

AMSTERDAM STUDIES IN JEWISH THOUGHT

# HERMANN COHEN'S CRITICAL IDEALISM

edited by  
Reinier Munk

## HERMANN COHEN'S CRITICAL IDEALISM

# Amsterdam Studies in Jewish Thought

Editor:

Reinier Munk, *University of Leiden and Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam,  
The Netherlands*

Editorial Board:

Arthur Hyman, *Yeshiva University, New York, U.S.A.*

David Novak, *University of Toronto, Canada*

Howard Kreisel, *Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Beer Sheva, Israel*

Resianne Fontaine, *University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

Albert van der Heide, *Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

Robert Gibbs, *University of Toronto, Canada*

Warren Zev Harvey, *The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel*

Kenneth Seeskin, *Northwestern University, Evanston, U.S.A.*

VOLUME 10

The titles published in this series are listed at the end of this volume.

# HERMANN COHEN'S CRITICAL IDEALISM

Edited by

Reinier Munk

*University of Leiden and Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam,  
The Netherlands*

 Springer

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

ISBN-10 1-4020-4046-6 (HB)  
ISBN-13 978-1-4020-4046-7 (HB)  
ISBN-10 1-4020-4047-4 (e-book)  
ISBN-13 978-1-4020-4047-4 (e-book)

---

Published by Springer,  
P.O. Box 17, 3300 AA Dordrecht, The Netherlands.

*www.springer.com*

*Printed on acid-free paper*

All Rights Reserved

© 2005 Springer

No part of the material protected by this copyright notice may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner.

Printed in the Netherlands.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Abbreviations	ix

### INTRODUCTION

HELMUT HOLZHEY: Cohen and the Marburg School in Context	3
---	---

### *LOGIK*

WERNER FLACH: Cohen's <i>Ursprungsdenken</i>	41
REINER WIEHL: Identity and Correlation in Hermann Cohen's System of Philosophy	67
GIANNA GIGLIOTTI: <i>Beweis</i> and <i>Aufweis</i> : Transcendental <i>a priori</i> and Metaphysical <i>a priori</i> in Cohen's Neo-Kantianism	97
PIERFRANCESCO FIORATO: Notes on Future and History in Hermann Cohen's Anti-Eschatological Messianism	133
ASTRID DEUBER-MANKOWSKY: Hanging over the Abyss: On the Relation between Knowledge and Experience in Hermann Cohen and Walter Benjamin	161

### *ETHIK*

ROBERT GIBBS: Jurisprudence is the Organon of Ethics: Kant and Cohen on Ethics, Law, and Religion	193
PETER A. SCHMID: Hermann Cohen's Theory of Virtue	231
DAVID NOVAK: Hermann Cohen on State and Nation: A Contemporary Review	259

ÄSTHETIK

ANDREA POMA: The Portrait in Hermann Cohen's Aesthetics	283
MARC DE LAUNAY: The Statute of Music in Hermann Cohen's <i>Ästhetik</i>	307
URSULA RENZ: Critical Idealism and the Concept of Culture: Philosophy of Culture in Hermann Cohen and Ernst Cassirer	327

RELIGION

ARTHUR HYMAN: Maimonidean Elements in Hermann Cohen's Philosophy of Religion	357
IRENE KAJON: Critical Idealism in Hermann Cohen's Writings on Judaism	371
NORMAN SOLOMON: Cohen on Atonement, Purification and Repentance	395
ANDREA POMA: Suffering and Non-Eschatological Messianism in Hermann Cohen	413
Contributors	429
Index	431

## PREFACE

Hermann Cohen (1842-1918) is generally considered to be the leading systematic thinker and the outspoken representative of the Marburg School of Critical Idealism. The Marburg School was a leading school in German academic philosophy and in German Jewish philosophy for a period of more than thirty years preceding the First World War. Initially standing at the front of the 'Return to Kant' movement in nineteenth-century German philosophy, Cohen subsequently went beyond Kant in developing a system of critical idealism in which he offered a critique of and alternative to absolute idealism, positivism, and materialism. As a critical idealist in heart and soul Cohen is also recognized as a man who embodied German Jewish culture.

