



The three works dedicated to securing the foundation of Kantian doctrine are linked inextricably to Hermann Cohen's philosophical life's work.³ For as much as Cohen distanced himself from Kant's conclusions on individual points in building his own system, the methodological consciousness that inspired all of Cohen's individual achievements certainly first achieved clarity and maturity in his scientific, comprehensive analysis of Kant's fundamental works. So in this case there is no division, no partition between the historian and the systematic philosopher. The impact that Cohen's books on Kant have had rests above all on this inner cohesion. The particular power of these books, and certainly, at the same time, their peculiar difficulty, consists in the fact that here the understanding of Kant is not considered as a matter for a detached historical professionalism, rather, it presupposes throughout a particular systematic position on the fundamental problems. The thinker positions himself in the great context of the history of philosophy and of science: "philosophizing on one's own steam," in which each individual tries to find the solution to the problem of being solely in a personal, contingent reaction, should be brought to an end. But, at the same time, a historical perspective opens up here that cannot be achieved by any pragmatic description of a mere succession of "systems." Each thought, each authentic fundamental theme for philosophizing, is situated in an ideal community with all the others: initially, this community of ideas lends sense and life to historical consideration as well. Cohen situates his works within this view of the task of history, outside the sphere of all mere "Kant-philology." Kantian doctrine is not taken here as a dead and indifferent subject matter to be dissolved,

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as it were, into its individual isolated elements by a disinterested manipulation of concepts, and then put back together again in clever and erudite permutations. Rather, from the outset a highly unified point of view is present here, according to which the details of the system should be surveyed and grasped as a true whole. For Cohen, Kant's system answers the truly fateful question of philosophy in general: the question of the relation between philosophy and science. The reconstruction of this system from its original driving forces takes us into the midst of the historical debate over the continuation of philosophy itself. The value of Kant's doctrine is that the sharpest, most concise expression of this debate is found in his work: it is the quintessential revelation of his thought,

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the seminal significance of which is attached to no single time and no single school.

To feel the true weight of this way of looking at the problem, one must place oneself back in the era in which Cohen's studies of Kant began.⁴ At the time the fundamental questions of philosophy appeared to be solved, because, insofar as these questions were shared with the disciplines of the natural sciences, they seemed to be absorbed by the sciences. Any independent methodological awareness of the fundamental presuppositions of cognition⁵ was regarded now as a relapse into dialectic, and the now mature discipline [of philosophy] believed itself to be free, finally, of the demands of dialectic. The meaning and content of cognition should be determined by specific empirical methods and by the empirical results of particular sciences, rather than by the abstract generalities of speculative reflection. So according to the fundamental view of the time, all that the consideration of nature and history can deliver in terms of positive data takes the place of any system that tries to encompass the whole of actuality.⁶ Cohen's position on this fundamental view is characteristic, in its positive aspects as well as in the negative ones. He takes the fact of science as a foundation unrestrictedly; but, with Kant, he transforms this fact in turn into a problem. Now, with this simple methodological change, it appears that the sense of the leading model of cognition undergoes a radical conversion. Even when it was most prevalent, "naturalism" as a *metaphysical* view never achieved unlimited dominance. In the circles of speculative philosophy, Schopenhauer's idealist doctrine was opposed to it, and in research circles, most notably, Helmholtz's epistemological research (which was, again, linked deliberately to Kant) was opposed to it. But one can see the power exercised by the methodology of naturalism even in these conflicts, even where one thought the real content of its worldview had been surmounted. True, from his metaphysical heights Schopenhauer looked down genteelly on the "men of the crucible and of the alembic,"⁷ but nonetheless in his epistemology⁸ he used, utterly naively and without critical scrutiny, the *language* that natural science, and in particular physiology, had constructed. In fact, *Helmholtz*⁹ made this language incomparably sharper and more precise;

but even he used it far beyond the limits within which it is valid in a strict sense, and within which alone it possesses a real meaning beyond the metaphorical. The entire doctrine of the a priori appears from now on as a mere extension of a certain individual result of natural science: it becomes a continuation of and a correlative to *Johannes Müller's* doctrine of specific nerve energies.¹⁰ The power of the generally naturalistic method of reasoning is demonstrated most persuasively by the fact that this method immediately casts a spell even over Kantian epistemology, which is invoked against it. As much as *Friedrich Albert Lange* attempts to overcome the dogmatism of naturalism, "psychophysical organization," which surely describes the puzzle of cognition rather than solves it, remains the last word to him nonetheless.¹¹ Even *Otto Liebmann's* early writings, despite all their freedom of thought, move unquestionably in this direction. Liebmann's text "On the objective perspective" of 1869 attempts to pursue Schopenhauer's and Helmholtz's insights further, and even Liebmann's discussion in *Analysis of Actuality* finds definite confirmation of Kant's doctrine that space is phenomenal in modern physiological theories and results.¹² Thus, all these efforts effectively take on the color of the very systems they are fighting. They search in vain to analyze the whole critically, meanwhile taking one element of the cognition of nature as fixed. The a priori truths, understood in terms of "type classification,"¹³ become a particular class of psychophysical "actualities," and thus inevitably are classified under, and subordinated to, the conditions for cognition of actuality, rather than being able to ground them and analyze them independently. Likewise, whether phenomenal actuality is interpreted as "a product of the brain" or, in seemingly refined usage, as "a product of representation,"¹⁴ the mere concept of a "product" still begs the entire question from the standpoint of epistemology.

