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Marburg Neo-Kantianism as Philosophy of Culture

1 Introduction

Although Ernst Cassirer is correctly regarded as one of the foremost figures in the Neo-Kantian movement that dominated Germany from 1870 – 1920, specifying exactly what his Neo-Kantianism amounts to can be a challenge. Not only must we clarify what his commitments are as a member of the so-called Marburg School of Neo-Kantianism, but also given the shift between his early philosophy of mathematics and natural science to his later philosophy of culture, we must consider to what extent he remained a Marburg Neo-Kantian throughout his career.

With regard to the first task, it is typical to approach the Marburg School, which was founded by Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp, by way of a contrast with the other dominant school of Neo-Kantianism, the Southwest or Baden School, founded by Wilhelm Windelband and carried forward by Heinrich Rickert and Emil Lask. The going assumption is that these two schools were 'rivals' in the sense that the Marburg School focused exclusively on developing a Kantian approach to mathematical natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*), while the Southwest School privileged issues relating to normativity and value, hence their primary focus on the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*). If one accepts this 'scientist' interpretation of the Marburg School, one is tempted to read Cassirer's early work on mathematics and natural science as orthodox Marburg Neo-Kantianism and to then regard his later work on the philosophy of culture as a break from his predecessors, veering closer towards interests championed by the Southwest School.

In this paper, however, I argue that this way of interpreting Marburg Neo-Kantianism as well as Cassirer's relationship to it threatens to obscure one of the deep commitments shared by Cohen, Natorp, and Cassirer alike, viz., defending a systematic *philosophy of culture*, which accommodates both the mathematical natural sciences and the humanities. In order to bring to light the Marburg commitment to the philosophy of culture, I begin by calling into question the 'scientist' reading of the Marburg School that pits it against the Southwest School. I claim that although there are some important points of disagreement between the two schools, e. g., with regard to the notion of 'intuition,' there is a great deal that they agree on. In the first place, I show that they both endorse the basic tenets of Neo-Kantianism *in general* (Section 2). Moreover, I demonstrate that the Marburg and Southwest

Schools were united in rejecting 'genetic' interpretations of Kant in favor of an 'anti-psychologistic' interpretation, which placed emphasis on the logical conditions of knowledge in the mathematical natural sciences and humanities alike (Section 3). Once we begin to appreciate the continuity between the Marburg and Southwest Schools on these issues, we will be in a position to turn more directly to the Marburg approach to the philosophy of culture. To this end, we will consider not only how the Marburg Neo-Kantians use their distinctive 'transcendental method' to investigate the various regions *within* culture (Section 4), but also their attempts to account for the *systematic unity* of culture as a whole surprisingly by means of a distinctive form of 'psychology', which studies the consciousness of culture (Section 5). I conclude by claiming that this revised understanding of the Marburg School has implications for how we should understand Cassirer's relation to it: rather than read his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* as a break from his Marburg predecessors, we should treat it as a *critical revision* of Cohen's and Natorp's attempts to carry out the basic Marburg cultural project, which he continued to adhere to (Section 6).

2 Basic Neo-Kantian Commitments

Let's begin by situating the Marburg School within the Neo-Kantian movement more generally. In many ways, the Neo-Kantian movement arose in response to a worry about the continued value of philosophy in light of the rapid advancement of science in the mid-19th century: why would we continue to look to philosophy when science appeared to be capable and more reliable in providing answers to questions about the nature of the mind and world? The state of philosophy in the early 19th century did nothing to allay this worry, as the absolute idealism of Hegel and Fichte seemed to many to be little more than abstruse reasoning that had lost touch with the real world. This led many thinkers to endorse the 'positivist' idea that we should dispense with philosophy as a means of gaining knowledge and look exclusively to science to answer questions about the mind and world.

The Neo-Kantian movement emerged as a reaction against this positivist line of thought and as an attempt to justify the need for philosophy in the face of scientific progress. As the label for the movement suggests, the Neo-Kantians maintained that in order to vindicate philosophy, it was necessary to go 'back to Kant'.[1] But why Kant? For the Neo-Kantians, there are at least two reasons:

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1 In *Kant und die Epigonen* (1865), Otto Liebmann critiques post-Kantian idealism and con-

first, Kant's philosophy gives us reason to doubt the underlying philosophical commitments of positivism, and, second, it offers a more satisfying analysis of how knowledge, whether in mathematics, natural science, or philosophy, is possible at all.

With regard to their criticisms of positivism, the Neo-Kantians argue that its proponents often make problematic assumptions with regards to metaphysics and epistemology. On the metaphysical side of things, the Neo-Kantians claim that many positivists are committed to a position we could call '*naïve realism*', according to which subjects and objects form two ontologically independent realms.[2] On this view, neither the existence nor the properties of the entities in these realms depend upon each other. Epistemologically, the Neo-Kantians claim that positivists tend to endorse what we could call the '*copy theory*' of knowledge, which characterizes knowledge as a process in which our minds form a mental 'copy' of mind-independent objects.[3]

According to the Neo-Kantians, however, if we go 'back to Kant', then we will discover that endorsing either of these positions undermines one's ability to give a satisfying account of how we come to have knowledge, even in mathematics and natural science. To appreciate this, a few remarks about the basic Kantian framework for knowledge are in order. For Kant, knowledge is a matter of forming judgments that are *objectively valid*, i.e., they 'agree' with objects, and are *necessarily universally valid*, i.e., they are judgments that any judger at any time ought to make.[4] As such, from a Kantian perspective, any satisfying theory of knowledge must explain how we are able to form judgments that are valid in these ways.

Yet by Kant's lights, theories of knowledge that rest on naïve realism and the copy theory fall short on both of these counts. With respect to objective validity, Kant worries that if naïve realism is right, then it does not seem as if our judgment could 'agree' with objects: how could something non-mental agree with something mental?[5] As for necessary universal validity, Kant maintains that if

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cludes each chapter with the phrase "*Also muss auf Kant zurückgegangen werden.*" While this is often cited as the origin of the phrase 'back to Kant', Willey (1978), 80 and Köhnke (1991), 128 note that this phrase does not originate with Liebmann, but had been used earlier by Kuno Fischer and Eduard Zeller.

2 Not all positivists adhere to this view: Ernst Mach, for example, endorses some version of phenomenalism.

3 See, e.g., Cassirer's Introduction to the first volume of *The Problem of Knowledge* in Cassirer (1957).

4 See, e.g., Kant (1902a), §18.

5 Kant (1902a), 282.

the copy-theory is correct, then our minds must conform to objects; in which case, the only access we have to objects is in the course of experience. But, echoing Humean worries about induction, Kant claims that if judgments arise only in the course of experience, they could never be necessary: "experience teaches me what there is and how it is, but never that is necessarily must be so and not otherwise."[6] Hence we would not be able to assert necessary universal validity of our judgments.