Over the past decades we have witnessed a growing interest in the thought of Hermann Cohen. The increasing number of publications on Cohen by scholars in the field of modern philosophy and modern Jewish philosophy can be characterized in rather general terms as aiming at a historical and systematic analysis of this classic author in modern philosophy and as an attempt to continue the legacy of critical idealism in philosophy and the philosophical articulation of Judaism. The growing interest in Cohen's work is also exemplified by recent translations of his writings into Italian, French, and Spanish, as well as by the publication of his *Werke* in seventeen volumes. The collected writings are edited under the direction of the Hermann Cohen Archives and its director, Helmut Holzhey, and are published by Olms Verlag, Hildesheim, Germany.

Publications on Cohen in the English language are rather small in number. The present volume aims at partially filling this gap. The book offers an analysis of Cohen's *System of Philosophy* — the three-volume classic on logic, ethics, and aesthetics — and his writings on Judaism and religion. The book aims at highlighting Cohen's contributions in these fields, including his discussions with, among others, Maimonides, Leibniz, Kant, and Hegel. It will also demonstrate the congeniality of Cohen's critical idealism as expounded in the *System* and his writings on Ju-

daism. The articles included here offer an overview of contemporary Cohen research. They are all original and written for the present collection by scholars from Switzerland, Italy, Great Britain, France, Canada, and the United States.

Thanks and gratitude are due to my graduate student Erik Kreiter, who served as a most reliable acting editor of this volume, and to the Adolf Aussenberg Foundation for its generous support in the preparation of this volume for publication.

The editor

## ABBREVIATIONS

### *Works of Hermann Cohen*

#### *Werke*

*Werke*, herausgegeben vom Hermann-Cohen-Archiv am Philosophischen Seminar Zürich unter der Leitung von Helmut Holzhey, Hildesheim/Zürich/New York, 1977ff.

#### *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*

*Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*, Berlin, 1871, 1885<sup>2</sup>, 1918<sup>3</sup>. Reprint of the third edition: *Werke*, volume 1/I-III.

#### *Kants Begründung der Ethik*

*Kants Begründung der Ethik*, Berlin, 1877, 1910<sup>2</sup>. Reprint of the second edition: *Werke*, volume 2.

#### *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*

*Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*, Berlin, 1889.

#### *Prinzip der Infinitesimal-Methode*

*Das Prinzip der Infinitesimal-Methode und seine Geschichte. Ein Kapitel zur Grundlegung der Erkenntnisskritik*, Berlin, 1883. Reprint: *Schriften*, volume 2, 1-170, Frankfurt am Main, 1968, and *Werke*, volume 5/I.

#### *Einleitung*

*Einleitung mit kritischem Nachtrag zu F. A. Langes Geschichte des Materialismus*, Leipzig, 1896, 1902<sup>2</sup>, 1914<sup>3</sup>. Reprint of the third edition: *Schriften*, volume 2, 171-302 and *Werke*, volume 5/II.

*Logik*

*Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*. System der Philosophie. Erster Teil, Berlin, 1902, 1914<sup>2</sup>. Reprint of the second edition: *Werke*, volume 6.

*Ethik*

*Ethik des reinen Willens*. System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil, Berlin, 1904, 1907<sup>2</sup>. Reprint of the second edition: *Werke*, volume 7.

*Ästhetik*

*Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*. System der Philosophie. Dritter Teil, 2 Bände, Berlin, 1912. Reprint: *Werke*, volumes 8 and 9.

*Der Begriff der Religion*

*Der Begriff der Religion im System der Philosophie*, Gießen, 1915. Reprint: *Werke*, volume 10.

