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# Review of Helmut Holzhey, Cohen und Natorp (1986): Volume I, Ursprung und Einheit; Volume II, Der Marburger Neukantianismus in Quellen

Harry van der Linden

Butler University, hvanderl@butler.edu

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## COHEN UND NATORP

Helmut Holzhey

Basel/Stuttgart: Schwabe & Co., 1986.

Volume I; **Ursprung und Einheit**, xii + 419pp.

Volume II: **Der Marburger Neukantianismus in Quellen**, 536pp.

This detailed study examines the close cooperation between the two main figures of the Marburg School, Hermann Cohen (1842-1918) and Paul Natorp (1854-1924), primarily from the time that Natorp came to the University of Marburg in 1880 to write his *Habilitationsschrift* under Cohen until Cohen's resignation from Marburg in 1912. It is a common view that during this period Cohen and Natorp were of one philosophical mind: Cohen developed the basic premises of Marburg Kantianism, first in his explications of Kant's three *Critiques*, and later in his own philosophical system [*Logic of Pure Cognition* (1902), *Ethics of the Pure Will* (1904), and *Aesthetics of Pure Feeling* (1912)], while Natorp used these premises in his historical studies (e.g., on Descartes and Plato) and in the construction of his social pedagogy. On this account, it was not until Cohen's departure from Marburg, or even not until the latter's death, that Natorp's philosophy began to differentiate clearly from Cohen's, taking an increasingly metaphysical-mystical turn. Holzhey successfully undermines this view. He shows that during Cohen's Marburg period Natorp was actually critical of some basic aspects of Cohen's epistemic logic, ethics, and philosophy of religion, but that Natorp underplayed his disagreements and largely kept them from becoming public.

To substantiate his thesis, Holzhey first offers in Volume I a detailed history of the Marburg School. This exposition makes clear that there are several factors that can account for Natorp's reluctance to publicize his philosophical objections to Cohen's system, such as their friendship, Natorp's personal and intellectual indebtedness to Cohen, and Cohen's dominant personality (see p. 36). More importantly, Holzhey's historical exposition (and his study in general) brings to our attention the richness and philosophical creativity of Marburg Kantianism, not only as displayed in the works of Cohen and Natorp, but also as developed by their students Ernst Cassirer, Albert Garland, and Karl Vorländer (to mention only a few). This point can hardly be sufficiently stressed; for, as Holzhey notes with obvious disapproval, today's Kantian philosopher "prefers to toil on the basis of the original Kantian thoughts, often simply out of ignorance of neo-Kantian concepts" (p. ix).

Holzhey next provides a comparative analysis of the views of Cohen and Natorp, focussing on their epistemic disagreements. In the course of this analysis Holzhey uses various hitherto unpublished materials, such as Natorp's critical review of Cohen's *Logic of Pure Cognition*, which Natorp decided not to submit for publication in *Kant-Studien* after Cohen had objected that it did not adequately represent his own viewpoint (see p. 35). These materials, together with numerous letters by Cohen and Natorp, can be found in Volume II. (The letters necessarily offer a one-sided picture of the dialogue between Cohen and

Natorp; only some drafts of letters from Natorp to Cohen are extant, as Cohen's personal papers were lost when his wife was deported to Theresienstadt.)

Holzhey's focus on Cohen's and Natorp's epistemic logic, though unobjectionable in itself, has at times a distortive effect. For example, Holzhey rightly argues that the transcendental method constitutes the "connecting element" of the Marburg School (see Volume I, pp. 49 ff.), but what also needs to be emphasized is that most Marburg Kantians held that Kant's notion of the kingdom of ends sets forth the demand for democratic socialism. In short, the Marburg School aspired to be not just an academic force, but also a social-political force, seeking to correct the dogmatic Marxism of the German Social Democratic Party. Likewise, Holzhey deals too hastily with Cohen's ethics in his discussion of the interconnectedness of Cohen's system (see Volume 1, Chapter X). Holzhey inadequately stresses that Cohen saw not only a methodic unity between epistemic logic and ethics, but also maintained in *Ethics of the Pure Will* that both theoretical and practical reason (science and ethics) must aim at the unification of natural and moral laws (i.e., "truth"), a postulated possibility that has its ultimate ground in the regulative idea of God. Thus it can be argued, more emphatically than Holzhey does, that some of Natorp's criticisms of the "weak" interconnectedness of Cohen's system are misplaced.

A short review can hardly do justice to the richness of Holzhey's study: we can find in his work a complete bibliography of Cohen's writings, a fascinating description of the inner faculty struggles at Marburg, which came to a climax when Cohen did not succeed in making Cassirer his successor, as well as interesting notes on the failed attempts of the Marburg Kantians to acquire their own journal and on their polemic with the editors of *Kant-Studien*. Also, Holzhey's numerous annotations to the letters of Cohen and Natorp offer a wealth of information concerning German philosophy around the turn of the century, besides being helpful in exploring Cohen's and Natorp's attitudes to some of the main German political figures and events of the time. All this makes Holzhey's study indispensable, both for the Kantian philosopher and the historian of Wilhelminian Germany.

Harry van der Linden  
*University of North Carolina*