1905, pp. 398-411; later in Id., *Präludien. Aufsätze und Reden zur Philosophie und ihrer Geschichte*, 2 vols., Mohr, Tübingen, 1911⁴, vol. 1, pp. 213-229. Quotations are taken from the 1915 edition of the *Präludien (Präludien)*, vol. 1, pp. 213-229; hereafter cited as StI).

“*Abweichung*” (deviation) and “*Hinausgehen*” (going beyond) Kantianism²³. Essentially, this constitutes a renewed formulation of the *Würdigung* model of Schiller “as a philosopher”, through his inclusion in the theoretical trajectory that leads from critical philosophy to the idealism of Hegel – an interpretive line traceable to Kuno Fischer and his influential 1858 book, republished in a revised and expanded edition in 1891-1892²⁴.

Windelband presents Schiller’s reflection as a “Cultural Psychology of Art”²⁵ which arises from a need for self-reflection concerning the ultimate meaning of artistic activity rather than from the intention to found a philosophical system. This need for self-clarification is connected with that of determining “the position of art within the sphere of the rational values of humanity and their historical development”²⁶.

In light of this framework, Schiller’s idealism takes shape as a general “*Grundüberzeugung*” (fundamental conviction): the conviction that “for consciousness no other reality, no other ‘objects’, have validity except those that it itself produces out of its own rational activities”²⁷. Only if one designates as freedom this “spontaneity of the spirit” can one recognise in Schiller’s thought the same centrality of the *Freiheitsbegriff* (concept of freedom) that is found in Kant and Fichte²⁸.

Windelband strives to integrate and reconcile within this theoretical and interpretative framework – constructed around the idea of a Schillerian idealism – all the elements of possible discontinuity with Kantianism²⁹. Thus, the aestheticising tendency that Schiller introduces into the trajectory of transcendental idealism is interpreted as the immediate reflection of his “artistic disposition [*künstlerische Gesinnung*]”³⁰. Here, Windelband acknowledges a shift from the transcendental problematic toward psychologism, which risks translating into an aestheticising subjectivism: “With the subtle turn toward the psychological [*mit der leisen Wendung ins Psychologische*], which is unmistakable here, autonomy becomes a prerogative of the

²³ Cf. StI, pp. 213-214. In the same vein, see B. Bauch, “Schiller und die Idee der Freiheit”, in *Kantstudien*, 10, 1905, pp. 346-372, p. 353.

²⁴ K. Fischer, *Schiller als Philosoph*, Hermann, Frankfurt, 1858. After forty years, Fischer republished the work in a considerably expanded version in two volumes: Id., *Schiller als Philosoph, zweite neubearbeitete und vermehrte Auflage*, in zwei Bücher, Winter, Heidelberg, 1891-1892.

²⁵ StI, p. 215.

²⁶ StI, p. 215.

²⁷ StI, p. 216. Windelband continues: “The conversion of the world into the objects of consciousness is the decisive act of the critical philosopher. Schiller perceived it with the same acuity and understood it with the same intensity as Fichte”.

²⁸ StI, p. 216.

²⁹ Windelband tends to reduce the differences to a “slight nuance [*verschiedene Färbung*]” (StI, p. 217) that the thesis of the spontaneity of consciousness assumes in Schiller as compared with Kant, and which in any case are to be traced back to the “differences of interpretation to which the Kantian doctrine itself has, sooner or later, been subject”.

³⁰ StI, p. 218.

individual aesthetic personality and is placed in danger of losing its attunement to universal lawfulness [*Gesetzmäßigkeit*]"³¹.

The "aestheticisation of transcendental idealism"³² thus exposes itself to the danger of conflating "the autonomy of the artistic personality" with "the sovereignty of an unbounded imagination", to which the Romantics would later arrive through a misunderstood Fichte³³. Yet Schiller is preserved from the danger of lapsing into Romantic irony precisely by those elements of his aesthetics that are specifically anti-Kantian – namely, by his effort toward an objective deduction of the beautiful developed in the *Kallias-Briefe*. Here, Schiller pursues a theoretical demand left partially unfulfilled within the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (*Critique of the Power of Judgment*), owing to the strict transcendental orientation that Kant sought to maintain in it. Once again, however, according to Windelband, this broadening of perspective – or this deviation from Kantianism – is itself rooted in Schiller's "artistic lived experience [*künstlerisches Erleben*]"³⁴. On the other hand, his attempt at an objective deduction of the beautiful would have led Schiller to the fulfilment of transcendental idealism, had he fully grasped that "the natural phenomena, which are to be endowed with that objective character of beauty in itself, are already conceived as objects of consciousness in general"³⁵. Schiller was never so close to the "culmination of transcendentalism" as when he attempted to transcend it through his objective deduction of beauty as freedom in appearance³⁶. The step from this position to the speculative aesthetics of Schelling and Hegel would have been a short one, yet Schiller never resolved to take it³⁷. He remains an intermediate station along the speculative trajectory that leads from critical philosophy to the transcendental idealism of Schelling and Hegel. Along this path, his progress came to a halt; his personal interest redirected him from metaphysical questions back toward the problem of art and toward anthropological reflection³⁸.

It is within the context of such a theoretical withdrawal that the anthropological reflection of the *Ästhetische Briefe* unfold, in which "aesthetic life" is defined as the integrative dimension of "the human being's dual sensible-supersensible nature"³⁹. The originally Kantian problem of coordinating the two dimensions of the human being is thus transposed by Schiller from a transcendental to a *transzendentalpsychologisch* plane⁴⁰. In this way, Windelband believes he can contextualize Schiller's

³¹ StI, p. 220.

³² StI, p. 218.

³³ StI, p. 220.

³⁴ StI, p. 221.

³⁵ StI, p. 222.

³⁶ StI, p. 222.

³⁷ StI, p. 223.

³⁸ StI, p. 223.

³⁹ StI, p. 223.

⁴⁰ StI, p. 225. Windelband also recalls that it was precisely this psychologistic inflection of the transcendental problematic carried out by Schiller that exerted a decisive influence on Lange's

objections to Kant's moral rigorism, by interpreting them through a refined historical-problematic analysis of the evolution of the *Zweiweltentheorie* ("two-worlds theory"), from Plato to Kant.

The relation between the two worlds united in the human being – the sensible and the supersensible – appears in Kant, as in Plato, under a double aspect: on the one hand, there exists between them the necessary opposition, without which the norm and the imperative would lose their meaning in relation to empirical reality; and, on the other hand, the belonging-together, by virtue of which alone even a limited realisation of the norm within the actual world can be taken into account. The negative side of this relationship was emphasised by Kant, above all in the field of morality proper, with a rigorism that provoked Schiller's contradiction and irony. Yet even Kant, in his grand views of life, clearly marked the ultimate shaping of the sensible world as the realisation of freedom. Schiller, however, declared himself unconditionally in favour of the necessity of the opposition in all cases in which the higher aim of his aesthetic reconciliation had not yet been attained⁴¹.

Windelband acutely observes that the *Zweiweltentheorie*, to which the irreducible dualism of the *sinnlich-übersinnlich* (sensible/supersensible) is ultimately traceable, has always been marked by a certain degree of ambivalence, insofar as the distinction between the sensible real and the supersensible ideal refers on the one hand to their insurmountable distance and constitutive difference, and on the other hand to the extension of a continuum of relation that turns the real into the domain of an infinite and ever-unfinished process of realizing the ideal, and the ideal into the norm that sustains and orients this process. In this way, the doctrine of the two worlds can operate simultaneously – often within one and the same philosophical system – both in the sense of a devaluation of the sensible real in favour of the absolute transcendence of the supersensible ideal, and in the sense of a positive valuation of the sensible real as the sphere of realization of the ideal. The tradition of Western Platonism has experienced every gradation and every possible combination of this ambivalence, which even Kant's philosophy could only receive and make its own. Schiller and Kant thus move within the inner oscillation of this theoretical field, thus sharing a deeper commonality of orientation than their differing solutions to specific problems might suggest⁴².

This is the case with the different assessments that the poet and the philosopher gave to the "value of lawfulness" and, consequently, with the ethical inflection that Schiller imparted to aesthetics through the doctrine of the "beautiful soul"⁴³. Windelband tends to interpret Schiller's demand for an overcoming of Kant's moral

neo-Kantianism. On Lange and his reception of Schiller, see C. Russo Krauss, "Il ruolo di Schiller nel neokantismo di Lange", Introduction to F. Lange, *Le poesie filosofiche di Schiller*, FedOA, Naples, 2024, pp. 9-18. One cannot escape the impression that in these pages Windelband seeks to elaborate an interpretation of Schiller alternative to that of Lange.

⁴¹ StI, p. 227.

⁴² Cf. StI, p. 228.

⁴³ StI, p. 228.

rigorism in terms of an objective articulation of Kantian ethics, which once again represents an incomplete anticipation of Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*⁴⁴. It is clear, of course, that Windelband cannot fail to perceive that Schiller's protest against the "*Maximenhaftigkeit der kantischen Moral*" ("being based on maxims of Kant's morality"), according to which the individual acquires value only through conformity to the universal law, arises from Schiller's affirmation of the "original strength of personality" – a force that Kant certainly recognized in general, but whose "individual formation" he never fully managed to do justice to⁴⁵.

The question of the value of personality, and the limits of Kant's philosophy in acknowledging it, marks the threshold of access to the historical problem and to the different assessment that Kant and Schiller developed in this regard. Here, the differences between the two become evident: while the former conceives historical development as the sphere in which the progress of reason is realized in the juridical and institutional dimension of the *Staatsverfassung* (State constitution), for Schiller it is rather the "aesthetic state" that constitutes the cornerstone – or the guiding star – of universal history⁴⁶. Yet once again these differences unfold within a shared theoretical framework that interprets history as a process of gradual emancipation from the maternal womb of nature. For both, history is idealistically the work of humanity, a free action, a *Selbstbestimmung* (self-determination) of the human being. And this, for Windelband, constitutes "the ultimate and highest spiritual community [*Gesinnungsgemeinschaft*] of both thinkers within transcendental idealism"⁴⁷.

Before turning to some concluding considerations on the distinctive argumentative features of Windelband's analyses in *Schillers transzendentaler Idealismus*, it is worth briefly dwelling on the *Festrede* delivered in the same year, entitled *Schiller und die Gegenwart* (Schiller and the present)⁴⁸. In this address – oriented more toward a general cultural appraisal than toward a philosophical framing of Schiller – Windelband traces Schiller's transcendental idealism back to three fundamental motives within the Kantian tradition. First, the "resignation" that arises from the lucid awareness of the opposition between idea and reality, that is, from the clear consciousness of the inevitable unattainability of the ideal⁴⁹. Second, the conviction that the value of the human being lies in their capacity to give form to their own existence and to their world⁵⁰. Finally, the certainty that the value-positing activity of personality is safeguarded from the danger of solipsism through its rootedness in the totality of humanity's values, which impart form and meaning onto the world⁵¹.

⁴⁴ StI, p. 228.

⁴⁵ StI, p. 229.

⁴⁶ StI, p. 229.

⁴⁷ StI, p. 229.

⁴⁸ W. Windelband, *Schiller und die Gegenwart*, Winter, Heidelberg, 1905.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Windelband insists on Schiller's dismay towards those who believe "they can find value in life without placing it within life itself" (*ibid.*, p. 12).

⁵¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 7.

However, these elements – once again aimed at including Schiller within the Kantian tradition and the trajectory of transcendental idealism – are accompanied by several assessments of the significance of Schiller’s poetics for Windelband’s own time, which help us to understand more clearly the position underlying his interpretation. In particular, Windelband focuses on the pathetic element in Schiller’s poetics, emphasizing its profound untimeliness.

From this point of view of *aesthetic truth*, one must regard Schiller’s *pathos* in order to do it justice. It is not the pathos of tendency or of preaching [*Pathos der Tendenz und der Predigt*], but rather the *ethos of disposition* [*Gesinnung*] in aesthetic self-realisation. It is true that today we must regain our sense for it through historical understanding. A different spirit runs through our age. The more vigorously we act outwardly, or believe ourselves to be active, the more our *disposition* seems inclined to withdraw into the unspoken inwardness of our being [...]. It is not modern to be pathetic; we no longer love the solemn expression of inner emotion, the talkative and intellectually stylized outpouring of feeling. Just as we no longer write letters but postcards and telegrams, so too all displays of inwardness in speech and conversation are regarded, even in drama, as an old-fashioned and outdated mode [...]. Perhaps another factor has also come into play. *Pathos* is the natural method for exerting influence upon the masses, and it is therefore the indispensable means in political speeches and assemblies; and since all parties must resort to it, this has undoubtedly contributed to discrediting the pathetic. Thus, within the modern aversion to *pathos* there lie aesthetic, ethical, and political motives of various kinds. It cannot be denied that whoever speaks in lofty tones and with grand words must be prepared to encounter the smile of the augur, which calls his sincerity into question”⁵².

To Windelband, the pathetic element of Schiller’s poetics⁵³ stands as an obstacle to a proper assessment of its significance in the context of his age, for pathos had by then become the language of the masses, and the authenticity of moral feeling had retreated into the unspoken inwardness of personality. Yet it is precisely the constant reference to the value of personality perceptible throughout Schiller’s work that represents the best “antidote against the levelling that the masses have introduced into the dynamics of culture, and that has brought about the crisis of historical values”⁵⁴. With his enthusiasm and his moral fervour, with his cult of personality in its irreducible autonomy, he lived on “the threshold of the century that Hegel characterised with the words: “The masses are advancing””⁵⁵. From that threshold, Schiller continues to point the way to healing the ills of the age.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

⁵³ It will suffice here to refer to F. Schiller, *Ueber das Pathetische*, in NA 20, pp. 196-221.

⁵⁴ W. Windelband, “Schiller und die Gegenwart”, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

3. *A One-Sided Reception and Its Reasons*

From the examination of Windelband's two essays, a specific model of the appropriation of Schiller can be derived. We have seen how *Fischer's* scheme – which reads Schiller as an intermediate and preparatory stage, suspended between the adoption of *Kantian criticism* and the fulfilment of *transcendental idealism* – is substantially taken over by Windelband. Yet this model undergoes a series of problematisations or complications, aimed, on the one hand, at identifying those resistant or discontinuous elements in Schiller's thought that do not fit within the theoretical framework into which one seeks to insert him; and, on the other hand, at integrating and reabsorbing those very elements back into the same schema. Thus, the inclusion of Schiller within the domain of *transcendental idealism* is taken as a presupposition of the argument and traced back to the *Grundüberzeugung* of the autonomy of personality. If Schiller, starting from this Kantian premise, did not take the decisive step toward the fulfilment of idealism, this is due to two sets of reasons closely connected with the poet's biography.

- a) his genuine interest was not truly speculative, but rather directed toward the self-clarification of artistic activity;
- b) from this intellectual disposition followed the aestheticization, that is, the psychologization and anthropologization of transcendental idealism, and hence the partial attenuation or neutralisation of its speculative force.

It clearly emerges that Windelband seeks to account for the shortcomings of Schiller's speculative thought – when viewed against the background of the idealist model – by appealing to the self-reflective attitude that defines it. Yet he does not ascribe genuine theoretical autonomy to Schiller's treatment of the aesthetic problem; rather, he construes it as a psychologizing and anthropologizing departure from the speculative line of development running from Criticism to Speculative Idealism.

Without entering into the specifics of the historiographical problem concerning Schiller, it can only appear paradoxical to entrust the construction of an 'idealistic Schiller' to a mere *Grundüberzeugung* – however significant, such as that of the spontaneity and autonomy of personality – and to regard as deviations or regressions the very elements that define the distinctive character of his reflection, namely its aesthetic and anthropological dimensions. Even on a merely chronological and philological-textual level, it would be difficult to locate this supposed original idealism later deflected and neutralised in psychological and anthropological terms. It is evident that we are not faced with a historiographical reconstruction but rather with an attempt at philosophical and cultural appropriation of a symbol of the national culture, which neo-Kantianism deemed useful to integrate into its own philosophical trajectory. Yet this operation is markedly incomplete precisely because of its very premises. Claiming to acknowledge the philosophical value of Schiller's ideas – as Fischer intended with his unfortunate formula *Schiller als Philosoph* – in fact means asserting that he was a philosopher only insofar as he was *Kant's Schüler* and a forerunner of the idealism of Schelling and Hegel. And if he failed to take the

decisive step towards his illustrious successors, it was precisely because of the most distinctive feature of his theoretical posture: the reformulation of the anthropological problem in the light of an ethical-political reconsideration of aesthetics. Such an attempt at appropriation thus fails to grasp and assess the historical significance and the peculiar philosophical value of Schiller's intellectual development. Maintaining – as has also been done quite recently – that the neo-Kantian *Würdigung* of Schiller made it possible to appreciate fully the philosophical significance of his work is, in my view, not a tenable position – at least not from a historical standpoint⁵⁶.

It is by now a well-established fact in historical scholarship that the genesis of Schiller's philosophical-anthropological problematic can hardly be traced back to his particular reception of Kantianism⁵⁷. Rather, it must be contextualized within the tendencies characteristic of the German Enlightenment, oriented toward the formulation of an anthropology of the “whole human being”, through the progressive overcoming of the dualistic approaches derived from Cartesianism, as well as those associated with the psycho-physical parallelism of Leibnizian descent. The elements of this cultural constellation are complex and heterogeneous. First and foremost, one must mention the advances in physiological research which, beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century, made possible a full recognition of the autonomy of biochemical causality within organic processes and, consequently, the gradual overcoming of both the spiritualist framework of Georg Ernst Stahl⁵⁸ and the mechanistic reductionism of the Cartesian tradition⁵⁹. Decisive in this respect were the investigations of Albrecht von Haller on the physiology of the brain and the nervous system, and on the neural correlates of thought – the so-called *materielle Ideen* – which contributed to reviving the question of the *commercium mentis et corporis* from a new anti-metaphysical and anti-innatist perspective⁶⁰. Equally significant was the work of Johann Georg Sulzer who, through his fundamental distinction between *Vorstellung* and *Empfindung*, opened an experimental perspective on the

⁵⁶ See especially F. Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher. A Re-Examination*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2005, pp. 269–270. See also the more recent F. Beiser, “The Neo-Kantians and Schiller's Transcendental Idealism”, in A. Falduto and T. Mehigan (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook on the Philosophy of Friedrich Schiller*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2023, pp. 559–571. The author here seems to adopt the neo-Kantian interpretation, insofar as the undeniable divergences between Kant and Schiller in the moral and aesthetic spheres are traced back to their solid common theoretical ground – that of transcendental idealism (*ibid.*, p. 560).

⁵⁷ For present purposes, it will suffice to refer to W. Riedel, *Die Anthropologie des jungen Schiller. Zur Ideengeschichte der medizinischen Schriften und der “Philosophischen Briefe”*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg, 1985. By the same author, see also the more recent *Id.*, “Schiller and Philosophical Anthropology”, in *The Palgrave Handbook on the Philosophy of Friedrich Schiller*, pp. 293–317.

⁵⁸ Cf. G. E. Stahl, *Theoria medica vera, ad praxin solidam, ad normam mechanico-geometricam adornata et novis experimentis illustrata*, Orphanotropheum, Halle, 1707.

⁵⁹ Cf. W. Riedel, “Schiller and Philosophical Anthropology”, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 297. Cf. A. von Haller, *Elementa physiologiae corporis humani*, Bousquet, Lausanne, 1757–1766, vol. 4–5.

study of psychic phenomena⁶¹. This resulted not only in an attempt to transcend the rationalistic concept of the soul characteristic of the Wolffian tradition⁶², but also in helping to define aesthetics as an autonomous sphere of reflection grounded in the full acknowledgment of the value of sensibility. It was Sulzer, in fact, who formulated the idea of the aesthetic as an integrative dimension between feeling and intellect, and who emphasized the educational function of art, founded on its capacity to lead the human being toward virtue⁶³. It is within this context that the anthropological project of Ernst Platner⁶⁴ took shape, as well as the scientific orientation of the *Philosophische Ärzte* (philosophical physicians), who started from the premise that a full understanding of the human being could be achieved only through the joint investigation of its physical and spiritual nature⁶⁵.

This empiricist-physiological orientation was received at the Hohe Karlsschule in Stuttgart through the activity of Jacob Friedrich Abel, who taught there between 1772 and 1790 and represented a crucial point of reference for the education of the young Schiller⁶⁶. Through Abel's teaching, Schiller came into contact with the most innovative currents of physiological, anthropological, and aesthetic research of the time, as attested by the three dissertations he composed at the conclusion of his studies⁶⁷.

Along this trajectory – entirely divergent from the transcendental path adopted by Kant⁶⁸ – Schiller had the opportunity to reflect in an original way on the prob-

⁶¹ Cf. J. G. Sulzer, *Vermischte philosophische Schriften*, Weidmanns Erben & Reich, Leipzig, 1773. See in particular the essay "Anmerkungen über den verschiedenen Zustand, worin sich die Seele bei der Ausübung ihrer Hauptvermögen, nämlich des Vermögens, sich etwas vorzustellen, und des Vermögens, zu empfinden, befindet", in *Vermischte philosophische Schriften*, op. cit., pp. 225-243.

⁶² Riedel speaks of a "dewolffianisation of the concept of soul" (W. Riedel, "Schiller and Philosophical Anthropology", op. cit., p. 296).

⁶³ It suffices here to recall J. G. Sulzer, "Von der Kraft (Energie) in den Werken der schönen Künste", in *Vermischte philosophische Schriften*, pp. 122-145; and especially Id., *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste, in einzeln abgehandelten Artikeln nach alphabetischer Ordnung*, 2 vols., Weidmanns Erben und Reich, Leipzig, 1771-1774.

⁶⁴ Cf. E. Platner, *Anthropologie für Aerzte und Weltweise*, Erster Theil, Dyckische Buchhandlung, Leipzig, 1772.

⁶⁵ Cf. W. Riedel, *Die Anthropologie des jungen Schiller*, op. cit., pp. 11 ff.; A. Košenina, *Ernst Platners Anthropologie und Philosophie. Der "Philosophische Arzt" und seine Wirkung auf Johann Karl Wezel und Jean Paul, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg, 1989; and C. Zelle, "Vernünftige Ärzte". Hallesche Psychomediziner und die Anfänge der Anthropologie in der deutschsprachigen Aufklärung*, Niemeyer, Tübingen, 2001.

⁶⁶ See W. Riedel, *Die Anthropologie des jungen Schiller*, op. cit., pp. 17 ff. Cf. J. F. Abel, *Einleitung in die Seelenlehre*, Mezler, Stuttgart, 1786.

⁶⁷ F. Schiller, *Philosophie der Physiologie* (1789), in NA 20, pp. 10-29; *De discrimine febrium inflammatoriarum et putridarum* (1780), NA 22, pp. 31-62; *Versuch über den Zusammenhang der thierischen Natur des Menschen mit seiner geistigen* (1780), NA 20, pp. 37-75. The first two dissertations were rejected, and only with the third did Schiller obtain his academic degree.

⁶⁸ It is perhaps worth recalling how Kant's pragmatic anthropology positioned itself in explicit and polemical opposition to the orientations here mentioned. See, in this regard, the *Vorrede* to the *An-*

lem of the “connection” between spirit and body, intellect and sensibility, drawing from his research significant dramatic motifs that found immediate expression in the composition of *Die Räuber*⁶⁹. But – and this is an even more significant point – it should be recalled that already in his earliest writings he addressed two questions that would remain central throughout his entire intellectual itinerary:

- a) The centrality that the problem of freedom acquired at an early stage in Schiller’s thought must be traced back to an anthropological rather than an idealist-transcendental genesis. This problem finds its first formulation within the framework of the psychophysiological discussion of the *Philosophie der Physiologie* (Philosophy of physiology). In this philosophical debut of the young Schiller, freedom is essentially referred to *attention* (*Aufmerksamkeit*), thus prefiguring an empirical foundation of moral autonomy⁷⁰.
- b) In the *Philosophische Briefe*, an attitude of anti-metaphysical and anti-rationalistic resignation emerges, consistently aimed at grounding morality in an anthropological perspective⁷¹.

thropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht: “A doctrine of the knowledge of the human being (anthropology) can be approached either from a *physiological* or from a *pragmatic* point of view. The *physiological* knowledge of the human being investigates what *nature makes of the human being*; the *pragmatic* knowledge, by contrast, inquires what *he as a free-acting being makes of himself, or can and should make of himself*. Whoever speculates about the natural causes of what lies at the basis of the human being’s faculty of memory may, as Descartes did, pursue the traces of impressions left by sensations, but he must finally admit that, in such a play, he is merely the *spectator* of his own representations. He must therefore leave nature to do as it pleases, since he neither knows nor can employ for his own purposes the nerves and the cerebral fibers; and consequently, every subtle theoretical investigation in this field is a *waste of time*” (I. Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, in AA 7, pp. 117-333, p. 119; En. tr., *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, ed. by R. B. Loudon, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, pp. 3-4)

⁶⁹ Cf. L. A. Macor, *Il giro fangoso dell’umana destinazione. Friedrich Schiller dall’illuminismo al criticismo*, ETS, Pisa, 2008.

⁷⁰ F. Schiller, *Philosophie der Physiologie*, p. 17: “The soul exerts an active influence on the organ of thought. It can strengthen material ideas, adhere to them arbitrarily, and in this way it also makes spiritual ideas stronger. This is the effect of attention. The soul thus has power over the intensity of the motives [*Beweggründe*]; it is itself what makes them motives. In this way, the question of what freedom is becomes resolved. Only the confusion of the first with the second will has caused debate on the matter. The first will, which determines my attention, is free; the latter, which determines action, is the slave of the intellect. Freedom therefore does not lie in the fact that I choose what the intellect has determined as best (...), but rather in the fact that I choose what my intellect can determine as best. Human morality as a whole is thus grounded in attention, that is, in the active influence of the soul on material ideas within the organ of thought” (ibid., p. 27; translation mine). Riedel recalls the significance of the concept of attention in Abel’s thought and its diffusion within the philosophical culture of the European Enlightenment, from Bonnet and Condillac to Herder: cf. W. Riedel, “Schiller and Philosophical Anthropology”, op. cit., pp. 305-306.

⁷¹ On this issue, it is difficult to follow B. Bauch’s reconstruction (*Schiller und die Idee der Freiheit*, p. 355): “Above all, the aesthetic need leads to a transformation of the critical foundations into the metaphysical; and the newly gained metaphysics itself forms the basis for a free further development of critical ethics, and thus also of the doctrine of freedom”. On this point, see Pisano’s reading of

If, then, Schiller's original concern was the empiricist construction of a new anthropology of the human being understood in its dual sensuous and spiritual nature, the encounter with Kantianism did not amount to a "revolution"⁷², but rather to "an addition of new materials to an already-solid foundation"⁷³. The psychophysiological phenomenalism that Schiller derived from his medical training never developed into transcendental idealism, but instead unfolded its heuristic potential within the anthropological domain⁷⁴.

When Schiller's reflection moved beyond the strictly physiological sphere to adopt the instruments of transcendental philosophy and to probe the solutions proposed in

the neo-Kantian reception of Schiller centred on the question of the "function of metaphysics": F. Pisano, "*Tutta la natura è solo sintesi, ...*", op. cit., pp. 48 ff.

⁷² Beiser speaks of a "revolution" and a radical transformation: "The net effect of Schiller's reading of Kant in the early 1790s was nothing less than a revolution in his ethical thinking. The revolution was as broad as it was deep. Where Schiller's early ethics placed the source of moral obligation in the laws of nature and divine providence, his later Kantian ethics would locate that source in the laws of the rational will alone. Where his earlier ethics attempted to connect moral duty and self-interest, his later Kantian ethics would stress moral principle as the sole motive for moral conduct. Where his earlier ethics saw the general happiness as the fundamental law of morality, his later Kantian ethics would find this law in the categorical imperative alone. And where his earlier ethics would stress the importance of love and benevolence as the basis of moral action, his later Kantian ethics would replace naturally good sentiments with the moral law. A more complete and sweeping reversal is scarcely imaginable!" (F. Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, p. 44).

⁷³ Cf. Riedel: p. 307: "Thus, Schiller's thought was relatively mature when he began to deal with Kant's *Critiques* in February 1791 (...). It is not a new start, but rather an addition of new materials to an already-solid foundation. Schiller had already carried out, on a phenomenalist path, Kant's newly formulated focus on cognitive references in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which was compared with a 'Copernican revolution' (...). However, it was not a matter of the nature of the 'transcendental *a priori*', but rather a matter of the 'endemic forms of human neurophysiology', in which natural history ('the planet') 'gives us the idioms of our concepts'". Riedel refers to F. Schiller, *Philosophische Briefe*, in NA 20, pp. 107-129, pp. 126-127: "Our purest concepts are by no means images of things, but merely their necessarily determined and co-existing signs. Neither God, nor the human soul, nor the world are truly what we take them to be. Our thoughts about these things are only the endemic forms in which the planet we inhabit transmits them to us – our brains belong to this planet, and therefore also the idioms of our concepts that are stored within it. Yet the power of the soul is peculiar, necessary, and always identical with itself; the arbitrariness of the materials through which it expresses itself changes nothing in the eternal laws according to which it expresses itself, so long as this arbitrariness is not in contradiction with itself, so long as the sign remains completely faithful to what it signifies. Just as the power of thought develops the relations of the idioms, these relations must also truly exist in things. Truth, therefore, is not a property of the idioms, but of the inferences; not the resemblance of the sign to what it signifies, nor of the concept to the object, but the agreement of this concept with the laws of the power of thought" (translation mine).

⁷⁴ Cf. W. Riedel, *Die Anthropologie des jungen Schiller*, pp. 216 ff. Riedel recalls that Adam Ferguson, in his *Institutes of Moral Philosophy* (1769), also maintained the merely analogical character of sensible representation. Ferguson was another essential reference for Schiller's philosophical education, which he knew through Garve's translation: A. Ferguson, *Grundsätze der Moralphilosophie. Uebersetzt und mit einigen Anmerkungen versehen von C. Garve*, Dyck, Leipzig, 1772. Cf. also W. Riedel, "Schiller and Philosophical Anthropology", op. cit., p. 304.

the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, the fundamental concerns and interests that had taken shape during his early period remained intact. His aesthetic turn in no way amounted to an adoption of transcendental idealism, but rather to the further development of his original anthropological problematic, now pursued through the adoption of Kantian tools and conceptual devices. It was thus inevitable that certain realignments occurred, along with genuine forms of adherence to Kant. The aesthetic became the terrain upon which to seek an answer to the problem – previously examined on physiological grounds – of the integration between spirit and sensibility, and thus to the question concerning the identification of a possible domain in which the human being might achieve fulfilment. This, however, entails a clear displacement of aesthetics from the theoretical plane (as in the Leibnizian tradition) or from the reflective one (as in the Kantian tradition) to a moral, or more precisely, an ethical-political plane.

The most evident symptom of the persistence of Schiller's original anthropological orientation can be found in *Über Anmuth und Würde* (*On Grace and Dignity*), where he makes explicit his protest against Kant's ethical rigorism, which irrevocably subjects sensibility to the sovereignty of the law, thereby humiliating a fundamental aspect of the human being⁷⁵. Schiller, by contrast, is convinced that only the aesthetic dimension of the *schöne Seele* (beautiful soul) – understood as harmony between reason and sensibility, or between *Pflicht* (duty) and *Neigung* (inclination) – fully realises the human vocation, even from an ethical point of view.

⁷⁵ In *Ueber Anmuth und Würde*, Schiller writes: "In Kant's moral philosophy, the idea of duty is presented with a severity that repels all graces and might tempt a weak intellect to seek moral perfection by taking the path of a somber and monkish asceticism" (F. Schiller, *Ueber Anmuth und Würde*, in NA 20, pp. 251-308, p. 284; En. tr., in *Schiller's "On Grace and Dignity" in Its Cultural Context. Essays and a New Translation*, ed. by J. V. Curran and C. Fricker, Camden House, NY, 2005, pp. 123-222, p. 150). If he was led to this by the "circumstances of the time" and by his need to fight against the prevailing "coarse materialism", it is nevertheless undeniable that he "adopted the rule of relentlessly pursuing sensuousness, both where it impudently scorns ethical sensibility and under the impressive cover of morally praiseworthy aims, in which a certain enthusiastic spirit of a certain Order knows particularly well how to hide it" (ibid.). "How were the *children of the house* at fault, if he was only concerned about the *servants*? Must an unselfish emotion in the noblest of breasts come under suspicion just because impure inclinations often usurp the name of virtue? Just because the moral weakling would like to introduce a certain *laxity* into the law of reason, to make it a toy for his own convenience, does this mean that a *rigidity* has to set in, transforming the most powerful expression of moral freedom into merely an honorable kind of servitude? Does the truly ethical human have a freer choice between self-regard and self-reproach than the slave of the senses between pleasure and pain? Is there perhaps less pressure on a pure will than on a depraved one? Does mankind have to be accused and humiliated simply by the imperative form of the moral law, and does the most sublime document of its greatness also have to be a certification of its frailty? Could one indeed, in this *imperative* form, have avoided a situation where a prescription given by humans to themselves as rational beings and therefore binding only on them and compatible only with their feeling of freedom took on the appearance of an unfamiliar and positive law – an appearance that could be reduced only with difficulty, because of their *radical* tendency (of which they stand accused) to work against it?" (ibid., pp. 285-286; En. tr., p. 151). See also Kant's reply in I. Kant, *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793-1794), in AA 6, pp. 1-202, B 10-14.

The position concerning the rehabilitation of sensibility⁷⁶ and the practical twist brought to aesthetics is now linked, in a new formulation, to the problem of freedom. Beauty – already defined in the *Kallias-Briefe* as *Freiheit in der Erscheinung* (freedom in the appearance) and, in continuity with Kantian thought, determined in the light of the concept of *Selbstbestimmung* – thus assumes an immediately political significance. The aesthetic refers to the analogy of a realm of freedom, in which the ruler exercises his will not in opposition but in harmony with the inclination of the citizen, and in which, in turn, the citizen affirms his inclination in consonance with the will of the ruler⁷⁷. There is undoubtedly a parallel here with the political metaphors through which Kant assimilated the critique of pure reason to the establishment of a juridical order that puts an end to the oscillation between scepticism and dogmatism, and thus to a "state of nature" in which reason itself "can establish and secure its assertions and claims only through war"⁷⁸. Yet the level of Kant's argumentation is significantly displaced in comparison to that on which Schiller moves. For the latter, indeed, it is not a matter of thematising the question of legitimate knowledge, within which sensibility must also find its epistemological justification and even its "apology"⁷⁹. The ground on which Schiller operates is rather the aesthetic-moral one, in which Kant's moral rigorism inevitably appears in its repressive aspects.

In conclusion, the Baden neo-Kantian appropriation of Schiller can only leave in the background the original anthropological motive of his thought, aimed at rehabilitating the significance of sensibility and rejecting the unilateral and repressive domination of reason over it. This dimension is evidently incompatible with the distinctive interpretation developed within that school, and – as Windelband himself explicitly reiterates – would lead toward a psychologistic inflection of critical philosophy. This must be acknowledged despite the group's efforts to advance a non-intellectualistic integration of criticism and to affirm the recognition – made possible precisely by Kantianism – of the irrational values of *Kultur*.

⁷⁶ The expression occurs in P. Kondylis, *Die Aufklärung im Rahmen des neuzeitlichen Rationalismus*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart, 1981, p. 19. Cf. also W. Riedel, "Schiller and Philosophical Anthropology", op. cit., p. 299.

⁷⁷ F. Schiller, *Ueber Anmuth und Würde*, pp. 278-279; En. tr., pp. 145-146: "With permission, I shall illustrate this with an image. When a monarchic state is run in such a way that, although everything proceeds in accordance with the will of one person, the individual citizen can still persuade himself that he is living according to his own lights and simply following his inclinations, one calls this a liberal government. However, one would be very hesitant to give it this name if *either* the ruler imposed his will against the citizen's inclinations or the citizen imposed his inclinations against the will of the ruler; since, in the first instance, the government would not be *liberal*, and in the second it would not be a *government*". For an overview of the "political" interpretations of Schiller, the reading of C. Brodsky, "Schiller and Critical Theory", in *The Palgrave Handbook on the Philosophy of Friedrich Schiller*, op. cit., pp. 625-654, proves especially illuminating.

⁷⁸ I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, AA III, Abt. 1, B779-780, A751-A752; En. tr. by N. Kemp Smith, Macmillan & Co., London, 1929, p. 601.

⁷⁹ Kant himself speaks of an "apology of sensibility" (*Apologie der Sinnlichkeit*) in *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, in AA 7, B 30.

It seems to me both possible and legitimate to trace Kantianism back to its fundamental anthropological foundations and, on this basis, to rediscover a ground of convergence with Schiller's thought. Yet it is precisely the valorisation of the anthropological elements of critical philosophy that is categorically rejected by the mature neo-Kantian schools, which thereby preclude themselves from access to what, in my view, constitutes the proper standpoint from which to apprehend the relationship between Kant and Schiller.

This particular neo-Kantian approach to Schiller stems from reasons rooted in a broader cultural and historical dimension. Schiller's programme, culminating in the *Ästhetische Erziehung* (aesthetic education), is a project of educating humanity to freedom through beauty and art. Educating to freedom means the *Selbstbestimmung* of all dimensions of the human being, understood in its sensible and spiritual condition. In this sense, art becomes the bearer of a critical function with regard to existing reality, and of a civic and political function with regard to society and the state. It becomes an instrument for transforming society, for healing alienation, and for the concrete liberation of the human being⁸⁰. In Windelband's neo-Kantianism, as we have seen, the *kulturphilosophisch* aspects are clearly present. There are also elements of a *Kulturkritik*, yet these are entrusted to the ideal unfolding of reason – no longer understood intellectualistically as a merely logical connection, but as the totality of the fundamental values of *Kultur*. Nevertheless, one cannot escape the impression that such a *Kulturphilosophie* has ceased to be an instrument of struggle for the emancipation of humanity, as it was for Schiller's generation, and has instead become a 'strategy of resistance' toward modernity and a form of resigned defence against the advancing massification of culture⁸¹.

⁸⁰ On the Schillerian question of *Entfremdung*, I may refer – also for further bibliographical indications – to G. Morrone, "Schiller e la critica della cultura moderna", op. cit.

⁸¹ On the trajectory of German *Kulturkritik* and the gradual exhaustion of its emancipatory import, see G. Bollenbeck, *Eine Geschichte der Kulturkritik*, op. cit.

Schiller as Kantian *Vermittler* for Goethe in Jonas Cohn's Critical Account

DOMENICO SPINOSA

1. Introduction

It is well known that 1905, the centenary year of Schiller's death, saw the publication of an important monographic issue of *Kant-Studien*¹ dedicated to the German poet and philosopher. This issue contained works by representatives of the neo-Kantian movement, with the notable exception of the Marburg neo-Kantians. Alongside contributions from Otto Liebmann, Wilhelm Windelband, Hans Vaihinger and Bruno Bauch, there was also a lengthy (almost sixty pages long) and dense article entitled "Das Kantische Element in Goethes Weltanschauung. Schillers philosophischer Einfluss auf Goethe" (The Kantian element in Goethe's worldview. Schiller's philosophical influence on Goethe)² by the young neo-Kantian³, Jonas Cohn, consisting of a preface and four closely connected parts (in addition to the conclusions). In this paper, I will outline some of the themes and issues addressed by Cohn concerning the extent to which Kantian influence, mediated by Schiller, manifests in fundamental aspects of Goethe's work and thought. Or, as Cohn himself puts "the extent and content of this inheritance"⁴. At the beginning of his discourse, Cohn points out that Schiller

gave Goethe, in the only way possible for him, what the poet could have benefited from Kant. To understand Goethe's relationship with Kantian philosophy correctly, it is important to remember the friend who introduced him to this unfamiliar territory and translated its incomprehensible language for him⁵.

¹ The aforementioned second issue of the tenth volume of *Kant-Studien* contains contributions from the following authors (in addition to those already mentioned): Rudolf Eucken, Tim Klein, Maximilian Runze, Friedrich Alfred Schmid.

² See J. Cohn, "Das Kantische Element in Goethes Weltanschauung. Schillers philosophischer Einfluss auf Goethe", in H. Vaihinger and B. Bauch (eds.), *Schiller als Philosoph und seine Beziehungen zu Kant*, *Kant-Studien*, 10/2, 1905, pp. 286-345 (from now on abbreviated as KGS).

³ See S. Marck, "Am Ausgang des jüngeren Neu-Kantianismus. Ein Gedenkblatt für Richard Höningwald und Jonas Cohn", *Archiv für Philosophie*, 3/2, 1949, pp. 144-164, in particular chapter 3 "Jonas Cohn, kritischer Dialektiker", pp. 159-164.

⁴ KGS, p. 287.

⁵ KGS, p. 286.

The classical interpretation, which was still prevalent in Cohn's time, often portrays Goethe as a Spinozist, or suggests that Spinoza was the philosopher who influenced Goethe the most. However, as Cohn points out, experts have since recognized the influence of Kant. Cohn refers to Karl Vorländer and Otto Harnack here, the latter of whom "had the decisive merit of emphasizing Kant's significance for Goethe in the years of his full maturity"⁶. Nevertheless, Cohn also adds that "as far as I can see, there is still no evidence of what Goethe actually appropriated from Kant"⁷.

One of the first important points that Cohn highlights in the introduction to his work is that Goethe's researches for him were *Erlebnisse*:

While in later years he did not form or maintain friendships without a background of shared intellectual interests, conversely, every intellectual pursuit led him to personal involvement. Thus, Schiller's friendship and Kantian philosophy merged into a single entity in his mind⁸.

This means that, while Goethe was influenced by Schiller's Kantianism, it was not quite in the strict sense of the term. Instead, he transformed this foreign material in a fruitful way by molding it in the furnace of his own personality.

According to Cohn, two key concept words, which would later occupy a dominant position in Goethe's philosophical reflections, only acquired their meaning after his relationship with Schiller: 'idea' and 'symbol', which encapsulate the most significant philosophical (and non-philosophical) issues for Goethe. In fact, Cohn points out that "for the poet, a word is more than just an external designation for a clearly defined concept. The poet feels a sense of desecration when, in the strict world of science, thought seeks to free itself from the dominion of language and reduce words to arbitrary symbols and counting signs"⁹. For Goethe, the history of the human spirit "lives in words"; more than that, words themselves live and have a "magical power"¹⁰. Needless to say, when it came to thinking and research, Goethe distanced himself from "murky floods of mystical verbosity"¹¹, and yet a meaningful word was always a valuable treasure for him.

Cohn argues that, for Goethe, the meaning of words such as 'idea' and 'symbol' is not confined to one philosophical domain. At first glance, the term 'idea' encompasses what Goethe derived from Kantian epistemology. However, as this epistemological concept aided Goethe in his scientific endeavors, it is also deeply connected to his philosophy of nature. Furthermore, as Kant's concept of 'idea' already had an ethical dimension, Goethe adopted this term to extend the scope of his philosophy of nature towards aesthetics and religion. Conversely, 'symbol' is primarily an im-

⁶ KGS, pp. 286-287.

⁷ KGS, p. 287.

⁸ KGS, p. 289, *emph. mine.*

⁹ KGS, p. 291.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

portant term in aesthetics. However, it also has applications in the context of knowledge of nature, and since it arguably has its deepest meaning in religion, Goethe uses it in this context too.

These two key concepts therefore indicate that none of the main areas of philosophy should be omitted when considering the influence of Schiller-mediated Kantianism on Goethe. Consequently, Cohn structures his exposition into four parts: "theory of knowledge, ethic, aesthetics, and philosophy of religion"¹².

2. *Theory of knowledge*

Cohn begins his account with the occasion on which Goethe first met Schiller: a conversation following a meeting of the 'Natural Science Society' in Jena in the summer of 1794. This marked the beginning of their unique friendship and gave Goethe the most significant inspiration he had ever received with regard to Kant's theory of knowledge. Both poets were dissatisfied with the purely empirical treatment of scientific and natural phenomena. In contrast to this approach, Goethe developed a way of striving to see the legitimate action of nature in every single phenomenon, using the example of plants' metamorphosis. He drew the *Urpflanze*, convinced that he was conveying an immediate experience. Schiller's response, as is well known, was "That is not experience, that is an idea"¹³. Apparently, the only common ground between the two poets seemed to be their rejection of a *geistloser* approach. However, Schiller's remark, made at a pivotal moment, prompted Goethe to reconsider the purpose of his research. He adopted the term 'idea' for his *Urpflanze*. In fact, as Cohn notes, their correspondence in the first two months of 1798 is full of references to investigations into the method of natural scientific research. It was during this exchange with Schiller that Goethe's convictions took shape. Therefore, according to Cohn, it is necessary to go into more detail, highlighting Schiller's positions first.

It is widely accepted that Schiller contributed to the foundation of modern aesthetics and developed his own views on ethics. Regarding the theory of knowledge, however, Cohn argues that Schiller remained essentially quite receptive. He was certainly freed by Kant from the uncertain oscillation between "fantastic enthusiasm and skeptical despair"¹⁴, and he recognized the importance of the subjectivity problem in our relationship with the surrounding reality. In fact, thanks to Kant's concept of 'idea', Schiller explores the crucial role of the spiritual dimension of human beings in relation to the meaning of their actions. As is well known, Kantian doctrine states that cognition is never the passive reception of something given, but

¹² Ibid.

¹³ KSG, p. 292. See H. W. Nevins, *Life of Friedrich Schiller*, Walter Scott, London, 1889, p. 102. Goethe replied: "Well, it's a great comfort to have Ideas without knowing it, and actually to see them with one's eyes.

¹⁴ KSG, p. 293.

rather an active process of the mind, an endless pursuit of an unattainable goal that ‘beacons from afar’ and, despite its unattainability, lends value and purpose to the pursuit itself. Accordingly, Cohn notes that the term ‘idea’ encompasses three core Kantian principles: the subjectivity of all knowledge, the spontaneity of the spirit, and the unattainability of the ultimate purpose. Schiller embraced these three fundamental concepts of the Kantian theory of knowledge. When he uses the word ‘idea’, Schiller therefore always means subjectivity, spontaneity, and unattainability at once. According to Cohn, such thoughts evoked “harmonic resonances” in Goethe’s spirit¹⁵. As a researcher of the natural sciences, Goethe sought clarification about the purpose of his work from the critique of the cognitive faculties. However, what remained hidden from him was that Kant’s concept of nature was based on mechanistic natural science, which contrasted sharply with Goethe’s “living intuition” (*lebendiger Anschauung*)¹⁶. Already in his early studies of Kant, Goethe examined the relationship between object and subject in his scientific research in depth. In 1792, he wrote *Der Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt und Subjekt* (published in 1823)¹⁷. In this work, Goethe draws a comparison between science and art. He argues that artists should submit their finished work to the judgement of others, while researchers should communicate every experience and hypothesis to the public. Only when research is diversified and an overview of the entire series of phenomena is presented in accordance with their natural order is it possible to observe the continuity between what precedes and what follows. In this case, there is a need for “more of an ‘exposition’ than of a proof” (*mehr der “Darlegung” als des Beweises*)¹⁸. Cohn argues that this expression becomes more concrete for Goethe (and Schiller) than an observant Kantian could accept. Therefore, Goethe completely translates this principle into its concrete reality.

Goethe’s interest in evolutionary orders led him to a conception involving the genetic compositions inherent in reality. He expounds this idea in his 1798 essay *Erfahrung und Wissenschaft*, which he sends to Schiller. In this essay, he distinguishes three stages of research. First, the “empirical phenomenon”, which everyone finds in nature, is raised through experiments to the level of the “scientific phenomenon”. However, this rational process is not the final step. Rather, the results of all our observations and experiments must ultimately be represented in the “pure phenomenon”¹⁹. Cohn notes that, for Goethe, reason is a means of proceeding from the scattered details of experience to *reiner Anschauung* (pure intuition) and that *Anschauung* remains the goal of all research. This improved appreciation of reason and clearer

¹⁵ KSG, p. 294.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Regarding this contribution by Goethe, also with reference to the themes and issues raised by Cohn, see W. von Engelhardt, “‘Der Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt und Subjekt’. Goethes Aufsatz im Licht von Kants Vernunftkritik, in *Athenäum. Jahrbuch für Romantik*, 10, 2000, pp. 9-28.

¹⁸ KSG, p. 295.

¹⁹ J. W. Goethe, “Empirical Observation and Science”, in Id., *Scientific Studies*, En. tr. by D. Miller, Suhrkamp, New York, 1988, pp. 24-25, p. 25.

indication of the three stages represents a significant advance on the earlier essay. Schiller recognizes this development and presents it in accordance with the Kantian philosophical scheme. He describes the three stages of Goethe's process of acquiring knowledge as follows: common empiricism, rationalism, and rational empiricism.

For his part, Goethe requires rational empiricism to be critical; according to Cohn, this means allowing different modes of representation to exist alongside one another. Ideas transferred from the realm of thought to that of experience are suited only to a subset of phenomena. As Goethe affirms: "I might say, nature is unfathomable for the very reason that no one man can comprehend it, although humanity, as a whole, might be able to comprehend it. But as dear humanity can never exist at one and the same time, nature, therefore, has the game in its own hands, when wishing to hide itself from us"²⁰.

This thought deeply struck Schiller. It is indeed interesting to observe Goethe's way of thinking with regard to the form that Kantian stimuli ultimately took in him. When Goethe uses the term 'subjectivity of knowledge', he is referring to the influence of the concrete and individual subject. This totality of all human forces takes the place that a philosopher, bound by a rigorous critical method, would assign to the abstract concept of supra-individual consciousness. The participation of the subject and various subjective and individual predispositions in knowledge is no longer seen as merely an obscuring of the object, but rather as a "promoting force" (*fördernde Kraft*)²¹. In a sense, in this way, rationalism still plays a role in the cognitive process, as the spontaneity of the spirit is recognized as part of individual subjectivity. Yet Goethe does not indiscriminately adopt Kantian ideas; he transforms them into concrete concepts. While Kant believed that the activity of the spirit resided in the categorical form of every act of thought, Goethe believed that it resided in the living activity of the researcher. Goethe repeatedly emphasizes that nothing can be gained through passive transmission in scientific research. Rather, everything must be achieved through one's own efforts: "Similarly in the sciences you really know nothing, you always have to do, to act"²². Such action must be purposeful, so it is necessary to understand the tools at one's disposal. For this reason, Goethe demands "a critique of the senses and human intellect"²³. Every force must be aware of its own effectiveness and limitations. Above all, Goethe believes that his own nature is such a force. He defines his inner production as a heuristic, i.e. a means of revealing truths. Even when he says, "I never thought about thinking"²⁴, he sets himself the task of becoming aware of his own scientific ingenuity. Therefore, according to Cohn, this not-thinking-about-thought is true with regard to abstract,

²⁰ Letter from Goethe to Schiller, February 1798, in L. D. Schmitz (ed.), *Correspondence between Schiller and Goethe, from 1794 to 1805*, Georg Bell & Sons, London, 1890, vol. 2, § 437, p. 56.

²¹ KSG, p. 299.

²² J. W. Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, En. tr. by E. Stopp, Penguin, London, 1998, § 415.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ J. W. Goethe, *Gedichte, Goethes Werke*, Sophienausgabe, I/5, Böhlau, Weimar, 1893, p. 92.

theoretical cognitive analysis, whereas Goethe repeatedly attempted to clarify the particularity of his way of knowing and his personal cognitive abilities.

Rather than transforming the phenomena of *Anschauung* into concepts, Goethe orders them into continuous sequences according to their internal affinity, so that the more complex phenomena develop from the simpler ones. As Cohn points out, the correct understanding of the ultimate *Urphänomene*, which cannot be traced back to anything else, remains the main issue for Goethe. Indeed, through his concept of *Urphänomen*, Goethe aimed to develop a clear understanding of what can be defined as the conformity of nature. For him, the law of nature is not an abstract statement or mathematical formula, but rather a specific intuition — an analogy that renders entire groups of other phenomena understandable. Goethe attributes an “exact sensory imagination” (*exakte sinnliche Phantasie*)²⁵ to the artist, which is also the natural gift of the researcher in the artistic field. Kant described the *intellectus archetypus* as an intuitive faculty of judgement. Goethe dared to identify himself with this concept, which was originally conceived as an ideal one. While this approach to understanding his own work diverges from Kantian thought, Goethe nevertheless owes his focus on the autonomous activities of his spirit, and his recognition and appreciation of the dependence of all knowledge on theoretical-cognitive activity, to Kantian influence, always mediated by Schiller.

The term ‘idea’ signifies that the individuality of the subject is present in the results of knowledge as “productive activity” (*schaffende Thätigkeit*)²⁶. However, the term ‘idea’, with its exquisitely polysemic meaning, is not confined to this. Goethe makes a clear and precise distinction between ‘idea’ and ‘concept’: “A concept is summation, an idea is the result of experience”²⁷. The concept of an animal or plant species, for example, simply summarizes what always repeats in a series of individual experiences. The ‘idea’, on the other hand, emerges from the totality of experience as a universal law, which is the basis of all experience in ever-changing forms. According to Goethe, the *Urpflanze* cannot be obtained by mere comparison or summation. Rather, it is observed when the entire variety of plant formations is traced back to a single type. As Cohn notes, for Goethe this intuitive lawfulness of nature is essentially one and the same everywhere.

In this way, the influence of Kant combined with Goethe’s concept of *Naturvergötterung*²⁸. However, according to Cohn, it should be emphasized that Goethe’s concept of nature became increasingly ‘spiritualized’ in his work. When Goethe reread his poem *Die Natur* (1783) many years after writing it, he realized that it lacked a vision of the two great mechanisms of nature: *Polarität* and *Steigerung*. In *Polarität*, unitary nature is divided into opposites and differences are conceived as essential

²⁵ J. W. Goethe, “[Review of] Ernst Stiedenroth: A Psychology in Clarification of Phenomena from the Soul (Part One, Berlin: 1824)”, in Id., *Scientific Studies*, op. cit., pp. 45-46, p. 46.

²⁶ KSG, p. 301.

²⁷ J. W. Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, op. cit., § 1135.

²⁸ KSG, p. 302.

parts of nature, rather than mere negations as in Spinoza. *Steigerung* introduces value into nature, allowing it to be conceived as a preliminary stage of the spirit. Thanks to this concept of *Steigerung*, which he developed through his research in biology, Goethe's conception of nature approaches idealistic philosophy. The spirit is no longer just a random part of nature, equivalent to all other parts; rather, it is growth, the end of nature, and in its cognitive activity it has a kind of 'intuition' (*Ahnung*)²⁹ of the greater being of all things.

Cohn believes that to correctly understand Goethe, we must grasp the meaning of this *'Ahnung'*. Kant's critical attitude must accord with the reverential respect with which Goethe approached the investigation of nature's secrets. It would be impossible to explore the meaning of the term 'idea' in Goethe's work if we were to overlook the element of unattainability: "A thinking man's greatest happiness is to have fathomed what can be fathomed and to revere in silence what cannot be fathomed"³⁰. This respect for the unattainable prevents Goethe from becoming lost in purely speculative explorations of nature, or from developing a rigid system of natural philosophy. Any attempt to grasp the 'idea' could be considered as a resemblance to the unattainable, but only a resemblance. After all, Goethe could have agreed with Kant that his field was "the fertile pathos of experience"³¹. According to Cohn's, both Goethe and Kant agree that no limits should be placed on research within experience. However, while for Kant the unattainable remains a limiting concept, for Goethe it pervades all experience and can therefore be foreseen, albeit not recognized. This foresight becomes increasingly meaningful the more nature is explored in a diverse and faithful manner. Only in this way can the famous maxim be understood: "If you want to reach the infinite, explore every aspect of the finite"³². Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that there is essentially only one object, and all differences between things are established transcendently by humans.

Let's summarize Cohn's view of Shiller's mediated Kantian influence on Goethe's theory of knowledge. Therefore, Kant's "critical foundation"³³ was transformed by Goethe into a productive disposition of the spirit. Nevertheless, Cohn maintains that the deepest foundation of Kant's thought remained foreign to Goethe. Where Goethe uses Kantian artistic terms, he always reinterprets them in his own way. Although Goethe remained somewhat distant from scientific theories of knowledge, he benefited from them. In particular, from Kant's theory of knowledge he learned to consider the role of the spirit in the cognitive domain. His own personal relationship with the spirit became a matter to be addressed, and Kant's critical method shielded him from metaphysical fervor. Furthermore, by studying philoso-

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ J. W. Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, op. cit., § 1207.

³¹ KSG, p. 303.

³² J. Naydler (ed.), *Goethe on Science. An Anthology of Goethe's Scientific Writings*, Floris Book, Edinburgh, 1996, p. 37.

³³ KSG, p. 303.

phy, Goethe was able to understand his most important contemporaries more fully. However, everything he learned from the critique of reason followed the lines indicated to him by Schiller.

3. *Ethic*

Turning to moral issues, Cohn observes that Goethe's attitude towards Kantian ethics in his youth differed greatly from his attitude towards Kant's theory of knowledge. While the latter was simply foreign to him, the former appeared directly hostile. The sharp Kantian opposition between duty and inclination, morality and nature, seemed to contradict Goethe's natural interiority and moral sense as much as any ascetic morality would. This was how Goethe originally felt. However, Cohn asserts that Goethe's convictions were actually much closer to Kantian ethics than one might think. Unfortunately, there is no material available to trace this process of acceptance in detail. Therefore, to examine the positions Goethe took at a later stage, one must briefly analyze the development of his moral convictions up to his friendship with Schiller.

Like all members of the Sturm und Drang movement, the young Goethe disdained any constraints that could hinder the expression of a free and brilliant personality. For these youth, strength was the ideal, and they cared little about its direction. The aims of bourgeois life were viewed with suspicion. The entire edifice of culture, which the Enlightenment had regarded with such pride, now seemed shaken to its very foundations by Rousseau's criticism. Therefore, personality became the only benchmark of value. Hostility towards social class distinctions and the constraints of bourgeois life led, in Goethe's case at least, only to an aversion towards one aspect of this despised system – never to revolutionary plans. In fact, it was not society, but the individual, that was considered the main issue. These sentiments were certainly far from those of Kant, but, as Cohn points out, they were both influenced by the same source: Rousseau. Like Goethe, Kant was also convinced by Rousseau's argument that cultural progress does not necessarily lead to increased happiness.

For various reasons, Goethe and Kant became opponents of conventional Enlightenment morality, which smoothed out all rough edges in an apparent harmony. For Goethe, this was a period in which all conscious activity was considered to be an effect of nature. This is evident in the words with which he concludes the fragment entitled *Die Natur*, in which he addresses Mother Nature as follows: "She has brought me here and will also lead me away. I trust her. She may scold me, but she will not hate her work. It was not I who spoke of her. No! What is false and what is true, she has spoken it all. The fault, the merit, is all hers"³⁴. Cohn also points out that this religious-style devotion to nature probably intensified during Goethe's trip

³⁴ J. W. Goethe, *Zur Naturwissenschaft, Goethes Werke*, Sophienausgabe, II/11, Böhlau, Weimar, 1893, p. 9.

to Italy. The rich and free nature of the southern hemisphere clashed with the rigid imposition of northern manners.

For Goethe, nature must be honored for everything that is great. According to Cohn, only in this way can we understand why he was deeply hurt by Schiller's 1793 work *Über Anmuth und Würde*. Goethe believed that Schiller had expressed himself irreverently towards 'great mother nature' and felt that certain passages were directed against him. Given that, in *Über Anmuth und Würde*, Schiller sought to mitigate the alleged rigor of Kantian ethics in favor of aesthetic harmony between nature and freedom, Goethe's disagreement with Kant himself becomes even more apparent. However, Goethe changed his mind on this point so quickly that, on 26 October 1794, he wrote that Schiller's *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (1795) coherently and nobly expressed what he had long recognized as right – what he had partly lived and partly wished to live³⁵.

In *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, the relationship between nature and morality is conceived in exactly the same way as in *Über Anmuth und Würde*. Therefore, this sudden change is difficult to explain, especially since we lack more precise and detailed insights. Cohn hypothesizes that Goethe's failure to fully engage with Schiller's philosophical writings, as evidenced by his tendency to skim over individual sentences, may have contributed to his negative impression of *Über Anmuth und Würde*. Thus, it was thanks to his personal relationship with Schiller, that Goethe recognized the true meaning of Kantian ethics and realized that his previous naturalism could not guide his behavior in practical life. By applying Kantian ethical principles of individual action to the sphere of personality as a whole, Schiller made them accessible to Goethe. Duty no longer appeared as something foreign, but rather as an inner law of the individual. Thus, Cohn points out that Goethe adhered to Kantian ethics consistently and admiringly throughout his mature years, and only sought to mitigate its 'rigor' by following Schiller. In *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795–96), the moral message is about accepting restraint and voluntarily renouncing. Indeed, the novel's subtitle is *Die Entsagenden* (The Renouncers), which Cohn considers to be a distillation of Goethe's legacy regarding morality.

Goethe certainly follows in Schiller's footsteps when he states: "Duty: where one loves what one orders oneself to do"³⁶. If duty is recognized as the inner law of the self, then its unattainability is no longer frightening. As mentioned previously, the 'idea' is the unattainable goal that nevertheless provides guidance, both in action and in knowledge. "To live in the realm of ideas means treating the impossible as though it were possible", writes Goethe³⁷. The 'idea' can only retain its purity if the awareness of its unattainability persists; otherwise, it becomes 'comically' intertwined with the minor events and impediments of everyday life. The position of the 'idea' is analogous in both the practical and theoretical spheres: it provides guidance

³⁵ Cf. KSG, p. 308 (see also note n. 2 on this very page).

³⁶ J. W. Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, op. cit., § 829.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, § 262.

and must assert itself in every aspect, but it is impossible for it to be realized or to perfectly appear in any single case. As Cohn notices, at times the unattainability and unconditionality of the practical 'idea' leads Goethe so far away from his original naturalism that he contrasts the realms of freedom, values and culture with that of nature in a completely dualistic way, elevating moral will above all natural circumstances.

Given the apparent contradiction between Goethe's ethics and his view of nature, it's important to remember that he was not a systematic thinker. He consciously pursued different lines of thought in different fields all at once. Therefore, one can never fully understand Goethe by ignoring positions such as the following: "What culture has gained from nature must not be relinquished, must not be given up at any price. Thus, the concept of the sanctity of marriage is a valuable cultural achievement of Christianity, even though marriage is unnatural"³⁸. An example of the contrast between Goethe's naturalism and his ethical and spiritual tendencies, especially as applied to marriage, is found in the novel *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809) – the only large-scale work in which Goethe aimed to depict a radical "idea". As Cohn points out, the prevailing opinion (not only among Goethe's contemporaries) was that this "idea" was entirely naturalistic: just as chemical elements break old bonds under strong constraints to form stronger bonds, human bonds are left at the mercy of inexplicable sympathies. Indeed, the title of the work, inspired by Goethe's ongoing work in chemistry, could lead to such an interpretation. However, Cohn points out that, in the introduction, Goethe emphasizes the underlying ethical roots of the chemical metaphor, attempting to trace it back to its spiritual underpinnings.

According to Cohn, one can only understand the tragic ending of the novel within the context of a morally rigorous conception of marriage and duty. Goethe introduces two contrasting characters: Eduard, who enters into an illicit relationship with frivolous cheerfulness, undisturbed by his conscience; and Ottilie, who condemns herself to death by her own hand because she has allowed Eduard's passionate love to carry her away toward sinful desires. Ottilie represents the dignity of human nature, which manifests itself forcefully through terrible torment, discomfort, and pain. The novel essentially expresses the idea that an inexplicable natural affinity attracts human beings to one another, dissolving bonds that our morality demands be indissoluble. If an individual places himself on a higher moral ground and allows these inclinations to take over, he can only preserve his true nature through earthly ruin. In this work, Goethe depicted the tragic, eternal inner conflict between the force of natural passions and the unconditional precept of morality more deeply than ever before. Therefore, Cohn considers the book a testament to Goethe's approach toward addressing moral issues:

³⁸ J. W. Goethe, *Gespräche*, eds. by F. Biedermann, Biedermann, Leipzig, 1910, vol. 4 (Vom Tode Karl Augusts bis zum Ende: 1828 Juni bis 22. März 1832), p. 216.

The poet wants and should inspire understanding, empathy, and love, not cold judgment or judicial severity. If he intends to convey a moral idea, it should be reflected in the characters and their fates rather than in the poet's judgment of them. When Goethe describes the sanctity of marriage as an idea of *Wahlverwandtschaften*, it does not mean that he wrote the book with the intention of defending the sanctity of marriage. Rather, he experienced these ethical convictions and conflicts within himself and portrayed them³⁹.

4. *Aesthetics*

At the core of the third part of the essay, Cohn places the relationship between "idea" and "appearance". This topic became a fundamental problem for Goethe, in both the spheres of nature and morality, as well as that of art, only thanks to Schiller. Cohn focuses on the transition from *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung* (1777-1785) to *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Ultimately, it was Schiller, and not Goethe himself, who expressed the "idea" behind the latter work with the following words: "he [Wilhelm] steps from an empty and undefined ideal into definite, active life, but without losing any of his idealizing power"⁴⁰. However, it should be noted that when Schiller wrote these words, the book was already finished. Only the eighth part was still being revised. In a letter to Schiller dated July 7, 1796, Goethe wrote:

If it accords with your mind, you cannot fail to see your own influence in it, for I should certainly never have been able to finish it – at least not in the way it is done – had it not been for the friendly relation which subsists between us. A hundred times when I was talking to you about theory and practice, my mind was dwelling upon the situations which you have now lying before you, and I was silently judging them according to the principles upon which we were agreed⁴¹.