*Religion der Vernunft*

*Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, herausgegeben von Ben Zion Kellermann, Leipzig, 1919, Frankfurt am Main, 1929<sup>2</sup>.

*Schriften*

*Hermann Cohens Schriften zur Philosophie und Zeitgeschichte*, 2 Bände, herausgegeben von Albert Görland und Ernst Cassirer, Berlin, 1928.

*Jüdische Schriften*

*Hermann Cohens Jüdische Schriften*, 3 Bände, herausgegeben von Bruno Strauß, mit einer Einleitung von Franz Rosenzweig, Berlin, 1924.

*Briefe*

*Briefe*, ausgewählt und herausgegeben von Bertha und Bruno Strauß, Berlin, 1939.

*Works of Immanuel Kant**Kritik der reinen Vernunft*

*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Riga, 1781 (A), 1787<sup>2</sup>(B).

*Akademie Ausgabe*

Other works of Immanuel Kant will be cited according to: *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, herausgegeben von der Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin, 1910ff.

## INTRODUCTION

## COHEN AND THE MARBURG SCHOOL IN CONTEXT

HELMUT HOLZHEY, ZÜRICH

### *1. Neo-Kantianism in Germany: The Historical Background*

In 1871 Friedrich Ueberweg observed in his résumé of ‘the present state of philosophy in Germany’ that while during the past several decades the Hegelian and Herbartian schools had dominated the philosophical scene, ‘recently a return in part to Aristotle and in part to Kant’ had gained more adherents than the post-Kantian doctrines of German Idealism. He further referred to philosophers who had taken up the teachings of Schopenhauer and Beneke as well as to a number of proponents of materialism (Karl Vogt, Jakob Moleschott, Ludwig Büchner), adding that Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg, Gustav Theodor Fechner, Rudolph Hermann Lotze, Eduard von Hartmann and others had gone new ways.<sup>1</sup> By 1870 the Hegelian school was indeed past its peak and neo-Kantianism began to unfold, initially in parallel to positivism and always differentiated from the philosophies of Schopenhauer, Herbart, and the materialists.<sup>2</sup> The motivation to ‘return to Kant’ was considerably increased by Friedrich Albert Lange (1828-1875) who, in the widely read second edition of his *Geschichte des Materialismus* (1875) spoke of ‘a young school of Kantians in a narrower and wider sense of the word’. Among these he counted Otto Liebmann, Jürgen Bona Meyer, and Hermann Cohen. Lange admitted that Cohen’s book *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (1871) had inspired him to revise his presentation of the Kantian system.<sup>3</sup>

Translated from the German by Vilem Mudroch

<sup>1</sup> F. Ueberweg, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie der Neuzeit* (Berlin, 1872<sup>3</sup>), 329.

<sup>2</sup> The expression ‘neo-Kantianism’ as a label for a philosophical movement appeared around 1875. Cf. H. Holzhey, ‘Neukantianismus’, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 6 (Basel, 1984), columns 747-754.

In Germany Kant's thought exercised some influence during all of the nineteenth century. It became especially prominent in the ideological debates after the failed revolution of 1848, when, during the post-revolutionary stage of repression, a 'critical', ideologically neutral position arose that was sceptical towards metaphysics and that instead resorted to epistemology.<sup>4</sup> Kant was present outside of Germany as well. However, while the reception of Kant in England, which promoted the critique of empiricism, hardly assumed the form of genuine neo-Kantianism, and while in France (Charles Renouvier) and in Italy (Carlo Cantoni and others) some notable neo-Kantian tendencies did appear, it was only in Germany that a full blown Kantian movement emerged. Around the time of the founding of the German Empire in 1871 a philosophical new beginning based on Kant was made. The philosophical revitalization effected by neo-Kantianism coincided with the scientific and technological progress of the Wilhelminian era. Later, this movement split up into divergent directions and was partially institutionalized in different schools.

