In an introductory note to Karl Vorländer's "Die neukantische Bewegung im Sozialismus" (1902), the editors of Kant-Studien wrote: "The neo-Kantian movement in socialism has gained in the past few years such a significance that the editors of Kant-Studien feel obliged to keep their readers informed about this movement. The editors have therefore requested Dr. Vorländer, who is most familiar with this movement, to report on it in an objective manner" (p. 23n.). The editors had chosen well; for Vorländer may be described as the early historian of Kantian socialism as well as its main popularizer (in a nonpejorative sense of that word). The editors also correctly observed that Kantianism had made some impact on the German socialist movement: Conrad Schmidt, a member of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) had argued in 1897 that Kant's epistemology could function as a corrective of "Hegel's poetic metaphysics" and thus provide a more adequate epistemic framework for Marx's social theory. Schmidt's polemical thesis drew a vehement response by the Russian Marxist George Plekhanov. The main impetus behind the debate on the significance of Kant's philosophy for socialist theory and praxis was, however, the influence of Eduard Bernstein, leader and theoretician of the revisionist faction in the SPD. In 1899 Bernstein evoked the critical spirit of Kant against the "Cant" of orthodox Marxism,
with its belief in the inevitable collapse of capitalism. The debate soon took a broader turn, to include the question of the socialist importance of Kant's ethics, and led to a series of papers, many of which were published in the SPD organs *Die neue Zeit* and *Sozialistische Monatshefte.* Franz Mehring defended the traditional Marxist view that Marxism does not need a critical ethics and that Kant's ethics is a philosophy of reconciliation, weakening the class struggle. The Kantian viewpoint was represented by Franz Staudinger and Ludwig Woltmann. Others who jointed the debate were Karl Kautsky on the side of the Marxian orthodoxy and Kurt Eisner and Vorländer himself on the side of Kantian socialist ethics.

A glance at Vorländer's report for *Kant-Studien* makes clear, however, that the development of Kantians becoming socialists or socialists adopting Kantian elements in their theoretical work was not limited to Germany: Vorländer points out that Kantianism influenced various French and Russian socialists, such as Jean Jaurès, Charles Rappoport, Nikolay Berdyayev, and Peter Struve. Turning to Vorländer's *Kant und Marx* (1911), we find an even broader picture emerging: Kantianism also influenced some Austrian and Italian socialists, such as Max Adler and Alfredo Poggi. Nonetheless, it seems to correct to say—and this presumably accords with Vorländer's view—that the link between Kant and socialism was most closely and systematically made by Hermann Cohen and the Marburg School, including such "members" as Eisner, Albert Görland, Paul Natorp, Staudinger, and Vorländer. This is certainly so if we take as our concern a Kantianism that functions not just as an epistemic corrective of Marx's social theory but also as a source of socialist values and moral guidelines—that is, a Kantian ethical socialism.

Early Austro-Marxism, as represented by Max Adler and Otto Bauer, may seem to be a noteworthy exception to this contention. And, indeed, both Adler and Bauer held in the early 1900's that Kantian ethics offered a necessary moral justification for socialism. Yet, their intellectual labor was not focused on expounding this idea, as was that of some Marburgers. Adler was interested mostly in using Kant's epistemology to establish a transcendental foundation of Marx's social theory; Bauer's work was centered around the growing problem of nationalism. Moreover, they both came to reject Kantian ethical socialism. Adler, although still believing in the importance of an epistemological synthesis of Kant and Marx, claimed in the early 1920's that, even though the Marburg School was not wrong in holding that Kant's practical philosophy offers
a justification for socialism, Marxism as a social science simply does not need such a justification; for it explains on the basis of "formal-teleological causality" how "socialized man" necessarily comes "to realize what he considers to be morally justified." Thus Adler concluded that "[i]f the idealism of Kant and his followers was the philosophy of the conceptual possibility of socialism, the scientific socialism of Marx becomes the theory of the actual reality of idealism." Bauer was less charitable. Echoing the early orthodox SPD critics of the Marburg School, he wrote in an essay on the history of Austro-Marxism (1938) that the "bourgeois intelligentsia" and their Kantianism "aimed to win over the working class, to pacify the socialist movement, and eliminate its revolutionary character. . . . [They sought to undermine] Marx's theory of the historical inevitability of social revolution . . . , and socialism was reduced to an ethical postulate, a simple maxim for value-judgments and action within the existing social order." And, Bauer added, this "bourgeois criticism of Marx" was elaborated "at a new level of sophistication" in Bernstein's revisionist thought as well as in the works of such Kantians as Eisner and Staudinger. The various members of the Marburg School displayed different philosophical interests, religious commitments, and attitudes toward revolution, the SPD, and revisionism. What tied them together, besides Cohen's personality, was that they all took Cohen's Kant interpretation as their point of departure, stressing the transcendental method and rejecting any physiological or psychological understanding of Kant's epistemology. Also, they all agreed that the personality principle, i.e., the third formulation of the categorical imperative, sets forth the idea of socialism, and that a tenable socialism needs such a moral underpinning. It will suffice here to say a few words about three key figures: Friedrich Albert Lange as the forefather of Marburg socialism; Vorländer and his attempt to synthesize Kant and Marx; and Eisner's efforts to bring the Kantian ideal into practice in the Munich Revolution. My remarks on Cohen will be largely in passing, for his work has received ample attention in the text. I will also make some (additional) synoptic comments on the Kant discussion in the SPD and on the link between Marburg socialism and the revisionism of Bernstein.