The change in Goethe's way of thinking, as seen in the eighth book of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, only became apparent to the poet a year later during his trip to Frankfurt and Stuttgart en route to Switzerland. Specifically, in a letter sent to Schiller from Frankfurt on August 16, 1797, Goethe describes a turning point: He writes that he has discovered "a sort of sentimentality towards the objects"⁴² within himself. Things are no longer as they once were when individual impressions stimulated intense feelings in him. Now, Goethe remains "calm", almost indifferent to particular things, while a general poetic mood reigns within him. Although "the old realist is still so powerful in him that he ascribes a significant role to objects when it comes to this general emotional state"⁴³, in his reply, Schiller rightly points out

³⁹ KSG, p. 315 emph. mine.

⁴⁰ Letter from Schiller to Goethe, 8 July 1796, in *Correspondence between Schiller and Goethe*, op. cit., vol. 1, § 187, p. 192.

⁴¹ Letter from Goethe to Schiller, 7 July 1796, in *ibid.*, vol. I, § 186, p. 187.

⁴² KSG, p. 320.

⁴³ KSG, pp. 320-321.

that the cause of this *Sentimentalität* does not lie in the objects themselves but in the temperament of the observer, as any object that encounters such a disposition of the spirit can arouse similar feelings and considerations.

According to Cohn, the most striking aspect of this change is that, in Goethe's work, the individual development of the characters becomes almost irrelevant. At the same time, the genericization of characters leads to a decline in interest in individual details. It's not that Goethe becomes more concise in his descriptions of objective details. Rather, individual aspects randomly come to the fore, as in the battle scene in Act IV, Part II of *Faust* (1808), or in the description of the weavers in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Characters and things no longer arouse the poet's passionate interest in and of themselves. His spirit no longer inhabits them completely, but seems to detach itself momentarily and 'float' above them in a free vision. However, as the mature style emerges, characters and objects are no longer considered in isolation, but rather reflect a deeper meaning. As Cohn notes, they are not allegories that express something other than what is expressed directly. Rather, they exist within the poet's awareness as representatives of a general relationship that is elevated to an exemplary 'idea' through their individual cases.

Together, the two works serve as a means of expressing the wisdom that Goethe derived from his own life and a tradition spanning millennia. This wisdom is not conveyed through sparse words, but rather through mysterious images rich in omens. According to Cohn, this is because even thought itself is transformed into poetry in Goethe. Indeed, the neo-Kantian philosopher observes that:

It has often been lamented that his later works lack the freshness and passion of youth, the vivid clarity and perfection of his prime; but this loss is not a consequence of his richness of thought, but rather a consequence of age. The experiences are no longer as new and vivid to the poet as they once were; they derive their meaning primarily from the significance his spirit attaches to them⁴⁴.

The aesthetic views of Kant, Schiller and Goethe focus on immediate and spontaneous creative genius. However, this does not mean that the abundance of ideas in Goethe's later works merely echoes the philosophy of Kant and Schiller. Rather, it is the product of Goethe's entire life. Encountering Kantian philosophy stimulated Goethe to explore creative activity and the purpose of the human spirit. According to Cohn, there is a profound connection between the change in style and the 'metamorphosis' of aesthetic theory after Goethe encountered Schiller. In the 'sentimental' approach, the self-conscious spirit becomes effective in relation to things; likewise, the creative force of the artist gains increasing recognition in Goethe's theoretical reflections.

Schiller and Goethe both faced the same problem: how does art, understood in its autonomy, relate to the extra-artistic realms of nature and spirit? Bearing this in mind, one can trace the changes in Goethe's point of view. Initially, the simple imitation of nature appears as a modest preliminary stage, from which the great

⁴⁴ KSG, pp. 322-323.

artist progresses to style. However, even style is viewed as a representation of nature; indeed, at this higher stage, the artist perceives the true essence of things beyond the random appearances of reality. Cohn argues that this distinction between truth and reality is largely mediated by the Platonic doctrine of ideas, which probably came to Goethe via Winckelmann:

Just as *simple imitation* depends on a quiet regime and comfortable surroundings, and *manner* has a facility for grouping superficial appearances, so style is based on the profoundest knowledge, on the essence of things insofar as we can recognize it in visible and tangible forms⁴⁵.

The naive belief that true artists grasp the essence of things collapses under the influence of Schiller. However, the analogy between scientific research and art persists. In both fields, the Platonic 'idea' is replaced by the 'idea' in the sense of Kant and Schiller. Rather than receiving an objective 'idea' that presents itself as already complete through passive observation, man now elaborates it in the workings of the spirit. The unity of spirit and nature remains Goethe's fundamental conviction. However, nature itself is increasingly spiritualised, and unity is no longer an obvious presupposition, but rather the ultimate goal of knowledge, which can never be fully attained. According to Cohn, this development in both natural science and art theory enables Goethe to still treat both as a unity, even in his mature years.

Although Goethe's intention remained to unite art and scientific research, the relationship between the two fields became more problematic precisely because of the deeper understanding gained through critical philosophy. Those who recognize the productivity of the spirit in the 'idea' must also consider that the artist and the natural scientist approach production differently. Indeed, alongside the question of the relationship between spirit and nature in artistic creation, another question arises: that of the relationship between artistic and scientific spirit. According to Cohn, Goethe only became aware of these two issues thanks to Schiller. This newfound awareness is also evident in Goethe's contributions to the *Propyläen* journal (1798-1800). In the introduction to the first issue, Goethe seeks to justify his intention to include topics from the natural sciences in his journal for the benefit of artists. Ten years earlier, this would have seemed obvious, Cohn argues. Afterwards, however, he felt that a well-founded motivation was necessary. Goethe praises the importance of anatomy for the artist's work, equating the "deep inner" (*tiefe Innere*) of every living being with the "spiritual deepening" (*geistige Vertiefung*)⁴⁶. For Goethe, these two aspects are indeed connected, as a deeper understanding of the human body can only be achieved through knowledge of what lies beneath the skin. However, for the artist, nature is always and only a treasure trove of raw materials.

⁴⁵ J. W. Goethe, "Simple imitation of Nature, Manner, Style. *Der Teutsche Merkur*, February 1789", in J. Gage (ed. by), *Goethe on Art*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1980, pp. 21-24, p. 22.

⁴⁶ KSG, p. 327.

In his 1798 essay *Über Wahrheit und Wahrscheinlichkeit der Kunstwerke*, the distinction between natural truth and the inner truth of things is clarified through exemplary cases drawn from fields ranging from theatre set design to opera. In a work of art, consistency of execution is what matters. Only the naïve and uneducated spectator, like the sparrows in Zeuxis's famous painting⁴⁷, satisfies their desire by being content with the illusion of the work of art. However, even for the connoisseur, something natural remains in the work of art. As Cohn notes, Kant also emphasized this when he argued that art is beautiful when we recognize it as art, even though it appears to us as nature. In line with this Kantian approach, Schiller developed his doctrine of freedom in relation to the technical-artistic sphere. Goethe shares similarities with both thinkers, except that he maintains a metaphysical conception of the unity between the human spirit and nature. As a product of the human spirit, the finished work of art is simultaneously a work of nature. However, it is only through the harmonizing and ennobling activity of the spirit that it transcends nature.

According to Cohn, it is here that the Kantian-Schillerian view of the creative power of the artist and the normative and constitutive nature of art becomes significant. In this context, we can see how the new perspectives derived from critical philosophy coalesced with Goethe's early beliefs. The outcome of this fusion can be seen in a coherent series of maxims written in prose and published posthumously. Goethe explicitly states that anyone wishing to write or discuss art must understand what philosophy has achieved and continues to achieve. As we will see below, this philosophy is precisely that of Kant, who provides the means to counter naturalism and enlighten the artist with regard to their own work.

That said, the question of how the 'idea' is expressed in the final form of the artwork has yet to be addressed. The fact that the idea is unattainable implies that it cannot be a simple and direct representation, nor can it be considered an ordinary similarity. Instead, it is a very special relationship that can only be described by the term 'symbol'. Considering the importance of this term in Goethe's later works, Cohn emphasizes that it does not appear before Schiller's influence. In particular, Cohn remarks:

The oldest place where I can find evidence of this is in Chapter 7 of Book 8 of *The Apprenticeship Years*. Its use became more frequent after 1797. In Goethe's correspondence with Schiller, the word "symbol" appears for the first time on August 16, 1797; a month later (September 13, 1797), his diary shows that Goethe distinguishes between symbol and allegory⁴⁸.

According to Cohn, Goethe's concept of 'symbol' can only be fully understood when considered in relation to its Kantian origins and subsequent development by Schiller. Kant's fundamental position is that 'pure thought' in itself cannot pro-

⁴⁷ This refers to an anecdote narrated by Pliny the Elder: the painters Parrhasius and Zeuxis took part in a competition, and Zeuxis created a painting of grapes that was so realistic that birds flew up to it, mistaking it for the real fruit (Pliny, *Natural History*, Book XXXV, pp. 65-68).

⁴⁸ KSG, p. 332.

vide human beings with any knowledge; it must always be combined with intuition. Within the framework of schematism, the categories, or pure forms of theoretical thought, become applicable only when integrated with the pure form of intuition relating to time. The "visualization" (*Veranschaulichung*)⁴⁹, which is necessary for a rational idea to become effective, in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, is provided by natural law.

Through the form of unconditional legality, the law becomes the 'type', or as Goethe also puts it, the 'symbol' of morality. By contrast, in *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, beauty presents itself as a 'symbol' of the moral realm. Once again, the symbolic power lies in particular formal aspects. The universality, necessity, disinterest and freedom of beauty symbolically express pure morality. To define this concept of 'symbol' more precisely, three points must be considered: what is symbolically represented in beauty; the means by which it is represented; and how the mediation between the represented and the intended representation should be conceived. What is symbolically represented is morality, or the 'idea' of practical reason. The means of representation are the specific formal features of beauty. Goethe describes the type of mediation as intuitive. This definition suggests that, in symbolic intuition, the 'idea' is grasped immediately, whereas in allegory, intuition must be abandoned in favor of discursive, comparative judgements to understand the meaning.

Among the formal analogies that Kant establishes between aesthetic and moral judgements, one in particular becomes decisive for Schiller: through beauty, the freedom of our sensory imagination is presented in accordance with the legality of the intellect. Similarly, through moral judgement, the freedom of the will is conceived as concordance with the general laws of reason. Schiller reformulates this idea by applying the principles of symbolization from aesthetic judgement to the aesthetic object. Accordingly, beauty is defined as that which appears to be the result of an internal freedom acting in accordance with a norm that is not forced. Schiller then broadens the scope of what is symbolically represented. For example, the higher principle of landscape painting and poetry is established through reference to the symbolic. According to Cohn, there are two ways in which inanimate nature can symbolize human nature: through the representation of 'ideas', which fits with Kant's positions, or through the representation of sensations. The focus shifts from the expressive value of beauty to the meaning of the work of art as something typical, and to the artist's ability to express a general law in a single example.

Goethe constantly emphasizes the intuitive nature of symbolism without ever using the word itself. His concrete thinking enables him to provide a more precise illustration, based on his own practical experience, of what Kant had mainly stated in general terms. Similarly to Kant, Goethe clarifies his position by contrasting 'symbol' and allegory. In particular Cohn refers to two of Goethe's most famous quotations:

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Allegory transforms an object of perception into a concept, the concept into an image, but in such a way that the concept continues to remain circumscribed and completely available and expressible within the image⁵⁰.

Symbolism transforms an object of perception into an idea, the idea into an image, and does it in such a way that the idea always remains infinitely operative and unattainable so that even if it is put into words in all languages, it still remains inexpressible⁵¹.

In the 'symbol', the 'image' and the 'idea' are essentially one and the same. Through it, the work of art reveals its deepest, most profound meaning, while the naive viewer merely sees the image itself. As Goethe writes, "This is true symbolism, where the particular represents the general, not as dream and shadow, but as a live and immediate revelation of the unfathomable"⁵².

While Kant found the concept of 'symbol' to be a uniform feature of all aesthetic phenomena, Goethe, as an artist, examined the specific problems of different modes of representation more closely and thus separated symbolic art from other forms.

In his 1798 essay *Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst*, Goethe distinguishes between two modes of representation: one primarily oriented towards the object, and another in which the artist's spirit is expressed more autonomously. In the latter case, the objects in the work of art coincide with the most significant and superior real-life objects thanks to a profound feeling, and for this reason become symbolic. Allegory is criticized because it erases interest in representation and causes the spirit to close in on itself. In allegory, the concept remains autonomous. Consequently, as soon as the concept is grasped, the representation is neglected; in contrast, the meaning of a symbol can only be understood by immersing oneself completely in the spirit and form of the artwork.

In a series of pivotal passages, Cohn returns to the theme of the 'idea', clarifying that, in Goethe, it signifies both realized morality and the potential foreshadowing of unity between humanity and nature. However, one might argue that, compared to its predominant position in Kant and, until 1796, in Schiller, morality is in some way 'set aside' by Goethe. For him, a divine truth is hidden in every natural phenomenon and can only be understood symbolically. The connection between Goethe's conception of nature and his conception of art also falls within the concept of 'symbol'.

Through the *Urphänomen*, one intuitively perceives the legality of the all-encompassing nature. Here, the individual case represents the Allgemeine, which is not an abstract concept, but a concrete unity of nature. The *Urphänomen* is therefore "symbolical because it understands all cases, [it is] identical with all cases"⁵³. It is something 'superior' to mere intellectual knowledge. Although this expansion of the

⁵⁰ J. W. Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, op. cit., § 1112.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, § 1113.

⁵² *Ibid.*, § 314.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, § 1369.

symbolized content appears to diverge from Kant's standpoint, Cohn argues that it remains Kantian thanks to Goethe's interpretation of the 'idea'. The Allgemeine, as a conceptual approximation of the "idea", is not as intuitive as the latter and can only be represented through the symbolic, even if it is not as unattainable as the "idea" in the strict sense of the term. It is not an allegory, since the symbolic "is the thing without being the thing, and yet it is the thing, an image condensed in the spiritual mirror and yet identical with the object"⁵⁴.

In summary, intuitive mediation is the fundamental characteristic of symbolism. The range of things that can be symbolized spans the entire spectrum, from ideas in the highest sense, to representable objects that cannot be correctly intuited except within the stylistic framework of a specific work of art. For Goethe, the concept of 'symbol' thus becomes the means of reconciling science and art after overcoming naive metaphysics. The artist's highest productivity is both unconscious and valid, and conveys the greatest possible knowledge. According to Cohn, prior to Kant's influence, Goethe conceived of the cognitive purpose of art as an immediate understanding of true nature. Following Schiller's influence, however, this was reframed as grasping and displaying the 'idea' in the form of the symbol.

5. *Philosophy of religion*

As we have seen, the 'symbol' is one of the central concepts in Goethe's thinking. It connects aesthetics and the philosophy of nature, and also plays a key role in the examination of religious issues. According to Cohn, this application of the term 'symbol' to the religious sphere is certainly found in Kant, but not in Schiller. This is significant when considering Schiller's influence on the development of philosophical themes in Goethe's work. Nevertheless, despite having much less direct influence on Goethe with regard to religious issues, Schiller's impact in this area is still worth a brief assessment.

Religious issues were more important to Goethe than to Schiller, as Goethe had strong religious feelings towards nature from an early age. He felt gratitude and adoration for the fact that his existence and creativity were subject to a great unknown energy which he did not perceive as foreign, but rather as something that revealed its presence within him as it did within everyone else. What Cohn calls "sense of devotion" (*Gefühl der Ergebenheit*)⁵⁵ played a lesser role in Schiller, who was a man of strong will and conscious strength, and who defied nature by pushing his suffering body to its limits in the service of the 'idea'. This does not mean that Schiller was devoid of religious sentiment, merely that, for Goethe, every higher aspiration

⁵⁴ J. W. Goethe, "Philostrats Gemähde. Nachträgliches. I", *Goethes Werke*, Sophienausgabe, I/49, Böhlau, Weimar, 1818, pp. 136-142, p. 142.

⁵⁵ KSG, p. 341.

was permeated by a feeling of religious obedience and unity with the divine. Cohn therefore states that:

Therefore, Schiller had less to offer his friend in this regard, as religious questions rarely arose in their correspondence. On one occasion, however, Schiller attempted to persuade Goethe to be fairer in his assessment of Christianity. He noted that the distinctive features of the Christian religion, or rather what a beautiful soul could make of it, had not yet been given their due in *The Confessions of a Beautiful Soul* [the title of the sixth book of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*]⁵⁶.

6. Conclusions

When we look at Cohn's essay, it becomes clear that his main intention was to carefully and rigorously clarify that Goethe "was never a Kantian"⁵⁷, but that he was nevertheless significantly influenced by the philosopher from Königsberg. With the sole exception of the field of philosophy of religion, these influences "can all be traced back to Schiller"⁵⁸. While Goethe's thinking was originally directed towards nature, the objects and the unity of the external world, he later became interested in the thinking, willing and creative spirit. Thanks to the mediation of Kant and Schiller, the significance of the question of subjectivity emerged. Cohn suggests that only then Goethe realised that overcoming duality in unity was not at all obvious, but rather a constant challenge for human beings that could never be fully resolved.

From a certain point of view, it seems clear that, in Cohn's critical perspective, Schiller's role is presented primarily as a 'transitional figure' who hands the baton of Kant's philosophy to the young Goethe, enabling him to embrace and transform it within his own personality. This approach prioritises Goethe over Schiller, implicitly celebrating the former while overlooking the latter. In fact, the title of the *Kant-Studien* issue in question was *Schiller als Philosoph und seine Beziehungen zu Kant*, clearly stating the intention to present studies on the relationship between Kantian and Schillerian philosophy. However, while Cohn's essay analyses various significant aspects of Kantian critical philosophy, it does not do the same for Schiller's philosophy. Therefore, it seems accurate to argue that Cohn's contribution does not really participate in the rediscovery of Schiller's philosophy, but rather in the broader late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century movement that elevated Goethe's personality and work to the North Star of German culture in literature, philosophy, and science⁵⁹.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ KSG, p. 344.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Let us mention essays such as those by Hermann von Helmholtz (*Über Goethe's naturwissenschaftliche Arbeiten*, 1853 and *Goethe's Vorahnungen kommender naturwissenschaftlicher Ideen*, 1892); Kuno Fischer (*Goethe's Faust. Über die Entstehung und Composition des Gedichts*, 1878); Emil Du Bois-Reymond (*Goethe und kein Ende*, 1882); Ernst Haeckel, (*Die Naturanschauung von Darwin, Goethe und*

If we trace the theoretical development of concepts from Kant via Schiller to Goethe, we find a striking example of the way in which rigorous philosophical thinking proves effective. This is an aspect of the history of ideas – its *Wirkung* – that Cohn investigates and seeks to highlight. Alongside the individual sciences, religion and poetry are the true intermediaries “between *philosophy* and *popular thinking*. In this way, the concepts must lose *sharpness* and *definiteness* but gain *concreteness* and *applicability*”⁶⁰. In other words, the fundamental point for Cohn is that “the effectiveness of our concepts depends on them being reintroduced into *life*”⁶¹.

By examining how Kantian criticism was received by Goethe through the figure of Schiller, Cohn attempts to investigate the extent to which the most influential outcomes of modern philosophical and scientific thought were translated into active repercussions during that epochal laboratory of creative enterprise known as the great German Neoclassical-Romantic period. For Cohn, this primarily involves revisiting the relationship between *Anschauung* and *Begriff*, and challenging the conventional epistemological perspective that *Anschauung* invariably leads to *Begriff* in something of a ‘one-way’ and ‘irreversible’ manner. Through his work, Cohn seeks to reverse the terms of the question and update them in accordance with critical philosophy. Thus, he highlights that the direction can be reversed and, more importantly, that it functions in both directions (as Kant already outlined in *Kritik der Urteilskraft*)⁶². Consequently, Cohn argues that the value of science must be reconsidered in broader terms – not merely as a theoretical and cognitive activity of conceptualization, but as a feedback loop between *Anschauung* and *Begriff* that transforms our reality and therefore has a fundamental *Kulturbedeutung*⁶³.

In light of this, Cohn argues that what we experience and what becomes real and effective for us – out of the possible *Anschauungen* – always depends on the points of view “under which our mind regards *experiences* and *things*”⁶⁴. This clarifies the

Lamarck, 1882); Wilhelm Windelband (*Aus Goethes Philosophie*, 1899); Friedrich Gundolf (*Goethe*, 1916); Heinrich Rickert (*Die Wetten in Goethes Faust*, 1921, *Die Einheit des Faustischen Charakters. Eine Studie zu Goethes Faustdichtung*, 1925 e *Goethes Faust. Die dramatische Einheit der Dichtung*, 1932); Johannes von Kries (*Goethe als Psycholog*, 1924). For more on the reception of Goethe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially by natural scientists, see the recent volume by Dietrich von Engelhardt, *Goethe als Naturforscher im Urteil der Naturwissenschaft und Medizin des 19. Jahrhunderts: Themen, Texte, Titel*, Heidelberg, Metzler, 2024. I would like to thank Edoardo Massimilla and Christian Krijnen for their valuable insights on these issues during the discussion following my presentation at conference the “The Neo-Kantian Reception of Schiller” in Naples.

⁶⁰ KSG, p. 345, *emph. mine*.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, *emph. mine*.

⁶² As is well known, the bibliography on these topics and issues is extensive, to say the least, and new studies continue to be published today, offering updated and expanded critical perspectives. I will therefore just refer to one notable work on the topic, which I believe is still worth reading: G. Carchia, “Le rovine della rappresentazione. Lettura della *Critica del Giudizio*”, in *Id.*, *La legittimazione dell'arte. Studi sull'intellegibile estetico*, Guida, Napoli 1982, pp. 139-169.

⁶³ KSG, p. 345, *emph. mine*.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, *emph. mine*.

meaning of an expression that, as Cohn reminds us, Germans should not utter without reverence: *Weltanschauung*. Grasping the whole world in a single *Anschauung* is an 'idea' as grandiose as it is impossible. Cohn argues here that replacing this unity with an encyclopedic collection of the results of all the individual sciences can only lead to partial knowledge, never to the totality of *Anschauung*. Indeed, for Cohn, "ultimately the general and strict *concepts* of *critical philosophy*, in themselves, can form *convictions* [*Überzeugungen*], but not *Anschauungen*"⁶⁵. Nevertheless, concepts and convictions organize our *Anschauung*, guide us in choosing what is important, and determine our 'way of seeing'. The term *Weltanschauung* can only refer to a specific and consistent approach to viewing the entirety of things, whose supposed unity is termed 'world'. Therefore, if the meaning of the word is defined in this way, Cohn asserts that *Weltanschauung* becomes the highest personal *goal* of every critical thinker.

Cohn concludes his account by discussing the meaning of 'Weltanschauung' to emphasize Goethe's unique way of thinking, which is not incompatible with that of critical philosophy. As he writes, a *Weltanschauung* combines "scientific and personal elements, the provable and the unprovable. *Concept* and *feeling* are inextricably linked. In this sense, Goethe had a *Weltanschauung*, not a philosophy in the strict sense of the word. Indeed, one might think that the term *Weltanschauung* was coined for him"⁶⁶.

⁶⁵ Ibid., *emph. mine.*

⁶⁶ Ibid., *emph. mine.*

Actualizing Freedom. On Schiller's Relevance for South-West Neo-Kantianism

CHRISTIAN KRIJNEN

1. *Introduction*

The view that neo-Kantianism is essentially a philosophy of culture has become firmly established in contemporary neo-Kantianism research (Konersmann 2012, p. 1; Ferrari 2003, ch. 10; Krijnen 2001, ch. 2). It was from Kant that the neo-Kantians learned to distinguish cultural realms as specific realms of reason with unbreakable laws of validity. And post-Kantian idealism was driven by it in its attempt to overcome the dualisms that characterize Kant's conception (theoretical and practical reason, thing-in-itself and thing-as-appearance, intuition and concept, etc.) through a higher-level unity of reason. Neo-Kantianism offers a synthesis of Kant and Hegel and thus an appropriation of and distancing from both at the same time. This is accompanied by highly complex problems that in many respects have lost none of their topicality for philosophy to this day.

In his analysis of Schiller's transcendental idealism, Wilhelm Windelband ([1905] 1915) touches shortly upon one of these problems. It concerns an issue that has shown to be of the utmost importance for the development of German idealism from its early phase to neo-Kantianism and beyond: the problem of actualizing freedom. In line with his Kant interpretation (Krijnen 2001, ch. 2.4.2), Windelband stresses that Kant's "decisive deed" is the transformation of the world into "objects of consciousness", a transformation he refers to as "freedom" and as the "central concept" of both Kant and Schiller (1915, p. 216)¹. This transformation contains, among others, the idea that the matter of natural appearances and the form of reason eventually point to each other and are purposefully coordinated (Windelband [1905] 1915, p. 223). Schiller, though, as Windelband explains, focuses on the place of art in human life and conceives of it as the unity of theoretical and practical reason: art is freedom as appearance. As such, art is self-determination of humans. The idea of self-determination constitutes the higher principle to which all realms of reason are subjected (Windelband [1905] 1915, pp. 226 f.). Despite the validity and autonomy of these realms, in particular of morality and art, Schiller famously holds

¹ All translations of German texts are mine.

that art trumps “duty” in the “beautiful soul” (*schöne Seele*). Moreover, he elaborates on the “educational significance” of the “aesthetic refinement of sensations” for the “objective realization” of the Kantian moral law (Windelband [1905] 1915, p. 228), turning the objective realization or actualization of the moral law into a “value in its own right” alongside the value of morality. With this elaboration, Schiller, as Windelband rightly notices, prepares a conception as we can find it in Hegel’s distinction between “subjective morality” and “objective ‘*Sittlichkeit*’” (Windelband [1905] 1915, p. 228).

My thesis is that this indication of Windelband concerns a core interest of Bruno Bauch’s philosophy of values, particularly his ethics. It is a core interest that Bauch develops innovatively by integrating Schiller’s view, criticizing Kant, and finally establishing the concept of the “imperative of culture” as the concept of realizing validity, i.e. actualizing freedom. This conception is both consequent within the framework of transcendental idealism and problematic against the background of Hegel’s speculative idealism. Seen systematically, it concerns the much-discussed issue of Kant’s formalism (Krijnen 2022a)².

2. *Formalism: From Kant to Schiller and Bauch*

With his critical remarks on Kant’s moral philosophy, Schiller provided post-Kantian idealists and neo-Kantianism with an important, albeit in many respects systematically inadequate, template.³ According to Schiller, fundamental concepts of Kant’s philosophy presuppose a unity of their relatedness that Kant is unable to elucidate. The problem of the much-discussed harmony between duty and inclination, more generally speaking, between nature and freedom, reason and sensibility is the crux of the matter. Schiller attempts to remedy this within the framework of Kantian conceptions. The concrete subject and thus real actions are a positive unity of both. Nature therefore not only restricts but also enables freedom. In later German idealism, particularly with Hegel, nature itself is comprehended as a determinant of reason, no longer assumed to be merely opposed to it. Schiller’s relevance apparently goes deeper than becomes apparent in the direct debate between Schiller and Kant, as already indicated by Windelband but also, for instance, by Dieter Henrich (1982, pp. 43 ff.). What turns into the fundamental problem here is the actualization of freedom in the sense of its becoming concrete and thus singularized: the problem of the existence of freedom. Schiller had accused Kant of underestimating the importance of inclination and with this the natural, non-rational determinacy of the subject (agent). For Hegel, this aspect of the positive inclusion of that which is given

² I discussed this issue in greater detail in Krijnen (2018). In the present chapter, I focus on Schiller and Bauch.

³ See for a critical analysis from the perspective of contemporary Kant scholarship, e.g., Geismann (2009, 157 ff.) or Höffe (2012, 187 ff., 2006). In the present volume, see chapter 10 of Meer/Klinger.

outside the law of reason will ultimately prove to be a condition for the actualization of the law of reason. The philosophical doctrine of validity and that of action must be unified. Validity without action is empty, action without validity is blind.

This issue also paved the way for the further development of transcendental philosophy. The ethics of Bauch, of one of the sharpest and most profound neo-Kantians, takes up Schiller's problematization of Kant and his supposed formalism and attempts to come to grips with the problem of the actualization of reason. He does so against Kant but in a Kantian fashion, just as the existence of validity has become a problem for contemporary transcendental philosophy of culture and has led to an innovative solution – the introduction of the unconditional idea of the economic-social. In all of them, the existence of freedom and thus of culture as 'realization', 'actualization', 'presentation', or 'shaping in accordance with reason' itself becomes a problem. Schiller brought it up, Hegel sublated it speculatively, and a thinker like Simmel casts it in a provocative formula with his conception of the "individual law" (Simmel 1918)⁴.

It is not by accident that Bauch deals with Simmel's conception. Simmel takes up the problem of action as the realization of freedom in terms of *Lebensphilosophie*. He reproaches Kant's moral philosophy for not taking into account the individuality of life and consequently for being inapplicable. Moral duty should be understood as an individual duty that emerges from the life of the subject; required is not an abstract-universal law but an "individual-universal one" (Simmel 1918, p. 238). That is to say that Simmel does not abandon the recourse to the universal or the law but attempts to develop an ethics on the basis of individual life as the origin of the moral law. Kant's categorical imperative leaves out decisive aspects of the action, not least the context of the actor's life within which the action takes place. Simmel now attempts to place the actor himself in the foreground as the performer of an act that can be morally judged in the first place. As it turns out, however, "individuality and law can clash" in such a way that the agent concludes: "the law does not suit me, it is not *my* law" (Simmel 1918, p. 230). Although Simmel wants to hold on to objectivity in the individual instead of letting it slide into mere arbitrariness, he falls out of the frying pan into the fire by linking objectivity to the socio-cultural situatedness of the agent. Thus he merely presupposes normativity without being able to account for it reflexively⁵.

Simmel does not do justice to the objectivity of the moral claim of the action, neither according to Kantian, Hegelian, or neo-Kantian standards, nor according to his own holistic individualism of deriving duties from the entirety of the life of the respective individual. To put it regarding neo-Kantianism, oriented towards the issue of validity, a law that is supposed to apply to life can never emerge from life⁶. The subject's moral competence to judge would be lost. Bauch in particular has tried

⁴ Concerning more recent literature on Kant and Simmel, see Lotter (2000), on Bauch and Simmel see Strasser (1967, pp. 71 ff.).

⁵ Cf. on this, e.g., the analysis of Lotter (2000, pp. 194 ff.).

⁶ Cf. Rickert's critique of Simmel: 1922, pp. 62 ff., 1929, pp. 710 ff.

to think individuality and universality within the framework of Kant's categorical imperative and not against it. The categorical imperative of morality always and everywhere applies to acts of freedom, to any self-determined activity. However, Bauch too holds that Kant's categorical imperative is not sufficient to make a concrete duty determinable. Duty must be schematized, so to speak, from categorical imperative to action.

Bauch takes on this task, albeit with strong philosophical borrowings not so much from Hegel as from Fichte. Thematically, he uses Schiller's critique of Kant as his starting point. Already in his dissertation on Kant's ethics, Bauch (1902) argues against individualism as proposed by Simmel or Nietzsche and aims to avoid amoral individualism while establishing ethical individualism⁷. In line with contemporary Kant research, Bauch attempts to show how Kant's formalism does not destroy the individuality of the person but rather provides it with a moral framework. Nevertheless, Kant's categorical imperative is for Bauch not sufficient to do justice to the particularity of the moral individual. Despite all reservations, he finds this same insight formulated by Schiller and notes tirelessly that Schiller argued against Kant's "one-sided moral assessment" of man and pleads for a "complete" assessment of the "totality of character" (Bauch 1905, 1924, 1935)⁸.

In order to remedy Schiller's complaint philosophically, Bauch wants to add further points of assessment. Ultimately, these concern what Bauch calls the "requirement of actualization" (*Wirkensforderung*), i.e. the "cultural imperative". Bauch gains the additional points of assessment by working out the content-relatedness of Kantian formalism both more strongly and differently than in Kant. Three "basic forms of the ethical principle" emerge, all of which are of a "content-related nature" (Bauch 1935, 89). For Bauch, principles as such do not have a merely formal but a "content-logical" character (1935, 56). Without doubt, stressing the content-logical nature of principles is fully in line with the neo-Kantian appropriation of Kant, mediated by German idealism. How does it deal with Schiller's concern?

3. *Ethical Individualism: Bauch's Imperative of Culture*

Bauch is perhaps the best Kant expert of neo-Kantianism. His *Immanuel Kant* (1923a) counts as a highlight of neo-Kantian Kant books and Kant research in general. Despite his criticism of the widespread critique of Kant's formalism, Bauch too is convinced that Kant did not do sufficient justice to the individuality of the moral constellation. He reproaches Kant regarding the individuality of the subject as well as the historical situation. Consequently, he undertakes a further development of Kant's conception, in which both are integrated in terms of a theory of principles.

⁷ On this and the development of the concept of the person in Bauch see Schlotter (2004, pp. 29 ff.).

⁸ See on Kant's "one-sided moral assessment" versus a "complete" assessment of the "totality of character" Schiller (1980, 4th letter).

To this end, Bauch modifies Kant's doctrine of the categorical and hypothetical imperative. Four aspects are decisive here.

Firstly, in line with Schiller, Bauch rejects Kant's doctrine of the categorical imperative as too narrow, as a "one-sided moral assessment of man" (1935, p. 3 *passim*). People should be assessed "according to the totality of the assessment possibilities to be applied to them", that is, according to the "totality of character" (1935, 3). For the South-West neo-Kantian Bauch, the standards of assessment are 'values'. Although ethics is closely related to morality, Bauch's ethics addresses the *moral* character in a way that relates it to the *totality* of character. Ethics as practical philosophy, as philosophy of the *πράττειν*, concerns action in its entirety. It should not, like Kant contrary to the intention of his basic law of pure practical reason, narrow ethics mainly down to the *will*, even if, also for Bauch, the will remains the "center" of all action (1935, 6).

Secondly, Kant does not satisfactorily explain the relationship between the ethical task and the fulfillment of the task in ethical action. For Kant, the task is indeed subject-independent in its validity; but that and how the task finds fulfillment remains unclear: Kant conceives of it as merely an 'infinite', 'eternal' task, without clarifying how "concrete temporal tasks" arise from it, which in turn are fulfillments of that task. The infinite or eternal task seems to become a mere abstraction. Yet it must be able to enter into an action, i.e. to be represented (*dargestellt*) in the realm of temporality (Bauch 1935, p. 67). It is precisely this possibility of fulfilling the task that Bauch wants to shed light on. Above all, how "concrete temporal tasks" arise from the "eternal" task.

Thirdly, Bauch's elucidation of the possibility of fulfillment initially leads to the insight that the task should generally not be understood merely in the fashion of an *imperative*, i.e. a commandment (1935, pp. 68 ff.). Kant's imperativism is too narrow. Rather, the task is the value in its subject-relatedness. Not all values are commands; there are value claims that have no imperative character. Accordingly, Bauch does not restrict the *πράττειν* merely to actions that can be commanded but extends it to ethical behavior in a broad sense.

Fourthly, the objectivity of the value as a *task* implies the demand for the *fulfillment* of the task. Bauch conceives of the demand to a certain extent as the bridge between the task and its fulfillment. He emphasizes that there is a difference between the universal validity of a value in the sense of the claim to universal *recognition* on the one hand and the universal validity in the sense of the claim to universal *representation* (realization, actualization) by all subjects towards all subjects on the other (1935, pp. 69 ff.). Task and representation, validity and actualization diverge here. The ethical principle qua ethical law refers to action in the broadest sense, to "the whole of the attitude". The *subject-independence* of the validity of the ethical principle qualifies it as a *value*; the *subject-relatedness* of the value as manifested in an 'ought' qualifies the value as a *task* (Bauch 1935, 77). The ought relates the ethical value to the subject. The *πράττειν*, the practical, however, is for Bauch not only, as in Kant, that which we can 'do' or 'make'; in contrast, he extends it to "the whole of the atti-

tude” of the ethical subject of the ethical value (law). At issue for Bauch here is the required “representation” of values (1935, p. 81).

Obviously, Bauch’s criticism of Kant’s formalism in no way falls prey to the reproach that forms are merely empty shells, a reproach repeatedly brought up against a Kantian type of transcendental philosophy. This reproach fails to recognize the content-logical character of principles. In transcendental philosophy, principles are understood as ‘conditions of the possibility’. Bauch continuously emphasizes the “content-logical” (1935, p. 56) character of principles. Conceiving of them as mere abstract universalities is for Bauch itself merely an abstract universality. In his *Ethik*, he points out from the start that true universality cannot be without a relationship to the concrete, since it is fundamental to it (Bauch 1935, p. 4). For Bauch, there is no absolute detachment of the universal principle from a concrete situation. The validity of the former is independent of the latter, whereas the existence of the concrete (as concrete) is dependent on the universal principle (Bauch 1935, p. 61 *passim*). Correspondingly, the ethical value enters into life, life is to be shaped according to it (Bauch 1935, p. 12). Its validity is independent of any individual and concrete life, but the ethical value only has meaning in its relationship to life; it is valid for life as it is independent of life (Bauch 1935, pp. 12, 16 f., 57, 90).

In contrast to approaches that dissolve validity in the concreteness of life, Bauch both wants to give the individuality of life its due and to hold on to the good sense of the categorical imperative. The ethical ought does not arise from life, but it is valid for it. Life itself is to be subjected to the requirement of validity; in itself, life is not a sufficient reason for legitimizing human action. The mere adherence to the individuality of life rather amounts to a hopelessly relativism of values. In contrast, the personal design of life and the unconditionally valid, universally binding values must be brought into a productive synthesis. This synthesis is conceived of by Bauch in such a way that the individual will *concretizes* the universal ought. The individual will is understood as the actualization of the universal will. Therein lies the meaning of Bauch’s *hypothetical imperative*: the (universally valid) demand for fulfillment related to the individual subject. The hypothetical imperative is part of Bauch’s ethics.

One of the obligations of ethics is to determine the ethical principle (Bauch 1935, p. 57). The ethical principle underpins the *ethical character* of action and is valid for life as ethical (Bauch 1935, 59). In relation to the subject, the principle is a task. Its validity is independent of the subject. This subject-independence constitutes the value character of the principle. The task is therefore an *objective* task and as such it possesses value in itself. Apparently, value and task denote the same issue in different directions (Bauch 1935, pp. 63 f.).

Although Bauch maintains the fundamental importance of Kant’s distinction between the categorical and the hypothetical imperative, he wants to develop Kant’s distinction further⁹. Kant distinguishes between theoretical and practical philoso-

⁹ It should come as no surprise that this results in a system that deviates from Kant. Bauch incorporates problems that have arisen in the course of post-Kantian philosophy. The integration of

phy to the effect that the doctrine of *Sittlichkeit* is only a “moral-practical” doctrine; it leaves technical and pragmatic, i.e. hypothetical imperatives out of consideration (AA VI, pp. 217 f.). In contrast, Bauch integrates them as ethical principles, i.e. as part of the doctrine of *Sittlichkeit*. Moreover, precisely because it is an imperative, Kant’s categorical imperative is not universal enough. Kant’s basic law of pure practical reason is for Bauch not *the* law of ethical validity. Rather, it concerns a specific sphere *within* ethical validity (Bauch 1935, p. 84). In order to better understand how Bauch conceives of the relationship between the ethical principle and the individual situation, his ethics need to be considered more closely.

According to Bauch’s theory of values, all ethical principles as values have “objective meaning”; this includes hypothetical imperatives (1935, p. 83). Bauch distinguishes between demands that can be commanded and demands that cannot. Non-commandable demands refer to the essence of the person; they are *demands of essence* (*Wesensforderungen*). Commandable demands refer to the will and the activity of the person; they are *demands of will* (*Willensforderungen*) and *demands of actualizing* (*Wirkensforderungen*). These three demands constitute the basic forms of the ethical principle (Bauch 1935, pp. 89 ff.).

The *demand of essence* is to a certain extent a synthesis of the categorical and the hypothetical imperative. It concerns the *value-relatedness of the subject* and therefore the essence of the subject *as such*, not merely the will (Bauch 1935, 91). ‘Constantly become value’ would be an imperativist formulation for this highest ethical universality. As a demand of essence, however, it cannot be an imperative. Rather, it is directed at the whole of the subject qua person. This whole cannot be commanded as it is always already presupposed as a condition of the possibility of being able to be commanded at all (Bauch 1935, p. 94). Bauch’s demand of essence refers to the whole of personal becoming, i.e. to behavior in the most comprehensive sense as *behavior to value*. This constancy of becoming value is the “being” of the person, not its “doing qua action or deed” (Bauch 1935, p. 106).

The *demand of will* is central to Kant’s ethics. Bauch agrees, but for Bauch it does not constitute the entire problem of ethics (1935, pp. 106 f., 124). In contrast, it establishes the universal *ethical* significance in the sense of the obligatory nature of behavior. A demand is explicitly set as a goal. Goal setting is a matter of the *will* (Bauch 1935, p. 108). For Bauch, as for Kant, the ‘pure will’ is practical reason as the entirety of practical laws. The will sets the objective value as its goal. The demand of the will is the specifically *ethical* fundamental value, the moral principle in the narrow sense. It refers to the will as will without regard to the willed material. The content is volition as volition. The will is not without content but makes its own law its content. This willing of the law for the sake of itself is the *first-order* ethical val-

validity and realization as well as the changed demands on the form of the system of philosophy also necessitate modifications in ethics. Unfortunately, a thorough systematic investigation into the advantages and disadvantages of Bauch’s alterations in comparison to Kant’s doctrine is a research gap until today.

ue. It can then turn the entire realm of objective values into its *second-order* content (Bauch 1935, pp. 121 f.). The primary ethical value coincides with Kant's categorical imperative and the associated principle of autonomy; it is the law of binding the will to the law of willing.

The *demand of actualization* coincides with Kant's hypothetical imperative – although Bauch develops the problem in a direction not taken by Kant (Bauch 1935, pp. 124 f.). Kant excludes hypothetical imperatives from the doctrine of morality. This doctrine concerns duty as an unconditional, absolute ought on the basis of a non-natural (empirical) law of reason, merely “because and insofar as he [man] is free and has practical reason” (AA VI, p. 216). In contrast, the ‘technical-practical’, i.e. hypothetical imperatives, are for Kant a part of the philosophy of nature; they do not concern “laws” (AA V, pp. 172 f., cf. p. 20). Bauch, on the other hand, gives the hypothetical imperatives a new meaning: they ‘individualize’ the law of validity. He models hypothetical imperatives as demands of actualization. According to Bauch, the hypothetical imperative combines objective, *universal* validity and *individual* particularity (1935, p. 125). The immediate ethical value – autonomy as first-order law content – is to be actualized; that is to say that it should be acted out of duty, for the sake of validity itself. At the same time, a second-order law content is included and “represented” in a concrete and individual situation; in this way, a *concrete* duty is fulfilled (Bauch 1935, 126). As a duty, it is supra-individual, an objective moment; but as “my particular duty” it is subjective and individual (Bauch 1935, p. 128). The objective content of the duty and the subjective conditionality of its fulfillment go together. The fulfillment of a duty is dependent on the abilities and powers of the subject.

Thus in Bauch, in contrast to Kant, the subjective conditionality of duty fulfillment turns into an *objective* moment of validity. Hypothetical validity does not mean mere *conditional* validity. The demand of actualizing is not a conditional one, a demand at the subject's discretion (‘if A, then ...’). In Bauch's ethics, the hypothetical aspect does not concern the *content* of the claim but its *representation* (*Darstellung*) or actualization by the subject. The content of the demand is *objective, unconditional*. The duty is the content of the demand in its subject-relatedness, whereas its representation brings the value content in reality through the action of the subject (Bauch 1935, pp. 129 f.). The powers and abilities of the agent constitute the subjective moment; the fulfillment of the demand is dependent on them (Bauch 1935, pp. 129, cf. pp. 134 f.).

On the one hand, the demand of actualization is directed at the subject insofar as it is individual; on the other, it relates the *individual* capacities to a *universal* value. Consequently, the individual characteristic of the subject is placed at the service of *culture*. In this way, the concrete subject is given supra-individual significance. In the realm of culture, and hence that of actualizing values, any person does what it can to the best of its ability. This is the meaning of Bauch's demand of actualization. Unsurprisingly, he denotes it as the “cultural imperative” (1935, pp. 130, 132, 135). In Bauch's ethics, Kant's hypothetical imperatives transform into cultural imperatives.

So cultural relativism is ruled out. Bauch's hypothetical imperative establishes a connection between the demand of the will, including its central value ‘autonomy’,

and a value that does not need to be ethical itself, but which acquires ethical significance through this connection. The demand of actualization as an *ethical* law always relates to the value of autonomy (Bauch 1935, p. 131). The concrete situation of action takes on supra-individual significance through the objective reference to values. In contrast to the demand of will, the demand of actualization encompasses the entire realm of secondary content, i.e. particular duties, content-laden duties (Bauch 1935, p. 133). To be sure, Kant's principle of autonomy (categorical imperative) is by no means devoid of content; as a rule of action it is necessarily connected with certain contents of freedom of choice of individuals. In comparison to Bauch's doctrine of the hypothetical imperative, however, Kant's principle of autonomy proves indeed to be formal, since in Bauch's hypothetical imperative the principle of autonomy takes possession of secondary content in addition to its own content. While the demand of will does not yet reach the concrete situation of action but requires a secondary value content, the demand of actualization conversely only acquires *ethical* meaning through the reference to the demand of will and its principle of autonomy. The individuality of the concrete action obtains universal, objective meaning.

In Bauch, the hypothetical nature of imperatives does not lie in their merely conditional validity but in their relationship to *subjective dispositions of actualization*. It is precisely this subjective dimension that obtains objective meaning through the objective validity of the demand of actualization. It demands what a person can do and no one can do in its place (Bauch 1935, p. 135). While the categorical imperative demands *universality*, the hypothetical imperative demands *particularity* of actualization. Both demands necessarily apply to one and the same individual action. Bauch's Fichtean sounding ethical imperative reads as follows: "Act in such a way that the maxim of your will can at all times be regarded as the principle of a universal law and that you nevertheless represent a universal, supra-personal value in your actions in an individual and personal way" (1935, p. 138).

4. *Does Bauch's Individualization of the Moral Law Suffice?*

The question points out to Hegel's doctrine of *Sittlichkeit* as a speculative idealist conception of the existence of freedom. Bauch aims to overcome Kant's formalism by integrating the moment of actualizing validity through actions into the transcendental theory of validity. With this, there is a Hegelian motif in Bauch's examination of Kant's practical philosophy. In Hegel's case, the debate with Kant boils down to overcoming the standpoint of morality through that of *Sittlichkeit*, i.e. the constellation of spirit in which freedom actually comes into being and actions are truly free actions¹⁰. The following considerations about Bauch express fundamental, primarily philosophical-methodological aspects.

¹⁰ I argued elsewhere that translating Hegel's *Sittlichkeit* as the "actuality of freedom" is better than the standard English translation, i.e. "ethical life" (Krijnen 2022a, pp. 116 ff.).

Like Hegel, Bauch criticizes Kant's architectonics of reason. Unlike Hegel, he maintains Kant's division of reason into theoretical and practical but at the same time offers a conception of the unity of both, which, like Hegel, endeavors to identify the One reason as the ground of everything in a validity-reflective fashion (i.e. in a way that renders meaning or validity conceptually explicit in terms of its own principles).

Bauch sets out this idea in his theoretical philosophy in particular. In his *Ethik*, he returns to it, namely under the title "The Dialectic between Value and Reality", directly after defining the three basic forms of the ethical principle (1935, pp. 141 ff.). In doing so, he tackles a problem that Hegel tackled in his logical doctrine of the idea. Here, Hegel shows that the absolute idea sublates in itself the theoretical and the practical idea and thus overcomes their mere opposition (GW pp. 12, 192 ff.). In Bauch's ethics, this figuration takes the form that the ethical value requires its fulfillment in reality, but in order for the value to be a task towards reality at all, reality must be able to be represented by values. For Bauch, this necessary unity of value and reality is guaranteed by the "transcendental conditionality of reality" (1935, p. 142). This transcendental conditionality culminates in Bauch's concept of the 'idea'.

Bauch conceives of the 'idea' as that objective relation of validity which, as the whole of conditions of objects, constitutes reality as well as its cognition (Krijnen 2008, ch. 5.3). The idea is the validity relation par excellence. In this respect, Bauch and Hegel agree on the *relational character* of the idea and its fundamental status. They also agree, unlike Kant, that the idea in the realm of cognition does not merely have a *regulative* function but a *constitutive* one too. The idea is the ground or principle of everything, the whole of all conditions of whatever is.

Understood in its constitutive meaning, Bauch characterizes the idea as "the truth itself" (1926, pp. 129, 146; 1935, pp. 154, 161, 253). In accordance with Southwest German neo-Kantianism, Bauch at the same time defines truth as a "value" (1923b, 3, cf. pp. 466 ff.; 1926, pp. 152 ff.). The value character of truth or the idea lies in its autonomous validity (1923b, pp. 471 ff.; 1926, pp. 160 ff.). It grants cognition its validity; it is the goal as well as the presupposition of any cognition. Although Southwest German neo-Kantianism can generally be understood as a philosophy of values, Bauch brings the concept of the idea so close to the concept of value that it becomes the basic concept of philosophy. As the value character of the idea is only one of its dimensions, the concept of the idea, like in Hegel (for whom the absolute idea is the only object and content of philosophy), is even the superordinate one.

Thus it seems plausible that Bauch not only qualifies the idea as (truth) value and as truth itself but also as (objective) "reason", "spirit" or "λόγος", as the basis of what is (Bauch 1923b, pp. 461 passim; 1926, pp. 184 f. with 190 f. passim). A meaning of truth comes to the fore that exceeds the prevailing determination of truth in neo-Kantianism as a specific type of validity, namely as "theoretical" validity, i.e. a qualification of the realm of cognition. This encompassing meaning of truth concerns truth as rationality or ideality as such, truth as the foundation of any realm of values.

According to Bauch's view of the primacy of theoretical reason or the value of truth, the extended meaning of truth has two aspects. On the one hand, it expresses that values as values are characterized by their validity and are therefore part of a system of validity relations of truth; on the other hand, their objective validity is ultimately guaranteed by the value of truth that therefore encompasses the whole system of values. Only here (more precisely, in theoretical philosophy), is a radical justification of validity possible. Hence, the value of truth is the relation of unity between the various value realms, the idea as the unity of the multiplicity of values: the logical as logos (Bauch 1926, p. 259). One of the consequences of this conception is that it indeed makes sense to speak not only of theoretical truth but also of atheoretical (moral, esthetical, religious, etc.) truth (Bauch 1923b, pp. 485 f.; 1926, pp. 260).

Concerning validity, truth is the whole of values. Whereas the truth value qua theoretical value only determines a particular realm of values, as the whole of validity it is all-encompassing. It constitutes reality and thereby makes "value actualization as such" possible. Initially, of course, this concerns the performance of cognition. Along with the constitutive function of truth goes the regulative one, namely that truth in its validity regulates the subject as the cognizing agent. In this regulative respect, the value is a task (Bauch 1923b, pp. 487 ff.). In this manner Bauch brings to light a close connection between truth, value, and reality. It results from the interrelation of constitution and regulation.

This interrelation emerges in Bauch's cryptic speech that reality is the path and passage from the λόγος-ground of its conditions of possibility to its λόγος-goal in the sense of Heraclitus πάντα διήκων λόγος (1923b, pp. 462, 465, 489, 535): The logos is the ground and goal of all reality. After all, truth constitutively conditions everything that is real and at the same time encompasses the whole of values (qua the whole of validity). Therefore, it makes reality the place of actualizing truth, the "path and passage" of validity as the ground of the task. Reality is thus conceived of as a transition from validity to validity. As the foundation of all that is real, truth can lead the real to values; and by leading the real to values, it leads the real to itself (Bauch 1923b, pp. 535, 489, 465). In short, the value is characterized by the twofold dimensionality of validity and task; the actualization of the value (and thus something real) is demanded by the value itself.

One could see this as an innovative development of the *fundamental axiomatic relationship* (gr. ἀξία = value), common in Southwest German neo-Kantianism (Krijnen 2017; 2023). In this relationship, which is fundamental to the transcendental system of philosophy, value actualization and self-formation of the subject are complementary: subjects realize values and in doing so create goods, whereby values underlie all reality and all reality is ultimately, as Bauch emphasizes, constituted by truth. Values, whose validity is independent of whether they are recognized by subjects, give meaning and direction to the endeavors of subjects. Being a value and a task are both determinacies of the idea; the idea is (as a value) a presupposition and (as a task) a goal at the same time (Bauch 1926, pp. 160 ff.). Of course cognition is not the only task (Bauch 1926, pp. 162 f.). Rather, different "duties" can be identified, at

least phenomenologically, which are constituted by different “values” (Bauch 1926, pp. 215, cf. pp. 217, 227, 231; 1923b, pp. 478 ff.). Reality is the path and passage from the λόγος-ground to the λόγος-goal, to truth.

As indicated, Bauch applies this fundamental conception to his *Ethik*. Accordingly, he reproaches Kant for insufficiently having captured the relationship between “task” and “fulfillment” of the task (Bauch 1935, p. 64). This also concerns Kant’s conception of the task as an “eternal”, merely regulative task in the sense of a goal to be striven for but never to be achieved through action, never realized, never brought “to representation” (Bauch 1935, pp. 66 f.). This is also the decisive factor in Hegel’s deliberations on the logical idea of the good (GW 12, pp. 231 ff.). “Actualization of values” (*Wertverwirklichung*) as “making reason sensible” (*Vernunftversinnlichung*) qua “entering (*Hineinbilden*) values into reality” presupposes that reason and sensibility, values and reality do not stand opposite each other without relation, as “two separate worlds” (*χωρισμός*), but that the sensible realm has its transcendental condition in an “objective”, admittedly not metaphysical but “functionally lawful” order of reason (Bauch 1935, 94). This is, as Bauch rightly notes, a “fundamental presupposition” of any ethics; it finds its justification in “theoretical philosophy” (1935, p. 94, n. 3).

Bauch’s “dialectic between value and reality” (1935, pp. 141 ff.) accordingly amounts to a clarification of reality as the place of possible fulfillment of meaning, i.e. possible shaping according to values, possible actualization of values qua formation of reality under the guidance of values. For Bauch, Kant due to his regulative version misjudged the constitutive connection between values and reality in the ‘idea’. Nevertheless, it is important for Bauch that Kant saw that “the world must be conceived of as originated from an idea” (AA III, B 843), even if the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* was not yet able to sufficiently elaborate the constitutive significance of the idea (Bauch 1935, p. 149). Bauch conceives of the idea as “constitutive” for all reality, as the “very essence” of reality in which it “appears”, without the idea and reality degenerating into a *χωρισμός* of two worlds. Rather, reality represents itself, that is to say that it represents its actual self: the “idea” as the “essence” of reality, reality as the “appearance” of the idea (Bauch 1935, p. 149). In this way, the idea (ultimately as the idea of truth) is the “ground” and “goal” of reality. Consequently, values can be actualized in reality, as culture; they can be a “medium of value representation” (Bauch 1935, pp. 149 f.). In line with this conception, Bauch does not think of reality as “value-detached” from the outset but as “standing in the validity of values” (1935, p. 150). In almost Hegelian terms, he writes that the representation of the idea is the “otherness of the idea”; the idea and the other of the idea make up the “whole of the idea” (1935, pp. 150 f.).

Part of this reality “standing in the validity of values” is that the value, as the dimension of the idea related to the subject qua task, itself demands that instance of realization of value which is the subject as a real person (Bauch 1935, p. 148). Moreover, according to Bauch’s conception of ethical principles, via the demands of will and actualization the entire objective realm of values is brought into the self-deter-

mination of the performing subject. Hence, not only Kant's perennial ought of the intention is overcome but also any formalism of the categorical imperative.

This doubtlessly is a considerable approximation to Hegel's speculative idealism by the transcendental idealist Bauch. However, it is only one side of the coin. The other is that Bauch's approximation is constantly contaminated by oscillating between the Kantian format of practical philosophy as a doctrine of duty and a Hegelian tendency to conceive of the normative conditions of the existence of freedom as something brought about by action.

Bauch's demand of essence – 'constantly become value' – posits the subject in its function of self-determination. In this respect, it coincides with Hegel's free spirit as a spirit that knows and wants itself as free (GW 20, § 482). While Hegel subsequently elaborates on the objective-spiritual conditions under which the existence of freedom can come about, or in other words, how the idea gives itself existence, Bauch immediately turns to the demand of will and thus to the moral determinacy of human actions. Although Bauch provides this moral determinacy of the will that determines itself with content, that is to say with the realm of objective values, this connection of autonomy with the realm of values still does not make it comprehensible what qualifies a concrete action in terms of its validity, just as for Hegel the standpoint of morality does not make the existence of freedom comprehensible. Bauch introduces the demand of actualization, the cultural imperative. In the structure of the three ethical principles, the demand of actualization should make comprehensible how concrete duties arise for the subject, just as Hegel's *Sittlichkeit* as a unity of the universality of the determination of rules and the particularity of self-determination of agents makes the concrete action qua singularization of freedom comprehensible.

According to Hegel, the constellation of an abstract system of rules ("Abstract Law": GW 14.1, §§ 34 ff.) and a subject that formally determines itself ("Morality": GW 14.1, §§ 105 ff.) is not sufficient to comprehend the actualization of a purpose through actions. The normative content of the *Sittlichkeit* in which the situated subject actualizes its purposes must also be taken into account. Therefore, the free endeavor of the subject and thus the existence of freedom requires that the social conditions of individual freedom are included and comprehended philosophically from the perspective of modernity. The shape of *Sittlichkeit* is constitutive for our actions. Actions can only take place where there is *Sittlichkeit*. As truly free actions, the *Sittlichkeit* must be one that is itself a product of freedom, i.e. a free *Sittlichkeit*. In Hegel's doctrine, the shapes of *Sittlichkeit* thus prove to be the shapes of existence of free spirit.

In contrast to Hegel's conception, in the demand of actualization, Bauch does not initially focus on the social conditions of individual freedom. Rather, he introduces the conditions of concretizing as determinations of the subject – as its 'subjective dispositions, capacities and powers'. The normative context of these subjective conditions only comes into the validity-reflective view later. From a Hegelian perspective, determinations of subjective spirit, in which the concept of the subject is

constituted, are confused here with determinations of objective spirit, in which the free subject giving itself existence is thematic. In this respect, the demand of actualization remains underdetermined.

Although the demands distinguished by Bauch are addressed to the “ethical subject”, “personal” demands are “at the same time social demands” (1935, p. 169). Values of personality and values of community are not regarded as different values but as different “dimensions” of the same values (Bauch 1935, pp. 170, 172, 200). For Bauch, community and society are already part of human life as life (1935, pp. 192, 194 f.). The individual and society are mutually dependent. Accordingly, Bauch does not conceive of society as the result of individual activity; both are what they are only in relation to each other. This also applies to person and community: in “real” value-laden life, the personal and communal dimension are inseparable (Bauch 1935, p. 207). In Bauch’s deliberations on “social associations” (1935, pp. 210 ff.), however, two things are noticeable that fit well with the oscillation between a Kantian program and the actualization of this program through Hegelian tendencies of unity: First, that Bauch strips of Kant’s duty-oriented profile and second the lack of necessity in Bauch’s determination and classification of social associations.¹¹ Seen in this light, it takes its revenge that Bauch’s conceptual development does not, like Hegel’s, take place in the mode of self-development of the concept. Bauch’s path from the *λόγος*-ground to its *λόγος*-goal is all too characterized by randomness, immediacy, particularity.

With Kant, Bauch wants to address the subject’s actions from the perspective of duty, and his three ethical demands actually express this. However, Bauch’s thematization of social associations primarily offers a description of the meaning of the validity of these very social associations and therefore of the values that constitute them. They concern different functions of self-formation of the subject and “fundamental structures” of life in the community (Bauch 1935, pp. 211 ff.). As such, however, they are not specifically deduced by Bauch. Their systemic context remains quite implicit, and, consequently, basic features of their determinacy. They do not appear conceptually as a path from the *λόγος*-ground to its *λόγος*-goal, i.e. as an ‘immanent deduction’ or ‘manifestation’ of the absolute ground, which is the idea, as Hegel would say. For Hegel, this manifestation of the idea is not exhausted in the explication of relations of self-formation and the ‘cultural realms’ that accompany them. Rather, Hegel transforms these relations for self-formation through relations of self-knowledge of the idea. He apparently takes serious Bauch’s own approach, namely that truth functions as the foundation of all that is real, and, via the path from the ground to the goal, also leads the real, constituted by it, ‘to itself’, to itself as the whole of validity. In doing so, Hegel arrives not so much at a system division of cultural realms as at a division of the system into logic, nature, and spirit qua

¹¹ Bauch’s views in this regard often give the impression of an ideological commitment. Thus it is not surprising that Bauch’s political convictions are repeatedly scrutinized critically. Cf. Heinz and Schäfer (2010), Löwisch (1986), Schlotter (2004).

dimensions of the only theme and object of philosophy: the (absolute) idea. Consequently, he develops a conception of self-formation as self-knowledge in terms of the self-realization of the concept. The relationship between validity and actualization takes on a consistently different format than in the model of self-formation typical of the Kantian tradition of transcendental philosophy.

Finally, regarding the problem of actualizing validity, it should also be noticed that Bauch's ethics is unable to adequately appreciate the conditions of realizing validity in their intrinsic value. The imperativistic style prevents a proper comprehension of freedom. I am referring to the opposition of intrinsic values and conditional values, common in Southwest German neo-Kantianism, and thus, as Bauch also says, of culture and civilization. Values of civilization are here only a means to the end of representing values in the life of spirit (Bauch 1935, p. 229; 1923b, pp. 514 ff.). He continuously makes a sharp distinction between "objective values" and "subjective benefits and interests" and understands this latter sphere of subjectivity as the "whole of the conditions of realization of the actual representations of value" (Bauch 1924, p. 262). For Bauch, the life of spirit (subjects, agents) is guided by cultural values in the strict sense. These "intrinsic values" are not subordinated to "usefulness" or "means to the end of usefulness" (Bauch 1932, p. 108). Rather (as with Rickert), life is to be shaped according to values (Bauch 1932, pp. 95 ff.). As values, these are objective and, hence, the talk of a subjective value presupposes the objective value (1932, p. 102).

Contemporary transcendental philosophy has rightly overcome this opposition of intrinsic values and conditional values by presenting civilization or utility as the idea of the 'economic-social' (Wagner 1980, § 28; Flach 1997, pp. 137 ff.; Krijnen 2015, ch. 3-5). It constitutes an intrinsic value, namely that of actualizing validity. Hegel's doctrine of right or objective spirit as the existence of freedom qua manifestation of the absolute idea structured in the fashion of self-knowledge, however, differs from this transcendental conception of validity and its actualization all together. The reason being that due to its deficient conception of self-knowledge, formalism remains in transcendental philosophy of culture, albeit in a sublimated way¹².

Abbreviations

- AA I. Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Königlich-Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften Georg Reimer, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1910 ff.
GW G. W. F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Meiner, Hamburg, 1968 ff.

¹² Cf. on this also Krijnen (2022c, 2022b; 2025).

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The *Beautiful Soul*: Schiller's Rupture with Kant from a Neo-Kantian Perspective

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Nineteenth-century receptions of Schiller often emphasize the continuity between his concept of the *beautiful soul* and Kant's doctrine of the *primacy of practical philosophy*. Schiller's critique of Kant was in this sense interpreted merely as a psychological supplement or an anthropological limitation – an approach that follows Schiller's own self-understanding but overlooks the deeper differences. This view nevertheless became a dominant interpretation of the Kant–Schiller controversy and was later echoed in neo-Kantianism. There were however also dissenting voices that critically exposed Schiller's *misrepresentations* of Kant's fundamental principles. Most notably, Kuno Fischer and Bruno Bauch clearly articulated Schiller's rupture with Kant, thereby firmly distinguishing Kant's project from Romantic philosophy.

This paper examines Schiller's transformation of Kant's practical philosophy. At its core is Schiller's critique of Kantian *rigorism*, from which he develops his concept of the beautiful soul. Two points become evident here: first, his critique of Kant's opposition between duty and inclination ultimately fails; second, his reinterpretation undermines the universal validity of the moral law. The root of this lies in the differing relationships between *legality* and *morality*, as well as in the role of *free will* in relation to practical reason. Drawing on Kant's texts and current scholarship, the positions of Fischer and Bauch in the Kant–Schiller debate can be substantiated by close exegesis. Fischer underscores divergences in Kant's doctrine of the highest good, while Bauch emphasizes differences in the relation between reason and sensibility. Taken together, they show that Schiller's view is not a mere quantitative extension but a revision of Kant's philosophical foundations.