The beginning was made by individual, young philosophers, who in 1871 had just turned thirty years of age or were even younger; the most important ones were Otto Liebmann (1840-1912), Hermann Cohen (1842-1918), Alois Riehl (1844-1924), and Wilhelm Windelband (1848-1915). Their publications do not represent a unified position. This was caused mainly by the fact that the young Kantians owed their philosophical training to different traditions. Liebmann and Windelband were students of Kuno Fischer in Jena, whose understanding of Kant was marked by idealistic tendencies. Riehl and Cohen had been schooled in contemporary psychology and were both strongly interested in science. In spite of these differences a common direction can be identified. The authors argued anti-naturalistically and anti-

<sup>3</sup> F. A. Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart*, Vorrede und Einleitung mit kritischem Nachtrag von Hermann Cohen, 2. Buch: *Geschichte des Materialismus seit Kant* (Leipzig, 1896<sup>5</sup>), vol. 2, 115.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. K. C. Köhnke, *Entstehung und Aufstieg des Neukantianismus. Die deutsche Universitätsphilosophie zwischen Idealismus und Positivismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1986), esp. 175ff.

materialistically, thus declining the all too obvious option of capitalizing on the great general respect for science. In the so-called *Kulturkampf* between the Prussian government and the Catholic Church they maintained an anti-clerical position, criticising the tutelage of the Church. Faced with the rampant adherence to Schopenhauer they assumed an anti-pessimistic stance. As a consequence they justified and defended the ideal of civil liberty.<sup>5</sup>

Along with other factors the divergent backgrounds determined the nature of the separation of neo-Kantianism into the different schools. Cohen, who from early on was motivated by an interest in the 'idealism in science', developed a 'critical idealism' for epistemology and ethics, an approach that eventually furnished the 'Marburg School' with its leading pattern of thought. For this purpose, he especially embraced Friedrich Albert Lange's criticism of materialism as it was presented in the latter's *Geschichte des Materialismus*. However, while Lange, when confronted with the need for ethical orientation, advocated a 'standpoint of ideal', to be arrived at by a process of 'free conceptual poetic composition',<sup>6</sup> Cohen championed, instead of the poetic approach to the ideas of reason, a logical one and thus sought a strictly 'epistemological foundation of ethics'.<sup>7</sup> Of some importance for this conception was a reconstruction of Plato's ideas as pure foundations (hypotheses) of knowledge. Ideas were conceived as the instruments of knowledge of a particular kind, but not as independently existing entities. This non-metaphysical employment of Plato's philosophy was made possible by the distinction between, on the one hand, the being of things, the occurrence of events, and the existence of relations and, on the other hand, the validity of propositions. Hermann Lotze (1817-1881), who developed this distinction, fundamental for the whole of neo-Kantianism, in 1874, identified the alleged 'being' of Platonic ideas with the 'validity of truths'.<sup>8</sup> Wilhelm Windel-

<sup>5</sup> Köhnke, *Entstehung und Aufstieg des Neukantianismus*, 321.

<sup>6</sup> F.A. Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart*, ed. A. Schmidt (Frankfurt am Main, 1974), 981ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Kants Begründung der Ethik*, vi.

<sup>8</sup> Cohen, 'Platons Ideenlehre und die Mathematik' (1878), *Schriften I*, 336-366. Cf. H. Lotze, *Logik. Drei Bücher vom Denken, vom Untersuchen und Erkennen*, ed. G. Misch (Leipzig, 1912), 505ff.

band's writings were influenced directly by Lotze, and it was the latter's conception of validity that became the foundation of the understanding of logic and philosophy in 'Southwest German neo-Kantianism'. The decisive impulse for this direction of neo-Kantianism, however, was provided by Kuno Fischer's Fichtean understanding of Kant.<sup>9</sup>

Although the Marburg and the Southwest schools were separated by virtue of the fact that they had different founders, they did share a common critical idealism that distinguished them from a *critical realism* as it was propounded for instance by Alois Riehl. This third large scale attempt to re-appropriate Kant's critical philosophy in a contemporary form was marked by an appreciation of tradition and of empiricism.<sup>10</sup> Not only were the empirical sciences analyzed here in order to identify their rational a priori elements, but the 'real' elements representing the given were acknowledged as well. In general, the early neo-Kantianism of the 1870s was characterized by a multitude of ties to positivism.