Lange and the Marburg School

The indebtedness of the Marburg School to Lange is both personal and programmatic in nature. Lange (1828–75) became full pro-
fessor at Marburg in 1873 and that same year arranged a position for Cohen as Privatdozent (university lecturer) at Marburg. He did this partly due to the fact that he had read Cohen's *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (1871), acknowledging its influence on his own understanding of Kant's epistemology in the second edition of his classic *History of Materialism*. 7 [Lange's book was widely read among socialists. It was in his Epilogue to the fifth edition of this work (1896) that Cohen for the first time systematically expounded his thesis that socialism is to be morally grounded in Kant.] 9

Cohen reminisced about his first meeting with Lange in these words: "Following his noble nature he directly wished to draw out an open-hearted statement about the religious issue that separated us. ‘Are our views different with regard to Christianity?’ No, I said: What you call Christianity I call prophetic Judaism. And immediately a close understanding arose between us. ‘Yes, I can also show you passages of the prophets that I have underlined.’ Thus ethical socialism had at once overcome the barriers of our religions." 9 This enlightened attitude was a rare exception in Wilhelmian Germany; for, although it was not too hard for Jews to obtain academic posts, the climb up the academic ladder was extremely difficult, if not impossible, without conversion. It was Lange's untimely death and his emphatic request for Cohen to become his successor that freed Cohen from this arduous academic road: Cohen became full professor in 1876 and expressed throughout his life his personal gratitude to Lange. History, however, did not repeat itself; for in 1912 Cohen's wish to make his distinguished student Ernst Cassirer his successor was sidestepped. 10

There are some important differences between Lange and the Marburgers. They agreed with Lange's rejection of metaphysical materialism as set forth in his *History of Materialism*, but they were critical of his rebuttal insofar as it was based on a psychological interpretation of Kant. (Lange saw the a priori categories as constituents of the human mind rather than as rational or logical constructs.) Moreover, Lange can hardly be called a Kantian socialist, even though he was an ethical socialist. To be sure, Lange did not fail to mention some strengths of Kant's ethics and accepted some of its aspects, but he was also rather negative about it, declaring it to be the "transitory part of the Kantian philosophy." Thus Vorländer came to state: "[T]he connection between [Lange's] ‘Kantianism’ and his ‘socialism’ is not a systematic one; it consists rather in his noble personality filled with pure ethical idealism." 11 Besides this inspirational link, however, there are also some
programmatic affinities between Lange and the socialism of the Marburg School. Like the Marburgers, Lange was a gradualist, believing in the possibility of incremental improvement in the conditions of the German working class. In this vein he started a consumer cooperative in Duisburg in 1862, hoping that this type of cooperative would be a first step toward the producer cooperative, and a few years later he opened his own publishing house, printing cheap pamphlets and a newspaper directed toward the working class. But what is most interesting is that Lange did not make the common socialist mistake of focusing attention primarily on industrial workers as the agents of social change: he made a plea for state credits and other forms of support not only for industrial cooperatives but also for agrarian cooperatives. More radically, Lange called for a redistribution of the land of the Junkers. Here, then, we can discern an additional influence of Lange's thought on Cohen (and the Marburg School), in that they both envisioned the ideal society as an association of cooperatives. Presumably, Lange was more reformist-oriented than at least Cohen was and also more doubtful concerning the possible emancipatory effects of state programs (emphasizing instead "self-help"); yet, they also shared the belief that a true socialism is a democratic socialism and that the struggle for the emancipation of labor should be linked to the struggle for political emancipation. Accordingly, the ultimate significance of Lange for the Marburg School must be sought in the fact that he contributed to shaping its social agenda.