This line of thought represents a weapon for the Neo-Kantians to yield against positivism: insofar as positivism endorses some combination of naïve realism and the copy theory of knowledge, it will be in no better a position to explain how knowledge is possible than, say, Hegel or Fichte. What is needed instead, they argue, is a more philosophically viable account of knowledge, which can explain how objectively and necessarily universally valid judgments arise. To this end, they appeal to Kant and his so-called 'Copernican Revolution':

As Kant famously says in the Preface to the B edition of the first *Critique*,

up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition [*Erkenntnis*] must conform to the objects; but all attempts to find out something about them *a priori* through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing. Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther... by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition.[7]

As we see in this passage, for Kant, as long as we suppose that our minds conform to objects (á la naïve realism and the copy theory), then we cannot make headway in our account of knowledge [*Erkenntnis*]. It is only if we reject that paradigm and instead conceive of objects as conforming to the conditions of knowledge that we will make any progress. Implicit in this line of thought are two Kantian commitments that become the foundation of the Neo-Kantian movement. The first is Kant's alternative to naïve realism, viz., '*critical*' or '*transcendental*' *idealism*, according to which the objects we have knowledge of are not 'things-in-themselves' or 'noumena', but rather 'appearances' or 'phenomena'

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6 Kant (1902a), 294. See also Kant (1998), B3–4.
7 Kant (1998), Bxvi. It should be noted that the more recent Cambridge translations of Kant, e.g., the Guyer/Wood translation of the first *Critique*, render '*Erkenntnis*' as 'cognition' and while there are good reasons to think Kant himself distinguishes between 'cognition' [*Erkenntnis*] and 'knowledge' [*Wissen*], this is not a distinction the Neo-Kantians appear to make. Cassirer, e.g., in his English work *Essay on Man* (1944) never uses the term 'cognition', but only the term 'knowledge' in passages where he discusses ideas related to '*Erkenntnis*' from the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. For this reason, I shall use the term 'knowledge' for '*Erkenntnis*', unless citing texts from Kant.

that conform to our minds. The second is his alternative to the copy theory, call it the '*critical theory of knowledge*', which treats knowledge as the process through which objects conform to our minds.

More specifically, Kant characterizes knowledge as a process through which our minds *give form to* appearances[8]. He claims that there are primarily two mental capacities that are responsible for this: 'sensibility' [*Sinnlichkeit*], our passive sensible capacity for being affected by the world, and 'understanding' [*Verstand*], our spontaneous intellectual capacity for thought.[9] To each of these capacities he ascribes a priori forms, which appearances, if they are to be possible at all, must conform to: sensibility has the pure intuitions of space and time, while the understanding has the twelve 'pure' concepts or 'categories', like 'substance', 'cause', and 'reality'.

Kant maintains that once we appreciate that appearances are objects that conform to these a priori forms, then we will be in a position to account for how knowledge can arise. If the objects we are making judgments about are determined by the mind, then it is possible for those judgments to 'agree' with them; hence, objectively valid judgments become possible. Moreover, insofar as space, time, and the categories are constitutive of *our* minds, then any judgment in which I assert space, time, or the categories of appearances will be a judgment that I at any time and any other judger should make as well; in which case, Kant's view can also explain the possibility of necessarily universally valid judgments. Thus, on the Kantian account, the a priori forms of sensibility and understanding become the *conditions of the possibility of* knowledge.

However, for the Neo-Kantians, it is important that we recognize that Kant not only offered a general account of knowledge, but also that he endeavored to show that the knowledge we have in mathematics and 'pure' natural science rests on his critical presuppositions. Indeed, in the *Prolegomena* Kant orients the two parts of his investigation around the questions 'how is pure mathematics possible?' and 'how is pure natural science possible?' He claims that the answers to these questions hinge on critical idealism: it is only if our judgments in these fields are not about things in themselves, but rather about appearances that a priori conform to the mind that we will be able to issue knowledge claims like 'the shortest distance between two points is a straight line' and 'everything

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8 Cf. Kant (1998), A20/B34, A93/B125.
9 Cf. Kant (1998), A50/B74-A52/B76. Though we cannot discuss this here, in the first *Critique*, Kant also highlights the contribution of a third capacity, the 'imagination' [*Einbildungskraft*], which mediates between sensibility and understanding. See, e. g., Cassirer (1907), Book 8, Section IV.

that happens is determined by a cause according to constant laws'.[10] For the Neo-Kantians this is especially pertinent since it indicates that in order to establish knowledge claims in the fields positivists are most concerned with, i.e., mathematics and natural science, one must resort to a Kantian explanation of the conditions of the possibility of knowledge.

Ultimately, then, we find that the rejection of positivism with regard to naïve realism and the copy-theory of knowledge and the endorsement of Kant's critical idealism and critical theory of knowledge constitute two of the basic commitments endorsed by (almost) every Neo-Kantian, Marburg and Southwest included.[11]

3 The Neo-Kantian Schools

In spite of agreement on these fundamental issues, different schools within Neo-Kantianism arose as a result of disagreement with respect to how to specify the a priori forms that serve as the conditions of the possibility of knowledge.[12] Among the first Neo-Kantians, there is a tendency to identify these conditions with the physiological and/or psychological organization of human beings.[13] This so-called 'genetic' variety of Neo-Kantianism is defended, for example, by Hermann von Helmholtz and Friedrich Albert Lange.[14] According to Helmholtz, who trained as a physicist, physician, and physiologist, Kant's a priori considerations should be read as anticipating the recent empirical discoveries, especially in the field of psychology, which had uncovered the physiological structures that make perception possible.[15] Meanwhile Lange in *The History of Materialism* (1866, 1st

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10 Kant (1902a), 269, 295.

11 Alois Riehl is the notable exception as he was a Neo-Kantian who defended positivism.

12 For a discussion of the various schools within Neo-Kantianism, see Willey (1978), Köhnke (1991), Chignell (2008), and Pollock (2010).

13 This is not to say all the early Neo-Kantians endorsed the genetic approach; as Cassirer points out, Zeller and Liebmann focused on demonstrating the deficiencies in post-Kantian idealist and realist philosophy, in favor of a more 'epistemological' approach to the conditions of knowledge. Cf. Cassirer (1929), 215–6 and Cassirer (2005), 96.

14 See Cassirer (1943), 223. The precedent for 'psychological' readings of Kant had been set earlier in the 19th century by J.F. Herbart in his textbook *Psychologie als Wissenschaft neu gegründet auf Erfahrung, Metaphysik, und Mathematik* (1824–5) and J.F. Fries in *Neue oder anthropologische Kritik der Vernunft* (1828–31).

15 See Cassirer (1929), 215 and Cassirer (2005), 96. Citations to Cassirer's German texts that have been translated into English are to the English translations unless otherwise noted. Helmholtz was particularly interested in the philosophy of perception and there is disagreement as to what

ed.) argues at length against positivist assumptions about reality and offers as his alternative an idealist account that makes reality depend on the physio-psychological dispositions of the human being.

However, for the second generation of Neo-Kantians, which was dominated by the Marburg and Southwest Schools, the genetic approach to Kant is unacceptable. According to the younger generation, the genetic accounts endorse 'psychologism', the view that identifies psychological entities, e.g., actual mental acts or processes, as the source of logic and the conditions of knowledge, and members of both the Marburg and Southwest Schools argue that this is problematic on, at least, two counts.

First, they maintain that the genetic accounts leave out something that was of the utmost importance for Kant, viz., our *normative* experience of *values*.[16] Whether we consider values and norms relating to theoretical, practical, or other cultural domains, the Neo-Kantians claim that what is at issue is not how we *in fact* are, but rather how we *ought* to be, i.e., our sense of how we ought to think, how we ought to act, or how the world ought to be. However, they argue that all the genetic accounts have at their disposal is an analysis of the psycho-physiological dispositions that we in fact have, thus have no way of accounting for these important normative experiences.[17] As Cassirer makes this point against Lange:

> By extending this [genetic] interpretation to all parts of the Kantian system, Lange arrives at the conclusion... that even the "intelligible world," which was used by Kant as the foundation of ethics is a "world of poetry."... in this very implication, which threatened to transform the Kantian transcendental idealism into a *fictionalism*... the deficiencies of the empirco-physiological interpretation of Kantian Apriorism became clearly apparent.[18]

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extent Helmholtz's theory of perception is truly Kantian (for discussion and references, see Hatfield (1991), 325–6.