1. Introduction

The dispute between Friedrich Schiller and Immanuel Kant over the doctrine of the primacy of practical philosophy has become a classic controversy in the history of philosophy¹. It expresses the tension between Enlightenment thought on the

¹ At the center of this discussion are Schiller's *Über Anmut und Würde* (*On Grace and Dignity*), published in 1793, and *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (*Letters on the Aesthetic Education of*

one hand and Romanticism on the other. The terminological overlaps and Schiller's own self-descriptions, however, have led to the complex relationship between Kant and Schiller being long misunderstood and remaining a subject of research to this day. In keeping with Schiller's self-understanding, the history of Kant reception in the nineteenth century emphasized a continuity with Kant's practical philosophy². Schiller's critique was accordingly seen as directed only toward a psychological or anthropological limitation or supplementation of Kant's practical philosophy.

This interpretation was largely adopted in neo-Kantianism. There were, however, dissenting voices that pointed out Schiller's *mislabeling* and the problematic understanding of Kant. Kuno Fischer and Bruno Bauch in particular clearly articulated Schiller's break with Kant and, in doing so, demonstrated an awareness of the fundamental systematic differences between Kant's practical philosophy and Schiller's understanding of philosophy.

When looking at the Kant–Schiller controversy, it is important to distinguish between a thesis that emphasizes continuity and a thesis that emphasizes rupture. Both share the premise that Schiller does not simply adopt Kant's conception of practical philosophy but rather transforms and expands it, thereby addressing a problematic area that Kant's ethics either leaves untouched or treats only marginally (call this the *supplementation thesis*). These expansions, however, can be considered a *continuity* only if Schiller remains committed to the fundamental principles of Kant's practical philosophy (call this the *continuity thesis*). A *rupture*, by contrast, arises when Schiller's expansions come into fundamental conflict with the Kantian project (call this the *rupture thesis*).

Relying on this distinction between continuity and rupture, the present paper pursues two interrelated aims. First, starting from the *charge of rigorism*, it reconstructs Schiller's conception of the *beautiful soul* together with the transformation of Kantian philosophy tied to it. Two points emerge here: first, that Schiller's critique of Kant's opposition between duty and inclination is based on a specific interpretation; and second, that the revision built upon this critique calls into question the universal validity of the moral law itself. Schiller's concept of the beautiful soul thus stands in fundamental contradiction to Kant's doctrine of the primacy of practical philosophy, and his additions accordingly amount to a revision of its foundations.

Man), published in 1794, in which he again refers to Kant's *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (*Critique of Practical Reason*) and *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (*Critique of the Power of Judgment*). Kant, in turn, responded at greater length to Schiller's critique in his *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*) (1794). In addition, two letters have been preserved: Schiller wrote to Kant on June 13, 1794, and Kant replied on March 30, 1795 (Kant AA XI, p. 506; AA XII, pp. 10–12). Also relevant are several letters from Schiller to Christian Gottfried Körner from the years 1792 and 1793 (the so-called “Kallias Letters”). By contrast, Schiller's literary works, which also reflect his relation to Kant's philosophy, remain largely unconsidered here (see, for example, Bauch 1905, p. 346).

² On Schiller's reception in the first fifty years, see Sharpe 1995, pp. 7–19.

Second, it can be argued that Fischer and Bauch had already identified and clearly articulated this rupture between Kant and Schiller in the 1850s and again in the early 1900s. Thus, throughout the entire period in which neo-Kantianism constituted the dominant academic current in the German-speaking world, there existed an awareness of the central differences between the two thinkers. Fischer and Bauch not only broke with a Romanticized interpretation of Kant's practical philosophy but also anticipated findings that would not be demonstrated textually in Kant scholarship until the 1990s, in the context of debates about the *role of feeling in moral action*³.

The paper is organized into three parts: Beginning with a survey of Schiller's reception in neo-Kantianism, it seeks to assign the different neo-Kantian positions to either the continuity or rupture thesis and to reassess them in light of contemporary Kant research (*Part II*). This is followed by a step-by-step reconstruction of the Kant–Schiller debate, discussing similarities, differences, and central misunderstandings in light of Fischer's and Bauch's readings (*Part III*). This approach ultimately allows for a reassessment of Schiller's reception in neo-Kantianism (*Part IV*) against the background of Kant's teaching on the primacy of practical philosophy and Schiller's conception of the *beautiful soul*.

2. The Kant–Schiller controversy in neo-Kantianism and beyond

The Kant–Schiller controversy is an important area of research within neo-Kantianism. Various authors at different times engaged with this controversy on the basis of their newly developed understanding of Kant. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, the continuity thesis dominated, along with the assumption that Schiller merely expanded Kant's teaching on the primacy of practical philosophy.

This standpoint is expressed in the 1870s by the most prominent representatives of neo-Kantianism: Hermann Cohen, in *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik (Kant's Foundation of Aesthetics)* (1889), and Wilhelm Windelband, in *Schiller und die Gegenwart (Schiller and the Present)* (1905), both attribute to Schiller a fundamentally correct grasp of Kant's philosophical project. For Windelband, Schiller is even a prophet of Kantian philosophy, while Cohen explicitly regards the concept of the *beautiful soul* as a supplement to Kant:

[Schiller] is the prophet of that remaking of the world through the spiritual power of personality which constitutes the infinitely fruitful core of Kantian idealism, and we may well say that, in this sense, there has been no greater disciple of the new philosophy than our poet⁴.

³ Paton 1948, p. 47; Allison 1990, p. 110; Baron 1995, pp. 117–226; Herman 1993; Schneewind 1992, pp. 327, 338; Wood 1999, pp. 11, 28–29; Loudon 2000, pp. 77, 203.

⁴ Windelband 1905, pp. 14–15.

[Schiller] posits as the only remaining difference – or rather as a supplement to Kant – the ‘aesthetic surpassing of duty’⁵.

Neither author, however, pursues the controversy in greater detail in these texts⁶. Ernst Cassirer likewise arrives at similar conclusions, particularly in *Idee und Gestalt. Methodischer Idealismus (Idea and Form: Methodical Idealism)* (1921). And he, too, emphasizes less the differences between Kant and Schiller than the significance of Schiller for post-Kantian Romantic philosophy:

[Schiller] stands precisely at the point where Kant’s transcendental method begins to pass over into the dialectical method of his successors. How significant Schiller’s writings were for this transition, and how decisive they thus became for the entire formation and development of the post-Kantian systems, is something that the history of philosophy has scarcely acknowledged. [...] That this change in method arises from very specific objective motives and problems admits of no doubt⁷.

The most detailed argument is presented by Karl Vorländer in his essay *Ethischer Rigorismus und sittliche Schönheit (Ethical Rigorism and Moral Beauty)*, published in 1894 in the *Philosophische Monatshefte*, where he defends the continuity from Kant to Schiller, particularly with regard to moral philosophy, writing:

In the methodological sense – which alone is of systematic interest and alone justified – Schiller too paid homage to the ethical rigorism established by Kant; and furthermore: once he had attained this standpoint, he remained faithful to it⁸.

Vorländer thus stands as an exemplary representative of the continuity thesis in neo-Kantianism, which was widely accepted for instance by Moritz Wilhelm Drobisch⁹, Karl Grün¹⁰, and Otto Liebmann¹¹.

The reflections of Kuno Fischer and Bruno Bauch, however, stand in contrast to the continuity thesis. Within the framework of neo-Kantianism, they stand out as the exception that proves the rule. In his book *Schiller als Philosoph (Schiller as Philosopher)*, published in 1858, Fischer identifies a fundamental difference in the philosophical presuppositions of the two opponents. Fischer refers in particular to the conception of the human ideal:

⁵ Cohen 1889, p. 403.

⁶ Of course, both Windelband and Cohen devote some thought to Schiller, but on other topics. See the contributions by Scott Edgar and Gerald Hartung in this volume.

⁷ Cassirer 1921, pp. 94–95. See also Cassirer 2015, p. 42: “Schiller grasped the principle of critical philosophy in its deepest sense. [...] His relation to this philosophy is not that of an enthusiastic ‘dilettante’, who passively appropriates certain of its *results* that captivate him; rather, he masters it from the standpoint of its *method*, of its scientific concept”.

⁸ Vorländer 1894, p. 403.

⁹ Drobisch 1859, pp. 177, 193.

¹⁰ Grün 1844, pp. 263–265.

¹¹ Liebmann 1880, pp. 572–635.

In a number of his most significant aphorisms [...] the beauty of the soul and the cultivation of the soul are praised as the highest measure of human perfection, as the true mark of the human ideal, so that the aesthetic human being now appears not merely as the condition and precursor but as the very fulfillment of the moral. The aesthetic human being is the unity of the sensuous and the rational, the individual and the universal¹².

Almost fifty years later, in his 1905 essay *Schiller und die Idee der Freiheit* (*Schiller and the Idea of Freedom*), Bauch reaffirmed the rupture thesis already outlined by Fischer and further developed it systematically. He argues that because of an “independent metaphysical fundamental view” and a “not insignificant misunderstanding of Kant’s doctrine”¹³, Schiller distanced himself from Kant’s conception of freedom. As he says: “He deceived himself about Kant’s teaching, and had he in fact stood in the relation to it in which he believed himself to stand, he would not merely have given himself the ‘appearance of an opponent’, but would have been an opponent”¹⁴. With regard to practical philosophy, he further says:

As much as the poetic philosopher felt himself addressed by [Kant’s principle of autonomy], as much as he acknowledged for the ‘immortal author of the *Critique*’ the ‘glory’ of having, through this very principle, restored ‘sound reason’ to philosophy, just as little could the harmony-seeking philosophical poet be content with its entirely necessary consequences¹⁵.

Despite this clear judgment, Bauch takes a more differentiated view of the Kant–Schiller controversy, emphasizing that Kant’s influence is evident everywhere and that Schiller – despite differing presuppositions – developed an underexplored aspect of practical philosophy¹⁶. In doing so, however, “the pupil” had “independently reworked the teacher, namely as an artist who arrived at philosophy through art”¹⁷.

Bauch and Fischer thus articulated a position that would reappear in sharpened form only in the second half of the twentieth century, and especially in the 1990s, in the context of debates about the *role of feeling in moral action*. In these debates, Schiller was identified as the first critic to accuse Kant of neglecting the role of feeling. Starting from this so-called “asceticism charge”, the differing metaphysical presuppositions of the two opponents were highlighted, and Kant’s practical philos-

¹² Fischer 1858, p. 340.

¹³ Bauch 1905, p. 355.

¹⁴ Bauch 1905, p. 356. Bauch’s phrase “appearance of an opponent” (*Ansehen eines Gegners*) refers to a formulation by Schiller in a letter to Kant (AA XI, p. 506).

¹⁵ Bauch 1905, p. 356.

¹⁶ He shows this with reference to the development of Schiller’s literary texts, in which he identifies four distinct conceptions of freedom.

¹⁷ Bauch 1905, p. 353. What follows leaves aside Bauch’s reflections on the realization of freedom of appearance in the state and the German nationalist sentiment bound up with it (see Holzhey 2004, p. 111). The fact that Bauch himself goes beyond Kant in his thinking and also draws on Schiller is demonstrated by Christian Krijnen in his contribution to this volume.

ophy was clearly distinguished from Schiller's reflections. Henry Allison formulates this exemplarily:

Generations of commentators and critics have taken Kant here to be claiming, or at least implying, that an action cannot have moral worth if, at the time of its performance, the agent has an inclination to perform it. Indeed, this reading can be traced back to Kant's contemporary Schiller¹⁸.

Aligning with arguments by Barbara Herman, Allison makes the following distinction:

Thus, the distinction between an act being accompanied by inclination [*mit Neigung*] and being motivated by or from inclination [*aus Neigung*] is an essential component of Kant's moral psychology. Admittedly, Kant does not make this as explicit as he might have; nevertheless, this distinction is certainly implicit in his suggestion¹⁹.

Allison highlights the distinction between acting *with inclination* and acting *from inclination*, a nuance that was largely overlooked in interpretations of Schiller and that led to some of the central misunderstandings. In a similar vein, Alan Wood writes:

Kant's critics often call attention to the deep distrust of human nature exhibited in his insistence on the opposition of reason and inclination and his reservation of moral esteem only to actions motivated by duty. (Even in Kant's own time, his ethical views were criticized on these grounds, by men such as Garve, Rehberg, and Schiller.) But the critics display shortsightedness when they condescend to this feature of Kant's ethical thought (as by making snide references to his personality quirks or pietistic upbringing). They overlook the fact that Kant's interpretation of the a priori moral principle itself, as well as his conception of its application to the human will, depends on some quite distinctive views about human nature and history²⁰.

In these studies on Kant, however, the historical contexts of post-Kantian philosophy – in which different camps contended over Kant's legacy – are largely neglected. Frederick Beiser seeks to bring this overlooked dimension back into focus when he writes: "There is still a logical connection between Schiller's ethics and aesthetics and Kant's theoretical philosophy, even if it is never made explicit. It is the task of the Schiller scholar to make this connection clear"²¹.

With few exceptions, these analyses of the Kant–Schiller Controversy proceed without reference to neo-Kantianism. Beiser, by contrast – who does take the debates into account – arrives at a rather one-sided judgment in his book *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-Examination* when he describes his aim in these words: "The chief aim of the present chapter is to show that the neo-Kantians have completely mis-

¹⁸ Allison 1990, p. 110.

¹⁹ Allison 1990, p. 111.

²⁰ Wood 1999, p. 11.

²¹ Beiser 2023, p. 560.

understood Schiller's dispute with Kant"²². In doing so, however, he pays too little attention to the heterogeneous positions within neo-Kantianism, and thereby overlooks the breakthrough Fischer and Bauch achieved with their rupture thesis²³.

3. In conflict

To truly grasp the Kant–Schiller Controversy properly, Schiller's supplementations of Kant need to be evaluated in their relation to Kant's foundations. We should not look at *rupture* or *continuity* as if they could be determined based on a scale – where the similarities as a whole might outweigh the differences – but ask whether the undeniable differences (*supplementation thesis*) undermine the assumed common ground (*rupture thesis*) between the philosophers views or not (*continuity thesis*).

3.1 Similarities and differences

Schiller makes frequent use of Kantian terminology. He admits in a letter to Gottfried Körner that “I have already taken much from [Kant] and made it my own”²⁴. In substance, he agrees with Kant's practical philosophy on two key points: first, that the principles of morality must be grounded in reason rather than in the pursuit of happiness; and second, that an action has moral worth only when it is performed for the sake of duty²⁵. Schiller, however, rejects two aspects of Kant's practical philosophy: the strict separation of inclination and duty; and, closely related to this, the imperative tone of Kant's ethics of duty. In this sense, he writes: “In Kant's moral philosophy, the idea of duty is presented with such harshness that it frightens away all grace and might easily tempt a weaker mind to seek moral perfection along the path of a dark and monastic asceticism”²⁶.

²² Beiser 2008, p. 170.

²³ An exception here is the study published in 1965 by Manfred Brelage in *Studien zur Transzendentalphilosophie (Studies on Transcendental Philosophy)*, in which Schiller's reception in neo-Kantianism becomes a thematic focus (Brelage 1965). Beyond this, Francesco Pisano (2025) has shown that Schiller opened up a third path for neo-Kantianism – Kantian rather than psychological.

²⁴ Schiller's letter to Gottfried Körner, January 1, 1792 (No. 102; NA XXVI, p. 127).

²⁵ See, for example, *Über Anmut und Würde* (NA XX, pp. 282–283): “Even if the drive for happiness does not claim blind dominion over the human being, it will nevertheless want to have its say in moral choice, thereby harming the purity of the will, which should always follow only the law and never inclination. Thus, in order to be completely certain that inclination has not shared in the determination, one prefers to see it at odds with the law of reason rather than in agreement with it – because it could all too easily happen that its mere advocacy alone would give the law its power over the will. For since in moral action what matters is not the lawfulness of deeds but solely the dutifulness of dispositions, one rightly places no value on the consideration that it is usually more advantageous for the former if inclination happens to be on the side of duty”.

²⁶ Schiller, *Über Anmut und Würde* (NA XX, p. 284).

Schiller and Kant thus share a common foundation of ethical conviction, according to which morality entails obedience to reason. It is the supreme principle of morality that unites Schiller and Kant²⁷. Beyond this shared foundation, both thinkers agree that human beings possess a dual nature, at once *sensible and rational*. But they differ fundamentally in how they interpret the relationship between sensibility and reason. Fischer points precisely to this difference in the Kant–Schiller Controversy when he highlights an ambiguity in Schiller’s view on the relation between the aesthetic state and the moral state: “We are told that the moral state arises easily and securely out of the aesthetic state and thus is the higher and remains so. But then we are assured that in the aesthetic state the moral state is already fulfilled, its task accomplished, moral effort is no longer necessary, and therefore superfluous”²⁸. Bauch is even more explicit when he writes that Schiller stands in opposition to in a way he himself did not even recognize: “It is the manner of connection that each establishes between the moral and the sensible determination that divides them”²⁹.

The tension between sensibility and reason can be conceived in three ways: as the subordination of one side to the other, or as a form of balance. Both Kant and Schiller, however, agree that if sensibility were to be placed above reason, it could not lead to morality (the first form of subordination). Schiller, in line with Kant, conceives the principle of freedom “as ‘an inner principle of our autonomous reason’, as an absolute value of reason”³⁰. According to Schiller’s interpretation, however, moral values in Kant stand in opposition to inclination³¹. From Schiller’s perspective, while Kant argues for a “pure morality” in which reason is placed above sensibility (the second form of subordination), Schiller calls instead for a unity of duty and inclination, advancing the concept of the *beautiful soul*³² or of “moral beauty”³³. Inclination, he argues, can indeed contribute to moral value alongside duty. “Only the complete harmony of both principles”, as Bauch reconstructs Schiller’s position, “indeed their unity, constitutes ‘the perfect seal of humanity and what is meant by a beautiful soul’”³⁴. In contrast to Kant’s rigorism, Schiller insists that it is only through the interplay of inclination and duty – in the form of a duty performed out

²⁷ Cf. Bauch 1905, p. 354.

²⁸ Fischer 1858, p. 321.

²⁹ Bauch 1905, p. 360.

³⁰ Bauch 1905, p. 354. Compare Schiller’s letter to Gottfried Körner, February 8, 1793 (No. 151; NA XXVI, pp. 181–182). According to Bauch, Schiller “learned to understand his own art more deeply by orienting the tragic toward the sublime. He finds its logical place in the universally valid, supra-individual determination of reason, and thus in the supersensible moral nature of the human being”. (Bauch 1905, p. 354).

³¹ Schiller’s famous distich, in which he mockingly exposes Kant’s rigorism, has become a paradigmatic representation of this opposition: “I gladly serve my friends, / yet, alas, I do it with inclination, / and so it often vexes me / that I am not virtuous”. (NA I, p. 357).

³² See Schiller, *Über Anmut und Würde* (NA XX, pp. 287–289).

³³ See Schiller’s letter to Gottfried Körner, February 18/19, 1793 (No. 154; NA XXVI, pp. 195, 198).

³⁴ Bauch 1905, p. 358.

of inclination – that a genuinely moral disposition can arise. This alone makes the true moral perfection of human beings possible: “With an ease as if instinct alone were acting, [the beautiful soul] performs humanity’s most difficult duties”³⁵. Put differently, for Schiller the *beautiful soul* represents a kind of *pre-established harmony* between inclination and practical reason, through which one fulfills duties instinctively, with ease.

Consistently with this, Schiller also rejects the imperative form of the moral law. When the moral law always addresses human beings in the form of a command, it produces an ethic for *slaves*, one that works through *fear* rather than through *trust*³⁶. There is, then, no moral surpassing of duty, but there is an aesthetic one – and this becomes an anthropological principle. Fischer reformulates Schiller’s idea as follows:

In the aesthetic disposition of mind our powers are in balance and harmony: here we find ourselves in a state of calm reflection and refined desire; the enemy over which moral strength is meant to triumph is reconciled and has disappeared – such triumphs are no longer necessary³⁷.

In this sense, Bauch also puts it – quoting Schiller – as follows:

Just as metaphysics is directed toward the “convergence” of reason and nature, so ethics is directed toward the attunement of morality and sensibility, of duty and inclination. Worldview and view of life are oriented toward one another and proceed in complete parallel through the striving for a reconciled unification of opposites³⁸.

This parallelism makes the imperative form of the categorical imperative unnecessary.

3.2 *Misunderstandings*

Schiller takes up considerations from Kant’s ethics and extends them in line with his own self-understanding. This gives rise to a twofold problem of interpretation: Schiller attributes to Kant presuppositions, which he then critiques in order to make his own expansions and supplementations appear plausible. However, these supplementations also contradict Kant’s actual presuppositions. When interpreting Schiller, it is therefore important to distinguish between self-fashioned similarities and differences and the real ones.

³⁵ Schiller, *Über Anmut und Würde* (NA XX, p. 287).

³⁶ In Schiller’s words (*Über Anmut und Würde*, NA XX, p. 286): “It is certainly not advantageous for moral truths to set themselves against feelings that a human being may acknowledge without shame. But how are the feelings of beauty and freedom to be reconciled with the austere spirit of a law that guides him more through fear than through trust, that strives always to isolate the very being whom nature has united, and secures its rule over one part of him only by arousing mistrust against the other?”

³⁷ Fischer 1858, pp. 320-321.

³⁸ Bauch 1905, p. 355. See Schiller, *Über Anmut und Würde* (NA XX, p. 258).

At least three fundamental misunderstandings can be reconstructed that account for Schiller's supplementations:

1) Schiller's critique of Kant begins with the rigid separation of inclination and duty. "In Kant's moral philosophy the idea of duty is presented with such harshness that it frightens away all grace"³⁹. This charge of rigorism, however, rests on a misinterpretation of Kant. Bauch points this out explicitly: "The charge of 'rigidity' that Schiller raised against Kant is based on a misunderstanding"⁴⁰. For Kant, duty without regard to inclination does not mean that it is always directed against inclination. However, that an action is in fact performed "from duty" is shown precisely in those cases where there is no inclination to perform it. Kant makes this clear already in the *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*) in his exposition of the concept of duty, for example when he discusses the duty of self-preservation⁴¹. When Kant highlights precisely those cases in which actions are performed against inclinations, he is making an epistemic point. Within the framework of his ethical system, it is irrelevant whether a rational determination of the will is made against or in accordance with inclination. However, in order to be able to know whether an action is performed from duty, only such cases of actions against inclination are helpful⁴². There can, then, indeed be agreement between duty and inclination. Kant's central point, however, is that inclination must not be the determining ground of the will⁴³. Kant therefore asks about the conditions that the will must meet in order to be good. An action is in accordance with duty if it follows the categorical imperative (the criterion of universal validity)⁴⁴. At the center of Kant's

³⁹ Schiller, *Über Anmut und Würde* (NA XX, p. 284).

⁴⁰ Bauch 1905, p. 359.

⁴¹ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (AA IV, pp. 397-398; Kant 1998, p. 11): "[T]o preserve one's life is a duty, and [...] everyone has an immediate inclination to do so. But on this account the often anxious care that most people take of it still has no inner worth and their maxim has no moral content. They look after their lives in conformity with duty but not from duty. On the other hand, if adversity and hopeless grief have quite taken away the taste for life; if an unfortunate man, strong of soul and more indignant about his fate than despondent or dejected, wishes for death and yet preserves his life without loving it, not from inclination or fear but from duty, then his maxim has moral content".

⁴² See, for example, Brelage 1965, p. 236.

⁴³ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (AA IV, pp. 400-401; Kant 1998, pp. 13-14): "Now, an action from duty is to put aside entirely the influence of inclination and with it every object of the will; hence there is left for the will nothing that could determine it except objectively the law and subjectively pure respect for this practical law, and so the maxim of complying with such a law even if it infringes upon all my inclinations".

⁴⁴ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (AA IV, p. 402; Kant 1998, pp. 14-15): "But what kind of law can that be, the representation of which must determine the will, even without regard for the effect expected from it, in order for the will to be called good absolutely and without limitation? Since I have deprived the will of every impulse that could arise for it from obeying some law, nothing is left but the conformity of actions as such with universal law, which alone is to serve the will as its principle, that is, *I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law*".

ethics stands morality, not the mere legality of actions. An action is good because it is commanded by practical reason and performed out of respect for the moral law⁴⁵. In *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 1794), he formulates this in his reply to Schiller's *Über Anmut und Würde* (*On Grace and Dignity*) as follows:

I readily grant that I am unable to associate *gracefulness* with the *concept of duty*, by reason of its very dignity. For the concept of duty includes unconditional necessitation, to which gracefulness stands in direct contradiction. The majesty of the law (like the law on Sinai) instills awe (not dread, which repels; and also not fascination, which invites familiarity); and this awe rouses the respect of the subject toward his master, except that in this case, since the master lies in us, it rouses a *feeling of the sublimity* of our own vocation that enraptures us more than any beauty⁴⁶.

Schiller's concept of the *beautiful soul* would therefore, for Kant, amount to *moral enthusiasm* (*Schwärmerei*).

If *enthusiasm* in the most general sense is an overstepping of the bounds of human reason undertaken on principles, then *moral enthusiasm* is such an overstepping of the bounds that practical pure reason sets to humanity, thereby forbidding us to place the subjective determining ground of dutiful actions – that is, their moral motive – anywhere else than in the law itself or to place the disposition which is thereby brought into the maxims anywhere else than in respect for this law, and so commanding us to make the thought of duty, which strikes down all *arrogance* as well as vain *self-love*, the supreme *life-principle* of all morality in human beings⁴⁷.

Even though this formulation already appears in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (*Critique of Practical Reason*), prior to the Kant–Schiller Controversy, it applies directly to Schiller's position. From Kant's perspective, Schiller transgresses the limits of human reason by introducing principles constructed for that very purpose and thus falls into *enthusiasm*. This is moreover *moral enthusiasm* since he seeks motives for moral action beyond respect for the law itself. Bauch makes clear in this connection that Schiller fails to grasp “the significance of this logical distinction between inclination and duty”. And: “He overlooks the nature of the opposition”⁴⁸. In misunderstanding this distinction, Schiller confuses “what Kant demonstrated to be extra-moral with what is immoral”⁴⁹. The divergent interpretations of the rela-

⁴⁵ See Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (AA V, p. 81; Kant 2015, p. 67): “The concept of duty, therefore, requires of the action objective accord with the law but requires of the maxim of the action subjective respect for the law, as the sole way of determining the will by the law. And on this rests the distinction between consciousness of having acted in conformity with duty and from duty, that is, respect for the law, the first of which (legality) is possible even if the inclinations alone have been the determining grounds of the will whereas the second (morality), moral worth, must be placed solely in this: that the action takes place from duty, that is, for the sake of the law alone”.

⁴⁶ Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (AA VI, p. 23; Kant 1996, p. 72).

⁴⁷ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (AA V, pp. 85-86; Kant 2015, p. 71).

⁴⁸ Bauch 1905, p. 357

⁴⁹ Bauch 1905, p. 357.

tion between sensibility and reason within the human being's *sensible–rational* dual nature thus rest on fundamentally different conceptions of human nature and human vocation in Kant and Schiller. Kant's critical perspective in this sense becomes a causal–metaphysical one in Schiller's hands.

2) Schiller interprets Kant's pure morality as an ethos of fulfilling duty for the sake of duty⁵⁰. He accordingly interprets Kant's project as a heteronomous ethics of law and in doing so misconstrues it entirely. In *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*), Kant – defending his concept of duty – explicitly refers to the “frightened graces” mentioned by Schiller:

But *virtue*, i.e. the firmly grounded disposition to fulfill one's duty strictly, is also *beneficent* in its consequences, more so than anything that nature or art might afford in the world. Hence the glorious picture of humanity, as portrayed in the figure of virtue, does allow the attendance of the *graces*, who, however, maintain a respectful distance when duty alone is at issue⁵¹.

According to Kant, then, there is no unity of duty and inclination, but there can be indeed a synthesis⁵². So much so that he can write that “a heart joyous in the compliance with its duty (not just complacency in the recognition of it) is the sign of genuineness in virtuous disposition”⁵³.

Beyond these historical connections, it becomes clear that Schiller's critique of pure morality is directed less against Kant than against himself. In this way, he overcomes a pietist inheritance in his own thought. This is especially evident in the terms that Schiller himself introduces into the debate – *servants* and *children of the house*, *fear* and *trust*, *tree* and *fruits of the tree*. None of these terms come from Kant's philosophy; they are taken from Luther's Bible and revolve around themes such as

⁵⁰ Thus, in *Über Anmut und Würde* (NA XX, pp. 285–286), he writes: “From the sanctuary of pure reason he [= Kant] brought forth the strange yet so familiar moral law, set it up in all its sanctity before a degraded age, and cared little whether there were eyes unable to bear its radiance. – But what had the *children of the house* done to deserve that he cared only for the *servants*? Because often very impure inclinations usurp the name of virtue, did even the selfless affection in the noblest heart have to be made suspect? Because the moral weakling would gladly grant the law of reason a laxity that turns it into a plaything of convenience, did reason therefore have to be saddled with a rigidity that transforms the more powerful expression of moral freedom into nothing more than a more respectable kind of servitude? For does the truly moral person have a freer choice between self-respect and self-contempt than the slave of the senses has between pleasure and pain? Is there less compulsion there for the pure will than here for the corrupted one? Did the imperative form of the moral law have to indict and debase humanity, making the noblest document of its greatness at the same time the certificate of its frailty? And was it possible, with this imperative form, to avoid the appearance that a command which man as a rational being gives to himself – and which, for that very reason alone, is binding on him and thus alone compatible with his sense of freedom – took on the semblance of a foreign and merely positive law [...]?”

⁵¹ Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (AA VI, p. 23; Kant 1996, p. 72).

⁵² Bauch 1905, p. 360.

⁵³ Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (AA VI, p. 24; Kant 1996, p. 73). On this see, Guyer 1993, pp. 335–393; Sorrell 1987, pp. 87–101.

the *law of the Gospel* and the *law of grace*⁵⁴. Especially, Bauch exposes this self-critique, disguised as a critique of Kant, through several stages of Schiller's reflections on freedom⁵⁵: Through Kant, Schiller's concept of freedom was purified of a "vague subjectivism and mere individualism"⁵⁶. Schiller in this regard appropriated Kant's principle of autonomy, but still saw in it his own refined version of the Protestant concept of freedom – one he sought to overcome precisely in going beyond Kant.

3) Kant and Schiller's differing interpretations of the human being's sensible–rational dual nature also lead to theoretical differences concerning the faculties. In Kant, free will and the laws of practical reason stand in a relation of mutual determination:

Thus freedom and unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other. Now I do not ask here whether they are in fact different or whether it is not much rather the case that an unconditional law is merely the self-consciousness of a pure practical reason, this being identical with the positive concept of freedom; I ask instead from what our cognition of the unconditionally practical starts, whether from freedom or from the practical law. It cannot start from freedom, for we can neither be immediately conscious of this [...], nor can we conclude to it from experience [...]. It is therefore the moral law, of which we become immediately conscious (as soon as we draw up maxims of the will for ourselves), that first offers itself to us and, inasmuch as reason presents it as a determining ground not to be outweighed by any sensible conditions and indeed quite independent of them, leads directly to the concept of freedom⁵⁷.

In Schiller, by contrast, the will as the principle of human self-determination is independent of its relation to practical reason. According to Bauch, it was Kant's idea of the *intellectus archetypus* that provided the poet with "an initial favorable point of reference"⁵⁸. Whereas the "greatest critical thinker" sought precise and logically conceptual distinctions, the poet aimed at a "real unification and synthesis"⁵⁹. In the process, Kant's determining power of judgment quietly became for him a determining reason, and "critical ideality, the value-reality, turned into metaphysical reality"⁶⁰. Free will thus becomes an *exalted principle*, standing between the demand of

⁵⁴ Brelage 1965, pp. 241-243.

⁵⁵ He develops this not only on the basis of theoretical but above all literary texts. See also Fischer 1858, pp. 294-341.

⁵⁶ Bauch 1905, p. 354.

⁵⁷ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (AA V, p. 31; Kant 2015, pp. 26-27). See also Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (AA V, p. 46; Kant 2015, p. 40): "In this undertaking the Critique can therefore not be censured for beginning with pure practical laws and their reality, and it must begin there. Instead of intuition, however, it takes as their basis the concept of their existence in the intelligible world, namely the concept of freedom. For this concept means nothing else, and those laws are possible only in relation to the freedom of the will; but on the presupposition of freedom they are necessary or, conversely, freedom is necessary because those laws are necessary, as practical postulates. How this consciousness of moral laws or, what is the same thing, this consciousness of freedom is possible cannot be further explained; its admissibility can, however, be defended in the theoretical Critique".

⁵⁸ Bauch 1905, p. 354.

⁵⁹ Bauch 1905, p. 356.

⁶⁰ Bauch 1905, p. 355. The concept of *heautonomy* comes to the fore here, which Bauch also explicitly points out: Kant's moral autonomy is to be understood as aesthetic heautonomy. See Schiller's

reason and the drives⁶¹. If the will – in Schiller’s sense – is assigned an unconditional value, then practical reason becomes merely a faculty for issuing moral prescriptions. And it is precisely this point that Schiller levels as a charge against Kant, without taking into account the shifted presuppositions in their respective concepts. In contrast to Kant’s ethics of duty, Schiller posits a free-floating will that follows the maxim: “determine yourself from yourself”⁶². Bauch describes this shift of standpoint as follows: “The ‘coincidence’ of the ‘demands’ of reason ‘with the necessity of nature’ is ‘explained’ on a metaphysical basis, insofar as reason makes a transcendent use ‘of the effect of the mere sensible world’”⁶³.

4. *Best friends... almost*

All three of the misunderstandings reconstructed in the previous section rest on Schiller’s fundamental shifting of Kant’s principles. In this sense they do not touch Kant’s actual project, so it does not really make sense to talk about continuity here.

Schiller’s supplementations are not opposed to Kant. The conflict arises instead from Schiller’s metaphysical shift of the critical project on which he bases his supplementations. Fischer sees Schiller’s advance over Kant above all in the field of aesthetics, especially in the *Kallias-Briefe* (*Kallias Letters*), where he “grounds the objective constitution of the beautiful”⁶⁴. Bauch sees the value of Schiller’s interpretation precisely in the fact that he distinguishes the “different instances” of Kant’s philosophy from one another, even if he reunites them in the *beautiful soul*: “He brought, despite all failures in opposition and polemic, a successful and welcome supplement to Kant’s teaching, which is indeed quite compatible with it”⁶⁵. Only more recent Kant scholarship has offered textual support for Fischer’s and Bauch’s perspective on the Kant–Schiller Controversy. Neglect of the dimension of feeling and the charge of asceticism do not do justice to Kant’s practical philosophy: “To overlook the compatibility of this supplementation, insofar as it is indeed only a supplementation, means to misconstrue Kant’s teaching itself. Without the poet’s own metaphysical turn – which, however, first led him to this point – Kant’s philosophy

interpretation of beauty as *heautonomy* in his letter to Gottfried Körner, February 23, 1793 (No. 155; NA XXVI, pp. 208–210).

⁶¹ Schiller: *Über Anmut und Würde* (NA XX, p. 290): “The will of the human being is a sublime concept, even when one does not attend to its moral use. The *mere* will already raises the human above animality; the *moral* will elevates him to divinity. But he must first leave the former behind before he can approach the latter; hence it is no small step toward the moral freedom of the will to exercise the *mere* will by breaking the necessity of nature within himself – even in matters of indifference”.

⁶² Schiller’s letter to Gottfried Körner, February 19, 1793 (No. 154; NA XXVI, p. 191).

⁶³ Bauch 1905, p. 355. See Schiller, *Über Anmut und Würde* (NA XX, p. 260).

⁶⁴ Fischer 1858, p. 293. See also Fischer 1858, pp. 274–276.

⁶⁵ Bauch 1905, p. 356.

would have been capable of the supplementation on a purely critical basis”⁶⁶. Bauch succinctly formulates the entire problem of the Kant–Schiller Controversy in this passage: Schiller rightly recognized the need to supplement practical philosophy, but did so from a mistaken standpoint.

From a historical perspective, Schiller’s self-understanding of his connection to Kant’s project also had the consequence that criticism was transformed into a subjective idealism, without acknowledging the transformation as such. The quantitative expansion he claimed thus proves to be a fundamental revision of the foundations of Kant’s project. This revision significantly contributed to a shift in transcendental philosophy, that was carried out by German idealism. The role that Schiller’s concept of a beautiful soul played in this shift was not correctly understood by the neo-Kantians – with the exceptions of Fischer and Bauch⁶⁷.

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Abbreviations

- AA I. Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Königlich-Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Georg Reimer/de Gruyter, Berlin, 1910 ff.
- NA F. Schiller, *Schillers Werke*, Nationalausgabe, ed. by J. Petersen and F. Beißner, Hermann, Weimar, 1948 ff.

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⁶⁶ Bauch 1905, p. 356.

⁶⁷ We would like to thank Steven Tester for his help in preparing the English version of this paper.

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“True Idealism Is Realism”.

Schiller as the Poet of the Ideal in Hermann Cohen

GIAN PAOLO CAMMAROTA

1. *Platonism and Kantianism in Cohen's interpretation of Schiller*

In the final chapter of *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* (Kant's foundation of aesthetics), published in 1889, Hermann Cohen uses the following expression to define Friedrich Schiller's philosophy: “True idealism is realism [*Echter Idealismus ist Realismus*]”¹. To understand how this statement applies to Schiller, however, a premise is necessary.

Schiller's importance within the neo-Kantian movement, beginning with Friedrich Albert Lange² and notably continuing with Hermann Cohen, is undoubtedly tied to him being interpreted as a Kantian philosopher. However, this interpretation is only possible if Schiller is placed within the Platonic-Kantian philosophical tradition. Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the claim of an intellectual continuity between Plato and Kant was a defining characteristic of the Marburg School. This school was founded by Cohen following the publication of the first edition of *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (Kant's theory of experience) in 1871³.

In fact, it should be remembered that in the final part of his philosophical system, *Asthetik des reinen Gefühls* (Aesthetics of pure feeling), published in 1912, Co-

¹ H. Cohen, *Kants Begründung der Aesthetik*, Dümmeler, Berlin, 1889. Now published in Id., *Werke*, hrsg. im Auftrag des Hermann-Cohen-Archivs am Philosophischen Seminar der Universität Zürich von H. Holzhey und H. Wiedebach, G. Olms, Hildesheim, Zürich, New York, vol. III, 2009, Einleitung von H. Holzhey, p. 381 (from now on abbreviated as KBA).

² As Chiara Russo Krauss rightly states, “Schiller plays a key role in defining Lange's neo-Kantian program” (C. Russo Krauss, “Prefazione. Il ruolo di Schiller nel neokantismo di Lange”, in F. A. Lange, *Le poesie filosofiche di Schiller*, ed. by C. Russo Krauss, Federico II University Press, Napoli, 2025, pp. 9-18, p. 15). In its turn, Lange's Schillerian Kantianism is crucial to understanding neo-Kantianism as a whole. In fact, in comparison to the “early stages of the ‘Back to Kant’ movement, which were more interested in the theory of knowledge and the critique of metaphysics, Lange paved the way for a recovery of the Kantian project as a whole, that is, as a form of humanism of the Enlightenment tradition, based on the idea of man's moral destination as the goal of universal history” (ibid., p. 18).

³ H. Cohen, *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*, Dümmeler, Berlin, 1871, 1885², B. Cassirer, Berlin, 1918³. First and third edition republished in Id., *Werke*, op. cit., Einleitung von G. Edel, vol. I/1, I/2, I/3, 1987. From now on abbreviated as KTE.

hen posited a fundamental identification between the history of philosophy and the history of Platonic idealism, to the extent that he peremptorily proclaimed: “Philosophy is Platonism”⁴. More broadly, the identification of philosophy with Platonism characterizes Cohen’s entire intellectual journey. In fact, in his project of continuing Kant’s critique of reason with his own critique of experience – and particularly since his 1878 work, *Platons Ideenlehre und die Mathematik* (Plato’s doctrine of ideas and mathematics)⁵ – Cohen consistently refers to Plato’s theory of ideas, which for him encapsulates “the theory of the foundation of being in thought”⁶. As has been rightly noted, one could even argue that Cohen’s critical idealism is more closely aligned with pure Platonic thought than with Kant’s a priori synthesis⁷, so much so that “the image of Plato [...] constitutes the constant backdrop to his entire philosophy”⁸. Significantly, in the Preface to the first edition of his *Platons Ideenlehre* (Plato’s doctrine of ideas), published in 1902, Paul Natorp states: “I have no hesitation in naming Hermann Cohen as the one who opened our eyes both to Kant and to Plato”⁹. And then he adds that “only the rebirth of Kantian idealism has shown full understanding for Plato’s idealism as well”¹⁰.

These statements clearly reveal the close connection between Kantianism and Platonism that defines the Marburg School, which drew on a reinterpretation of Plato to gain a new understanding of Kantian philosophy. As Natorp put it, Plato’s doctrine of ideas “serves as an *introduction* to idealism”, and philosophy itself “is nothing but idealism”¹¹.

If we ask ourselves what it means to say that philosophy is Platonism, that the Platonic doctrine of ideas is an introduction to idealism, and that philosophy itself is idealism – in other words, if we query the meaning of idealism – we must turn to Friedrich Schiller, the transcendental philosopher and follower of Kant, “the poet

⁴ H. Cohen, *Asthetik des reinen Gefühls*, 2 Bde, B. Cassirer, Berlin, 1912. Now published in Id., *Werke*, op. cit., Einleitung von G. Wolandt, vol. VIII-IX, 1982, vol. 1, p. 245. From now on abbreviated as ArG). Cf. K.-H. Lembeck, *Platon in Marburg. Platonrezeption und Philosophiegeschichtsphilosophie bei Cohen und Natorp*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg, 1994, pp. 3 ff.

⁵ H. Cohen, *Platons Ideenlehre und die Mathematik*, in Id., *Schriften zur Philosophie und Zeitgeschichte*, 2 Bde, hrsg. von A. Görland und E. Cassirer, Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 1928, I, pp. 336-366.

⁶ A. Poma, “*Sehnsucht della forma. Hermann Cohen nel postmoderno*”, in A. Poma, *Cadenze. Note filosofiche per la postmodernità*, Milano, Mimesis, 2014, p. 38.

⁷ A. Poma, *La filosofia critica di Hermann Cohen*, Mursia, Milano, 1988, p. 45. See also G. Edel, “Kantianismus oder Platonismus? Hypothesis als Grundbegriff der Philosophie Cohens”, *il cannocchiale*, 1/2, 1991, special issue on the philosophers of the Marburg School, edited by B. Antomarini, pp. 59-87.

⁸ K.-H. Lembeck, “Cohens frühe Platon-Deutung und seine Quellen”, *il cannocchiale*, 1/2, 1991, pp. 89-116, p. 89.

⁹ P. Natorp, *Platons Ideenlehre: Eine Einführung in den Idealismus* [1902], Felix Meiner, Hamburg, 1994, p. x.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p. ix.

of the ideal”, as Cohen calls him, in order to understand why authentic idealism is realism.

2. *The poet of the ideal*

For Cohen, Schiller stands as the true successor to Kantian aesthetics. He understood better than any of Kant’s followers that beauty is an ideal form, distinct from the forms of nature and morality. What’s more, none captured the simple and profound, eternally true meaning of the Kantian method of philosophizing better than Schiller, the “poet of the ideal” (*Dichter des Ideals*)¹².

This is the image of Friedrich Schiller that Hermann Cohen presents to us. Schiller reappears throughout his works dedicated to Kant, as well as in his philosophical system. Cohen devotes significant reflections to the poet of ideals – and particularly to his *Ode to Joy* – which help us better understand how he situated Schiller within the history of thought. Furthermore, his interpretation of Schiller’s works enables us to reconsider Cohen’s work, helping us to avoid certain clichés, particularly those concerning his relationship with Kant.

The work in which Cohen paints his portrait of Schiller is undoubtedly *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*, since, as the title suggests, it is an examination of Kantian aesthetics. In the introduction¹³, Cohen begins with a historical survey, embarking on a fascinating excursion into how aesthetic problems arose in pre-Kantian philosophy¹⁴. In particular, Cohen focuses on Plato and Plotinus and the centrality of the Idea for the foundation of art, contrasting this approach with Aristotle’s empiricism. Nevertheless, as the true founder of philosophical aesthetics, he identifies Immanuel Kant and his system of critical philosophy. As Gamba puts it, according to Cohen, being the first author of a philosophical system, “Kant, with his foundation of aesthetics, addressed the problem of doing justice to a realm of cultural facts that cannot be reduced to either scientific knowledge or morality”¹⁵. In any case, for Cohen, “aesthetics does not deal with subjective experiences and evaluations, but rather with art”¹⁶.

In the final chapter of *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*¹⁷, significantly titled “Critical Aesthetics, Its Friends and Opponents”, Cohen argues that the classics of German literature and poetry are linked to Kantian aesthetics. He asserts that classical idealism is transcendental, unlike Romantic philosophy¹⁸. The reason for this is that,

¹² Cf. KBA, p. 379.

¹³ KBA, pp. 6-91.

¹⁴ E. Gamba, *La legalità del sentimento puro. L'estetica di Hermann Cohen come modello di una filosofia della cultura*, Mimesis, Milano, 2008, p. 57.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁷ KBA, pp. 335-433.

¹⁸ KBA, 343.

contrary to the modern sensualists' notion of the idea as a representation (*Vorstellungs-Idee*), thanks to the notion of the transcendental idea, Kant could revive the original Greek meaning of the term 'idea', which was the ancient name for 'form'¹⁹.

Regarding Schiller, Cohen states: for him "Ideal and form cannot constitute an opposition to reality and content. For such an opposition does not exist for Schiller's idealism"²⁰. And then he adds the passage we mentioned earlier: "Transcendental idealism is, above all, the idealism of experience, the idealism of science. True idealism is realism"²¹. This is the key to understanding Cohen's interpretation of Schiller, as "from this follows that the opposition between idealism and realism can be overcome [*aufheben*], and that the concept of form or ideal is what brings about this overcoming [*Aufhebung*]"²². Consequently, as already Kant stated, "transcendental idealism [...] is empirical realism"²³.

The aesthetic ideal constitutes a new form, produced by the idealization that unifies the aesthetic overcoming of duty and the aesthetic overcoming of natural lawfulness²⁴. In this regard, I would like to refer to what Giovanna Pinna wrote in the Preface to a collection of essays about Schiller and the project of modernity. She maintains that, in order to recognize the centrality of Schiller's contribution to European cultural history, without risking emptying his work of its "dialectical, productively contradictory, idealistically realistic content", which is what makes him 'modern', it is necessary to free Schiller from the cliché "according to which he represents the link between Kant and idealism"²⁵, meaning the post-Kantian idealism of classical German philosophy. What stands out in this assessment is the reference to the dialectical, contradictory, and yet idealistically realistic content of Schiller's work. To understand in what sense this content is 'idealistically realistic', one must grasp Schiller's relationship with Kant²⁶, the type of idealism that characterizes Schiller's thought, and the meaning of ideas and reality on which he based his philosophy.

In her contribution included in the aforementioned edited collection, Giovanna Pinna clearly identifies the meaning of Schiller's idealism, when she points out that, in the Preface to *The Bride of Messina*, Schiller states that nature is essentially an idea,

¹⁹ Cf. KBA, 363: "The old term for Form is Idea. One of the basic meanings of Idea" is Shape [*Gestalt*] or Form [*Form*]. Thus, alongside moral concepts, aesthetic objects were also referred to as ideas. Like truth and goodness, beauty is an idea".

²⁰ KBA, p. 381.

²¹ Ibid.

²² KBA, p. 382.

²³ KBA, p. 382. Cohen refers to Kant's claim that "the transcendental idealist is an empirical realist" from the *Critique of Pure Reason* (we quote from the English translation ed. by P. Guyer and A. Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, A 371).

²⁴ KBA, p. 381.

²⁵ G. Pinna, *Prefazione. Riflessione e poesia*, in G. Pinna, P. Montani, A. Ardivino (eds.), *Schiller e il progetto della modernità*, Carocci, Roma, 2006, pp. 7-10, p. 7.

²⁶ A. L. Siani, G. Tomasi, *Introduzione*, in A. L. Siani, G. Tomasi (eds.), *Schiller lettore di Kant*, ETS, Pisa, 2013, pp. 5-10, p. 9.

and can therefore only be accessed through the spirit, despite not being produced by it²⁷. Schiller's statement echoes Kant's conception of transcendental idealism as empirical realism. In the section on Transcendental Dialectic in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, more precisely in the "Criticism of the fourth paralogism of transcendental psychology", Kant states: "Thus the transcendental idealist is an empirical realist, and grants to matter, as appearance, a reality which need not be inferred, but is immediately perceived"²⁸.

According to Cohen's interpretation, Kant's transcendental aesthetics, which deals with sensibility as a source of cognition (*Erkenntnis*), has the metaphysical outcome of "positing a realism that is, *as such*, idealism"²⁹. Cohen contrasts transcendental idealism *qua* empirical realism against common idealism, which he considers a form of empirical idealism or transcendental realism, that seeks to ground the real world in something other than experience and thus transcends the limits of experience in search of supersensible ideas³⁰. Conversely, the transcendental idealist "starts from the possibility of experience, of cognition" yet acknowledges that "not all cognition must derive from where it starts". The transcendental idealist abstracts from the matter of experience, as "this is for him not the beginning of all thought". From the perspective of transcendental idealism, cognition does not begin before all experience – as would happen if one presupposed the world of things, so as to grasp its alleged a priori truth through experience. In the Copernican spirit that defines transcendental idealism, we question the possibility of experience by reversing the order of the concepts of reflection: matter and form. As Cohen writes: "The first thing to look for is the form of the spirit, the form of experience. This is the true a priori. The object must revolve around this; it is in revolving around this that the object originates"³¹.

As we shall see, it is precisely in this reversal of the relationship between matter and form that one of the fundamental elements of Schiller's Kantianism lies, an element that sets him apart from Romantic philosophy.

The new relationship between form and matter does not mean, as post-Kantian philosophy would have us believe, that reality is formed by self-creating concepts. Kant is completely misunderstood if one does not bear in mind that "it is not in the concepts alone, but in sensuality and, first and foremost in the latter, that the a priori is *discovered*; and because of this, *intellectual* intuition is rendered impossible"³². Cohen points out that these are the goals of the Kantian critique of reason:

²⁷ G. Pinna, "Die Natur selbst ist nur eine Idee des Geistes, die nie in die Sinne fällt'. Aporie e variazioni del concetto schilleriano di natura", in *Schiller e il progetto della modernità*, op. cit., pp. 71-87, p. 71.

²⁸ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, op. cit., A 371.

²⁹ KTE, p. 239.

³⁰ Cf. KTE, p. 242.

³¹ KTE, p. 243.

³² Ibid.

The revolving of objects around concepts, the reduction of absolute realities to objective validities, the dissolution of substances into ideas = extended categories, the construction of phenomena from forms that transcendental investigation confirms as a priori = condition for the possibility of experience³³.

For Cohen, ultimately, this is “the secret of idealism”: “to dissolve the diversity of things into differences of ideas”³⁴. Consequently, Schiller’s idealism for Cohen is the idealism of the transcendental philosopher, for whom, as we have already seen, “Ideal and form cannot constitute an opposition to reality and content. For such an opposition does not exist for Schiller’s idealism”³⁵. In particular, Cohen quotes a passage from the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, in which Schiller affirms that the transcendental philosopher “claims no ability to explain the possibility of things, but contents himself with establishing the kind of cognition that is needed to grasp the possibility of experience”³⁶.

3. *Schiller and Kant’s moral philosophy*

As Cohen points out, Schiller not only determined, from the point of view of knowledge of nature, “the conditions of experience starting from cognition”, but even before his encounter with Kantian philosophy, “he understood moral law as the condition for history”, i.e., for “the history of human persons as moral beings”³⁷. In this regard, Cohen quotes the “Briefe über Don Carlos” (Letters on Don Carlos) of 1788, in which Schiller opposes all forms of moral enthusiasm and exaltation (*Schwärmerei*), recognizing that “the moral motives, which are derived from *an ideal of excellence to be achieved*, do not lie naturally in the human heart”³⁸. In particular, Schiller claims that “Men seem to be more inclined to be guided in their moral choices by immediate and simple feelings than by abstract ideas of reason, and *individual* motives are far more compatible with their nature than *universal* and general ones”³⁹.

As Crescenzi pointed out, in the “Briefe über Don Carlos”, thanks to the convergence of ethical reflection and empirical anthropology, Schiller brings to light what

³³ KTE, p. 257.

³⁴ KTE, p. 270.

³⁵ KBA, p. 381.

³⁶ KBA, p. 379. F. Schiller, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen* [1795], in *Sämtliche Werke*, hrsg. von G. Fricke und H. G. Göpfert, Carl Hanser Verlag, München, 1967, V, Neunzehnter Brief, p. 629, En. tr. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man and Letters to Prince Frederick Christian Von Augustenburg*, by K. Tribe, Introduction and Notes by A. Schmidt, Penguin, London, 2016, Letter xix. Trans. slightly modified.

³⁷ KBA, p. 380.

³⁸ F. Schiller, “Briefe über Don Carlos”, *Der Teutsche Merkur*, December 1788, Letter 11, pp. 224–267, p. 260.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

can be considered the most interesting element of his dramaturgy: "the psychological deconstruction of morality and the discovery of the fragile foundations on which Western culture is based"⁴⁰. In characterizing the relationship between Marquis Posa and Prince Carlos, the future king, Schiller criticizes the Marquis' egotistical individualism and unveils his Schwärmerei, revealing that behind Posa's seeming affection lies "the mask of cold utilitarianism and even an instinct to overpower others. The man admired on stage as the noblest of friends is revealed, through Schiller's analysis, to be an individualist motivated by ulterior motives and focused solely on his own intellectual and moral superiority"⁴¹.

From this point of view, in order to understand Schiller's conception of the human being in relation to Kantian moral philosophy, it is useful to recall what Cohen writes about the meaning of duty in *Kants Begründung der Ethik* (Kant's foundation of ethics): "The objective reality of the moral law therefore consists precisely in the fact that it is *not* real in experience: so that it *becomes* real 'through our actions and omissions'"⁴². Only if we start not from the sensuous man, but from the moral law, can we arrive, "if not directly at man, at least at humanity as the required subject of that will"⁴³.

Furthermore, when it comes to defining "our human relationship to the moral law", Cohen emphasizes that Kant's principle of duty is not an ethical limiting principle with the function of preventing natural impulses, as Schopenhauer and Schleiermacher would have us believe. Rather, it is an ethical principle of self-formation⁴⁴. This is the direction in which Schiller developed Kantian ethics, so that "the seeds of Kantian aesthetics, blossomed into richer fruitfulness in Schiller, springing from the barren soil of duty"⁴⁵.

In light of this, it is clear why Cohen writes that "It would be highly desirable if the conventional interpretation of the relationship between Kant and Schiller – according to which Schiller mitigated Kant's aesthetic rigor – were to finally disappear from our literary histories"⁴⁶.

If we look at the quotations from the *Briefe über Don Carlos* contained in *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*, it becomes clear that – although Cohen considers him the "poet of the ideal" – he acknowledges that, like Kant, Schiller combines a drive toward the ideal with an emphasis on the empirically determined human being.

⁴⁰ L. Crescenzi, "La critica della morale e il martire della storia. Studi sui *Briefe über Don Carlos*", in *Schiller e il progetto della modernità*, op. cit., pp. 91-108, p. 95 ff.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁴² H. Cohen, *Kants Begründung der Ethik*, Dümmmler, Berlin, 1877, B. Cassirer, Berlin, 1910². Now published in *Id.*, *Werke*, op. cit., Einleitung von Peter Müller und Peter A. Schmid, vol. II, 2002, p. 309. From now on abbreviated as KBE.

⁴³ KBE, p. 310.

⁴⁴ KBE, p. 324.

⁴⁵ KBE, p. 327.

⁴⁶ KBE, p. 326.

In this regard, we could read what Schiller writes in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, with reference to the events of the French Revolution and its excesses:

The fabric of the natural state is tottering, its rotting foundations give way and there seems to be the physical possibility of enthroning the law, of finally treating man as an end in himself, and making true liberty the foundation of political association⁴⁷.

Nevertheless, Schiller regards this possibility as a “vain hope”, since “the *moral* possibility is lacking”⁴⁸. Therefore, his view is more disillusioned: “The spirit of the age vacillates between perversity and brutality, between unnatural and bare nature, between superstition and moral unbelief, and it is only the balance of evil that sets a temporary limit”⁴⁹.

According to Schiller, the bleak outcome of the French Revolution stems from the fact that we cannot disregard the empirically determined man. Consequently, he believes that we need to contrast the sensual man with the aesthetically determined man. As he writes:

Through the aestheticization of the soul, the autonomy of reason is already revealed in the domain of sensibility [...]. The step from the aesthetic condition to the logical and moral condition (from beauty to truth and duty) is thus infinitely easier than the step from the physical state to the aesthetic (from mere blind life to form)⁵⁰.

It is only through the aesthetic state, and the idea as form, that the moral state of man can develop, not from the physical state⁵¹.

We can now understand why Cohen refers to this Twenty-Third Letter from Schiller’s work. It is this letter that clarifies that, if we act in accordance with a purpose in the physical world, we can only rise above that purpose from an aesthetic point of view, as duty may prescribe that the will be holy, but not that nature be sanctified. Hence, Cohen agrees with Schiller that “There is no moral surpassing [*Uebertreffen*] of duty, but there is an aesthetic surpassing of it”⁵². This means that “*alongside morality, there is art*”⁵³.

Whether art can be considered a surpassing of duty is one of the fundamental issues of the aesthetic problem, which is related to another issue: whether it is possible to aesthetically surpass the legality of nature. In short, the issue of the aesthetic surpassing is essentially the issue of the Ideal itself, which applies to the domain of morality as much as to that of nature. As Cohen writes both morality and nature

⁴⁷ F. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, op. cit., Letter v.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Letter xxiii. Trans. slightly modified.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² KBA, p. 381.

⁵³ Ibid.

"serve as material [*Stoff*] for art"⁵⁴. Which means that "Idealization alone unites both materials to create a new form, the aesthetic ideal"⁵⁵.

Consequently, according to Cohen, Schiller does not regard Ideal and Form as opposed to reality, since, on the contrary, it is they that, through idealization, shape and constitute reality as form – that is, as idea. For example, it is only through a process of idealization that the universal idea of humanity is constituted in its reality (*Realität*).

In this regard, it is particularly significant that Cohen discusses the *Ode to Joy* in both *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* (Logic of pure knowledge) and *Asthetik des reinen Gefühls* (Aesthetics of pure feeling). In this poem, he recognizes the process of idealization that leads from the mythical hero to man through the primary poetic form of comparison (*Vergleichung*)⁵⁶.

In the *Logik*, referring to the *Ode to Joy* verse that says, "All men become brothers" (*Alle Menschen werden Brüder*), Cohen states: "The poet says that they *become* brothers because, in *historical reality*, they are not recognizable as such", even though from a logical and conceptual point of view "men are brothers"⁵⁷. In other words, he opposes the *conceptual* identity, according to which men are indeed brothers, to the *Wirklichkeit* (the actual historical reality in which men do not recognize themselves as brothers). Schiller, being a poet, follows a different logic and adopts an *aesthetic* point of view. In the proposition "Men are brothers", there is not a categorical judgment, but rather an affirmative judgment (*Bejahung*) whose important effect is to proclaim and create the identity. By saying that men "become" brothers, instead of "are" brothers, Schiller avoids the affirmation (*Bejahung*) and shifts toward a categorical judgment. Through the phrase "men become brothers", he strongly criticizes the historical violation of the fact that men are brothers – that is, the violation of the identity between man and brother⁵⁸.

4. Conclusions

As a disciple of Kant, Schiller belongs, together with Goethe and Humboldt, to the tradition of authentic idealism. Indeed, as Gamba puts it, one of the fundamental elements of his thought is "the attention to the connection and systematic distinction of the different directions of culture", which "implies the recognition of the autonomy of each of these different directions"⁵⁹. Schiller neither denies the autonomy of art by subordinating it to knowledge of nature, morality, or religion

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ ArG, I, p. 369 ff., p. 376.

⁵⁷ H. Cohen, *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, B. Cassirer, Berlin, 1902, 1914². Now published in Id., *Werke*, op. cit., Einleitung von H. Holzhey, 1977, vol. VI, p. 545. From now on abbreviated as LrE.

⁵⁸ LrE, p. 545.

⁵⁹ E. Gamba, *La legalità del sentimento puro*, op. cit., p. 92.

nor asserts a predominance of art that nullifies the autonomy of other cultural directions. On the contrary – as we have seen stressed by Cohen – for Schiller art draws its material from knowledge and morality.

Furthermore, Cohen believes that Schiller, being a Kantian philosopher and the poet of the ideal, embodies Platonic and Kantian idealism, authentic idealism understood as true realism. In this regard, it is particularly significant what Cohen states in the chapter of *Ethik des reinen Willens* (Ethics of pure will), aptly entitled “The Ideal”:

True *idealism* does not make itself dependent, but rather independent of reality [*Wirklichkeit*] and experience; however, it pays all the more vigorous and thorough attention to the connection with experience. It does not want to speculate about cloud cuckoo land, but rather, with the sense of reality that is characteristic of genuine idealism, it wants to grasp reality in order to tame it, master it, and transform it. *The deepest meaning of purity lies in its applicability*, in the creation of being, as an application of the pure concept. It is towards reality that purity is applied; but in doing so, purity accomplishes the *overturning* [*Umwendung*] of reality⁶⁰.

We can apply to Schiller what Cohen believes to be the meeting point of Plato and Kant: “The path of idealism is the one that frees itself from the constraints of nature and the tyranny of experience”⁶¹.

In this sense, the ideal that – as Lange put it – always precedes life⁶², is also always in a struggle with life. Cohen recognizes this struggle expressed in Schiller’s poem *Das Ideal und das Leben* (The Ideal and Life):

The ideal is no longer the realm of shadows; rather, it should pervade life so that freedom overcomes fate and life is transformed into the land of freedom. This is not an abstract poetic thought, it is the humanization of moral law, which is what Schiller always strived for⁶³.

⁶⁰ H. Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, B. Cassirer, Berlin, 1904, 1907². Now published in Id., *Werke*, op. cit., Introduction by S. Schwarzschild, vol. VII, 1981, p. 391. From now on abbreviated as ErW.

⁶¹ ErW, p. 14.

⁶² Cf. F. A. Lange, *Einleitung und Kommentar zu Schillers philosophischen Gedichten*, Velhagen & Klasing, Bielefeld-Leipzig, 1897.

⁶³ H. Cohen, *Über das Eigentümliche des deutschen Geistes* [1914], in Id., *Werke*, op. cit., bearbeitet und eingeleitet von H. Wiedebach, vol. XVI, 1997, pp. 239–297, pp. 288 f.

Noumenal Affection and Play in Hermann Cohen's Schillerian Aesthetics

SCOTT EDGAR

1. *"The Poet of the Ideal" and Cohen's aesthetics*

"I believe I can say that no one has so clearly understood the simple and deep, the eternally true meaning of the Kantian method of philosophy as the poet of the ideal" (Cohen 1889, p. 379). This is Hermann Cohen's estimation, in his *Kant's Foundation of Aesthetics* (1889), of Friedrich Schiller's significance for the development of Kantian philosophy. It matters that this assessment comes at the end of the 1880s. Over the course of that decade (really, starting in 1877), in successive books, Cohen articulated his own critical idealism with increasing detail and sophistication. *Kant's Foundation of Aesthetics* is a late entry in this series, and as such offers a relatively well developed version of Cohen's critical idealism¹. It is thus with this relative clarity about his own views that Cohen assesses Schiller's importance for the Kantian project.

In fact, at key points in Cohen's aesthetics, he is indebted to Schiller even more than to Kant². However, the full extent of Schiller's influence on Cohen becomes clear only when we have a sufficiently detailed picture of his aesthetics. I thus have two aims. First, I will argue that, for Cohen, the idea of play is an ideal we must

¹ At the same time, *Kant's Foundation of Aesthetics* represents only one period of Cohen's writings, and only one period of his writings on aesthetics, specifically, the middle of three periods. It is in this middle period that Cohen is clearest about his debts to Schiller. See Gamba (2021) for a detailed account of the differences between these three periods in Cohen's writing on aesthetics.

² I want to note, but cannot here pursue, the multiple and fascinating ways that Cohen, in *Kant's Foundation of Aesthetics*, articulates not just his aesthetics, but his critique of knowledge, by reference to Schiller's aesthetics. A full account of this would have to include the fact that Cohen credits Schiller with having articulated the indifference of the real and the ideal (Cohen 1889, pp. 388-382), a thesis that, starting in the early 1880s, Cohen takes to be central to his idealist account of knowledge. A full account would also have to explain the significance of the many passages in *Kant's Foundation of Aesthetics* where Cohen draws explicit analogies between the role of geometrical figures in the constitution of the object of knowledge, and the role of figure (literally, line drawings) in making the objects of aesthetics. Finally, a full account would have to make sense of Cohen's ubiquitous use of the vocabulary of mathematics and mechanics to explicate core concepts of both his own and Schiller's aesthetics. This is all very philosophically rich terrain, but I cannot explore any of it here.

posit as a demand of rational inquiry. It is an ideal that expresses our commitment to making noumenal affection intelligible to ourselves. However, defending that interpretation of Cohen will require me to develop a relatively fine-grained interpretation of feeling as distinctively aesthetic content in his *Kant's Foundation of Aesthetics*³. Then second, I will use the interpretation I develop to show how, in multiple ways, Cohen explicates his account of aesthetic content by drawing explicitly and self-consciously on Schiller.

