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ERNST CASSIRER'S INFLUENCE ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF WILFRID SELLARS

1. Introduction – Criteria which point to an influence

At the beginning of this paper stands the idea of highlighting a possibly hidden reception of Ernst Cassirer's works in both historical and systematical terms. I want to explore this idea by trying to establish links between the philosophies of Ernst Cassirer and Wilfrid Sellars. The latter of whom, through the reception of his followers Richard Rorty, John McDowell, and Robert Brandom, is nowadays well known as the founder of the so called Pittsburgh School of (post-)analytical philosophy¹. To ensure that a project linking Cassirer and Sellars is not from the very beginning unfounded, I will, right from the outset, try to clarify some criteria that would make it possible to speak of a reception or an influence in a philosophically meaningful way.

1) One would think that to speak of a proper reception, a thinker would have to read another thinker's works and comment on them in order to further develop his or her own works. Let us call this a *direct* influence. Such a case can be seen, for instance, in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*². Here, Merleau-Ponty on the one hand interprets and affirms Cassirer's doctrines of "symbolic pregnance"³

¹ See: Ch. Maher, *The Pittsburgh School of Philosophy: Sellars, McDowell, Brandom*, Routledge, London 2012; *Normative Functionalism and the Pittsburgh School*, ed. by P. J. Reider, «Social Epistemology Review & Reply Collective», Special Issue 1, 2013.

 $^{^2}$ M. Merleau-Ponty, $\it Phenomenology$ of $\it Perception$, tr. by C. Smith, Routledge, London 2005.

³ E. Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, III. *Phänomenologie der Erkenntniss*, hrsg. von B. Recki, Text und Anmerkungen bearbeitet von J. Clemens, in *Gesammelte Werke*. *Hamburger Ausgabe*, Bd. 1-26, hrsg. von B. Recki, Meiner, Hamburg 1998-2009 (= ECW), 13, 2002, p. 235.

and "symbolic form" 4 as modes and directions of intentionality5, and on the other hand criticizes its underlying theory of mind as intellectualistic⁶. Interestingly enough, though drawing extensivley on the third volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Merleau-Ponty at no point mentions that Cassirer, especially in the aforementioned volume of his Magnum opus, repeatedly employs the terminology "Phenomenology of Perception" 7. One could think this is so, because they have a common point of reference in Wilhelm Schapp's Beiträge zur Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung⁸, which both Cassirer and Merleau-Ponty do explicitly quote9. But it is also obvious that Cassirer had already much further developed Schapp's ideas into the direction that Merleau-Ponty later on would call the full-fledged Phenomenology of Perception. In the end, it seems obvious that Merleau-Ponty was conscious of how much he owed to Cassirer regarding content and title of his principle work. One could even go so far as to claim that a part of Merleau-Pontys enterprise draws heavily on the idea to read Cassirer's Phenomenology of Knowledge as a Phenomenology of Perception¹⁰. Hence, it appears plausible to say that with hiding this evidence, Merleau-Ponty actively is playing down a rather strong influence that we can recontruct as a direct influence.

2) One could then argue that two thinkers, first *a* and then *b*, both struggle with the works of a third thinker *c* and come to similar conclusions of how to properly adapt *c*'s thinking for their own work. One might assume that there's an *indirect* influence from *a* on *b* through *c*, because *a* had set possibilities and impossibilities of how to read *c*. Such a mediated influence could be seen in the way Cassirer adopts Kantian thinking via his teachers Georg Simmel, Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp. Having heard Simmel's

⁴ E. Cassirer, *Der Begriff der symbolischen Form im Aufbau der Geisteswissenschaften*, in *Aufsätze und kleine Schriften* (1922-1926), hrsg. von B. Recki, Text und Anmerkunmeg bearbeitet von J. Clemens, ECW 16, 2003, p. 79.

⁵ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, cit., pp. 32 and 61-62.

⁶ Ibid., p. 147 n. 63.

⁷ ECW 13, pp. 33, 69, 220.

⁸ W. Schapp, Beiträge zur Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung, Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 2013.

⁹ Cf. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, cit., pp. 266-267, 352, 360, 371; ECW 13, p. 139.

¹⁰ I have argued elsewhere for this view. See T. Endres, *Die Philosophie der symbolischen Formen als Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung*, in *Philosophie der Kultur- und Wissensformen. Ernst Cassirer neu lesen*, hrsg. von T. Endres et al. Peter Lang, Frankfurt a.M. 2016, pp. 35-53 and T. Endres, *Ernst Cassirers Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung*, Meiner, Hamburg 2020.

Kant-lecture in 1894 and, soon after, having read Cohen's three groundbreaking books on Kant, it was very clear to Cassirer that popular 19th century's psychologistic and biologistic Kant-readings, such as heard in Friedrich Paulsen's lectures or as read in Schopenhauer's The World as Will and Representation, are utterly misguided interpretations of what Kant had in mind from what he had called transcendental philosophy. Now, while one could hold that the early Cassirer from Substance and Function has rather been directly influenced by Cohen and Natorp, we can still uphold the view of an indirect influence for the Cassirer of the philosophy of the symbolic. Although Cassirer, in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, had largely moved on from Cohen's focus and method¹¹, the transformation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason into a critique of culture¹² is still indebted to his teachers' views as it is at least in no strong contradiction with their fundamental principles, such as it would be the case if Cassirer would have changed to an empiricist reading of Kant in his main work. Rather Cassirer had widened the scope of how to make sense of Kant on the grounds of a pluralistic phenomenology of all kinds of forms of knowledge.