Cohen's interpretation and critique of Kant introduces an original twist on this point. It comes about through simple reference to those ideas that Kant himself places constantly at the center of his doctrine. The "revolution of thought" developed in the critique of reason is rooted in

the transcendental problem; however, “transcendental,” for Kant, means an approach that begins not from the objects but from our *kind of cognition* of objects in general. The fundamental error¹⁵ of the “naturalistic” offshoots emerges clearly right away, in the light of this definition of the concept: for these offshoots must always presuppose a particular domain of objects, and a particular form of interaction between them, to describe the process of cognition. As long as the question of what kind of cognition of the object justifies knowledge¹⁶ of the object remains unanswered, the question of the being of the object in the transcendental sense remains undetermined and inexplicable. Accordingly, the true object of *philosophy* is not the “organization” of nature, nor that of the “psyche,” rather, above all it must determine and bring to light only the “organization” of the *cognition of nature*. This start sets the course of all the following inquiries accurately. In fact, from now on there are no more unsuspected or paradoxical twists: the new starting point determines further progress unambiguously and necessarily. From now on, the “facts” of natural science are valid only insofar as they can be justified by secure and exact *judgments*. Now we can achieve such security in that way only where particular natural judgments are anchored effectively in general fundamental judgments of mathematics. The order of *certainty* goes from mathematics to physics, not vice versa. So the transcendental question should be directed at *mathematical natural science* first. Of course, it is not at all accurate when it is said that Cohen’s cognition-critique addresses itself one-sidedly to mathematical theories of nature alone. The origin of this fundamental idea already rules out such a view, for this view requires us to overlook Cohen’s critique of *physiology*, no less than that of *physics*, within the general context of the problem that Cohen encountered. But the most general, fundamental meaning of the concept of object itself, which even physiology presupposes, cannot be determined rigorously and securely except in the language of mathematical physics. The concept of sensation leads to that of “stimulus,” which leads back to the general concept of motion. “Nature” must be conceived as a system of mechanical processes¹⁷ that stand in a lawful relationship to

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each other before we can count on it for cognition, as we would count on a fixed and well-founded datum. While dogmatic materialism attempts to derive thought as a special case of mechanics, this way of seeing it only needs to be developed, and thought through to a conclusion, to lead quickly to a peculiar about-face. For when the concept of mechanics is taken not in its unclear sense as a popular catchphrase but in its precise scientific meaning, mechanics itself leads back to mathematical, that is, to *ideal* fundamental elements. What motion “is” cannot be expressed except in concepts of quantity; understanding these presupposes a fundamental system of a pure doctrine of quantity.¹⁸ Consequently, the principles and axioms of mathematics become the specific foundation that must be taken as fixed in order to give content and sense to any statement of natural science about actuality.

In so doing, we achieve an immediate consequence, strictly continuous with the same idea. The analysis of cognition does not concern itself with the sphere of discussion of any kind of existing actualities and their causal interactions; rather, it develops a general ideal interrelation between truths and their reciprocal dependency relations, regardless of all such assumptions about the actuality of things. It is enough to secure the pure meaning of these truth relations before making any application to existing things. So already, in its very ideality, cognition-critique takes a strictly *objective* turn: it does not deal with representations and processes in the thinking individual, but with the validity relation¹⁹ between principles and “propositions,”²⁰ which as such must be established independently of any consideration of the subjective-psychological event of thinking.²¹ This fundamental idea of “transcendental” method has proven particularly effective and fruitful in the development of nineteenth-century philosophy. All of contemporary logic appears to be guided and pervaded by it. The idea [of “*transcendental*” method], which initially must have appeared paradoxical next to the leading naturalism and psychologism of the 1870s, begins to be more and more of a scientific common ground. From its disparate starting points, philosophical development drew ever nearer to it: the “pure logic,” whose challenge

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Husserl took up following *Bolzano*, as well as the new “object-theoretical”²² research that branched off bit by bit from psychology, are directed toward the ideal that *Cohen*’s texts on Kant first worked out in its full precision and forcefulness.

The energy with which science is referred to as the true and indispensable correlative to the transcendental method explains the need to preserve the “objective” sense of Kantian idealism. Where this connection is relaxed, theoretical idealism loses its sure guide. For then, despite all efforts toward interpersonal content, theoretical idealism approaches the problematic sphere of psychological representational idealism. For *Cohen*, on the other hand, the “unity of consciousness” is only another expression for the unity of the synthetic principles on whose validity rests the possibility of experience and, thus, the possibility of objectivity in general. The organization of the “mind”²³ that idealism seeks can be deciphered nowhere else but in the structural relationships of natural science, ethics and aesthetics.

So initially critique is the warning not to equate philosophy with mathematics or natural science or to put them only on the same terms. Philosophy does not have to create things, or, as the seductive and notorious phrase looted from mathematics has it, to “construct” them, but instead simply to understand and to re-examine how the objects and laws of mathematical experience are constructed. But with this warning, critique brings the insight, and at the same time the consolation, that mathematical natural science does not rest on mathematics and experience alone, but is itself an element of philosophy. Critique teaches how to recognize this element, and thus when the philosopher re-examines the object of his critique, he sees a mind from his own mind.²⁴

Certainly, following Kant’s words, we can know nothing of things a priori besides what “we ourselves” put into them: but the self that is at issue here will not be grasped in speculative musings about science, but solely in the continuity and lawfulness of the subject’s activity. This lawfulness is the first hypothesis of transcendental research, which, insofar as that research itself makes progress, is transformed more and more

into assertoric certainty. And the same relationship is repeated in the remaining areas of philosophy. Even ethicists cannot create the content of the moral law, but instead establish the “formula” for this content.