Vorländer and His Kant-Marx Synthesis

Vorländer (1860–1928), a Marburg native, studied under Cohen and wrote his dissertation on Kant. Vorländer was primarily interested in Kant's practical philosophy and emphasized aspects of Kant's work which have been all too often neglected, such as his philosophy of history, his commitment to the French Revolution and other liberal revolutions, and, in general, the social nature of his ethics. He was also a distinguished biographer of Kant. Quite early in his intellectual career Vorländer made the step from Kant to socialism, which explains why, despite an impressive publication record, including studies on Goethe, Marx, and Schiller, and a two-volume work on the history of philosophy, he remained a Gymnasium teacher until 1919, when the more liberal climate made it at last possible for him to obtain a university post at Münster. The repressive political climate of Wilhelmian Germany also explains why Vorländer, against his own expressed desire, did not join the
organized socialist struggle until 1919: civil servants were not legally permitted to become SPD members.\textsuperscript{16}

Vorländer's Kant-Marx synthesis is often misunderstood: he argues not that Kantian ethics and Marx's social theory are in fact compatible, but that they can be made complementary, forming together a philosophy of socialism. To see this point, we must turn briefly to the long systematic conclusion that Vorländer added to the second edition of \textit{Kant und Marx} (1926). Under the heading, "What Do We Keep from Historical Materialism?," Vorländer seeks first to eliminate possible misunderstandings concerning this conception of history: historical materialism should not be equated with a mechanical or metaphysical materialism; for intellectual lifeforms are "conditioned" but not "produced" by economic (material) relations, and these relations, in turn, reflect intentional human action.\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, as the later Engels stressed, interaction takes place between the superstructure and the economic basis of society.\textsuperscript{18} What is most important, however, is that the materialist conception of history should be seen not as a "dogma" but as a "guideline" for the scientific study of society and its evolution (\textit{Kant und Marx}, 2nd ed., p. 319). Vorländer then goes on to argue that Marx and Engels did not think historical materialism through philosophically as a "research hypothesis," since they tended to reduce philosophy to "genetic-causal deduction" (ibid., p. 321). The source of this mistake is to be found in Hegel: "[Marx] and his friend Engels were philosophically still strongly under the influence of Hegel, whose genetic method is fruitful in itself but sets aside the eternal distinction between being and ought . . . . Thus they both placed in their theory 'the jump from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom' . . . . in the future" (ibid., p. 322). And, Vorländer writes a little further on, their mistaken claim that the proletariat "has no ideals to realize" has a similar root: Marx and Engels followed, in effect, Hegel's self-conscious attack on Kant's view of ethics (ibid., p. 325).

In short, then, the main drift of Vorländer's view is that a Kant-Marx synthesis is possible once the materialist conception of history is freed from what I have described in Chapter VII as its reductionism and its dogmatic metaphysical underpinning. And, of course, Vorländer contends that this synthesis presupposes that Kant's ethics be further developed as a Kantian socialist ethics. Furthermore, Vorländer argues that, once historical materialism is interpreted as a "research hypothesis," it is an open question which epistemology or philosophy of science will fit best with this conception of history, because Marx and Engels never (fully) de-
veloped such a philosophical foundation. Referring to the work of Max Adler, Vorländer suggests that a Kantian epistemology may be adequate to the task, but it is clear that this is not his main concern (see *ibid.*, p. 335). Thus Vorländer arrives at his final conclusion that a philosophy of socialism must fulfill two tasks: first, “it must not be satisfied with utopian dreams that are merely created in the head, as happened in previous centuries, but it must go hand in hand with a secure method of exploring the economic and historical development of the social order of things. Marxism has in this respect made an essential contribution. . . .” And second, as a “socialism of praxis [Tat], it “must raise the question: What is the end-goal that socialism must seek . . . ? Only a philosophy of *ought*, i.e., ethics, can answer this question. Engels’s ‘jump into freedom’ . . . cannot be postponed to an undetermined future but must already start in the present, in the economy, law, and education” (*ibid.*, pp. 347–48).