3) Lastly, there could be something like an *institutional* influence so that a writer is in a way indebted to another writer, consciously or not, because forerunners had prepared the ground for a certain school or way of thinking. Let us, for example, say that Sebastian Rödl's critique of Robert Brandom's deduction of predication¹³ is institutionally influenced by what is called the Pittsburgh School in 20th century analytic philosophy, of whose founder is Wilfrid Sellars. This school had not yet broadened its scope to Hegel and post-Kantian German Idealism during Sellars' lifetime, yet nowadays not only consists of what is also called analytic Kantianism (with its forerunners Wilfrid Sellars and Peter Strawson), but has at the moment strong proponents of objective idealism in, e.g., the works of John McDowell, Robert Brandom and Sebastian Rödl. This set-up – Sellars and Strawson bringing Kantian thought to anglophone analytic philosophy; Sellars being very influential in Pittsburgh and (in Brandom and McDowell) bringing forth themselves influential scholars; the creation of

¹³ S. RÖDL, Categories of the Temporal. An Inquiry into the Forms of the Finite Intellect, tr. by S. Salewski, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 2012, pp. 135-142.



¹¹ For a more detailed view on how recent scholars tread this *topos* of the classical Cassirer-reception see S. Luft, *The Space of Culture: Towards a Neo-Kantian Philosophy of Culture (Cohen, Natorp and Cassirer)*, OUP, Oxford 2015, p. 19.

¹² Cf. E. Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischenFormen*, İ. *Die Sprache*, hrsg. von B. Recki, Text und Anmerkungen bearneitet von C. Rosenkranz, ECW 11, 2001, p. 9.

an international research center for Analytic German Idealism in Leipzig, where Rödl, amongst others, holds a university chair – might make it appear justified to speak of an institutional influence from Sellars on Rödl, although the latter does not directly engage with the works of the former.

In the following, I will try to show that in all three respects there are reasons to believe that an influence from Cassirer on Sellars had taken place.

2. Are there any starting points to match with the set criteria?

There are at least three reference points to establish a connection between the philosophies of Ernst Cassirer and of Wilfrid Sellars.

- 1) In 1948 Sellars wrote a short review¹⁴ of Susanne K. Langer's translation of *Language and Myth*¹⁵. Here, we find Sellars' one and only direct commentary on Cassirer's work, but also have to learn that he was not at all familiar with Cassirer's principal works, neither with the *Problem of Knowledge* (1906–1950) nor with the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923-1929). It is here where I will, in a second step subsequently, investigate the question for a *direct connection*.
- 2) The Pittsburgh School shares some common systematical insights with the Neo-Kantian movement of Marburg that can be addressed in Sellars' words as "the Myth of the Given" high, which traces back to a common root in Kantian philosophy and gave birth to what we currently can call "Analytic Kantianism" 17.

Sellars' thoughts on the so called "space of reasons" are another field worth to compare with Cassirer's development of a philosophy of culture; that is to say beginning with the teachings of his forerunners Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp. The former's systematical affinities have already

¹⁴ W. Sellars, "Review: *Language and Myth*. Ernst Cassirer. (Translated by Suzanne K. Langer, New York and London, Harper & Bros., 1946, pp. x-103)", «Philosophy and Phenomenological Research», 9 (2) (1948), pp. 326–329.

¹⁵ E. Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, tr. by S. K. Langer, Harper & Brothers, New York and London 1946.

¹⁶ W. Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, intr. by R. Rorty, Harvard University Press., Cambridge (Mass.)/London 1997, p. 33.

¹⁷ See: J. HAAG, *Analytic Kantianism: Sellars and McDowell on Sensory Consciousness*, in *Con-Textos Kantianos*, «International Journal of Philosophy», 6 (2017), pp. 18-41.

¹⁸ W. Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, cit. p. 76; J. McDowell, *Mind and World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 1994, p. 125.

been well investigated by Ursula Renz who reads Sellars (and Brandom) in the light of Cohen¹⁹ and the latter ones by Sebastian Luft who seeks to transform the space of reasons into a space of culture, based on the philosophies of all three Marburg thinkers Cohen, Natorp, and Cassirer²⁰.

Renz furthermore, though only to a limited extent²¹, sheds light on Sellars's notion of "the *manifest* and the *scientific* image of man-in-theworld" from a Neo-Kantian perspective and it is here where I will try on similar grounds to establish some *systematical* parallels between Cassirer and Sellars in the last part of this paper.

Another promising line would be to examine, if Cassirer's concept of myth could have had any impact on Sellar's conceptual use of this term. When Sellars talks about "the Myth of the Given" it is never without ambiguity in at least some respects. Particularly, the idea of a given is not a myth in the sense that a given simply does not exist. It is, more precisely, the idea that a given that is not conceptually structured could account for fulfilling the role of grounding rational thought, that can be qualified as a myth. Myth in this context, hence, rather would say that this myth cannot play a certain role, but not that it is non-existent. This non-fictional understanding of myth might as well be a heritage from actually reading *Language and Myth*, in which Cassirer rejects negativistic theories that «explain the occurence of myth in terms of error»²³. Moreover, Sellars contrasts a myth with a myth – the myth of the given is "killed"²⁴ by the myth of Jones.

Anyways, to prove substantial influence would be too much of an endeavour within the case that I can make here, which is why I will solely touch Sellars 1960 lectures *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man*. It nonetheless should be clear by now that there is some reason to speak of an indirect influence from Cassirer, or more generally from Marburg thought, on Sellars²⁵.

- ¹⁹ U. Renz, *Von Marburg nach Pittsburgh: Philosophie als Transzendentalphilosophie*, «Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie» 59, 2 (2011), pp. 149-270, here p. 250.
- ²⁰ Cf. S. Luft, The Space of Culture: Towards a Neo-Kantian Philosophy of Culture (Cohen, Natorp, and Cassirer), cit.
- ²¹ U. Renz, Von Marburg nach Pittsburgh: Philosophie als Transzendentalphilosophie, cit., p. 268.
- ²² W. Sellars, *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man*, in *Frontiers of Science and Philosophy*, ed.by R. Colodny, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh PA 1962, 35-78; reprinted in Id., *Science, Perception, and Reality*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London and The Humanities Press, New York 1963, pp. 1-40, here p. 5; reissued by Ridgeview Publishing Co., Atascadero CA 1991.
 - ²³ W. Sellars, "Review: Language and Myth. Ernst Cassirer", cit. p. 326.
 - ²⁴ W. Sellars, Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind, cit. p. 117.
 - ²⁵ The fact that in 1930 Sellars possibly had attended Richard Hönigswald's Kant-lec-

3) In 1979 Sellars gave a series of lectures on Kant at Yale University that were published in 2002 under the subtitle "Sellars' Cassirer Lectures Notes" 26. In it, Sellars – unfortunately for my claim – does not talk about Cassirer at all. It is this third reference point where I will start my investigation by having a look into the historical institution of the *Cassirer Lectures* at Yale. The case might not come out as strong as the aforementioned examples of the Pittsburgh School and more generally analytic Kantianism and analytic German Idealism, but nonetheless provides sufficient material to investigate an institutional influence that has not been properly looked into until today.

