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The Neo-Kantian Reception of Schiller

Edited by Chiara Russo Krauss

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Schiller as Kantian *Vermittler* for Goethe in Jonas Cohn's Critical Account

DOMENICO SPINOSA

1. Introduction

It is well known that 1905, the centenary year of Schiller's death, saw the publication of an important monographic issue of *Kant-Studien*¹ dedicated to the German poet and philosopher. This issue contained works by representatives of the neo-Kantian movement, with the notable exception of the Marburg neo-Kantians. Alongside contributions from Otto Liebmann, Wilhelm Windelband, Hans Vaihinger and Bruno Bauch, there was also a lengthy (almost sixty pages long) and dense article entitled "Das Kantische Element in Goethes Weltanschauung. Schillers philosophischer Einfluss auf Goethe" (The Kantian element in Goethe's worldview. Schiller's philosophical influence on Goethe)² by the young neo-Kantian³, Jonas Cohn, consisting of a preface and four closely connected parts (in addition to the conclusions). In this paper, I will outline some of the themes and issues addressed by Cohn concerning the extent to which Kantian influence, mediated by Schiller, manifests in fundamental aspects of Goethe's work and thought. Or, as Cohn himself puts "the extent and content of this inheritance"⁴. At the beginning of his discourse, Cohn points out that Schiller

gave Goethe, in the only way possible for him, what the poet could have benefited from Kant. To understand Goethe's relationship with Kantian philosophy correctly, it is important to remember the friend who introduced him to this unfamiliar territory and translated its incomprehensible language for him⁵.

¹ The aforementioned second issue of the tenth volume of *Kant-Studien* contains contributions from the following authors (in addition to those already mentioned): Rudolf Eucken, Tim Klein, Maximilian Runze, Friedrich Alfred Schmid.

² See J. Cohn, "Das Kantische Element in Goethes Weltanschauung. Schillers philosophischer Einfluss auf Goethe", in H. Vaihinger and B. Bauch (eds.), *Schiller als Philosoph und seine Beziehungen zu Kant*, *Kant-Studien*, 10/2, 1905, pp. 286-345 (from now on abbreviated as KGS).

³ See S. Marck, "Am Ausgang des jüngeren Neu-Kantianismus. Ein Gedenkblatt für Richard Höningwald und Jonas Cohn", *Archiv für Philosophie*, 3/2, 1949, pp. 144-164, in particular chapter 3 "Jonas Cohn, kritischer Dialektiker", pp. 159-164.

⁴ KGS, p. 287.

⁵ KGS, p. 286.

The classical interpretation, which was still prevalent in Cohn's time, often portrays Goethe as a Spinozist, or suggests that Spinoza was the philosopher who influenced Goethe the most. However, as Cohn points out, experts have since recognized the influence of Kant. Cohn refers to Karl Vorländer and Otto Harnack here, the latter of whom "had the decisive merit of emphasizing Kant's significance for Goethe in the years of his full maturity"⁶. Nevertheless, Cohn also adds that "as far as I can see, there is still no evidence of what Goethe actually appropriated from Kant"⁷.

One of the first important points that Cohn highlights in the introduction to his work is that Goethe's researches for him were *Erlebnisse*:

While in later years he did not form or maintain friendships without a background of shared intellectual interests, conversely, every intellectual pursuit led him to personal involvement. Thus, Schiller's friendship and Kantian philosophy merged into a single entity in his mind⁸.

This means that, while Goethe was influenced by Schiller's Kantianism, it was not quite in the strict sense of the term. Instead, he transformed this foreign material in a fruitful way by molding it in the furnace of his own personality.

According to Cohn, two key concept words, which would later occupy a dominant position in Goethe's philosophical reflections, only acquired their meaning after his relationship with Schiller: 'idea' and 'symbol', which encapsulate the most significant philosophical (and non-philosophical) issues for Goethe. In fact, Cohn points out that "for the poet, a word is more than just an external designation for a clearly defined concept. The poet feels a sense of desecration when, in the strict world of science, thought seeks to free itself from the dominion of language and reduce words to arbitrary symbols and counting signs"⁹. For Goethe, the history of the human spirit "lives in words"; more than that, words themselves live and have a "magical power"¹⁰. Needless to say, when it came to thinking and research, Goethe distanced himself from "murky floods of mystical verbosity"¹¹, and yet a meaningful word was always a valuable treasure for him.

Cohn argues that, for Goethe, the meaning of words such as 'idea' and 'symbol' is not confined to one philosophical domain. At first glance, the term 'idea' encompasses what Goethe derived from Kantian epistemology. However, as this epistemological concept aided Goethe in his scientific endeavors, it is also deeply connected to his philosophy of nature. Furthermore, as Kant's concept of 'idea' already had an ethical dimension, Goethe adopted this term to extend the scope of his philosophy of nature towards aesthetics and religion. Conversely, 'symbol' is primarily an im-

⁶ KGS, pp. 286-287.

⁷ KGS, p. 287.