And even for aesthetics, the final element of the system, critique says something positive as well as negative: namely, what the philosopher is entitled to for the discovery of the aesthetic law. He does not need to give the rule and law – as if he were the genius – but instead to learn from art works, and from the relationship between special aesthetic interests and the innocence of nature, on which rests the devotion to the lovely allure of “purposefulness without a purpose,” as well as our means of understanding it in general and situating it conceptually. The law of the beautiful cannot be discovered philosophically, rather, it is to be composed out of that on the basis of which such a law can exist and does exist.²⁵

Thus, even this doctrine recognizes throughout a “given” to which philosophical consideration is to orient itself; but it is almost a given of a higher level, which consists in the logical structure of principles and ideas, rather than in the material determinateness of things.²⁶

At the same time, this transformation brings about a completely modified account of the oppositions on whose basis the problem of cognition had been considered and described until now. Above all, this involves the opposition between “subjective” and “objective” itself, which from now on must withdraw, for it cannot count any longer as any kind of a clear expression of the connection that the “transcendental” approach establishes between cognition and science. It is undeniable that Kant’s *language* still supports this distinction wholeheartedly; but the *fundamental idea*²⁷ of critique has grown beyond him on principle. For the transcendental-“subjective” is that which is demonstrated as a necessary and generally valid factor in cognition of any kind; but the highest “objective” view we can attain accounts for just that. So before taking any further steps, it is enough to see that “subjective” and “objective” are no longer to be seen as elements of a proper disjunction *after* the “Copernican revolution in thought” has once been completed.

Just as transcendental cognition never begins as cognition of the object as such, but of the kind of cognition of objects in general, as far as this can be possible a priori: likewise, the value of the a priori can never be identified as belonging directly to any class of objects as a predicate, but in every case can be meant only as a characterization of a certain kind of cognition. "That the two concepts are complements that belong together elevates the a priori above the realm of oppositions: actual-possible; object-concept; thing [*Sache*]-idea; objective-subjective" (KTE 135). The idea is the basis of "thingness" [*Sachheit*], but certainly only as the objectivity [*Sachlichkeit*] and necessity of a judgment; the concept becomes the "ground" of the "object" [*Gegenstand*], but where objecthood [*Gegenständlichkeit*] is understood as nothing but the expression of a necessary theoretical relation, of belonging together. The principal concept that contains all these disparate points of view, and gives them their unity and their relative meaning, is the "possibility of experience." "Things" [*Dinge*], then, are given to us only as contents of a possible experience; however, experience itself is never exhausted by the matter of particular perceptions, but necessarily contains a relation to specific formal principles of connection. This insight overturns even the opposition of "empiricism" and "rationalism"; for that "reason" of which theoretical idealism speaks must be exhibited in the *system of experience itself*. Thus, insofar as experience must be conceived as a unity, the moment of the logical is within experience, while, in contrast, the necessary relation to the problem of giving form to the empirical is brought forward in the logical functions, and thus an indissoluble relation between both elements is forged. Without cognition of this correlation, experience itself remains only an unclear catchphrase; and the problem with historical "empiricism" consists in the fact that it has "considered and put forward this most imprecise and indeterminate word, about which one can allow oneself to think all the right things as well as all the most perverse, as the final solution to all questions about the foundations and, not least, about the value of cognition."

The reciprocal connection of the logical and the empirical moment of cognition emerges most clearly in the further treatment that Cohen has

given Kant's principle of the "Anticipations of Perception." Here lies the path that, in its continuation, has led on to Cohen's own systematic formation of the *Logic of Pure Cognition*.²⁸ The thought-structure that begins here forms the final and fateful step in the overall direction of Cohen's approach to the renewal of the Kantian doctrine. The natural-scientific "realities" should no longer count as the self-evident and unquestionable *beginning* of cognition-critique. They reveal themselves to a progressive analysis as *ideal* structures:²⁹ as contents whose determinacy rests on the logical content³⁰ they contain. In this way, matter and motion, force and mass are conceived as instruments of cognition. However, the high point of this development will be reached only when we return to the fundamental mathematical motive,³¹ which comes before all specific conceptual formation in the natural sciences. This motive lies before us in the theoretical method of the "infinitesimal." Without it, it would be impossible to describe rigorously the concept of motion as mathematical natural science presupposes it, let alone to have a conceptual command of the lawfulness of motions. Thus, the circle of critical research closes here. For there can be no further doubt that the concept of the infinitely small describes not a sensibly graspable "existence"³² but a specific kind, and fundamental orientation, of thought: but in this fundamental orientation the concept of the infinitely small proves itself to be, henceforth, the necessary presupposition for the object of natural science.

Certainly an objection can be raised against this narrow dependence of logic on the fundamental forms of mathematical natural science. Philosophy appears to be robbed of its self-sufficiency by this dependence, and to be linked inextricably to the contingent particularities of a specific science. Will not philosophy be entrapped in the fate of this science as well, in its temporal rise and fall? If it is true that, as Cohen formulated it explicitly, "only a Newtonian could come forward as Kant," then any revision to Newton's mechanics threatens the system of "synthetic principles" to its essential core. However, Cohen's own development has refuted this account of his doctrine. For, with the same energy that Cohen devotes to placing the Newtonian system at the focus of attention, he has

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followed the transformations that Newton's system has experienced in the physics of the nineteenth century with resolute interest and impartial appreciation. Not only was he one of the first to point out the *philosophical* significance of *Faraday*, he delved into the principles of *Heinrich Hertz's* mechanics, to understand and to justify their content for the critique of cognition.³³ So, for Cohen, the orientation to science does not imply any commitment to its temporal, contingent form. The "givenness" that the philosopher recognizes in the mathematical science of nature ultimately means the givenness of the *problem*. In its actual form the philosopher seeks and recognizes an ideal form, which he singles out, to confront it with the changing historical configuration as a standard for measurement.³⁴ If this is an apparent circle, it is an unavoidable circle, for it arises from that reciprocal interaction between idea and experience through which – according to the words of Goethe – the ethical and scientific world is governed.