3. Three possible ways to speak of an influence from Cassirer on Sellars

3.1 An institutional attempt: The Cassirer Lectures

In early 1964 Toni Cassirer and Yale University Press set up the *Ernst Cassirer Publication Fund* signing an agreement that would let the Department of Philosophy at Yale handle the Literary Property of Ernst Cassirer by paying annually in equal parts Cassirer's heirs and into this fund²⁷. The sums accumulated would then be used to either buy books for the Yale library or to subsidize publications of Yale University Press "in the field of philosophy" ²⁸. First use of the fund was made for two publications, namely James Halden's translation of *Kants Leben und Lehre*, which did not appear before 1981 and Donald Philip Verene's translations and first publications of some posthumous writings which appeared in 1979 under the title *Symbol, Myth, and Culture. Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer*²⁹.

tures in Munich (cf. J. Seibt, *Wilfrid Sellars*, Mentis, Paderborn 2007, p. 11) strenghtens the view to at least speak about an indirect influence from Neo-Kantian thought on Sellars.

²⁶ Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics: Sellars' Cassirer Lectures Notes and Other Essays, Ed. and Introduced by. J. F. Sicha, Ridgeview Publishing Co., Atascadero CA 2002.

²⁷ I take the following information from a four pages document from the archives entitled "Memorandum of Understanding about the Ernst Cassirer Publication Fund" that Karsten Harries – former Chairman of the Department of Philosophy at Yale – very kindly submitted to me along with the permission to publish it as an Appendix to this article. It is signed by Chairman Karsten Harries and Director (of Yale University Press) Chester Kerr, and is dated October 16th 1975. It will be cited (Kerr/Harries 1975) throughout.

²⁸ CH. KERR-K. HARRIES, *Memorandum of Understanding about the Ernst Cassirer Publication Fund*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1975, p. 1 (published here as an Appendix, *infra*, pp. 167-170).

²⁹ Cf. *ibid*. p. 2.

By this time, four speakers had already been invited to hold the Ernst Cassirer Lectures that eventually were equally supposed to publish their lectures from this money.

- 1) The first invited speaker, inaugurating the Cassirer Lectures, was the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski, whose lecture *Husserl and the Search for Certitude* was delivered in November 1974 and published in 1975³⁰. Although the author here mainly deals with Husserl, he also includes some reflections from his 1972 book *Obecność mitu* (translated as *The presence of Myth* in 1989), in which he adopts Cassirer's views that no forms of culture can go without a grounding in myth and that mythical consciousness is omnipresent in all societies³¹.
- 2) The second speaker then, in 1975, was Lewis White Beck who argues in the same years' publication *The Actor and the Spectator* that persons cannot be understood as machines or analogous to computers. An important argument supporting this thesis is Beck's conception of "synecdochic perception"32which can be compared to Cassirer's two-directional conception of perception of things and of expression³³. Expressive perception for Cassirer is different from perception of just physical objects, as it is not objectifying, but nonetheless the *direct* perception of moods, of cultural objects, and of states of affairs of other minds³⁴. All modes of perception take part hence, and this is of greatest importance, in *intersubjective* expression. Beck puts it like this: «To see a man as angry does not require us to see (or feel) his anger as a hidden cause known only to himself; if it did, we could never know he is angry [...] Unless there were reliable signs in behaviour of what a man is inwardly feeling, we could not have synecdochic perception»³⁵. Furthermore, it is not really necessary to actually prove that Beck is philosophically indebted to Cassirer as he is stating this

³⁰ Cf. ibid.

³¹ L. Kolakowski, *The Presence of Myth*, tr. by A. Czerniawski, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1989.

³² L. Wh. Beck, *The Actor and the Spectator*, "The Ernst Cassirer Lectures", Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1975, p. 63.

³³ Cf. E. Cassirer, *Dingwahrnehmung und Ausdruckswahrnehmung*, in *Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften*, in E. Cassirer, *Aufsätze und kleine Schriften* (1941-1946), hrsg. von B. Recki, Text und Anmerkungen bearbeitet von C. Rosenkranz, ECW 24, 2007, pp. 391-413.

³⁴ Cf. T. Endres, Was sind die Objekte der Wahrnehmung? Ernst Cassirers Antwort auf die analytische Wahrnehmungsphilosophie, in Ernst Cassirer in systematischen Beziehungen. Zur kritisch-kommunikativen Bedeutung seiner Kulturphilosophie, hrsg. von Th. Breyer-St. Niklas, «Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie», Sonderband 40, de Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 25-46.

³⁵ L. WH. BECK, *The Actor and the Spectator*, cit., p. 63.

fact explicitly in the preface of his Cassirer Lecture publication: «Unlike many in my audience, I never did meet Cassirer. His *Substance and Function* was the first serious philosophical work I ever studied seriously; it was almost my introduction to philosophy [...] The influence of Cassirer on my thought is visible in almost all my writings, and I like to think that he would not have disagreed very much with what I say in these lectures dedicated to his memory»³⁶.