16 See, e.g., Windelband (1907); Rickert (1913), (1921); Cohen (1904); and Natorp (1912a), 216–218.

17 As Kant makes this point about ethics in the *Groundwork*, "what is at issue here is not at all whether this or that does happen, but that reason by itself and independently of all appearances commands what ought to happen" Kant (1902a), 408.

18 Cassirer (1929), 215. Cassirer raises a similar objection against Riehl's positivism, claiming that, "through this confinement of philosophy to the pure science of knowledge, Riehl ends by allowing the theory of values to fall out entirely... This separation of knowledge from faith carried with it the danger that scientific value was attributed to natural knowledge exclusively, while the pure sciences of the mind (*Geisteswissenschaften*), the sciences of the historical reality of man's mental achievements, were deprived of their specific methodological foundation" Cassirer (1929), 216.

For these reasons, the Marburg and Southwest Neo-Kantians claim that if we are to remain in line with Kant's project as a whole, then we must give an account of the conditions of the possibility of the knowledge we have of values and norms.[19]

A second key objection members of both schools levy against the genetic theory is that it offers an unsatisfactory explanation of knowledge because it cannot account for the objective validity of our judgments.[20] They argue that by reducing the conditions of knowledge to the physio-psychological features of the human being, the genetic theory manages only to explain the *subjective* validity of our judgments, i.e., why we human subjects happen to make them, not why those judgments are *objectively* valid.[21] As Natorp frames this worry, with psychologism:

> [o]ne not only destroys logic, as the independent theory of the objective validity of knowledge, one also cancels out objective validity itself and changes it into purely subjective validity, if one attempts to support it on subjective grounds and to deduce it from subjective factors.[22]

Indeed, they take this to be a concern that Kant himself addresses in the B Deduction:

> If someone still wanted to propose...that the categories were... subjective predispositions for thinking, implanted in us along with our existence... in such a case the categories would lack the necessity that is essential to their concept. For, e.g., the concept of cause, which asserts the necessity of a consequent under a presupposed condition, would be false if it rested only on a subjective necessity, arbitrarily implanted in us... which is precisely what the skeptic wishes most.[23]

Thus it would seem even by Kant's own lights that the genetic approach side steps his core concern, viz., with explaining "how **subjective conditions of thinking** should have **objective validity**, i.e., yield conditions of the possibility of all cognition [*Erkenntnis*] of objects."[24]

For the Marburg and Southwest Neo-Kantians, then, in order to offer a proper account of knowledge, we must pursue an *anti-psychologistic* route, a route that investigates not the psychological conditions, but rather the *logical*, hence

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19 We shall discuss how the Marburg School does this in more detail below.
20 For a discussion of Neo-Kantian approaches to psychologism, see Kusch (1995), 169–177; Anderson (2005); and Edgar (2008).
21 See Cassirer (1929), 215
22 Natorp (1981), 251.
23 Kant (1998) B167–8. Cf. Cassirer (1943), 224–5.
24 Kant (1998), A89–90/B122.

objective conditions of knowledge, i.e., the a priori concepts, principles, laws, structures, etc., that make objectively valid judgments possible.[25] In short, for these Neo-Kantians the only appropriate way to defend a 'theory of knowledge' [*Erkenntnistheorie*] is with what Kant calls a 'transcendental logic':

> a science, which would determine the origin, the domain, and the objective validity of such cognitions [*Erkenntnisse*]... it has to do merely with the laws of the understanding and reason, but solely insofar as they are related to objects *a priori*.[26]

If we look at the relationship between the Marburg and Southwest School along these lines, then we find that they have a common goal, viz., offering an anti-psychologistic analysis of the a priori conditions of the possibility of knowledge, which extends to our knowledge of values and norms in the mathematical natural sciences and humanities alike. Yet the fact that the Marburg and Southwest Neo-Kantians share this as a common starting point tends to be overlooked because, as was mentioned at the outset, more often than not it is the differences between these schools that are highlighted. There are, in particular, two differences that I want to consider here.[27] The first concerns what type of knowledge each school focuses on. As the story usually goes, whereas the Marburg School is interested only in the knowledge we have in mathematics and natural science, the Southwest School privileges the humanities and is interested only in knowledge in normative fields.[28] The second difference that is often emphasized is connected to the role of 'intuition': while the Marburg Neo-Kantians endorse a version of 'logicism' according to which intuitions themselves are forms of thought, the Southwest School demands that intuitions be non-conceptual in character, serving as the 'given' on which thought is based. We shall return below to the genuine disagreement between these schools with regard to the notion of 'intu-

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25 As Cassirer characterizes this anti-psychologistic approach: "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 relation [*Geltungszusasmmenhang*] between principles and "propositions" [*Sätzen*], which as such must be established independently of any consideration of the subjective-psychological event of thinking [*Denkgeschehens*]" Cassirer (2005), 97.
26 Kant (1998), A57/B81. See, e.g., Rickert's claim that the terms 'theory of knowledge' [*Erkenntnistheorie*], 'logic', and 'doctrine of truth' [*Wahrheitslehre*] are interchangeable (Rickert (1909), 170).
27 See Friedman (2000), 29–30 for a discussion of the difference between the two schools regarding the relationship between mathematics and logic.
28 See, e.g., Krois (1987), 72; Crowell (1998); Verene (2001), 10; Gordon (2010), 57–61; and Stati (2013). For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between the two schools, see Krijnen (2001), 77–93; Friedman (2000), 26–37; and Krijnen and Noras (2012).

ition'; here, however, our concern is with the first supposed difference. More specifically, given our primary interest is in Cassirer's relationship to the Marburg School, though there are reasons to worry about this way of depicting the Southwest School, we shall concentrate on issues surrounding their alleged scientism of the Marburg Neo-Kantians.[29]

To be sure, there are many reasons commentators have been led to this interpretation of the Marburg School. In the first place, the members themselves seem to endorse this position. According to Cohen, "Philosophy does not have to create things... but instead simply to understand and to re-examine how the objects and laws of mathematical experience are constructed."[30] As he makes this point elsewhere, "the chief question of logic and the foundational question of philosophy" is the question of the "concept of science".[31] Natorp, meanwhile, appears to suggest that 'thinking' and 'logic' are exclusively concerned with the objects of science:

> Thinking is in each case focused upon its particular object. An entirely new level of reflection is required to investigate, not the particular object, but the laws in accordance with which this and any *scientific object* in general first constitutes itself as an object. This new kind of reflection we call "logic".[32]

In light of these sorts of remarks, Cassirer himself tends to characterize Cohen and Natorp along scientist lines, claiming in the Introduction to the fourth volume of *The Problem of Knowledge* that:

> in the development of neo-Kantianism the theory of Cohen and Natorp is sharply opposed to that of Windelband and Rickert: a dissimilarity that flows of necessity from their general orientation, determined in the one case by mathematical physics, in the other by history.[33]

The critics of the Marburg School also took them to be engaging in a philosophical project that privileges mathematics and natural science. Heidegger, for one, claims that Cohen and Natorp interpret the first *Critique* as an "epistemology of

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29 Rickert, for example, offers extensive analyses of natural science in *Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft* (1926, 6th/7th ed.) and *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung* (1929, 6th ed.).
30 Cohen (1885), 578. Translated by Patton in Cassirer (2005), 98.
31 Cohen (1902), 445. Translated by Kim (2008). Describing Cohen's project, Cassirer says, "For Cohen, Kant's system answers the truly fateful question of philosophy in general: the question of the relation between philosophy and science." Cassirer (1912), 95.
32 Natorp (1910), 10–11, my emphasis. Translated by Kim (2008).
33 Cassirer (1957b), 11.