Putting together this picture of Cohen's aesthetics will require us to see various concepts drawn from all corners of his critical idealism: from his critique of knowledge, the ideas of universal communicability and the universal validity of theoretical knowledge, as well as his concept of things in themselves; from his ethics, his concepts of the will and noumenal affection; and from his aesthetics, his accounts of feeling and play.

To these ends, I begin in §2 by rehearsing the broad outlines of Kant's, Schiller's, and Cohen's systematic aesthetics. Doing so reveals that in one important respect Cohen's aesthetics are much closer to Schiller's in his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters* (1794) than to Kant's⁴. Like Schiller, and unlike Kant, Cohen argues that aesthetic content is the product of an interaction between the cognitive faculties of theoretical consciousness and the will, that is, moral consciousness. For Cohen, objective aesthetic consciousness is the unification of theoretical and moral consciousness.

In §§3 and 4, I develop a detailed interpretation of what the unification consists in, namely, the mutual interdependence of theoretical and moral consciousness. §3 argues that, for Cohen, moral consciousness depends on theoretical consciousness. §4 argues that, for Cohen, theoretical consciousness depends on moral consciousness. At the same time, both §§3 and 4 show how Cohen's conception of the interdependence of theoretical and moral consciousness commits him to noumenal affection.

In §5, I argue that, for Cohen, play – conceived explicitly on the model of Schiller's play drive – is a rational ideal that expresses our commitment to making noumenal affection intelligible to ourselves, and thus also to making the unification of theoretical and moral consciousness intelligible to ourselves. I conclude in §6 by indicating all too briefly what consequences Cohen's views have for his conception of a unified ego.

³ I will draw on and, I hope, extend the accounts of Cohen's aesthetics found in Guyer 2008 and Beiser 2018.

⁴ My assessment of Cohen's relation to Schiller and Kant is semi-anticipated, albeit through a glass darkly, by Rosalewski (1912). He offers an account on which Schiller agrees with Kant on details that matter for my interpretation. But his interpretation of Kant is not so much Kant himself as Cohen's views from *Kant's Foundation of Ethics*. So unbeknownst to Rosalewski, he is in fact marking Cohen's (not Kant's) agreement with Schiller on points where both of them disagree with Kant.

2. *Play in Kant, Schiller, and Cohen*

The problem space that both Schiller and Cohen are navigating in their aesthetics was, of course, established by Kant. So Kant is where we have to start.

The Introduction to Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* presents a problem for aesthetics as a branch of philosophy. Kant takes himself to have established in his previous work that philosophy is concerned with a faculty of cognition, whose operations are the concern of theoretical philosophy, and a faculty of desire, whose operations are the concern of practical philosophy (Kant [1790] 2000, pp. 171 ff.). But then, what room is there in the critical system for aesthetic philosophy, whose concern would be the operations of the faculty of feeling (Kant [1790] 2000, p. 177)? Kant's proposal is that aesthetic judgment occurs without its object being subsumed under a determinate concept of either what it is (as happens in theoretical cognition) or what it should be (as happens in moral consciousness). Rather, aesthetic judgments express the feeling of pleasure we have in the free play of our faculties of imagination and understanding, in response to an object that is presented to us. (Kant [1790] 2000, p. 217). Kant takes this account to show that aesthetic judgments do not refer to properties of their objects, but that those judgments can still be shared universally. In other words, for Kant, there is some component of aesthetic judgment that is, as he puts it, "universally communicable" (Kant [1790] 2000, p. 219).

For Kant, aesthetic judgment is a species of what he calls reflective judgment. But it is only one of two such species. The other is teleological judgment: that is, judgments about ends or purposes in nature. To be sure, these judgments are not unrelated to considerations of aesthetics. They are essential to Kant's account of the sublime. But Kant's motivation for developing an account of them is not principally aesthetic. Rather, in the Introduction to the third *Critique* Kant suggests that teleological judgment and the ideal of purposiveness in nature concern a much deeper philosophical need. They will, somehow, mediate between the domain of theoretical consciousness, where we cognize ourselves according to deterministic laws in the phenomenal world, and moral consciousness, where we are aware of ourselves as noumenal subjects who make free choices (Kant [1790] 2000, pp. 175-176, 195-196). Kant thus divides the third *Critique* into two distinct parts: one corresponding to aesthetic judgment, concerned with the free play of the faculties of imagination and understanding; and one corresponding to teleological judgment, concerned in part (and perhaps ultimately) with mediating between theoretical consciousness and moral consciousness.

Schiller rejects Kant's systematic distinction between these two species of reflective judgment. He thus develops an account of play and its function in aesthetic consciousness that differs importantly from Kant's. He develops this account in his *Aesthetic Letters*. That work has multiple aims: to be sure, in it Schiller is concerned with philosophical aesthetics, but he is also concerned with republican politics, and he suggests that the right aesthetic education is a requirement for mature moral

and political selfhood⁵. For my purposes, though, the work is most important for Schiller's attempt to develop an analytic of the beautiful. That is where he develops his alternative to Kant's account of play.

Schiller's account of play is the culmination of an argumentative arc, developed in the eleventh to the fifteenth letters, that concerns three "drives": the sense drive, the form drive, and the play drive. For Schiller, the sense drive and the form drive are the opposing components that together constitute a human being in its "sensuo-rational nature" (Schiller [1794] 1967, p. 77). His contrast between these drives is complex and nuanced. He associates the sense drive with matter and the form drive with form. He associates the sense drive with what is finite and changing in a human being, and the form drive with what is infinite and unchanging. I do not know how to do justice to how these pieces (and all the other pieces) of Schiller's distinction between these drives fit together.

Fortunately, for my purposes we can restrict our focus to other components of the distinction. Schiller also says that the sense drive "proceeds from the physical experience of man" (Schiller [1794] 1967, p. 79), that is, a human being's sensible nature, which appears in the phenomenal world and can be the object of theoretical cognition. The sense drive thus expresses the part of humanity that is subject to deterministic causal laws. In contrast, the form drive "proceeds from the absolute existence of man, or from his rational nature, and is intent on giving him the freedom to bring harmony into the diversity of his manifestations..." (Schiller [1794] 1967, p. 81). That is, the form drive expresses the part of a human being that is rational and free, and in that way fully a moral agent. The form drive thus proceeds from a human being's noumenal self.

Schiller proposes that his third drive, the play drive, is the idea of the unification of the sense drive and the form drive. The play drive is thus the idea of the opposing sides of humanity unified. The idea of that unity involves, among other things, the idea that a free noumenal self can be efficacious in the phenomenal world – that the self's moral ends can be pursued and realized in the physical (and political and historical) world. For Schiller, this unity is the idea of humanity in the most complete sense.

Schiller suggests that we are rationally required to take the play drive – the idea of humanity in the most complete sense – as our end. That is, humanity is structured by the ideal of a purposiveness that aims at humanity's completion as its end. But strikingly, Schiller also argues that the play drive is beauty, that is, the object of aesthetic consciousness (Schiller [1794] 1967, pp. 103-107).

Undoubtedly, there is much in Schiller's account that he accepts from Kant. Perhaps most fundamentally, he inherits Kant's view that aesthetics does not have its own object that is independent of the domains of nature and freedom. So he initially faces the same question Kant does about the place of aesthetics within a critical philosophy.

⁵ For more detailed accounts of Schiller's aims in the *Aesthetic Letters*, see Beiser 2008.

However, Schiller's concept of play differs sharply from Kant's. Kant conceives of play as the play between two cognitive faculties (imagination and understanding), having nothing to do with moral consciousness. Further, Kant's concept of play supports his distinction between aesthetic and teleological judgment: while play does not involve any practical faculty, teleological judgment involves mediating between theoretical and moral consciousness. In contrast, Schiller conceives of play precisely as the relation between the side of humanity that is an object of theoretical cognition and the side that is a free moral subject. Thus Schiller collapses Kant's distinction between aesthetics and teleology. The result is that, for him, the play drive is an ideal, demanded by reason, of the end of humanity's development as it seeks to unify its empirically cognized and free natures; and no less, the play drive is beauty.

With this contrast between Kant and Schiller in hand, we can start to see just how much of Cohen's aesthetics are drawn from Schiller rather than Kant. Cohen develops his own account of the object of aesthetic consciousness in roughly parallel passages in *Kant's Foundation of Aesthetics*, in chapters 1-2 and 4⁶. In chapters 1 ("The lawfulness of aesthetic consciousness") and 2 ("The content of aesthetic consciousness"), Cohen presents his views systematically and (more or less) in his own voice, although also still purporting to interpret Kant's third *Critique*. In contrast, in chapter 4 ("The critical aesthetics, its friends and its enemies"), Cohen surveys the views of Goethe and Schiller and the romantics, in order to situate his own views in relation to them. The "enemies" of critical aesthetics are the romantics, and its friends are Goethe and especially Schiller⁷. In the context of Cohen's extended discussion of Schiller, he highlights how much of his own views he has borrowed from Schiller. Of course, Cohen almost certainly interprets Schiller in a way that fails to do justice to the complexity of the latter's views. But I will leave aside the question of the extent to which Cohen gets Schiller right. Instead, I want to emphasize only how much Cohen draws self-consciously from Schiller, as he understands him.

Still, the way Cohen frames his project comes decidedly from Kant. Cohen wants to account for the place of aesthetics within the system of his critical idealism. Like Kant, he thinks the domain of nature and the domain of freedom exhaust the sphere in which laws apply with universal validity. So what hope is there for a philosophical aesthetics that does more than just record the idiosyncratic tastes of different people? The first part of Cohen's answer to this question echoes Kant. Cohen suggests that aesthetics has a distinct content, namely, feeling, which can thus also be called aesthetic consciousness (Cohen 1889, pp. 158, 160). His challenge is thus to explain how feeling could ever be "lawful, pure, and universally valid" (Cohen

⁶ For much fuller surveys of Cohen's views in *Kant's Foundation of Aesthetics*, see Guyer 2008 and Beiser 2018, ch. 8. I follow both Guyer and Beiser in finding substantial disagreement between the aesthetics Cohen presents in the book and Kant's actual views.

⁷ See Gamba (2021, pp. 268 ff.) for a plausible argument about who Cohen's (mostly unnamed) contemporary targets were in chapter 4 of *Kant's Foundations of Aesthetics*.

1889, p. 158). That lawfulness and universal validity would then be the object of aesthetic consciousness (Cohen 1889, p. 169).

The account Cohen develops in response to this challenge also seems Kantian, at least on its surface. Cohen suggests that aesthetic consciousness – that is, feeling – is objectified when it is built up “from the two modes of content it consumes as material” (Cohen 1889, p. 249). That is, objective aesthetic consciousness somehow arises from the interrelation between two other modes of consciousness. Moreover, apparently still echoing Kant, Cohen conceives of that interrelation as play (Cohen 1889, pp. 170, 174).

However, it turns out that Cohen’s conception of play follows Kant only superficially. Cohen rejects Kant’s view of what play actually is, that is, for Kant, the free play of the faculties of imagination and understanding. As Cohen makes increasingly clear over the course of chapter 2 of *Kant’s Foundation of Aesthetics*, the two modes of consciousness he thinks are involved in play are theoretical consciousness and moral consciousness⁸. Play, for Cohen, is the unification of those two modes. The opening pages of chapter 2 are concerned with a contrast between theoretical consciousness or nature and moral consciousness or morality (Cohen 1889, pp. 222, 225). His point is twofold. First, the content of aesthetic consciousness cannot be derived from either of these modes individually. But second, it can and is derived from both of them in tandem, “a combination of both” (Cohen 1889, p. 225)⁹. That combination is a unity, and on Cohen’s account it is produced by play (Cohen 1889, pp. 251–252, 397 ff.). Cohen is perfectly clear that this conception of play is a departure from Kant. He criticizes Kant precisely for restricting play to cognitive faculties and missing the role of moral consciousness:

Not only understanding and imagination are at play [*spielen dieses Spiel*]; but, just as imagination itself plays over to the side of ideas, so the entire weight of moral consciousness, and to be sure, from its very foundation as consciousness of movement, must be incorporated into this proportion (Cohen 1889, pp. 397–398)¹⁰.

Cohen here concedes to Kant that play does involve the imagination and the understanding. But more fundamentally, he thinks, it involves the relations between those cognitive faculties and moral consciousness.

Cohen’s conception of play thus owes much more to Schiller’s than it does to Kant’s. As Cohen makes abundantly clear in chapter 4, he echoes Schiller self-consciously in conceiving of play as a relation between the sensible, phenomenal self that is an object of theoretical cognition and the noumenal self that wills freely and is subject to the rational demands of morality. He thus also follows Schiller in collapsing Kant’s distinction between aesthetic and teleological judgment. Indeed, Cohen suggests (incorrectly) that even for Kant aesthetic consciousness is teleological (Cohen 1889, p. 397). Cohen wants to attribute that view to Kant, because as Cohen

⁸ My interpretation of Cohen on this point follows that of Beiser (2018, pp. 154 ff.).

⁹ See also Cohen (1889, pp. 226 and 238).

¹⁰ See also Cohen (1889, pp. 251–252).

sees it, a certain purposiveness is at work in aesthetic play. He ultimately argues that theoretical and moral consciousness each require us rationally to posit their unification – that is, play – as an end of inquiry. In short, for Cohen play is purposive.

Unpacking the details of Cohen's view will be our business in the next four sections.

3. How moral consciousness depends on theoretical consciousness, and how that dependence involves noumenal affection

If play for Cohen is the unification of theoretical and moral consciousness, then our first task is to understand exactly what he thinks that unification consists in. He offers some hints in chapter 2 of *Kant's Foundation of Aesthetics*, but is much clearer in chapter 4. There, he articulates his view that the unification of theoretical and moral consciousness consists in their mutual interdependence. That is, Cohen thinks, in order for theoretical consciousness to carry out its proper task, it depends in an essential way on moral consciousness; and moral consciousness, in order to carry out its proper task, depends in an essential way on theoretical consciousness. Teasing this view out of Cohen's text will take some work.

Cohen hints at the view when discussing the value that the aesthetic ideal brings to the critical system. He says, for example, that the "aesthetic direction" of consciousness is an "intergrowth and melding" of theoretical and moral consciousness that "equally benefits" them both (Cohen 1889, p. 251). Cohen hints at what those benefits might be when he remarks that the "hallmark" of "aesthetic treasure" – and thus the value of the unification of theoretical and moral consciousness – is that it "fulfills the concept of humanity". Without it,

the value of science for man himself would be only sterile pride, and the dignity of freedom only makes him at home in a realm of morals and ends, in order to make him alien to the world of phenomena to which he belongs as a being of nature (Cohen 1889, p. 398).

The concept of humanity is the concept of a being that has both theoretical and moral consciousness. But here Cohen suggests that if theoretical consciousness, and paradigmatically natural science, did not have the benefit of being unified with moral consciousness, it would be "sterile". Conversely, if moral consciousness, expressed as freedom, did not have the benefit of being unified with theoretical consciousness, it would leave us "alien" to the natural world we inhabit.

This passage already hints at why moral consciousness, in order to carry out its proper task, requires theoretical consciousness. The task of moral consciousness is the exercise of freedom. That is, for Cohen, it is the exercise of humanity's capacity to set its own ends and pursue those ends as it sees fit, subject to the constraints only of its own rationality. But a moral subject cannot set ends or pursue them rationally without relying on its theoretical consciousness.

Consider an example. Suppose I make it my end (as Cohen did) to advocate for the political and economic interests of workers. How do I pursue that end without at least some understanding of economic history, political economy, and current economic and political events? Without that knowledge, how would I know which of my activities would be likely to advance workers' interests? How would I evaluate my tactics in an ongoing way, and adjust to new economic and political realities?¹¹ I can begin to pursue my end – I can begin to exercise my freedom – only when I rely on knowledge (and paradigmatically science) furnished to me as a subject by my theoretical consciousness.

This example illustrates why, without the deliverances of theoretical consciousness, the will and any exercise of its freedom would be “alien” to the phenomenal world we inhabit. It thus illustrates why moral consciousness, in order to carry out its proper task, depends on theoretical consciousness.

However, there is one more point we need to see about this example, and about the more general idea that, for Cohen, moral consciousness depends on theoretical consciousness. Cohen's view of that dependence commits him to what contemporary Kantians call noumenal affection: that is, the idea that the will, a faculty of the noumenal self, initiates causal series of events in the phenomenal world. Think once more of the end of advocating for workers' interests. That example presents a picture of the will's action in the world that requires us to conceive of the will initiating a whole causal series of events, a series that leads, ultimately, to the realization of the will's intended ends within history, in the economic and political world. Which is to say, the example requires us to conceive of the will initiating a causal series in the phenomenal world. That is noumenal affection. Without it, Cohen says, the will would be an “alien to the world of phenomena” (Cohen 1889, p. 398).

4. How theoretical consciousness depends on moral consciousness, and how that dependence involves noumenal affection

Let's turn to Cohen's view that theoretical consciousness depends on moral consciousness. This view will take more work to understand. But it will also reveal another important respect in which Cohen articulates his own views by borrowing self-consciously from Schiller.

We want to understand why Cohen claims that science, unless it has the benefit of being unified with moral consciousness, “would be only sterile pride”. We need an explanation for why he thinks the “freedom of the imagination, which reigns in aesthetic play” “ennobles the lawfulness toward which [humanity's] quest for knowledge is directed” (Cohen 1889, pp. 398-399). That is, we want to understand why

¹¹ See Widmer (2023) for an account of Cohen's moral and political philosophy that emphasizes the extent to which he thinks political norms must be evaluated in the context of historically actual economic, legal, and political institutions.

Cohen thinks theoretical consciousness, in order to carry out its task, depends on moral consciousness.

The task of theoretical consciousness is, for Cohen, to transform subjective representations (paradigmatically, sensory contents) into representations that are universally valid, and in that respect objective. In chapter 4 of *Kant's Foundation of Aesthetics*, he explicates certain details about how he thinks theoretical consciousness does this. Strikingly, Cohen draws heavily on Schiller, and on Schiller's conception of the play drive, to do so. To be sure, though, Cohen interprets Schiller's play drive in a very specific and idiosyncratic manner. He interprets it in light of a concept we saw introduced by Kant, but that is also used by Schiller: the concept of universal communicability. Cohen ultimately argues that universal communicability is a central function of the play drive.

Cohen finds Schiller developing the concept of universal communicability in lectures from the winter semester of 1792-1793. In these lectures, Schiller discusses the central problems of his aesthetics, including how a person's sensation of aesthetic pleasure could be answerable to an objective standard when sensations of all kinds seem paradigmatically subjective. For Schiller, the idea of an objective aesthetic taste requires, as he puts it, that:

[m]an must make the universal communicability of his sensations law... If a sensation of pleasure is to be universally communicable, everything empirical, material, and all influence of inclination must be separated from it... Sensations assumed to be universally communicable are subject to internal subjective conditions that must necessarily be common to all people... Taste is opposed to the faculty of sensory cognition, is applied to sensations, to something subjectively universal and necessary, and is the ability to judge the universal communicability of a feeling (Schiller [1792-1793] 1871, pp. 42-43; quoted in Cohen 1889, p. 401).

Cohen's comment on this passage consists in nothing but two cryptic sentences: "feeling is to be universally communicable, the subjective is to become objective. That is the problem of aesthetics" (Cohen 1889, p. 401).

Nevertheless, despite Cohen's brevity on this point, this passage is important for him. Schiller is describing the role that the concept of universal communicability plays in transforming a representation that is at first subjective into one that is objective. Everything individual, particular, or idiosyncratic about that representation must be separated out from it. Only then can the representation become the object of representations shared by multiple individual people, and in principle, ideally, shared by all people. Precisely that universal validity is what the representation's objectivity consists in. Cohen remarks that, for Schiller, this is the problem of aesthetics. But make no mistake, for Cohen, this is also a fair way to describe the problem of his entire critique of knowledge: that is, understanding how representations and modes of consciousness that are subjective are transformed into ones that are universally valid, and in that sense objective. Thus for Cohen, Schiller's brief discussion of universal communicability encapsulates precisely the main problem of a critical idealist account of knowledge.

On just this point, Cohen thinks, Schiller's better-known concept of the play drive echoes his concept of universal communicability. Cohen observes that when Schiller introduces the idea of the play drive, he assigns it the same function that, in his earlier lectures, he had assigned to universal communicability: transforming a subjective mode of consciousness into something objective. To be sure, Cohen acknowledges that this is not how Schiller introduces the idea of the play drive in the *Aesthetic Letters*. Rather, it is how he introduces that concept in the version of his discussion of it that appeared in *Hora*. On that version, Cohen quotes Schiller as saying that the purpose of the play drive is "to make law into feeling, or, what amounts to the same thing,... to make feeling into law" (Schiller; quoted in Cohen 1889, p. 401). Of course, on Cohen's account, the function of play is precisely to unify theoretical and moral consciousness. Thus, on the interpretation of Schiller that Cohen defends, the unification of those two modes of consciousness is necessary for what Schiller takes to be the problem of aesthetics and what Cohen takes to be the whole problem of his critical idealism: the transformation of subjective modes of consciousness into objective ones.

We need to be careful about what exactly Cohen thinks the connection is between the concept of universal communicability and the play drive. Given that Cohen thinks they have the same function, one might expect Cohen to see universal communicability as, so to speak, merely a first draft of the idea that Schiller ultimately expresses a few years later as the play drive. But that is too simple. Instead, Cohen seems to regard universal communicability as a key component of the play drive, and in particular, as the play drive's specifically logical function. After all, on Cohen's interpretation, the play drive has the function of transforming subjective modes of consciousness into objective ones (which it does by unifying the theoretical and moral modes of consciousness). But for Cohen, to carry out that function, the play drive must separate out from a particular content everything about it that could make it individual or idiosyncratic to a particular subject. Only then can the content in question be, in Schiller's words, "common to all people", and thus for Cohen objective. For that reason, Cohen calls universal communicability "the logical foundation for [the] aesthetic psychology" that is the play drive (Cohen 1889, p. 400).

We need to understand better why Cohen thinks universal communicability is "the logical foundation" of the play drive. One set of passages is especially useful for this purpose. These are passages in chapter 2 and 4, where Cohen discusses what he calls the "projection-drive" of consciousness (Cohen 1889, p. 251). In one of those passages, Cohen says,

If this purposiveness among the main tendencies of consciousness, if this favorable proportion among the movements of its main modes, were not established, then universal communicability would be thwarted and all theoretical understanding would become impossible. Here, too, the criterion of universal communicability rests on the cooperation of the consciousness of movement and thus of the will. For the projection that gives existence to the sound, and in this to the word, is a result of the direction of the movement (Cohen 1889, p. 399).

This passage is important. It contains the keys to understanding Cohen's view that universal communicability is "the logical foundation" of the play drive, that theoretical consciousness depends on moral consciousness, and finally, that *that* dependence involves noumenal affection. So we need to consider this passage carefully¹².

First, this passage comes in the context of a distinction Cohen makes between two kinds of consciousness: consciousness of representation and consciousness of movement (Cohen 1889, p. 246). The first is our awareness of our epistemic activities; the second is our awareness of our own bodies' (including our muscles') movement in the world. Cohen associates consciousness of movement with what he calls our "projection into a beyond of consciousness" (Cohen 1889, pp. 244-245), that is, the "projection-drive of consciousness" (Cohen 1889, p. 251). In *Kant's Foundation of Aesthetics*, Cohen emphasizes the role of this projection-drive in art. The acts of sculpting and singing are two of his examples of the projection-drive (Cohen 1889, p. 251). In singing, that projection-drive "gives existence to the sound".

However, in the passage above, Cohen is not simply talking about singing wordless pitches. He is talking about singing lyrics: the use of sound, produced by the body, to communicate linguistic meaning. That is why universal communicability is implicated in the process he describes. In fact, everything Cohen says in the above passage applies not just to singing lyrics but to all speech in general. As a consequence, the series of events Cohen describes in the passage strongly suggests a specific picture of the will's role in generating knowledge that is objective.

For Cohen, objective knowledge is knowledge that is universally valid – that is, valid for all relevant epistemic subjects. The task of theoretical consciousness just is to constitute the object of knowledge with ever-increasing universal validity. But the very idea of universal validity presupposes universal communicability: it presupposes that the relevant representations can be shared between multiple epistemic subjects. At the same time, Cohen thinks, that sharing cannot take place without the will's action. After all, for one subject to share an idea with other epistemic subjects, the

¹² I also want to pause here to observe how strange and uncharacteristic this passage and parallel passages elsewhere in *Kant's Foundation of Aesthetics* are for Cohen. As I will discuss in detail below, these passages seem to suggest that *speech between epistemic subjects* is necessary for theoretical consciousness' production of representations that are universally valid. This concern is entirely unlike Cohen's more characteristic manner of theorizing universal validity, namely, by attributing it to a priori principles that he locates in a trans-subjective experience or consciousness.

There are two points I will note here, but do not have the space to explore in any detail. First, while these passages' approach to universal validity is very unlike Cohen's more characteristic approaches, it need not be inconsistent with them, and might serve as a complement to his more characteristic approaches. Second, a concern with the role of language in producing knowledge was ubiquitous within the empiricist and positivist traditions that Cohen generally opposed. It is possible that he added these passages about speech as a response to one or more such empiricist authors. However, entirely characteristically for Cohen, he provides no citations to authors he is responding to. Developing a plausible interpretive hypothesis about who specifically his targets might have been would be difficult, and I cannot attempt to do it here. I am grateful to Christian Krijnen and Paolo Pecere for discussion on these points.

first subject must initiate some series of events that results in other subjects coming to grasp the idea it wants to share. And as Cohen suggests in the passage above, the subject's will is what initiates that series of events. It follows for Cohen that in order for theoretical consciousness to carry out its proper task of generating universally valid knowledge, theoretical consciousness necessarily depends on the will's action. That is, for Cohen, theoretical consciousness depends on moral consciousness.

We can also now see much better why Cohen thinks universal communicability is "the logical foundation" of the play drive. Universal communicability is a component of the play drive, because, for Cohen, the play drive is what unifies theoretical and moral consciousness, and universal communicability is implicated necessarily in his account of what that unification consists in. (Specifically, it is implicated in Cohen's account of how theoretical consciousness depends on moral consciousness). But universal communicability is the specifically logical component of the play drive, because it serves a specifically logical function, namely, making universally valid knowledge possible.

There is still more to say about the above passage. It suggests a richer picture of how people, including scientists, share ideas with one another. Ideas are not shared, as it were, by noumenal telepathy. Communication between subjects takes place in the phenomenal world. Speech consists in sound, and sounds, for Cohen, are vibrations in the aether. The sounds that constitute speech are aether vibrations produced by certain muscular contractions in the throat. Similarly, text is ink on paper, produced by the muscular contractions involved in fingers grasping pens and arms moving those pens between inkwells and the page. The series of events Cohen describes in the above passage is thus one in which the will, standing apart from the phenomenal world, projects itself into that world – that is, initiates a causal series within the phenomenal world. So to be sure, Cohen offers an account of how theoretical consciousness depends on moral consciousness. But that account involves noumenal affection.

So here we have Cohen's view of why theoretical consciousness, in order to carry out its task of generating knowledge that is universally valid, depends on moral consciousness. We can also see how this account commits Cohen to noumenal affection. Finally, we can see how Cohen develops this account by drawing explicitly and in detail on (his interpretation of) Schiller's play drive and his use of the concept of universal communicability.

5. *Play as a rational ideal*

So for Cohen, the unification of theoretical and moral consciousness – that is, their mutual interdependence – involves noumenal affection. This raises a question for him, since for Kant noumenal affection is, in one strict sense, unknowable. For Kant, the category of causality can yield cognition only when it is applied within the limits of possible experience. But noumenal affection requires that things

beyond those limits, such as our noumenal selves, be causes of events in the phenomenal world. A Kantian can conceive of such causality, and might even be able to grasp it in further ways that nevertheless fall short of theoretical cognition. But for Kant, there forever remains a standard of cognition that our representations of noumenal affection will never meet. Against this Kantian background, and given Cohen's commitment to noumenal affection, the problem for him is to explain how it is possible. That is, the problem for Cohen concerns how and to what extent we can make noumenal affection – and so too the unification of theoretical and moral consciousness – intelligible to ourselves.

It is worth pausing here to consider what it might mean for us to understand noumenal affection. On this point, it helps a great deal to consider Cohen's account of things in themselves.¹³ He begins to articulate that account in *Kant's Foundation of Ethics* (1877), develops it further in the second edition of *Kant's Theory of Experience* (1885), and affirms it again in *Kant's Foundation of Aesthetics*. For my present purposes, the important part of his account is this. The concept of things in themselves expresses the idea of a ground for all experience (Cohen 1877, p. 18). In just this sense, it expresses the idea of an object whose representation would provide us with a complete understanding of all experience. The concept of things in themselves thus presents itself as an ideal, a teleological end of all rational inquiry (Cohen 1877, pp. 77-78; 1889, pp. 117-120). But then, it follows for Cohen that the more we expand and deepen our knowledge of experience, the more our representations of the object of that experience approximates a representation of things in themselves. Of course, our representations will never reach the point where they are complete representations of things in themselves: representing things in themselves is an infinite task, and the gap between them and our experience will always remain (Cohen 1877, pp. 77-78). But it is a demand of reason that we continually seek to narrow that gap.

Cohen's account of things in themselves suggests what it would be, on his view, for us to understand noumenal affection, and continually to increase that understanding. On Cohen's view, the more we know about our phenomenal selves and the nature those selves inhabit, the more our knowledge approximates a representation of things in themselves – including our noumenal selves. We can, as it were, continually narrow the gap between our knowledge of our phenomenal selves and our conception of our noumenal selves. But then, the more we narrow that gap, the more our application of the principle of causality to our phenomenal selves (and their relations to nature) will model the causal features of our noumenal selves (and their relations to the rest of the noumenal world). That is, the more we will come to understand our noumenal selves and their causal relations to the world. To do this would be to increase our understanding of noumenal affection, the process by which, as Cohen puts it, the will projects itself into the phenomenal world. Further, inso-

¹³ I do not have the space here for anything like a full account of Cohen's account of things in themselves. For such accounts, see Poma 1997 (1988) and Beiser 2018.

far we increase our understanding of noumenal affection, we will likewise increase our understanding of the unification of theoretical and moral consciousness that involves noumenal affection.

We thus find ourselves presented with the idea of a complete understanding of noumenal affection, and so too the possibility of a complete understanding of the unification of theoretical and moral consciousness. In fact, this idea is an ideal we must posit as a demand of rational inquiry. For Cohen, rational inquiry requires us to make concepts, principles, and phenomena intelligible to ourselves when they might otherwise remain brute and unexplained¹⁴. So, for example, Cohen thinks the ideal of the thing in itself as complete knowledge of the ground of all experience presents itself as a demand of rational inquiry. In just the same way, the ideal of a complete understanding of noumenal affection presents itself as a demand of rational inquiry.

Finally, for Cohen this ideal – the ideal of a complete understanding of noumenal affection, and so too of the unification of theoretical and moral consciousness – just is the content of the idea of play, or what Schiller calls the play drive. Cohen quotes Schiller on just this point. He says,

Since this play drive has the task of uniting the two opposing human drives, the unifying drive must be necessary, since this unity is necessary to the concept of humanity. Accordingly, it is described as a transcendental requirement. “Reason, on transcendental grounds, makes this demand: let there be a... play drive.... Consequently, as soon as reason utters the pronouncement: Let humanity exist, it has by that very pronouncement also promulgated the law: Let there be beauty”. Beauty is the product of the play drive, and the play drive is a transcendental demand for the definition of humanity (Cohen 1889, pp. 401-402; quoting Schiller [1794] 1967, p. 103).

There is a lot going on in this passage. But for my purposes, it is important for two distinct reasons.

First, consider at least part of the argument that Cohen is making in this passage. He argues that we must posit play on transcendental grounds, that is, as a necessary condition of the possibility of the unification of theoretical and moral consciousness. For Cohen, play is thus a necessary condition of the possibility of the mutual interdependence of theoretical and moral consciousness. Consequently, for Cohen that means play is also a necessary condition of the possibility of noumenal affection. To understand play would be to understand the conditions that make noumenal affection possible, and thus to make it intelligible to us. But then play becomes an ideal of rational inquiry. It expresses our rational commitment to making noumenal affection (and so too the unification of theoretical and moral consciousness) intelligible to ourselves. It demands that we continually deepen our understanding of noumenal affection and the unification of theoretical and moral consciousness. (At the same time, since the idea of humanity just is the ideal of the

¹⁴ I do not here have the space to provide more than a brief mention of the rationalism in Cohen I am alluding to. For much more thorough accounts of various aspects of it, see Damböck (2017, ch. 4), Beiser (2018), Edgar (2020), and Renz (forthcoming).

unification of theoretical and moral consciousness, we must posit the idea of play as a commitment to the intelligibility of humanity).

Second, notice one last time that Cohen draws explicitly and self-consciously on Schiller, in order to articulate the details of the very core of his critical aesthetics. Recall (from §2 above) that Cohen follows Schiller rather than Kant in conceiving of play – and thus also aesthetic consciousness or objective feeling – as the unification of theoretical and moral consciousness. Once again, in the passage I have just quoted, he draws self-consciously on Schiller to develop his view that play is the ideal we must posit as a condition of the intelligibility of that unification. He thus concludes his argument in the passage above with the result that play is the ideal we must posit, in order to account for the intelligibility of beauty itself.

6. *The unified ego*

Time to take stock. For Cohen, as for both Kant and Schiller, the object of aesthetic consciousness is not a distinct domain of consciousness separate from the domains of theoretical and moral consciousness. Rather, the object of aesthetic consciousness – that is, feeling – is the unification of those two other modes of consciousness. I have argued that, on Cohen's account, that unification consists in the mutual interdependence of theoretical and moral consciousness. But I have also argued that Cohen's account of that mutual interdependence commits him to noumenal affection. On this view, there can be no aesthetic feeling unless the will projects itself into the phenomenal world. Finally, I have argued that for Cohen, play (or in Schiller's terms, the play drive) is the ideal we must posit as a commitment to the intelligibility of noumenal affection, and so too the intelligibility of the unification of theoretical and moral consciousness.

At the same time, my interpretation of Cohen reveals the extent to which he draws explicitly and self-consciously on Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters* to articulate his account of the place of aesthetics within his critical idealism. In several important ways, Cohen's aesthetics follows Schiller's more closely than it does Kant's. Like Schiller, Cohen takes play to involve both theoretical and moral consciousness. He draws on Schiller more than Kant to develop his account of the role of universal communicability in play. And finally, Cohen's conception of play as an ideal is explicitly indebted to Schiller rather than Kant.

However, there is one last consequence of Cohen's account that is worth drawing out, if only briefly and by way of conclusion. I have defended the idea that play, as an ideal of inquiry, is a rational commitment to continually developing our understanding of noumenal affection and the unification of theoretical and moral consciousness. It thus involves the requirement that we seek to narrow the gap between our knowledge of our phenomenal selves and our conception of our noumenal selves. We do this by expanding and deepening our knowledge of our phenomenal selves and the nature they inhabit. But the demand to narrow that gap is a demand to unify

ourselves in a certain respect: it is the demand to overcome the gulf that separates our phenomenal selves from our noumenal selves.

This is just what Cohen suggests when he says,

This is the content that aesthetic feeling builds up from the two types of content it consumes as material. Both simultaneously create the subject in their objects. But the subject of thinking is not solid and alive without that of willing; and the subject of willing is not unified, but rather fragmented into impulses, without that of thinking. Aesthetic consciousness is the first to unify and consolidate, enliven, and concentrate the ego (Cohen 1889, p. 249).

Aesthetic consciousness, and play as the ideal it requires us to posit, makes it possible to approach a conception of ourselves on which we inhabit a sensible world of colours, shapes, and sounds, but do so as beings who are free, rational, and moral. This view suggests a consequence that might be Cohen's deepest commitment to Schiller's philosophical outlook. It suggests that, for Cohen, the individuals who most closely approach this ideal of a unified self – the individuals who most fully realize their humanity – are, ultimately, artists¹⁵.

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¹⁵ See also Cohen (1889, p. 250) for this suggestion.

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Aesthetic Education and Self-Consciousness of Humankind. Friedrich Schiller in Hermann Cohen's Thought

EZIO GAMBA

Friedrich Schiller is not infrequently mentioned or quoted by Hermann Cohen in his works; however, we can find a genuine examination of Schiller's thought or of Schiller's philosophical theses by Cohen only in Cohen's aesthetic writings or, more precisely, in his two main works on aesthetics: *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* (Kant's foundation of aesthetics, 1889) and *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls* (Aesthetics of pure feeling, 1912). This paper will therefore focus on these two works, or more generally, on Cohen's aesthetics.

Although interest in aesthetics was central to Cohen's early writings and significant in his late production (since 1912, the year of the publication of *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*), it was not continuous in Cohen's work throughout his life. On the contrary, we can identify three short periods (1865-1869, 1888-1889, and 1912-1918) in which Cohen cultivated a real interest in it; these three periods are separated by two long intervals of silence on aesthetics.

The first period is clearly less significant than the second (the period of *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*) and the third (which begins with *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*) both in terms of Cohen's importance in the history of philosophy and with regard to his examination of Schiller's thought. However, an examination of Schiller's place in Cohen's aesthetics and thought also requires some remarks on this early period – or, more precisely, on one essay from this period: “Die dichterische Phantasie und der Mechanismus des Bewußtseins” (Poetic fantasy and the mechanism of consciousness, 1869)¹.

1. Schiller in “Die dichterische Phantasie und der Mechanismus des Bewußtseins” (1869)

The first of the three periods mentioned is also Cohen's first philosophically productive phase, during which he works within Moritz Lazarus and Heymann

¹ This essay is now published in both Cohen 1928, vol. I, pp. 141-228, and Cohen 2012, pp. 347-463. In the following pages, references to this essay will indicate the page numbers in both collections.

Steinthal's *Völkerpsychologie*. In this period, Cohen (who cannot yet be defined as a neo-Kantian philosopher, since he had not begun his intensive study of Kant's thought and his philosophical interests were still far from transcendental inquiry) pursued research that is more accurately described as the psychology of art rather than philosophical aesthetics.

In the longest and most ambitious writing of this period, "Die dichterische Phantasie und der Mechanismus des Bewußtseins", Cohen discusses several passages drawn from Schiller's *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* and adopts a critical stance toward Schiller's thought.

In this essay, Cohen's aim is to explain the origin of poetry, both in the sense of its historical emergence at the dawn of culture and in the sense of how each individual poem comes into being. His approach, in accordance with Lazarus and Steinthal's *Völkerpsychologie*, is a psychological one. In his view, explaining the origin of poetry means explaining the origin of a complex of representations (*Vorstellungen*) and of the connections between representations that are typical of poetry, as opposed to those that are typical of science or, more generally, of a reliable knowledge of reality. Cohen provides a psycho-physiological account, based on a general mechanistic theory of consciousness derived from Herbart, of the origin of these representations and their connections.

For the purposes of this paper, it is unnecessary to examine Cohen's explanation of the origin of poetry. As far as Cohen's interpretation of Schiller's thought is concerned, however, it is important to note that Cohen contrasts his psycho-physiological and mechanistic attempt to explain the origin of poetry with an opposing theory of art – the theory that art is, in essence, inexplicable. According to Cohen, this theory represents a modern version of the ancient conception that poetry is granted to humankind by a god, and that the poet, or more generally the human being, can only receive it in a state of divine madness, without even knowing what is happening. Another ancient version of the same idea is the conception that the Muse dictates poems to the poet.

In modern times, we no longer believe that poets are possessed by a god when they conceive their works, or that they merely write down what a Muse dictates. Nor do we believe that artists or poets are passive in relation to some external force that possesses them and compels them to act as they do. However, many modern authors who have reflected on artistic creation believe that, in poetic or artistic creation, the rationality, consciousness, and will of artists are passive with respect to a power that is not external to them but, on the contrary, is part of them. This power is genius – or, to use another term that makes it clearer that we are speaking of a human capacity, fancy. Clearly, the word *genius* in Latin means a divine being (so the use of this word makes it clear that this view of art derives from the ancient concept of the divine origin of poetry), whereas the word *fancy* refers to a human capacity. Yet both are used to denote a power that, although not external to us, is independent of our will and hidden from our awareness. Just as they were possessed by a god, poets do not know what they are doing in the act of artistic creation. To this way of think-

ing – which cannot add anything to our understanding of art or poetry, since, no matter how pompous its wording may be, it is nothing more than the admission that there is nothing we can understand in it – Cohen opposes the explanatory power of the mechanistic psychology founded by Herbart and developed by Lazarus and Steinthal.

Clearly, Cohen’s presentation of the aesthetics of genius or fancy is not the precise reconstruction of a specific theory of artistic creation; rather, it is a general overview of a shared horizon of aesthetic reflection among many authors, whose philosophical principles may differ greatly from one another. Among these authors, Cohen mentions Friedrich Schiller, Friedrich Theodor Vischer (whose *Ästhetik* was clearly the main source of the young Cohen’s knowledge of aesthetic theories)², Friedrich Schelling, Jacob Grimm, and, more marginally, Wilhelm von Humboldt, as well as the Herbartian psychologist Moritz Wilhelm Drobisch. The inclusion of Drobisch shows that the aesthetics of genius and fancy was widespread even among thinkers whose general principles were far removed from classical or Romantic German philosophy, and closer to Cohen’s own.

As far as Schiller is concerned, at the beginning of the essay Cohen quotes two passages from the first part of *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* to show that Schiller’s concept of genius perfectly fits the description Cohen gives of the aesthetics of genius, and that the ancient concept of poetry as a gift from a god clearly survives in the modern aesthetics of genius. Schiller writes: “Only to genius it is given to be at home beyond the accustomed and to *extend* nature without *going beyond* her” (Schiller 1966, p. 96). A few lines later, he writes that the genius “proceeds not by the accepted principles, but by flashes of insight and feelings; but its insights are the inspirations of a god (everything done by healthy nature is divine), its feelings are laws for all ages and for all races of men” (Schiller 1966, pp. 96-97)³.

These two passages are quoted by Cohen in his essay. They show that the genius is at home outside the accustomed and does not proceed according to accepted principles, but rather according to flashes of insight and feelings. It follows that any attempt to explain rationally or to give an account of a genius of this kind must be seen as the result of a misunderstanding of the nature of genius itself. Moreover, Schiller explicitly acknowledges the divine origin of the genius’s flashes of insight; according to him, “divine” does not mean “supernatural”, but must be understood as the fruit of “healthy nature”, because “everything done by healthy nature is divine”. However, this association of divine and natural does not imply that the genius’s flashes of insight can be explained according to the laws of nature; these flashes of insight are the opposite of proceeding according to accepted principles. On the contrary, this combination of nature and divinely inspired flashes of insight challenges the very

² On Vischer’s relevance as the main source of the young Cohen’s knowledge of aesthetic theories, see Gamba 2008, pp. 27-30, and Gamba 2021, pp. 265-266.

³ Both passages are quoted in Cohen 1928, vol. I, p. 146; Cohen 2012, p. 357. See also Cohen 1928, vol. I, p. 152; Cohen 2012, p. 366.

possibility of understanding nature through accepted principles; in the quotation, “laws” are not those determined by the natural sciences, but rather the feelings of the artistic genius. Clearly, the stance expressed by Schiller in these sentences is a thesis that Cohen cannot accept at all.

Some other passages from *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* are quoted by Cohen in this essay. The most relevant among them is a passage concerning the immortality of the spirit of poetry in humankind. According to Cohen’s mechanistic and psychological account of the origin of poetry, scientific progress makes poetry increasingly difficult and even jeopardizes the very possibility of its survival in the future. Schiller’s stance, according to which “the poetic spirit is immortal and inalienable in mankind, it cannot be lost except together with humanity or with the capacity for it”, (Schiller 1966, p. 110)⁴ is here contrasted with Cohen’s in order to highlight not merely their opposition in content, but above all the difference between Schiller’s way of thinking – which leads to statements like this one, which, though pompous, has no real evidence in its support – and the scientific explanations of psychology.

Cohen’s general attitude towards Schiller, as it clearly emerges from these remarks⁵, is critical: he blames Schiller – and, in a similar way, many other thinkers – not only for failing to develop a scientific understanding of poetry, such as the one Cohen tries to provide, but also for having hindered this development by supporting a view according to which poetry is mysterious and unexplainable. However, as we have already seen, this first period of Cohen’s production is the least important both for his role in the history of philosophy and for his interpretation of Schiller’s thought. In this phase, Cohen had not yet recognized that Kant’s thought possessed a philosophical rather than merely historical relevance (Kant is, indeed, very rarely mentioned in Cohen’s writings of this period); his encounter with Kant’s philosophy clearly changed his general attitude toward philosophy and psychology. He abandoned the field of psychology to devote his efforts to transcendental philosophy: his aim was no longer the *quaestio facti* of explaining the psychological processes that build our representations, but the transcendental *quaestio juris* concerning the conditions of validity of knowledge, morality, and art. This shift in his philosophical aims

⁴ Quoted in Cohen 1928, vol. I, p. 212; Cohen 2012, p. 442.

⁵ In Cohen’s essay there are some other references to *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, with or without verbatim quotations, but they are not particularly significant (see Cohen 1928, vol. I, pp. 163 and 210; Cohen 2012, pp. 381–382 and 439). It is more interesting to note that the essay also contains a pseudo-quotation from Schiller: Cohen cites a sentence which he attributes to Schiller, according to which the philosopher is merely half a man, while only the poet is the complete man (see Cohen 1928, vol. I, p. 165; Cohen 2012, p. 384). In a footnote to this quotation in Cohen 2012, Hartwig Wiedebach and Helmut Holzhey point out that this sentence does not appear verbatim in Schiller’s work, but its source is probably to be found in a letter from Schiller to Goethe, in which Schiller claims that only the poet is the complete man, whereas the philosopher, by comparison, can only be a caricature. I would add to this significant comment that the channel linking this letter by Schiller to Cohen’s pseudo-quotation is once again Friedrich Theodor Vischer’s *Aesthetik*, where Vischer attributes to Schiller the statement reported by Cohen (Vischer 1846–1857, vol. I, p. 174).

took Cohen far from the questions of philosophical aesthetics for almost twenty years, during which he wrote no aesthetic reflections in his works, or at most only minimal allusions. When he returned to aesthetics with a completely different attitude compared to his writings of the first period, he clearly would not have endorsed many of the theses we find in “Die dichterische Phantasie und der Mechanismus des Bewußtseins”: for example, he no longer criticized the use of the concept of genius, but, following Kant, recognized the relevant role of this concept in aesthetics. Consequently, his judgment of some (though only some) of the authors he criticized in “Die dichterische Phantasie und der Mechanismus des Bewußtseins” changed radically; Schiller is one of them.

2. Schiller in Kants Begründung der Ästhetik (1889)

At the end of his long period of silence on aesthetics, Cohen returned to this discipline with a work of considerable commitment⁶: his third book of interpretation of Kant’s thought, *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* (1889), preceded by an essay entitled “Jubiläumsbetrachtungen” (Reflections on an anniversary, 1888)⁷, in which we find some anticipations of *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*, as well as two brief remarks concerning Cohen’s view of Schiller, as expressed in the book on Kant (Cohen 1928, vol. I, pp. 427 and 429).

Among Cohen’s works, *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* is the one in which he devotes the most attention to Schiller’s thought. This work is Cohen’s third book on Kant’s thought, following *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (Kant’s theory of experience, 1871; 2nd ed. 1885; 3rd ed. 1918) and *Kants Begründung der Ethik* (Kant’s foundation of ethics, 1877; 2nd ed. 1910)⁸. In the opening words of *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*, Cohen presents this book as the third part of a twenty-year unitary endeavour to study and interpret Kant’s philosophy (Cohen 1889, p. iii). However, as the immediately following lines of the book clearly show, this statement must be understood as Cohen’s retrospective judgment on the path he had completed, not as

⁶ Frederick C. Beiser points out in his intellectual biography of Cohen that he prepared the return to aesthetics in his writings by beginning to lecture on aesthetics in the Winter Semester of 1885/86 (Beiser 2018, pp. 152-153). The list of Cohen’s courses from 1872 to 1908 is published in Cohen 2015, pp. 143-157. A reading of this list shows that, between 1885 and 1889 – the year of the publication of *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* – Cohen offered, in addition to a course simply entitled “Aesthetics” and another on “The Aesthetic Principles of German Philosophers”, two courses on “Schiller’s Philosophical Poems and Treatises”. This list also reveals the (surprising) fact that Cohen had already lectured on Schiller’s philosophical poems and treatises in the Winter Semesters of 1879/80 and 1882/83.

⁷ Now published in Cohen 1928, vol. I, pp. 397-431.

⁸ Cohen’s contributions to the study of Kant’s thought include several shorter writings, as well as his *Kommentar zu Immanuel Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Commentary on Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1907). However, this trilogy is generally regarded as his principal work in the field of Kantian scholarship.

the declaration of having carried out a plan devised from the start. This trilogy of books, whose structure clearly follows the order of Kant's three *Critiques*, is not the result of a project conceived by its author from the beginning.

In *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*, we can distinguish, with regard to Cohen's attitude toward Schiller, a general judgment about his thought, a specific examination of some of its aspects, and an overall evaluation of his poetry. However, the most important aspect of Cohen's relationship with Schiller is found on a page where Schiller is not even mentioned by name, but only referred to through a brief remark on his work *On the Aesthetic Education of Humankind*. This passage of Cohen's book directly concerns the problem of the structure of philosophy as a system.

More generally, we can say that every aspect of this book is connected, either more directly or more indirectly, with the question of the structure of the philosophical system: in *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*, the problem of the foundation of philosophical aesthetics and that of philosophy as a system are deeply interwoven. From a historical point of view, Kant, according to Cohen, is the founder both of philosophical aesthetics and of the system of philosophy. It is important to understand that recognizing Kant as the founder of philosophical aesthetics and as the founder of the system of philosophy does not mean attributing to him two distinct and mutually independent historical merits. On the contrary, only by grounding aesthetics on its genuine foundation and elevating aesthetics itself to the full recognition of its philosophical dignity could Kant bring philosophy itself to attain true systematicity (see for example Cohen 1889, p. 101).

Cohen's main reason for stating in *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* this close relationship between the historical foundation of aesthetics and the foundation of the system of philosophy is the completeness of Kant's enterprise: by taking into consideration scientific knowledge of nature, morality, and art, Kant examined all the fundamental fields of culture. The third part of Kant's system, namely aesthetics, is also the last; therefore, only through aesthetics does philosophy achieve its systematic completeness and become a true system. For this reason, according to Cohen, the meaning of Kant's transcendental thought as a system of philosophy and its overall structure can be understood only through an examination of Kant's aesthetics.

The endeavour to found philosophical aesthetics as part of a system of philosophy, whose first parts are the philosophy of knowledge (or theory of experience) and ethics, means establishing aesthetics as an autonomous discipline. This means that it must have its own principles and can be neither a branch of one of the preceding parts nor merely the outcome of their connection. It is equal in dignity to them, yet has a specific place and role within the system, and necessary relationships with its other parts.

Clearly, the place of aesthetics within the system of philosophy corresponds to the role of art within the systematic unity of culture. It is autonomous from scientific knowledge and morality, and cannot be reduced to either of them, nor to the outcome of their connection, but it has necessary relations with both.

This is something that Schiller and Goethe, according to Cohen, understood well. From the very beginning of the book, we find in Cohen's pages a clear appreci-

ation of the historical role of Schiller and Goethe, who, in the “Systematische Einleitung” (Systematic introduction) of the book, are described as “the disciples of Kant” (Cohen 1889, p. 94). This means that they are the authors who best understood and carried forward Kant’s endeavour to found an aesthetics that is both autonomous with respect to the other philosophical disciplines and conscious of its own relation to them. This judgment becomes clearer in the last chapter of the book, titled “Die kritische Aesthetik, ihre Freunde und ihre Gegner” (Critical aesthetics, its friends and its enemies). Here, Cohen shows that, in the two or three generations following Kant, aesthetics was developed both by authors who carried forward Kant’s endeavour to establish an autonomous aesthetics within the system of philosophy and to acknowledge the validity and autonomy of art within the systematic unity of culture, and by authors who denied this autonomy of art or its specific place and role within the systematic unity of culture. The first group, the friends of critical aesthetics, is headed by Goethe and Schiller, the disciples of Kant, along with some of their associates, such as Wilhelm von Humboldt. Among them, Schiller can be considered the most relevant with regard to the systematic character of philosophical aesthetics. Their opponents, the enemies of critical aesthetics, are the Romantics, who misunderstand the relationship between art and the other fields of culture. They deny the autonomy of art, and more generally the autonomy of the different fields of culture, by arranging them in a hierarchy of perfection. Consequently, the Romantics may claim that the ultimate goal toward which philosophy, science, and morality strive is their resolution into art or poetry (as, for example, in Schelling’s view), or, conversely, that art attains its true value only through its sublation into philosophy (as maintained by Hegel and his epigones). By contrast, Kant and Schiller recognize the autonomy of each field of culture – scientific knowledge, morality, and art – while at the same time maintaining a clear awareness of their mutual relations.

In Cohen’s book, this general judgment on Schiller’s philosophical thought is supported by several specific analyses of Schiller’s (or Schiller’s and Goethe’s) reflections on certain concepts of Kant’s philosophy, and above all of Kant’s aesthetics. These analyses by Cohen cannot be examined in detail here; consequently, I will limit myself to listing those concepts of Kant’s philosophy that are the object of Schiller’s reflections as considered by Cohen. The first is Kant’s concept of idea, which is among the main objects of Cohen’s reflections in the “Systematische Einleitung” of the work. Here, Cohen refers to a dialogue between Goethe and Schiller about the symbolic plant as an idea (Cohen 1889, pp. 124-126). Schiller’s reflections on three other concepts of Kant’s philosophy are examined in the last chapter of *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* – the one on the friends and enemies of critical aesthetics. In this chapter, Cohen considers Schiller’s reflections on the subjectivity of the judgment of taste, the concept of form, and the concept of play (respectively, Cohen 1889, pp. 353-354, 378-384 and 400-404).

Cohen’s judgment on Schiller and Goethe as the disciples of Kant is connected with a general appreciation of German classical poetry and music. The possibility of clearly understanding the place of art within the systematic unity of culture – and

thus of bringing philosophical aesthetics to life – arose from the great flourishing of poetry and music in Germany; in turn, the birth of philosophical aesthetics in Germany contributed to this flourishing. In the context of this celebration of German music and poetry with which Cohen concludes his book, Schiller and Goethe are praised as the greatest poets of German literature, bound by a relation of complementarity: Schiller is the poet who brings the ideality of thought to interiorization and resolves it into feeling; Goethe is the poet who brings the fundamental feeling of art, which is love, to its most powerful and moving expression (Cohen 1889, pp. 430–431). However, this celebration of the two great poets is somewhat generic, since it is not supported by a specific examination of any of their poetic works. In these pages no poetic work by Schiller is mentioned, not even by its title, and among Goethe's works only *Faust* is referred to – yet only in a brief and rather vague remark.

Despite all these comments and judgments on Schiller's thought by Cohen, the most important aspect of his reflections on Schiller is found on a page where Schiller is not even mentioned by name; this is also the aspect that most directly concerns the structure of Cohen's philosophical system. In this book, Cohen upholds a conception of the system of philosophy in which aesthetics constitutes its final part. The main reason for this stance has already been given: Cohen considers Kant as the true founder of the system of philosophy because of the completeness of his enterprise; by taking into consideration scientific knowledge of nature, morality, and art, Kant examined all the fundamental fields of culture. However, it is clear that we can cast some doubts on this stance: why couldn't other fields of culture be added to these three? In the development of his aesthetic theory in *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*, Cohen shows that both scientific knowledge of nature and morality play an essential role in art, and he concludes that art is the domain where scientific knowledge of nature and morality achieve their unity, their harmonious conciliation. Through art, therefore, culture attains its completeness in the conciliation of scientific knowledge of nature and morality, of the kingdom of nature and the kingdom of ends. As Cohen writes:

The idea of personality is the moral idea, which is absolutely not founded in feeling [which is the aesthetic direction of consciousness]. The *homo noumenon* that is founded through the task of feeling, is the human being of humanity. The moral *noumenon* is the human being of freedom, which divides nature and morality; the aesthetic one is the human being of harmony, which reconciles nature and morality. The moral human being is the human being of duty and ultimate purpose, the aesthetic one is the human being of participation and sympathy, who ennobles also intermediate purposes as seeming ultimate purposes (Cohen 1889, p. 216; my translation).

Hence Cohen's solemn statement that art is the self-consciousness of humankind⁹.

Clearly, this view of art can be considered as deriving from Kant's statement that the power of judgment (*Urteilkraft*) is an intermediary (*Mittelglied*) between

⁹ "Die Kunst ist das Selbstbewusstsein der Menschheit" (Cohen 1889, p. 217).

understanding and reason in its practical use, or that the feeling of pleasure and displeasure is an intermediary between the faculty of cognition and the faculty of desire (Kant 2000, p. 56). However, Cohen's stance evidently goes far beyond this statement, as Kant certainly did not think that art could be the intermediary between scientific knowledge and morality (despite what might appear from the table in Kant 2000, p. 83), and even less that it could be a kind of synthesis or harmonious conciliation of the two as the self-consciousness of humankind. Regarding this view of art, Cohen clearly acknowledges the relevance of Schiller's thought in developing the fundamental theses of Kant's aesthetics beyond Kant himself. On the page preceding his solemn statement that art is the self-consciousness of humankind, in the context of a reflection on the role of art within culture as a whole and on the importance of this issue for establishing a true understanding of the system that philosophy is called to build, Cohen includes a brief remark on *On the Aesthetic Education of Humankind*. Thus, although he does not even mention Schiller by name, he recognizes the significance of this work and of the very concept of the aesthetic education of humankind (Cohen 1889, p. 216) as a consistent and valuable development of Kant's thought. Moreover, in the chapter on the friends and enemies of critical aesthetics, Cohen states that the root of the aesthetic works by Schiller and his friends lies in their understanding that comparing the different directions of consciousness – knowledge, will, and feeling – and considering them in light of the ideal of consciousness as a whole is a task belonging to the concepts of critical aesthetics (Cohen 1889, pp. 349-350).

It should, however, be clear that this view of art as the self-consciousness of humankind is inconsistent with Cohen's perspective on both the general structure of the system of philosophy and the systematic unity of culture. This inconsistency lies in the fact that, in *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*, aesthetics plays a dual role within the system: it is both the transcendental philosophical discipline focused on art as a specific field of culture (this is the way Cohen introduces aesthetics at the beginning of the book, crediting Kant with the historical merit of discovering the necessity of aesthetics as a part of the system of transcendental philosophy) and the discipline that completes the system by founding the unity of culture, bringing the fields treated in the previous parts of the system to their synthesis or harmonious conciliation. Clearly, the consistency of these two roles of aesthetics can be defended only by accepting – as Cohen actually does in *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* – the bold statement that scientific knowledge of nature and morality find their unity or their conciliation in art, which therefore is the self-consciousness of humankind. However, if this statement implies that scientific knowledge of nature and morality achieve their full value only when they are assumed into art, this would clearly be unacceptable for Cohen.

He asserts that in art the directions of consciousness or the fields of culture addressed in the first two parts of the system serve merely as preconditions, materials, or negative conditions (since art cannot violate laws of nature or moral laws, but its value does not reside in this conformity to natural or moral laws) for a truly new con-

tent; Cohen, indeed, clearly maintains that pure feeling must have its own content, distinct from the contents of knowledge and of will. We can interpret this stance as the claim that scientific knowledge of nature and morality have their validity in themselves, and that this validity is not assumed and transcended (as in a Hegelian *Aufhebung*) by art, which, rather, simply makes use of some of their contents as its materials. This interpretation would be consistent with Cohen's general view of culture and of the system of philosophy. However, this interpretation clashes with Cohen's view of art as the self-consciousness of humankind. If only art – conceived as the field of culture in which scientific knowledge of nature and morality find their synthesis or harmonious conciliation – is the self-consciousness of humankind, it becomes difficult to maintain that scientific knowledge and morality do not attain their full value only in art, but instead possess their own intrinsic validity, independently of their incorporation into it.

This inconsistency in Cohen's view of the system of philosophy, of the systematic unity of culture, and of the role of art within it was corrected by him in his *System der Philosophie* (System of philosophy), and above all in its third part, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*.

3. *Schiller in Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls (1912)*

After *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*, there follows a new period of silence on aesthetics from Cohen. Although this silence on aesthetic questions is not entirely uninterrupted¹⁰, we can say that it lasts until 1912, we can nevertheless say that it lasts until 1912, when Cohen published *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*.

On the contrary, after returning to aesthetics in 1912, Cohen no longer abandons this field until his death in 1918. During these years, he writes an important chapter on aesthetics and religion in *Der Begriff der Religion im System der Philosophie* (The concept of religion in the system of philosophy, 1915), a revised and expanded version of his essay on Mozart ("Die dramatische Idee in Mozarts Operntexten", The dramatic idea in Mozart's opera librettos, 1916)¹¹, and numerous significant discussions of aesthetics and the relationship between religion and art in *Religion der Vernunft (Religion of Reason*, posthumous, 1919; 2nd ed. 1929) and in several

¹⁰ In these 23 years, Cohen publishes an essay specifically devoted to aesthetic questions, "Mozarts Operntexte" (Mozart's opera librettos, 1905-1906, now published in Cohen 1928, vol. I, pp. 490-519), but this is not relevant for understanding his stance on Schiller. Moreover, we find some pages on Kant's aesthetics in a speech for the centennial of Kant's death ("Rede bei der Gedenkfeier der Universität Marburg zur hundertsten Wiederkehr des Todestages von Immanuel Kant", Speech at the commemoration ceremony of the University of Marburg on the centenary of the death of Immanuel Kant, 1904, now published in Cohen 1928, vol. I, pp. 469-489; Schiller is mentioned on pp. 486 and 489); finally, there are many references to art in *Ethik des reinen Willens* (Ethics of pure will, 1904; 2nd ed. 1907).

¹¹ Now published in Cohen 2002, pp. 1-108.

essays. However, with regard to Cohen's stance on Schiller's thought, only *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls* is a relevant source.

Cohen's main aesthetic work, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, is, like *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*, the third part of a philosophical trilogy entitled *System der Philosophie*. Its first two parts are *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* (Logic of pure knowledge, 1902; 2nd ed. 1914) and *Ethik des reinen Willens* (2nd ed. 1907). Clearly, this systematic trilogy follows the same pattern as Cohen's earlier trilogy on Kant's thought: gnoseology/logic, ethics, and aesthetics. However, we must note at least two differences between the two trilogies, aside from the simple fact that the former concerns Kant's philosophy, whereas the latter represents Cohen's own independently developed system.

The first difference is that Cohen's *System der Philosophie* was conceived from the outset as a unitary and systematic project; the title *System der Philosophie* already appears in the first edition of its initial volume. The second difference – more relevant to the topic of this paper – is that, whereas the earlier trilogy presents itself as complete, without the need or possibility of further parts, the *System der Philosophie* was never meant to consist of only three parts. A fourth one was planned: following logic, ethics, and aesthetics, it was to be psychology. This psychology, unlike the other three parts of the *System*, was not intended to be a critical examination of a specific field of culture, but rather a retrospective view that philosophy, after the examination of the various fields of culture conducted in the first three parts of the system, can cast on culture as a whole to grasp its unity. However, the book devoted to psychology was never written¹². Instead, in 1915, Cohen published *Der Begriff der Religion im System der Philosophie*, which is *not* a part of the *System*, but is closely connected with it, since it explores the relationship of religion with each of the four parts of the *System* (including psychology).

In his *System der Philosophie*, Cohen no longer upholds his earlier view of art as the self-consciousness of humankind and profoundly rethinks the role of aesthetics within the system. The inconsistency noted above is resolved by adding a fourth part – psychology – to logic, ethics, and aesthetics. The task of constituting the moment in which the system achieves its unity is thus removed from aesthetics, which, like the first two parts of the system, is now exclusively focused on the foundation of a specific field of culture. Within the framework of *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, therefore, Cohen's thesis that scientific knowledge of nature and morality serve as preconditions for art by providing it with its materials no longer gives rise to the

¹² According to Franz Rosenzweig's testimony, the project was not abandoned by Cohen, who, in the last year of his life, still hoped to write this book soon (Rosenzweig 2021, p. 240). Cohen's enduring interest in philosophical psychology is also witnessed by the list of the courses he gave or planned to give in his last years, which includes titles such as "Psychology as an encyclopedia of philosophy" or "Introduction to psychology" (Wiedebach 1997, pp. xix-xx). However, we have no preparatory notes by Cohen for either the book or the lessons.

suspicion that it might imply that knowledge and morality attain their true validity only in art itself.

We might question whether the same inconsistency is simply transferred from aesthetics to psychology. However, the answer is negative, as psychology is not focused on the foundation of a fourth specific field of culture. Psychology investigates the unity of the directions of consciousness, which are respectively the foundation of the different fields of culture, without assigning to any specific field the task of being the seat of the synthesis or the harmonious conciliation of the others. Certainly, taking specific and detailed stances on Cohen's psychology is always risky, given the lack of documentation.