(3) Third on the list is a big shot of German 20th century philosophy, who was with Jürgen Habermas and Ernst Tugendhat one of the very first bringing continental and analytic thought together: Karl-Otto Apel³⁷. He delivered his first Cassirer Lecture in March 1977 and it was published in summer 1978 under the title *Transcendental Semiotics and the Paradigms of First Philosophy*. The twenty pages publication informs us that more lectures were programmed along with a Yale University Press publication under the title *The Ernst Cassirer Lectures*³⁸, but ultimatively leaves us in the dark as to their whereabouts. Then again, if we think about Apel's program of a transcendental pragmatics, the steady defence of a transformed apriori and the adaption of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics, we already have gathered enough points of contact with Cassirer's philosophy, freeing us from the obligation to show that the Ernst Cassirer lecturers in Yale are in one way or the other indebted to Cassirer's thought. For the sceptics, though, let us briefly cite Apel who writes:

Having myself started out in philosophy from interpreting Heidegger's transformation of Husserlian phenomenology as a hermeneutics of speech and of language, respectively I would like to point out that I still see the great achievement of this philosophy in its account of the historical events, not to be disposed of scientifically, but rather achieved by the pre-scientific workings of myth[os], poetry, and the arts, of the disclosure of meaning as the precondition of possible truth and falsehood of propositions. I even think that these Heideggerian perspectives may be liable to be further displayed in the future, along with Cassirer's philosophy of "symbolic forms" [...] within the hermeneutical part of semiotics³⁹.

4) Fourth in line now is Sellars, but before we address this and just for the sake of completeness, I want to mention that there is at least one

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. x.

³⁷ I am also indebted to Fabien Capeillères who provided me with information to find out Apel and Wollheim.

³⁸ K.-O. APEL, *Transcendental Semiotics and the Paradigms of First Philosophy*, «Philosophic Exchange», 9 (1), Brockport, New York 1978, pp. 3-22, here p. 20 n.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 19.

further documented Cassirer lecturer, Richard Wollheim, who held a Cassirer Lecture in 1991, which was published by Yale University Press eight vears later under the title *On the Emotions*. This publication indeed shows. as far as I can see, no affinities with Cassirer's works and also makes no mention of him. But what we know from its preface⁴⁰ is that the current Chairman of the Philosophy Department in Yale was at this point Jonathan Lear⁴¹, whose research also shows no intersections with any Cassirer related research. His predecessor was Karsten Harries and we know from the fund-memorandum that, although it also states that it «is clearly most desirable to continue the Cassirer Lectures now begun so effectively with the Kolakowski and Beck volumes»⁴², only the Chairman and the Director of Yale University Press together, who take advice from «a committee composed of two representatives of the Department of Philosophy and two from the Press»⁴³ can decide on what to spend the Cassirer royalties. The change of personnel might thus explain, why the Cassirer Lectures, initially, lost touch with Cassirer's intellectual heritage, and, afterwards, ceased to exist.

Sellars now held the Ernst Cassirer Lectures on April 16, 18, and 19 1979 at Yale University and they were published by his student and follower Jeffrey Sicha in 2002 under the subtitle *Sellars' Cassirer Lectures Notes* as part of a collection of some of Sellars' unpublished writings entitled *Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics*. From what we know so far, Sellars was supposed to publish his lectures back then; and due to what I could show previously, it seems rather *unlikely* that Karsten Harries and Yale University Press would have had invited a speaker, who, from their point of view, would have no connection to Cassirer at all. The fact that those notes, just like Wollheim's lectures, do not mention Cassirer at all – this would be my thesis – should not inhibit us from a continued search for links between Cassirer and Sellars. *It should not bother us at all*.

More importantly and first of all, we have to acknowledge what Sicha states in the preface of this volume:

⁴⁰ R. Wollheim, *On the Emotions,* "The Ernst Cassirer Lectures", Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1999, p. ix.

⁴¹ Lear was the Kingman Brewster professor of the humanities at Yale (1985-1996) and before that a fellow at Clare College Cambridge (1978-9) and at Yale (1979-1985) (cf. A. FOURNIER, *Q&A with ... Jonathan Lear*, «The Chicago Chronicle» 20, 5 (2000) and Lear's Wikipedia-Page).

⁴² Ch. Kerr-K. Harries, Memorandum of Understanding about the Ernst Cassirer Publication Fund, cit., p. 3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

In one respect, this volume, now entitled Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics, must be accounted a failure. It was intended to contain Sellars' Cassirer Lectures [...]. The central cause of the failure is that Sellars died before finishing these lectures—indeed, even before really beginning the process of re-writing them. What was left to work with is his (handwritten) notes. When I say "notes," I do mean just that. Apparently, Sellars spoke on many occasions with much less on paper in front of him than his audience would have imagined as they listened to his spoken, complete (and, in many cases, quite complex) sentences. Some paragraphs, particularly in the beginning of the Cassirer Lecture notes, consist of no more than a phrase stating the topic of the paragraph and a (sometimes not very readable) diagram. Sellars used his diagrams, not only as aids in explaining his views, but as guides for himself in delivering the paper. So, no volume can contain Sellars' Cassirer Lectures; he never wrote them⁴⁴.

Furthermore, we cannot assume that Sellars had abandoned the project of publishing the lectures. The fact that he did not find the force to rewrite them might simply be explained by the fact that in 1984 he suffered a stroke as a consequence of his life-long alcoholism from which he never really recovered⁴⁵. And we know that Sicha had to promise him to «get the lectures out»⁴⁶ (Sellars 2002: ix). Sicha also brings to our notice that Sellars was generally very happy with the notes and that he thought by reading Kant's "*Critique* backwards"⁴⁷, he assumed to «really got Kant right this time»⁴⁸.

To conclude this first part, my proposal to establish an even deeper connection between Cassirer and Sellars based on the *Cassirer Lectures Notes* would take shape as a comparative study between Sellars last approach towards Kant by reading the *Critique of Pure Reason* backwards with Cassirer's main adaptions of essential Kantian doctrines. What is obvious is that by laying the focus on Kant's dialectic and the transcendental ideas, by focusing more on the regulative principles than on the constitutive ones, we open a path to reading Kant's philosophy in general from the *Critique of Judgement*, especially in line with its first introduction. And here, we will meet with Cassirer who always stressed the importance of



⁴⁴ Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics: Sellars' Cassirer Lectures Notes and Other Estays, cit., p. ix.