Although Vorländer emphasized that a philosophy of socialism must be open-ended and subject to continuous improvement, explicitly rejecting Bolshevism as a “closed” system (see *ibid.*, p. 347), he obviously hoped that his Kant-Marx synthesis—his main intellectual life-task—constituted an important contribution to the formation of an adequate philosophy of socialism. In my view, this hope was (and is) justified. Admittedly, Vorländer did not sufficiently explore the Hegelian elements in Marx, but this is understandable in light of what he sought to show, namely that Marx’s social theory as an empirical theory is important to a tenable philosophy of socialism. It is, moreover, this same endeavor to separate good science from bad metaphysics in Marx—so that a critical Kantian ethics could be put in the latter’s place—which helps to account for the fact that Vorländer at times suggests that our evaluation and interpretation of the world are two completely independent processes. He states, for example, that “the view of Marxists is basically purely directed toward explanation, and not toward the evaluation of . . . what is happening. From this angle it must reject any meddling of moral viewpoints in its pure theoretical sphere” (*ibid.*, p. 330; cf. p. 322). To say the least, this statement is misleading; for Marxism as a critical social science must be guided in its theory formation by the socialist ideal, although such an evaluative perspective must be set aside in the testing of hypotheses. This is implied by Kant’s primacy of praxis, and Cohen’s notion that the scientist must seek the ‘truth’ as the unification of causal and moral laws points in the same direction (see Chapter VI, section 3, above).
Vorländer, after learning of Bernstein's interest in Kant, began to correspond with Bernstein, sending him papers by the Marburgers and recommending literature on Kant. Vorländer's rationale for taking on this role of mentor is that he hoped that Bernstein would thus come to give more content to his professed "Kantianism." Bernstein's call "Back to Kant" was primarily a call for adopting a healthy critical attitude toward some unquestioned beliefs ("Cant") embedded in the Erfurt Program (1891) of the SPD, such as the increasing concentration of capital, the intensification of economic crises, the growing class polarization, and the inevitability of the socialist revolution. Thus Bernstein writes in Evolutionary Socialism that "social democracy require[s] a Kant who should judge the received opinion and examine it critically. . . . Such a thinker, who with convincing exactness could show what is worthy and destined to live in the work of our great champions, and what must and can perish, would also make it possible for us to hold a more unbiased judgment on those works which, although not starting from premises which to-day appear to us as decisive, yet are devoted to the ends for which social democracy is fighting" (p. 223). And, in apparent reference to the fact that the orthodox Marxists of the SPD were not prepared to give up the revolutionary road outlined in the Erfurt Program, although the party was increasingly engaged in reformist and parliamentary politics, Bernstein adds that "[n]o impartial thinker will deny that socialist criticism often fails in [displaying a critical Kantian spirit] and discloses all the dark sides of epigonism."

It was only secondarily that Bernstein appealed to Kant as an antidote to dogmatic historical materialism with its reductionism and its denial that the socialist ideal sets a moral task. Notwithstanding Vorländer's efforts, however, these issues hardly receive a Kantian explication in Bernstein's work. Most significantly, Bernstein's understanding of ethics is decisively un-Kantian, in that he held that morality cannot be based on a systematic and rational foundation. Also, his view of the moral ideal is not Kantian; for he stressed happiness rather than autonomy as its essential feature. Peter Gay in his excellent intellectual biography of Bernstein rightly concludes then that "in spite of some superficial resemblances to the Critical Philosophy, Bernstein was never a Kantian. [H]e never followed through Kant's speculations in the realms of knowledge and ethics. . . . He called on Kant, but he remained a common-sense philosopher." And we may note in support of this
conclusion that Bernstein claims in *Evolutionary Socialism* that the call "Back to Kant" may be translated as "Back to Lange," because in Lange we can find the "union . . . of an upright and intrepid championship of the struggles of the working class for emancipation with a large scientific freedom from prejudice which was always ready to acknowledge mistakes and recognize new truths" (pp. 223–24).