This change in Cohen's view of the system of philosophy leads him to adopt a more critical stance toward Schiller and his concept of the aesthetic education of humankind (Cohen 1912, vol. I, p. 234). In *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Schiller is still regarded by Cohen as an example of genuine philosophical engagement on the part of a great artist – one who reflects on art with true philosophical competence. This judgment, of course, refers particularly to Schiller's deep knowledge of Kant's thought and to his attempts to develop Kant's main theses concerning morality, art, and their relationship (Cohen 1912, vol. I, pp. 29, 86, 223, 232). Also, Cohen's appreciation of Schiller as a German poet is still expressed in this work: in connection with some reflections on freedom as the central theme of Schiller's theatrical works and on the historical culture they express, Cohen defines Schiller as "our true national poet" (Cohen 1912, vol. II, p. 95). However, in *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Cohen never devotes more than a few lines to examining a specific philosophical thesis expressed by Schiller, or to praising him for having correctly understood or developed a particular thesis of Kant's – as he does several times in the "Systematische Einleitung" and in the last chapter of *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*. We may perhaps take as the first sign of a change in Cohen's view of Schiller the fact that, on the very page where he first acknowledges the genuineness of Schiller's philosophical engagement, he simultaneously expresses scepticism about the possibility of considering ancient Greek poetry as *naïve* (Cohen 1912, vol. I, p. 29).

However, the focus of Cohen's criticism of Schiller is the concept of aesthetic education. In the last pages of the fourth chapter of the first volume of *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls* (Cohen 1912, vol. I, pp. 234–236), Cohen turns his attention to what he sees as the error of German spiritual life, which, after Kant and the classical age, turned toward Romanticism; the concept of aesthetic education – here mentioned by Cohen without naming Schiller, similarly to what occurs in *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* – serves as the medium for this transition from the classical age to Romanticism. According to Cohen, this concept arises from enthusiasm for art and for the fact that art preserves and safeguards human dignity. As a consequence of this enthusiasm, German authors (that clearly refers primarily to Schiller) thought that art can lead to morality. On the contrary, morality cannot be founded by art, because it is its precondition. Art can express morality and human dignity, but it cannot found them. Art originates from love for human dignity; it is not its foundation.

Above all, art can give the human subject a face and a figure, representing it in its unity of body and soul. In this way, art frees the moral subject – that is, the human being as allness – from conceptual abstraction by making it an object of love, while the foundation of this moral subject, of humankind as a subject, belongs to ethics. In contrast, the concept of aesthetic education implies that art provides a foundation of morality superior to that offered by ethics alone¹³.

As we have seen, in *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* we read, a few lines after Cohen mentions *On the Aesthetic Education of Humankind*, his solemn statement that art is the self-consciousness of humankind. Cohen's brief discussion of the concept of aesthetic education in *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls* leads, at the end of the fourth chapter, to an equally solemn assertion, which can be regarded as a correction of the one in *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*: love for the human being is the *self-feeling* of humankind in the human being¹⁴. Love for the human being is the feeling that constitutes the foundation of art; neither this love nor art itself is the self-consciousness of humankind. On the contrary, this love is the self-feeling of humankind; it is a specific direction of consciousness (feeling, alongside knowledge and will), not consciousness as a whole. Thus, Cohen's change in his conception of the structure of the system of philosophy is clearly intertwined with his distancing from Schiller.

Cohen's evaluation of Schiller as a philosopher is thus less laudatory in *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls* than in *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*; however, in *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls* Cohen gives a more detailed judgment of Schiller as a poet. In *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*, indeed, there is no analysis of specific works of poetry or art, so Cohen's final celebration of Goethe's and Schiller's poetry is as enthusiastic as it is generic. On the contrary, in *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls* Cohen devotes considerable attention to the detailed examination and evaluation of specific works from every kind of art. This is especially true in the second volume of the work, which is organized into eight chapters devoted to epic poetry, lyric poetry, drama, novel, music, architecture, sculpture, and painting. Some of Schiller's works are considered in the chapters on lyric poetry and drama. In both cases, however, Schiller is associated or compared with Goethe, and Cohen's attention is directed more toward Goethe than toward Schiller.

In the chapter on lyric poetry, Goethe is celebrated as the poet who brought lyric poetry to its perfect accomplishment (Cohen 1912, vol. II, p. 30). In comparison, the fundamental feature or theme of lyric poetry has not reached the same maturity in Schiller's lyric works. Among these, Cohen examines only Schiller's ode *An die Freude*, which he had previously used, in the last chapter of the first volume of the book, as paradigmatic for showing that – not only in ancient times but also in modernity – poetry is founded on simile (Cohen 1912, vol. I, pp. 369–387). Certainly,

¹³ An anticipation of this later criticism of Schiller's concept of aesthetic education can already be found in Cohen's *Ethik des reinen Willens* (see Cohen 1907, p. 635).

¹⁴ "Und so ist auch die *Liebe zum Menschen das Selbstgefühl der Menschheit im Menschen*" (Cohen 1912, vol. I, p. 238).

using this poem as paradigmatic implies a clearly positive evaluation of the work. Yet, in the second volume of *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, in the chapter on lyric poetry, Cohen also makes a critical remark regarding this celebrated composition. The reason is that, according to Cohen, the fundamental theme of lyric poetry is the love between two human subjects, I and you. This love is *Sehnsucht* – yearning¹⁵ – that is love as passion (*Leidenschaft*), which means suffering (*Leid*). In the chapter on lyric poetry Cohen maintains, by examining the ode *An die Freude* and extending his considerations on this poem to Schiller's lyric output in general, that in Schiller's lyric poetry there is no such suffering, no such love between I and you. In *An die Freude*, which celebrates love as joy rather than as suffering, passion, or *Sehnsucht*, Schiller expands lyric love beyond the reference to a single you, extending it to the whole of humankind. This love thus becomes a religious love, in which every human being is a neighbour to love. Schiller's embrace is for all the millions of human beings who constitute humankind ("Seid umschlungen, Millionen!" is one of the first lines of the poem); this religious love for the whole of humankind is indeed true love, and therefore Schiller's lyric poetry is not mere *Gedankenpoesie* – it is not merely the expression of conceptual thought in verse (see also Cohen 1912, vol. I, pp. 375-376). However, it is not the kind of love that characterizes lyric poetry, which is love for an individual you. For this aspect, Schiller's poetry is similar to the *Volkslied* and to Romantic poetry, which share a certain impersonality, in the sense that in them love is not directed toward a particular person. In this kind of poetry, love is not love for someone, not yearning for a beloved person, but rather yearning for someone to love, yearning to be loved. This impersonality is a kind of immaturity in poetry; the aesthetic self is not truly produced in it, but only striven for (Cohen 1912, vol. II, p. 32). Thus, we can see that here Cohen, despite his overall positive evaluation of Schiller's poetry, indicates how Schiller's lyric works pave the way to Romantic lyric poetry, just as his concept of aesthetic education paves the way to Romantic philosophy, with its confusion of the directions of consciousness.

Cohen's assessment of Schiller as a dramatist, by contrast, is unreservedly appreciative, even though in the chapter on drama Cohen again associates Schiller with Goethe and devotes more attention to the latter. Here, Schiller is regarded as a paradigm of modern drama. According to Cohen, one of the main specific features of modern drama in comparison to ancient tragedy is the theme of history. In modern drama, the dramatic individuals and their moral dilemmas are connected to universal history, and often the individuals become the puppets in the game of history. This characteristic of modern drama, Cohen argues, clearly emerges in Shakespeare's plays centered on the lives of English kings, as well as in those dealing with figures from Roman history (*Coriolanus*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Julius Caesar*).

¹⁵ The question of the best translation of *Sehnsucht* into a single English word is clearly not an easy one. I follow the choice of Andrea Poma and his translator John Denton in using *yearning*; others, such as Simon Kaplan in his English translation of Cohen's *Religion der Vernunft*, prefer *longing* (see Poma 2006, p. 236).

Schiller's dramas belong to the same tendency: in *Don Karlos* and *Wallenstein*, we see the drama of the conflict between freedom and the forces of history, which can reduce the individual to a mere puppet of their play. Cohen therefore remarks that historical culture – meaning knowledge of history and, above all, reflection on it – is the foundational ground of Schiller's dramatic masterpieces, and that Schiller's commitment to freedom (political freedom, but above all freedom of thought or inner cultural freedom) is a consequence of this historical culture.

4. Conclusions

This is an overview of Cohen's judgments and reflections on Schiller and on his historical role as both a thinker and a poet. We can draw some conclusions. The first is that Cohen's view of Schiller clearly changes over time: leaving aside the first *völkerpsychologisch* phase of Cohen's output, in *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* Cohen regards Schiller as a thinker who developed Kant's ideas on art, on aesthetic consciousness, and on the place of aesthetics within the system of philosophy in a consistent and fruitful way. Twenty-three years later, in *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, however, Cohen also offers some significant critical remarks on Schiller and emphasizes certain aspects of his thought and poetry that lead toward Romanticism. This change of view is closely intertwined with the evolution of Cohen's own conception of the system of philosophy.

The second conclusion we can draw from this overview is that Cohen displays a clear sympathy for Schiller and, even when he cannot agree with him, formulates his critical remarks within a positive framework, showing a respect for Schiller and for his historical role that he certainly does not extend to Romantic philosophers and poets¹⁶. This may be due to Schiller's close connection with Kant, or, more generally, to the fact that Cohen's view expressed in *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* – namely, that critical or systematic aesthetics (and, we may add, critical or systematic philosophy as a whole) has its friends and its enemies – remains substantially valid for him even in his final years. Classical thinkers and artists such as Goethe and Schiller are the friends of critical philosophy, whereas Romantic thinkers and poets are its enemies. Thus, Schiller clearly belongs among the friends, and even though Cohen

¹⁶ We can also note that in several other writings from the same period Cohen makes brief remarks – though without any sustained analysis – about Schiller. These remarks generally express a clear appreciation of Schiller's works and of his historical role. See, for example, the essays "Über das Eigentümliche des Deutschen Geistes" (About the peculiarity of the German spirit, 1914; now published in Cohen 1928, vol. I, pp. 527-570 and Cohen 1997, pp. 237-297; see particularly Cohen 1928, vol. I, pp. 563-564 or Cohen 1997, pp. 288-289) and "Deutschtum und Judentum. Mit grundlegenden Betrachtungen über Staat und Internationalismus" (Germanism and Judaism: With fundamental considerations on state and internationalism, 1915; now published in Cohen 1924, vol. II, pp. 237-301 and Cohen 1997, pp. 465-560; see particularly Cohen 1924, vol. II, pp. 249-250 or Cohen 1997, pp. 487-488).

is more aware than before that in Schiller (and also in Goethe) there are errors and ambiguities that may pave the way to Romanticism, his overall assessment of their work remains broadly favourable.

Finally, a last remark: my overview of Schiller's presence and role in Cohen's thought is devoted exclusively to Cohen's *explicit* reflections on Schiller – on his historical role, his thought, and his poetry. It is, however, probably possible to detect a more hidden, subterranean presence of Schiller in Cohen's philosophy: not Cohen's explicit engagement with Schiller's works, but rather the influence of Schiller's philosophical theses on Cohen's own thinking. The main field of this influence is likely Cohen's theory – formulated in *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* and maintained (though with significant modifications)¹⁷ in *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls* – according to which beauty has two moments: the sublime and the humour. The difference between these two moments lies in the predominance of knowledge in the one and of morality in the other. The family resemblance to Schiller's theory – set out in *On the Aesthetic Education of Humankind* (particularly in the sixteenth letter) – concerning the two kinds of beauty in which ideal beauty manifests itself in actuality is evident, and it is reinforced by the fact that Cohen presents his theory of the two moments of beauty through mechanical metaphors – for example, the term *Gleichgewicht* (“equilibrium”) – which are also used by Schiller (Cohen 1889, pp. 280–281). However, a historical inquiry into these influences and into the possible mediations through which these ideas were transmitted from Schiller to Cohen and transformed into Cohen's own thought would require a different and far more demanding investigation.

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¹⁷ On the changes in Cohen's theory of the sublime and the humour between *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* and *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, see Andrea Poma's essay “Cohen and Mozart: Considerations on Drama, the Beautiful, and Humaneness in Cohen's Aesthetics”, in Poma 2006, pp. 87–110.

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The Presence of Schiller in the First Period of Natorp's Philosophy

MATTIA PAPA

1. Introduction

In contrast to other neo-Kantian philosophers¹, Paul Natorp did not write a specific work on Friedrich Schiller, nor did he devote a substantial portion of any of his writings to him². There are only a few brief references to Schiller in Natorp's works, appearing within a broader framework of discussion³. It is probably for this reason that no studies have been devoted specifically to their relationship.

At the same time, Natorp explicitly recognised Schiller's influence on neo-Kantianism. The suggestion that Schiller is something more than a mere passing reference in Natorp's thought came from Natorp himself, in his *Kant und die Marburger Schule* (Kant and the Marburg School, 1912), where he writes:

¹ The most notable are Kuno Fisher (*Schiller als Philosoph*, 1858), Friedrich Überweg (*Schiller als Historiker und Philosoph*, 1884), Karl Vorländer (*Kant, Schiller, Goethe. Gesammelte Aufsätze*, 1907) and Ernst Cassirer (*Die Methodik des Idealismus in Schillers philosophischen Schriften*, published in 1921 *Idee und Gestalt*). In the context of the Marburg School, it is also worth noting the book *Kants und Schillers Begründung der Ästhetik* (1895) by Eugen Kühnemann, a former student of Cohen. For a general introduction to the neo-Kantian interpretation of Schiller, see also *Appendix 2* in Beiser 2005, pp. 268-270.

² This was the case, for example, with Hermann Cohen, who gave lectures on Schiller's poems and treatises during the winter semesters of 1887-1888 and 1888-1889, following two years of lectures on Kant's aesthetics. At the same time, Schiller remained one of Cohen's main cultural references and is present in both *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* (1889) and *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls* (1912). See Beiser 2018, pp. 152-153.

³ The *Bucherverzeichnis der Bibliothek Paul Natorp* (1938), published in Tokyo – where Natorp's personal library is preserved – lists two works by Friedrich Schiller: *Philosophische Schriften und Gedichte* (Leipzig, 1902) and *Über Anmut und Würde* (Leipzig, 1910). These entries confirm Natorp's direct engagement with Schiller's writings. Moreover, the catalogue reveals his broader familiarity with the philosophical discourse surrounding Schiller, as evidenced by the presence of several interpretative and critical works in his collection. These include Friedrich Überweg's *Schiller als Historiker und Philosoph*, Eugen Kühnemann's *Kants und Schillers Begründung der Ästhetik* (1895), Vorländer's *Kant, Schiller, Goethe*, and *Die Philosophie unserer Klassiker. Lessing, Herder, Schiller, Goethe* (1923). Of particular interest is also Robert Sommer's *Grundzüge einer Geschichte der deutschen Psychologie und Ästhetik von Wolff-Baumgarten bis Kant-Schiller* (1892).

It can hardly be denied that we have remained faithful to the spirit of Kant and of Plato. As with all our predecessors – Schiller, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and all the others – for us Kantianism is not a matter of the head, but a matter of the heart, a matter of life as a whole (Natorp 1912b, p. 219)⁴.

According to Natorp, Schiller belongs to the same Kantian tradition as the Marburg School and occupies a place in the history of transcendental philosophy alongside Kant and Plato⁵.

Furthermore, this reference provides a framework through which we can begin to understand Natorp's conception of Schiller. Schiller is a Kantian who helped Kantianism reach its current form. In other words, he helped develop Kantianism into the Marburg School's interpretation of transcendental philosophy – but here, we clearly need to consider transcendental philosophy from Natorp's point of view⁶. On this basis, the question I aim to address is the role that Schiller actually plays in Natorp's philosophy: in other words, what Natorp's idea of Schiller was, and how it influenced his own thought.

To address this question, in the following pages I will concentrate exclusively on the theoretical and explicit references to Schiller in Natorp's philosophy, particularly during his first period. By 'first period', I refer to the years from 1880 – when Natorp arrived in Marburg – to the years between 1912 and 1914⁷, that is, before the First World War⁸. Up to 1912-1914, Natorp was still worked within the framework of his conception of transcendental philosophy, centred on articulating the fundamental idea of monism, which was ultimately presented in the *Allgemeine Psychologie nach*

⁴ Natorp 1912b, p. 219.

⁵ A comprehensive discussion of this topic lies beyond the scope of this paper. For further reference, see Lembeck 1994. Additional insights into Plato's contribution to Natorp's aesthetics – alongside relevant references to Schiller – can be found in Krebs 1976, which will be discussed briefly later. In any case, Schiller undoubtedly belonged to the intellectual canon of German culture during that period. Nevertheless, he is not cited in either edition of *Platos Ideenlehre*. Therefore, at least in terms of explicit references, it is not immediately possible to establish a direct relationship between Plato, Schiller, and Natorp. One may, of course, consider Schiller's influence on Natorp when discerning certain Platonic concepts, particularly through the mediation of Cohen's interpretation of Plato. However, within the history of transcendental philosophy, Plato is more closely associated with Kant than with Schiller. It is only in the posthumous *Philosophische Systematik* (1958) that we find a direct reference to the connection between Schiller and Plato. For more on this, see the final section of this contribution.

⁶ For an overview of Natorp's philosophy, see Holzhey 1986. For the relationship between Kant and Natorp, see Holzhey 1981. A broader introduction can be found in Jegelka 1992, Stolzenberg 1995, Kim 2003, Lembeck 2008 and Dufour 2010. On the Marburg School, see Ferrari 1988, Sieg 1994 and Luft 2015.

⁷ During these three years, he published *Allgemeine Psychologie nach kritischer Methode* (1912), *Philosophie und Psychologie* (1913), and the review of Husserl's *Ideen* (1913-1914). However, the latter two works are still based on the same philosophical perspective described in the *Allgemeine Psychologie*. See Luft 2013.

⁸ On this topic, see Luft 2002.

kritischer Methode (General psychology according to the critical method, 1912)⁹. Through the monism of the *Allgemeine Psychologie*, Natorp sought to extend the method of the Marburg School considerably beyond Cohen's scientism¹⁰. After this period, the 'late' Natorp attempted to move beyond the monistic conception in the *Allgemeine Psychologie* and gradually entered his so-called mystical period¹¹.

Direct and theoretical references to Schiller in Natorp's 'first period' appear only from 1899, with the last occurring in *Philosophie. Ihr Problem und ihre Probleme* (Philosophy. Its problem and its problems, 1911)¹². This means that Schiller emerges in Natorp's philosophy during the final decade of his 'first' period, i.e. at the point at which he consciously turned away from Cohen's point of view. In other words, Schiller appeared when Natorp attempted to justify cultural forms starting from the life of consciousness, and definitively established the monism of experience – or methodical monism, as he termed it in 1912 – as the basis of reality¹³. Hence, another way to approach this work could be to consider in what sense Schiller helped Natorp depart from Cohen and establish the monism of experience¹⁴.

⁹ Even in his later work, Natorp believed he was still working within the framework of transcendental philosophy. However, after 1914, his understanding of the "transcendental" increasingly diverged from the Kantian sense of the term. See Gigliotti 1989, pp. 270 ff., Wetz 1993 and Luft 2015, pp. 111 ff.

¹⁰ On the periodisation of Natorp's philosophy and his departure from Cohen, see Luft 2015, pp. 86 ff. See also Holzhey 2004 and Lembeck 2008.

¹¹ In his *Selbstdarstellung*, Natorp wrote that he was dissatisfied with *Allgemeine Psychologie* because it only showed the "contrapositive relationship between object and subject", but did not properly develop his idea of monism. The relationship between object and subject described in this work seemed to Natorp to be merely a "simple logical inversion" (Natorp 1921, p. 157). It was this theoretical need that drove Natorp to conduct research on the *Ursprung*, on which the final part of his philosophical reflections is based. According to Natorp himself, therefore, we can consider the years between 1912 and 1914 to mark the end of the first period of his philosophy. After this period, Natorp focused particularly on social writings. Except for reviews such as that of *Bruno Bauch's Immanuel Kant* and the memorials in honour of Hermann Cohen, as well as the second edition of *Platos Ideenlehre*, the theoretical part of the so-called "late Natorp" (see Stolzenberg 2002) is present only in posthumous writings such as the *Allgemeine Logik* (1918-1919) published by Helmuth Holzhey, the *Vorlesungen über praktische Philosophie* (1925), and the aforementioned *Philosophische Systematik*.

¹² See Natorp 1911. I specify "theoretical" because other references to Schiller appear in Natorp's political and social writings (especially in *Jemands und Ich*, 1906), which, in my opinion, do not contribute to the theoretical development within which Natorp situated Schiller up to 1912.

¹³ See Natorp 1912a, pp. 131 ff.

¹⁴ The relationship between Cohen and Natorp was certainly characterised by great mutual respect. After Cohen helped to advance Natorp's academic career, the two became involved in the public promotion of Marburg neo-Kantianism and in the academic politics of the Marburg faculty. However, their political, academic and public alliance must be considered alongside the now well-established view of a fundamental philosophical-conceptual distance between them, which was exacerbated by the publication of Cohen's *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* in 1902. In *Kant und die Marburger Schule*, Natorp emphasised that he was never a student of the school's founder. Nevertheless, the controversy between the two men was mainly known to Cassirer and Görland until Cohen's death. See Dussort 1963, Marx 1964 and Holzhey 1986.

2. General background to Natorp's interest in Schiller

Schiller appears for the first time in one of Natorp's writings in 1899, in the essay *Zur Streitfrage zwischen Empirismus und Kritizismus* (On the dispute between empiricism and criticism). There, Natorp writes with reference to Schiller:

However, identifying the legal conditions on which the progressively more precise formation of factual judgements depends – through a rigorously methodical, *a priori* verification process – is the task that logic must accomplish in relation to empirical research; for the accomplishment of this, it cannot do without the help of the most foresighted among exact researchers. It cannot be said that, in this field of investigation, the alliance between philosophy and natural science is still premature, as Schiller rightly believed at the time of his early youthful enthusiasm for transcendental philosophy. May the debate between criticism and empiricism, to which the present discussion offers a modest contribution, help to dispel the mutual misunderstandings that have thus far hindered this alliance (Natorp 1899b, p. 201).

Here, Natorp is clearly referring to the first period of Schiller's philosophy, during which Schiller attempted to overcome the competing monistic theories of materialism and idealism¹⁵. In the second half of the 19th century, Natorp encountered a similar issue: the theoretical debate surrounding the introduction of psychology as a science and the associated problems of its logical foundation and its distinction from philosophy. At that time, there was great confusion surrounding the meaning of scientific statements about knowledge and the usefulness of philosophy because the sciences were attempting to apply the scientific and naturalistic method to all fields of knowledge (specifically psychology, in this case)¹⁶. The debate thus became polarised between empiricism and criticism, a difference that Natorp addressed throughout his philosophy¹⁷, proposing criticism as the correct logical foundation for all cultural phenomena, including science and the empirical method.

¹⁵ See Beiser 2005, pp. 24 ff.

¹⁶ In the second half of the 19th century, in the broader context of the *Materialismusstreit* (see Beiser 2014, pp. 53 ff.), Natorp was one of the key figures involved in the *Psychologismusstreit* (see Rath 1994 and Pelegrin 2024). He interpreted the issue of psychologism as a misunderstanding of the logical relationship between the sciences and the general task of philosophy. He addresses the issue in his work *Über objective und subjective Begründung der Erkenntnis* (1887). In summary, according to Natorp, every fact must be related to and understood as a phenomenon within logical categories. Logic takes precedence over science. However, this does not mean that empirical experience is irrelevant to logic. On the contrary, our categories function only through experience. Philosophy – the critique or theory of knowledge – does not attempt to subordinate the natural sciences, but rather provides them with the basic logical criteria that enable them to be objectively valid. Natorp believed that all scientists could accept this and that it would overcome the disagreements between (philosophical or scientific) empiricism and transcendental philosophy. For further discussion of Natorp's position in this debate, see Edgar 2008.

¹⁷ Again in *Allgemeine Psychologie*, Natorp's approach to the various branches of psychology is generally concerned with the issue of objectification. In the case of scientific psychology, moreover, the

Therefore, Natorp's interpretation of Schiller's role in the development of transcendental philosophy must be consistent with the formation of a strong alliance between philosophy and science, akin to Schiller's previous efforts too reconcile materialism and idealism. According to Natorp, transcendental philosophy is precisely the ground on which this agreement must be reached. He holds that a viable approach to solving this problem is to understand aesthetic judgement in the way that Schiller (and Kant) conceived of aesthetics within a transcendental framework.

In other words, this reference may represent the first indication of Schiller's interpretation of Kantianism – specifically, the role of aesthetics in knowledge – as a piece of the puzzle in establishing the monism of experience, a concept already outlined in the *Einleitung in die Psychologie nach kritischer Methode* (Introduction to psychology according to the critical method, 1888) and thus already among Natorp's main theoretical objectives.

3. *Aesthetics as a solution to the unity of objectivity*

Above all, however, according to Natorp, Schiller represents the historical moment when aesthetics was first recognised for its mediating role between the theoretical and moral spheres, highlighting the direct connection between philosophy, life, and cultural phenomena.

This interpretation is evident throughout Natorp's writings, despite the limited number of instances in which he explicitly refers to Schiller. In fact, Natorp never quotes Schiller's works, but only mentions him. Similar reflections appear in *Sozialpädagogik* (Social pedagogy, 1899), the contemporary *Philosophische Propädeutik* (Philosophical Propaedeutics, 1903), *Zum Gedächtnis Kants* (In memory of Kant, 1904), and later in the aforementioned *Philosophie. Ihr Problem und Ihre Probleme*. In these works, Schiller consistently features in Natorp's discussions of aesthetic philosophy as the thinker who identified the aesthetic as the mediating principle between the theoretical and moral domains – that is, the principle through which the ultimate unity of reality finds its grounding.

I will proceed chronologically, with the exception of *Sozialpädagogik*. Natorp's reflections on aesthetics occupied a significant place in his writings during the first decade of the 20th century. However, the basic concept of aesthetic judgement was already present in *Sozialpädagogik*, where he developed it within a broader framework than in his later works. Therefore, *Sozialpädagogik* helps to complete the reconstruction of his position on Schiller and aesthetic judgement more effectively than if the discussion were to begin with it.

question is how to identify the natural sciences as the only possible method for investigating both subjectivity and objectivity.

3.1 *The ultimate connection*

As we have seen, the central problem from which Natorp begins lies in the disparity between the two sides of human experience. On the one hand, there is the theoretical domain, the world of objective knowledge based on our categories and the pure forms of sensibility. On the other hand, there is the moral domain. It is important to note that, from Natorp's point of view, both domains belong to the objective side of knowledge, which does not appear to us as distinct fields, but as a single representation. The question, then, is how the unity of objectivity is grounded, i.e. how the theoretical and moral domains are connected within a unified whole.

When Natorp refers to Schiller, his interest primarily concerns the unification of these two domains. This is made explicit in the *Philosophische Propädeutik*, where Natorp observes that, "according to the results of Kant's and Schiller's aesthetic research", the connection between the theoretical and the moral (or ethical) realms takes place within aesthetic judgement (Natorp 1903, p. 51). According to Natorp, philosophical aesthetics

is not directly concerned with artistic creation, but with the foundations of the knowledge of artistic creation, and, in particular, must determine how this way of positing an object relates to theory and ethics, and understands them in an ultimate unity (ibid.).

The task of aesthetics is to establish the unity between the theoretical and the ethical and to determine how things appear to us in their ultimate interconnectedness – not merely in their theoretical or moral value.

Things always appear to us as a unity in which all their connotations (theoretical, ethical, and so on) converge into a single representation. Moreover, things themselves are not divided into two or more things. Of course, there are different possible ways of considering a thing, but what appears to us is always one. Theoretical and ethical representations are abstractions through which we can only describe partial aspects of reality, not its totality. Likewise, our lives are not confined either to theoretical constructions of knowledge or singular wills; rather, both are parts of our experience and collaborate to express a meaning in the world around us. Our theoretical experience has a direction, just as our actions are guided by purposes. The connection between these two domains is mediated by aesthetics.

Therefore, aesthetic judgement is the 'ultimate connection' through which we can achieve the ideal unification of all parts of objective knowledge. In this way, it realises the miracle in which what ought to be is presented as something real, and reality appears as something that ought to be from the ideal point of view. Natorp writes:

This ultimate connection (...) would be recognised by the fact that, while in the actual reality of human existence there is a gap between intellect and will, experience and idea, the natural world and the moral world, art achieves at least an ideal union of the two by representing what exists as if it ought to be, and what ought to be as if it existed (ibid.).

Despite the possibility of its recognisability, this unity cannot be fully realised in reality, since it is not a natural object. It represents the miracle in which the ought-

to-be is presented as something real, and reality appears as something that ought to be from the ideal point of view. Natorp recognises that this unity cannot be something real; on the contrary, it is a fiction. Nevertheless, the aim remains to unify intellect and will – theoretical and ethical – through the projection of the will onto the representations of knowledge in experience. The crucial question, however, is how this connection is possible. According to Natorp, it is made possible precisely by the fictional function of aesthetic judgement. The ‘fiction’ does not mean falsehood or illusion, but rather faith in the creative power of aesthetics:

Therefore, the most radical effect of art lies in the ideal anticipation of unity – thinkable and required in itself, even if not yet achieved or achievable in empirical reality – between nature and morality, *Sein* and *Sollen* (ibid.).

Hence, aesthetic judgement enables the connection between the two domains precisely because it does not claim the same truth value as theory or ethics. Through the creative power of aesthetics, we attain the ultimate and highest truth – namely, that:

on the one hand, the fundamental law of natural form and, on the other, the law of morality indicate an ultimate unity towards which they strive, and which constitutes their common final goal (ibid.).

3.2 *Aesthetic judgement*

According to Natorp, the connection between intellect and will is possible precisely because of the fictional role of aesthetic judgement. As we have seen, this must not be understood as falsehood or illusion, but rather as faith in the creative power of the aesthetic faculty. Aesthetic judgement is the only way to bridge the gap between intellect and will, creating an ideal representation of unity. Aesthetic knowledge is, therefore, the field in which unity lies. Indeed, the fictional nature of ultimate unity does not imply a ‘chimerical’ dimension; on the contrary, through it we attain both the purposes themselves and the very possibility of their thinkability within the world of objectivity.

In defence of Kant’s achievement in modern philosophy¹⁸, Natorp reaffirms his position in his commemorative essay *Zum Gedächtnis Kants*, written for the centenary of Kant’s death. Moreover, Natorp takes a step further: aesthetic judgement, he claims, is the only means of attaining a deeper cultural consciousness. He states:

Modern art and poetry aspire to a deeper relationship with modern life and modern science; now, this deeper relationship irrevocably refers to an ultimate ground of unity in which everything ultimately converges. This is what philosophy strives for. Kant’s philosophy, in particular, has been exemplary for all who followed, for it was, for the first time in the fullest sense of the term, a philosophy of human and humane culture. If modern art aspires, in short, to a deeper cultural consciousness, then it aspires to pre-

¹⁸ Here, Natorp briefly refers to Kant’s third *Critique*.

cisely what, since Kant, philosophy itself has aspired to (...). Thus, at their highest levels, philosophy and art illuminate one another (Natorp 1904b, p. 83).

Clearly, the development of art and poetry is primarily of theoretical value, seeking the ultimate principle through which all reality is grounded and appears as one. Historically, art and poetry have sought to highlight the creative power of reason. However, they require philosophy to recognise their role.

Indeed, when Natorp points out that art and philosophy enlighten one another, he suggests that art reveals a potential which philosophy must then elevate to the level of formal law, thereby uncovering the possibility of describing our world through aesthetic judgement. It was Schiller who understood this better than anyone:

Schiller had already fully recognised the need to apply Kant's conception of the basis of aesthetic judgement and aesthetic knowledge directly to artistic creation itself. Indeed, artistic creation itself is a specific form of knowledge that must stand in a necessary relation to the two fundamental forms of knowledge – the scientific and the moral. The artist need not always be consciously aware of this relationship in his creation, but he must certainly be aware of it, to the extent that his creation itself must reach the highest degree of conscious-ity [*Bewusstheit*] (ibid.).

Conscious-ity, or *Bewusstheit*, is not a neutral term in Natorp's philosophy. It refers to the activity of consciousness itself – to the fact that I am conscious of something precisely in the act through which I become conscious of it. Significantly, Natorp employs a term specific to his critical psychology, expressing the relationship between the content of consciousness and the *Ich*. *Bewusstheit* designates the activity of consciousness, that which consciousness ultimately is. Consciousness itself is nothing other than this ongoing relationship that runs through the whole of lived experience. Conscious-ity marks the moment of the actual activity of consciousness. It is the *Grundcharakter* of consciousness, its ultimate and irreducible value, the boundary of consciousness itself, its foundational level. It expresses the inner, continuous relation of consciousness that allows us to be aware of something – that is, of what appears to us (See Natorp 1912a, p. 26).

Bewusstheit is the fundamental activity of consciousness, whereby something appears as content within it. Natorp, however, said that aesthetics attains the highest degree of *Bewusstheit* through aesthetic judgement. What does Natorp mean by this? Perhaps he intends to suggest that aesthetic judgement raises our consciousness to a new level of *Bewusstheit*, enabling a deeper relationship with the object – that is, a more profound appearance of content in consciousness. Natorp appears to describe this higher degree of consciousness as 'cultural consciousness', a state in which, through the contemplation of objectivity, the theoretical and the ethical illuminate one another, allowing us to represent reality as a unified whole.

Indeed, when he wrote in 1903 that "art achieves at least an ideal union of the two by representing what exists as if it ought to be, and what ought to be as if it existed" (Natorp 1903, p. 51), he was probably trying to express the idea that the

power of the ideal is to unite theoretical and ethical issues. This refers to a cultural consciousness in which we reach the highest levels of consciousness. In other words, we attain the highest level of knowledge in aesthetics because we ground our judgements in consciousness: these judgements are driven by our ability to create an ideal unification of different kinds of objective experience and incorporate it into the immediacy of experience – into our lived experience – through the elevation of our level of consciousness.

3.3 *Aesthetic consciousness*

Attaining the highest level of cultural consciousness is not just a matter of theory or theoretical justification. Theory demonstrates its validity precisely in practice, as Natorp shows in *Philosophie. Ihr Problem und Ihre Probleme*. Here, Natorp illustrates the practical and concrete results of aesthetic knowledge.

He presents *Technik* as a lower form of artistic creation in which, nevertheless, the union of the theoretical and the ethical is achieved. Although it represents a lesser form of artistic creation, *Technik* also unites the accomplishments of theoretical knowledge with the ideal of the moral world. Consequently, from a certain perspective, *Technik* provides the clearest expression of how the theoretical and ideal realms come together:

Technik, as such, is not art, yet it is a preliminary stage to all the higher achievements of art. Only the rigorous technical elaboration of the artistic elements, insofar as they are rationally comprehensible, guarantees the high degree of freedom in which the final stage of artistic creation is achieved – namely, the stage in which the idea itself asserts itself in its infinity and irrationality as a purely individual, even sensuous form (Natorp 1911, p. 117).

It is important to note that Natorp uses the term ‘idea’ rather than ‘the moral world’, highlighting the presence of the ideal in the empirical world. In a sense, Natorp expresses the role of the entire cultural world in relation to the empirical world, where all the achievements of cultural consciousness gradually shape the empirical realm.

From this perspective, *Technik* is the clearest manifestation of cultural consciousness, in which the highest degree of consciousness expresses itself. In other words, on the one hand, *Technik* is a creation of ours, in which we use theoretical knowledge to create something for a specific purpose or to create the context and the technical possibilities to make something possible. In this sense, we can define *Technik* as one of the actual manifestations of culture. On the other hand, *Technik* can be described as an objectification that extends to all areas of cultural consciousness, representing the cultural stage achieved by our contemporaneity. Thus, for Natorp, *Technik* becomes a *Weltanschauung*.

Clearly, Natorp wants to show how the creative function of aesthetics deals with reality rather than *Technik*. He demonstrates this by showing how, after Kant’s philosophical revolution, the most significant philosophical turning point is the concep-

tion of aesthetics as a faculty that can unite natural experience and the ideal, thus enabling the ideal to be realised in reality. According to Natorp, Schiller is ultimately responsible for this accomplishment:

Perhaps this emerged for the first time in all its clarity in Schiller, even to the point of unilaterality; but even the most naive works of Goethe and Beethoven show more than a little of that Kantian philosophy of self-knowledge which brings the dual cosmos – the external and the internal, “the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me” – into the most immediate and personal life of the human spirit and makes it understand, or at least guess, that it is its own creation. This should therefore be called the rational form of aesthetic consciousness, which necessarily comes into close contact with the highest form of scientific and moral consciousness, namely philosophy. Indeed, reason implies unity, and at their ultimate centre, all these worlds are unseparated, even though they are directed in different directions from the common centre and are therefore quite clearly distinct in their further development (Natorp 1911, p. 118).

In this context, aesthetic consciousness is the most authentic expression of our consciousness in the act of objectification, i.e. what we might call the ‘productive’ moment of consciousness.

3.4 *The ultimate connection as the law of consciousness*

As mentioned at the beginning, Schiller is also referenced in the 1899 *Sozialpädagogik*, where he is treated in the same manner and within a similar context as in the previously cited works. Indeed, Schiller appears in the aesthetic section of the book, which addresses aesthetic judgement and related topics. It is important to note that these reflections remained unchanged in the 1904 edition¹⁹, published after *Philosophische Präpedeutik* and in the same year as *Zum Gedächtnis Kants*. However, I left this work for the end of the discussion of Natorp’s references to Schiller because here the topic is presented within the broader framework of cultural philosophy and, even more significantly, with the law of consciousness as its constant point of reference. In this way, all the entire development of Natorp’s aesthetics – through the role of Schiller – finds a general context within which we can attempt to determine Natorp’s definitive position on Schiller during the first period of his philosophy.

Natorp begins to set out his position on the role of the idea. In 1899, he writes that the idea “expresses the form of a thing that we have in mind as that which ought to be, towards which the given material – whether to be shaped or to shape itself – ought to aspire” (Natorp 1899a, p. 5). Clearly, the idea does not belong to the realm of nature; it belongs to the realm of the will, the realm of the ought to be. Here Natorp suggests that the relationship between the natural realm and the will – which can only be based on the idea – constitutes an ‘ultimate relationship’, as he will remark in his other, already cited writings. In this context, however, Natorp is more

¹⁹ This text went through several revisions (1909, 1919, 1923, 1925), but the most significant additions were published in the second edition in 1904.

explicit: it is neither natural nor moral; the unity created through this relationship, which is oriented towards the power of the idea, defines something new.

In *Sozialpädagogik*, according to Natorp, both the will and aesthetic judgement are grounded in the “fundamental law of consciousness”, which “*unconditionally* demands unity in all diversity or lawfulness” (Natorp 1899a, p. 33). The unity that is guided by the idea and realised in aesthetic judgement is originally rooted in the lawfulness of consciousness, which is always one and does not divide reality into abstractions, but rather experiences all the various areas of culture as a living immediacy. There exists a substantial unity towards which all our faculties strive. What, then, is the specific role of the aesthetic within this essential unity of consciousness? Once again, it is Schiller who provides the answer. Interestingly, it is only in the second edition of *Sozialpädagogik* that Natorp become more explicit about Schiller. The main concepts of *Sozialpädagogik* and of his aesthetics were already articulated in the first edition; nevertheless, in the second, Natorp adopts Schiller's concept of *Spiel*. This development probably reflects his concurrent studies and the development of his idea of aesthetics between 1903 and 1904, as we have seen.

In the 1904 edition, Natorp notes that *Spiel*, in the proper sense in which Schiller defined it, does not carry a negative connotation. *Spiel* is not something “*serious*” in either the theoretical or the practical domain, Natorp observes. Nevertheless, it possesses its own “*specific truth value*”, which lies in the particular way in which the aesthetic configures objects (Natorp 1904a, p. 349). It plays a similar role to the fiction function Natorp ascribes to aesthetics in *Philosophische Propädeutik*. Indeed, we already know that aesthetics transcends the claims of both the theoretical and the ethical: rather than realising them individually, it realises them together through a fiction. The aesthetic will never solve the conflict or contradiction between the theoretical and ethical on the empirical level; rather, as Natorp writes in 1904 edition of *Sozialpädagogik*, it realises their unity in an ideal reconciliation between the idea and the empirical experience, taking “the idea of perfection from the moral world and the appearance of reality from the natural world, thereby clothing the idea in order to make it visible” (Natorp 1904a, p. 351).

If the aesthetic object does not belong to either the natural or the moral world, then it is not bound by the laws that govern those realms. And yet, if it consists of ‘only’ in an illusion based on the ‘play drive’, what is the role of aesthetic judgement? In other words, how does aesthetic judgement operate within life, and where does it derive its right to do so? Natorp writes in the 1904 edition:

This right is granted to us by the fully true consciousness: that *nature and morality, the world and the otherworld, earth and heaven and hell all belong to our consciousness as its creations* – related not merely to their objects (as if they were absolutely separate), but to themselves as the original source from which they arise. It is the pure, yet at the same time supra-individual, sense of self – because it is related to the formation of objects – that the play of aesthetic creation imparts to us: a self-feeling [*Selbstgefühl*] in creation, insofar as it is more than merely individual, although it is always, indeed, first and foremost, individual (Natorp 1904a, pp. 352-353).

Aesthetic creation – most clearly through aesthetic judgement – represents an object that could not exist within empirical experience. Aesthetics assists the moral world in establishing a “harmonious relationship” with the empirical world (Natorp 1904a, p. 353): a harmony in which morality does not sacrifice its rigour, yet is able to transcend its limitation – namely, its inability to attain the world of real experience. However, all these dimensions must ultimately be brought back to the power of consciousness, which conceives *Spiel* as the expression of the productive faculty of aesthetics: the faculty of that unifies the various domains of objective knowledge and bridges the gap between them. Yet all of this is possible only in accordance with the lawfulness of consciousness.

Natorp writes that the limits of the faculties are won by

the impulse towards the beautiful (...), that is, towards the *totality* of the universe, both internal and external, which is to be brought to and beyond the boundary of the realm of ideas through the representation of ultimate unity (Natorp 1899, p. 323; Natorp 1904a, p. 359)²⁰.

Thus, according to Natorp, “as Kant and Schiller taught us” (Natorp 1899, p. 323; Natorp 1904a, p. 359), aesthetics collaborates with science and with the audacity of moral idealism to clarify the fundamental connection of consciousness (See Natorp 1904a, p. 360). In particular, aesthetics ideally accomplishes the highest moral idea through the power of aesthetic judgement, in the form of the appearance of reality – as creation of the productive faculty of aesthetic consciousness, based on the general lawfulness of consciousness – in order to unify, in an ultimate connection, the otherwise distinct domains of objectivity.

4. *Unresolved Conclusions: Schiller and the final destination of Natorp’s philosophy*

At this point, we can summarise our findings and outline a few conclusions.

First, it can be established that the principal reference to Schiller in Natorp’s first period does not consist in direct quotation. Rather, it is clear that Natorp refers to Schiller and his works indirectly, using them to justify his own philosophical aims.

Secondly, Natorp’s references to Schiller pertain to the theoretical development of Natorp’s own philosophy rather than to Schiller’s philosophy itself. By invoking Schiller – and emphasising his fundamental continuity with Kant – Natorp articulates the central concepts of his own aesthetics. Schiller’s role, therefore, lies in providing the aesthetic solution to the problematic distance between the empirical and moral realms. According to Natorp, Kant, and subsequently Schiller, sought an ultimate unity in which this distance, this gap, could be resolved. Natorp adopts

²⁰ Here, Natorp also briefly refers to Plato’s *Symposium*. However, the reference does not make an explicit connection between Plato and Kant or Schiller, apart from the shared ground on which all three are placed – namely, the development of the transcendental method.

their approach as a means of bridging the divide between these domains, seeking to address the intellectual tensions of his time between the natural and the cultural sciences – that is, between the empirical and the ideal world, and between philosophy and the methods of the natural sciences.

As is well known, in Natorp's view, this distance pertains to the objective side of knowledge. Accordingly, the framework within which aesthetics operates is that of objectivity. The task, then, is to unify theoretical and moral fields within the process of objectification. Drawing on the legacy of Kant and Schiller, Natorp finds this solution in aesthetic judgement. Not 'despite' its fictional power, but precisely because of it, the aesthetic enables us to achieve an ultimate unity that bridges the gap in objectivity.

In this way, as we have seen, through the Schillerian concept of *Spiel*, Natorp identifies the specific truth value of aesthetics. *Spiel* represents the particular mode by which aesthetics configures objects. It is a fiction, yet one with its own logical valence. The fictional role of aesthetics does not concern empirical truth, but rather the way in which the ideal 'is clothed' and thereby enables the object to appear to us as unified, without discrepancy between different domains of experience. In other words, according to Natorp, all the abstractions we employ in constructing concepts and ideas converge in appearance through aesthetic judgement, which is guaranteed by the lawfulness of consciousness underlying every process of knowledge. This lawfulness is called aesthetic consciousness, which in turn rests upon the more general cultural consciousness that ensures the unity and coherence of appearance through our experience and the power of aesthetic creation. The key point is that the role of aesthetics can be properly understood only through philosophy, which establishes its logical value – that is, its function within the development of the theory of knowledge.

Without fear of contradiction, it may be said that this interpretation of the role of aesthetics constitutes Schiller's most significant contribution to Natorp's philosophy and, in Natorp's view, to the development of the transcendental method itself. Moreover, Schiller – like Kant – played a crucial role in shaping Natorp's thought. Natorp's references to cultural consciousness, the power of aesthetic judgement as the ultimate connection between theory and ethics, the ideal representation of the world, and the 'clothed idea' that thereby appears within the natural world, are sufficient to support the view that Schiller's influence pervades Natorp's philosophy throughout its evolution – or, at the very least, throughout the development of its first period.

However, if these are the conclusions from examining the references to Schiller, beyond the clear evidence that Natorp deliberately employs and interprets Schiller for his own purposes, many unresolved (and maybe unsolvable) questions remain, arising from both the cited passages and the final destination of Natorp's philosophy. The following pages aim merely to propose a few additional connections or suggestions that may help to elucidate the role of aesthetics in the first period of Natorp's thought.

4.1 *The relationship between Cohen's and Natorp aesthetics*

The first issue concerns Natorp's theoretical debt to Cohen. Although it is not possible here to explore the relationship between Cohen's *Kants Begründung der Aesthetic* (1889) and Natorp's aesthetic, we may nonetheless consider Inge Kerbs' and Gianna Gigliotti's reflections on the connection between Cohen, Natorp, and Schiller.

In her 1976 *Paul Natorps Aesthetik*, Krebs rightly observed that Natorp's engagement with Schiller's aesthetics was probably mediated by Cohen and tended towards placing the individual at the centre (see Krebs 1976, pp. 229 ff.). Most notably, Krebs argues that Cohen sought to explain the activity of aesthetic consciousness as a 'free play of the faculties', drawing on Schiller's interpretation of Kant's third *Critique*. In Cohen's conception of aesthetics, all faculties cooperate in the production of representations. Yet, for him, aesthetics does not produce a particular kind of representation (such as the theoretical or the ethical), but rather expresses the very direction of consciousness itself. Natorp, in this respect, accepts Cohen's legacy. As we know, for him, Schiller represents the moment when aesthetics fulfils its role as a synthesis of the theoretical and ethical planes. According to Natorp, Schiller clarified how the theoretical and ethical moments of knowledge described by Kant can be related through aesthetic judgement. However, the step that Natorp appears to take beyond Cohen concerns the way in which aesthetic judgement can be directly connected to cultural phenomena and to life itself. Moreover, although aesthetics belongs to the objective side of knowledge, Natorp seems to operate at the boundary with its subjective side. Indeed, philosophical aesthetics establishes a connection between theoretical and ethical objects and unites them within singular, coherent representations. If these representations are neither theoretical nor moral, then they must be representations of things in their ultimate appearance, which is the point from which critical psychology begins its task.

However, Krebs does not connect Cohen's aesthetics with the problem of subjectivity. Gianna Gigliotti, on the other hand, does. According to her, the fact that aesthetics in Cohen does not produce a particular representation but rather expresses the direction of consciousness itself through the aesthetic moment marks the point at which Cohen's attempt to approach the problem of subjectivity takes place (see Gigliotti 1989, pp. 163-164, n. 34).

Nevertheless, as Gigliotti also notes, this issue is not the same in Natorp. Subjectivity, for Natorp, corresponds to the correlate of all objectivity, i.e. the realm in which things are considered from their concrete point of view. On the contrary, aesthetics is concerned with how the ideal is translated into reality. Psychology, by contrast, deals with consciousness and subjectivity themselves. At most, one could say that aesthetics concerns the most concrete moment of objectivity, but this is a definition that still requires further clarification.

4.2 Aesthetic consciousness and critical psychology

As we have just begun to see, a relationship between aesthetic consciousness and critical psychology in Natorp exists only if aesthetics is understood as the concrete moment of objectivity, and, in this sense, as correlated with the concrete moment of subjectivity – that is, with the task of psychology.

We must also remember that Natorp's conception of aesthetics is always situated within the broader context of his philosophy. As we have seen, during his 'first period', Natorp was engaged in establishing the monism of experience and critical psychology – his two main theoretical aims. Indeed, it was precisely for these reasons that he advanced his project following the publication of the *Allgemeine Psychologie*. Moreover, the reference to *Bewusstheit* in *Zum Gedächtnis Kants* cannot be regarded as merely a lexical choice, given its profound significance within Natorp's critical psychology.

For these reasons, aesthetic judgement may represent the object in the immediacy of life – or, at least, it allows us to establish a connection between the task of psychology and aesthetics. In other words, this suggests that aesthetic judgement could constitute the correlative moment closest to subjectivity. This is, of course, a controversial point, but I am attempting to follow only the path traced by Natorp himself. Indeed, aesthetic consciousness, grounded in cultural consciousness, may represent the point at which Natorp brings together all lived experience in the moment of objectification. After all, what does it mean to speak of cultural consciousness, if not that we are immersed in life – a continuous flow in which we objectify our momentary degree of consciousness? This obviously does not imply that subjectivity overcomes objectivity, but rather that what appears to subjectivity is precisely what is produced through aesthetic judgement.

As Natorp explains in his *Über objektive und subjektive Begründung der Erkenntnis*, it is clear for him that subjectivity does not absorb the objects that “are there, outside and independently of all subjectivity” (Natorp 1981, p. 253). At the same time, an object is also that which is given in our knowledge through the form of our understanding. It is not a product of the immediacy of consciousness, but a mediated expression of that immediacy through the logical form of knowledge. However, an object is also that which appears. The distinction lies in the fact that it appears as the representation of something, i.e. as an abstraction of the immediate. Indeed, the validity of an object arises from the fact that abstraction is unified by the law of knowledge through our transcendental forms of understanding, under the authority of the transcendental subject.

Something different, however, is the subject of concrete experience, which clearly possesses the logical forms of knowledge, but is also the locus in which lived experience takes place. It is therefore more accurate to call the object a 'phenomenon' rather than merely an 'appearance'. The phenomenon is the reduction of the appearance to the law of knowledge – a law that must be represented by every individual – whereas appearance is the “representation which is not yet objectified in

law and consequently is still subjective” (Natorp 1981, p. 256). Thus, we may regard the phenomenon as the object of knowledge, while appearance is the content of consciousness, that which presents itself to us in immediacy.

Nevertheless, both appearance and phenomenon, it is clear, continue to appear within and through our individual lived experience. The difference lies in the degree of objectification, but the context remains, in every case, that of subjective experience. Indeed, in 1887, Natorp writes:

Knowledge is in every case an occurrence within the context of subjective experience, an event in consciousness, a psychic encounter. As such, it is naturally grasped and treated scientifically in the context of the whole subjective life of consciousness. Lawfulness in knowledge thus appears to be a necessary consequence of the laws governing psychic life. If ‘objective’ validity is to be ascribed to knowledge at all, then, since this validity is an attribute of knowledge, it must somehow be grounded in the subjectivity of knowledge. It must have its roots in the activity or the subjective experience of knowing (Natorp 1981, p. 248).

Now, based on what has been argued so far, appearance in the immediacy of consciousness remains something not yet objectified. However, objectification also occurs in the context of subjectivity, as the most concrete point of knowledge itself. Concretely, life is in the subjects who lived it. If something appears, it appears within and through our individual lived experience, and it must therefore possess a form of objectification that is – and can only be – non-universal. Simply put, subjectivity and objectivity are correlative: there is always an element of objectification within subjectivity, and vice versa. On the other hand, in the *Allgemeine Psychologie*, Natorp writes, quoting Goethe and Schiller (without reference): “When the soul *speaks*, alas, the *soul* no longer speaks” (Natorp 1912, p. 98)²¹. There is always a form of objectification that is no longer subjective, representing a lower stage of objectification that is more primordial and therefore closer to the immediate, subjective stage.

The question is whether aesthetic judgement could represent this lower degree of objectification within the subjectivity of knowledge. Indeed, according to Natorp, aesthetic judgement enables consciousness to shape material into a representation that manifests the highest degree of the activity of consciousness itself. In fact, aesthetic judgement is a form of objectification that unifies theoretical and ethical considerations. This would mean conceiving the aesthetic not as the final form of objectification, but as the lowest form – that is, the form in which something appears in our consciousness in its most basic state of logical mediation.

²¹ As Luft notes in Natorp 2013, 93, n. 5, the reference is to Goethe and Schiller’s *Distichon* “Sprache” (1797) from *Zahmen Xenien*: “*Spricht die Seele, so spricht, ach, schon die Seele nicht mehr*”.

4.3 The 'pure presence'

In the broader context of Natorp's thought, as I have suggested, the development of his philosophy during its first period – a particularly in his effort to extend the transcendental method beyond a purely scientific interest – reveals aesthetics as something which completes the process of concretising knowledge. Obviously, these are only indications pointing towards a wider interpretation of Natorp's philosophy. What we can affirm, however, is the general conception of aesthetics as the power of our reason to unify the different kinds of experiences we have.

However, the creation involved in aesthetic judgement may represent the appearance of the content of consciousness – the phenomenon of ultimate authority, as Natorp called it in 1887, or 'appearance' as we called it. In this context, aesthetic judgement itself might ultimately be understood as the correlative moment of the activity of consciousness on the objective side of knowledge. Put differently, it would be correct to say that the main achievement of aesthetics lies in having raised *Bewusstheit* to a new level, namely a new capacity for relationality within consciousness, realised through the unity attained in aesthetic judgement. This new relational capacity determines the manner in which things appear to us, marking the point at which the objective and the subjective converge into one.

To conclude, moving beyond the boundaries of our periodisation, this interpretative line may find support in the *Allgemeine Logik* (General logic, 1918-19), published posthumously. It is particularly interesting to note that aesthetic knowledge, which until 1912 had been included among the main domains of *Kultur*, either disappears or undergoes transformation here. Following the section on *Praktik*, Natorp introduces one dedicated to *Poietik*. In this section, he makes his position clear by stating that the *Poiesis*

does not mean a third type or direction of objectification, subordinate to theory and practice; rather, as their common basis and unified origin, it has an effect on both without transforming into either; it not only preserves, but originally contains, what is most positive in both, while denying what is negative in meaning: the mere hypothesis of theory, the mere duty of practice. It is *Vorstellung* not in the sense of *Repräsentation*, but of pure presence, in that it is an object [*Gegenstand*], though not in the sense of standing in relation to a counterpart; and therefore it is not subjective in the sense of negating objectivity; and yet, in transcending mere striving and aiming at something that is not, but must become, it retains in full the liveliness of practice – its bold anticipation of the infinite (Natorp 1980, p. 252).

Moreover, in the *Philosophische Systematik* (Philosophical Systematics), Schiller is mentioned precisely in relation to *Poiesis* (Natorp 2000, p. 125). Here, Natorp connects Schiller's *Gestalt* with the Kantian concept of spontaneity, while ultimately also revealing the unspoken relationship within Plato's *Idea*:

Spontaneity, the arising and flowing from one's own ground, originality – in short, the freedom of creation and self-creation – is what matters here; in this alone lies fulfilment, bliss, and self-sufficiency (...). Thus, it carries both the 'is' and the 'ought' within itself, surpassing them both at the same time, so that it abolishes their opposition and

reconciles them within itself. It is the victory that grants mercy to the vanquished, the peace that not only ends to the conflict between opposites, but also truly reconciles and transcends them. This is what I call the poietic content – the content of creation, of self-creation. It is what Schiller calls ‘Gestalt’, and what Plato calls the ‘Idea’, which corresponds to the *Kalon* and *Poiesis* (Natorp 2000, p. 341).

If the substitution of aesthetics with *Poiesis* is legitimate, then the hypothesis that what Natorp sought to establish with aesthetics and the notion of the ultimate connection finds its fulfilment in the *poietic* act is equally valid. In this act, a third degree of representation is not realised; rather, what emerges is a form of presence in which the correlation between objectivity and subjectivity dissolves into pure appearance – into the immediate, one might add.

It is clear that this passage carries a strongly idealistic connotation from which Natorp could not escape and which, indeed, may have contributed to limiting the dissemination of his thought, which in any case remained posthumously published. On the other hand, Gadamer himself places Natorp alongside Fichte and Hegel, not merely near Kant (see Gadamer 2000, pp. xvi-xvii). Moreover, Gadamer’s observation explicitly refers to the distinctive activity of thought found in Fichte, which reaches its culmination in Natorp, particularly in his transformation of the problem of monism and of critical psychology during his ‘late’ philosophy.

Following this sequence of reflections – or, rather, suggestions – of varying validity, Schiller emerges even more clearly as a significant figure in Natorp’s philosophy. Indeed, it is through Schiller’s aesthetic thought, which Natorp interprets as being animated by a spirit that is more Romantic than Enlightenment, and more Idealistic than Kantian, that he succeeds in identifying the vanishing point of his philosophy²². This, arguably, is the greatest merit that should be attributed to Schiller’s role in Natorp’s thought – one that far outweighs the limited attention paid to the few references to his works.

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²² Natorp’s point of view probably lies at the boundary between Kantianism and the metaphysical approach described by Beiser 2005, p. 269. According to Beiser, Schiller adhered strictly to Kant’s guidelines. Hence, it is a mistake to attempt to extend Schiller beyond these boundaries.

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“The Realm of Shadows”: the Presence of Schiller in Cassirer’s Philosophy of Science

LUIGI LAINO

Introduction

To the best of my knowledge, Schiller’s name rarely appears in studies devoted to Cassirer’s philosophy of science. This is unsurprising, as Schiller is not among Cassirer’s principal references in this domain. Nevertheless, I shall argue that if Schiller’s thought is essential for understanding the neo-Kantian reinterpretation of Kant¹, it is reasonable to maintain that Schiller had bearing on Cassirer’s philosophy of science. This influence is evident in two of Cassirer’s central commitments: (i) the rejection of the copy theory of knowledge – that is, the notion that knowledge results from an abstract process aimed at reproducing reality ‘as it is’ –; and (ii) the development of Cassirer’s holism, arising from the generalisation of the understanding’s spontaneity in constructing representations of reality.

Regarding methodology and structure, the paper offers a historical reconstruction and contextualisation of Cassirer’s explicit references to Schiller in his epistemological writings, drawing on Cassirer’s works on Schiller only as an auxiliary resource to illuminate these references. The discussion is organised into five sections. The first examines early mentions of Schiller, dating back to 1907. The second explores how Schiller’s ideas contribute to explaining theoretical holism. The third analyses the reference that provides the title of this paper, found in Cassirer’s work on Einstein’s theory of relativity. The fourth briefly considers Cassirer’s engagement with Schiller in *Determinismus und Indeterminismus* and his appeal to his thought in defending the moral autonomy of human agents. The fifth section presents the concluding remarks.

1. *Mentions from 1907*

The reader may be surprised to learn that Cassirer’s references to Schiller in his epistemological writings appear at an early stage. In the second volume of *Das*

¹ On this point, see Beiser (2005; 2023).

Erkenntnisproblem, Cassirer draws on one of Goethe and Schiller's epigrams from *Xenien* to elucidate the task – namely, the “*Leistung*”² – of critical philosophy:

So deeply does the concept of absolute being seem to be embedded in the foundations of our knowledge, so insolubly is it apparently fused with them, that to attempt to isolate and abolish it is tantamount to the destruction of those foundations themselves. It is at this point that Kantian philosophy begins. The well-known epigram by Schiller truly applies to it: that it knows nothing of the thing and nothing of the soul. In its beginnings and its foundation, at the very least, it does not need to know this opposition; it does not need to acknowledge it as an original and self-evident one. The content of Kant's doctrine is not the self (or the 'I'), nor its relationship to external objects, but what it primarily concerns itself with is the lawfulness (*Gesetzlichkeit*) and the logical structure of experience (1907a, p. 553).

The epigram to which Cassirer refers is:

Von dem Ding weiß ich nichts, und weiß auch nichts von der Seele;
Beide erscheinen mir nur, aber sie find doch kein Schein (Kant).
Wir erkennen, ist das Hauptresultat der Kant'schen Kritik, kein Ding an sich, sondern nur Erscheinungen; unsere Erkenntnis realer Objekte ist daher auf Erfahrung beschränkt³.

The notion that knowledge does not concern ‘substances’ such as things or the soul had already appeared in Cassirer's early work on Leibniz and was clearly articulated within the Marburg School, particularly in Cohen (1883). The implication is that if we focus on the “lawfulness” and the “logical structure of experience”, we presuppose that there is no experience devoid of logical structure; consequently, objectivity is reduced to normativity⁴. This leads directly to theoretical holism and constitutes the first example of how a reading of Kantian philosophy – mediated through Schiller – can be specified in relation to issues within the philosophy of science.

The second reference from 1907 is even more striking, as it occurs in a technical paper on the philosophy of mathematics, *Kant und die moderne Mathematik* (Kant and modern mathematics). Here, Cassirer defends a neo-Kantian philosophy of mathematics against the logicist programme of Couturat and Russell. Cassirer was particularly concerned that reducing mathematics to logic gives rise to two problems: first, it encourages Platonism and a form of medieval realism regarding

² The term “*Leistung*” is used by Cassirer to defend the idea that transcendental philosophy entails the perpetual synthetic activity of the understanding in shaping reality. By way of example, the expression occurs several times in Cassirer's *Leibniz' System* (Cassirer 1902, p. 15 *et passim*).

³ *SA*, I, p. 267. “Of the thing I know nothing, and know nothing also of the soul; / Both merely appear to me, yet they are still not an illusion (*Schein*)” – Kant. The main result of the Kantian critique is that we recognise no thing-in-itself, but only appearances; our cognition of real objects is therefore limited to experience”.

⁴ As Cassirer later put it: “There is ‘objecthood’ (*Gegenständlichkeit*) or objective ‘reality’ (*Wirklichkeit*) because and insofar as there is lawfulness – not the other way around” (Cassirer 1937, p. 159).

the existence of mathematical objects, thereby confusing function-concepts with substance-concepts; second, it risks obscuring the relationship between theory and experience. Cassirer (1907b, p. 76) observes:

But with this, a problem is posed that lies completely outside the purview of 'logistics' and is thus not even touched by its criticism. All empirical judgments are beyond its domain: it stops at the boundary of experience [*an der Grenze der Erfahrung*]. What it develops is a system of hypothetical preconditions, but we can never know whether they will ever be realised in any experience, or whether they will therefore ever permit any mediate or immediate concrete application. According to Russell, the general concept of magnitude already falls outside the scope of pure mathematics and logic: it contains an empirical element that can only be given to us through sensory perception. Following the fundamental view of logistics, the task of thinking is completed when it has succeeded in establishing a strict deductive connection among all its structures and products. Concern for the lawfulness of the world of objects, however, is left entirely to direct observation [...] Logic and mathematics are only concerned with the order of concepts; the order or confusion among objects does not affect them and need not confuse them. Thus, no matter how far one might push the analysis of concepts from this standpoint, empirical being remains an eternally incomprehensible problem.

In this context, it is preferable to adopt Schiller's view that natural science and transcendental philosophy must be distinguished, though not in the sense of positing a rigid dualism between theoretical and merely conceptual structures on the one hand and sense data on the other⁵. Cassirer (1907b, p. 81) writes:

Perhaps the best description for the relationship between the two approaches to research and observation today is the statement Schiller made about the connection between natural science and transcendental philosophy: only when they separate in their searching, can the truth, at which they both aim, be recognised.

The reference here is to Schiller's epigram *Naturforscher und Transzendental-Philosophen*: "*Feindschaft sei Zwischen euch, noch kommt das Bündnis zu frühe; / Wenn ihr im Suchen euch trennt, wird erst die Wahrheit erkannt*"⁶. Significantly, these verses are

⁵ Cassirer associates empiricism with the idea that sense data constitute a primary source of knowledge. This is true, but not as naively as Cassirer sometimes suggests. In Russell (1914, pp. 80-103), physical objects are built as constructs and logical "fictions" over sense data. In Schlick, there is no trace of a copy theory of knowledge, since reality is organised through a hierarchy of principles (1918, §10, esp. p. 63), whose higher levels can be compared to Kant's synthetic a priori judgments. Later, Schlick (1932) would claim that all we speak about and know are "structures". Perhaps the difference is more a matter of attitude than of theory, given Russell's reliance on "common sense" regarding the denotation of actual men outside logic books (Russell 1951, pp. 53-54). Nevertheless, portraying empiricism as uniformly committed to the primacy of sense data would be a historical oversimplification. This is essentially Schlick's criticism of Cassirer (Schlick 1921). Finally, the formative role of empiricism may be typified by constructivist approaches such as van Fraassen's (2008), who argues that there is no need for a model to represent "appearances" (measurement results) as "phenomena" (observable entities).