Since the 1920s it has been generally accepted that neo-Kantianism had been composed of only two schools. Riehl's realistic interpretation of Kant seems to have led to Oswald Külpe's 'critical realism' and thus no longer counted as neo-Kantianism. While the Marburg School, represented by Hermann Cohen, Paul Natorp, and the early Ernst Cassirer, explicitly claimed to be Kant's true heir, in spite of integrating, after the turn of the century, the philosophy of Leibniz, the theory of value oriented criticism of the Southwestern School with its main representatives Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert, and Emil Lask participated in the Hegel-Renaissance;<sup>11</sup> its representative organ was the journal *Logos* (1910-1933).

Born as the only son of Friederike (maiden name Salomon) and Gerson Cohen on July 4, 1842 in Coswig (Anhalt), young Hermann was instructed in Hebrew and literature since the age of

<sup>9</sup> K. Fischer, *Immanuel Kant. Entwicklungsgeschichte und System der kritischen Philosophie*, 2 vols. (Mannheim, 1860).

<sup>10</sup> A. Riehl, *Der philosophische Kriticismus und seine Bedeutung für die positive Wissenschaft*, vols. 1, 2.1, 2.2, (1876-1887).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. H. Levy, *Die Hegel-Renaissance in der deutschen Philosophie mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Neukantianismus* (Charlottenburg, 1927), 58ff.

three by his father, who was the cantor at the local synagogue and a teacher at the Jewish school in Coswig. In 1853 Hermann went to the high school (Gymnasium) at Dessau and in October 1857 to the Jewish Theological Seminary at Breslau. He quit the school three years later without graduating, but registered in 1861 at the Philosophical Faculty of the Breslau university. Some weeks after having earned his high school diploma, he switched in the autumn of 1864 to the university in Berlin, where he visited lectures by Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg and August Boeckh and attended courses in mathematics, science, and medicine, namely those by Emil du Bois Reymond. His first articles, among them 'Die platonische Ideenlehre psychologisch entwickelt', appeared in the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, a journal edited by H. Steinthal and Moritz Lazarus. Steinthal's work on the theory of language had a significant influence on Cohen's philosophical development.

In 1864/65 Cohen submitted a prize essay in Berlin, which failed to win the prize, but did receive praise from Trendelenburg,<sup>12</sup> and which presumably served as basis for a Latin dissertation on the teachings of Greek philosophers on the antinomy of necessity and accident. This was submitted in 1865 in Halle, where it was accepted. Having shared numerous tenets of Herbart's psychology for a number of years, Cohen found his way to Kant with a contribution to the discussion between Kuno Fischer and Adolf Trendelenburg concerning the proper understanding of Kant's theory of time and space. In 1871 Cohen published his *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*, a work of fundamental importance for neo-Kantianism, both in philological and philosophical regard. In 1873 Cohen obtained his *Habilitation* in Marburg; in 1876 he became a professor of philosophy there, succeeding his deceased promoter Friedrich Albert Lange. Setting it as his goal to renew Kantian idealism, Cohen published his *Kants Begründung der Ethik* (1877, 1910<sup>2</sup>) and his *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* (1889). These works, together with a significantly re-worked and expanded second edition of his *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (1885) and along with his study *Das Prinzip der Infinitesimal-Methode* (1883) constituted the foundations for the teachings of the

<sup>12</sup> H. Cohen, *Briefe*, 19.