Bernstein's common-sense philosophy constitutes both a strength and a weakness of his work. On the one hand, his rather straightforward orientation toward the "facts" enabled him, notwithstanding his deep personal immersion in orthodox Marxism, to question critically some of its dogmatic beliefs. Unlike most orthodox Marxists, Bernstein had the courage to face the growing prosperity of the German working class in the 1890s and to think through the increasingly evolutionary politics of the SPD. On the other hand, Bernstein tended to take the "facts" too much at their face value, projecting the economic improvement of the 1890s toward the future and overestimating the capacity of capitalism to overcome its economic irrationalities, such as its recurrent economic crises. The result is that Bernstein at times sketched too rosy a picture of the future, describing a unilinear model of progress in which class antagonisms would slowly diminish in capitalist society, while socialism would gradually and peacefully evolve through reformist and parliamentary action. Here his thought again takes a somewhat un-Kantian turn; for the Kantian notion of progress fully incorporates the possibility of temporary regress. In Bernstein's defense, however, it is to be noted that he did not reject revolution as such. Rather, he follows Kantian gradualism in criticizing the Hegelian conception of the socialist revolution as the negation of the negation, leading to an a priori justification of revolutionary violence as well as to eschatological expectations concerning the effects of revolution. As Bernstein put it, this "vision" of "social collapse . . . is the picture of an army. It presses forward, through detours, over sticks and stones, but is constantly led downward in its march ahead. Finally it arrives at a great abyss. Beyond it there stands beckoning the desired goal—the state of the future, which can be reached only through a sea; a red sea, as some have said."

In general, Kantian socialist ethics shares Bernstein's moral concern with the means of social change. His view, for example, that a political mass strike, paralyzing the economy, is justified as a means of defending democratic rights or of pressing for such rights, is Kantian in nature; for the very conditions of autonomy
are at stake, and, once these conditions are threatened, action that may lead to revolution is justified. 26 Also, the Marburgers could not but have agreed with Bernstein’s contention that democracy is both the means and the end of socialism. 27 And, like the Marburgers, Bernstein stressed the importance of cooperatives, both as an instrument for the emancipation of the working class and as an essential aspect of the socialist ideal. 28 Last, Bernstein’s (infamous) slogan that “the ultimate aim of socialism is nothing, but the movement is everything” accords with the Kantian socialist viewpoint, at least in the two dominant meanings Bernstein gives to this slogan: incremental changes are significant in themselves and must not be seen as mere preparatory steps toward the final collapse of capitalist society (the “great abyss”), as the orthodox Marxists in effect contended; and the socialist ideal must be viewed as open-ended, in that continuous theoretical and practical learning processes will shape its detailed character. 29 We may, moreover, give two further Kantian twists to Bernstein’s slogan: the end must follow from the means, rather than vice versa; and the moral ideal sets an infinite task. In sum, Bernstein was in a sense correct in maintaining that his “Back to Kant” could be translated as “Back to Lange”; for his relation to Marburg socialism is similar to that between Marburg socialism and Lange: they share significant programmatic points, but clearly differ in their philosophical underpinning of these points.

Bernstein’s revisionism was definitely rejected at the 1903 Dresden congress of the SPD, although the revisionists were allowed to remain within the party. The party once again affirmed its revolutionary character and predicted ever-growing class conflict and struggle. This had, however, little effect: the reformists within the party, and notably the representatives of the trade unions with their economistic orientation, became stronger, and the party increasingly took a turn which conflicted not only with the orthodox Marxist view but also with Bernstein’s revisionism. The trade unions succeeded, for example, in 1906 to eliminate in effect the political mass strike from the SPD agenda, in opposition to Bernstein, Kautsky, and the Marxist party leader August Bebel. 30 Likewise, Bernstein soon joined such Marxists as Kautsky and Karl Liebknecht in their opposition to the SPD support of the Great War. And, during the 1920s and early 1930s, Bernstein was a critic not only of Bolshevism but also of the increasing right-wing turn of the SPD and the Weimar Republic. His voice was not heard. Yet, in the year of his death (1932), the 82-year old Bernstein wrote to Kautsky: “You are right, we can only wish each other the strength
to get through these miserable times without harm. What will be the outcome? Will that which we have worked for so passionately all our lives be preserved? We, as old fighters, cannot take such thoughts lightly in view of the serious situation. . . . Meanwhile I have full confidence in the energy of our party; it will carry on. . . .” Bernstein did not live to see his heroic hope fatefully crushed: he died a few months before the last trace of democracy was eliminated in Germany in early 1933.