mathematical natural sciences" and he argues that on this point, they are fundamentally mistaken because they overlook Kant's primary concern with metaphysics and ontology[34]:

> The intention of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, therefore, remains fundamentally misunderstood, if it is interpreted as a "theory of experience" or even as a theory of the positive sciences. The *Critique of Pure Reason* has nothing to do with a "theory of knowledge".[35]

So too does Rickert challenge the Marburg approach for placing too much emphasis in their interpretation of the first *Critique* on natural science instead of metaphysics:

> the main problem of [the first *Critique*] is not a theory of the experiential sciences [*Erfahrungswissenschaften*]. Rather, it revolves around the old, ever-recurring *problems* of metaphysics. The work on these problems becomes the foundation for an encompassing theory of worldview culminating in the treatment of issues in the philosophy of religion. The theory of mathematics and physics is merely *preparatory* for the treatment of these issues.[36]

More recently, the scientist interpretation of the Marburg School has manifested in two veins. In one vein, Marburg scientism has been emphasized by philosophers of science, like Michael Friedman, Alan Richardson, and Jeremy Heis, who are interested in establishing the historical roots of contemporary philosophy of science in Marburg Neo-Kantianism.[37] In another vein, commentators interested in Cassirer's relationship to the Marburg School have urged that while in his early work, like *Substance and Function* (1910) Cassirer endorsed the scientism of the Marburg School, with his declaration in the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* that "the critique of reason becomes a critique of cul-

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34 Heidegger (1997), 46.

35 Heidegger (1990), 11.

36 Rickert (1924), 153. Translated by Staiti (2013).

37 Heis, for example, claims that for the Marburg Neo-Kantians, "the proper object of philosophy is our best current mathematical sciences of nature. These sciences are the "fact" whose preconditions… it is the task of philosophy to study" Heis (2012), 8. In a similar vein, Richardson suggests that what is unique about Cohen and Cassirer's approach to epistemology is their scientific conception of experience: "The key to scientific Neo-Kantianism… is this: Unlike traditional empiricism, the neo-Kantians do not begin with a notion of experience as sensory impressions that serve as the subjective starting point of all knowledge… Rather, Cohen and Cassirer invite us to… understand the question of how objective knowledge of nature is possible in experience to be answered by a consideration of the preconditions of possibility of achieving a rigorously mathematized science of empirical nature" (Richardson (2003), 62). For discussion of the Neo-Kantian roots of contemporary philosophy of science, see Coffa (1991); Richardson (1998), (2003); Friedman (2000), (2005); and Stone (2005).

ture," he definitively with his predecessors.[38] In this vein, one could read his opening remarks to the first volume as a repudiation of Marburg scientism: his attention towards areas like language, myth, religion, and art, which fall beyond the purview of Cohen's and Natorp's concerns.

While there can be no doubt that the Marburg Neo-Kantians are deeply invested in defending a Kantian approach to mathematics and the natural sciences,[39] in what follows I argue that it is a mistake to think that this is the *only*, let alone the *primary* concern of the Marburg School. I show that Cohen, Natorp, and Cassirer alike are committed to the broader project of offering a systematic philosophy of culture. Although an analysis of science and mathematics constitutes an important component of this project, they, just as much as the Southwest Neo-Kantians, acknowledge that there are other regions of culture, like ethics, religion, and art that must be accounted for as well. Indeed, as we shall see, the Marburg School saw it as their task not only to elucidate each *particular* cultural sphere, but also to identify the unifying factor underlying our cultural experience *in general*. This systematic approach to culture is something they took Kant to have been heading towards in his three *Critique* and it is a task they think that those seriously committed to going 'back to Kant' must pursue even further.

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38 Cassirer (1953), 80. Cassirer's claim about methodology at the outset of the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* might suggest this as well: "[after *Substance and Function*] it gradually became clear to me that general epistemology [*Erkenntnistheorie*], with its traditional form and limitations, does not provide an adequate methodological basis for the cultural sciences. It seemed to me that before this inadequacy could be made good, the whole program of epistemology would have to be broadened" Cassirer (1953), 69. So too it has been suggested that he indicates his break from the Marburg School in his 1939 essay 'Was ist Subjektivismus?': "I myself have often been classified as a 'neo-Kantian' and I accept this title in the sense that my whole work on the field of theoretical philosophy presupposes the methodological basis that Kant presented in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. But many of the doctrines which are attributed to neo-Kantianism in the literature today are not only foreign to me, they are opposed and contradictory to my own opinion." Cassirer (1993), 201, translated and discussed by Rudolph (1998), 3. Other commentators who emphasize Cassirer's break with the Marburg School include Krois (1987), 36–7, 41, 44; Marx (1988); and Skidelsky (2011), 50–1, 65. For arguments that Cassirer did not break with the Marburg School, see Seidengart (1994), Orth (1996), Ferrari (2009), and Luft (2011), 277–280. We shall return to this issue in §6.

39 This is evident, e.g., in Cohen's *Kant's Theory of Experience* (*Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*) (1871/85) and the *Logic of Pure Knowledge* (*Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*) (1902), Natorp's *The Logical Foundations of the Exact Sciences* (*Die logischen Grundlagen der exakten Wissenschaften*) (1910), and Cassirer's first two volumes of *The Problem of Knowledge* (*Das Erkenntnisproblem*) (1906, 1907) and *Substance and Function* (1910).

4 The Transcendental Method

In order to bring out the Marburg commitment to the philosophy of culture, I want to begin with a discussion of what is arguably the 'core-thought' of this school, viz., the transcendental method. For the Marburg Neo-Kantians, going 'back to Kant' is not a matter of simply endorsing Kant's own doctrines. As Natorp makes this point, it was never the 'intention' [*Meinung*] of the Marburg School "to want or to expect to unconditionally adhere to Kant's tenets [*Lehrsätzen*]."[40] It is, instead, Kant's *way of philosophizing*, his *method* that the Marburg School endeavors to revive.[41]

Cohen calls Kant's distinctive philosophical method the 'transcendental method' and in his three-volume interpretation of Kant, he claims that Kant uses this single method in order to investigate theoretical, practical, and aesthetic philosophy in each *Critique* respectively.[42] Emphasizing the systematic role of the transcendental method in Cohen's Kant-interpretation, Cassirer says:

> Cohen gave for the first time a critical interpretation of the *entire Kantian system* which, with all its penetration into the specific detail of Kant's fundamental doctrines, sets, nevertheless, *one single systematic idea* into the center of the investigation. This is the idea of the "transcendental method".[43]

For the Marburg Neo-Kantians, however, the transcendental method is not merely of historical interest; it is the method they pursue in their own philosophical work.

So what exactly does the transcendental method involve? To answer this question, we shall follow Natorp in his 1912 article "Kant and the Marburg School" (*Kant und die Marburger Schule*) and his claim that the method involves two steps: first, orienting oneself around facts and second, uncovering the conditions of the possibility of those facts.

The *first step* concerns the starting point of philosophical investigation. Recall that in the early 19th century, philosophy was dominated by the abstract ver-

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40 Natorp (1912a), 194. Translations of Natorp (1912a) are my own.

41 Natorp suggests that this is what Kant himself would have wanted: "Kant who understands philosophy as critique, as method, wanted to teach philosophizing [*Philosophieren*], but never "a" philosophy ["*eine*" *Philosophie*]" Natorp (1912a), 194.

42 *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (*Kant's Theory of Experience*) (1871/85), *Kants Begründung der Ethik* (*Kant's Foundations of Ethics*) (1877), and *Kant Begründung der Aesthetik* (*Kant's Foundations of Aesthetics*) (1889).