⁴⁵ S. DOWNIE, *In Memoriam* (a collection of remarks made at the Memorial Service for Wilfrid Sellars in the Heinz Chapel at Pitt (1989), and some additional remarks by some of his students) 1990.

⁴⁶ Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics: Sellars' Cassirer Lectures Notes and Other Essays, cit., p. ix.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

Kant's productive imagination, which is guided by the reflective power of judgement, rather than by the determining power of judgement⁴⁹. As this attempt would clearly go beyond the scope of this paper, I will for now only point at this desideratum⁵⁰.

3.2 A direct attempt: Sellars' review of Language and Myth

I will now turn towards the one and only text of Cassirer of whom we know for certain that Sellars has read it: In 1925, just after finishing the second volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer published an almost one hundred page lengthy essay entitled *Sprache und Mythos. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Götternamen* that Susanne Langer translated and published in 1946, just two years after *An Essay on Man* was available first for the English readers. As the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* was not yet translated at this point, Langer assumed that this article, for now, would fill the gap for the readers who wanted to better understand of how Cassirer had come to the results he is presenting in *An Essay on Man*⁵¹.

Sellars reviewed this volume in 1948 and from its first paragraph we learn that he is aware of its context, which is why we have to ask ourselves, if he might not have even read *An Essay on Man*⁵². He is sympathetic towards Cassirer's philosophical approach (a) being transcendental, and not naive, (b) thinking the categories' historicity, rather than being fixed and timeless, (c) hence giving Kant's Copernican Revolution a "»nominalistic« twist" of hence giving Kant's Copernican Revolution a "sominalistic twist", and to sum it up (d) having developed "his own brand of Critical

 49 Cf. E. Cassirer, Kants Leben und Lehre, hrsg. von B. Recki, Text und Anmerkungen bearbeitet von T. Berben, ECW 8, 2001, pp. 292-293.

⁵⁰ Filling such a desideratum might help to change the role the philosophy of Cassirer is playing today in Yale and in influential departments more generally. Currently there simply is no such role Cassirer is playing, as Harries describes as follows: «How much Cassirer appreciated what Yale offered him is demonstrated by the establishment of the Cassirer Publication Fund, to be jointly administered by the Director of the Yale Press and the Chairman of the Philosophy Department. Among other things it financed the Cassirer Lectures, inaugurated in 1974 with Leszek Kolakowski's *Husserl and the Search for Certitude*. But that was then. Neither Cassirer nor that fund figure in any prominent way in the present department's activities» (K. Harries, *Diminished Expectations: Heidegger and Cassirer at Davos and the Present State of Philosophy*, 2015, pp. 3-4).

⁵¹ Cf. E. Cassirer, An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture, hrsg. von B. Recki, Text und Anmerkungen bearbeitet von M. Lukay, ECW 23, 2006, pp. vii-viii.

⁵² W. Sellars, "Review: *Language and Myth*. Ernst Cassirer", cit. p. 326.

⁵³ Ibid.

Philosophy"⁵⁴. What then follows briefly is the expression of a dissatisfaction, which can be boiled down – and Sellars is aware that this might be the case⁵⁵ – to a lack of access to essential works that had not yet been translated into English.

Sellars complains (1) that «no account of the nature of a symbolic form is given other than the mentioning of the transcendental function they perform» ⁵⁶. Cassirer's definition of a symbolic form is given in the article *Der Begriff der symbolischen Form im Aufbau der Geisteswissenschaften* from 1923 where he tells us that a symbolic form is «every energy of spirit by which the content of spiritual signification is linked to a concrete and intrinsically appropriate sensuous sign» ⁵⁷. The "nature" of symbolic forms, hence, is simply functional in semiotic and perceptual respects and Sellars, for his part, does not elaborate at all how going beyond such Kantian "immanent metaphysics" ⁵⁸ is motivated. Following Kant, to whose basic systematical claims Sellars himself is committed, does not allow for an ontological essentialism that seeks to establish a substantial understanding of symbolism⁵⁹.

2) Sellars then criticizes that the «specific differences of the four types of symbolic forms [language, myth, art, and science] are nowhere clari-

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 327.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ E. Cassirer, *Der Begriff der symbolischen Form im Aufbau der Geisteswissenschaften*, in E. Cassirer, *Aufsätze und kleine Schriften (1922-1926)*, hrsg. von B. Recki, Text und Anmerkunmeg bearbeitet von J. Clemens, ECW 16, 2003, p. 79.

⁵⁸ W. Sellars, "Review: Language and Myth. Ernst Cassirer", cit. p. 327.

⁵⁹ In Cassirer's words: «The philosophy of symbolic forms starts from the presupposition that, if there is any definition of the nature or »essence« of man, this definition can only be understood as a functional one, not a substantial one. We cannot define man by any inherent principle which constitutes his metaphysical essence— nor can we define him by any inborn faculty or instinct that may be ascertained by empirical observation. Man's outstanding characteristic, his distinguishing mark, is not his metaphysical or physical nature — but his work. It is this work, it is the system of human activities, which defines and determines the circle of »humanity«. Language, myth, religion, art, science, history are the constituents, the various sectors of this circle» (ECW 23, pp. 75-76). For a closer examination of how Cassirer places symbolism in the *anthropolical* context — a question that Sellars obviously is evoking here — and how Cassirer's positive view on metaphysics develops throughout his œuvre, see T. Endres, *Ernst Cassirers Kritik an der modernen Anthropologie und die Bestimmung des Menschen als* animal symbolicum, in *Anthropologie in der klassischen deutschen Philosophie*, hrsg. von Ch. Asmuth-S. Helling, Würzburg 2021, pp. 301-316.