With the rejection of revisionism at the Dresden congress the debate on Kantian ethics and its significance for socialism gradually receded. In philosophical terms, the criticisms raised against the Kantian position were not of a high level. We have examined in Chapters VI and VII two main points of criticism that Kautsky launched in *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History*: the personality principle is as consistent with liberalism or anarchism as it is with socialism, and will be superfluous in the socialist society. Mehring, the earlier critic of Marburg socialism, also set forth the first objection. After citing Cohen’s view that Kant “is the true and real originator of German socialism,” Mehring wrote: “He [Kant] has not contributed a grain of sand to the foundation of socialism, but he has contributed many a stone to liberalism and in particular to an anti-socialist liberalism.” Mehring added: “Have these liberals or the neo-Kantians misunderstood their Kant?” Now, obviously, Mehring is correct in observing that Kant’s practical philosophy has been used to support various forms of liberalism—Mehring never tires of pointing out that Kant accepted capitalism and made the workers into passive citizens—but this is irrelevant; for the real issue is whether socialism can be logically and cogently derived from Kant’s ethics. Both Mehring and Kautsky failed to address this issue systematically. Mehring’s view somewhat differed from Kautsky’s with regard to the latter’s second point of criticism. Notwithstanding his contention that Kant is essentially a philosopher of liberalism, Mehring argued that the personality principle corresponds to Marx’s description in the *Manifesto* of the communist society as “an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.” Instead of drawing the conclusion, however, that this means that Marxism needs a critical ethics, Mehring saw it as an indication of the completeness of Marxism. Moreover, on Mehring’s account, the ideal must be viewed not as a moral task but rather as the inevitable product of the laws of history. But on these terms Kautsky was also prepared to call the socialist ideal a moral ideal, although he additionally attempted to undercut the
need for a critical morality by turning to "social instincts" as the determinants of human behavior. The upshot is that the main bone of contention between the Marburgers and the orthodox Marxists of the SPD still stood: only the former held that morality in its corrective, directive, and motivational functions is indispensable for socialist theory and praxis.

A final major criticism against Kantian ethical socialism is more tactical than strictly philosophical in nature: Kant's ethics weakens the revolutionary impulse of the proletariat. Both Kautsky and Mehring raise this objection, Mehring less emphatically, for he maintained that the neo-Kantians were of "good will" and that "some of them stood close to socialism." Kautsky writes in *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History*: "Despite the categorical imperative, which the Kantian Ethic cries [out] to the individual, its historical and social tendency, from the very beginning on till today, has been that of toning down, of reconciling the antagonisms, not of overcoming them through struggle" (p. 69). To some extent, Kautsky's claim is correct: the Marburgers believed that reformative labor and cooperation with progressive liberals was the right tactic around the turn of the century. Most orthodox Marxists, however, basically agreed with this, although their revolutionary program formed an obstacle to such cooperation and gave a different meaning to reformative steps, as steps toward the final collapse of capitalism. (Another problem was that German liberalism only slowly gave up its anti-working class orientation.) The Marburgers, then, established a more convincing link between theory and praxis than the SPD orthodox did. Contra Kautsky and Mehring, moreover, the issue of revolution was for the Marburgers not a question of dogma but a moral and empirical question. True, some of them may have held the view that revolution can never be morally justified, but this was not the general view. We have seen that Cohen held that revolutions constitute "periods of experimental ethics"; and one of the Marburgers played a leading role in one such practical experiment: Eisner was prime minister of the Bavarian Republic from November 1918 until February 1919.

**Eisner and the Munich Revolution**

Eisner (1867–1919) was above all a journalist. At the age of twenty-two he broke off his study at the Friedrich Wilhelm University at Berlin and accepted a position at a Berlin news agency. In 1892 Eisner worked at the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and finished a critical study of Nietzsche. (Nietzsche was second only to Hegel as the main target of the philosophical polemic of the Marburg School.)
From 1893 to 1897 Eisner was a political editor at the *Hessische Landeszeitung* in Marburg; during this period, under the influence of Cohen, he began to define his socialism as a Kantian ethical socialism. Eisner renewed his Kant studies (started earlier at Berlin), followed lectures by Cohen, and became personally acquainted with Cohen and other Marburgers. He later wrote that Cohen's ethical socialism touched him at the core of his being. Indeed, Cohen's impact is clearly manifest in a series of articles that Eisner wrote in 1904 for *Vorwärts* on the occasion of the centennial of Kant's death. Eisner argued here that the categorical imperative as the "eternal principle of morality" cannot be completely realized in any social order (i.e., morality sets an infinite task), but that this imperative presently demands socialism. Such a moral demand is, moreover, essential; for, Eisner noted, "[t]he proletariat seeks not only to understand history but also to shape it." Thus Eisner followed Vorländer in claiming that a philosophy of praxis must combine Kantian ethics and Marxian socioeconomic analysis. And, finally, in his typical polemical fashion Eisner wrote: "More idealism—that is the rousing cry of today—more idealism, and this means—Kautsky don't turn pale—more 'ethics.'"