43 Cassirer, (1929), 215 (my emphasis)

sions of idealism defended by Hegel and Fichte and proponents of positivism rejected such 'high-flying' speculation as a route to truth. On this point, the Marburg Neo-Kantians agree with the positivists: one's account of what is true or what we can know needs to be grounded in facts in some sense. Yet this is a point they take Kant himself to have made already in the *Prolegomena:* "High towers and the metaphysically-great men who resemble them, around both of which there is usually much wind, are not for me. My place is the fertile bathos of experience."[44] For this reason, Kant restricts his account of knowledge in the first *Critique* and *Prolegomena* to what falls within the bounds of experience. As Cohen renders this point, Kant's theoretical philosophy takes the 'fact of experience' as its departure point.[45] It is, however, important to recognize that the Marburg Neo-Kantians take Kant to be using the term 'experience' in a technical sense to refer to our experience of the world in mathematical natural science.[46] In Cohen's words, "Nature is experience, which is mathematical natural science."[47] Thus, on the Marburg interpretation, the 'fact of experience' that Kant begins his theoretical philosophy with is the 'fact of mathematical natural science'.

Yet according to the Marburg Neo-Kantians, it is not just Kant's theoretical philosophy that is oriented around facts: they claim that the second and third *Critiques* are also guided by the respective 'facts' of ethics and art. In the second *Critique*, for example, Kant claims that our consciousness of the moral law is a 'fact of reason.'[48] As Cohen emphasizes, Kant says that this fact is "one that every natural human reason cognizes [*erkennt*]" and is given "so to speak [*gleichsam*], as a fact, that precedes all subtle reasoning about its possibility."[49] Meanwhile, in his analysis of Kant's aesthetic theory, Cohen argues (more controversially) that in the third *Critique*, Kant takes as his starting point the fact of "art as the cultural region [*Kulturgebiet*] in which aesthetic consciousness primarily operates."[50] He identifies the aesthetic consciousness at work in this realm as the

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44 Kant (1902a), 373fn.

45 Cohen (1885), 255. Cohen translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

46 See Richardson (2003).

47 Cohen (1885), 501.

48 Kant (1902c), 31.

49 Kant (1902c), 91. See Cohen (1877), 224. By describing this as a 'so to speak fact' Kant does not mean to diminish its status, but rather to indicate that it is given to us in a way that is distinct from how facts are given in science, viz., through our distinctive consciousness of the moral law.

50 Cohen (1889), 144. See Guyer (2008) for a discussion of how Cohen's interpretation of Kant's aesthetics departs from Kant's own approach.

'feeling' [*Gefühl*] we have in the beautiful, i.e., the communicable feeling that is grounded in the free play of our cognitive faculties.[51]

Summarizing Kant's transcendental method, Cohen says:

> The transcendental method everywhere adheres to the stock of *cultural* facts [*Kulturthatsachen*], which are to be surveyed as to their conditions, to the 'fact of experience', the 'quasi fact', the 'analogue of a fact' of the moral law, and also to the works of the art of genius.[52]

While Cohen takes Kant to pursue this method with respect to the theoretical, practical, and aesthetic facts at issue in each *Critique*, notice that he generalizes the point: the transcendental method begins with the 'stock of cultural facts'. Indeed, Cohen goes on to say that the "transcendental point of view [*Gesichtspunkt*]" does not just concern local issues related to, say, theoretical or moral philosophy, but rather 'systematic' issues related to culture in general.[53] Thus he claims in no uncertain terms that "culture forms the universe, the complex of problems [*Aufgaben-Complex*] for the transcendental method."[54]

Natorp presents the transcendental method along similar lines in his article on the Marburg School, claiming that it must begin with "the existing, historically available facts of science, ethics, art, religion," indeed with the "entire creative work of culture."[55] To this end, he claims that although the Marburg Neo-Kantians are concerned with the facts pertaining to the mathematical natural sciences, they are equally concerned with the humanities [*Geisteswissenschaften*], e.g., with "social science [*Sozialwissenschaft*] (economics, jurisprudence, and education), history, the science of art [*Kunstwissenschaft*], and the science of religion [*Religionwissenschaft*]."[56] This is why Natorp insists that Marburg Neo-Kantianism must be understood as a 'philosophy of culture' [*Kulturphilosophie*].[57]

What this line of thought reveals is that far from endorsing scientism, both Cohen and Natorp explicitly insist that Marburg methodology is oriented around the facts *of culture*. Indeed, as we see Natorp emphasize, they take as their starting point the *historical developing* facts of culture.[58] This has two important im-

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51 See, e.g., Kant (1902d), §9; Cohen (1889), 222–3.
52 Cohen (1889), 190 (my emphasis).
53 Cohen (1889), 344.
54 Cohen (1889), 344.
55 Natorp (1912a), 196, 197.
56 Natorp (1912a), 216.
57 Natorp (1912a), 219.
58 To this end it has been suggested that the Marburg School shows its debt to Hegel (see, e.g., Verene 1969, 2011). While the emphasis on history is surely shared with Hegel, both Natorp and Cassirer insist on the differences between their views and Hegel's. According to Natorp, while

plications for how we understand the relationship of the Marburg School to Kant. In the first place, although they take their cue from Kant's investigation of the facts of experience, ethics, and art, they think that we need to *widen* the scope of philosophical investigation. Cohen and Natorp do this in their extensive analysis of religion and as Cassirer does in his analysis of language and myth.[59] As Cassirer describes this extension in the 1936 lecture, "Critical Idealism as a Philosophy of Culture":

> The problem of Kant is not bound to an inquiry into the special forms of logical, scientific, ethical, or aesthetical thought. Without varying its nature we may apply it to all the other forms of thinking, judging, knowing, understanding, and even of feeling by which the human mind attempts to conceive the universe as a whole. Such a synopsis of the universe, such a synthetic view, is aimed at in myth, in religion, in language, in art, and in science.[60]

Furthermore, the Marburg Neo-Kantians claim that we need to be open to *revising* our understanding of these facts as they develop historically. On this point, they admit that Kant was too rigid, e.g., treating Euclidean geometry or Newtonian physics as *the* facts of experience; however, they take a proper philosophy of culture to be a philosophy that addresses how the human spirit unfolds over time.[61] With respect to science, for example, Cassirer says:

> The "givenness" [*Gebenheit*] that the philosopher recognizes in the mathematical science of nature ultimately means the givenness of the *problem* [*Gebenheit des Problems*]. 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.[62]

This point, however, is one the Marburg Neo-Kantians take to apply to culture more generally: cultural facts should not be regarded as something 'given' [*gege-*

Hegel thinks that history progresses towards an 'absolute end' in which philosophy itself becomes 'absolute science', he insists that for the Marburg Neo-Kantians history and philosophy are involved in a never-ending process of development that could never be completed (Natorp 1912a, p. 211). Meanwhile Cassirer claims that critical idealism parts ways with Hegel's speculative idealism because Hegel sees history as the "self-actualization of the absolute idea... [which] is exempt from all conditions and all determinations of time," whereas Cassirer claims that critical idealism can understand culture only by remaining within it and its historical developments, Cassirer (1979b), 80.