⁶ *SA*, II, p. 110, nr. 153. "Let there be enmity between you; the alliance comes too soon; / If you separate in your search, the truth will only then be recognised".

dedicated to Schelling rather than Kant. This suggests that the relationship between philosophy and empirical science cannot be resolved in favour of the transcendental philosopher, who might otherwise claim the authority to interpret and rework scientific results as ‘philosophical propositions’. Instead, philosophers should analyse natural science to uncover the principles that make it possible to apply mathematics to physical reality and to comprehend physical objects as mathematical constructs.

If we seek to develop this position in terms of theoretical holism, we must preserve a certain distinction between purely theoretical and empirical assertions. However, given that the scientific understanding of reality is always theory-laden, the only legitimate object of knowledge is the unity of what we call ‘experience’. The implications of this argument will be examined in the next section.

2. 1910–1920: *Aesthetic Idealism, Theoretical Holism, and Conventionalism*

In this section, I proceed retrospectively from *Freiheit und Form* (Freedom and form, 1916), which contains an extensive chapter on Schiller, to *Substance and Function* (1910), where Cassirer adopts a particularly robust form of theoretical holism.

Freiheit und Form is Cassirer’s first monograph on the philosophy of culture, and it is obvious that it devotes considerable attention to Schiller, one of the national poets and central figures of the German humanistic tradition. What is less obvious, however, is that the text also contains an indirect reference which, by drawing on the revision of Kant’s philosophy in terms of aesthetic idealism, enables us to return to *Substance and Function* and clarify how holism emerges as a consequence of rejecting the copy theory of knowledge.

To begin with, two passages from the 1916 work are particularly relevant:

i) However, the purest relation between ‘idea’ and ‘experience’, the most perfect balance of the ‘subjective’ and the ‘objective’, was discovered by Schiller not as an artist, but as a thinker. Just as he praises critical philosophy for having opened the way to lead empiricism back to principles and speculation back to experience, so too did he constantly go through this dual path in the foundation of his aesthetics (p. 292).

ii) Our whole knowledge, as all philosophers agree, consists in a conventional illusion, with which nevertheless the strictest truth may subsist. Our purest conceptions are by no means images of things, but only their necessarily determined and coexisting signs. Neither God, nor the human soul [...] are actually that which we consider them. Our ideas of those things are only the endemic forms, through which the planet which we inhabit transmits them to us. Our brain belongs to this planet, consequently also the idioms of our conceptions which lie stored there. But the power of the soul (*die Kraft der Seele*) is peculiar, necessary, and ever like itself; the caprice of the material through which it expresses itself, does not alter the eternal laws by which that expression is made, so long as this caprice does not contradict itself, so long as the symbol corresponds to the thing symbolised. Just as reflection unfolds the relations of the idioms, these relations must actually exist in the things themselves (p. 294).

Schiller also added that "truth is no property of the idioms, but of the results – not the similarity of the symbol with the thing symbolised, of the conception with the object, but the agreement of this conception with the laws of reflection"⁷. It is difficult not to imagine that the whole passage could have been written by Cassirer himself. Concepts do not mirror reality; rather, they represent the way theoretical patterns articulate empirical relations by virtue of "the power of the soul", that is, the Kantian faculty of synthesis of the understanding. As long as the syntax of these theoretical patterns remains internally consistent, agreement between theory and the objects symbolised is possible.

How this connects with the philosophical context of Cassirer's time can be explained as follows. A key notion in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century epistemology was that of "Zuordnung" – the "coordination" between theoretical structures and empirical data, such as those obtained through measurement (see Ryckman 2005, p. 27 *et passim*). Once again, it is evident that this idea was anticipated in Schiller's passage and that these claims were incorporated into *Substance and Function*, albeit within a broader and more systematic epistemological framework.

Speaking as a natural scientist, Schiller defends the conventional character of our theoretical principles on the basis of the brain's nature and its relation to the environment. This theme, to some extent, recalls Kant's claim in the *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* that the perceptual structure of living beings depends on the distribution of matter in the universe and their distance from the sun (see Kant 1755, En. tr. pp. 297 ff.). For the expert in epistemology, however, this perspective evokes von Helmholtz and Poincaré, and thus the idea that the principles by which we organise physical reality are not synthetic a priori judgements – apodictically valid – but rather "conventions", that is, analytic propositions "in disguise", employed with the aid of experience (Poincaré 1902, En. tr. p. 50) and coordinated with "the things themselves".

Cassirer appears to exploit Schiller's conventionalism in a distinctive way to interpret the principle of general relativity. The advent of Einstein's theory posed a challenge to neo-Kantian philosophy, for it asserted the empirical character of geometry. Indeed, however far one might go in revising Kantian philosophy, the conviction that geometrical concepts are not empirical should not be abandoned. It is therefore unsurprising that, inspired by Poncelet, Staudt, Klein, Poincaré, and Hilbert, among others, Cassirer reshaped Kant's notion into a more liberal view, attributing to geometry the status of a free creation of the human mind independent of experience⁸.

In his book on Einstein, Cassirer (1921, p. 39; En. tr. pp. 383–384) extends this claim, arguing that the principle of general relativity functions as an analytic prescription governing the mathematical form of physical laws – namely, that they

⁷ *SA*, XI, pp. 129–130; En. tr. pp. 369–370.

⁸ Cassirer often invokes Dedekind's motto and Cantor's conception of mathematics as a free and creative activity. See, for example, Cassirer (1910, p. 39; Eng. trans. pp. 38–39).

must exhibit invariance. Leaving aside technical and historical issues concerning the identification of invariance with general covariance⁹, we may say that scientific theories serve as reference points around which natural phenomena are made to revolve “almost arbitrarily”, while efforts are undertaken to incorporate specific theories into progressively broader theoretical frameworks (Cassirer 1921, p. 18; En. tr. p. 366). This is nothing but a reference to Schiller’s *Der Spaziergang*, which also appears in the course Cassirer delivered in the winter semester of 1920/21: “With that, despite all the relativity and all the divergence in our spatial and temporal measurements, we have nevertheless arrived back at a unity, which now forms the ‘resting pole in the flight of appearances’ – but ‘resting’ [...] in the pure sense of validity” (Cassirer 1920/21a, p. 82).

Schiller’s poem offered a universal history of human knowledge, which, in relation to the birth of modern science, declares that it

sucht das vertraute Gesetz in des Zufalls grausenden Wundern,
Sucht den ruhenden Pol in der Erscheinungen Flucht (133-134)¹⁰.

In sum, Cassirer appears to have recognised that descriptions of natural phenomena – centred on specific theories – cannot claim to represent the truth of physical reality as it is. Yet conventionalism is here tempered by Schiller’s notion of the “power of the soul”, as Cassirer’s exchange with Schlick illustrates. Schlick (1918, § 5, p. 22; § 10, pp. 62 ff.) explicitly emphasised the conventional character of scientific hypotheses as an interplay of “signs” and denied the existence of synthetic a priori judgements. In a letter to Schlick dated 23 October 1920, Cassirer (2009, pp. 50-51) clarified:

The difference amidst us, as far as I can see, does yet consist in the *concept of a priori*, which I represent differently as you do: i.e. not as it was a constant, a once and for all stationary entity connected to material ‘intuitions’ or concepts, but rather as a function, lawfully determined, which thereby remains identical in its way and form, but that in the development of knowledge can experience, as regards content, the most different shapes. I would like that as ‘a priori’, strictly speaking, may be valid only the thought of the ‘unity of nature’ (*Einheit der Natur*), viz. the legality of experience in general, or perhaps more briefly: the ‘uniqueness of coordination’ (*Eindeutigkeit der Zuordnung*). However, how this thought specifies itself into particular principles and premises: to me this becomes evident only by moving from the process of scientific experience, although I think I can never recognise here fixed schemata, but stable basic themes of knowing, viz. of researching and questioning. Thereby I must also confess that Kant had not distinguished rigorously enough between the general principle and its concrete accomplishment, thus I think that its doctrine needs a revision concerning this point. But, for sure, the uniqueness principle seems to me to be something more than a mere ‘convention’ or as an ‘inductive generalization’: it seems to me an expression of ‘reason’, of logos as such.

⁹ See Ryckman (1999).

¹⁰ *SA*, I, p. 138, En. tr. p. 213: “Seeks the familiar law in chance’s miracles dreaded, / Looks for the ne’er-changing pole in the phenomena’s flight”.

I shall not address the legitimacy of Cassirer's position, which also involves rejecting Schlick's arguments regarding probabilistic knowledge. My purpose is rather to show how Cassirer reappropriated Schiller's notion of the "power of the soul" in order to ground a neo-Kantian philosophy of physics, identifying unambiguous lawfulness as the sole genuine a priori.

It is worth noting that, in *Erkenntnistheorie nebst den Grenzfragen der Logik* (Theory of knowledge alongside the border questions of logic), Cassirer had already criticised Vaihinger's fictionalism on similar grounds (Cassirer 1913, pp. 180-185). If we assume that all concepts and theories are mere "fictions", we must conclude that all knowledge becomes a form of "art" or *Kunstlehre* (Vaihinger 1911). By contrast, from an empiricist or positivist perspective, one must either affirm the reality of sense data or the existence of lawful connections. Choosing the latter leads to Marburg's scientific idealism, which, as I have suggested, defends *Zuordnung* as the a priori "fact" or "condition" of reason.

Although this may appear an old-fashioned conception of science when compared with the neo-empiricist view, the radical interdependence of theory and experience that it asserts offered a strikingly modern interpretation of scientific practice. It is therefore worth taking a step back to examine how this approach was systematised in the 1910 work.

In *Substance and Function*, Cassirer begins by rejecting the copy theory of knowledge, observing that "no matter how complete our knowledge may be in itself, it never offers us the objects themselves, but only signs of them and their reciprocal relations" (1910, p. 327; En. tr. p. 303). He further maintains that no single observation can verify a theoretical assertion. Cassirer's position (1910, pp. 288 ff.; En. tr. pp. 266 ff.) can be illustrated by the following diagram:

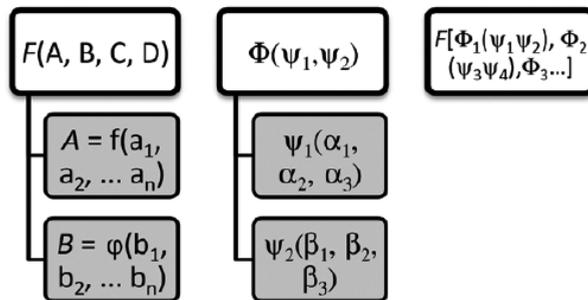


Figure 1. A holistic representation of the theory of the invariants of experience presented in *Substance and Function*.

F denotes a set of relations among groups of phenomena (A , B , etc.); in turn, A , B , and so forth can be decomposed into smaller constituents (f as correlating a_n , etc.). This yields a network of "syntheses" that illustrates, at various levels, how we

organise natural knowledge, such that no observational statements fall outside the domain of theory¹¹. Indeed, even ψ_n , which likely represents empirical laws connecting the “elements” of two fields, A and B – namely, α_n and β_n – remains intratheoretical. Φ signifies a new relation that initiates the search for increasingly general laws and indicates the direction of theoretical development. When “assured observations” fail to accord with F , modifications are introduced “from within outwards”, meaning that we adjust ψ_n while striving to preserve the overarching framework. Cassirer emphasises, however, that revisions may affect the most universal principles, so that the latter should never be regarded as “unchanging dogmas”.

In a recent essay on Cassirer’s theoretical holism, Alan Richardson contrasts this model with Quine’s account and observes:

Physics progresses by heading back to theory perhaps to reformulate laws, perhaps to remodel the experiment [...]. Neither the laws nor the facts are established until harmony is achieved between them. The goal of mathematical science is to subsume and explain all such facts – when this happens, we have ‘the entirety of experience’ as a determinate object of knowledge (Richardson 2015, p. 118).

Richardson thus argues that Cassirer’s holism is more coherent than Quine’s, as it acknowledges the impossibility of drawing a sharp distinction between theoretical and observational statements. Richardson (2015, pp. 118–119) continues:

It is easy to see that Quine’s holism of theory-testing and even his eventual “web of belief” are not holistic enough. The offerings of sensation against which Quine claims science is tested stand as facts outside the scientific system: Quine attends neither to the issue of the scientific form of the facts nor to the ways in which changes to theory induced by acceptance of this fact eventually lead to theories that alter the understanding of the fact itself. Quine is a Baconian, whose epistemology presupposes a gulf between theory and fact, for whom experience “impinges” on the web of belief from the outside. For Cassirer science always works from within: the epistemological problem occurs when facts and laws, both couched in theoretical language, diverge; it is solved when the divergence is resolved.¹²

What I have sought to demonstrate in this section is that Cassirer’s theoretical holism overlaps with his later discussion of Schiller’s *Philosophical Letters* and aesthetic idealism. Given that Cassirer referred to Schiller even before 1916 in a man-

¹¹ On this, see also Ihmig (2001, pp. 102–126).

¹² Quine’s holism (Quine 1980, pp. 20–46) is grounded in his critique of the so-called two dogmas of empiricism: (i) the distinction between analytic truths – true by virtue of meaning – and synthetic propositions, which, in the absence of synthetic a priori judgments, gives rise to (ii) “reductionism”, the view that theoretical statements can, in some way, be reduced to observations and “immediate experience”. Quine nevertheless assigns a significant role to “recalcitrant experiences”, for his aim is to show that “no statement is immune to revision”. This leads him to endorse a more conventionalist form of holism than Cassirer’s and to claim that physical objects are “myths” preferable to “Homer’s gods” (Quine 1980, pp. 43–44). While this stance appears consistent with Cassirer’s aesthetic idealism and his philosophy of symbolic forms, the crucial point is that Quine frames this preference as a matter of belief (Quine 1980, p. 44).

ner consistent with holism as a natural consequence of rejecting the copy theory of knowledge, there is little risk of overstating this influence or denying its translatability. The strictly intratheoretical character of a theory-laden, holistic epistemology can be elucidated through Schiller's notion of "the power of the soul", which serves as the analogue of what Cassirer, in 1907 and 1910, terms "*erzeugende Relation*"¹³ – that is, the synthesis generating the elements of a given mathematical structure. At the same time, the fact that we acknowledge and engage with observations ensures that theoretical relations remain empirically testable, so that the existence of relations in things enables us continually to reassess the concordance between theory and experience. Cassirer likely regarded this as Kantian in spirit, at least for these three reasons: (i) knowledge does not concern things in themselves but the ways in which we represent and construct them; (ii) if knowing does not entail copying external objects, then the foundation of knowledge lies in the activity of the understanding, which spontaneously shapes the external world; nevertheless (iii) we cannot transcend the bounds of experience.

In short, Cassirer acknowledges receptivity, yet assumes that our access to experience is mediated: we apprehend sense data via observational statements that already participate in the theoretical fabric of science.

Let us now consider how these ideas develop in Cassirer's writings on relativity.

3. *Relativity and "The Realm of Shadows"*

In a passage discussing Minkowski's well-known critique of the existence of space and time as separate forms of experience, Cassirer observes

this demand contains nothing terrible for the critical idealist, who has ceased to conceive space and time as things in themselves or as given empirical objects. For the realm of ideas is for him a "realm of shadows", as Schiller called it, since no pure idea corresponds directly to a concrete real object, but rather the ideas can always only be pointed out in their systematic community, as fundamental moments of concrete objective knowledge (1921, p. 86, En. tr. p. 424).

Here again, we encounter both holism and Schiller. Interestingly, Minkowski (1909, En. tr. p. 39 mod.) also began his celebrated address by invoking the notion of "shadows":

Gentlemen! The intuitions (*Anschauungen*) of space and time which I want to present to you arose from the domain of experimental physics, and therein lies their strength. Their tendency is radical. From now onwards space by itself and time by itself will recede completely to become mere shadows and only a type of union of the two will still stand independently on its own.

¹³ See Cassirer (1907b, p. 59 *et passim*; 1910, p. 14 *et passim*, En. tr. p. 15 *et passim*).

The key question, then, is how to interpret the term “shadow”. Cassirer clearly had in mind the first version of *Das Ideal und Das Leben*, originally published as *Das Reich der Schatten*. In his essays on Schiller, he repeatedly returns to this theme and stresses how misleading the alteration of the thirtieth line was:

Nur der Körper eignet jenen Mächten,
Die das dunkle Schicksal flechten;
Aber frei von jeder Zeitgewalt,
Die Gespielin seliger Naturen,
Wandelt oben in des Lichtes Fluren
Göttlich unter Göttern die Gestalt.
Wollt ihr hoch auf ihren Flügeln schweben,
Werft die Angst des Irdischen von Euch,
Fliehet aus dem engen, dumpfen Leben
In der Schönheit Schattenreich.

Nur der Körper eignet jenen Mächten,
Die das dunkle Schicksal flechten;
Aber frei von jeder Zeitgewalt,
Die Gespielin seliger Naturen,
Wandelt oben in des Lichtes Fluren
Göttlich unter Göttern die Gestalt.
Wollt ihr hoch auf ihren Flügeln schweben,
Werft die Angst des Irdischen von Euch,
Fliehet aus dem engen, dumpfen Leben
In des Ideales Reich!¹⁴

From these excerpts, we may infer that the creation of forms requires transcending the senses without fearing that the outcome will be mere “shadows”, since forms are not mere copies of things. This view evokes a kind of Platonism, although here the status of “shadows” is attributed to ideas rather than to their imitations. In a sense, it represents a form of idealism that responds to the empiricist claim that ideas are faint impressions (Hume 1739, I, sec. VII, pp. 142-147). Indeed, a neo-Kantian such as Cassirer faced a challenge analogous to that which Hume posed to Kant, particularly given the Humean influence on later philosophy of science. Just as Kant sought to secure the synthetic activity of the understanding against scepticism, Cassirer had to defend it against conventionalism, as seen earlier in his debate with Schlick.

It is striking that the third chapter of Cassirer’s book on Einstein undertakes a detailed analysis of the relationship between relativity and scepticism. Although Schiller’s name does not appear here, the argumentative strategy relies on rejecting the copy theory of knowledge, as Schiller had advocated. Since the possibility that concepts merely reproduce things has been ruled out, the absence of an absolute representation of reality does not entail any sceptical conclusion. On the contrary, the principle of general relativity guarantees that observations are theoretically mediated and systematically interconnected, so that experience is constituted as an integrated whole grounded in a network of mathematical equations (Cassirer 1921, pp. 392-393). It follows that if ideas – understood as theoretical relations – do not originate in things and are themselves “shadows”, then observational statements tied to “things” cannot serve as a means of verification of theoretical propositions.

With respect to space and time, these are simply factors that organise experience within a broader conceptual network (including, for example, matter, electric charge, and so forth), but they do not correspond to any real objects. This feature of scientific thought becomes even more pronounced in general relativity. Without

¹⁴ Original version quoted in Cassirer (1920/21b), p. 59; *SA*, I, p. 192.

entering into technical details¹⁵, we may assume complete freedom in selecting the geometry through which measurements are expressed, such that the only satisfactory form of knowledge is the logical consistency between a chosen axiomatic system and the relevant observations. Cassirer (1921, pp. 50–51, En. tr. p. 393) writes:

According to the critical view, the object is no absolute model to which our sensuous presentations more or less correspond as copies, but it is a "concept, with reference to which presentations have synthetic unity". This concept the theory of relativity no longer represents in the form of a picture but as a physical theory, in the form of equations and systems of equations, which are covariant with reference to arbitrary substitutions. The "relativisation", which is thus accomplished, is itself of a purely logical and mathematical sort. By it the object of physics is indeed determined as the "object in the *phenomenal world* (Erscheinung)"; but *this* phenomenal world no longer possesses any subjective arbitrariness and contingency. For the ideality of the forms and conditions of knowledge, on which physics rests as a science, both assures and grounds the empirical reality of all that is established by it as a "fact" and in the name of objective validity.

In this sense, when compared with the vividness of sensuous reality, an "idea" may appear as a mere shadow; yet this very characteristic is essential to understanding what it means to know. The "relativisation" achieved by relativity theory is purely mathematical, so that the objects it encompasses are shadows generated by theory. From a phenomenal standpoint, we must conclude that there are no facts without theory, as Cassirer often repeats with Goethe¹⁶.

Therefore, the trajectory from Schiller to epistemology can be summarised as follows: Cassirer interprets, on the one hand, Schiller's notion of "the power of the soul" as the spontaneity of the understanding in generating axiomatic systems; on the other, he acknowledges the role of experience in determining which system of axioms is appropriate, since theoretical relations must ultimately correspond to "the things themselves". This contribution of experience, however, should not be understood in a largely passive sense. If observational statements can be identified – and thus a distinction drawn between theoretical and empirical assertions – this is possible only because observational claims are themselves theory-laden.

Accordingly, the distinction between the pure and empirical components of scientific theory, and the related question of their agreement, should not be construed as implying complete heterogeneity. In Kantian terms, this can be expressed by say-

¹⁵ In essence, Cassirer interpreted general relativity as marking a shift toward a purely functional and formal conception of physical theory, since every reference to empirical constraints (such as the constancy of the speed of light) is abandoned. He also emphasised the principle of active general covariance, which allows for the generation of multiple metrics for given spacetime regions (see Ryckman 2005, pp. 16–19). This point is vividly illustrated by the so-called "hole argument" (see Ryckman 2005, pp. 19–22), of which Cassirer was, however, unaware (Ihmig 2001, p. 158).

¹⁶ See, e.g., Cassirer (1914, p. 185). The history of physics abounds with such episodes. For instance, when the young Heisenberg confessed to Einstein during a walk that he had been inspired by relativity theory and its positivistic spirit, Einstein replied: "Only theory decides on what we can observe" (*Erst die Theorie entscheidet darüber, was man beobachten kann*). See Heisenberg (1971).

ing (Cassirer 1921, pp. 104–105, En. tr. p. 440) that relativity does not enable the coexistence of multiple real spaces, but rather “the possibility or necessity of applying different measurements, i.e., different geometrical conceptual languages in the interpretation of certain physical manifolds”. Cassirer (1921, p. 108, En. tr. p. 443) thus remarks:

It is not experience that grounds the content of the geometrical concepts; rather these concepts foreshadow it as methodological anticipations [...]. When they first appeared, the systems of non-Euclidean geometry seemed lacking in all empirical meaning, but there was expressed in them the intellectual preparation for problems and tasks, to which experience was to lead later.

Cassirer’s holism is therefore justified by a particular conception of the scientist’s task: the creative invention of models for interpreting natural phenomena. Scientists employ the “power of the soul” to construct mathematical representations that will ultimately be applied to reality, so that:

Thought does not advance in the field of the concrete by dealing with the particular phenomena like pictures to be united into a single mosaic, but by sharpening and refining its own means of determination while guided by reference to the empirical and by the postulate of its determinateness according to law (Cassirer 1921, p. 109, En. tr. p. 444).

It is difficult not to perceive a parallel between the work of the scientist and that of the artist: both shape the world through spontaneous and creative activity.

The final chapter of Cassirer’s book is particularly revealing in this respect. Science is portrayed as a human endeavour aimed at producing objective, non-anthropomorphic representations of physical reality – an undertaking that is, paradoxically, interpreted as anthropomorphic (Cassirer 1921, p. 111, En. tr. p. 445).

Later, in the third volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer elaborates on this point in his discussion of Eddington’s interpretation of general relativity. Eddington adopts a subjectivist and, to some extent, “transcendental” perspective, combining the abstract mathematical language of general relativity (the “world-geometry”) with the specific spacetime partitions resulting from the observer’s interaction with physical reality. Consequently, the features of nature that appear in scientific knowledge – such as invariance – are less intrinsic properties of reality than conditions imposed by the mind¹⁷. Yet, in his widely read *Space, Time and Gravitation*, Eddington (1920, p. 30) described relativity as offering a view of nature “from the point of view of no one in particular”.¹⁸ This stands in tension with aesthetic ide-

¹⁷ On the complex interpretation of Eddington – who was also influenced by Clifford’s panpsychist and monistic metaphysics – see Hentschel (1990, pp. 473–480).

¹⁸ And he continues by saying: “Whether we are able to go still further and obtain a knowledge of the world, which not merely does not particularise the observer, but does not postulate an observer at all; whether if such knowledge could be obtained, it would convey any intelligible meaning; and whether it could be of any conceivable interest to anybody if it could be understood these questions

alism, for scientific objects, like cultural ones, are created by subjectivity¹⁹ – by the “power of thought” (*Denkkraft*). Significantly, in this context Cassirer (1929, p. 555, En. tr. p. 478) asserts that physics “cannot jump over its own shadow”, deliberately invoking Schiller’s key metaphor.

To conclude this section, I shall cite two passages²⁰ from works explicitly devoted to Schiller, which help to complete the picture outlined thus far. It is worth noting that *Idee und Gestalt* was published in 1921, while the posthumous volume *Schillers philosophische Weltansicht* (Schiller’s philosophical worldview) originated as a series of public lectures delivered at the University of Hamburg during the same semester in which Cassirer taught on relativity.

The first passage, from *Idee und Gestalt* (Idea and form), reads:

Thus, beauty is not an empirical concept (or concept of experience), but an imperative. It is objective, not insofar as we can point it out as a necessary component in the structure of the world, but insofar as it lies before us as a necessary task of our spiritual, our ‘sensibly-rational’ nature (Cassirer 1921/24, pp. 329-330).

Here, we move beyond the Greek ideal of *καλοκάγαθία*. As an imperative, beauty demands that human beings pursue it as the regulative goal of their activity. This implies that what we take to be the external component of knowledge – namely, the objects that appear before us – is in fact the outcome of our unceasing imperative to shape the world. Science is no exception, and this insight paves the way for the argument developed in the third volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Viewed from this perspective, Cassirer’s holism emerges as the only viable epistemological stance, given the aesthetic imperative to form and configure reality. Objectivity, therefore, can manifest only under a theoretical guise.

The second excerpt reinforces this interpretation:

Only now, after we have assured ourselves of the conceptual framework of Schiller’s view of art and Schiller’s worldview, do we turn to the poem *Das Reich der Schatten*, which in a later version was given the title: *Das Ideal und das Leben*. Fundamentally, the earlier title is the more descriptive one [...]. But the realm of shadows is much more the realm of forms – and thus the true realm of life – but a life that no longer adheres merely to raw matter and is consumed by the mere material drive; rather, one that is realised and perfected in play (*Spiel*) and in image (*Bild*), in pure form (*Gestalt*) (Cassirer 1920/21b, p. 61).

need not detain us now. The answers are not necessarily negative, but they lie outside the normal scope of physics” (Eddington 1920, p. 31). Eddington’s openness on this point may have prompted Cassirer’s criticism.

¹⁹ In Cassirer scholarship, it is well known that the philosophy of symbolic forms pivots – though with significant differences – on Hegel’s objective spirit (see at least Skidelsky 2008, pp. 105-109; Moss 2014). I object, however, that each symbolic form is shaped subjectively, in the sense that it results from a balance between an act of creativity and expression and the degree of objectification inherent in the cultural product thus created. A general account of this mechanism can be found in Cassirer (1930).

²⁰ In these cases as well, I will provide direct English translations of the excerpts.

The circle thus closes. Cassirer invokes *Das Reich der Schatten* (The realm of shadows) to illustrate that what we call “form” is the product of an idea that transforms “raw matter” into “pure image”. Human existence becomes an aesthetic play: there are no external things to be passively reproduced in thought; rather, thought actively moulds reality, and this constitutes “the true realm of life”. For Cassirer, relativity represents the highest expression of this transfiguration within physics, thereby explaining the reference to Schiller’s poem in the 1921 work.²¹

4. *Freedom and Necessity: Schiller and Quantum Mechanics*

After completing his extensive work on the philosophy of culture – within which the philosophy of science was integrated – Cassirer returned to epistemology with his study of quantum mechanics, *Determinismus und Indeterminismus. Historische und systematische Studien zum Kausalproblem (Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern physics; Historical and Systematic Studies of the Problem of Causality)*, published in Sweden in 1937. Schiller appears in this work on two occasions. First, Cassirer once again cites the motto from *Xenien* concerning the relationship between natural scientists and transcendental philosophers, cautioning readers that it might still be premature to attempt a definitive interpretation of quantum mechanics, a theory then in the process of development. Nevertheless, he affirms that it is a fundamental task of philosophy to transcend the rigid boundaries of the sciences and to reflect on their principles and the meaning of their theories. Second, Cassirer appeals to Schiller to defend the critical separation of freedom and necessity and to argue that free will constitutes the independent source of moral law. Indeed, Cassirer warns against the misleading anthropomorphism of statements such as “an electron decides to jump from one orbit to another”, which cannot be meaningfully compared to the deliberation of a human agent before or during action (Cassirer 1937, pp. 249-254). The passage from Schiller that Cassirer quotes is taken from the letters *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen (On the Aesthetic Education of Man)*:

Die Person also muss ihr eigener Grund sein, denn das Bleibende kann nicht aus der Veränderung fließen; und so hätten wir denn fürs erste die Idee des absoluten, in sich selbst gegründeten Seins, d.i. die *Freiheit*. Der Zustand muss einen Grund haben; er muss, da er nicht durch die Person, also nicht absolut ist, *erfolgen*, und so hätten wir fürs zweite die Bedingung alles abhängigen Seins oder Werdens, die *Zeit* (cited in Cassirer 1937, pp. 245-246; *SA*, XII, p. 39).²²

²¹ In the course, Cassirer (1920/21a, p. 61) also cites Duhem’s well-known statement (Duhem 1906, p. 274) that “the facts of experience” are presented by physics “in a symbolic form”.

²² “Person, then, must be its own ground, since the permanent cannot result from the changeable; and thus we should have, firstly, the idea of the absolute, self-founded Me, that is, *freedom*. Condition must have a ground; and since it depends not upon person, consequently is not absolute, it must *result* (from something); and so we should have, secondly, the conditional state of all dependent Me, or becoming, that is, *time*” (En. tr. p. 49).

The essential point is that quantum mechanics does not permit us to rely on the ordinary ontological framework of physical reality, according to which particles behave as stable objects whose identity is fixed in both perception and language. On the contrary, we can speak only of the "omnipresence" of waves (Cassirer 1937, pp. 217, p. 228) and define a physical entity in terms of Bohr's complementarity principle and the formalism of the theory.²³ As Cassirer observes, "particularity" is not the starting point for positing the existence of physical objects but rather the outcome of a process.

This ontological indeterminacy, however, disappears when we turn to the domain of moral law, where we encounter true ontological being: the individual as "person". Only on this basis can full responsibility be ascribed to the subject in its free ethical deliberations. Hence, Cassirer's aim was to resist the unwarranted extension of physical indeterminacy into ethics, thereby preserving an anti-reductionist conception of free will. Freedom, he argues, is a form of determination (Cassirer 1937, p. 243) that, while not alien to the principle of causality in physics, remains distinct from it. Before citing Schiller, Cassirer (1937, pp. 244–245) writes:

Every act of "imputation" in the ethical sense always presupposes and is bound to some form of "prediction" (*Vorausberechnung*). An action that entirely fell out of the causal connection, that occurred randomly without cause, would stand completely in a vacuum; it could neither be related to a constant ethical subject nor be imputed to it [...]. The question of "free will" cannot and must not, therefore, be conflated with the question of physical "indeterminism". Free will, whose justification is relevant to ethics, contradicts a dogmatic fatalism; but it by no means contradicts a determinism that has been critically understood and implemented. [...] "Constancy" is not only a physical category; it is at the same time, albeit in an entirely different sense, an ethical category. For all truly moral actions must flow from the unity and constancy of a determined moral "character".

It must be also noted that Cassirer had already refined his interpretation of the principle of causality in quantum mechanics. In brief, he sought to demonstrate that Heisenberg's uncertainty principle does not entail the abandonment of causality and determinism, provided these are understood in a critical sense as expressions of "lawfulness".²⁴

²³ Bohr's complementarity principle consisted in the mutual exclusiveness of the particle- and wave-oriented descriptions of quantum phenomena, coupled with the paradoxical claim that only these two alternatives, taken together, exhaust the "truth" of such phenomena. On this, see Laino (2025).

²⁴ In his famous paper on uncertainty, Heisenberg (1927, p. 197) stated: "In the strict formulation of the causal law, to wit, 'if we can know the present with certainty, we can calculate the future', it is not the apodosis to be false, but rather the protasis (*Voraussetzung*). We cannot know in principle the present in all its determining parts. Thereby every act of perception is a selection of a number of possibilities and a limitation to what is possible in the future". Cassirer argues that even in this case we do not alter the structure of the causal statement, which remains a material conditional, i.e., a proposition of the form "if x , then y ". Indeed, we are merely warned against an overly immediate acceptance of arbitrary values for our variables (Cassirer 1937, p. 150). For example, if we were to

5. Concluding Remarks

This paper has sought to reconstruct Schiller's influence on Cassirer's philosophy of science. The main conclusions can be summarised as follows.

First, the framework of Cassirer's holistic epistemology was developed in *Substance and Function* (1910) as a response to the epistemological debates of his time and his interpretation of Kantian philosophy, which emphasised the spontaneity of the understanding over the passivity of sensory perception. Although this reinterpretation of Kant was influenced by multiple sources, Schiller played a significant role, as evidenced by Cassirer's early references from 1907.²⁵

Second, drawing on passages from *Freiheit und Form* (1916), I have argued that Cassirer's engagement with Schiller aligns with his holistic epistemology. Schiller demonstrated that critical philosophy reveals how experience can be traced back to theory and how theory, in turn, can be applied to experience. Moreover, the recurrence of *Das Reich der Schatten* in both Cassirer's writings on Schiller and in *Zur Einstein'schen Relativitätstheorie* (On Einstein's relativity theory, 1921) suggests a fundamental continuity between epistemology and aesthetic idealism.

Finally, Schiller's thought offered Cassirer a conceptual framework for preserving the autonomy of ethical decision-making against the improper transfer of scientific concepts – such as indeterminacy and uncertainty – into the moral sphere. In this way, free will and moral responsibility remain the foundational pillars of a genuine philosophy of the human being.

engage in a measurement process inconsistent with the limits imposed by the uncertainty principle – attempting to determine both the position and the momentum of a particle simultaneously – the results would be simply absurd (the error in one measurement would approach infinity). Thus, Heisenberg would have confused the rule “*sublato conditionato tollitur conditio*” with the impossible norm “*sublata conditione tollitur conditionatum*” (negation of the antecedent), which would entail nothing less than an inconceivable disruption of the lawfulness of nature. In fact, in such a case not only would a false prediction result, but no prediction would be possible at all, since there would be no reasons to explain phenomena.

²⁵ I have omitted two further references made by Cassirer in the essays *Cohen und die Erneuerung der Kantischen Philosophie* (1912) and *Die Grundproblem der Kantischen Methodik und ihr Verhältnis zur nachkantischen Spekulation* (1914). In the first, Cassirer (1912, pp. 137-138) incorporates the faculty of aesthetic creation into the three directions of consciousness characteristic of Kant's system, which is generally based on “principles of formation” (*Prinzipien der Gestaltung*). In the second, Cassirer (1914, pp. 201-202) mentions Schiller among the post-Kantian thinkers who contributed to forging a unified spirit for Kantian philosophy. Last but not least, more than a hint of Schiller's aesthetic idealism can be found in the category of “will to formation” (*Wille zur Gestaltung*), which appears in Cassirer (1995, p. 27).

Abbreviations

- SA Schillers *Sämtliche Werke. Säkular-Ausgabe in 16 Bänden*, hrsg. von E. von der Hellen, Cotta, Stuttgart-Berlin, 1905. En. tr. by J. Weiss, *The Aesthetic Letters, Essays, and the Philosophical Letters*, Little & Brown, Boston, 1845; En. tr. by E. A. Bowring, *The Poems of Schiller*, Bell, London, 1874.

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The Unified Human Being: Schiller's Legacy in Dilthey's Critique of Mathematical Psychology

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1. Introduction

In his 1883 *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften* (Introduction to the sciences of spirit), Wilhelm Dilthey made a striking claim about Friedrich Schiller's contribution to the foundation of the human sciences:

Schiller contrasted scientific analysis, which disaggregates and kills, with the synthesis of artistic contemplation as a procedure of a higher degree of metaphysical truth and, accordingly, in his aesthetics he ascribed to the artist the grasping of nature's autonomous life. Schiller highlighted how art paves the way for the scientific study of this [human] world¹.

This passage – one of the few explicit acknowledgments of philosophical debts in Dilthey's *magnum opus* – deserves careful attention. What could it mean to say that art “paves the way” for the *scientific* study of the human world? How could aesthetic contemplation, which Schiller opposed to analytical dissection, serve as methodological preparation for rigorous scientific inquiry?² And why would Dilthey invoke Schiller at precisely this juncture in his project to establish the epistemological foundations of the *Geisteswissenschaften*?

This article suggests that Schiller's aesthetic epistemology exercised an underappreciated influence on Dilthey's revolutionary conception of analytic and descriptive psychology, which was conceived by him as the methodological cornerstone of the human sciences. More specifically, Schiller's promotion of the unified, organic, creative human being provided Dilthey with both a philosophical alternative to the

¹ Dilthey [1883] 1959, p. 372. For a comprehensive guide to the *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften*, see Lessing 2001. Dilthey even formulated what he called the “Schiller principle” – that is a principle according to which “the aesthetic process grasps in form the vitality experienced in feeling and thus animates intuition, or intuitively represents this vitality by transposing life into form; hence the principle according to which a continuous translation of lived experience into form and form into lived experience takes place” (Dilthey [1887] 1958, p. 117).

² As Dilthey emphasized in a passage from his mid-1890s essay on Schiller, the intellect “dissects, groups and divides” [*Gruppieren einzuteilen*]; “it rushes from observations to conclusions [*Er eilt von den Beobachtungen zu den Schlüssen*]” (Dilthey [mid 1890s] 1957, p. 21).

mechanized conception of mind underlying Herbartian psychology and a positive model for how consciousness could be studied scientifically without fragmenting its living totality. The stakes of this influence extend beyond intellectual biography. Between the 1840s and 1870s, German psychology diverged into two competing traditions: the Herbartian lineage (represented by Moritz Wilhelm Drobisch, Theodor Waitz, Wilhelm Fridolin Volkman, Gustav Theodor Fechner), which treated mental representations as physical forces governed by mathematical laws and introduced the problematic concept of a “threshold of consciousness”; and the emerging neo-Kantian tradition (Friedrich Albert Lange, Jürgen Bona Meyer), which often programmatically reconnected with Schopenhauer, defending the active, spontaneous character of consciousness and the irreducibility of qualitative mental distinctions³. Dilthey’s encounter with Schiller occurred at the precise historical moment when this alternative was crystallizing.

By examining Dilthey’s intellectual development from his first encounter with Schiller in 1852 through the watershed year 1865 (when he first articulated his *Realpsychologie* and Lange published his refutation of Herbartian psychology) to the systematic formulation in the 1894-1895 *Ideen über eine beschreibende und zergliedernde Psychologie* (Ideas on descriptive and analytical psychology), this paper demonstrates how Schiller’s aesthetic method – the holistic grasp of living totalities through synthetic contemplation rather than analytical dissection – may have become the epistemological model for Dilthey’s descriptive psychology. Only a method capable of preserving the total and fully developed human being could serve as the foundation for sciences whose object is precisely human meaning, cultural expression, and historical life.

2. 1852: Dilthey’s First Encounter with Schiller in Context

The interest in Schiller is already evident in Dilthey’s high school “Abschieds-Rede” (Farewell speech) and in the very first pages of his diary, in which there are clear debts to the German poet and philosopher regarding the relationship between ideal

³ When Jürgen Bona Meyer established the connection between Schopenhauer and Helmholtz, he acknowledged this crucial aspect, as well as the distance between Herbartianism and neo-Kantianism on this point. Meyer addressed Schopenhauer in a brief article titled *Schopenhauer als Mensch und Denker* (1872), in which, while sketching a biographical-intellectual profile of the author of *Die Welt*, he emphasized Schopenhauer’s importance and, particularly, the “surprising” agreement demonstrated by his 1816 essay *Über das Sehen und die Farben* with the physiological conception of Kantianism developed nearly thirty years later by Helmholtz – a conception that many regarded as having inaugurated the neo-Kantian movement. According to Meyer, Schopenhauer’s 1816 essay was “significant both from a physiological and philosophical point of view”, since it addressed the problem of how sensible intuition delivers its “material content” to our mind. Schopenhauer demonstrates that “the senses are already active in receiving material impressions”, and in this “integration” lies the “philosophical importance of his work” (Bona Meyer 1872, pp. 18-19, 25).

and life, and the task entrusted to poetry and philosophy to seek their composition in a higher unity⁴. It is significant to examine the intellectual context of 1852 in some detail. This year falls just seven years before the famous *Schillerfest* of November 8-10, 1859 – a centenary celebration that proved pivotal for the emerging neo-Kantian movement. Indeed, the centenaries of both Fichte and Schiller have been recognized as formative events in neo-Kantianism's origins⁵. The *Schillerfest* was marked by major philosophical interventions, including Kuno Fischer's essay *Schiller als Philosoph* (Schiller as philosopher, 1858) and Friedrich Albert Lange's celebratory address, in which he proclaimed that "Schiller's words are the mother's milk for the spirit of the nation"⁶. Moreover, in the mid-1850s, Hermann von Helmholtz delivered his historic lecture "Über das Sehen des Menschen" (On human vision) at Königsberg (February 27, 1855), which many scholars regard as a foundational event of neo-Kantianism⁷.

As concerns the year 1852: we have a crucial piece of evidence from precisely this year that sheds light on another significant aspect of the German philosophical context in which Dilthey's early encounter with Schiller occurred. Herbart and Schopenhauer returned to prominence on the German philosophical scene as Dilthey first encountered Schiller.

In 1852, Johann Eduard Erdmann published an article titled "Schopenhauer und Herbart: Eine Antithese" (Schopenhauer and Herbart: An Antithesis) in the *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik*, noting the "growing interest" in both philosophers during the 1840s-1850s and attributing it to widespread "dissat-

⁴ Misch 1960. Cf. Schiller 1919, pp. 290-294. As concerns Dilthey's early references to Schiller see Bianco 2006. We can reasonably assume that Dilthey read *Grace and Dignity* (1793) and *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795) in the early 1850s, and he may already have known the poem *Die Künstler*. He acknowledged the importance of this poem in the mid 1890s: "The poem *Die Künstler* indicates the highest point of Schiller's entire youthful phase and contains all the foundations of his subsequent aesthetics. Art is the organ of humanization [*Humanisierung*] and prepares for truth and freedom" (Dilthey [mid 1890s] 1957, p. 15). As Herman Nohl has shown in his introduction to Dilthey's Schiller-Aufsatz (Nohl ed. 1957), the first documented evidence of Dilthey's intention to write an essay on Schiller appears in a letter to him from May 1894: "Write your Schiller. This is living history". One year later, Dilthey published *Dichter als Seher der Menschheit* in two volumes, which included the essay on Schiller. It is worth recalling that precisely in that period he was drafting his notes on descriptive and analytic psychology.

⁵ White Beck 1991.

⁶ Lange 1859. See also Fischer 1858. The cultural and philosophical significance of this moment has been thoroughly examined by Chiara Russo Krauss in her recent introductory essay: Lange 2025.

⁷ The problem of neo-Kantianism's origins remains contested in current scholarship. Some of the most authoritative voices in the field – notably Frederick Beiser – have argued that the movement's beginnings should be significantly backdated to Herbart himself, rather than "Liebmann or Helmholtz" (Beiser 2022, pp. 3, 102; for a counterargument, see Guastamacchia 2024). This remains a deeply complex historiographical issue. The first English anthology dedicated to neo-Kantianism adopts Helmholtz as a major starting point: Luft 2015.

isfaction” with Hegelian philosophy⁸. This juxtaposition of Herbart and Schopenhauer represented two fundamentally opposed receptions of Kantianism: Herbart’s systematic rejection of transcendental aesthetic, mental faculties, and subjective spontaneity in favor of mathematical-mechanistic psychology; versus Schopenhauer’s defense of transcendental aesthetic as Kant’s supreme achievement and his anticipation of physiological neo-Kantianism through emphasis on the subject’s active role in perception. This antithesis would define the structure of German psychological debate for decades to come⁹.

Herbart represented a critique of the faculties of the soul and transcendental aesthetic, sharp rejection of the Kantian *a priori*, denial of the spontaneity of the knowing subject, and implementation of an ambitious, strongly anti-Kantian attempt to mathematize psychology. Between the 1840s and 1860s, the Herbartian school produced a substantial collection of works attempting to establish a “third way” between transcendental idealism and materialism:

- Drobisch, M. W. (1842). *Empirische Psychologie nach naturwissenschaftlicher Methode*, Leipzig, Voss (Empirical psychology in accordance with scientific methods).
- Waitz, T. (1846). *Grundlegung der Psychologie*, Perthes, Hamburg and Gotha (Foundation of psychology).
- Waitz, T. (1849). *Lehrbuch der Psychologie als Naturwissenschaft*, Vieweg, Braunschweig (Textbook of psychology as a natural science).
- Drobisch, M. W. (1850). *Erste Grundbrenen der mathematischen Psychologie*, Voss, Leipzig (First fundamental principles of mathematical psychology).
- Volkmann, W. (1856). *Grundriss der Psychologie*, Fricke, Halle (Outline of psychology).
- Fechner, T. (1860). *Elemente der Psychophysik*, Breitkopf und Härtel, Leipzig (Elements of psychophysics).

Schopenhauer’s legacy, by contrast, pointed in a different direction. Herbart himself had criticized Schopenhauer in 1818 for the “ample credit” given to transcendental aesthetic – the very doctrine Herbart dismissed as speculative “recklessness”¹⁰. If, on the one hand, Herbart had argued for a receptive, mechanistic psychology grounded in mathematical laws governing the mutual inhibition of representations, on the other hand, Schopenhauer had insisted – following Kant – on the active, constitutive role of the subject even in elementary sensory processes. This fundamental opposition between Herbartian receptivity and Schopenhauerian (and later Helmholtzian) spontaneity would structure the subsequent developments of German psychology.

Here lies the essential point: in 1852, we find ourselves in the midst of the post-Kantian debate on the possibility of a scientific psychology. The first estab-

⁸ Erdmann 1852, pp. 209-211.

⁹ For an overview on this topic: Poggi 1977; see now Russo Krauss 2020.

¹⁰ Schopenhauer [1818] 1977, p. 537; Herbart [1819] 1964, pp. 57, 59, 63.

lished fact to emphasize is the following: Dilthey approached Schiller precisely as a fundamental alternative was crystallizing in the background of German culture – the divide between Herbartian mathematical-mechanistic psychology and the neo-Kantian tradition. It is difficult to deny that Schiller's pages contributed significantly to steering Dilthey away from the mathematizing and physicalizing attempts characteristic of Herbart's psychological program. When Dilthey was developing his analytic and descriptive psychology between 1852 and 1865, he certainly had in mind Schiller's promotion of the unified, organic, creative human being in direct opposition to the mechanized conception of humanity underlying Herbartian psychology.

Yet a crucial question arises: how exactly did the aesthetic or artistic method prove pivotal in the psychological field? To substantiate this research hypothesis, we must examine the specifics of Dilthey's anti-naturalistic epistemology and demonstrate how it reflects Schiller's legacy.

3. *The 'Watershed' Year 1865: Challenging the Herbartian Paradigm*

It was in his 1865 essay on Novalis – published in the *Preußische Jahrbücher* – that Dilthey first explicitly referenced a *Realpsychologie* whose “descriptions” could make comprehensible the entire totality of psychic life¹¹. Here, drawing on the distinction between analytic and explanatory psychology from the Herbartian Theodor Waitz, he began articulating his alternative vision¹². However, Dilthey's conviction had taken root several years earlier. Historiography served as the *proving ground* for his methodological commitments, and the new method he sought for psychology corresponded precisely to the requirements imposed by historical science – a discipline with fundamentally different characteristics from the experimental sciences.

Historiography cannot become an *exact science* governed by the law of connection between “cause” and “effect”. Already in the early 1860s, Dilthey asserted – in agreement with the German historian Johann Gustav Droysen and his polemic against the methodological dogmatism of the positivists – the autonomy of historical knowledge from the methods of the *Naturwissenschaften*. As he wrote in the *Preußische Zeitung* in 1861:

We owe the method of the empirical sciences, as they have been applied with such great success for two centuries, to Bacon. He prescribed a great quantity of rules, without whose observance no useful and certain result could be achieved. Direct knowledge

¹¹ Dilthey [1865] 2005. The essay appeared in the *Preußische Jahrbücher*, Bd. XV, Heft 6, pp. 596–650; then reprinted in *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*.

¹² Waitz 1849, pp. 25 f. In the first two editions of the *Grundzüge* (1874, 1880), also Wundt adopted the distinction between “explanatory” and “descriptive” psychology, on which he based the division of psychology, gradually abandoning it through the fifth and sixth editions (1902–1903, 1908–1911) where this distinction disappeared (Araujo 2016, pp. 185 f.).

[*Die Autopsie*] must replace transmitted convictions; the analogies of nature must be made to prevail against human opinions; observation through instruments must replace bare sensory experience [...]. All these prescriptions are inapplicable in the field of history. We cannot know [*durch Autopsie kennenlernen*] the situations of the past directly; we cannot discover through any experiment under which conditions a historical event might not have occurred¹³.

The need for a “new Bacon” – as Dilthey continued in 1860 – who would prescribe the rules to be applied in the field of historiography in order to achieve “positive results” and avoid “errors”, derives from the fact that “historical *empiria*” requires different rules from those of natural science. An *empiria* without the proper methods “ceases to be science”:

Phrenology is a collection of assertions and theories, each of which finds confirmation in a series of experiences. One can hardly dispute the fact that in various men with a strong sense of orientation, a notable elevation of the frontal bone above the eyebrows has been found, and that in many important musicians, prominent temporal bones have been observed. Nevertheless, phrenology is not a science, because its experiences are not collected according to the proper method, because the analogies drawn from nature clash with the fact that the functions of the brain cannot be traced through observation of the skull. Buckle represents, among historians, what the phrenologist represents among physiologists. Instead of attempting to penetrate into the facts of the historical world, he merely remains on its surface¹⁴.

For this reason, Dilthey was convinced that psychology that constitutes the key to access the historical-social world cannot be constructive, hypothetical, scientific-naturalistic. It must be different; it must preserve – à la Schiller, we might say, – the total human being, in its methods and in its results. Thus, what is the problem with mathematical and constructive psychology? The answer is the following: it borrows the methods of “explanatory sciences”.

Dilthey’s mature formulation of the distinction between explanatory and descriptive psychology, articulated in the 1895 *Ideen*, had its roots in these reflections as well as in the great divide which split the German philosophical and psychological context during the ‘40 and 70’s. It is no coincidence that his conception crystallized in 1865 – a year that marked the beginning of systematic philosophical resistance to Herbartian psychology. To understand this development fully, we must once again examine the broader context.

Lange’s *Grundlegung der mathematischen Psychologie* (Foundation of mathematical psychology, 1865) mathematically refuted Herbart’s threshold concept and exposed fundamental errors in Drobisch’s systematization¹⁵. Lange’s main polemical focus (such as for many detractors of Herbart’s psychology) was the strong link,

¹³ Dilthey [1861] 1972, p. 105. These passages are taken from Dilthey’s important review of Thomas Buckle’s *History of Civilisation in England*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

¹⁵ Cf. Drobisch 1850.

suggested by Herbart, between psychology and metaphysics¹⁶. His verdict as to this critical point was harsh; Herbart's "metaphysical sickness" [*metaphysische Krankheit*], and the metaphysical contradictions to which he had linked psychology did not prevent him from avoiding some "clumsy errors". Most notable of these was the assumption of multiple inhibited representations in consciousness; if the soul were a "simple essence", it would only have "a single representation" to which it would be identical, and there would be no "evolution", "change", or "inhibition" between multiple representations. If Herbart's idea of a soul as a simple essence is correct, it follows that this simple essence would not be able to accept two "mutually limiting" representations in such a way that "a remainder advances from both"¹⁷. The problem deriving from the "remainder of mutual limitations" was one of Lange's major criticism to Herbart's psychology. What type of principles led Herbart to make this mistake? The explanation is that there is no such thing as a "threshold of consciousness", as Herbart emphasized in the *Lehrbuch zur Psychologie* (Textbook of psychology):

A representation is conscious in the sense that it is not inhibited and is a genuine representation. It enters consciousness when it rises from a state of complete suppression. As a result, it is on the threshold of consciousness. It is critical to calculate how intense a representation must be in order to stand exactly on the threshold of consciousness, beside two or more intense representations, in order [...] to pass into actual representation¹⁸.

To summarize, for Lange Herbart's mathematical psychology begins with an inaccurate assumption; the existence of a *threshold of consciousness*, which Herbart (like Drobisch) considers to be an "empirically established" fact. Nonetheless, as Lange expressly pointed out, "in a certain sense" the "faculties of the soul" may be called "empirical facts" as well¹⁹.

Only a few years later, Bona Meyer's *Kants Psychologie* (Kant's psychology, 1870) mounted a vigorous defense of faculties psychology, arguing that Herbart's "futile

¹⁶ Lange 1865, pp. 1-2; Bona Meyer (1870, pp. 87, 90-91, 301-302) was one of the most vocal opponents of the metaphysical presupposition of the "simplicity of the soul". Wilhelm Wundt also disputed Herbart's postulated relationship between metaphysics and psychology – as did Beneke in the *Neue Psychologie* (1845) – in his *Vorlesungen über die Menschen- und Thierseele* (Wundt 1863, pp. 4-10). It is noteworthy that Wundt was very interested in Schopenhauer's work. He dedicated several interesting pages to him in Wundt 1877, pp. 505-510; as concerns his debt to the author of *Die Welt*, see the brief references in Araujo 2016, pp. 70-71, 111 f. See also Wundt 1896, p. 23.

¹⁷ Lange 1865, pp. 3-4. : as Lange pointed out, a ratio between the starting force of x and the total of those of the other representations is used by Herbart to calculate the "remaining inhibition" of a given force x . As a result, there can never be a situation in which "remainder = 0", i. e., a representation can never completely disappear. Lange's rebuttal plainly contradicted Herbart's conjecture (cf. Herbart [1825] 1964, §§44-45).

¹⁸ Herbart [1834] 1964, §16.

¹⁹ Lange 1865, p. 22. It is noteworthy that in the second edition of the *Geschichte des Materialismus*, Lange benefited from Cohen's *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* and eliminated references to the term *Vermögen*, to avoid Herbartian criticisms (cf. Bertolini 1990, pp. 15-16).

reluctance” toward faculties prevented him from grasping “the qualitatively substantial diversity” of mental acts (representing, feeling, and desiring). Contrary to Herbart’s view, when discussing *mental faculties*, “we are not dealing with convenient logical generic concepts or arbitrary formations of our thought, but with real elementary distinctions among the forces of a determinate being”. He continued:

Well, according to Herbart’s metaphysical conception of substance and change, the soul is a simple essence, not only without parts but without any multiplicity in its quality; it has no dispositions or faculties whatsoever, neither for receiving anything nor for producing. Originally it has no representations, no feelings, no desires²⁰.

Having demonstrated that Herbart’s view of the soul’s simplicity is not only conceptually weak, but also inadequate to explain experience, Meyer questioned whether “the entire richness of our soul’s life can truly be derived solely from the supposed continuous accumulation of representations”, adding at the conclusion of his defense of the doctrine of *Seelenvermögen* (faculties of the soul):

I would be particularly gratified if Herbartians would subject this critique of their mentor, as well as my foundation of the opposing view, to rigorous criticism. Their critique will not find me indifferent²¹.

Significantly, the neo-Kantian response during the mid 60’s emphasized: (1) the *active*, spontaneous character of consciousness; (2) vindication of transcendental aesthetic through Helmholtz’s physiological research; (3) rejection of the threshold model as implying problematic passivity; (4) defense of qualitative distinctions between mental “faculties” against mechanistic reduction. The conflict between these factions was not merely technical but reflected fundamentally opposed anthropologies: Herbartian realism versus Kantian idealism, mechanistic calculation versus qualitative distinction.

4. *Dilthey’s 1894-1895 Ideen: Preserving Psychic Totality Against Mathematical Reductionism*

Let us retrace the stages explored thus far. Dilthey first assimilated Schiller in 1852, when an irreconcilable dualism emerged in the background of German philosophical culture – the return to prominence of the Herbart-Schopenhauer antithesis. In 1865 we find the first attestation of a program envisioning an alternative psychology of analytic and descriptive character, while that very same year also wit-

²⁰ Bona Meyer 1870, pp. 69, 101-102.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 87, 90-91, 301-302.

nessed Lange's important critique of the Herbartian program, which preceded by only a few months the publication of the *Geschichte des Materialismus*²².

One final crucial piece of the puzzle remains before proceeding: another fundamental publishing event that suggests how powerfully the Schillerian echoes may have influenced Dilthey's trajectory during the crucial decade of his intellectual development, which led to the first elaboration of his analytic psychology – that is the publication between 1856 and 1864 of the three volumes of Rudolf Hermann Lotze's *Mikrokosmos* (Microcosm). These influential pages warned of the danger that the *mechanization of the cosmos* might undermine the *integrity* of the *human microcosm* – which Lotze characterized as “more artful than others because it feels its own movements and admires those of others”²³. Significantly, Lotze invoked Schiller as “the last guardian of mythology” against the twin threats of cultural secularization and cosmic mechanization²⁴. This appeal to Schiller's humanistic vision as a bulwark against reductive naturalism resonated powerfully in the context of the *Materialismusstreit* and the ascendancy of Herbartian mathematical psychology. Lotze's *Mikrokosmos* thus amplified the Schillerian alternative during the years when Dilthey was formulating his own critique of mechanistic approaches to mental life. The connection acquires biographical significance: Dilthey succeeded Lotze in the Berlin chair following the latter's sudden death in 1883²⁵.

Just as Newton's *Principia* marked a turning point in 1687, so did the *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften* establishing a milestone in 1883 for the study of the human, social, and historical sciences²⁶. In certain respects, Dilthey was a Newton

²² As Lange wrote in the *Grundlegung's* Vorbemerkungen: “I felt forced to address Herbart's mathematical psychology in my soon-to-be-published *History of Materialism*, despite the fact that the work's structure forbade a full exposition of its ideas. I owe considerable gratitude to Herbart's school, and a sense of veneration stops me from passing judgment on mathematical psychology” (Lange 1865, p. 5). As he pointed out in a letter to Kambli on September 27th, 1858: “Those [speculation] days are over! Hopefully throughout Germany. In my opinion, the Hegelian system is a step backward towards scholasticism. Herbart, to whom I initially adhered [*anschloß*], was just a bridge to Kant, to whom many solid scholars are now returning in order to do what he only partially completed: abolish [*vernichten*] metaphysics” (Ellissen 1891, pp. 105-106). Lange's *Nachlass*, preserved at the Stadt-Archiv in Duisburg, contains 14 pages (undated) of notes on Herbart's metaphysics, as well as much material devoted to the study of psychology: a *Bonner Vorlesung* (1856/1857, 709 pages), a *Vortrag* concerning the *Critique of Psychology* (undated, 13 pages), a lecture on psychophysics from 1872/1874 (40 pages), Zurich lectures on psychology from 1871 (1871), and various other fragments (1855, 1871/1872, 1866/1870): cf. H. Schoeps, J. H. Knoll 1975, pp. 246-247.

²³ Lotze 1856, pp. xi, 29.

²⁴ Lotze 1856, pp. xiii-xv.

²⁵ As a 1881 letter to Wilhelm Scherer testifies, Dilthey hastened the completion of the first volume of the *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften* – a project long in preparation – driven also by the need to publish a “systematic work” for the appointment at the University of Berlin following Hermann Lotze's sudden death (Jonach and Rodi 1982, p. X).

²⁶ Cf. Pulte 2016, pp. 74-75.

of the human sciences, while his unfinished work was immediately presented by its author as a “Critique of Historical Reason”²⁷.

The first stage in the journey that led to the *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften* (1883) was the *Grundriß der Logik und des Systems der philosophischen Wissenschaften* (Outline of Logic and the System of Philosophical Sciences, 1865), an important essay for Dilthey’s early research on the foundation of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. In that work, Dilthey characterized “logic” as “theory of scientific knowledge, its forms and its methods”, following Eduard Zeller and Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg²⁸. The entire task of the *Einleitung* was to provide a theoretical-epistemological account of the historical world and its distinctive “object”. How do the natural sciences and the human sciences differ in terms of their procedure?

Neither the “Historical School”, nor Droysen, nor indeed Comte, Buckle, or John Stuart Mill had answered this question: none of them had succeeded in grounding the “philosophical foundations” of the “human sciences” in a “theory of knowledge”. As Dilthey noted in 1883:

In opposition to the methods of a Mill or a Buckle, who approach the human sciences to a certain extent from the outside, the task must be resolved in this way: to justify the human sciences through a theory of knowledge, to legitimate and protect their independent configuration, and to definitively set aside the subordination of both their principles and their methods to those of the natural sciences²⁹.

Dilthey had long been convinced that the *Geisteswissenschaften* were still living through their youth, just as the natural sciences had once been merely descriptive of nature. As he wrote already in the late 1850s: “Just as the entire corporeal nature is governed by laws of motion, so too – though obviously in essentially different ways – is spiritual life governed by laws of motion”³⁰.

²⁷ Dilthey wrote about a “new” critique of reason as early as 1859 (Misch 1960, pp. 80, 120). He was also firmly convinced of the importance of *Erkenntnistheorie* and the “back to Kant” that occurred in the mid-nineteenth century, expressing this conviction in his 1867 Basel inaugural lecture: “beyond Hegel, Schelling, and Fichte”, philosophy must follow “Kant’s path” (Dilthey [1867] 1957, p. 13). On Dilthey’s neo-Kantianism see Mezzananza 2006, pp. 56-73.

²⁸ As Trendelenburg wrote: “The *Einzelwissenschaften*” successfully pursue their own path, but without accounting for their own *form* and *methods* – an objective that it is logic’s task to fulfill, since it alone can “observe”, “compare”, and “bring to consciousness” what remains “unconscious” in the progress of the sciences (Trendelenburg 1840, p. iv). Cf. Zeller 1862 and Hartung 2010, pp. 163-166.

²⁹ Dilthey [1883] 1959, p. 109.

³⁰ Dilthey [mid 1850s] 1977, p. 206. The project of investigating the “laws of motion” ruling the events of the historical world owed much to Trendelenburg’s teaching. Reconciling aspects of Herbart’s realism with a revival of Aristotle and Kant, Trendelenburg developed in his 1840 *Logische Untersuchungen* a critique of the first triad of Hegelian logic; his critique pivoted precisely on the idea of “motion”. In Trendelenburg’s view, motion represented the only common element to “Being” and “Thought”: in the first case, regarding physical bodies, it should be understood as Aristotle had stressed it; in the second case, it was Kant who had best described the function of motion within thought, demonstrating its crucial role in the procedure underlying mathematical conceptualization. This relationship with Kant emerges even more clearly, however, from Trendelenburg’s later

Convinced that psychology could serve as the foundation of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, Dilthey nevertheless believed that to aspire to such a role, this new science needed to abandon the constructive method of Herbart and his epigones – from Waitz to Volkmann – in order to constitute itself as an “analytic and descriptive” science. Herbart’s “extraordinary significance” for “the progress of explanatory psychology consisted in the fact that he took rigorously and scientifically seriously the methodical requirements contained in the project of explanation according to the natural sciences”, adopting the “presupposition” of “determinism”. Yet it is also true that “the procedure of explanatory psychology was born from an unjustified extension of natural scientific concepts to the domain of psychic life and history”³¹.

The reason for his criticism about the constructive method of Herbart and the Herbartians was readily comprehensible: could the foundational science of the *Geisteswissenschaften* adopt a method that transposes “scientific-naturalistic” hypothetical construction onto “psychic life”? In Dilthey’s view:

Psychology must take the opposite path to that followed by the representatives of the constructive method. Its procedure must be analytic, not constructive. It must start from developed psychic life, not deduce it from elementary processes³².

In this regard, a particularly interesting aspect concerns Dilthey’s critique of Kant on the psychological front. According to Dilthey, Kant’s “fundamental error” – an error that Herbart had in fact followed in justifying a psychometry of the soul – “lies in the extension of the concept of phenomenon to inner experiences”. As Dilthey argued:

In inner experience, according to Kant, we have only phenomena – that is, psychic facts apprehended in the form of inner sense (time) and connected through the forms of the understanding [...]. Even the ultimate level that this analysis encounters, the concept of the *a priori*, is merely an expression of the intuition of time and causal relation, and only within this does such a concept have meaning. Therefore, the Critique of Pure Reason itself, in all that it discovers, is merely an analysis of appearances. Apperception is as little an actual psychic fact as the *a priori* or the ideas can be³³.