Marburg School. The goal of surmounting the methodological dualism of intuition and thought led Cohen to formulate his doctrine of the 'origin' of knowledge in pure thought in his *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* (1902, 1914<sup>2</sup>), the first part of his *System der Philosophie*. In his second major systemic work, the *Ethik des reinen Willens* (1904, 1907<sup>2</sup>), he presented a doctrine of the 'ethical person', which, in accordance with Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals*, he subdivided into a doctrine of law and a doctrine of virtue. Here he justified his theory of ethical socialism and claimed that the teachings of religion were accommodated in ethics. In his *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls* (1912) he grounded the validity of artistic work and judgement in 'pure feeling', understood as a third direction of consciousness, connecting the theoretical and practical production of objects.

## 2. Hermann Cohen: *Life and Writings*

In 1912 Cohen became a professor emeritus and moved to Berlin. There he taught at the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*. He had published on philosophical-religious issues and had taken position in regard to religious, cultural, and political questions concerning Judaism already while in Marburg. Since his 'Bekenntnis in der Judenfrage' (1880), his contribution to the 'Berliner Antisemitismusstreit'<sup>13</sup> that had been originated by Heinrich von Treitschke, and his expert opinion 'Die Nächstenliebe im Talmud' for the Marburg process of 1888, Cohen fought against the rampant antisemitism. Although he represented a liberal Judaism, he nevertheless vehemently insisted on the right to and the duty towards one's own religion. In May of 1914 Cohen visited a number of Jewish communities in Russia. His patriotism, at the outset of the First World War still undiminished, soon turned into bitterness and skepticism owing to the fresh outbreak of anti-Jewish sentiment. Prominent among the numerous works of his last years, some of them dealing with the relationship between the spirit of German culture

<sup>13</sup> Cf. W. Boehlich (Hrsg.), *Der Berliner Antisemitismusstreit*, (Frankfurt am Main, 1965).

and the spirit of Jewish culture, are his study *Der Begriff der Religion im System der Philosophie* (1915) and the posthumously published *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* (1919). The former leads on the basis of an esteem for the peculiarity of religious consciousness to a new concept of the individual, the latter connects Jewish religiosity with philosophical reason. In June of 1917 he proposed to commence on the fourth part of his system, the 'Psychology',<sup>14</sup> in which the unity of cultural consciousness was to be developed in a definitive form. This proposal, however, was not materialized. Cohen died on April 4, 1918 in Berlin while correcting the proofs of his *Religion der Vernunft*.

### 3. Cohen's Early Psychological Studies and his First Interpretation of Kant

In the 1860s Cohen's writings were based on Herbart's psychology. Although he did distinguish between, on the one hand, 'deductive critique', whose task it was to prove the 'metaphysical competence' of a concept as well as its inner non-contradictoriness, and, on the other hand, psychological analysis, he was chiefly interested in the latter, i.e. in the explanation of the *origin* of all cultural phenomena in terms of human consciousness. He viewed Plato's theory of ideas as the beginning of the true, namely psychological philosophy, and interpreted *idea* as the 'living thought-act of seeing',<sup>15</sup> in which the essence of things is grasped. Cohen also sought to provide a psychological explanation of the genesis of the Indo-European mythical ideas of God and of the soul (birth and death), i.e. a description of the 'psychological mechanism', which it was hoped would account for (the in itself already poetic) myth and especially for later poets' resort to myth;<sup>16</sup> according to Cohen's insight the recogni-

<sup>14</sup> Letter to Paul Natorp of June 10, 1917, in: H. Holzhey, *Cohen und Natorp*, vol. 2: *Der Marburger Neukantianismus in Quellen* (Basel, 1986), 480.

<sup>15</sup> *Schriften* I, 61.

<sup>16</sup> H. Cohen, 'Die dichterische Phantasie und der Mechanismus des Bewusstseins', *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* 6 (1869), 173-263, reprinted in: *Schriften* I, 141-228.