59 See, e.g., Cohen's *Religion of Reason: Out of the Sources of Judaism* (1919), Natorp's *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der Humanität* (1908), and the first two volumes of Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms.*

60 Cassirer (1979b), 70–1.

61 See, e.g., Natorp (1912a), 209–210 and Cassirer (1906), 14.

62 Cassirer (2005), 100.

ben] once and for all, but rather as something posed as a task or a problem [*auf-geben*] that can never be completed, but must rather be constantly undertaken anew.[63] For this reason, they saw no need for the transcendental method to adhere strictly to what Kant identifies as the relevant facts, but rather were open to revising Kant's views when they thought this was called for. In his *Ethics of Pure Will* (1904/1907), for example, Cohen claims that ethics should take as its starting point the facts related to the 'science of pure jurisprudence', i. e., the science that concerns how the will of human beings can be normatively constrained by laws. Meanwhile, Natorp claims that ethics should begin with the "practical forms of social order and of a life worthy of human beings."[64] In a theoretical vein, one of Cassirer's primary goals in *Substance and Function* (1910), *Einstein's Theory of Relativity* (1921), and *Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern Physics* (1936a) is to address the facts of mathematics and physics as they develop in the 19th and 20th centuries beyond Kant's more limited Euclidean and Newtonian paradigm.[65] Yet regardless of these extensions and revisions of Kant's views, the Marburg Neo-Kantians take their commitment to starting with the facts of culture to be in line with his transcendental method.

Once one has oriented oneself around these dynamic cultural facts, the Marburg Neo-Kantians claim that the *second step* of the transcendental method involves asking a 'transcendental question': what are the conditions that make the facts pertaining to each region possible in the first place?[66] For the Marburg Neo-Kantians, in order to answer this question, we must take our cue from the Copernican Revolution and specify the logical conditions that objects in each region conform to. According to Cohen, the transcendental method seeks to uncover the "general conditions of consciousness... in which the factual [*sachlichen*]

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63 See Natorp 1912a, p. 199–200.

64 Natorp (1912a), 197.

65 With regard to the relationship between Cassirer and Cohen on the status of the historical development of science, Cassirer claims that although Cohen takes his cue from Newtonian physics in his *Logic of Pure Knowledge* (1902), in his Introduction to Lange's *History of Materialism*, he was "one of the first to point out the *philosophical significance* of *Faraday*, [and] he delved into the principles of *Heinrich Hertz's* mechanics... So, for Cohen, the orientation to science does not imply any commitment to its temporal, contingent form" Cassirer (2005), 100. Meanwhile, Cohen's assessment of *Substance and Function* is mixed: according to Moynahan, Cohen saw it as in line with the general spirit of his own theoretical philosophy, although he worried that Cassirer's emphasis on the idea of pure relation failed to do justice the role of the notion of the 'infinitesimal' at the core of Cohen's theoretical philosophy (Moynahan (2013), 122).

66 Cohen (1889), 144, see also Natorp (1912a), 197.

laws of culture find their source and totality [*Inbegriff*]."[67] This is how Natorp describes their target,

> The creative ground, however, of any such act of object-formation [*Objektgestaltung*] is law; in the end that original law [*Urgesetz*], which one still understandably enough designates as *logos*, *ratio*, reason [*Vernunft*].[68]

Cassirer, meanwhile, tends to make this point in terms drawn from the first *Critique:* the 'transcendental' question concerns not so much the objects, as the "mode of knowledge [*Erkenntnis*]" on which those objects depend.[69]

This being said, there is an important restriction that the Marburg School places on these logical conditions, which differentiates their view not only from the Southwest School, but also from that of Kant himself. This returns us to the issue of the Marburg Neo-Kantians' 'logicism' and their intellectualizing of Kant's theory of intuition. While Kant and the Southwest Neo-Kantians following him attempt to ground some facts in the a priori conditions of *sensibility*, as a capacity distinct from the understanding, the Marburg Neo-Kantians argue that this is a mistake. On their view, indeed on the view they think is more thoroughly Kantian, the mind is always active, never passive, hence there can be no independent, receptive capacity of sensibility; there is only our spontaneous capacity for thought. As Cassirer summarizes their position:

> Neither in its sensuous experience nor in its rational activity is the mind a *tabula rasa*... It is active in all its functions, in perception as well as conception, in feeling as well as in volition. There is no room left for a mere "receptivity" in addition to and outside the spontaneity of the human mind.[70]

This is not to say that the Marburg Neo-Kantians deny that space and time ground the facts of culture in some sense; instead, they claim that these intuitions can actually be traced back to the activity of thought.[71] Making this point, Natorp claims, "'intuition' no longer remains as a factor in cognition

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67 Cohen (1889, 345.

68 Natorp (1912a), 197.

69 Kant (1998), A11/B25; see Cassirer (2005), 97 and Cassirer (1957a), 6.

70 Cassirer (1943), 226.

71 They argue that their position reflects Kant's own considered position, i.e., the one that he arrives at in the B Deduction in his analysis of the 'form of intuition'-'formal intuition' distinction in the B160–1 footnote, which his earlier views in the Transcendental Aesthetic should be revised in light of (see Natorp (1912a), 204 and Cassirer (1907), 571–586). For more recent discussion of this passage and the relevant secondary literature, see Allison (2004), 112–116, 223–5.

that opposes or stands against thought, instead it *is* thought."[72] For the Marburg Neo-Kantians, then, the transcendental question about each region asks after the laws, principles, or modes of thought that make the facts within each cultural region possible.

To this end, they model their approach on the approach they take Kant to have pursued in each *Critique*. As they see it, in the first *Critique* Kant identifies the categories as the conditions of the possibility of the fact of experience[73]; in the second *Critique*, it is the 'idea of freedom' that makes the fact of reason possible;[74] and in the third *Critique*, it is the 'subjective principle' of common sense that grounds our feeling in the beautiful.[75] Yet though the Marburg Neo-Kantians think that Kant employs the right strategy, they do not always concur with the specific conclusions that he draws. Cohen, for example, in the *Logic of Pure Knowledge* (1902) develops his theory of the principle of 'origin' [*Ursprung*] as the source of theoretical knowledge. Meanwhile in the *Logical Foundations of the Exacts Sciences* (1910), Natorp lays emphasis on the notion of '*fieri*' as the relevant theoretical grounds. Nevertheless, even if their own results differ from Kant's, the Marburg Neo-Kantians take their efforts to identify the logical conditions that make the facts of each cultural region possible to be in the spirit of the transcendental method as Kant established it.

5 Marburg Variations on the Unity of Reason

For the Marburg Neo-Kantians, however, a complete philosophy of culture cannot just address the logical conditions that govern *each* region; it must furthermore given an account of the underlying factors that make culture *as such* possible.[76] To this end, they wanted to elucidate something like Kant's 'unity of reason', i.e.:

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72 Natorp (1912a), 204; see also Natorp (1910), Ch. 6, §2.

73 See, e.g., Kant (1902a), 319.

74 See, e.g., Kant (1902b), 461. While this passage is drawn from the *Groundwork*, Kant makes it clear in the Preface to the second *Critique* that even if in this later work he wants to maintain that consciousness of the moral law through the fact of reason precedes consciousness of freedom, nevertheless, freedom remains the '*ratio essendi*' of the moral law: "were there no freedom, the moral law would *not be encountered* at all in ourselves" Kant (1902c), 4fn.

75 See, e.g., Kant (1902b), §§20–22, 35–40.

76 Indeed, Cassirer suggests that in Cohen's work on the systematic unity of these various cultural forms that "the fundamental ideal of transcendental method comes to the fore yet again, with full acuity." Cassirer (2005), 105.