On another front, Cohen's own system not only allows for but directly requires an advance over the boundaries of the problems of mathematical natural science. The problem of the organism, the problem of life can never be completely absorbed in the forms of motion of pure mechanics. Insofar as the ideality of these forms of motion is known, it is understood at the same time that the true *forms of life*, the individuals of biology, are indeed categorically subordinate to mechanics, but simultaneously, that the full content of the individuals of biology could never be exhausted by mechanics. The point-masses that underlie the motions of pure mechanics as subjects are only the first abstract *approach* to the problem. The classification of chemical substances already poses a new problem for science, and the more we expand our consideration of the embodiment of *natural history*, the farther and more unfathomably it stretches before us. It will not be gratuitous to present "systematic unities," which any descriptive natural science presupposes, next to the synthetic unities of the mathematical-dynamical principles; "for the system of nature, like experience, must include any natural science that does not proceed mathematically, whether

it is constrained to do so or whether it does so willingly."

Even assuming that the ideal of mathematical natural science were entirely realized, and that we were able to express all natural forms in static mechanical equations, mechanics still would not have exhausted the interest of the description of nature. For we want to classify natural forms, not merely as relations of equilibrium under mechanical processes, but instead according to the quality of their structure. It is not enough to fix the sun as the center of gravity, the sun should also be described according to the kind of substances that burn in it. Now when the plant and animal bodies sustained by the sun come into the question, it becomes evident that the structures and objectivizations³⁵ that are at issue certainly go beyond the mechanical abstractions of points in motion, but can in no way be absorbed into them with nothing left over. At best, it can appear that the ideal of research, to measure all nature by the system of points in motion, is realized in the case of chemical reactions. But if, even in chemistry itself, ordering and distinguishing elements as such necessitates another principle besides that of material points, then the urgent need for such a principle is unmistakable in the case of organisms that certainly tend to be investigated, after all, as mechanical-chemical aggregates, but which, for all that, form unities that are distinguished from those point-unities of mechanics by the problem and interests of research.³⁶

Nonetheless this extension of the *range* of the concept of nature does not invalidate its *content* as it has been defined until now. For the idea of an *end*,³⁷ which steps in now as the fundamental principle of what is peculiar to living phenomena,³⁸ does not oppose the causal explanation, but rather shows the way to the continuous employment of this kind of explanation. As an "idea,"³⁹ the concept of an end aims for the systematic completion of the causal account, and for its unlimited realization. On these points Cohen follows closely the view realized in the *Critique of Judgment*. The purposefulness⁴⁰ of organisms represents a "boundary" but not a "barrier" to mechanical causality: for it sets forth a problem

that as such, in and for itself, is certainly unfinished, but whose completion must be progressively *sought after* by means of the causal explanation itself. Thus, purposefulness describes a new and specific direction of research; it is a regulative [idea] of *cognition*, but not an objectively⁴¹ absolute power that underlies phenomenal causation. So the “turn,”⁴² toward which Cohen’s entire critical oeuvre is directed, was brought a step further into the center of work in natural science at the time. At the moment, it appears yet again that wherever, in the popular view, one has only to do with things and their effective forces, philosophical analysis is led to concepts and methods of cognition instead, determines their intrinsic validity, and distinguishes them from one another. However, insofar as the problem of *being* is directed back to the problem of *actuality* in this way, a new and broader problem arises. That problem is to determine the meaning of the concept of actuality within a comprehensive *system of validity*⁴³ and, since until now the single directions of theoretical consciousness were isolated from each other, to determine the whole, the fundamental orientation of theoretical reason in general, by confronting it with the kind of validity of ethical and aesthetic consciousness.

II

The foundation of theoretical philosophy carried out in the transcendental case has achieved an entirely new standpoint on the justification of ethics. Every worldview that begins with the “things”⁴⁴ and their real interaction and that calculates with them as if with established, absolute data sees itself landed in a particular difficulty with regard to the problem of ethics. For as much as one wants to describe and analyze this thing-world⁴⁵ as well: the phenomenon of the “ought”⁴⁶ has no location in it and cannot be teased out of it by any analysis, however astute. So when seen from this standpoint, this phenomenon remains a stranger to philosophy. Thus, skepticism must always be rehearsed over and over about whether the ethical problem in general deals with a meaningful, factually necessary question or, rather, with an illusion peculiar

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to representation. In the most favorable case, the ethical appears as a peculiar and paradoxical side-effect of the world of the existing and actual: as an epiphenomenon that materializes as a particular individual step of “being,” which stands in a relationship with being itself, but not in an internal and necessary one.

In contrast, from the beginning the critical reduction of being to the validity of first principles reorients even the determination of ethics.⁴⁷ Now the “maxims” and “rules” don’t make up anything plainly new, for which a logical state of affairs would be tracked down first: rather, they are the particular material of any philosophical consideration in general, which is established already by the foundation of theoretical science. The question of the lawfulness of cognition immediately stands aside for the question of the lawfulness of the will. In both cases, however, the law is not considered as a specific actual natural agent, which would be demonstrated somehow in the organization of the particular individual. The ethical norm cannot be represented as a kind of natural-scientific *average*, which is to be abstracted from consideration of actual human actions. In full agreement with Kant, any *anthropological* turn here will be rejected even more sharply than in the area of pure cognition. Such a turn does not solve the problem, but rather defeats its purpose, insofar as it misjudges the particular meaning and orientation of the problem. The “actual” from experience in human history should not be made the standard of the ethically “possible,” because, on the contrary, all productivity of ethical thought consists in just that: to seek out and to establish a “possible,” which itself demands a new “actuality” beyond anything given until now. The anthropological “rule” is never inherent in such a revolutionary stance with respect to the factual, for it must content itself with describing this factual itself according to its general historical type. Covering up this relationship with profound metaphysical formulas that claim to represent and to discover the “being” of the ethical cannot alter it. “A metaphysical wisdom, which can betray the psychological artifice of treating the in-itself of the world as so-called ethical drives, does not wish to designate ethics as a particular philosophical

discipline, despite any revelation of its worth” (KBE 2nd ed., 7).