fied»⁶⁰ which rather suggests that he has not yet read *An Essay on Man* at this point, from which he would have learned that those specific differences are grounded in different symbolic functions within a wider a theory of perception and representation⁶¹. Sellars questions, how «their [the symbolic forms] evolution [is] to be understood»⁶² and what «the organic unity of the several posited worlds»⁶³ would look like, are answered to the point in the final passage of *An Essay on Man*:

Human culture taken as a whole may be described as the process of man's progressive self-liberation. Language, art, religion, science, are various phases in this process. In all of them man discovers and proves a new power – the power to build up a world of his own, an »ideal« world. Philosophy cannot give up its search for a fundamental unity in this ideal world. But it does not confound this unity with simplicity. It does not overlook the tensions and frictions, the strong contrasts and deep conflicts between the various powers of man. These cannot be reduced to a common denominator. They tend in different directions and obey different principles. But this multiplicity and disparateness does not denote discord or disharmony. All these functions complete and complement one another ⁶⁴.

This leaves us with the rather disappointing result that Sellars complaint about a lacking «judicious footnote or two»⁶⁵ referring to the not yet translated German works is a bit disproportionate to his own efforts in reading and interpreting Cassirer.

3) Finally, he focuses his criticism on the fact that the symbolic forms are presented as *coordinate* rather than subordinate. Though Sellars shows some sympathy to the idea that all symbolic forms are «organically inter-related»⁶⁶, the former claim appears to him as an «extreme initial implausibility»⁶⁷. Cassirer's claim surely does not come without problems and demands a careful interpretation of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*⁶⁸. It

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<sup>60</sup> W. Sellars, "Review: Language and Myth. Ernst Cassirer", cit. p. 327.
<sup>61</sup> Cf. ECW 23, pp. 6 and 43.
<sup>62</sup> W. Sellars, "Review: Language and Myth. Ernst Cassirer", cit. p. 327.
<sup>63</sup> Ibid.
<sup>64</sup> ECW 23, p. 244.
<sup>65</sup> W. Sellars, "Review: Language and Myth. Ernst Cassirer", cit. p. 327.
<sup>66</sup> Ibid.
<sup>67</sup> Ibid.
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⁶⁸ For a defense of the coordinate or complementaristic view that still allows for a certain hierarchy in one way or the other see: S. LUFT, *The Space of Culture: Towards a Neo-Kantian Philosophy of Culture (Cohen, Natorp, and* Cassirer, cit.; T. ENDRES, "Review of Sebastian Luft, *The Space of Culture: Towards a Neo-Kantian Philosophy of Culture*

furthermore leads us already to the last part of this paper, where I will try to draw a parallel between the interrelatedness of the symbolic forms and Sellars attempt to unify several images of man-in-the-world.

But before we tackle this, a last remark on the essence of Sellars review is necessary, because the main part of Sellars concern has to do with a misunderstanding rather than with a lack of English translations of mandatory texts to get Cassirer right. Despite my criticism above, Sellars definitely shows genuine interest in Cassirer's thinking, especially in how Cassirer is conceiving the shift from emotional expression, that we also find in animal life, towards meaningful expression that is limited to human life⁶⁹. The fact that Cassirer is restricting meaning in the sense of objective reference – that is to say understanding objects as objects – to language and designation, leads Sellars to the wrong assumption that from this standpoint animals are simply not participating in using signs and higher animals even not in using symbols⁷⁰ and that Cassirer hence «is mistaken»⁷¹. This is simply erroneous as Cassirer makes the distinction between active and passive modes of expression, in which the latter animals do take part⁷². Cassirer covers this subject in the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*⁷³ and over and over again in his late writings⁷⁴, but the acquaintance with AnEssay on Men would have sufficed for Sellars to avoid this fallacy and to recognize that Cassirer is striving to exploit Darwin's *The Expression of the* Emotions in Man and Animals in a philosophical manner. I conclude from this that Renz' judgement that Sellars could anyway not have incorporated Cassirer's thought on myth, because he does not read his Kantianism in the light of Neo-Kantian theories of culture⁷⁵ is way too general. From a systematic point of view, Cassirer and Sellars share genuine interest in the question for the genesis of language and myth and the transition from nature to culture.

(Cohen, Natorp, and Cassirer)", «Phenomenological Reviews », September 2018 online, https://reviews.ophen.org/2018/09/05/sebastian-luft-the-space-of-culture/.

⁶⁹ W. Sellars, "Review: Language and Myth. Ernst Cassirer", cit. p. 327-328.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 329.

⁷¹ *Ibid*.

⁷² For a thorough study of Cassirer's conception of "natural symbolism" see: T. ENDRES, *Ernst Cassirers Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung*, cit. chapter 5, pp. 163-186.

⁷³ Cf. ECW 11, pp. 122-146.

⁷⁴ Cf. ECW 23, p. 125; E. Cassirer, *Dingwahrnehmung und Ausdruckswahrnehmung*, in *Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften*, cit., ECW 24, p. 410; E. Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, hrsg. von B. Recki, Text und Anmerkunmeg bearbeitet von M. Lukay, ECW 25, 2007, p. 45.

⁷⁵ See: U. RENZ, Von Marburg nach Pittsburgh: Philosophie als Transzendentalphilosophie, cit., p.249 n.3.

3.3 An indirect attempt: Worlds-for-mind and images of man-in-the-world

As we last saw, Sellars was not just puzzled by the question of how humans crossed the borderline seperating propositional language from emotional language, but even more how different world views could possibly coexist. Sellars is, besides the three lectures delivered in London on March 1, 8, and 15 1956 under the title The Myth of the Given: Three lectures on *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, best known for two lectures given at the University of Pittsburgh in December 1960 under the title Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man. Just as with the former, the latter also permits to investigate similarities between Cassirer and Sellars in a systematic way. Although by 1957 the translations of all three volumes of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* had been published, we have no further indication that Sellars ever became reinvolved with Cassirer's writings. What we can nonetheless assume – as a working hypothesis – is that the coordinate alignment of Cassirer's symbolic forms, which directly leads to the problem of a unified worldview and the problem of relativism, had had an impact on Sellars' thought by positing the legitimacy of differing world views along with the question of how to conciliate them. It hence is the Pittsburgh lecture that appears to me most promising for establishing an indirect influence from Cassirer on Sellars.