> to be able to present [practical reason's] unity with speculative reason in *a common principle*; because in the end there can be *only one and the same reason*, which must differ merely in its application.[77]

Only for the Marburg Neo-Kantians, it is not just the unity of reason, but also the unity of culture that one must explain. And, as we shall find, rather surprisingly given their anti-psychologistic bent, there is a line of thought beginning with Cohen, then continuing through Natorp and into Cassirer according to which this task should be accomplished by means of a special sort of 'psychology', a psychology that deals not with particular acts of consciousness within an individual, but rather with consciousness as the source of the logical conditions of culture.[78]

To see this, let's begin with Cohen. As Cassirer emphasizes, Cohen's commitment to consciousness as the systematic ground of culture is evident in *Kant's Foundations of Aesthetics*.[79] He argues that our theoretical, practical, and aesthetic knowledge of the world "form a systematic unity [*Einheit*]" because they are all 'developments' or 'directions' of a more encompassing consciousness.[80] Indeed, Cohen suggests 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."[81]

However, this theme is not just one that Cohen pursues in his Kant interpretation; he had, in fact, hoped to develop this idea as the capstone to his own *System of Philosophy*, in a fourth planned, but never executed volume dedicated to

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77 Kant (1902b), 391, my emphasis. See also Kant (1998), Axx and Kand (1902c), 291. Although we could approach the unity of reason both from the perspective of its unity as a *terminus a quo* and a *terminus ad quem*, in what follows I will focus only on the former issue. This is not to say that the Marburg Neo-Kantians do not have a teleological view of where 'reason' or 'culture' is headed, e.g., in Cohen's philosophy of religion or Cassirer's third volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, but for the purposes of this paper, I shall have to set these issues aside.
78 As I note below, there are reasons to think that in the late period of Cohen's and Natorp's philosophy, they veer away from this psychological project. Nevertheless, given that our interest is with their influence on Cassirer, what is important for our purposes is Cassirer's appropriation of this psychological project in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, which I discuss below.
79 Cassirer (2005), 102 emphasizes this point. For a discussion of how Cohen's idea of 'origin' [*Ursprung*] plays a unifying role in his philosophy of culture, see Renz (2005).
80 Cohen (1889), 95, 97.
81 Cohen (1889), 96, my emphasis. Patton translation of Cassirer (2005), 102. Cohen makes this point in the context of criticizing pre-critical forms of idealism, e.g., Descartes's and Leibniz's, for having failed to appreciate the systematic unity of the various experiences we have of the world.

the topic of 'psychology'.[82] For Cohen, the "*problem of psychology*" in his sense is nothing other than the problem of the "unity of consciousness," more specifically, "the *unity of consciousness of unitary culture*".[83] Unlike in the earlier volumes of the *System*, in which he analyzed the cultural regions associated with theoretical knowledge, ethics, and aesthetics respectively, he intended this fourth volume as the "encyclopedia of the system of philosophy," which was to explain how consciousness made culture as such possible.[84] To this end, Cohen suggests that his proposed volume on psychology would be a study of 'man': "*the teaching of man in the unity of his cultural consciousness, as the development of this unity and the genetic connection of all its features and their embryos.*"[85]

While Cohen only sketched out the idea of a Marburg psychology, Natorp devoted much of his efforts towards clarifying what exactly such a psychology would involve, e.g., in his *Introduction to Psychology According to Critical Method* [*Einleitung in die Psychologie nach kritischer Methode*] from 1888 and in his *General Psychology According to Critical Method* [*Allgemeine Psychologie nach kritischer Methode*] from 1912.[86] On Natorp's view, we can approach knowledge from two different directions: either from the 'objective' or 'plus' direction by studying the various facts and 'objectivities' that pertain to each region or from the 'subjective' or 'minus' direction by studying the dynamic acts, the '*fieri*' of consciousness that those facts are grounded in.[87] Psychology, he argues, should concern itself with the latter, with what he refers to as the 'ultimate concentration' of each region into consciousness:

> the inner world of consciousness can no longer be logically ordered over, next to, or under [the worlds of theoretical knowledge, ethics, art, and religion]; to all of them, to *objectivizations of any kind and level* [**Objektsetzung jeder Art und Stufe**], it represents as it were the *counterpart*, the *turning inward*, the *ultimate concentration* of them all *into experiencing consciousness* [gleichsam die **Gegenseite**, eben die **Innenwendung**, nämlich die **letzte Konzentration** ihrer aller **auf das erlebende Bewußtsein**].[88]

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82 For a discussion of Cohen's psychology, see Poma (1997), 147–153 and Zeidler (2001). As Poma notes, although Cohen never wrote this volume, he had been developing material for it in his lectures at Marburg 1905–06, 1908–9, and 1916 (Poma (1997), 148).

83 Cohen (1912), 426, 429. Translations of this text are my own

84 Cohen (1912), 432.

85 Cohen (1914), 11. Translation by Poma (1997), 153. Zeidler argues that Cohen abandons psychology because he comes to regard the philosophy of religion as the proper systematic capstone to his philosophy (Zeidler (2001), 141).

86 See also Natorp's "On the Objective and Subjective Grounding of Knowledge" (1887)

87 Natorp (1912b, 71). Translations of this text are my own. See also Natorp (1888), §14 and (1912b), 200

88 Natorp (1912b), 20.

According to Natorp, however, insofar as consciousness is the dynamic ground of objects, we cannot study it in the way that we study other objects. For this reason, he claims that we need to develop a distinctive method to study consciousness, which he labels the 'reconstructive' method.[89] This method begins with objects and then 'unravels' them in order to disclose the "psychological origin" and "subjective sources in consciousness," which condition them.[90] In so doing, Natorp suggests we reconstruct the immediate, concrete sources in consciousness that ground culture. Ultimately, he suggests that what we will uncover is the unitary source of culture, i.e., the "lawful ground, the unity of *logos*, of *ratio* in all such creative activity [*Tat*] of culture."[91]

By Natorp's lights, if we study consciousness in this way, i.e., by taking our cue first from objects and then reconstructing the subjective upon which those objects rest, then instead of lapsing into psychologism or 'subjectivism', psychology will retain its 'objective character':

> the law of objective formation [*objektiven Gestaltung*] can never be sought out other than in the objective formation itself... in the creation of the cultural life of humanity, at the same time it retains its rigorous *objective character*; thus it differs sharply from every "*psychologism*".[92]

Thus, by establishing the unitary source of culture through the reconstructive method, Natorp thinks we can arrive at an objective analysis of the subject that complements the rigorous analysis of the facts of culture.

If we now turn our attention to Cassirer, we find that he explicitly places his own *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* within this tradition of Marburg psychology, albeit with some important corrections. Emphasizing, in particular, his relationship to Natorp's psychology, at the outset of the third volume, Cassirer analyzes

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89 See, e.g., Natorp (1888), §13 and (1912b), Ch. 8

90 Natorp (1888), 101. See Cassirer (1957a), 53–4: "This psychology, as Natorp sees it, seems engaged in a mere labor of Penelope, unraveling the intricate fabric woven by the various forms of "objectivization" [*Objektivation*]."

91 Natorp (1912b), 197.

92 Natorp 1912a, 198; see also 208. Towards the end of his career, Natorp appears to have become dissatisfied with this approach insofar as it seemed to make the relationship between the subject and object still too external and did not yet fully get at the 'whole' of human life (Natorp (1921), 157). Thus he began to develop a 'general logic' instead, which was meant to overcome these difficulties, see, e.g., his 1921 essay in Schmidt's *Die Deutsche Philosophie der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen:* Natorp (1921), 157–176, *Vorlesungen über Praktische Philosophie* (*Lectures on Practical Philosophy*) (1925), and *Philosophische Systematik* (*Philosophical Systematic*) (1958). See Cassirer (1925), 280, 291–6 for a discussion of these later developments.

the continuities and discontinuities between his approach and Natorp's.[93] On the one hand, he agrees with Natorp that what is needed in addition to studying facts that pertain to each region of culture is a reconstruction of the subjective sources in which those facts are grounded:

> We start… from the problems of the objective spirit, from the formations in which it consists and exists; however, we shall attempt by means of reconstructive analysis to find our way back to their elementary presuppositions, the conditions of their possibility.[94]

As he puts it a few sentences earlier, "Our inquiry… aspires to find its way back to the primary subjective sources, the original attitudes and formative modes of consciousness."[95] Cassirer ultimately identifies these subjective sources as the three functions of consciousness, i.e., the expressive function [*Ausdrucksfunktion*], representative function [*Darstellungsfunktion*], and significative function [*Bedeutungsfunktion*], which he organizes the third volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* around.