Eisner's combative spirit landed him in jail in 1897: he was sentenced to a nine-month prison term for indirectly referring to the politics of the Kaiser as "Caesarean madness." His case caught the attention of Wilhelm Liebknecht, one of the originators of the organized socialist movement in Germany and the leading editor of the largest SPD newspaper *Vorwärts*. (In 1906 *Vorwärts* had a circulation of 112,000.) Liebknecht arranged a position for Eisner on the editorial board of *Vorwärts*, and within a year Eisner became its new leading editor. His position was difficult, for one of his tasks was to mediate between the revisionist and orthodox Marxist factions on the editorial board of the paper. Eisner had his disagreements with both groups. He did not share Bernstein's belief that the class struggle would gradually become less sharp, but, in opposition to the orthodox Marxists, he viewed this struggle as a moral struggle. (Bernstein's belief was based on the claim that the middle class was not disappearing and would come to cooperate with the working class. He held the economic condition of the workers was improving, but accepted the relative-immiseration thesis.) Ultimately, Eisner's mediation efforts failed: the orthodox Marxists led by Kautsky forced him to resign in 1905. His "crime" was independence of mind. After serving a few years as political columnist for the socialist newspaper *Fränkische Tagespost* in Nuremberg, in 1910 Eisner moved to his final home, Munich.
Eisner started here as a free-lance writer, but he soon became a political editor and literary critic of the SPD newspaper the Münchener Post. In 1915 he was dismissed as editor because of his opposition to Germany's role in the Great War.

Like Bernstein, Eisner had at first spontaneously supported Germany's declaration of war, but, even sooner than Bernstein, Eisner became one of the leading and sharpest critics of the German war machine and its annexationist policies. Former opponents became fellow travelers for the cause of peace: Bernstein, Eisner, and Kautsky were leading members of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USDP), which was founded in 1917 in opposition to the SPD support of the war. Eisner became de facto head of the USDP organization in Munich and, in this role, became the force behind a mass strike for peace in Munich, which under USDP leadership also took place in other industrial centers in January 1918. Eisner's successful personal call for the strike in several Bavarian war industries led to his second prison term. On the eve of the strike he was arrested, and he spent until mid-October, 1918, in prison. A few weeks later, on November 7, Eisner and the USDP turned a massive peace demonstration into a bloodless coup, effectively using the breakdown of the existing power structure to create the Bavarian Republic.