More than in the *Einleitung*, it was in the *Ideen* that an epistemological discussion of the foundations of constructive and explanatory psychology, contrasted with those of analytic and descriptive psychology, fully emerged. Here the foundation of descriptive psychology and the critique of the Herbartian orientation most clearly reflects Schiller’s influence on Dilthey.

work (Trendelenburg 1867, pp. 273-276). For an overview on this point, see Beiser 2014, p. 40. In 1903, Dilthey acknowledged his teacher Trendelenburg as both “friend” and “master”, whose “great influence” on his own intellectual formation he did not hesitate to recognize, recalling his early studies in Berlin in his *Rede zum 70 Geburtstag* (Dilthey [1903] 1957, p. 7).

³¹ Dilthey [1894/1895] 1957, p. 195.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169.

³³ Dilthey [1870/1895] 1982, pp. 33, 216.

At the root of the methodological inadequacy of mathematical and explanatory psychology lies a conception of explanatory science typical of the natural sciences. In 1895 Dilthey wrote, contrasting the psychophysical tradition:

By explanatory science must be conceived every subsumption of a field of phenomena under a causal nexus, through a limited number of univocally determined elements. This concept designates the ideal of a science as it has been constituted, especially with the development of atomic physics³⁴.

Explanatory psychology, following this model, constructs an *abstract totality* based on hypotheses – beginning with assumptions such as Herbart’s ones (mental representations conceived as forces, which are subject to laws = the three-body problem, elastic collision theory)³⁵. For Dilthey, the fundamental problem with this approach, was that it failed to capture “the entire human nature and the nexus of its contents”; mathematical psychology employed what Dilthey called *segments of vital fullness*, mixing in presuppositions of naturalistic origin that were inappropriate for understanding mental life. For this reason, Dilthey proposed descriptive psychology as an alternative, enabling “a universally valid connection of psychological knowledge, in which the whole of psychic life is *clearly and intuitively* visible”³⁶ (here, Dilthey’s 1883 tribute to Schiller from the *Einleitung* naturally comes to mind). Crucially, descriptive psychology *ends* with hypotheses, while explanatory psychology – exemplified by Herbart’s treatment of mental representations as forces subject to mechanical principles – *begins* with them. On the contrary, descriptive psycholo-

³⁴ Dilthey [1894/1895] 1957, pp. 139-140.

³⁵ In measuring the degree of inhibition of mental representations, Herbart’s starting point was a principle of Eulerian origin translated into the psychic realm: namely, that representations should not properly be considered “forces in themselves”, but rather their mutual resistance – expressed through their elastic impact – constitutes their “measurable force”. Significantly, in the *Elemente der Psychophysik*, Fechner paid homage to a triad expressed in the lemma: “Euler (Herbart, Drobisch)”. As concerns Herbart’s interest in physics and mechanics, see the reference to Lagrange at the end of §§ 71, 75-76 of *Allgemeine Metaphysik* (Herbart [1828] 1964, pp. 142, 147-149). See also the interesting letter from Herbart to Brandis of January 1832 containing a detailed explanation of the physical-mechanical convictions underlying the ‘metaphysics of the reals’ (Herbart [1832] 1964, p. 289). While Newton had integrated the concept of ‘force’ into a natural philosophy equipped with physical and mathematical principles, Lagrange used it only as a tool in a purely analytical system devoid of philosophical reflections and references to geometry, where principles functioned exclusively as formal axioms for the deductive organization of the theory. Euler represents the moment of transition in this historical process of formalization of mechanics: he introduced the *vis viva* as a derived concept, that is, as the line integral of the Newtonian force (Pulte 2012, pp. 183-199). For an in-deep examination of another example of the application of mechanics to the study of the psyche, specifically the application of the “principle of least action”, see Russo Krauss 2020, pp. 53-64.

³⁶ Dilthey [1894/1895] 1957, pp. 175, 194. On this point, also Wundt wrote: “the mode of knowledge of psychology is, in contrast to that of the natural sciences, immediate and intuitive, insofar as the substrate of its explanations is the same concrete reality, without the use of abstract auxiliary concepts” (Wundt 1896, p. 12).

gy's validity depends on embracing *psychic totality* without applying natural scientific constructive methods.

The formulation of this methodology remained problematic yet proved remarkably fertile for twentieth-century philosophy. It germinated in the midst of the post-Kantian debate between Herbartians and neo-Kantians over the possibilities and proper role of psychology within the classification of sciences, and more broadly, in the articulation of philosophical knowledge itself. This contested realm – where questions of psychological foundations intersected with epistemological concerns about the structure of social inquiry – generated methodological innovations whose influence extended far beyond their immediate polemical context. Could Dilthey's approach be considered a continuation of first-generation neo-Kantianism? Certainly, insofar as he shared Lange's and Meyer's concern for preserving qualitative distinctions in mental life. Yet Dilthey moved beyond their defensive stance – which remained tied to Kantian faculties theory – toward a positive phenomenological methodology adequate to ground the human sciences. Nonetheless, Dilthey's alternative remained largely neglected by the principal schools of Baden and Marburg neo-Kantianism³⁷. The mainstream neo-Kantian movement focused primarily on epistemological questions concerning the natural sciences and the logic of validity, leaving Dilthey's phenomenologically-oriented psychology in a marginal position within the broader neo-Kantian landscape³⁸. The neo-Kantian movement, especially after Hermann Cohen and Wilhelm Windelband, increasingly defined itself against psychological approaches to transcendental questions, viewing Dilthey's psychologically grounded human sciences as a threat to critical philosophy's methodological purity³⁹.

Finally, a piece of evidence confirms the relevance of what might be called an *artistic* – rather than atomizing and mathematizing – approach to the study of the psyche. Many years have passed since 1883 and the 1895 *Ideen*. Dilthey has been dead for three years, when Wilhelm Windelband delivered the final act in the fundamental debate on the foundation of the *Kulturwissenschaften* and the role and sta-

³⁷ As Rickert replied to Dilthey on this point: "Consciousness is a subject insofar as it stands opposed to all objects", including "psychic events". Indeed, psychic facts do not have a different mode of givenness to consciousness; for this reason, no internal/external dualism is admissible, nor any phenomenological distinction between "external object" and "psychic fact": the totality of psychic life is entirely and completely a "natural object" and, like the "physical world", "inexhaustible in principle" (Rickert 1929 [1896], pp. 155, 185).

³⁸ Regarding intersections with Paul Natorp's contemporaneous attempt at an anti-naturalistic foundation for psychology, see the epistolary exchanges published by Lessing 1985, pp. 200-204.

³⁹ On the focal points of the debate between Dilthey and the Baden School concerning the place of psychology within the classification of sciences and its proper methodology, see Stumpf 1892, pp. 468-469. For a comprehensive analysis of Dilthey's critique of neo-Kantian philosophy of science and its consequences for his theory of the human sciences, see Makkreel 2010; Luft 2016, pp. 176-198.

tus of psychology within them. The year is 1914. In what seems to be a posthumous response to Dilthey on precisely this point, Windelband wrote:

The psychology that the historian needs is something totally different from psychology as science: it is the psychology of everyday life, the psychology of knowledge and understanding of man, the psychology of poets and great statesmen – this psychology that no one can learn or teach [...]. This psychology is an art, not a science⁴⁰.

Without realizing it, Windelband highlighted the very nexus between Dilthey and Schiller regarding psychological methodology – confirming what Dilthey had learned from Schiller decades earlier: the psychology capable of accessing human historical reality must be an “art” rather than a natural science, a holistic, synthetic grasp rather than atomizing analysis.

5. *Concluding remarks*

This article has recovered the Schillerian lineage in Dilthey’s conception of analytic and descriptive psychology, demonstrating how the aesthetic method – holistic contemplation preserving vital unity – became the epistemological foundation for a science of psychic events adequate to ground the *Geisteswissenschaften*. Three crucial moments structured this development. In 1852, as Dilthey first encountered Schiller, the Herbart-Schopenhauer antithesis crystallized a fundamental divide in German psychology. Between 1852 and 1865, Lotze’s *Mikrokosmos* (1856-1864) amplified the Schillerian resonance, invoking the poet as “the last guardian of mythology” against the “mechanization of the cosmos” – precisely during the years when Dilthey was formulating his critique of mechanistic psychology. In 1865, the watershed year, Dilthey’s initial articulation of *Realpsychologie* converged with Lange’s mathematical refutation of Herbartian theory and Meyer’s defense of Kant’s psychology against the mechanical foundations of psychology promoted by the Herbartians. This intellectual constellation provided the framework for Dilthey’s alternative to mathematical psychology that preserved the total, fully developed human being against Herbart’s fragmentation of consciousness into quantifiable forces. When Dilthey wrote in 1883 that *Schiller highlighted how art paves the way for the scientific study of the human world*, he acknowledged that aesthetic synthesis provided the methodological model for accessing consciousness *from within*. This Schillerian foundation had profound consequences: Dilthey’s descriptive psychology established frameworks influencing phenomenology, hermeneutics, and the human sciences tradition, while remaining paradoxically marginal within neo-Kantianism itself.

⁴⁰ Windelband [1914] 1920, pp. 337 f.

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“Only in Error There Is Life”.

Nature and Idealization in Vaihinger and Schiller

FRANCESCO PISANO

1. *Introduction: Vaihinger's use of Schiller*

The philosophical work of Hans Vaihinger (1852-1933) is intricately linked to his role as a promoter of Kant's philosophy. Between the 1890s and early 1930s, Vaihinger played a key part in establishing neo-Kantian institutions. In 1896, he founded *Kant-Studien*, which quickly became the leading academic platform for disseminating the new *Akademie-Ausgabe* of Kant's works to the international Kantian studies community. In 1904, on the centenary of Kant's death, he, together with his close collaborator Benno Erdmann (1851-1921), founded the *Kant-Gesellschaft* (Kantian Society) to provide Kantian studies with an official international platform. He remained the editor of the journal and the president of the society until 1931. Overall, for nearly thirty years, he made significant contributions to the unification, organization, and academic establishment of neo-Kantianism in Germany.

Therefore, compared with his modest academic career as an extraordinary professor in Halle from 1894 to 1906, Vaihinger's true profession was, in fact, the promotion of Kantianism. His influence on German culture should be examined taking this effort into account, and his position in German philosophical discourse should be assessed in light of it.

The publication of Ernst Haeckel's (1834-1919) *Die Welträthsel* (The Enigma of the World) in 1899 had a profound impact on Vaihinger's cultural environment¹.

¹ E. Haeckel, *Die Welträthsel. Gemeinverständliche Studien über monistische Philosophie*, Strauss, Bonn, 1899. The first English translation appeared the following year: *The Riddle of the Universe at the close of the nineteenth century*, Harper & Brothers, New York-London, 1900. By 1912, *Die Welträthsel* had been translated, according to Haeckel's own meticulous tabulations, into twenty-four languages, including Armenian, Chinese, Hebrew, Sanskrit, and Esperanto. The book sold over 40.000 copies in the first year of its publication and well over ten times that during the next thirty years, and this only in the German editions. By contrast, during the three decades between 1859 and 1890, Darwin's *Origin of Species* sold only some 39.000 copies in the six English editions. See the introduction to a modern edition of *Die Welträtsel*, ed. by O. Klohr (Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 1961, pp. vii–viii). See also E. Krausse, “Wege zum Bestseller, Haeckels Werk im Lichte der Verlegerkorrespondenz”, in Id. (ed.), *Der Brief als wissenschaftshistorische Quelle*, Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, Berlin, 2005, pp. 145-70 (publication details in pp. 165-166). By 1914, when

Haeckel's book quickly became a bestseller, with hundreds of thousands of copies sold within a few years. It promoted a *monistic* worldview, within which a positivistic epistemology, a materialistic ontology, and a deterministic ethics were nested. Monism rejected dualisms, such as the distinctions between mind and body, or idea and nature. It also rejected metaphysics as a whole. However, beyond the decisive influence of Darwin's theory of natural selection (which Haeckel was credited with being the first to popularize in Germany, albeit with significant distortions), Haeckel's monism also inherited, in fact, an immanentist tradition (and, therefore, a metaphysical position) that extended at least from Spinoza onwards. Therefore, it stood in stark contrast to the neo-Kantian program all across the board: a positivist epistemology versus a constructivist one, a materialist ontology versus an idealist one, a deterministic ethic versus an ethic of freedom, and finally, a rejected, disguised metaphysics versus a metaphysics that was critically reconsidered as a knowledge-regulating device².

Although public acknowledgment of this contrast had to be limited due to Haeckel's academic authority and scientific reputation, the conflict between these two positions became an important topic of discussion in the pages of *Kant-Studien* – at least, immediately after the publication of *Die Welträthsel*. The young Richard Hönigswald (1875-1947), who in 1900 published a polemically Kantian booklet³ against Haeckel's manifesto, received high praise from Professor Vaihinger for this⁴, and was then asked to write a presentation of his own booklet in issue 5 (1901) of *Kant-Studien* – the same issue in which Erich Adickes (1866-1928) published an extensive essay titled *Kant contra Haeckel*⁵.

the celebratory volume *Was wir Ernst Haeckel verdanken. Ein Buch der Verehrung und Dankbarkeit* (ed. by H. Schmidt, Unesma, Leipzig, 1914) was published, the book had sold 310.000 copies in German and 250.000 copies in English. The sales figures for the German edition are reported by Schmidt (op. cit., vol. I, p. 155). The sales figures for the English translation are reported by McCabe (ibid., vol. II, p. 244). For the broader context, see H. Weber, *Monistische und antimonistische Weltanschauung. Eine Auswahlbibliographie*, Ernst-Haeckel-Haus-Studien, Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, Berlin, 2000, and E. Haeckel, "Eine autobiographische Skizze. Mit einem Nachwort von Heinrich Schmidt", in G. Heberer (ed.), *Der gerechtfertigte Haeckel. Einblicke in seine Schriften auf Anlaß des Erscheinens seines Hauptwerks 'Generelle Morphologie der Organismen' vor 100 Jahren*, Gustav Fischer Verlag, Stuttgart, 1968, pp. 3-14.

² See E. Clarke, "Neo-Kantianism, Darwinism, and the limits of historical explanation", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 29/4, 2019, pp. 590-613; H. Heidenreich, "Materialisten, Neukantianer, Spiritisten. Kantrezeptionen um 1900", in H. Heidenreich, F. Stengel (eds.), *Kant um 1900*, De Gruyter, Berlin-Boston, 2022, pp. 7-42. From these sources and those cited in the previous footnote, it is clear that, although neo-Kantianism was dominant academically at that time, it was in fact fighting a minority battle in popular culture.

³ R. Hönigswald, *Zum Begriff der „exakten Naturwissenschaft“*. Eine kritische Studie, Alexander Czéhsche Buchdruckerei, Alternburg, 1899. However, it is the second edition (Avenarius, Leipzig, 1900) that contains a polemical insert on Haeckel's book, which had just been published.

⁴ See Hönigswald's letter to Vaihinger dated 28.5.1900, digitalized and freely accessible at <<https://elekpub.bib.uni-wuppertal.de/edition-fghv/content/titleinfo/7877348>>.

⁵ H. Vaihinger (ed.), *Kant-Studien. Philosophische Zeitschrift*, Reuther & Reichard, Berlin, 1900, pp. 340-383. Hönigswald's presentation is at pp. 229-230.

Beyond coordinating the responses of young neo-Kantians to Haeckel's book, Vaihinger also addressed monism at a philosophical level. Two of his writings are emblematic of this philosophical work: the essay "Kant – ein Metaphysiker?" (Kant – a Metaphysician?, 1900), and the special issue of *Kant-Studien* he edited for the centenary of Friedrich Schiller's death, entitled *Schiller als Philosoph und seine Beziehungen zu Kant* (Schiller as philosopher and his relationships with Kant, 1905)⁶. The former essay defends a balanced view of Kantian critical metaphysics against the excesses of spiritualism and materialism. The journal issue presents Schiller, through the contributions of important neo-Kantian scholars such as Windelband and Bauch, as the bearer of the "innermost kernel" of Kantian philosophy.

This kernel is essentially dualistic, based on Kant's "antinomic way of thinking"⁷: it involves oppositions that Kant considered fundamental to empirical knowledge, such as those between causality and freedom, phenomenon and noumenon, and nature and idea. Keeping these oppositions unresolved is essential to avoid falling into the monist's metaphysical *Schwärmerei* while maintaining a dialectical relationship between the poles.

The following paragraphs the ways, limitations, and context of Vaihinger's use of Schiller as a supporter of a neo-Kantian dualism against monism, specifically as the promoter of a *dialectical dualism* between nature and idea. My claim is that Schiller serves as a figure or placeholder for a specific interpretation of the concept of idealization, which involves creating ideal representations while maintaining a strong connection to the subject's factual psychological structure.

This claim can only be understood by considering the fundamental features of Vaihinger's fictionalism. The core of Vaihinger's fictionalism – which he viewed as the most coherent extension of Kantian philosophy in the era of anti-metaphysical positivism – is the idea that the knowing subject is constantly adapting to its environment while *at the same time* striving towards a fictional ideal of truth and correspondence with reality. Vaihinger's fictions are adaptively useful, and their epistemic value lies in this usefulness. However, realizing this value in life and culture means simultaneously embracing an exquisitely Kantian ideal of autonomy, which consists of the ability to create one's own way of life amid a chaotic and hostile flow of sensations. The ethical and epistemic ideal of truth is fictional; however, pursuing it as if it were real enables us to live in nature⁸. Conversely, natural life is unlivable without the support of the idea, even if the idea does not originate deterministically from

⁶ H. Vaihinger, "Kant – ein Metaphysiker?", in AA. VV., *Philosophische Abhandlungen. Christoph Sigwart zu seinem 70. Geburtstag von einer Reihe von Fachgenossen gewidmet*, Mohr, Tübingen, 1900, pp. 133-158; H. Vaihinger (ed.), *Schiller als Philosoph und seine Beziehungen zu Kant*, Reuther & Reichard, Berlin, 1905.

⁷ I am referring to the title of H. Vaihinger, "Kants antithetische Geistesart", in M. Oehler (ed.), *Der Manen Friedrich Nietzsches*, Musarion, München, 1921, pp. 151-182.

⁸ C. Bouriau defended an interpretation of Vaihinger's fictionalism that highlights its Kantian roots, and therefore its differences from American pragmatism, in *Le comme si: Kant, Vaihinger et le fictionalisme*, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2013. A detailed analysis of Vaihinger's relationship with

our own natural need for adaptation and prediction. Nature and idea are, therefore, mutually irreducible *a parte subiecti*, from the point of view of the acting and knowing subject, which is conditioned by fictional representations – even if, *a parte obiecti*, there is actually only nature (that is, environments and organisms striving to survive and reproduce in them).

For Vaihinger, this delicate and asymmetrical dualism was, in fact, the core of Kantian philosophy. It represented the Kantian response to an era wary of all transcendence: a response that acknowledged the fictional character of the ideal, while also demonstrating its inherent, indispensable distinction from mere natural facts. Thus, this response was also where Vaihinger's two sides – the Kantian promoter and the post-Kantian fictionalist philosopher – converged. And Schiller's poetry played a crucial role in shaping it.

The initial examination of Vaihinger's direct references to Schiller (paragraph 2) will be recontextualized through an examination of the tensions inherent in Vaihinger's fictionalism (paragraph 3) and in Schiller's texts (paragraph 4). Vaihinger's Schiller will emerge as an advocate for idealization, viewing the creation of fictions rooted in imagination as an expression of a genuine psychological activity and an ethically engaged life. Paragraph 5 will then reevaluate the overall coherence of Vaihinger's use of Schiller for defending Kantian dualism between idea and nature in an era of materialistic monism.

2. *A survey of Vaihinger's mentions of Schiller*

Schiller's work *did* have a significant effect on Vaihinger's fictionalism, since Vaihinger himself admits it in his autobiography. He writes:

Last but not least, I must mention Schiller's poems and treatises, for they too had a significant influence on me at that period. Every earnest young student is inspired and fired by Schiller, but this Swabian poet had a special appeal for me. Schiller's philosophical poems, in which he contrasts the ideal world of pure form with the empirical world, were easily linked to the Platonic influences mentioned above. Many of Schiller's verses made an indelible impression on me, for instance, the words '*In error only there is life, and knowledge must be death*', words which in certain respects have become the foundation of my theory of fiction. Schiller's philosophical treatises were, of course, still too difficult for me to attempt, but I understood his theory of play as the primary element of artistic creation and enjoyment, and it had a great influence on the development of my thought, for later on I recognized in play the as if: the driving force of aesthetic activity and intuition⁹.

Kantian transcendental philosophy can be found in F. Pisano, "Hans Vaihinger's Fictionalism in the Context of Kant's Transcendental Philosophy", *Studi Kantiani*, 38, 2025, pp. 71-90.

⁹ H. Vaihinger, "The Origin of the Philosophy of 'As if'", in Id., *The Philosophy of 'As if'. A System of the Theoretical, Practical, and Religious Fictions of Mankind. Second Edition*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., London, 1935, pp. xxiii-xxviii, specifically p. xxv.

Here, Vaihinger claims that Schiller's poems had a decisive influence on the philosophical core of fictionalism, particularly about the relationship between the ideal and experience, as well as the role of play as the driving force behind the "aesthetic activity" that produces fictions.

However, this statement somewhat conflicts with what can actually be found in Vaihinger's texts. Compared to the declared foundational importance of Schiller for Vaihinger's fictionalism, one finds relatively few mentions of the poet in Vaihinger's main works. *The Philosophy of 'As if'* (1922 edition) counts 8 mentions out of 861 pages. The *Commentary of the Critique of Pure Reason* (1922 edition, 2 volumes) counts 20 mentions out of 1106 pages. The early book *Hartmann, Dühring, and Lange* (1876) contains 7 mentions across 235 pages. Even "Kant – a Metaphysician?", which deals directly with the (exclusively) regulative function of metaphysical concepts, counts only a single direct mention out of 23 pages.

An exegetical crossroads has now been reached. One option is to trust Vaihinger's words. The other option is to discredit them and assume that, ultimately, Schiller is not so important to Vaihinger's fictionalism.

An argument could be made for the second option. Considering the programmatic value of Vaihinger's autobiography and his role as a promoter of Kantianism, together with the fact that the rediscovery of Schiller as a philosopher is one of the distinctive features of the neo-Kantian period, one could see Vaihinger's autobiographical statement about Schiller's foundational value for fictionalism merely as a declaration of sympathy for a neo-Kantian trend, with little philosophical substance. This reading would indirectly favor the unilateral inclusion of fictionalism under the label of pragmatism, leaving Vaihinger's Kantianism in the background, perhaps reducing it to the supposedly exclusively philological Kantianism of the *Commentary*.

However, a careful examination of Schiller's references favors the first option. Vaihinger has, in fact, offered a reliable testimony about Schiller's profound influence on the development of fictionalism, while downplaying it within his major works. Sure enough, when these works were first published (1876 for *Hartmann, Dühring, and Lange*; 1881 for the first volume of the *Commentary*; 1892 for the second; 1911 for the *Philosophy of As-If*), it would have been problematic for the fictionalist Vaihinger to display his *epistemological* Schillerism. In the neo-Kantian context, following Kuno Fischer's *Schiller as a Philosopher* (1858) and, in particular, Lange¹⁰, it became common practice to refer to Schiller in ethical, aesthetic, and, notably, metaphysical contexts. The critique of knowledge, however, was another matter. When considering the epistemological issues typical of the period 1880-1914 in Germany, those familiar with the history of German epistemology will immedi-

¹⁰ See F. A. Lange, *Einleitung und Kommentar zu Schillers philosophischen Gedichten*, ed. by O. A. Ellissen, Velhagen & Klasing, Bielefeld/Leipzig, 1896, as well as C. Russo Krauss' introduction to the recent Italian edition of Lange's book, *Il ruolo di Schiller nel neokantismo di Lange*, in F. A. Lange, *Le poesie filosofiche di Schiller*, FedOA - Federico II University Press, Napoli, 2025, pp. 9-18. See also P. Pecere's and C. Russo Krauss' essays in this volume.

ately think of naturalism and psychologism. And while the relationship between neo-Kantianism in the broad sense and psychologism is undoubtedly complex and multifaceted, institutional neo-Kantianism was markedly anti-psychologistic. In the 1920s, with the *Psychologismusstreit* practically over, Schiller's influence (which, as it will be shown, could be easily construed as psychologistic) would have been much less problematic to admit.

It is worth considering Vaihinger's references to Schiller more closely. Thematically, they can be divided into three main groups:

- 1) *Schiller and Goethe*. These references speak of Schiller's role in German poetry. Often, they pair Schiller with Goethe.
- 2) *Schiller and Kant*. These references speak of Schiller's role as an interpreter, critic, and popularizer of Kantian philosophy in German culture. Lange's interpretation of Schiller plays a significant role in this context.
- 3) *Schiller's fictionalism*. These mentions pertain to Schiller's own 'fictionalism' and 'pragmatism' regarding the value and meaning of poetic idealizations.

At first glance, groups 2 and 3 seem more relevant to the question of idealization. In fact, they are deeply intertwined. Schiller's interpretation of Kant is indeed crucial to understanding the value of his own original contributions to aesthetics, ethics, and epistemology.

In Vaihinger's eyes, Schiller's work is undoubtedly part of a Kantian philosophical tradition, offering an alternative to Hegelianism, Herbartianism, and materialism. Vaihinger's fictionalism also draws value from establishing this Kantian canon, tracing it back to his immediate inspirator, Lange, and presenting his fictionalism as a coherent and updated Kantianism for the new anti-metaphysical climate. In this sense, Schiller is a mirror of Vaihinger, and particularly of the tension between Vaihinger, the interpreter of Kant (as seen in the *Commentary*), and Vaihinger, the neo-Kantian philosopher (as seen in the *Philosophy of As-If*): Vaihinger presents himself as an original continuator of Kant's philosophy, just like Schiller¹¹. This is a first indication of Schiller's importance to Vaihinger and of the significance of his more or less tacit absorption into fictionalism.

Let us then start with categories 2 and 3. In *Hartmann, Dübring und Lange*, Vaihinger writes:

The recognition of the subjective origin of both causality and matter, as well as teleology and idea, alone makes the miracle of reconciliation possible. Without attributing reality in the ordinary sense to the world of ideas, one should, with Schiller, the enthusiastic

¹¹ H. Vaihinger, *Hartmann, Dübring und Lange: Zur Geschichte der deutschen Philosophie im XIX. Jahrhundert*, Baedeker, Iserlohn, 1876, p. 122. Here are the complete references for Vaihinger's two major works: H. Vaihinger, *Kommentar zu Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 2 vols., Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, Stuttgart, 1881-1892; Id., *Die Philosophie des Als Ob. System der theoretischen, praktischen und religiösen Fiktionen der Menschheit auf Grund eines idealistischen Positivismus. Mit einem Anhang über Kant und Nietzsche*, Meiner, Leipzig, 1911.

Kantian, enter into it with a free spirit, as into the true home of the spirits, into the land of thought of free, eternal, divine beauty, to drink aesthetic satisfaction from it¹².

The attitude of the free spirit is the attitude that derives aesthetic satisfaction from ideas. Kantian dualisms are resolved in this satisfaction: not through a shared logical foundation, but through the oppositional configuration that produces aesthetic enjoyment. At a purely epistemological level, however, these dualisms remain irreconcilable. Schiller's enthusiasm, as a practical attitude, overcomes them in creating a work of art that serves as a source of aesthetic enjoyment. Conversely, it is only from the perspective of the practicing artist – the enthusiast, not the contemplative philosopher – that Kantian dualisms can be overcome: to still call ourselves Kantians, it is crucial to preserve the antinomic character of the dualism between nature and the ideal at the epistemological level. However, to provide a viable competitor to monistic metaphysics, it is equally crucial to compensate for this interdiction by allowing its ethical and aesthetic resolution.

The main epistemological implication of this double request is the need for caution when interpreting Schiller's aestheticization of the ideal. In Schiller's time, aesthetics was still a young discipline, hovering on the cusp between the theory of sensibility and the theory of art¹³. "Making the supersensible sensible"¹⁴ posed a concrete epistemological risk, from a Kantian point of view: the entry of intellectual intuition into the realm of legitimate cognitive acts. Vaibinger's solution is to make the object of the sensible, aesthetic grasp of the supersensible fictional. The supersensible must present some features of the sensible object without its reality; it must be an imaginary object. Vaibinger identifies the prototype of such an imaginary object – fictional yet suited to the realm of the sensible – in Schiller's interpretation of Goethe's archetypal plant (*Urpflanze*). He writes:

The distinction that the Kantian Schiller makes, using the Kantian terminology, coincides with the distinction between hypothesis and fiction in the language of methodologists. When Schiller says that [Goethe's] animal archetype and the plant archetype do not represent an experience, he does not, of course, mean to say that such archetypal forms have hitherto not been found in experience but may perhaps be experienced at some future date. What he wishes to say, in accordance with the Kantian concept of experience, is that plant and animal archetypes as such are never to be found in any experience; that they cannot possibly be objects of experience, whether they have already been discovered, or eventually to be discovered and therefore assumed in the meantime as valid hypotheses. The archetype represents 'an idea', i.e., a mere concept of reason invented by us. One which we necessarily form is true, but which is nevertheless imaginary and to which no empirical being can ever or anywhere correspond¹⁵.

¹² H. Vaibinger, *Hartmann, Dübring und Lange*, op. cit., p. 194.

¹³ See P. Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, 3 vols., Cambridge University Press, New York, 2014, specifically the first volume.

¹⁴ F. A. Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart*, Baedeker, Iserlohn-Leipzig, 1866¹, 1873-1875², 1887, p. 194.

¹⁵ H. Vaibinger, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*, Leipzig, Meiner, 1922, p. 604.

Vaihinger claims that Schiller, as a Kantian, regards the archetypal plant as an imaginary object, meaning it cannot be an object of experience. The outcome of the convergence between the imaginary and the impossible is then described as an idea, thereby opening up, through Schiller, Vaihinger's interpretation of Kant's theory of ideas.

Two distortions of the Kantian perspective are at work here. The first concerns the equation of the impossible and the imaginary. Kant notoriously distinguishes between *ens imaginarium* and *nihil negativum* (B 348-349). For something to be imaginable, claims Kant, it must conform to some minimal requirement of imaginability – namely, it must be determined with respect to space and time. This requirement does not apply to the *nihil negativum*, which instead represents the absolute unthinkability of self-contradictory objects. So, while it is true that an idea is a representation such that “no corresponding object can be given in the senses”, it is also true that ideas are necessary concepts of reason (B 355, 368) rather than products of the imagination.

The second distortion of Kant's thought concerns exactly this point: ideas are *necessary* concepts of reason as far as they “concern the absolute totality of the synthesis of conditions” (B 382 ss.). These are not freely created products and are therefore not a complex of representations of an indefinite and perhaps ever-growing number, as is the case with Vaihinger's fictions.

Vaihinger attributes both these distortions, which weaken Kant's strict distinction between the realm of the sensible (where intuition is possible) and that of the non-sensible (where intuition is not possible), to Schiller. Both distortions share a common feature: their rejection of the limits set by Kantian transcendental psychology.

Like much of neo-Kantianism¹⁶, Vaihinger assimilates transcendental aesthetic into transcendental logic. A key feature of Vaihinger's fictionalism, in fact, is that it highlights the empirical nature of productive imagination, which is no longer seen solely as a transcendental function, but as a real psychological activity. In light of the attribution of such a crucial role to real psychological activity, one can better understand Vaihinger's choice to devote his essay in the 1905 issue of *Kant-Studien* to the examination of the dissertation *De origine characteris animi* (On the origin of the character of the soul), which was defended by Johann Friedrich Abel (Schiller's mentor at the *Karlsschule*) in 1776. Vaihinger comments:

The borderland between psychology and physiology remained his [Abel's] favorite field of study, and precisely for this reason, he had to exert a lasting influence on Schiller, who had exchanged the study of law for medicine because the latter seemed to him a more useful means for studying the soul. Abel's lectures thus complemented [Schiller's] purely medical instruction in the most welcome manner. Abel's influence is therefore unmistakable in the two medical-philosophical dissertations by Schiller from the years

¹⁶ See K. Pollok, “The ‘Transcendental Method’. On the Reception of the Critique of Pure Reason in Neo-Kantianism”, in P. Guyer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2010, pp. 346-379, specifically p. 349.

1779 and 1780, the second of which concluded his studies at the *Karlsschule*. Abel was and remained Schiller's most beloved teacher. Schiller remained friends with him even after leaving the *Karlsschule* and moving to Stuttgart to live as a regimental physician. Indeed, Abel even visited the fugitive in Mannheim. Later, as a professor at Tübingen, Abel partially aligned himself with Kantian philosophy¹⁷.

In the 1905 special journal issue focused on Schiller's philosophy in relation to Kant, this passage, among many valuable contributions on Schiller's transcendental idealism, appears surprisingly un-Kantian. However, Vaihinger does present a similar account of his own intellectual development, emphasizing the influence of empirical psychology on his philosophical thinking. His interest in empirical psychology was sparked not by Kant, but by the works of Schopenhauer, Herbart, and Steinthal¹⁸ – just as Schiller's interest in empirical anthropology was sparked by Abel rather than Kant. Vaihinger thus situates both himself and Schiller within an empirically inclined (and thus somewhat heterodox) Kantianism.

This choice on Vaihinger's part brings back one's attention to group 1: the group of textual references dealing with Schiller's relationship with one of the most famous empiricists of the early 19th century – Goethe. An essential document in this regard is the *Festrede* that Vaihinger dedicated to Goethe in 1875. Vaihinger writes:

Goethe's significance as a philosopher has long not been appreciated as it should be; and while Schiller, as a Kantian, was assigned a specific place in the history of philosophy, ungrateful posterity has until now denied Goethe such a place, which he deserves for the very reason that, in the midst of the transcendental idealism of his time, he represented a Spinozistic-pantheistic naturalism or realism, which in our time has celebrated a brilliant resurrection under the name of 'monism'. [...] Goethe's relationship with Schiller in this respect is known to be described as that of a representative of objectivity in contrast to subjectivity, of the real in contrast to the ideal¹⁹.

Here, Goethe plays the role of the Spinozist, the advocate of objectivity (and of monism) as opposed to Schiller, the Kantian subjectivist. However, Vaihinger's words about Schiller's cultural dominions sound counterintuitive, given that the long history of asymmetry between Schiller and Goethe in German culture has always favored Goethe as the greater of the two. Schiller certainly represents Goethe's Kantian educator²⁰. But Goethe represents the much more disruptive emergence of a profoundly anti-Kantian tension within Romanticism – not just in Schiller's eyes,

¹⁷ H. Vaihinger, "Zwei Quellenfunde zu Schillers philosophischer Entwicklung", in Id. (ed.), *Schiller als Philosoph und seine Beziehungen zu Kant*, op. cit., pp. 125-141, specifically p. 129.

¹⁸ See H. Vaihinger, "Pessimismus und Optimismus vom Kantschen Standpunkt aus", *Archiv für Rechts- und Wirtschaftsphilosophie*, 17, 1923-1924, pp. 161-188; Id., "Über die Bedeutung Herbarts", *Erziehungsschule. Zeitschrift für Reform der Jugenderziehung in Haus und Schule*, 4, 1884, pp. 1-3; Id., "The Origin of the Philosophy of 'As if'", op. cit., pp. xxxvi-xxxvii.

¹⁹ H. Vaihinger, *Goethe als ideal universeller Bildung; Festrede, gehalten in der ersten gemeinschaftlichen Sitzung der Vereinigten wissenschaftlichen Vereine der Universität Leipzig*, Meyer & Zeller, Leipzig, 1975, p. 23.

²⁰ See D. Spinosa's essay in this volume.

but for European culture as a whole. From this perspective, it is indeed Schiller who responds and reacts to Goethe. He responds as a Kantian who had to modernize in order to resist the seductions of the rising Spinozistic-Goethean monism and uphold the ideals of ethical idealism and metaphysical criticism.

The key to this response, according to Vaihinger, lies in the fact that Schiller views actual human psychological reality mainly in “historical-ethical” terms, while Goethe sees it mostly in “psychological-pathological” terms. While Goethe’s naturalism focuses primarily on the psychological fact itself, Schiller incorporates the psychological activity of the individual into the ethical framework of character, all while staying true to its factual nature.

For Schiller, the fact that the psychological life feeding the imagination and creating idealizations is *real* means that it belongs not to an abstract transcendental subjectivity, but to an empirical subjectivity fundamentally characterized by its ethical orientation – that is, endowed with character. It is through comparison with Goethe rather than Kant (a comparison that, as far as Vaihinger is concerned, has already been substantially articulated by Lange), then, that the Schiller who interests Vaihinger emerges: not only and not primarily the poet of the ideal²¹, but more so the poet of living, ethically oriented imagination.

3. *Vaihinger’s fictionalism as an ambiguous theory of idealization*

Vaihinger’s somewhat fragmented reconstruction of Schiller’s perspective on idealization must now be examined in relation to Vaihinger’s fictionalism. The psychologistic implications of Schiller’s transition from the transcendental subject to the real subject endowed with character are not foreign to it. Schiller’s perspective is not an external psychologistic element later added to Vaihinger’s epistemology. In fact, Schiller’s concept of idealization as an actual psychological process is rooted in an intrinsically psychologistic aspect of the fictionalist proposal.

In the *Philosophy of As-If*, Vaihinger writes:

The fictive activity of the mind [*Seele*] is an expression of the fundamental psychical forces; fictions are mental structures. The psyche weaves this aid to thought out of itself; for the mind is inventive; under the compulsion of necessity, stimulated by the outer world, it discovers the store of contrivances that lie hidden within itself. The organism finds itself in a world full of contradictory sensations; it is exposed to the assaults of a hostile external world, and to preserve itself, it is forced to seek every possible means of assistance, external as well as internal²².

²¹ See e.g., F. W. Kaufmann, *Schiller, Poet of Philosophical Idealism*, Academy Press, Oberlin, 1942; more recently, H. Feger, “Schiller and the Birth of German Idealism”, in A. Falduto and T. Mehigan (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook on the Philosophy of Friedrich Schiller*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2023, pp. 527-540, as well as S. Edgar’s essay in this volume.

²² H. Vaihinger, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

Fictions are considered “mental structures” because they result from actual “psychical forces”. This is necessary if the motivation behind creating fictions stems from “the outer world [...] full of contradictory sensations”, because this conflict with the outer world only pertains to a subject viewed as an entity actually living in an environment, and thus motivated to adapt to it. In the post-Darwinian framework within which Vaihinger develops his fictionalism, this perspective is often applied to idealizations in general (think of Nietzsche). Vaihinger’s neo-Kantianism adds a layer of complexity, bringing together idealistic and anti-psychologicistic elements with those relevant to the naturalization of transcendental knowledge. The result is often reduced to a theory of fictions, that serve as useful ideal models for interacting with reality²³.

What types of mental structures are fictions, then? They are not merely false but also contradictory representations. Vaihinger believed that representations like the square root of a negative number in mathematics or the atom in physics and chemistry were, in fact, contradictory. For example, the atom is an *unextended body*: thus, a self-contradictory concept, an impossible representation in the sense of Kant’s *nihil negativum*. Vaihinger distinguished these proper fictions from “semi-fictions”, where the “concepts only contradict reality as given, or deviate from it, but are not inherently contradictory”²⁴. This distinction parallels the one between Galilean and Aristotelian idealizations – between introducing impossible simplifications (planes without friction and bodies without extension) and removing complications that are considered negligible for the purposes at hand (such as in Adam Smith’s rational egoist). This is the difference between idealizing through abstraction and idealizing through approximation. Of course, the line between approximation and omission is often blurry, and it is not always clear when a complication factor has been eliminated through abstraction or simply assumed to be too minor to matter practically. However, from Vaihinger’s perspective, this distinction between the two kinds of idealization is indeed valid and well-defined.

Fictions, both proper and semi-fictional, generally serve to organize the flow of sensations. Some fictions, in particular, produce reliable predictions based on this organization. These are *scientific* fictions. God is not, generally speaking, a scientific fiction. Instead, the atom and Smith’s rational agent are scientific fictions, in that they are useful for predicting the behavior of chemical substances or people. All scientific fictions, whether proper or semi-fictional, must provide adaptive value by enabling reliable predictions. In other words, they must be models, or parts of models, that effectively forecast the future course of experience – creative reconstructions of it, but ones that adhere to it in ways that enable the fulfillment of their scientific functions.

²³ See K. Podnieks, “Philosophy of Modeling in the 1870s: A Tribute to Hans Vaihinger”, *Baltic Journal of Model Computing*, 9/1, 2021, pp. 67-110.

²⁴ H. Vaihinger, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*, op. cit., p. 24.

However, this claim questions the internal consistency of Vaihinger's fictionalism. All idealizations are, to some extent, abstractions. Those by approximation remove factors deemed irrelevant. Galilean idealizations, or proper idealizations through abstraction, are abstract from the internal contradictions within their products, or rather from the explosion caused by these contradictions – that is, from the infinite implications derived from falsehood. This is a more significant and epistemically costly abstraction: since from semantical falsehood *sequitur quodlibet*, Vaihinger must introduce a pragmatic concept to replace it. This is the concept of error. Fictions, or rather the idealization practices that create fictional representations, are “conscious errors”²⁵, risky deviations from past knowledge that could nevertheless prove epistemically productive. The contradictory nature of one's own proper fictions, and thus the distinction of proper fictions from semi-fictions, stems from this pragmatic interpretation of falsehood in fictions.

From a semantic standpoint, instead, *every* fiction is *already*, in some sense, contradictory, if only because of the initial error that defined the semantic relationship as a connection between thought and being. In fact, truth as a relationship of correspondence between thought and being is “the most expedient of errors”²⁶: the initial fiction that allows science to develop as an enterprise of extreme refinement in organizing sensations. Conversely, semantical falsehood – the lack of correspondence between thought and reality – is an inherent feature of thought as a psychological process. According to Vaihinger, thought is a real activity occurring in the brain, a part of the natural world that scientific thought attempts to describe. Since the outcome of this thought process always alters the reality it claims to mirror, complete correspondence between thought and reality is ontologically impossible. This implies that, from an epistemological perspective, pure descriptions are equally impossible. The Humean distinction between description and norm collapses. In other words, within Vaihinger's framework, true knowledge in the classical correspondentist sense cannot exist. ‘Knowing’ something can only mean providing a rational, normative model for interacting with it.

The notion of idealization underpins Vaihinger's fictionalism as a whole, since knowledge itself is a (proper) fiction, a conscious error, and an idealization. *Truth is a (proper) fiction in itself*. If this is the case, however, fictionalism cannot be primarily a philosophy of models, i.e., adaptive semi-fictions. Instead, it should resemble an ethics and pragmatics of truth, where proper fictions function more as rules of epistemic behavior than as models representing something else.

Thus, there are actually two possible interpretations of Vaihinger's fictionalism as a theory of idealization: a psychologistic interpretation based on (semi-)fiction's ability to help human beings adapt to the real environment, and a constructivist interpretation based on the assumption that concepts like truth and reality are themselves (properly) fictional. If one favors the constructivist view, it is impossible to assume any knowledge of the actual psyche or its role in the environment to justify

²⁵ H. Vaihinger, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*, op. cit., p. 165.

²⁶ Ivi, p. 193.

and explain the processes of idealization. Conversely, if one favors the psychologistic view, such knowledge must be presupposed to understand fictionalist idealization. Schiller's realism about psychological activity conflicts with fictionalism if the constructivist perspective is adopted; it instead becomes an essential prerequisite of fictionalism if the psychologistic stance is taken.

4. *Naturalistic elements in Schiller's theory of idealization*

The fundamental ambiguity of Vaihinger's fictionalism makes Schiller's position within fictionalism ambiguous, too. However, before determining whether this ambiguity does in fact make Vaihinger's fictionalism inconsistent as a whole, it is worth considering whether Schiller himself does in fact offer a well-defined, unambiguous naturalistic perspective.

The most relevant passage on the matter can be found in *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (1795-1796). Schiller writes:

If the poetic genius must be able to rise with a free self-activity above all *accidental* limits, which are inseparable from every *fixed* condition, to attain human nature in its absolute capacity, so may it not, on the other hand, pass beyond the *necessary* limits, which the concept of human nature brings with it; for the absolute, but only within humanity, is his task and his sphere. We have seen that the naive genius is indeed not in danger of overstepping this sphere, but instead does *not realize it completely*, if it gives too much room to an external necessity or the accidental need of the moment at the expense of inner necessity. The sentimental genius, on the contrary, is exposed to danger, on account of the endeavor to remove all limits from it, to annul human nature altogether and not merely, as it may and should, to rise and to *idealize*, beyond every fixed and limited reality up to absolute possibility, but rather to pass even beyond possibility or to daydream [*schwärmern*]²⁷.

Transcending the nature of the ideal while bringing nature along with us and preserving it: this is the ethical-aesthetic purpose that Schiller ultimately assigns to art. Both types of artists are at risk of missing the mark. The naive artist risks remaining caught up in the heteronomies imposed by nature, failing to transcend them. The representations produced by their art will lose the ability to guide the moral subject toward autonomy. Likewise, the sentimental artist risks an excess of zeal in idealization, which will lead them too far from facts and toward abstractions of little practical use. The art they create will lose the ability to address the moral subject as it actually is in experience.

Schiller's first warning aligns with his image as a poet of the ideal, which often reflects the idea that idealization is simply distancing oneself, perhaps infinitely, from the realm of facts. However, this image hardly matches Vaihinger's representation of Schiller. Vaihinger highlights that, in addition to being a poet, Schiller was also a physician,

²⁷ F. Schiller, *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 17, ed. by O. Günter and G. Wittowski, Hesse, Leipzig, 1910, pp. 479-573, specifically p. 551.

historian, and anthropologist. Like his friend Goethe, he had an empiricist inclination that cannot be ignored when reconstructing his peculiar philosophy. The presence of this inclination in his philosophical and poetic work helps explaining why he, among many German idealists, became the focus of attention and celebration during the height of German neo-Kantianism, from the 1860s to the First World War.

In the more balanced image that results from the passage quoted, idealization that does not originate from nature is abstract and one-sided because nature is its starting point, at least in terms of the idealizing subject's character (naturally, essentially, naive, or sentimental). The factual individual psyche must be transcended. However, it cannot be transcended simply by abstracting from it, because abstraction itself is an actual psychological process, embedded, in certain fundamental respects, within the limits and characteristics of the subject undertaking it. The Kantian transcendental subject, universal and thus essentially non-plural, is replaced here by (at least two) subjects endowed with character – and, in this sense, naturalized: the naive and the sentimental artist.

Schiller leaves no room for the function of subjective transcendental idealization to actualize outside the human psyche. In this sense, he naturalizes and psychologizes (in the sense of empirical psychology) Kantian epistemology while rejecting Kant's transcendental psychology. However, Schiller's naturalization is not primarily about being human as a contingent fact, as a limiting condition for psychological abilities, but rather about being an ethical character engaged with practical (ethical, historical, i.e., not merely adaptive) challenges.

Beyond the well-known controversy about psychologism, choosing to base the idealization process on the contingent criterion of character has significant implications even within Schiller's view of idealization. In Schiller's perspective, achieving a perfectly balanced form of idealization is impossible because the idealizer is always inherently naive or sentimental, and thus inherently unilateral. This impossibility is especially relevant in an epistemological sense, since a perfect idealization would be nothing less than intellectual intuition: grasping an object that would at the same time not belong to the realm of empirical facts and belong to the realm of the objects of knowledge. Instead, Schiller, remaining perfectly Kantian in this regard, deems it impossible to gain knowledge of what lies beyond the antinomies of experience without falling into *Schwärmerei*. The poet writes, concerning idealization:

Be it, however, driven so far, that not only can no definite experience any longer correspond to it (for up to there the beautiful ideal may and must go), but rather that it runs counter to the conditions of all possible experience in general, and that consequently, to make it real, human nature would have to be altogether abandoned, then is it no longer a poetical, but rather an exaggerated thought—provided namely, that it has proclaimed itself to be representable and poetical; for if it has not done this, so is it already enough, if it only not contradict itself. Should it contradict itself, so it is no longer exaggeration, but rather *nonsense*; for what does not exist at all, that can also not exceed its measure²⁸.

²⁸ F. Schiller, *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, op. cit., pp. 552-553.

The "nonsense" Schiller refers to here is simply the contradiction between the ideal character assumed by the sentimental artist and the unavoidable psychological aspects of that character. Therefore, the main difference between Schiller and Vaihinger in this context is that, for Schiller, the one-sidedness of the sentimental poet results in overly abstract ideas and epistemologically useless products, while, for Vaihinger, these products can be useful too if interpreted as fictions and included within the naturalized space of the free products of real psychological activity.

The product of Schillerian idealization is neither absolutely ideal nor absolutely natural. Therefore, it inhabits a narrow margin, if not a nonexistent one. This is because the anchor tying ideas to nature leaves only a minimal mark of nature on the idealization process, which then easily risks falling into sentimental one-sidedness. The same obviously applies to naive one-sidedness, but in reverse: since achieving the mark of the ideal – the conglomerate of epistemic universality and ethical normativity that characterizes the aesthetic ideal in Schiller – is so complex that it sometimes appears to be reserved for the artistic genius, one can easily fall into naive one-sidedness.

Vaihinger liberalizes both marks, broadening the sphere of the natural and making the sphere of the ideal easier to grasp. Character is not the only mark of the natural since this dimension encompasses a complete set of diverse strategies for producing fictions in various contexts. Even the most abstract idea is thus fully recaptured in nature in relation to its genesis. Similarly, the ethical-aesthetic norm is not the only access to the ideal since an entire set of diverse constructions in all human discourse is fictional and thus ideal. Everything natural is reconstructed as an object of knowledge through fiction-producing idealizations.

In summary, once Kant's transcendental subject is freed from the metaphysical requirement to be universal, simple, and undivided, Schiller and Vaihinger both go on to naturalize and pluralize it. However, while Schiller's proposal primarily *dualizes* the idealizing subject, Vaihinger's proposal *multiplies* idealizing subjects *indefinitely*: every pretender idealizes to the extent that they pretend (and, according to Vaihinger, in knowledge, everyone is constantly pretending). It remains to be seen whether this change is purely quantitative, thus not altering the core meaning of what happens in Schiller and making Schiller himself a fictionalist, as Vaihinger claims, or if Vaihinger's shift in this regard fundamentally changes the matter.

5. Conclusion: a short-circuit between naturalism and fictionalism?

In a well-known passage from the "Introduction" to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant states that the two branches of human knowledge (sensibility and intellect) arise from a "common unknown root" (B 29-30). This fact cannot be traced back further from a transcendental perspective because it is presupposed as a condition of transcendental inquiry itself. Likewise, for Schiller, investigating the processes of idealization presupposes the original distinction between the naive and sentimental

characters. This distinction does not occur in the same way as that between ideas arising from mental activity. Although these ideas are true in a different way than empirical facts, they are presented and recognized, if not generated, based on the artist's mental activity. Therefore, they presuppose this mental activity and its ethical characterization – which is a fact, not an idea. In other words, both Kant and Schiller attribute a certain group of facts to an original and uninvestigable dimension that is the premise of transcendental analysis. This gives their perspectives a certain degree of realism, albeit dogmatic, and this realism reserves a protected space for certain facts. Thus, their idealism is not absolute but transcendental.

Vaihinger faces a similar problem when evaluating the role of empirical imagination in his fictionalism. However, his liberalization of the ideal generates a different issue. If the determination of productive imagination through certain features (e.g., the capacity for recollection and free association) is itself fictional, i.e., ideal, then either it is impossible to analyze the genesis of fictions and one must simply accept it as a metaphysical fact (thus significantly disarming fictionalism as a critique of knowledge), or one must admit a non-fictional domain of knowledge.

Given this ambiguity, explicitly attributing fictionalism to Schillerian roots carries clear epistemological significance. However, Vaihinger is not always eager to emphasize this psychologistic significance, and this is perhaps why one finds fewer references to Schiller than expected in Vaihinger's works. The specific reasons for Vaihinger's hesitation then vary depending on the parts of Vaihinger's work where Schiller could have been referenced but is instead absent.

It should be noted that the issue extends beyond Vaihinger's use of Schiller. Vaihinger's fictionalism is presented as an empirically informed philosophy, yet it dismisses the value of the core tool of empirical knowledge: direct perception and immediate observation. In Vaihinger, these are merely abstract elements within a flow of sensations ordered through ideal constructs. Perhaps the key is to understand fictionalism as a philosophy that is empirically informed, but not empiricist in itself. From this perspective, the question of how Vaihinger employs Schiller would naturally lead to the connection between Kantianism and pragmatism, rather than the relationship between Kantianism and classical empiricism.

Schiller's 'pragmatism' in conceiving the naturalization of transcendental subjectivity is, in fact, the only viable escape route for Vaihinger's fictionalism from the logical dead-end implicit in the realist claim of all psychologism. 'Pragmatism' should be placed in quotation marks here because it is uncertain whether the naturalization strategy proposed by Schiller, which emphasizes character and thus the ethical and practical role of the human individual performing the functions of transcendental subjectivity in idealization, can genuinely be called pragmatistic. Indeed, its ethical emphasis helps it avoid the common pitfalls of traditional, i.e., Millian, psychologism: the focus is less on individual acts of observation and mental processes within individual minds, and more on the features of an ideal psyche engaged in an (equally ideal) ethical realm.

Vaihinger's fictionalism undoubtedly has pragmatistic components. The most interesting question is how these components interact with his Kantianism. Based on what has been said so far, one might conclude that if one believes Vaihinger's words about Schiller in his autobiography, one could integrate Vaihinger's pragmatism into a Kantianism primarily understood in an ethical sense as a philosophy of practical subjectivity. This is in accordance with Baden neo-Kantianism, of which Vaihinger is a significant ally and promoter. If, instead, one does not believe Vaihinger's words and thus discredits Schiller's influence on his fictionalism, it becomes easier to integrate his Kantianism into a stronger 'American style' pragmatism, which Vaihinger would simply have adapted, more or less accidentally, to German culture's more typical references.

The argument presented thus far obviously leans toward the first option. Another implicit argument in this direction can be found in Vaihinger's autobiographical lines about Schiller, particularly in the verses he chose to quote. They are drawn from the 1802 ballad *Kassandra*. It reads:

*Nur der Irrtum ist das Leben,
Und das Wissen ist der Tod.*

*Only in error there is life,
And knowledge is death.*

The first verse could also be translated as "Life is only error". And if, indeed, life is only error and error is the production of fictions, then one can see why these verses are especially meaningful to Vaihinger. He is, in fact, more faithful to them than Schiller himself, for whom life is not only error (as in artistic idealization) but also something else – namely, the unavoidable fact of having a character, and thus being forced to face the realm of the ideal through a predetermined, and fundamentally finite, psychological perspective.

Schiller in Max Weber? An Open Question

EDOARDO MASSIMILLA

1. In the chapters of *Max Weber: Ein Lebensbild* (*Max Weber. A Biography*, 1926), Marianne Weber attempts to present some aspects of her husband's thinking in an accessible way that may offer insight into his genius. Throughout the book, the verb "disenchant" and the noun "disenchantment" only appear six times. However, in one of these instances, Marianne states that, in his essays on the economic ethics of world religions from the early 1900s, Weber shows that the "primitive belief in spirits and demons" undergoes a radical change when, for a variety of reasons, "man [...] begins to feel that the structure of the world should be, or could become, a meaningfully ordered cosmos". Then, "religious feelings and experiences are treated intellectually, the process of rationalization dissolves the magical notions and increasingly 'disenchants' the world and renders it godless [*entzaubert* und *entgöttert zunehmend die Welt*]"¹. I agree with Lawrence Scaff's view that this word choice is "a revealing juxtaposition of Weberian and Schillerian language"², which anticipated the complete overlap of the two languages, due to "the imagination of Hans Gerth as a translator"³. In fact, Gerth identified Weber's "*entzauberte Welt*" with Schiller's "*entgötterte Natur*", a phrase found in a stanza of the poet's poem "Die Götter

¹ Marianne Weber, *Max Weber, Ein Lebensbild*, Mohr (Siebeck), Tübingen, 1926, p. 348; En. tr. *Max Weber. A Biography*, ed. by H. Zohn, Routledge, London-New York, 1888, p. 333.

² L. A. Scaff, "Weber, Art, and Social Theory", *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics*, 2005, 2, p. 20, n. 4 (http://www.units.it/etica/2005_2/SCAFF.htm).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 7. It is not easy to establish whether and to what extent this juxtaposition is directly rooted in Marianne Weber's strong intellectual profile. Notably, she also received a neo-Kantian philosophical education during her time as a guest lecturer at university, both while she lived in Freiburg with her husband (1894–1897) and later (and more actively) after the couple moved to Heidelberg. In the short *Vorwort* to the essay *Fichtes Sozialismus und sein Verhältnis zur Marx'schen Doktrin* (included in *Volkswirtschaftliche Abhandlungen der Badischen Hochschulen*, volume IV, issue III, and published in Tübingen in 1900 by Mohr) Marianne immediately makes it clear that her research is aimed primarily at readers interested in philosophy. She thanks Paul Hensel (a student of Alois Riehl) for encouraging her to explore the relationship between Fichte's socialism and Marx's doctrine through his philosophy classes. She also expresses her gratitude to her "revered teachers", Kuno Fischer, Alois Riehl and Heinrich Rickert, for passing on their philosophical knowledge and opening up a path to German idealism for her. For more on Marianne Weber, see G. Roth, "Marianne Weber and her Circle. Introduction to the Transaction Edition", in Marianne Weber, *Max*

Griechenlands” (*The Gods of Greece*), which was first published in 1788 and later revised and abridged in 1793, with the final version appearing in print in 1800:

Unbewußt der Freuden, die sie schenket, / Nie entzückt von ihrer Herrlichkeit, / Nie gewahr des Geistes, der sie lenket, / Sel’ger nie durch meine Seligkeit, / Fühllos selbst für ihres Künstlers Ehre, / Gleich dem toten Schlag der Pendeluhr, / Dient sie knechtisch dem Gesetz der Schwere, / Die entgötterte Natur (Unconscious of the joys she dispenses / Never enraptured by her own magnificence / Never aware of the spirit which guides her / Never more blessed through my blessedness / Insensible of her maker’s glory / Like the dead stroke of the pendulum / She slavishly obeys the law of gravity / A Nature shorn of the divine)⁴.

In his remark, Scaff refers to the Introduction to the extensive anthology *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited and translated by Hans Heinrich Gerth and Charles Wright Mills and published in New York in 1946 by Oxford University Press, which marked a very important moment in Weber’s fortunes in the United States by providing the first wide-ranging presentation of Weber’s sociological ideas to the American public⁵. In this Introduction, entitled “The Man and His Work”, after stating that “The principle of rationalization is the most general element in Weber’s philosophy of history. For the rise and fall of institutional structures, the ups and downs of classes, parties, and rulers implement the general drift of secular rationalization”, the authors declare: “In thinking of the change of human attitudes and mentalities that this process occasions, Weber liked to quote Friedrich Schiller’s phrase, the ‘disenchantment of the world’”, consequently, “The extent and direction of ‘rationalization’ is thus measured negatively in terms of the degree to which magical elements of thought are displaced, or positively by the extent to which ideas gain in systematic coherence and naturalistic consistency”⁶.

This interpretative framework also includes a further (and significant) reference to Schiller in the final pages of Gerth and Mills’ introductory essay, where the authors focus on what they consider to be “a major theme of Weber’s work”, namely “the defensive pessimism for the future of freedom”⁷. In fact, one of the defining features of the modern Western world, namely the freedom of movement of the

Weber. A Biography, op. cit., pp. xv–lix; see also B. Meurer, *Marianne Weber: Leben und Werk*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2010, which contains a complete bibliography of her works.

⁴ F. Schiller, *Die Götter Griechenlands* (second version of 1793/1800). I quote the translation by Ch. Tylor, *A Secular Age*, Harvard UP, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 316–317. In the second version of the poem, which consists of sixteen stanzas, Schiller removes ten stanzas and adds two new ones.

⁵ Echoing a remark by Ralf Dahrendorf, Di Giorgi, curator of the Italian edition of the book, points out that, “with the publication of *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Weber’s name, which had previously been associated with the ‘Protestant ethic thesis’, began to be linked to the theme of rationality”, understood as rationalization and disenchantment. L. Di Giorgi, “Max Weber in America. Una lettura degli anni ‘40”, in H. H. Gerth e C. W. Mills, *Max Weber. Da Heidelberg al Midwest*, ed. by L. Di Giorgi, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 1993, pp. 1–57, p. 13.

⁶ H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills, “The Man and His Work”, in Id. (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1946, pp. 1–74, p. 51.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

individual (in the various possible senses of this expression), is constantly being reduced by the overwhelming and converging coercive force of two “embodiment[s] of rational impersonality”⁸ that it has paradoxically helped to generate: the capitalist economic system and the process of bureaucratization. In this context, individual freedom is symptomatically confined to the dimension of “irrational sentiment and privacy” and it becomes “at best a tarrying for loving companionship and for the cathartic experience of art as a this-worldly escape from institutional routines”⁹. And then Gerth and Mills add:

In this conception of freedom as a historically developed phenomena, now on the defensive against both capitalism and bureaucracy, Weber represents humanist and cultural liberalism rather than economic liberalism. The humanist tradition in which Schiller wrote that “*Der Mensch ist freigeschaffen, ist frei, und würd’ er in ketten geboren*” [Man is created free, and is free, Though he be born in chains] is evidenced in Weber’s concern with the decline of the cultivated man as a well-rounded personality in favor of the technical expert, who, from the human point of view, is crippled. Weber’s own work is a realization of his self-image as a cultivated man concerned with all things human. And the decline of the humanist and the ascendancy of the expert is another documentation for Weber of the diminished chances for freedom¹⁰.

I cannot discuss here the reasons why the overall interpretation of Max Weber’s work by Gerth and Mills, which was historically important, now seems outdated. Suffice it to note that, when discussing the “principle of rationalization”, the two scholars refer, without further specification, to a supposed “philosophy of history” in Weber¹¹. Instead, let us turn our attention to the legitimacy of the linguistic – or even conceptual – connection between Weber’s *entzauberte Welt* and Schiller’s *entgötterte Natur*. This double connection is argued for in an article by Harvey Greisman, published in *The British Journal of Sociology* in 1976¹², as well as in the opening pages of art historian Timothy Clark’s book, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (1999)¹³. This connection was also supported, albeit with greater caution, by Johannes

⁸ Ibid., p. 73.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. Schiller’s two verses are taken from the 1897 poem *Die Worte des Glaubens*, which was famously inspired by Kant’s three postulates of practical reason: freedom of will, the immortality of the soul and the existence of God.

¹¹ See above, footnote n. 5.

¹² H. C. Greisman, “Disenchantment of the World: Romanticism, Aesthetics, and Sociological Theory”, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 27 (1976), pp. 495–507, in part. p. 496. Greisman’s contrasts the notion of disenchantment as an “inexorable process” and the “fate” of the modern world in Weber’s “provocative and fragmentary philosophy of history”, with Adorno’s notion of disenchantment as “ideology” and “a class-anchored form of thought”, which is not unavoidable, but must be understood in order to be fought (ibid., pp. 495–496). This framing of the discourse also informs the different ways in which, according to Greisman, Schiller and Weber conceive of disenchantment (cf. ibid., pp. 497 and 502).

¹³ T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1999, p. 7.

Winckelmann in an essay from 1980 on the origin of Weber's notion of disenchantment¹⁴, and even Scaff argues that it is valid in the sense of a general congruence between Weber's analyses and Schiller's message, which goes beyond the undoubted linguistic and semantic differences¹⁵. In a 2005 essay, Jeffrey Green also essentially leans towards this position, albeit within the framework of an interesting (though, in my opinion, overly clear-cut) distinction between two conflicting variants of Weber's notion of disenchantment. One variant describes and explains a factual condition in historical and sociological terms. The other variant is expressed in the famous 1917 lecture on *Science as a Vocation* and, by emphasizing that breaking a spell is a magical act in itself, sees disenchantment as a true philosophical act, more specifically as an unusual form of moral discourse leading to a new ethical orientation arising from the disintegration of the previously consolidated moral horizon¹⁶. More recently, the idea that Weber's notion of the "disenchantment of the world" was inspired by Schiller's *entgötterte Natur* has been explored in an extensive and thought-provoking 2017 study on the myth of disenchantment, magic, modernity and the birth of the human sciences, written by Jason Josephson-Storm¹⁷.

On the other hand, it should be noted that contemporary *Webersforschung* largely questions the idea that Schiller is the source of Weber's term *Entzauberung der Welt* and/or its meaning. In this regard, the position of Wilhelm Schluchter is paradigmatic, given the authority of the scholar and the role he played in completing the enormous undertaking of the *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe*¹⁸. In the 2009 volume on Weber's "disenchantment of the world"¹⁹, as well as in the 2016 introduction to the critical edition of the definitive versions of Weber's studies on the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism, and on protestant sects and the spirit of capitalism²⁰ (to cite just two relatively recent works), Schluchter emphasizes that Weber first used the term *Entzauberung der Welt* in his 1913 essay on certain categories of Weber's interpretive sociology, in order to illustrate the distinction between a type of action that is only subjectively *zweckrational*, and a type of action that is *zweckrational* and also technically correct. In particular, Weber explains the subjective rationality of

¹⁴ J. Winckelmann, "Die Herkunft von Max Webers 'Entzauberungs'-Konzeption", *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 32 (1980), pp. 12-53.