On the other hand, Cassirer argues that Natorp fails to do justice to these subjective grounds for two reasons. To begin, Cassirer argues that Natorp's survey of the relevant facts is incomplete: he claims that Natorp follows the 'trichotomy' of Kant's system adding only religion to it, while Cassirer himself claims that we need to acknowledge other regions of culture, like myth and language.[96] Furthermore, Cassirer argues that Natorp's account is problematic because he tends to *assimilate* everything to the model of mathematics and natural science by identifying *laws* as the subjective ground of every region.[97] From Cassirer's perspective, while this may be appropriate in the case of theoretical knowledge, the other regions of culture "move in different paths and express different trends of spiritual formation."[98] This is, in part, why Cassirer appeals not to the notion of 'law', but to the more general notion of a 'symbolic form' to capture what is common across the different spheres of culture. This is also why he thinks we need to distinguish between the sort of significative consciousness that dominates mathematical natural science and the expressive and representative forms of consciousness that dominate the other symbolic forms.[99] Indeed,

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93 Cassirer (1957a), 51–57. For a discussion of Cassirer's relationship to Natorp, see Luft (2004).
94 Cassirer (1957a), 57.
95 Cassirer (1957a), 57.
96 Cassirer (1957a), 57.
97 Cassirer (1957a), 56.
98 Cassirer (1957a), 56.
99 Cassirer (1925), 296 suggests that the notion of the 'symbol' is perhaps the best way to describe what Natorp sees as the unifying factor of experience.

Cassirer argues that it is only if we acknowledge the distinctiveness of each mode of objectification that we will be able to fulfill our task in psychology: "These trends [of spiritual formation] must be kept sharply separate, each in its own peculiar determinacy, if the task of reconstruction is to succeed."[100]

At the same time, Cassirer does not give up on the Marburg idea that a philosophy of culture should also aim at exposing the unity that underlies culture more generally:

> all the various and complex systems of symbols that are contained in language, art, science, and mythical and religious thought… possess, in spite of their differences, an intrinsic unity… That unity which I am in the habit of calling the unity of symbolic thought and symbolic representations… is a condition of all the constructive processes of the mind, a force that pervades all our mental operations and energies.[101]

Indeed, for Cassirer, this is what is distinctive about us as human beings. This is why in the *Essay on Man*, he argues that we should not be defined as an '*animal rationale*', but as an '*animal symbolicum*'.[102] Although this emphasis on the symbol is surely distinctive in Cassirer, nevertheless his commitment to offering a 'psychology', which is properly understood as the study of humanity as the source of culture is a commitment he inherits from Cohen and Natorp.

6 Conclusion: Cassirer's Continued Commitment to Marburg Neo-Kantianism

We are now in a position to return to the question of Cassirer's status as a Neo-Kantian. In the first place, it is evident throughout his career, from the *Problem of Knowledge* to the *Essay on Man* that Cassirer adheres to basic tenets of Neo-Kantianism discussed in §2, i.e., he rejects naïve realism and the copy theory of knowledge in favor of critical idealism and a critical theory of knowledge. Moreover, it is clear that Cassirer along with the other members of the Southwest and Marburg Schools thinks we ought to pursue an anti-psychologistic route in order to specify the logical conditions on which our knowledge rests.

Yet matters become more complicated when we consider to what extent Cassirer remains a Marburg Neo-Kantian throughout his career. As was mentioned above, it has been suggested that we should read Cassirer's *Philosophy of Sym-*

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100 Cassirer (1957a), 57.
101 Cassirer (1979b), 71.
102 Cassirer (1944), 26.

bolic Forms as a break away from the Marburg version of Neo-Kantianism defended by Cohen and Natorp, as well as Cassirer himself in his early works, like *Substance and Function*. In light of the preceding considerations, however, this interpretation of his relationship to the Marburg School becomes less convincing. In the first place, we have seen that the *interest* in a philosophy of culture in no way sets Cassirer apart, but rather places him squarely within the Marburg tradition. Furthermore, in order to study culture, Cassirer relies on the transcendental method; hence he also remains *methodologically* in line with Cohen and Natorp.[103] Finally, as we saw, with respect to his efforts to identify the 'unity' that underlies culture more generally, Cassirer also follows in Cohen's and Natorp's footsteps by endeavoring to offer a *psychology of culture*, which clarifies the roots of the symbolic forms in consciousness.

Still what about the alleged 'scientism' of Cohen and Natorp that Cassirer himself appears to attribute to them? We must be careful on his issue. On the one hand, it is clear that Cassirer, alongside Cohen and Natorp, does accord a certain privileged status to mathematics and natural science even in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. This is evident in the teleological organization of these three volumes, which situates myth, religion, and language as stages that lead towards the development of theoretical knowledge.[104] On the other hand, as we saw above in his discussion of Natorp, it is clear that Cassirer takes issue with the reduction or assimilation of every region of culture to mathematics and natural science. For him, it is important to recognize that there are distinctive acts of spiritual formation that underwrite each region and that we cannot treat these all as the exercise of reason and its laws. For Cassirer, the reductivist attitude not only leads Cohen and Natorp to a mischaracterization of fields like ethics, aesthetics, and religion, but also to the neglect of the more primitive forms of culture, which serve as the 'substructure' on which the 'superstructure' of mathematical natural science is based.[105] In this way, Cassirer's philosophy of culture certainly shifts away from the strict rationalism of his predecessors; however, this does not amount to a repudiation of the Marburg commitment to defending a philosophy of culture. Instead, it appears as a broadening of the

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103 See Ferrari (2009) and Luft (2011), 277–9.

104 As Cassirer makes this point, "the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms now seeks to apprehend [the world view of exact knowledge] in its necessary intellectual mediations. Starting from the relative end which thought has here achieved [i.e., mathematics and natural science], it inquires back into the middle and the beginning, with a view to understanding the end itself for what it is and what it means" (Cassirer (1957a), xiv).

105 Cassirer (1957a), xiii. See Friedman (2000), 100–101.

scope of the investigation and a revision of what in his view is the overly rationalist approach of Cohen and Natorp.

Yet from Cassirer's own perspective this would seem to be enough to keep him within the Marburg camp, for on his view, we should define Neo-Kantianism "functionally rather than substantially", i.e., as a "matter of a direction taken in question-posing" rather than as the defense of a particular "dogmatic doctrinal system."[106] Making a similar point in his Inaugural Lecture at the University of Göteborg in 1935, "The Concept of Philosophy as a Philosophical Problem," he claims that even though he extends the transcendental method to new areas, he retains a commitment to its way of posing questions:

> however much the type of problems may have changed, and its circumference may have been widened... I still believe that we need not give up the basic critical problem as Kant saw it and as he first established it... We must now direct the critical question to a completely new material, but we can and should maintain the form of this question.[107]

So even if Cassirer thinks the scope of philosophical investigation needs to be broadened to include new regions of culture, which Kant, Cohen, or Natorp neglect, or if he argues that we need a revised understanding of the symbolic, rather than wholly lawful grounds on which culture rests, insofar as Cassirer retains a commitment to asking about the conditions of the possibility of culture, his way of going 'back to Kant' retains the distinctive stamp of Marburg Neo-Kantianism.[108]

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106 Heidegger (1990), 193.

107 Cassirer (1979a), 55.

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