In these matters, a distinction comes into play that Cohen had already made within the theoretical sphere, but which now demands a more rigorous definition. The questions of the lawful structure of theoretical and ethical “consciousness”⁴⁸ should not be confused with the question of why, of the metaphysical origin of consciousness. It is a question about consciousness when one demands to know how it occurs that representations are joined in us in spatial and temporal orders, that thought follows the determinate forms of substance, of causality and so on – instead of contenting oneself with what each of these forms *means* as a part of the logical whole of cognition, and with what ideal value is to be ascribed to them as a result. But only the latter problem allows for a real and precise answer, while the first threatens to lead us once more beyond the language of science into that of myth.

The question of consciousness is the question of old metaphysics, not of cognition-critique. It has to do with the possibility of the qualitative determinations of consciousness: how it comes about that we have sensations, representations, feelings and desires, how it comes about that we sense blue, that we think of causality, that pleasure and pain stir in us. The old metaphysical schools gave their answers to this question as spiritualism or as materialism, with their nuances. These questions of consciousness as such become antiquated with cognition-critique.⁴⁹

This insight, when applied to ethics, means that we do not need to look for the “law” of the will in itself, in the sense of asking: from which obscure source of the constitution of the world does the fact of the ethical will itself come forth? For while a decision about this may result, it certainly has nothing to do with the meaning of the ethical norm itself and can neither add to nor subtract from its validity.

It is all the same, whether the men in [our] experience can love each other because it is blown into their souls by a creator, or indeed because they hate each other, but love such a creator just because it exists, and thus

love even its mirror images . . . We may marvel at the profundity of such decipherings of the code of the person, or we may appraise them as cheap half-truths of a one-sided anthropology; it can be acknowledged, though, that such analyses of our ethical representations and events have their uses for the explanation of moral judgments, and even, in a limited way, for the conception of political history. Nonetheless, we call such considerations and research *psychology* or *anthropology*, but not – ethics.⁵⁰

For ethics does not look for the causal unity of the final cause of the determination of the will, but for the teleological unity in the content itself of these determinations. Ethics does not seek to establish where the determinations originate, but which form and quality they must have insofar as they are to be incorporated into a true unity, into a *system* of determinations of ends. Thus, the question is exactly analogous to that of pure cognition-critique: while the latter calls into question the possibility of their logical form and the conditions of this possibility, barring all assumptions about the origin of representations, here it suffices to establish those conditions to which the maxim of the individual act of will must conform, insofar as that maxim needs to have universal validity beyond the contingent particularity of the specific thing willed.

This connection between ethics and the doctrine of experience sheds new light on the main features of the general methodology. The comprehensive expression of the “law” henceforth will be the central point of the system: so much so that *Kants Begründung der Ethik* could venture the formulation that the law itself is the “thing in itself.”⁵¹ Appearances must stand under laws, must be expressed as single cases of laws to achieve the status of objective reality and objective validity. They constitute the fulfillment of the content of the synthetic principles, and play a part in “being”⁵² to the extent that they do so. However, if one inquires further into the “being” of these principles themselves, it is important to avoid confusion of this being with any manifestly given, “palpable” actuality. As soon as such a confusion is made, any approach to the mere question of *ethics* is certainly out of the

question; but, fundamentally, *logic* too is given its sense in this way.

It is still the same old [argument about the] impulse of the stone.⁵³ As the ideas should eke out a kind of existence in an intelligible realm, in order to signify an innate true being, so the lawful realities⁵⁴ still have an individual existence as well, so they can lend that existence to appearances. However, existence means not only to be in the form of our spatial intuition, but also to be demonstrable in *sensation*. Further, the laws of appearances call for, and indicate, a unification of our forms of intuition with still other particularities and conditions of our knowledge. This unification, residing again in the form of spatial intuition and also completely, demonstrably, represented in sensation, is what the ancients called the third man.⁵⁵ It is nothing but the sheer, indestructible confusion between *intuitive* representation and *conceptual* thought, which the word leads to even here. The law is the reality – that is to say, reality is to be conceived as a *conceptual* thought, not as intuitive, intuitable representation; as a *sign*⁵⁶ of the validity of *cognition* and as nothing else. The appearance is any half-baked object that we confront ourselves with by means of intuition.⁵⁷

This affiliation of being with a “sign” provides the “ought” as well with a secure and unassailable persistence in the whole system: the highest persistence, of which only the “idea” is capable. Once one overcomes the hereditary defect of materialism, “to think of all objectivity as material, in the unexplained forms of space and time,” one can appreciate that that which is true, is real, is valid, does not need to appear as such in sensible materiality: thus, in principle, nothing more stands in the way of the recognition of the specific ethical “a priori.” Cohen never made an attempt to reduce “being” to the “ought”; rather, he held the moments strictly separate according to their specific individuality, while, admittedly, they are posited and combined again, in connection with one another, under the general main concept of “validity.”⁵⁸ Cohen’s Kant-books have determined decisively the direction of modern research on these points as well. The category of “validity,” which for *Lotze*⁵⁹ accompanies a

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specific metaphysics, first achieves full methodological clarity and independence here with Cohen, while at the same time the single types of validity, not reducible to each other, preserve their full individuality and remain recognized for it.