¹⁵ See L. A. Scaff, "Weber, Art, and Social Theory", op. cit., p. 20, n. 4.

¹⁶ J. E. Green, "Two Meanings of Disenchantment: Sociological Condition vs. Philosophical Act – Reassessing Max Weber's Thesis of the Disenchantment of the World", *Philosophy & Theology*, 17 (2005), pp. 51-84.

¹⁷ See J. A. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment. Magic, Modernity and the Birth of the Human Sciences*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London, 1917, in part. pp. 76 ff., pp. 269 ff.

¹⁸ See J. Winckelmann, "Die Herkunft von Max Webers 'Entzauberungs'-Konzeption", op. cit.

¹⁹ W. Schluchter, *Die Entzauberung der Welt. Sechs Studien zu Max Weber*, Mohr (Siebeck), Tübingen, 2009.

²⁰ W. Schluchter, "Einleitung", in M. Weber, *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe* [from now on abbreviated: *MWG*], I/18: *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus / Die protestantischen Sekten und der Geist des Kapitalismus. Schriften 1904-1920*, hrsg. von W. Schluchter in Zusammenarbeit mit U. Bube, Mohr (Siebeck), Tübingen, 2016, pp. 1-59.

goal-oriented action by arguing that it applies to religious action guided by magical beliefs, the one which becomes impaired by the increasing “disenchantment of the world”²¹. Schluchter then notes that the concept of the disenchantment of the world becomes a *Leitbegriff*²² for Weberian sociology of religion, beginning with the first studies on the economic ethics of world religions, which were published in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* in 1915²³. In this regard, Schluchter emphasizes the importance of the final chapter of Weber’s essay on *Confucianism and Taoism* (entitled “Conclusions: Confucianism and Puritanism” in the 1920 edition). In this chapter, Weber contrasts “Confucian rationalism” – which he deems an “appropriate name” – with “Protestant rationalism”, and in doing so poses the question of how to define the degree of rationalization of a religion, thereby arriving at a more precise definition of the notion of the “disenchantment of the world”. According to Weber:

To judge the level of rationalization a religion represents we may use two primary yardsticks which are in many ways interrelated. [This means that, far from always offering convergent results, their application can also lead to divergent results.] One is the degree to which the religion has divested itself of *magic*; the other is the degree to which it has systematically unified the relation between God and the world and therewith its own ethical relationship to the world²⁴.

Then Weber adds the following consideration:

In the former respect the varying expressions of ascetic Protestantism represent a last phase. The most characteristic forms of Protestantism have liquidated magic most com-

²¹ See M. Weber, “Über einige Kategorien der verstehenden Soziologie”, in *MWG*, I/12: *Verstehende Soziologie und Werturteilsfreiheit. Schriften und Reden 1908-1917*, hrsg. von J. Weiß in Zusammenarbeit mit S. Frommer, Mohr (Siebeck), Tübingen, 2018, pp. 389-440, p. 397; En. tr. “Some Categories of Interpretive Sociology”, *The Sociological Quarterly*, 22 (1981), pp. 151-180, pp. 154-155: “Subjectively rational instrumental action and action ‘correctly’ oriented toward objectively valid goals (‘correctly rational’) are two very different things. An action which the researcher is seeking to explain may appear to him to be instrumentally rational in the highest degree and yet be oriented to assumptions of the actor that are totally invalid to the researcher. Action oriented toward conceptions of magic, for example, is often subjectively of a far more instrumentally rational character than any non-magical ‘religious’ behavior, for precisely *in an increasingly disenchanted world*, religiosity must take on increasingly (subjective) irrational meaning relationships (ethical or mystical, for instance)” (tr. slightly modified by me).

²² This is a significant distinction between Weber’s original 1904-1905 essays on Protestantism and their 1920 reissue, which are clearly linked to contributions on the economic ethics of world religions in the context of comparative sociology of religion, precisely thanks to their common reference to the anything-but-unambiguous process of the rationalization/disenchantment of the world.

²³ See *MWG*, I/19: *Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen. Konfuzianismus und Taoismus. Schriften 1915-1920*, hrsg. von H. Schmidt-Glintzer in Zusammenhang mit P. Kolonko, Mohr (Siebeck), Tübingen, 1989.

²⁴ M. Weber, *Konfuzianismus und Taoismus*, in *MWG*, I/19, pp. 128-478, p. 450; En. tr. *The Religion of China. Confucianism and Taoism*, ed. by H. H. Gerth, Free Press, Glencoe (Illinois), p. 226, emph. mine.

pletely. In principle, magic was eradicated even in the sublimated form of sacraments and symbols, so much so that the strict Puritan had the corpses of his loved ones dug under without any formality in order to assure the complete elimination of superstition. That meant, in this context, cutting off all trust in magical manipulations. *Nowhere has the complete disenchantment of the world been carried through with greater consistency*, but that did not mean freedom from what we nowadays customarily regard as “superstition”. Witch trials also flourished in New England. Still while Confucianism left untouched *the significance of magic for redemption*, Puritanism came to consider all magic as *devilish*. Only ethical rationalism was defined as religiously valuable, i.e., conduct according to God’s commandment and at that, proceeding from a God-fearing attitude²⁵.

Based on the aforementioned considerations and others of a similar nature, Schluchter observes that none of the many conjectures about the origin of Weber’s expression *Entzauberung der Welt* has been corroborated by conclusive evidence²⁶. In particular, he rejects the idea that the term is derived from Schiller’s *entgötterte Natur*, because when Weber speaks of disenchantment, he does not primarily refer to a process concerning nature, but to a process concerning religion and actions endowed with religious significance. Consequently, his original theme is not the de-divinization of nature, but rather the radicalization of the difference between divine majesty, on the one hand, and the creaturely dimension of the world and of man, on the other (which is entirely subordinate to divine majesty), and the consequences of this radicalization for religious and non-religious conduct of life²⁷. For this reason, Schluchter notes that, to indicate the point from which the process of disenchantment described by Weber gradually moves away, “another passage from the second version [sic] of Schiller’s poem [*The Gods of Greece*] would be more appropriate”: *Da die Götter menschlicher noch waren, / War der Mensch göttlicher* (Since the gods were then more human / Men were more godlike)²⁸. For the same reason,

²⁵ Ibid., emph. mine.

²⁶ See W. Schluchter, “Einleitung”, op. cit., p. 17.

²⁷ See ibid., p. 17, n. 67.

²⁸ Ibid. These are actually two verses that appear only in the first version of the poem and were removed from the second. See. F. Schiller, “Die Götter Griechenlandes”, in Id. *Sämtliche Werke in zehn Bände. Berliner Ausgabe, Bd. 1: Gedichte*, hrsg. von J. Golz, Aufbau, Berlin, 2005, pp. 184-190, vv. 191-192. According to Hegel, “Schiller’s famous saying” is “altogether false”, insofar as it conveys the meaning of the “original version of the poem”, which expressed “Schiller’s attitude to Christianity”, which “is polemical throughout” (G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, tr. by T. M. Knox, Clarendon, Oxford, 1975, vol. I, pp. 507-508). Indeed, in the first version of the poem, Schiller “happily prais[es] the Greek outlook for which the whole of nature was animated and full of gods” and contrasts it with the “renunciation” (*Entsagen*, see F. Schiller, “Die Götter Griechenlandes”, op. cit., vv. 101-104) that characterizes not only “the present and its prosaic treatment of natural laws and man’s position in relation to God”, but also “Christianity” itself (G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, op. cit., p. 507). However, from the point of view of Hegel and his ‘heterodox Lutheranism’, this involves adopting a one-sided and consequently distorted view of Christianity: “Of course in Christianity renunciation is an essential feature, but only in monastic ideas does it require man to kill in himself his mind, his feeling, the so-called natural impulses, and not to embody himself in the moral, rational, and real world, in family and state – just as the Enlightenment and its Deism gives out that God is unknowable

Schluchter finds particularly compelling the hypothesis of Hartmut Lehmann, according to which Weber “drew inspiration for this formula [of the disenchantment of the world] from the title of Balthasar Bekker’s treatise *De betoverde Weereld* [1691], which was translated into German [as early as 1693] under the title *Die bezauberte Welt* [The Enchanted World]”²⁹. Bekker’s treatise was an important expression of certain currents of Dutch Calvinism and essentially targeted the “demonological interpretations” of the Old and New Testaments, which “served only to limit the omnipotence of God”, insofar as they gave the devil the power to make a pact with humans that enabled them to practice magic independently of divine majesty. “It [was] therefore a theological rejection of the attempt to support belief in the power of the devil and witchcraft through the Scriptures”³⁰. However, despite recognizing that Bekker’s treatise dates back to the 17th century – a period of particular interest to Weber – and that it constitutes an important testimony of the “struggle against magic in the field of Reformed theology”, Schluchter does not believe that Weber was inspired by Bekker. This is not only for a series of theoretical reasons that I cannot detail here, but primarily because Weber never quotes the Dutch theologian’s treatise. Furthermore, when the term *Entzauberung der Welt* “first appears in Weber’s writings, he is not discussing ascetic Protestantism, but rather the systematic sociology of religion and the economic ethics of world religions”³¹.

and so lays on man the supreme renunciation, the renunciation of knowing nothing of God, of not comprehending him. Whereas, according to the truly Christian view, renunciation is only the factor of mediation, the point of transition in which the purely natural, the sensuous, and the finite in general sheds its inadequacy in order to enable the spirit to come to higher freedom and reconciliation with itself, a freedom and blessedness unknown to the Greeks. Of celebrating a solitary god, of his pure separation and detachment from the world emptied of gods there cannot in that case be any question in Christianity, for it is precisely in that freedom and reconciliation of spirit that God is immanent” (ibid., pp. 507-508). For this reason, Hegel refers back to the final four lines of the second draft of the poem as he deems them to be far more significant and truthful in their depiction of the ancient gods: *Aus der Zeitflut weggerissen schweben / Sie gerettet auf des Pindus Höhn: / Was unsterblich im Gesang soll leben / Muss in Leben untergehn* (Torn from the flood of time they hover / saved, o’er Pindus height / what shall live undyingly in song / must pass away in life).

²⁹ W. Schluchter, “Einleitung”, op. cit., p. 17, n. 67. See H. Lehmann, *Die Entzauberung der Welt. Studien zu Themen von Max Weber*, Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen, 2009.

³⁰ W. Schluchter, “Einleitung”, op. cit., p. 17, n. 67. Becker’s treatise was published in two volumes in Amsterdam in 1691. Two more volumes were added to the second edition in 1693. It immediately sparked heated controversy among Dutch Calvinists. Orthodox followers of Voetius accused Becker of Spinozism. In a preface to the second edition, the author responded to these accusations, clarifying the actual intent of his work. The first German translation, published in Hamburg in 1693, was followed by another, inspired by Johann Salomo Semler, published between 1781 and 1782. See B. Bekker, *Die bezauberte Welt (1693)*, 2 Bände, hrsg. mit einer Einleitung von W. van Bunge, Frommann-Holzboog, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1997. On the topic see also M. Valente, *Habent sua fata libelli. Il mondo incantato di Balthasar Bekker*, in L. Simonutti e C. Hermanin (a cura di), *La centralità del dubbio*, Olschki, Firenze, 2011, pp. 665-683.

³¹ W. Schluchter, “Einleitung”, op. cit., pp. 17-18, n. 67. Regarding the “systematic sociology of religion” mentioned by Schluchter, it should be noted that the draft of “Religious Communities” – the section on “sociology of religion” in the pre-war version of *Economy and Society* – dates mainly

Ultimately, therefore, Schluchter considers the term ‘disenchantment of the world’ (and what it means) to be “*eine Eigenprägung*”, i.e. something “self-coined” by Weber himself³². Of course, this does not exclude the possibility that Weber used pre-existing terminology for his coinage, drawn from literary creations of the past and his own time. In this regard, Schluchter refers to the studies of José González García, particularly a 2011 essay on the magic of language and music in a disenchanted world, as seen in the works of Weber, Goethe and Rilke³³.

In this essay, González García draws on Pedro Piedras Monroy’s 2005 work, which focuses on the analysis of Buddhism and Hinduism in Weberian sociology of religion³⁴, to argue that, among the authors of the *Goethezeit*, the literary use of the term *Entzauberung* that most closely aligns with Weber’s ideas is not found in Schiller’s works, but in a poetic composition by Herder³⁵. The reference is to the poem “Die Entzauberung. Lehre der Braminen” (The disenchantment. Doctrine of the Brahmins), contained in the sixth and final collection of *Zerstreute Blätter* (Scattered leaves) published in 1797, which begins as follows:

Bezwinge den Durst nach äußerem Gut, du getäuschter Mensch! / Entzaubere dir Verstand und Herz; / Der Gewinn an eigenen Thaten / Nur dieser beruhiget dich. / Güter, Ehren und Jugend haschet die Zeit hinweg; / Täuschungen sind sie, verschwunden im Augenblick. / Lerne das Ewige kennen, / Und faß’ es in dein Herz» [Conquer your thirst for external goods, you deluded human being! / Disenchant your mind and heart; / Only the reward of your own deeds / Will bring you peace. / Goods, honors, and youth are swept away by time; / They are illusions, vanished in an instant. / Learn to know the eternal, / And hold it in your heart]³⁶.

Indeed, it seems that here Herder indicates – to put it in Weberian terms – a mystical-contemplative path to the disenchantment of the magical world, which moves in an equal and opposite direction to the “motorically conditioned” path of the intramundane ascetic. The latter suspects that the mystical desire to “know the eternal” conceals the ancient temptation of the creature to deify itself, therefore he strives to become instead a docile instrument of a transcendent and ultimately unknowable God, and to order the world according to the portion of His plans He wanted us to know through natural reason and revelation. From the mystic’s point of view, this amounts to abdicating the essential problem of grasping and retaining in one’s heart the profound meaning of what happens, and paves the way for the

from 1913. See M. Weber, *Religiöse Gemeinschaften*, MWG, I/22, 2, hrsg. von H. G. Kippenberg in Zusammenarbeit mit P. Schilm, Mohr (Siebeck), Tübingen, 2001.

³² W. Schluchter, “Einleitung”, op. cit., p. 18, nota 67.

³³ J. M. González García, “Max Weber, Goethe and Rilke: The Magic of Language and Music in a Disenchanted World”, *Max Weber Studies*, 11 (2011), 2, pp. 267–288.

³⁴ P. Piedras Monroy, *Max Weber y la India*, Ediciones Universidad de Valladolid, Valladolid, 2005, in part. p. 17.

³⁵ J. M. González García, “Max Weber, Goethe and Rilke”, op. cit., pp. 268–269.

³⁶ J. G. Herder, “Die Entzauberung”, in Id., *Zerstreute Blätter (Sechste Sammlung)*, Carl Wilhelm Ettinger, Gotha, 1797, pp. 86–89, p. 86.

second-level *Entzauberung der Welt* that is the hallmark of our time, in which there is no longer any objective meaning to the world³⁷.

Returning quickly to our question, we must ask ourselves what can now be said about the importance of Schiller and his work for Weber. This is difficult to answer. However, in light of the well-founded objections raised to the intriguing hypothesis that Schiller was the main source of Weber's notion of the disenchantment of the world, I believe it is clear that we must start again from what is *certain* in the sense of the term used by Vico. In this case, this means starting with the few explicit references to Schiller present in Weber's writings, speeches and letters, as collected in the volumes of the *Gesamtausgabe*. Below, I will attempt to initiate this counter-movement. While I recognize that this cannot replace the interpretative impetus, it may provide more solid support for it, akin to the resistance of the air for Kant's ungrateful Platonic dove.

2. Starting from Weber's writings and speeches, a reference to Schiller can be found in Roscher's "*historische Methode*" (1903), the first of three articles that form the essay on Roscher and Knies and the logical problems of historical political economy. In a dense footnote, Weber discusses how Wilhelm Roscher rejected Schiller's identification of *Weltgeschichte* and *Weltgericht*³⁸ (a concept later developed by Hegel in a significant section of *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, namely the last section of the work, where he transitions from "right between states [*das äußere Staatsrecht*]" to "world history")³⁹. Weber presents this in the context of an interesting comparison between Roscher and Ranke, who (even more than Roscher) avoided the temptation

³⁷ On the topic, allow me to refer to E. Massimilla, "Il rifiuto del mondo dell'asceti e della mistica e la loro differente tensione con gli ordinamenti politici nella *Zwischenbetrachtung* di Max Weber", *Archivio di filosofia*, XCI (2023), 1 [monographic issue on the theme "Philosophy and civil religion: a historical problem"], pp. 307-325.

³⁸ *Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht* (World history is the world's court of judgement) [1] is the final verse of the penultimate stanza of the poem *Resignation*, published by Schiller in 1786, well before his Jena lecture on *Universalgeschichte* (1789). See F. Schiller, "Resignation", in Id., *Gedichte*, Erster Theil, Siegfried Lebrecht Crusius, Leipzig, 1800, pp. 293-297, p. 297. However, in this poem, the proposition about world history does not concern the philosophy of history. Rather, the context is the temporal finitude of the individual's existence, which forces everyone to choose between hope and enjoyment, compelling them to embrace one and relinquish the other, as well as carry excessive hopes – that are unfounded but understandable – to the grave.

³⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, tr. by T. M. Knox, ed. by S. Houlgate, Oxford UP, Oxford-New York, § 340, p. 315. The problem of the different meanings that identification between *Weltgeschichte* and *Weltgericht* takes on throughout Schiller's reflections on history is very complex. These reflections were strongly influenced by his intense engagement with Kantian philosophy, which began in 1787 and intensified from 1791 onwards. Equally complex is the issue of Hegel's reinterpretation of Schiller's maxim. For initial orientation, refer to W. Jaeschke, "La storia del mondo come tribunale universale. Sul problema della storia in Schiller e nella filosofia classica tedesca", in G. Pinna, P. Montani and A. Ardovino (eds.), *Schiller e il progetto della modernità*, Carocci, Rome, 2006, pp. 163-176.

of the idea of progress due to his strong religious beliefs and background in empirical historical research. As he writes:

Roscher rejects (*Reflections on Religion* [*Geistliche Gedanken eines National-Oekonomen*, Zahn & Jaensch, Dresden, 1895], p. 33) the view that one should expect to find anything similar to a theodicy in history and in the external events of human life. For the same reason, he rejects Schiller's view of "world history" as the "world tribunal". One wishes that the simple clarity with which he makes these points could be found in the work of more recent evolutionists. His religious belief makes the concept of "progress" unnecessary. As is well known, Ranke, too – both as a serious scholar and as a religious man – was subjectively cool to this idea. The concept of "progress" is required only when the religious significance of the human condition is destroyed and the need arises to ascribe to it a "meaning" which is not only this-worldly, but also objective⁴⁰.

In "Zur Lage der bürgerlichen Demokratie in Rußland" (Bourgeois Democracy in Russia, 1905), the first of Weber's two essays on the Russian Revolution of 1905⁴¹, he employs a few poignant Schillerian quotations. 1) The first is liberally adapted from the prologue to *Wallenstein*, in which the conflicting views on the Bohemian leader (one of the protagonists of the Thirty Years' War) are described as follows: *Von den Parteien Gunst und Hass verwirrt, / Schwanket sein Charakterbild in der Geschichte* (Partisan hatreds and affections shroud / His character, as history portrays it)⁴². Weber echoes these verses when discussing the agrarian reform projects of the revolutionaries in relation to the thorny problem of effectively involving the rural population in the desired process of changing the Tsarist empire's institutional structure. In this regard, Weber notes that these projects were limited by their conception of "the democratic state of the future" as "as an entity untouched by 'partisan hatreds and affections' [*von den Interessen Gunst und Haß*]" and operating according to 'objective' principles"⁴³. Nevertheless, Weber adds that the criticism directed at

⁴⁰ M. Weber, *Roscher und Knies und die logischen Probleme der historischen Nationalökonomie*. (Erster Artikel). I. Roschers "historische Methode" (1903), in *MWG, I/7: Zur Logik und Methodik der Sozialwissenschaften. Schriften 1900–1907*, hrsg. von G. Wagner in Zusammenarbeit mit C. Harpers, T. Kaden, K. Müller und A. Zahn, Tübingen, 2018, pp. 41–101, n. 84, p. 88; En. tr. "Roscher's 'Historical Method'", in *Roscher and Knies: The Logical Problems of Historical Economics*, ed. by G. Oakes, Collier Macmillan, London, 1975, pp. 55–92, n. 84, p. 229.

⁴¹ For an analysis of the relevance of these two texts in relation to both the historiographical debate on Russia at the turn of the twentieth century and Weber's own political thought, see F. Fera's insightful monograph, *Max Weber and Russian Liberalism. The Debate on Fundamental Individual Rights between East and West*, fedOA (Federico II University Press), Naples, 2025.

⁴² F. Schiller, *Wallenstein*, dtv Gesamtausgabe 6, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, München, 1973, p. 8.

⁴³ M. Weber, "Zur Lage der bürgerlichen Demokratie", in *MWG, I/10: Zur Russischen Revolution von 1905. Schriften und Reden 1905–1912*, hrsg. von W. J. Mommsen in Zusammenarbeit mit D. Dahlmann, Mohr (Siebeck), Tübingen 1989, pp. 86–279, p. 220; En. tr. "Bourgeois Democracy in Russia", in *The Russian Revolutions*, ed. by Gordon C. Wells and Peter Bachr, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 41–147, p. 88. The same quotation (here more precise) from the prologue to *Wallenstein* is used by Weber in a letter to Willy Hellpach from Heidelberg on 5 April 1905. The letter concerns the latter's proposed manuscript for the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, whose focus was the "notorious question of the 'method' of historical science". In particular, Weber

these “reformers” is not intended to be overly harsh, given that “even quite outstanding German economists [i.e. the exponents of the German historical school of economics belonging to the previous generation, such as Gustav Schmoller and Adolf Wagner] and especially those who are most anxious to be seen as *realpolitiker*, sometimes hold similar views with regard to the present-day Prussian state”⁴⁴. 2) Weber closes his essay with the second Schiller quote, expressing in the final pages his fear that such an attempt to reflect upon ongoing events will quickly become obsolete: “Today no one knows how many of the hopes of the liberals that the foundations will be laid for a libertarian reform which will break down bureaucratic centralism now will still be alive and how many of them will, like a mirage [*Fata Morgana*], have dissolved into thin air”⁴⁵. However, Weber is certain of one thing: even if the old regime founded on the ‘unsociable’ alliance between the Tsarist autocracy and its bureaucracy were to regain the upper hand through the application of the usual methods of government, “the events, promises, and hopes”⁴⁶ of 1905 would still leave the regime’s legitimacy in crisis.

The alarming feebleness of “spirit”, which this supposedly “strong” regime, despite the apparent refinement of its technique of government, has openly revealed, has surely etched itself in the mind of every section of the population. [...] the illusions and the nimbus with which it surrounded itself, hiding these developments from view, have been totally destroyed. It will surely be difficult [...] for the system to maintain its dignity and to start playing the old game again in the same old way. All too great is the number of those who, having seen it revealed in all its nakedness, would simply turn to it with a smile, saying: “Trickster! You will conjure no more spirits” [*Taschenspieler! Du wirst keinen Geist mehr rufen*]⁴⁷.

The quote comes from *Der Geisterseher* (*The Ghost-Seer*), Schiller’s unfinished novel, which was published in instalments in *Thalia* between 1787 and 1789. The protagonist of the novel is a young Protestant German prince who, during a trip to Venice, meets a mysterious Armenian and becomes embroiled in a complex web of intrigue and deception spun by a clandestine Jesuit society, which tests his ability to distinguish reality from illusion. In one of the novel’s opening episodes, the Armenian menacingly unmasks a Palermitan adventurer who pretends to be a magician capable of summoning ghosts, addressing the latter with the phrase quoted by Weber⁴⁸.

suggests a modification thanks to which “the importance of [...] the points of view” of the author “will be removed from ‘the Partisan hatreds and affections’ [*der Parteien Gunst und Haß*], allowing them to be highlighted more clearly” (*MWG II/4: Briefe 1903-1905*, ed. by G. Hübinger and M. R. Lepsius, with contributions from T. Gerhards and S. Oswald-Bargende, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2015, pp. 449-453, p. 449).

⁴⁴ M. Weber, “Zur Lage der bürgerlichen Demokratie”, op. cit., pp. 220-221; En. tr., p. 88.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 274; En. tr., p. 111.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 278; En. tr., p. 112.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 278-279; En. tr., p. 112.

⁴⁸ See F. Schiller, *Der Geisterseher. Aus dem Papieren des Grafen von*”, in *Schillers Sämtliche Werke. Säkular-Ausgabe*, Band 2, J. G. Cotta, Stuttgart- Berlin, 1905, pp. 231-359, p. 251.

Some time later, an explicit reference to Schiller – and in particular to the poem *Die Götter Griechenlands* – appears in the 1909 essay “Energetische Kulturtheorie” (Energetic Theories of Culture), a critical review of the volume *Energetischen Grundlagen der Kulturwissenschaft* (Energetic Foundation of the Science of Culture) published in the same year by Wilhelm Ostwald, who, in that very year, had received the Nobel Prize for Chemistry. Weber’s piece is a detailed examination of the many reasons why Ostwald’s idea is untenable. Ostwald claimed that all animals, unlike plants, are “katabionten”, i.e. “parasitic consumers of the energy of the sun collected by the [plants]”. Consequently, man ‘objectively’ differs from animals “only through the enormous and steadily increasing measure of the energy ‘exterior’ to him (outside of his epidermis) that is under his control in the form of tools and machines”. Therefore, “for Ostwald the historical development of culture [*Kultur*]” is identical with “the history of the incorporation of new kinds of energy into the human sphere of influence”⁴⁹ and with the improvement of their utilization, i.e. the increase in “the quantity of energy B that can be used, which we have gained by a conversion of raw energy A sought for a practical end”⁵⁰.

In Weber’s discussion, art is understandably one of the fields that best highlights the unacceptable and even paradoxical results of Ostwald’s “dilettantish” theory of the energetic foundations of the cultural sciences. Addressing this point, Weber begins with the following remark, in reference to some specific passages⁵¹ of the reviewed volume:

Ostwald does not rank art, for example, taken in the broadest sense, in any way at all among the “cultural factors”, unless, as is reassuringly seen on page 88 f., art finally avoids such blunders as are still found in Schiller’s *Götter Griechenlands* as paradigms of the “limitations of the beginner” [The reference is to the “fatal” representation of a large number of “unreal entities” that characterizes the poem] and takes into consideration the conversion and shifting of energy to matter. Taken in this way, art could place itself in the service of mass-enlightenment and work against the wasteful use of energy⁵².

A reference to Schiller also appears at the beginning of “Zur Methodik sozialpsychologischer Enquêtes und ihre Berarbeitung” (The methodology of social

⁴⁹ M. Weber, “«Energetische» Kulturtheorie”, in *MWG, I/12: Verstehende Soziologie und Werturteilsfreiheit. Schriften und Reden 1908–1917*, hrsg. von J. Weiß in Zusammenarbeit mit S. Frommer, Mohr (Siebeck), Tübingen, 2018, pp. 148–182, p. 168; En. tr. “Energetic Theories of Culture”, ed. by J. M. Mikkelsen and Ch. Schwartz, *Mid-American Review of Sociology*, 9 (1984), pp. 33–58, p. 42.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 157; En. tr., p. 36.

⁵¹ See W. Ostwald, *Energetischen Grundlagen der Kulturwissenschaft*, Klinkhardt, Leipzig, 1909, pp. 88–89, in which the failure of poetry to contribute to the advancement of culture in terms of energy control and optimal utilization is criticized: “Even today, in the realm of poetry, we perpetuate the notions stemming from the ‘limitations of the beginner’ that Schiller articulated in *The Gods of Greece*, and we have become accustomed to viewing such errors as particularly ‘beautiful’. The consequence is that today’s poets, having exhausted the limited content of that circle of representations, are striving unsuccessfully to create a real and living link between such compositions and the thoughts and feelings of our time”.

⁵² M. Weber, «Energetische» Kulturtheorie, op. cit., p. 169; En. tr., p. 43.

psychological surveys and their analysis, 1909), a review of three publications from 1908-1909 by Adolf Levenstein⁵³, a proletarian researcher who was partly self-taught and partly trained by attending university as an auditor. These writings were “by-products”⁵⁴ of broader and more significant investigations that Levenstein was conducting in those years, drawing on Weber’s teachings in his own way. These investigations involved preparing two questionnaires designed to survey workers’ attitudes towards the general strike, and the impact of industrial working conditions on workers’ inner lives and attitudes towards work, social forces (state, church, party and trade union) and cultural heritage⁵⁵. While Weber acknowledges that Levenstein “has acquired material of which he can be, and indeed is, proud”, precisely with regard to the three publications of 1908-1909, he raises “the question of [its] *use* and *usability* for truly scientific purposes”⁵⁶. More important to us, however, is the way Weber presents Levenstein at the beginning of his essay, where he writes:

The author of these documents, who had experienced proletarian and proletaroid existences first-hand, undoubtedly had a sincere and strong desire to improve his incomplete education through work, reading and, ultimately, attending numerous university lectures. As a social democrat, he was fortunate enough to maintain contact with his fellow proletarians and constantly expand his knowledge through an ever-growing correspondence⁵⁷.

Then, before highlighting how Levenstein “used his connections to gather together material on ‘the psychology of classes’ that is extremely valuable in its own right”⁵⁸, Weber adds:

He used this correspondence in the service of what was certainly sincere and heartfelt (even if, as far as I can judge from my personal impressions, not particularly clear in its thinking) propaganda for partly genuine and partly supposed Nietzschean ideals (which, understandably, resonate very little with the workers, at least as far as I have been able to see so far, who seem to respond more to Schiller and other genuine bour-

⁵³ A. Levenstein, *Aus der Tiefe. Arbeiterbriefe*, Morgenverlag, Berlin, 1908; Id., *Arbeiter-Philosophen und -Dichter*, Band I: *Blech-, Berg-, Metall-, Textil-Arbeiter, Sticker, Handschuhmacher, Bäcker, Buchdrucker, Weberinnen, Dienstmädchen*, Verlag F. Frowein, Berlin, 1909; Id., *Lebens-Tragödie eines Tagelöhners*, Verlag F. Frowein, Berlin, 1909.

⁵⁴ M. Weber, *Zur Methodik sozialpsychologischer Enquêtes und ihrer Bearbeitung*, in *MWG*, I/11: *Zur Psychophysik der industriellen Arbeit. Schriften und Reden 1908-1912*, hrsg. von W. Schluchter in Zusammenarbeit mit S. Frommer, Mohr (Siebeck), Tübingen, 1995, pp. 388-398, p. 393.

⁵⁵ The first of Levenstein’s two investigations, about which Weber had expressed the greatest doubts, remained unpublished. The second, however, was published: A. Levenstein, *Die Arbeiterfrage. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der sozialpsychologischen Seite des modernen Großbetriebes und der psycho-physischen Einwirkungen auf die Arbeiter*, Ernst Reinhardt, München, 1912. It is considered to be of great documentary value in relation to the actual experiences of workers in the context of the Wilhelmine Reich.

⁵⁶ M. Weber, *Zur Methodik sozialpsychologischer Enquêtes und ihrer Bearbeitung*, op. cit., p. 391.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 388-389.

geois moralists. Even when there are different tones, they hardly show any traces of the characteristic features of Nietzsche's ideal of personality in terms of pathos)⁵⁹.

In a footnote to his review, Weber reiterates this point, stating that the proletarian artistic and philosophical works collected in *Arbeiter-Philosophen und Dichter* (Working-class philosophers and poets, one of Levenstein's three volumes) "hardly contain anything truly characteristic, especially nothing that is characteristic of a certain 'class'. And, in this regard, Weber draws attention to the "characteristic role played by Schiller [...] in the dramatic attempt of a typesetter" mentioned in Levenstein's book⁶⁰. Weber also returns to this theme in his contribution to the discussion on "Technology and Culture" held on 20 October 1910 during the first congress of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie* (Frankfurt, 19-22 October 1910). In his speech, published in 1911 in *Verhandlungen des Ersten Deutschen Soziologentages* (Proceedings of the First German Sociology Conference), Weber states that "the 'working class' at best feels a literary connection with Schiller, but not with modern naturalistic art"⁶¹.

This concludes the explicit references to Schiller in the writings and speeches collected in the *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe*. There are more references to Schiller in Weber's correspondence, albeit of a different kind. Some, found in letters dating back to the second half of the 1870s, testify to the typical influence of Schiller on the education of a young man from a liberal bourgeois German background.

"I read Schiller's *Die Jungfrau von Orléans*" [*The Maid of Orleans*], states a letter dated 1 January 1876, written by Weber, who was not yet twelve years old, to his father, who was away from the family home in Charlottenburg (on *Schillerstraße*), to tell him how he had spent New Year's Eve⁶². Two years later, in a letter to his cousin Fritz Baumgarten written on 23 and 24 April 1878, Weber reports that on the afternoon of 21 April, his fourteenth birthday, his father had taken him to the National Theatre in Berlin⁶³, where all three parts of Schiller's *Wallenstein* had been staged, with a total duration of about seven and a half hours including intervals⁶⁴. "The actor playing Wallenstein was very good on stage" – the young Weber comments, speaking with the confidence of a seasoned theatre critic – "But the other roles were not performed particularly well. The actor playing Wallenstein had an imposing presence and was able to imbue his role with incredible dignity. Compared to him, the others seemed almost like valets"⁶⁵. A few months later, on 30 June 1878, while travelling with his father and two younger brothers, Weber wrote to his mother to

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 392, n. 3.

⁶¹ M. Weber, *Technik und Kultur*, in *MWG*, I/12, pp. 226-236, p. 231.

⁶² *MWG*, II/1: *Briefe 1875-1886*, hrsg. von G. Hübinger in Zusammenarbeit mit T. Gerhards und U. Hinz, Mohr (Siebeck), Tübingen 2017, pp. 34-35, p. 34.

⁶³ Founded in 1870, it was located in northern Berlin and offered a wide classical repertoire at reasonable prices. It was active until 1883.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-67, p. 65.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66. The actor who played Wallenstein was Ludwig Barnay (1842-1924), who was one of the leading figures in the great nineteenth-century tradition of German prose theater.

tell her that he had visited Jena and met many university students. He was impressed by the white enamel plaques on buildings in the city center commemorating the professors who had lived there⁶⁶, including Fichte, Oken and Schiller, who was appointed a professor of philosophy at the University of Jena in 1789.

From this deeply rooted familiarity with Schiller, Weber derives direct references, often ironic or parodic, to his works, which he includes in a series of letters written at various times in his life, dealing with private family matters and other issues, or university and academic matters⁶⁷. Among these letters, the one written from

⁶⁶ See. *ibid.*, pp. 70-71, p. 70.

⁶⁷ See: a) the letter from Pymount dated July 24, 1877, to his mother, in which Weber parodies two lines from the *Elegie* (MWG, II/1, pp. 53-54, p. 54); b) letter from Charlottenburg dated June 22, 1879, to his mother, who was in Heidelberg, in which Weber quotes a verse from the poem *Hoffnung* (MWG, II/1, pp. 162-164, p. 163); c) the letter written to his mother from Göttingen on January 24 and 25, 1886, in which Weber ironically quotes a verse from the ballad *Der Ring des Polykrates* (MWG, II/1, pp. 579-583, p. 583); d) the letter from Charlottenburg dated October 17, 1892, to his younger sister Clara, who was in Altmorschen (in northern Hesse), in which Weber ironically quotes, with modifications, two verses from the ballad *Der Handschuh* (MWG, II/2: *Briefe 1887-1894*, ed. von R. Aldenhoff-Hübinger in Zusammenarbeit mit T. Gerhards und S. Oßwald-Bargende, Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen, 2017, pp. 285-287, p. 286); e) letter from Charlottenburg dated June 16, 1893, to his fiancée Marianne, who was in Altmorschen, in which Weber, referring to the diaries of his youth that she had given him to read, freely quotes a passage from *Don Carlos* (MWG, II/2, pp. 402-404, p. 402); f) letter from Posen dated April 15, 1894, to his wife Marianne, who was in Freiburg (at the apartment rented by the couple at *Schillerstraße 22* and grappling with their maid's fanatical obsession with cleanliness), in which Weber ironically refers to Queen Elizabeth's behavior in *Maria Stuart* (cf. MWG, II/2, pp. 533-535, p. 534); g) the letter from Heidelberg to Willy Hellpach dated April 5, 1905 (see above, note 42); h) the letter from Heidelberg to Emil Lask dated September 3, 1905, in which Weber – advising his young colleague at the Ruperto Carola to pay attention to the problem (which was dramatic for him) of the constraints arising from teaching obligations – freely quotes a verse from *Die Piccolomini*, the second part of *Wallenstein* (see MWG, II/4, pp. 513-514, p. 514); i) the letter from Heidelberg to Gustav Schmoller dated November 16, 1905 – to be placed in the context of the correspondence following the general meeting of the *Verein für Sozialpolitik* on September 27 and 28 of that year, characterized by a head-on clash between Schmoller and Friedrich Naumann over the problem of state control over industrial cartels and the consequent risk of a split within the association – in which Weber quotes a verse from *Wilhelm Tell* in abbreviated form (cf. MWG, II/4, pp. 594-599, p. 594); l) the letter from Heidelberg to Heinrick Herkner dated February 17, 1909 – concerning issues of positions within the “German Society for Sociology” as well as the Society's relations with the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* – in which Weber quotes the caption that closes *Wallenstein*, instructing the actor playing Ottavio Piccolomini to raise his eyes to the sky in sorrow (cf. MWG, II/6: *Briefe 1909-1910*, hrsg. von M. R. Lepsius und W. J. Mommsen in Zusammenarbeit mit B. Rudhard und M. Schön, Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen, 1994, pp. 57-59, p. 58); m) the letter from Heidelberg to Georg Jellinek dated August 19, 1909 – in which Weber reacts extremely positively to his correspondent's plan to found a German-American academy of international law in Heidelberg – quoting a verse from the poem *Die Glocke* (see MWG, II/6, pp. 226-228, p. 226); n) the letter from Heidelberg dated March 21, 1914, to Frida Gross Schloffer – the long-time friend of Else Jaffé von Richthofen who, between 1913 and 1915, with Weber's legal assistance, sued her father-in-law Hans Gross for custody of her legitimate son Peter – which opens with an adapted verse from the ballad *Der Gang nach dem Eisenhammer*

Heidelberg to Georg Jellineck on 8 January 1908 stands out for its intimate content, revealing Weber's deep irritation at a previous conversation with his correspondent, who had tried to cheer him up about the lingering effects of his depressive illness by stating that, after all, Weber's health fluctuated like that of any other man. From a loyal friend, as Weber considered Jellineck, he could not accept such talk, though he was accustomed to tolerating it from his wide circle of acquaintances:

You will concede – Weber writes – that I am generally averse to accentuating my condition either in discourse or in other manners: yet that is the reason why I appear to most people as a “Malade imaginaire” [...]. I have gradually accepted this fact, which repeatedly exacerbates my relationships with people, as an established fact, and I “put it together with the rest”⁶⁸.

This quote comes from Schiller's play *Kabale und Liebe* (*Intrigue and love*), specifically from the second scene of the second act. In this scene, an elderly servant brings a trunk of jewels to the favorite of his prince as a wedding gift. After revealing to her, with tears in his eyes, that the jewels were the result of the prince selling thousands of soldiers, including his own sons, the servant indignantly refuses a bag of gold that the woman offers him in return for telling her the truth and he says to her: *Legt's zu dem Übrigen!* (Put it with the rest!)⁶⁹.

In addition, there is a long letter to his mother, written in St. Louis on 19 and 20 September 1904. In it, Weber tells her about his time in Chicago, which he describes as “one of the most incredible cities”⁷⁰ in the United States, where one can encounter a wide range of ethnic groups. He also mentions that, despite their large numbers, the role of Germans in Chicago is completely insignificant, as evidenced by the fact that “due to a disagreement, they even sold their ‘Schiller’ theatre”⁷¹ (inaugurated in 1892, but used to stage classical works in German for only a few years before changing its name and purpose in 1898). Here, albeit indirectly and, so to speak, between the lines, we see the conviction of a deep connection between Schiller's poetic activity and German national identity – a conviction that is established very early on in Weber's case. In this regard, we need only mention “Über Volkscharakter, Volksentwicklung und Volksgeschichte bei den indogermanischen Völkern” (Reflections

(*MWG*, II, 8: *Briefe 1913–1914*, ed. by M. R. Lepsius and W. J. Mommsen in collaboration with B. Rudhard and M. Schön, Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen, 2003, pp. 571–572, p. 571); o) the letter from Munich dated April 5, 1920, to Else Jaffé von Richthofen – in which Weber jokingly addresses the woman's imminent move from the residential district of Prinz-Ludwigs-Höhe to Edgar Jaffé's apartment in Schwabing – which contains a paraphrase of a verse from *Wilhelm Tell* (see *MWG*, II/10, 2: *Briefe 1918–1920*, edited by G. Krumeich and M.R. Lepsius in collaboration with U. Hinz, S. Oßwald-Bargende, and M. Schön, Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen, 2012, pp. 965–967).

⁶⁸ *MWG*, II/5: *Briefe 1906–1908*, hrsg. von M.R. Lepsius und W.J. Mommsen. in Zusammenarbeit mit B. Rudhard und M. Schön, Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen, 1990, pp. 427–428, p. 427.

⁶⁹ F. Schiller, *Kabale und Liebe*, in Id., *Kabale und Liebe. Don Carlos*, Pawlak Verlag, Herrsching am Ammersee, 1985, pp. 5–107, p. 30.

⁷⁰ *MWG*, II/4, pp. 285–297, p. 286.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

on the Character, Development and History of the Indo-Germanic Peoples), a draft essay written by Weber at the end of 1879 when he was only fifteen years old. In this essay, he states that the soul of a people emerges first and foremost in its poetry, but not in poetic compositions that are the work of one individual or only part of the people. And then he writes: “That Wieland and Goethe were not true popular poets is evident from the fact that their poems never had the impact on the people that the poems of Schiller and Klopstock did”⁷².

There is also a lengthy letter that Weber wrote to Karl Vossler in Munich on 5 May 1908, in which he expresses his appreciation of the volume *Die göttliche Komödie. Entwicklungsgeschichte und Erklärung* (The Divine Comedy. A history of its development and a commentary), which Vossler had published in 1907. Specifically, Weber applauds the accuracy of Vossler’s comments on the relationship between Dante and scholastic philosophy⁷³, referencing a passage in which Vossler explicitly compares Schiller’s enthusiastic reception of Kant’s work with Dante’s equally enthusiastic reception of scholastic philosophy⁷⁴, and argues that Dante “must be grateful to the great Scholastics not only for the scientific basis of his unshakable personality, but also for the rational foundation of his trust in criticism and reason”⁷⁵.

Finally, there is a long letter to her cousin, Emmy Baumgarten, written between 8 and 12 May 1887 in Charlottenburg. This letter is probably the most interesting of the ones containing a reference to Schiller, and it is not surprising that it is widely quoted in Marianne’s biography.

I was very pleased that you so greatly enjoyed the performance of *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* by the Meiningen company⁷⁶. I am sure it was excellent. This pleased me – all the more because nowadays it is not given to everyone to enjoy Schiller’s dramas. People, particularly those who occupy themselves with literature a great deal, are having their taste for Schiller spoiled by the exaggerated exclusive adoration of Goethe, and this makes them so unjust toward everyone else that I have often had occasion to be annoyed, for example with Alfred [Weber’s younger brother] and people his age. For what good is it to me if people tell me today how all-encompassing Goethe’s poetic conception is and how one can find in it the entire contents of human life from A to Z, if afterward I find one side, and the most important one, hardly touched? For in general

⁷² MWG, II/1, pp. 621–636, p. 621. Also see pp. 623–624, which state that after the social, political, spiritual and emotional destruction suffered by the German nation following the Thirty Years’ War, the country had to rebuild from the level it had reached in the sixteenth century – a feat it was only able to accomplish thanks to the poetry of Klopstock and Schiller.

⁷³ See MWG, II/11: *Nachträge und Gesamtregister*, hrsg. von R. Aldenhoff-Hübinger, E. Hanke und H. Baier, Mohr (Siebeck), Tübingen, 2019, pp. 34–44, p. 40.

⁷⁴ See K. Vossler, *Die göttliche Komödie. Entwicklungsgeschichte und Erklärung*, I Band, Carl Winter’s Universitätsbuchhandlung, Heidelberg, 1907, pp. 185–186.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁷⁶ The *Herzoglich Meiningische Hoftheater* (Meiningen Ducal Court Theatre), which played an important role in the development of *Regietheater* in Germany during the 19th century, staged Schiller’s play during a tour of the Municipal Theatre in Strasbourg in April 1905. The city was home to the family of Hermann Baumgarten, the husband of Weber’s mother’s older sister.

people's conception of life is not that the only thing that matters is for them to have a sense of well-being and to find a side of life that they can enjoy. Nor do people face only the question as to the road on which they can or cannot find happiness and inner satisfaction. But if one looks at things soberly and closely, this question is the deepest that one can derive from Goethe's works, including Faust, and everything, even the knottiest ethical problems, is illuminated from this standpoint. [...] To him form was all, and form in his writings, too; that is, by "form" I mean not only the beauty of verses, but the form in which things are imagined. And that is why he was a great artist, for he mastered form like few others, and by means of form an artist makes whatever he wants out of his subject. But as poets and writers, I think, others can be placed beside him⁷⁷.

In this passage in favor of Schiller and against Goethe, Kant's influence, and particularly Kantian moral philosophy, undoubtedly plays a role in the worldview of the young Weber⁷⁸. It is also true that, as Marianne writes:

The mature Weber admired in Goethe the all-encompassing genius and recognized that the primary determinant of his life was not a need for "happiness" but a titanic struggle for perfection in the exertion of his own enormous creative powers and a reverent sense of oneness with the laws of the universe⁷⁹.

And yet, immediately afterwards, Marianne herself tells us that this youthful appreciation of Schiller, as opposed to Goethe, reveals the first signs of a profound and enduring belief held by Weber, as "later, too, he refused to venerate Goethe [...] and Goethe never embodied for him the totality of the human; he missed the heroic elements in him"⁸⁰.

In this regard, I would like to conclude the discussion precisely where it should have, and could have, begun. To do so, I will simply quote Weber's late work, *Wissenschaft als Beruf* (*Science as Vocation*), which is often considered his spiritual testament. At one point, he states:

Ladies and gentlemen, in the realm of science, the only person to have "personality" is the one who is wholly devoted to his subject [*Sache*]. And this is true not just of science. We know of no great artist who has ever done anything other than devoted himself to his art and to that alone. Even a personality of Goethe's stature had to pay a price, as far as his art was concerned, for having taken the liberty of trying to turn his "life" into a work of art. In politics things are no different, but that cannot be discussed here today⁸¹.

⁷⁷ MWG, II/2, pp. 75-84, pp. 77-78. See Marianne Weber, *Max Weber, Ein Lebensbild*, op. cit., pp. 164-165; En. tr., pp. 154-155.

⁷⁸ Very significant in this regard is another letter to her cousin Emmy written from Charlottenburg between July 5 and 12, 1887 (MWG, II/2, pp. 96-106).

⁷⁹ Marianne Weber, *Max Weber, Ein Lebensbild*, op. cit., p. 165; En. tr., p. 155.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ M. Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, in MWG, I/17: *Wissenschaft als Beruf 1917/1919 – Politik als Beruf, 1919*, hrsg. von W.J. Mommsen und W. Schluchter in Zusammenarbeit mit B. Morgenbrod, Mohr (Siebeck), Tübingen, 1992, pp. 71-111, p. 84; En. tr. *Science as a Vocation*, in Id., *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. by D. Owen and T. B. Strong, tr. by R. Livingstone, Hackett, Indianapolis-Cambridge, 2004, pp. 1-31, p. 10.

Abstracts

FREDERICK C. BEISER, *Schiller versus Post-Modernism*.

This paper is an examination of the post-modernist interpretation of the aesthetic writings of Friedrich Schiller (*Anmut und Würde*, *Kallias Briefe* and *Aesthetische Briefe*). The paper covers three topics: Schiller's style or exposition; his objective aesthetic; and his concept of the aesthetic state. Regarding Schiller's exposition, it counters the post-modernist claim that the aesthetic writings should be understood as rhetorical and poetic rather than logical and systematic. The main evidence for this reading is Schiller's statement that he is more poet than philosopher. But this statement, while true, is insufficient to justify the post-modernist reading. It ignores Schiller's philosophical education at the *Karlschule*; and it neglects his critique of the Romantics. Regarding the objective aesthetic, Schiller's claim that there must be a quality of the object to justify an aesthetic judgment is defended against the post-modernist claim that all qualities of the object are irrelevant. Of two qualitatively identical objects, both must be beautiful or ugly; one cannot be beautiful or ugly and not the other. Finally, regarding the aesthetic state, post-modernists claim that this concept supports authoritarianism or fascism; but this argument is questionable insofar Schiller holds that the citizen of the aesthetic state must be a beautiful soul who cultivates moral and civic virtue.

SABATO DANZILLI, *Kuno Fischer: Schiller as a Bridge between Kritizismus and Romantik*.

This paper analyzes Kuno Fischer's positioning of Friedrich Schiller as a crucial philosophical bridge between Kantian *Kritizismus* and Romanticism. The study highlights how Schiller's aesthetic theory, particularly the concept of the *Spieltrieb* (play drive), is interpreted as a mechanism for resolving the dualisms of sense and reason. The central argument is that Fischer identifies Schiller's Aesthetic State as the essential medium, the missing step for advancing from the "State of Necessity" to the "State of Reason" after the failure of the French Revolution. By historicizing this work, Fischer elevates Schiller as a central figure of German Idealism.

PAOLO PECERE, *Materialism, Ideals and Political Myths. Friedrich Lange's Interpretation of Schiller and its Legacy.*

In this chapter, I reconsider Friedrich Albert Lange's neo-Kantianism by focusing on his interpretation of Schiller and its philosophical and political implications. Against the standard reading of Lange as a proponent of "physiological Kantianism", I argue that his engagement with Schiller reveals his broader project centered on aesthetics, ideals, and mythology. By transforming metaphysics into poetic and symbolic forms, Lange sought to preserve the motivating power of ideals while rejecting their metaphysical truth claims. I show how this strategy informed Lange's response to materialism, his critique of Kantian morality, and his attempt to articulate a secular, politically effective "new mythology", whose legacy proved both influential and deeply ambivalent.

CHIARA RUSSO KRAUSS, *Friedrich Albert Lange's Project of Schillerian Kantianism as the Philosophy for the Industrial Revolution.*

The essay clarifies Lange's assertion that Schiller's concept of "aesthetic redemption" is essential to solving the social question. The author analyzes how Lange uses Schiller to purify Kantian ethics of metaphysical elements, bringing it into the realm of aesthetics. Through this approach, Lange posits that only beautiful ideals can realize freedom, inspire moral action, and secure social progress. Ultimately, the study emphasizes Lange's conviction that the power of ideals is crucial for overcoming ethical materialism and channeling the industrial revolution for the benefit of humanity.

GERALD HARTUNG, *Wilhelm Windelband on Schiller's Transcendental Idealism as a Cultural Philosophy.*

Wilhelm Windelband was one of the leading university philosophers in the German-speaking world around 1900. In the guise of a major philosophical work, he left behind a series of essays, which were first published in 1884 under the title *Preludes – Essays and Speeches on Philosophy and its History*, and subsequently appeared in numerous editions and translations. One important essay deals with Schiller's transcendental idealism (from the fourth edition of *Preludes* in 1911 onward). The first publication of this essay can be found in Volume 10 of *Kant-Studien* (1905), which is dedicated to commemorating Schiller on the centenary of his death and exploring his continued relevance. This volume includes contributions from prominent figures in German-language philosophy around 1900 (Vaihinger, Liebmann, Eucken, Cohn, Bauch, and others). The second publication appeared in 1906 as a *Festschrift* for *Kant-Studien* (edited by Vaihinger and Bauch). In my study, I will analyze Windelband's treatise on Schiller's transcendental idealism in its various contexts. My hypothesis is that we read this treatise differently depending on whether we encounter it in a scholarly journal, a commemorative publication, or a fragmented monograph by the author.

ROBERTO REDAELLI, *On the Margins of Neo-Kantianism. Schillerian Traces in the Baden School.*

This chapter investigates the neo-Kantian reception of Schiller, with a particular focus on the most prominent representatives of the so-called Baden School: Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert, and Emil Lask. The chapter does not aim to provide an exhaustive account of these authors' reception of Schiller's work, but rather to examine selected aspects of that reception concerning Schiller's notion of the whole man. To this end, we examine a selection of annotations and lecture notes by Lask, Rickert, and Windelband, along with several major works. Through this investigation, we aim to show how Schiller's concept of the whole man served as a significant source of inspiration for the development of different themes within this philosophical movement.

GIOVANNI MORRONE, *A "Disciple of Kant"? On the Strategies and Limits of the Baden Neo-Kantian Appropriation of Schiller.*

This contribution examines the reception of Schiller within Windelband's philosophical thought and his historiography of philosophy. First, it identifies the presence of cultural-critical motifs and arguments of Schillerian provenance in the formulation of Windelband's early philosophical program. Second, it reconstructs Windelband's interpretation of Schiller, showing how the emphasis on "Schiller as an idealist" results in an inadequate appraisal of the anthropological dimension of his thought.

DOMENICO SPINOSA, *Schiller as Kantian Vermittler for Goethe in Jonas Cohn's Critical Account.*

This contribution aims to address Jonas Cohn's interpretation of the relationship between Schiller and Goethe in connection with the legacy of Kantian thought. In *Das Kantische Element in Goethes Weltanschauung. Schillers philosophischer Einfluss auf Goethe* (1905), Cohn regards Schiller's work in the context of its connection to Goethe. In addition to re-examining aspects of Schiller's *Wirkungsgeschichte* typical of 19th-century German philosophical and scientific culture, Cohn highlights some "lines of continuity" between the two great thinkers, tracing them back to Kant, in an approach that emphasizes points of contact over fractures. With regard to Kant's legacy (in particular the reception of the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*), Cohn's essay can be seen as an attempt to revise the general field of aesthetics from the perspective of a philosophy of values based on the principles of neo-Kantianism of the Baden school. This is a goal Cohn had pursued since the publication of his important book: *Allgemeine Ästhetik* (1901). In a previous contribution dedicated to Hegelian aesthetics, published in 1902, Cohn clarified his reworking of aesthetics, stating: "I dared to attempt to continue in the wake of Hegel's thought, to which Kant's and Schiller's are connected".

CHRISTIAN KRIJNEN, *Actualizing Freedom. On Schiller's Relevance for South-West Neo-Kantianism.*

In his analysis of Schiller's transcendental idealism, Windelband touches shortly upon an issue that has shown to be of the utmost importance for the development of German idealism: the problem of actualizing freedom. He holds that Schiller prepares a conception as we can find it in Hegel's distinction between "subjective morality" and "objective *Sittlichkeit*". I shall show that this indication of Windelband concerns a core interest of Bauch's philosophy of values, particularly his ethics; a core interest that Bauch develops innovatively by integrating Schiller's view, criticizing Kant, and finally establishing the concept of the "imperative of culture" as the concept of realizing validity, i.e. actualizing freedom. This conception, however, is both consequent within the framework of transcendental idealism and problematic against the background of Hegel's speculative idealism.

STEFAN KLINGNER, RUDOLF MEER, *The Beautiful Soul: Schiller's Rupture with Kant from a Neo-Kantian Perspective.*

Nineteenth-century receptions of Schiller often emphasize the continuity between his concept of the beautiful soul and Kant's doctrine of the primacy of practical philosophy. There were however dissenting voices that critically exposed Schiller's misrepresentations of Kant's fundamental principles. Most notably, Kuno Fischer and Bruno Bauch clearly articulated Schiller's rupture with Kant. This paper examines Schiller's transformation of Kant's practical philosophy. Drawing on Kant's texts and current scholarship, the positions of Fischer and Bauch in the Kant-Schiller debate can be substantiated. They show that Schiller's view is not a mere quantitative extension but a revision of Kant's philosophical foundations.

GIAN PAOLO CAMMAROTA, "True Idealism Is Realism". *Schiller as the Poet of the Ideal in Hermann Cohen.*

The paper highlights how Hermann Cohen's interpretation of Schiller is based on Platonism and Kantianism. Schiller is considered by Cohen to be "the poet of the ideal", the true successor to Kantian aesthetics, who clearly understood the simple, profound and eternally true meaning of the Kantian method of philosophizing. Schiller embodies the true meaning of philosophy, which not only identifies with Platonic idealism, but also understands authentic idealism as realism. For Schiller, in fact, the ideal and form are not opposed to reality, since, on the contrary, it is they, through idealisation, that constitute reality as form, that is, as idea.

SCOTT EDGAR, *Noumenal Affection and Play in Hermann Cohen's Schillerian Aesthetics.*

Hermann Cohen's aesthetics, from his *Kant's Foundation of Aesthetics* (1889), are deeply indebted to Friedrich Schiller. This paper seeks to show that by developing a detailed interpretation of Cohen's use of the concept of play. That account reveals that Cohen's account of play draws self-consciously on Schiller in three ways: in

Cohen's view that play involves moral consciousness; in the details of Cohen's use of the concept of "universal communicability"; and in Cohen's conception of play as a rational ideal.

EZIO GAMBA, *Aesthetic Education and Self-Consciousness of Humankind. Friedrich Schiller in Hermann Cohen's Thought.*

Hermann Cohen examined Schiller's thought primarily in his two major works on aesthetics: *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* (1889) and *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls* (1912). The central focus of Cohen's reflections on Schiller is the role of aesthetics within the philosophical system and the relationship between aesthetics and the first two parts of the system. However, this topic evolves significantly between the two works. This shift is also reflected in a change of attitude toward Schiller's concept of aesthetic education.

MATTIA PAPA, *The Presence of Schiller in the First Period of Natorp's Philosophy.*

The paper aims to reconstruct Schiller's presence in Natorp's philosophy, focusing on the role of Schiller's aesthetics in the first period of Natorp's writings (1880-1914). Its purpose is to show that, in the development of Natorp's thought, particularly from a theoretical standpoint, Schiller was as important to him as Kant. The paper then examines how aesthetics plays a crucial role within Natorp's theoretical perspective, especially in relation to his effort to identify the "ultimate unity" on the objective side of knowledge. Finally, it seeks to indicate, through a brief outline, how this is central to understanding Natorp's conception of the individual as a concrete moment of objectivity and its relation to with his critical psychology.

LUIGI LAINO, *"The Realm of Shadows": the Presence of Schiller in Cassirer's Philosophy of Science.*

This paper explores the largely overlooked influence of Friedrich Schiller on Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of science. While Schiller is seldom cited in Cassirer's epistemological writings, his ideas significantly inform two central aspects of Cassirer's thought: the rejection of the copy theory of knowledge and the development of theoretical holism. Through a historical and systematic analysis, the study traces Cassirer's references to Schiller from early works (1907) to major texts such as *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff* (1910), *Freiheit und Form* (1916), and *Zur Einsteinschen Relativitätstheorie* (1921). It argues that Schiller's aesthetic idealism and his notion of the "power of the soul" anticipate Cassirer's conception of knowledge as an active, constructive process rather than a passive reproduction of reality. This perspective underpins Cassirer's interpretation of relativity theory, where scientific concepts are seen as functional relations within a holistic network rather than isolated representations of empirical facts. Finally, the paper examines Cassirer's appeal to Schiller in *Determinismus und Indeterminismus* (1937) to defend moral autonomy against the misapplication of physical indeterminism to ethics. By highlighting these connections, the study reveals a deep continuity between Cassirer's epistemol-

ogy and Schiller's idealism, showing how aesthetic principles shape the neo-Kantian philosophy of science.

GIUSEPPE GUASTAMACCHIA, *The Unified Human Being: Schiller's Legacy in Dilthey's Critique of Mathematical Psychology*.

This article examines Friedrich Schiller's influence on Wilhelm Dilthey's conception of descriptive psychology as the methodological foundation for the human sciences. Between the 1840s and 1870s, German psychology diverged into competing traditions: Herbartian psychology, which treated mental representations as quantifiable forces, and the emerging neo-Kantian tradition, which defended qualitative distinctions in mental life and consciousness's spontaneous character. Dilthey's encounter with Schiller occurred precisely as this alternative crystallized. Schiller's aesthetic epistemology – emphasizing holistic contemplation of living totalities rather than analytical dissection – provided Dilthey with both a philosophical alternative to Herbartian mechanistic psychology and a positive model for studying consciousness without fragmenting its vital unity. Tracing Dilthey's development from 1852 through 1865 to the 1894-1895 *Ideen*, this paper demonstrates how Schiller's promotion of the unified, organic human being constituted the epistemological template for Dilthey's descriptive psychology.

FRANCESCO PISANO, "Only in Error There Is Life". *Nature and Idealization in Vaihinger and Schiller*.

The paper investigates Vaihinger's use of Schiller within the neo-Kantian critique of monistic naturalism. Vaihinger's appeal to Schiller plays a decisive role in this critique by framing idealization as a psychologically grounded yet normatively oriented practice, thereby sustaining a Kantian dualism between nature and idea. Both Vaihinger's and Schiller's perspectives on the matter are reconsidered in light of a close examination of Vaihinger's scattered references to the poet. As a result, fictionalism's internal tension between constructivism and psychologism emerges. Vaihinger's (sometimes concealed) reliance on Schiller is thus shown to both support and destabilize his attempt at a neo-Kantian pragmatism.

EDOARDO MASSIMILLA, *Schiller in Max Weber? An Open Question*.

The essay examines the alleged connection between Weber's concept of the "disenchantment of the world" (*Entzauberung der Welt*) and Schiller's concept of the "de-godded nature" (*entgötterte Natur*), a connection that has been contested by recent Weberian historiography. Through a detailed analysis of explicit quotations and references to Schiller in Weber's works and correspondence, the study reveals Weber's familiarity with the German poet and suggests that Weber viewed him as an example of a heroic personality.

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STUDIES IN NEO-KANTIANISM

Following the post-idealist identity crisis and the advent of nihilism, which dominated the European cultural scene after

the fall of the great systems of thought, philosophy underwent a decisive transformation under the impetus of a movement that rallied its best minds around the famous call “zurück zu Kant!”. This call had first been uttered by Eduard Zeller and then resounded throughout Europe, and soon found its place in the strongholds of scholarship which were the Universities of Heidelberg, Freiburg and Marburg, where various schools of thought took shape, united by the intention to meet the intellectual challenges of the present day with renewed forms of criticism. Prominent representatives of these schools, among them Windelband, Rickert and Lask in the Baden school, Natorp, Cohen and Cassirer in the Marburg school to name only the most famous, sparked a radical redefinition of the European philosophical and cultural scene in the 20th century and impacted disparate fields of study: from the theory of knowledge to aesthetics, from anthropology to the doctrine of values, the breadth of the horizons unlocked by the work of these authors became a cardinal reference point for successive generations of philosophers. The crucial role that this movement played in the genesis and development of twentieth-century philosophical thought is examined in the series *Studies in Neo-Kantianism*, whose goal is to provide an international platform for contributions from leading scholars in this current. Specifically, the series aims to collect historical-philosophical studies written in the major European languages with the purpose of investigating the multiple forms that neo-Kantianism has assumed, while remaining open to the thematization of the impact of this school of thought on the methods of the various cultural sciences, without excluding from its scope more explicitly theoretical works that highlight the contemporary relevance of certain issues raised by this current. The series also intends to include editions and translations of classic Neo-Kantian texts. In this mission, the series has a clear international vocation, strengthened by the collaboration with the Centre for Studies in Neo-Kantianism at the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität in Erlangen-Nürnberg. In keeping with the work of investigation and dissemination promoted by the research centre, the series seeks to restore the spirit of Neo-Kantianism by bringing together specialised works that are the fruit of international collaboration between leading scholars in this current of thought.

1. *Neo-Kantianism and Cultural Sciences*, edited by Giovanni Morrone and Roberto Redaelli
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6. Friedrich Albert Lange, *Le poesie filosofiche di Schiller*, traduzione e cura di Chiara Russo Krauss

7. Ernst Cassirer, *La vita della forma. Scritti su Schiller*, traduzione, cura e saggio introduttivo di Luigi Laino, prefazione di Chiara Russo Krauss
8. *The Neo-Kantian Reception of Schiller*, edited by Chiara Russo Krauss
9. Kuno Fischer, *Schiller filosofo*, presentazione di Chiara Russo Krauss, saggio introduttivo di Sabato Danzilli, traduzione di Lorenzo Licciardi

During the second half of the nineteenth century, several members of the Neo-Kantian movement became interested in Schiller. For the first time, he was regarded not only as a poet and dramatist, but also as a philosopher – and, above all, as a Kantian philosopher. The authors of the contributions collected in this book reconstruct how various Neo-Kantian thinkers engaged with Schiller. Thus, the book illuminates the pivotal role that neo-Kantianism played in the discovery of Schiller’s philosophy as well as the pivotal role that Schiller’s philosophy played in the shaping of neo-Kantianism.



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