Sellars begins his lecture by defining "THE" aim of philosophy by claiming that it is to know in a reflective way, in form of a knowing-that, «how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term»⁷⁶, including such different things as cabbages, kings, numbers, duties, finger snaps, aesthetic experience, and death⁷⁷. Therefore the philosopher has to investigate of how a unity of thinking is possible under the premise of (a) the multiplicity of individual sciences, such as physics, biology, sociology and so forth, and (b) the divergence of a common-sense world view and a scientific world view⁷⁸. True philosophy cannot be purely analytic, but has to be synthetic in order to develop a "synoptic vison"⁷⁹ or, as he later on says, a "stereoscopic view"⁸⁰ of this broad complex of things that Sellars compares to the «contemplation of a large and complex painting»⁸¹. Cassirer scholars should listen attentively, because it is

⁷⁶ W. Sellars, *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man*, cit. p. 1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*.

⁷⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4

well known that Cassirer determines the ultimate task of philosophy in *The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms* just as such a contemplation of the symbolic cosmos⁸² defining the task of a philosophical anthropology right there as the *synthesis* of the preceding analysis of symbolic forms⁸³.

Unfortunately, the riddle it is supposed to solve is much more complex for Sellars than just dealing with this multiplicity of world views, because each one of them, for Sellars, is again split in what he calls (a) the manifest image and (b) the scientific image of man-in-the-world84. Both of them are idealizations, have a history and are not identifiable with a prescientific and a scientific worldview, nor is one simply true and the other false⁸⁵. On top, Sellars claims that the manifest image is in itself in a certain way a scientific image that has originated from what he calls the *original* image⁸⁶ that is no more accessible, because the transformation into the manifest image comes with a paradoxical situation: The manifest image can be characterized by persons having an awareness of being-in-the-world. The paradox, then, is grounded in the fact that by trying to understand how humans came to having a self-understanding of being man-in-the-world presupposes exactly this self-awareness 87. In a way, this paradox coincides with the question of how it is possible that animals which cannot use concepts in the formerly determined symbolic way could develop into such animals whose existence is determined conceptually "all the way out"88. The salient point for Sellars is that this irreducibility only appears within the manifest image, but not for the scientific view. For Cassirer a problem similar to the paradox arises when we reflect on how the rupture between myth and logos, on how the occurrence of the distinction between the seeming and the real, is possible: The question for a primacy of myth or of language is a recurring subject within Cassirer research⁸⁹ and is hard to answer due to all the methodological difficulties that come with any genealogical perspective on it⁹⁰.

⁸² Cf. E. Cassirer, Zur Metaphysik der symbolischen Formen, hrsg. von J. M. Krois, unter Mitwirkung von A. Appelbaum, R. A. Bast, K. C. Köhnke und O. Schwemmer, in E. Cassirer, Nachgelassene Manuskripte und Texte, begründet von K. Ch. Köhnke, J. M. Krois, O. Schwemmer, hrsg. von Ch. Möckel, Meiner, Hamburg 1995-2021 (=ECN), 1, 1995, p. 194.

⁸³ ECN 1, p, 5.

⁸⁴ Cf. W. Sellars, *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man*, cit. p. 5.

⁸⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸⁶ Cf. ibid., p. 7.

⁸⁷ Cf. ibid., p. 6.

⁸⁸ J. McDowell, Mind and World, cit., p. 11.

⁸⁹ Cf. E. Rudolph, *Die nachmetaphysische Moderne im Widerstreit. Cassirers Symbolismus und Rortys Pragmatismus*, 2012, http://savoirs.ens.fr/expose.php?id=1021/.

⁹⁰ Cf. J. Derrida, De la Grammatologie, Minuit, Paris 1967, p. 17 n.1.

To reconstruct how Sellars and how Cassirer deal with these problems has to be elaborated in much more detail, which clearly is beyond the scope of this paper. I just want to sketch a last remarkable affinity, and also want to say that there is more to find in Sellars' texts. For Sellars, in the original image – which I would dare to identify with myth in Cassirer's thinking – all objects are categorically persons⁹¹. An important feature of the manifest image is a refinement of this category: Here, the *primary* objects are persons⁹². We address most objects as if they were persons. This can be made intelligible if we analyse the grammar of sentences like "The lightning struck the tree". It is only the scientific image where a previously subtle depersonalisation has come to its fulfilment⁹³. Here, we have found more than obvious similarities. which Cassirer discusses under the concepts of thing- and thou-perception or perception of things and of expression⁹⁴. And also the development from an original via a manifest through a scientific image of man can be brought in line with Cassirer's idea of a dialectical development from perceiving via representing through purely thinking the world in abstract relational categories of the natural sciences⁹⁵.

4. Conclusion

Against multiple existing differences in the systematic and methodological conceptions of Cassirer's and Sellars' philosophies, it could be shown that we actually can speak of a reception of Marburg thought through the founding father of the so-called Pittsburgh School. I have sketched this "hidden reception" within the framework of a direct, an indirect, and an institutional influence from Cassirer on Sellars. All this surely has to be investigated further and deeper, but I hope to have at least already pointed at the right desiderata.

Ultimately, I nonetheless want to stress the point that any approximation of Cassirer's and Sellars' thought might find its limits in the question for naturalism. Whereas Sellars endeavours to couple the manifest image of man-in-the-world with the scientific image⁹⁶, Cassirer will not bother his philosophical task with such an attempt. Surely, Sellars approach is

⁹¹ Cf. W. Sellars, *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man*, cit. p. 10,

⁹² Cf. ibid., p. 9.