Cohen’s account of the *concept of freedom*, and his presentation of the Kantian doctrine of freedom, supports a clearer determination of his fundamental insight in ethics. Here his method is presented with a difficult problem: for this part of the Kantian system is the most closely interwoven with metaphysical motives. Personality reveals itself in “intelligible character” as the autonomous core and the true “in itself” of actuality. In fact, any purely historical reproduction of the Kantian system would have to recognize that even Kant himself did not reach a sharp and clear distinction between the purely *methodological* and the *ontological* questions quite yet. In particular, the treatment of the concept of freedom in the *Critique of Pure Reason* presents both interests next to each other and still almost undistinguishable from each other, and the original *critical* meaning of the concept is defined precisely only with the new completion of content that the concept achieves in the *Groundwork for Metaphysics of Morals* and in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Thus, Cohen’s analyses are not so much simple reproduction as they are a conscious sharpening and development of the Kantian fundamental idea. As Cohen emphasizes himself,

Here is one of the most outstanding features with which to approach the method that will be put into practice in these books, which are dedicated to the reconstruction of the Kantian system as a method that is historically fruitful as much as systematically: not to introduce and to announce the appropriate path on the basis of an awareness of improvements one has made oneself, let alone on the basis of a cheaply inflated opposition; but to establish independently the foundation of the transcendental method, rediscovered and laid anew in the spirit of its creator, and, not less, to complete the structure according to the plan of the system, with free choice of each single building block, with no limits on the investigation into the adequacy of each one of them, and with the

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undisputed right to include some missing concepts and to exclude false ones.⁶⁰

But the Kantian doctrine of freedom is allowed to achieve a clearer and sharper sense under this assumption, if we maintain that freedom, according to the new meaning that it attains with Kant, is no concept of cause but purely and exclusively a *concept of end*.⁶¹ Understood in this sense, the concept of freedom does not describe the mysterious cause from which our ethical behavior originates, but the content of the determination of the goal on which it converges. This relationship can be expressed, perhaps, as follows: as ethical subjects, we act not from freedom, but towards freedom.⁶² Thus, for Cohen, the idea of “autonomy” becomes the idea of “autotely”:⁶³ the only act that is ethically autonomous and worthy is directed to the realization of a community,⁶⁴ in which each individual that belongs to it is [treated] “always at the same time as an end, and never as a mere means.” The idea of such a community is an indispensable and unwavering *regulative*⁶⁵ of our action: but we mustn’t sensualize it as a *corpus mysticum* of existing “intelligible essences.” Here is the front of Cohen’s battle against such accounts of the Kantian doctrine of freedom as became popular with *Schopenhauer*. If we understand freedom as if it is taken from the empirical I and brought forward from an intelligible I, as if it has given a certain form to the will in an autonomous act located beyond all temporality – then while one may consider its theoretical truth or falsity, in any case the problem and the orientation of ethics are frustrated through this mystical explanation. For this “freedom,” which remains suspended in the mere indifference of an originally timeless determination of choice, still has no *positive* sense and content, in itself, at all. From the standpoint of the empirical individual, it is indifferent whether we relinquish the conditions of nature or an unknown mythical power that confronts the individual extrinsically: his “personality” in the ethical sense is annulled in the former as in the latter case. Thus, it does not help anything to take the responsibility for the phenomenal subject and to saddle him with an “Adam from a transcendental rib”; that way, the problem is only pushed back into an impenetrable obscurity, but is in no way

solved or even formulated. “Freedom” is a truly “intelligible” concept only insofar as it is not broken down into any kind of givenness, but rather strictly retains the character of a *problem*.⁶⁶ Thus, the thought of the ideal “community of ends” gives the criteria for an individual: according to this idea, the individual becomes “free” insofar as he dissociates himself from contingent empirical ties. Thus, freedom is not understood as a “noumenon” already available in actual existence; rather, freedom itself, as the correlative concept of the ethical law, makes up the *content* of the noumenon, for it proposes a requirement that goes beyond all determinate, particular empirical ends. The idea preserves its pure validity and meaning only where one has learned to dispense with the need to support it with, and to ground it in, some purported existence. The whole fundamental orientation of the view makes it clear that the *application* of the idea of freedom to the empirical actuality of human history will not wither away as a result; for as the theoretical a priori promotes a constant reference back to “experience” and its possibility, so the idea of a “kingdom of ends” is the maxim to which the phenomenal order of nature conforms – in fact, according to which that order itself should be constructed from the active subject from within temporality. In contrast, from an apparently lofty perspective, spiritualism abstracts away from even all these truly “practical” goals.

And so truly there is no lack of examples from any time of enthusiastic idealism ossified into a base, contemptible realism, which endows its creations of reason with sublime attributes – but people indulge them as if they pleased God; since it would make it easy for them if it did please God. The physical man⁶⁷ climbs onto any step of the ladder of spiritualism, which arrogates to itself the name of idealism and holds itself to be in mystical readiness – this ladder lies outside all experience, in the miraculous. And so, with the opportunity to climb down, the possibility to climb up is also lacking. The idea, which acquires the status of a sensible existence, loses the value of cognition that is secure in the maxim.⁶⁸

Here, as with the doctrine of experience, we can go into only a few of the details of Cohen’s view of

Kantian ethics: only the continuous kinship of the structure of the *principles* of both doctrines must be discussed here, for each clarifies the other in turn. And this analogy between the fundamental themes anticipates, already, that new connection that both sets of problems encounter within *aesthetics*. The foundation of aesthetics is, like that of ethics, interwoven systematically with the problem of “actuality.” As long as the theoretical sense of this problem remains unilluminated, the conceptual status of any “being” alive in and specific to the art work will remain unidentified. The question arises always as to whether the world of aesthetic imagination⁶⁹ is a mere “imitation”⁷⁰ of nature or stems from a particular structural principle, which causes, autonomously, a new objective world to emerge from it. With this view of the question, the problem of being steps out of any abstract isolation which it seems to suffer while staying within pure epistemological⁷¹ considerations. For in the eighteenth century, aesthetic culture itself was led back to these fundamental questions purely as a result of its own needs. Thus, the circle of cultural interests closed here: art became the *formation*⁷² of that relationship between “idea” and “actuality” that theoretical critique formulated and grounded in general. Cohen’s presentation of Kantian aesthetics pursued this connection in detail, in its manifold ramifications, and, to an extent, had grasped again the intellectual principle from which its historical effectiveness developed. The general standpoint of the reconstruction that Cohen had put at the forefront proves its worth at just this point.