The Munich Revolution in its first phase (i.e., during the leadership of Eisner) was primarily a political and democratic revolution. Councils of soldiers, peasants, intellectual and manual workers were formed, but the socialization of the means of production was postponed to a later date. Eisner declared in the name of the interim revolutionary regime: "[I]t seems to us impossible, at a time when the productive power of the land is nearly exhausted, to transfer industry immediately to the possession of society. There can be no socialization when there is scarcely anything to be socialized." Thus the strategy was gradually to bring about the socialization of the means of production through improving the economic position of the workers and strengthening the councils. Above all, the interim revolutionary regime saw as its first duties to make Bavaria an effective democracy and to pressure the newly formed federal government in Berlin to distance itself from the old military hierarchy so that peace could become a preparation for socialism rather than for another war. Or, more precisely, these were the goals that Eisner had set for himself. A brief description of Eisner's heroic attempt to realize these goals in a climate of severe opposition displays Kantian ethical socialism in practice.
Although the SPD had not supported the overthrow of the Bavarian monarchy, it accepted the new state of affairs and joined the interim revolutionary regime. From the very beginning, however, the SPD opposed the idea of placing any real power in the hands of the revolutionary councils, which was the policy of the USDP. The Bavarian SPD leadership largely embraced the existing bureaucracy and held in effect that parliamentarianism was the only legitimate expression of democracy. The conflict between the SPD, on the one hand, and the USPD and other radical groups, such as the newly formed German Communist Party (KPD), on the other hand, came to a final breaking point after the election of the Bavarian parliament in January 1919. The new constitution had greatly broadened the electorate, lowering the voting age from twenty-five to twenty-one and giving suffrage to women. The election results were disastrous for Eisner and the USDP: the bulk of the votes went to the SPD and the conservative Bavarian People's Party (BVP). This result was not altogether surprising; for the SPD had a well-organized party machinery, which the USDP lacked, and the BVP was supported by the traditional Catholic Bavarian peasants. Yet, the election day must have been one of the most painful days of Eisner's life, posing a clear conflict between his democratic and his revolutionary-socialist convictions. Eisner sought the compromise of recognizing the Bavarian parliament, while also retaining the council system as an instrument of the emancipation of labor. He was desperately aware that without such a compromise the outcome could be civil war, but his mediating efforts between conservative and radical socialists were of no avail. The day before Eisner planned to offer his resignation and that of his revolutionary cabinet, placing legislative power in the hands of the Bavarian parliament, he spoke to the congress of councils, envisaging a “second [permanent] revolution”: “The second revolution will not be plundering and street-fighting. The new revolution is the assembling of the masses in city and countryside to carry out what the first revolution has started. . . . The bourgeois majority is now to implement bourgeois policies. We will see whether they are capable of ruling. In the meantime the councils should do their job: to build the new democracy. Then perhaps the new spirit will also arrive in Bavaria.” Indeed, the second revolution happened soon, and its fate was what Eisner had feared but denied in his ethical hope. On the day of his intended resignation, February 21, Eisner was murdered, and after another interim revolutionary regime of the SPD and the USDP, a council republic was
set up, the Soviet Republic of Bavaria. In early May it was brutally put down by the federal SPD government, with the support of the Bavarian SPD and the protofascist Free Corps.

Eisner's peace efforts also failed. Two examples suffice to make this clear. In late November 1918, Eisner made public some official documents that showed that Germany had done little to avert Austrian aggression toward Serbia. Eisner's direct aim was to pressure the federal government to dismiss the representatives of the old order in the foreign office and the armistice committee, in the hope that this would contribute to more promising peace terms with the Allied forces. But we may assume that Eisner's broader goal was psychological and moral: an honest public examination of the past was crucial for opening the road toward a peaceful and democratic-socialist future. Berlin, however, ignored the documents, and the general public reaction was disbelief. The second example concerns Eisner's speech at the congress of the Socialist International in Bern, early February, 1919. Here Eisner claimed German war guilt, attacked the militarism of imperial Germany, called for international socialist support for the "new" Germany, and proposed that German workers and students voluntarily engage in reconstruction work in northern France. The delegates at the congress, with the exception of most German socialists, enthusiastically received Eisner's speech. The public response in Germany was one of strong disapproval, if not outright hatred. It is no coincidence that Eisner was murdered by a fanatical nationalist. Eisner represented everything that the Nazis came to hate: Jew, pacifist, cosmopolite, and socialist.

Although it would be a mistake to place the revolutionaries of the Soviet Republic of Bavaria on a par with those of the KPD in the 1920's and the early 1930's, it can nonetheless be said that the events surrounding and following Eisner's death presaged Germany's greatest tragedy: the bitter conflict within the left contributed to the emergence and victory of the fascist right. It is not, however, my intention to claim that Kantian ethical socialism, if it had been more influential, could have prevented this tragedy. Such counterfactual claims are either truisms or at best oversimplifications. Instead, I hope that this historical note on Kantian ethical socialism has shown at least two things. First, it is misguided to equate Kantian ethical socialism with past or present mainstream social democracy, i.e., a socialism that no longer really seeks to challenge the core and foundation of the capitalist given. This equation may contain a grain of truth with regard to some Kantian
ethical socialists, but as a generalization it is simply false. Second, Kantian ethical socialism, and we may include here Bernstein's democratic socialism, offered a promising program: it sought to bring about a socialist society through democratic and peaceful means, even if this would mean that painful compromises had to be made; yet, it preserved its integrity and did not lose sight of the final ideal. Its critical interaction between means and ends makes this kind of socialism still significant for our own time. All too often courageous hope is confused with optimism and self-conscious ethical idealism with political naiveté.