⁹³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁹⁴ Cf. ECW 13, p. 137 and E. Cassirer, *Dingwahrnehmung und Ausdruckswahrnehmung*, in *Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften*, cit., ECW 24, pp. 391-413.

⁹⁵ Cf. ECW 13, pp. 46-47.

⁹⁶ Cf. W. Sellars, Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man, cit. p. 40.

neither reductive nor eliminative, but for Cassirer such unification is not worth striving for, because he clarifies the claim of even a weak naturalism on a very different level. In good old Kantian manner, he distinguishes the *quid facti* from the *quid iuris*, which allows him to admit that even a strict physicalism is – though in a very limited sense – correct⁹⁷, but simply does not touch the problem of the symbolic. That such a view would be unsatisfactory for Sellars should be clear from what we have learned from the *Language and Myth* review, where Sellars concludes that Cassirer's perspective simply did not help him⁹⁸. Lastly, we can conclude that Sellars was not one of those readers, like e.g. Susanne Langer or Nelson Goodman, who consciously and willingly drew immensely on Cassirer's work. But this is not a mistake, because our aim was to highlight a *hidden* reception.

⁹⁷ Cf. E. Cassirer, *Probleme der Kulturphilosophie*, in *Kulturphilosophie*. *Vorlesungen und Vorträge* 1929-1941, hrsg. von R. Kramme unter Mitarbeit von J. Fingerhut, ECN 5, 2004, p. 67.

⁹⁸ Cf. W. Sellars, "Review: Language and Myth. Ernst Cassirer", cit. p. 329.

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DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE ERNST CASSIRER PUBLICATION FUND

The Ernst Cassirer Publication Fund was set up in early 1964 in an agreement signed between the Estate of Mrs. Cassirer and the Yale University Press, and then approved by the Department of Philosophy at Yale. Essentially, the agreement provided that from January 1, 1964, the Press should handle the Literary Property of Ernst Cassirer and should pay over all proceeds annually, in equal parts and after deduction of a service charge, to the Cassirer heirs and to Yale University for the establishment of the Ernst Cassirer Publication Fund.

As to the subsequent uses of this Fund, the agreement reads:
"Any sums accumulated in this Fund will be used to purchase books for the
Yale University Library in the name of Ernst Cassirer or to subsidize
publication by the Press of volumes in the field of Philosophy. No use
of this money is to be made without the joint approval of the Director of
the Press and the Chairman of the Philosophy Department of Yale University."

During the eleven years ending June 30, 1975, income from the Cassirer Literary Property paid into the Fund by the Press has totalled \$38,144.17. These earnings break down by calendar year as follows:

- 2 -

Year		Amount
1964		\$1,234.96
1965		2,283.56
1966		2,600.72
1967		6,275.78
1968		4,190.45
1969		3,494.52
1970		3,670.10
1971		2,536.32
1972		2,449.22
1973		3,735.54
1974		5,673.00
	TOTAL	\$38,144.17

The Fund has been treated by the University Treasurer's Office as a so-called expendable fund and has earned interest over the years to bring the present total in the Fund to \$44,504.00.

To date, the only categories of use of the Fund properly approved by the two authorized University representatives are the editions of Cassirer texts now in progress (James Haden's translation of Cassirer's KANTS LEBEN UND LEHRE and D. P. Verene's edition of unpublished Cassirer papers) and the Cassirer Lectures (Leszek Kolakowski's HUSSERL AND THE SEARCH FOR CERTITUDE, delivered in 1974 and published in 1975, and Lewis Beck's THE ACTOR AND THE SPECTATOR, delivered in 1975 and also published in 1975). The sum of \$700 was paid out to Haden in 1967 and \$750 to Verene in 1972. The formula used on the Lectures was to pay each lecturer \$1500 for the lecture series and an additional \$1500 as an advance against royalties upon acceptance of the manuscript by the Press's Committee on Publications. The latter sum thus becomes a subsidy to the Press which is relieved of paying the first \$1500 of royalties due the author, while in turn the Press meets the costs of production (approximately \$3500 on each of these first two).

To encourage and clarify the prescribed uses of the Fund, it now seems desirable to the present Chairman of the Department of Philosophy and the present Director of the Press, to set forth a number of guidelines:

- The original 1964 agreement is a sound document and the parties concerned should continue to develop ways of using the Fund as intended in that document.
- 2. To this end, the Department of Philosophy will initiate recommendations on such special purchases of books in philosophy for the Yale University Library as may be needed beyond the latter's normal purchases. It is not expected that such special purchases will exceed 50% of the income in any given year.
- 3. As for subsidies in aid of Press publications, it is obviously desirable to provide aid where necessary to further the translation or editing of any Ernst Cassirer materials not yet published. Both the Press and Department will feel free to initiate such proposals.
- 4. It may be also desirable to aid the publication by the Press of one or more journals in philosophy which further the work of the Department or the Press. It seems sensible to restrict such support to periodicals produced under Yale auspices and closely related to Ernst Cassiver's own work.
- 5. It may further be desirable, from time to time, to use such subsidies to aid the publication or republication by the Press of acknowledged classics in philosophy, originating as suggestions either from the Department or the Press.
- 6. It is clearly most desirable to continue the Cassirer Lectures now begun so effectively with the Kolakowski and Beck volumes. Both parties will devote their efforts to early agreement on new choices.
 - 7. Finally, it is recognized that from time to time the Press may

accept, either from Yale faculty members or from outside scholars, volumes in philosophy which might benefit from publication subsidies. The Director will be free to seek consent from the Chairman on such uses of the Fund.

In Items No. 3 through 7 above, it is understood that all decisions taken in regard to publication by the Press require the approval of the Press's Committee on Publications.

To advance in the areas of activity described above, the Chairman and the Director will continue to rely on the advice of a committee composed of two representatives of the Department of Philosophy and two from the Press. This committee, which is expected to meet regularly and in a spirit of cooperation and common purpose, will make recommendations to the two principals who are authorized to approve use of the Funds.

Kaska Fairie Chairman, Department of Philosophy

Director, Yale University Press

(date)