The historical existence of a person coincides in no way with his personal action and will. Thus, historical understanding obtains by fraud the principle that any individual belongs in a powerful sense to an historical order, even if he may see it that way himself. Then we understand an event historically only when we conceive of it in that connection, which must remain hidden from it itself.⁷³

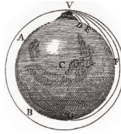
Even if one refrains from considering *Schiller’s* relationship to Kant, nonetheless those “secret-yet-fully-open” relationships remain, between *Kant* and *Winckelmann* or between *Kant* and

Goethe or *Beethoven*. Even the *theoretical* picture of Kantian aesthetics will be completed only when one includes these relationships in the whole picture, even if that picture is only “intelligible.” At the same time, in this completion of the system the fundamental idea of transcendental method comes to the fore yet again, with full acuity. From now on, full “homogeneity” exists between the two fundamental orientations of consciousness: like the world of art, the world of empirical, spatio-temporal existence, and likewise the world of ethical values, is not “encountered” immediately, but rests on principles of formation⁷⁴ that critical reflection discovers, and whose validity critical reflection demonstrates. Thus, art is no longer isolated among the kinds of consciousness; rather, art is that which presents the “principle” of these kinds and their relationship in a new sense. The transcendental system does not present so much a cohesive relationship between cognitions as it does a relationship between the kinds of development⁷⁵ of consciousness, of which each brings forth a content specific to it. “These contents must be related to each other, because the kinds of development of all contents are related as kinds of development of consciousness, and consequently they form a systematic unity.” The various subspecies of the comprehensive idea of *validity* are enumerated within this unity. Pre-critical idealism failed to realize this double turn, for from its perspective the world melted into a uniform unit of validity.⁷⁶

It wanted to derive all kinds of reality from consciousness; but it did not claim the right to determine a distinction between the values of cognition. Not only was the distinction between nature and ethics not determined clearly, even in the matter of the cultural spheres, but even such an important, encompassing, wide and universal sphere of culture as that which art presents had no place in the system of philosophy, and remained without a systematic validation, without the demonstration that consciousness, as the principle of all spheres of culture, is the source and condition for its value and end, and the foundation for its kind of development. Thus, the principle of consciousness was determined inadequately as long as it was unable to explain art.⁷⁷

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A fully resolved general ideal arises with these claims, toward which Cohen's *systematic* main works are directed throughout. In fact, there is the closest kind of interdependence between these works and the writings dedicated to the interpretation of the Kantian doctrine. The tight interrelation between all the elements of Cohen's historical work is realized only with the rigor of his own systematic research, and only with the fully objective commitment to Kant's works could his own system determine its ideal, universal-historical position.



notes

- 1 [In general, in what follows, I give the original words for many technical philosophical terms in footnotes. In cases where I think confusion might arise from the use of similar words (for instance, *Sache* and *Ding* used for “object” and “thing” in close proximity), I give the original in square brackets in the translated text. My own footnotes appear in square brackets followed by my initials; references to original German terms appear on their own – L.P.]
- 2 Originally published as “Hermann Cohen und die Erneuerung der Kantischen Philosophie,” *Kantstudien* 17 (1912): 252–73.
- 3 [*Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (first ed. Hildesheim: Ferdinand Dümmlers Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1871), hereafter KTE. *Kants Begründung der Ethik* (first ed., Berlin: Harrwitz und Grossman, 1877), hereafter KBE. *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* (first ed., Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmlers Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1889), hereafter KBA – L.P.]
- 4 [Cohen began his studies for a doctorate in philosophy at the Humboldt University in Berlin, in 1864 – L.P.]
- 5 *Erkenntnis*. [In the following, I translate *Erkenntnis* as “cognition” in every case. As far as I know, Werner Pluhar (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996)) originated this translation, pointing out that *Erkenntnis* does not actually correspond to the English word “knowledge.” Related terms are translated in the same way: for instance, Cohen’s term *Erkenntniskritik* becomes “cognition-critique.” However, this translation is for purely linguistic reasons, and I do not intend it to indicate a philosophical stance – L.P.]
- 6 [In his work on Kant, Cohen distinguishes carefully between *Realität*, reality, and *Wirklichkeit*, actuality – L.P.]
- 7 Herren vom Tiegel und von der Retorte [That is, empirical researchers – here, chemists. An alembic (*die Retorte*) is a device for distilling chemicals – L.P.]
- 8 *Erkenntnistheorie*. [At the time, the term *Erkenntnistheorie* had a specialized meaning. For a discussion of this meaning, see Klaus Christian Köhnke, *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism: German Academic Philosophy between Idealism and Positivism*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) 36f. – L.P.]
- 9 [Hermann von Helmholtz. For a discussion of Helmholtz’s epistemology, see David Cahan, *Hermann von Helmholtz and the Foundations of Nineteenth-Century Science* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994). See also Patton and Friedman (both in this issue) – L.P.]
- 10 *Lehre von spezifischen Sinnesenergien* [Helmholtz’s mentor Johannes Müller had observed in research that the same stimulus could produce different responses in each sense organ. Müller observed that each sense organ has its own mechanism, distinct from the others, that determines the quality of sensations. Müller explained this by arguing that there is a “specific nerve-energy” for each nerve in the body (see, for example, Hermann Helmholtz, “über das Ziel und die Fortschritte der Naturwissenschaft” in *Das Denken in der Naturwissenschaft* [1869] (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968) 56) – L.P.]
- 11 [While the two clashed over Kant-interpretation, Lange was Cohen’s strong supporter and mentor until he died, whereupon Cohen was chosen as Lange’s natural successor for his professorship at Marburg. See especially Ulrich Sieg, “Die frühe Hermann Cohen und die Völkerpsychologie,” *Ashkenas* 13.2 (2003): 461–83 – L.P.]
- 12 “Über den objektiven Anblick,” 1869, and *Analysis der Wirklichkeit*, first ed. 1876. [Wilhelm Windelband remarks:
- When the lecturer [*Privatdozent*] in Tübingen [Liebmann] published his inquiry, “On the

- objective perspective" (1869), he strolled along the trail that Schopenhauer and Helmholtz had blazed. With them, he placed the intellectual factor of sensation next to the sensual, and he counted as part of the former, besides the intuitions of space and time, among the categories not only causality, but also, quite correctly, subsistence: even then he was already on the trail of the true meaning of the Transcendental Analytic, when he understood extra-empirical necessity as the third, "transcendental" factor, that exists between the two others, so that that which we may call "existence," actuality in the sense of transcendental idealism, first comes into being from this factor. ("Otto Liebmanns Philosophie" (*Kant-Studien*, Bd. 15, 1910) IV; my translation – L.P.]
- 13 "Gattungsorganisation." [A technical term found in Lange and many early neo-Kantians. See Hans-Ludwig Ollig, *Der Neukantianismus* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1979) 19: "Lange found his place in the history of philosophy [...] through his doctrine of 'Gattungsorganisation,' which he shared with the other representatives of early neo-Kantianism" (my translation) – L.P.]
- 14 "Product of the brain" is *Gehirnprodukt*, "product of representation" is *Vorstellungsprodukt*.
- 15 *πρωτον ψευδος*.
- 16 Wissen.
- 17 *Bewegungsvorgänge*.
- 18 *Größenlehre*.
- 19 *Geltungszusammenhang*.
- 20 "Sätzen," which could also be translated as "theorems." Quotation marks in the original.
- 21 *Subjektiv-psychologischen Denkgeschehens*.
- 22 "Gegenstandstheoretisch."
- 23 "Geist."
- 24 *Geist von seinem Geiste*. KTE 578.
- 25 KTE 578.
- 26 *Dinge*.
- 27 *Grundgedanke*.
- 28 *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*. [The fourth edition of LRE was republished (in German), edited by

cassirer

- Helmut Holzhey, as vol. 6, Part I in *Hermann Cohen: Werke* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1997) – L.P.]
- 29 *Gebilde*.
- 30 *als Inhalte, deren Bestimmtheit auf dem logischen Gehalt beruht*.
- 31 *Das mathematische Grundmotiv*.
- 32 [In the whole of the text, I have translated "Dasein" as "existence," to distinguish it from *Sein*, which I have translated as "being" – L.P.]
- 33 [Both of these analyses can be found in Cohen, *Einleitung, mit kritischem Nachtrag, zur neunten Auflage von Langes Geschichte des Materialismus in Hermann Cohens Schriften zur Philosophie und Zeitgeschichte* [1914], eds. Albert Görland and Ernst Cassirer (Berlin: Akademie, 1928) 171–302 –L.P.]
- 34 *Maßstab*.
- 35 *Objektivierungen*.
- 36 KTE 508f.
- 37 *Zweck*.
- 38 *Lebenserscheinungen*.
- 39 [That is, as a "regulative idea" in Kant's sense – L.P.]
- 40 *Zweckmässigkeit*.
- 41 *Dingliche*.
- 42 "Umwendung."
- 43 *System der Geltungswerte*.
- 44 "Dinge"; quotation marks in the original.
- 45 *Dingwelt*.
- 46 "Das Sollen."
- 47 *Sittlichkeit*.
- 48 "Bewußtheit."
- 49 KTE 207f.
- 50 KBE 2nd ed., 144f.
- 51 *Kants Begründung der Ethik* 36.
- 52 *Sein*.
- 53 This refers to Galileo's argument against Aristotle in the *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*. The *Dialogue* is Galileo's discussion

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of the relative merits of the Copernican heliocentric system and the Ptolemaic geocentric system. Galileo insists that his defense of the Copernican model is not absolute, but rather is directed against specific Peripatetics who had argued that the earth does not move. Within five months of the publication of the *Dialogue* in 1632, Galileo was charged with heresy, and he was condemned in 1633.

54 *Gesetzrealitäten*.

55 *τριτοζ ανθρωποζ.*

56 *Wertzeichen*.

57 KBE 28f.

58 "Validity" here is "Geltungswert."

59 [Rudolf Hermann Lotze (1783–1829) was trained in philosophy, natural science, and medicine. In 1844, he took over Herbart's position in Göttingen, teaching philosophy, and in 1880 he moved to Berlin after the prominent neo-Kantians Hermann von Helmholtz and Eduard Zeller interceded for him. Like Helmholtz and Zeller, Lotze combined an interest in physiology with a lifelong attraction to idealist philosophy – L.P.]

60 KBE 2nd ed., 245f.

61 *Zweckbegriff*.

62 *Wir handeln [. . .] als ethische Subjekte nicht von der Freiheit aus, sondern auf die Freiheit hin.*

63 ["Autonomie" and "autotelie." That is to say, freedom of "norms" is changed to freedom of "telos," or in Kant's sense, the freedom to set one's own ends – L.P.]

64 *Gemeinschaft*.

65 ["Regulativ," i.e., again, a regulative idea in Kant's sense – L.P.]

66 *Aufgabe*.

67 [*Sinnenmensch*, perhaps as opposed to *Geistesmensch*, or spiritual man – L.P.]

68 KBE 2nd ed., 301.

69 *Phantasie*.

70 "Nachahmung."

71 *Erkenntnistheoretisch*.

72 *Gestaltung*.

73 [Cassirer does not give the reference to this quotation from Cohen, but it seems to be from KBA – L.P.]

74 *Prinzipien der Gestaltung*.

75 *Erzeugungsweisen*.

76 *Eine unterschiedslose Geltungseinheit*.

77 KBA 96.

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