⁸ KGS, p. 289, *emph. mine.*

⁹ KGS, p. 291.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

portant term in aesthetics. However, it also has applications in the context of knowledge of nature, and since it arguably has its deepest meaning in religion, Goethe uses it in this context too.

These two key concepts therefore indicate that none of the main areas of philosophy should be omitted when considering the influence of Schiller-mediated Kantianism on Goethe. Consequently, Cohn structures his exposition into four parts: "theory of knowledge, ethic, aesthetics, and philosophy of religion"¹².

2. *Theory of knowledge*

Cohn begins his account with the occasion on which Goethe first met Schiller: a conversation following a meeting of the 'Natural Science Society' in Jena in the summer of 1794. This marked the beginning of their unique friendship and gave Goethe the most significant inspiration he had ever received with regard to Kant's theory of knowledge. Both poets were dissatisfied with the purely empirical treatment of scientific and natural phenomena. In contrast to this approach, Goethe developed a way of striving to see the legitimate action of nature in every single phenomenon, using the example of plants' metamorphosis. He drew the *Urpflanze*, convinced that he was conveying an immediate experience. Schiller's response, as is well known, was "That is not experience, that is an idea"¹³. Apparently, the only common ground between the two poets seemed to be their rejection of a *geistloser* approach. However, Schiller's remark, made at a pivotal moment, prompted Goethe to reconsider the purpose of his research. He adopted the term 'idea' for his *Urpflanze*. In fact, as Cohn notes, their correspondence in the first two months of 1798 is full of references to investigations into the method of natural scientific research. It was during this exchange with Schiller that Goethe's convictions took shape. Therefore, according to Cohn, it is necessary to go into more detail, highlighting Schiller's positions first.

It is widely accepted that Schiller contributed to the foundation of modern aesthetics and developed his own views on ethics. Regarding the theory of knowledge, however, Cohn argues that Schiller remained essentially quite receptive. He was certainly freed by Kant from the uncertain oscillation between "fantastic enthusiasm and skeptical despair"¹⁴, and he recognized the importance of the subjectivity problem in our relationship with the surrounding reality. In fact, thanks to Kant's concept of 'idea', Schiller explores the crucial role of the spiritual dimension of human beings in relation to the meaning of their actions. As is well known, Kantian doctrine states that cognition is never the passive reception of something given, but

¹² Ibid.

¹³ KSG, p. 292. See H. W. Nevins, *Life of Friedrich Schiller*, Walter Scott, London, 1889, p. 102. Goethe replied: "Well, it's a great comfort to have Ideas without knowing it, and actually to see them with one's eyes.

¹⁴ KSG, p. 293.

rather an active process of the mind, an endless pursuit of an unattainable goal that ‘beacons from afar’ and, despite its unattainability, lends value and purpose to the pursuit itself. Accordingly, Cohn notes that the term ‘idea’ encompasses three core Kantian principles: the subjectivity of all knowledge, the spontaneity of the spirit, and the unattainability of the ultimate purpose. Schiller embraced these three fundamental concepts of the Kantian theory of knowledge. When he uses the word ‘idea’, Schiller therefore always means subjectivity, spontaneity, and unattainability at once. According to Cohn, such thoughts evoked “harmonic resonances” in Goethe’s spirit¹⁵. As a researcher of the natural sciences, Goethe sought clarification about the purpose of his work from the critique of the cognitive faculties. However, what remained hidden from him was that Kant’s concept of nature was based on mechanistic natural science, which contrasted sharply with Goethe’s “living intuition” (*lebendiger Anschauung*)¹⁶. Already in his early studies of Kant, Goethe examined the relationship between object and subject in his scientific research in depth. In 1792, he wrote *Der Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt und Subjekt* (published in 1823)¹⁷. In this work, Goethe draws a comparison between science and art. He argues that artists should submit their finished work to the judgement of others, while researchers should communicate every experience and hypothesis to the public. Only when research is diversified and an overview of the entire series of phenomena is presented in accordance with their natural order is it possible to observe the continuity between what precedes and what follows. In this case, there is a need for “more of an ‘exposition’ than of a proof” (*mehr der “Darlegung” als des Beweises*)¹⁸. Cohn argues that this expression becomes more concrete for Goethe (and Schiller) than an observant Kantian could accept. Therefore, Goethe completely translates this principle into its concrete reality.

Goethe’s interest in evolutionary orders led him to a conception involving the genetic compositions inherent in reality. He expounds this idea in his 1798 essay *Erfahrung und Wissenschaft*, which he sends to Schiller. In this essay, he distinguishes three stages of research. First, the “empirical phenomenon”, which everyone finds in nature, is raised through experiments to the level of the “scientific phenomenon”. However, this rational process is not the final step. Rather, the results of all our observations and experiments must ultimately be represented in the “pure phenomenon”¹⁹. Cohn notes that, for Goethe, reason is a means of proceeding from the scattered details of experience to *reiner Anschauung* (pure intuition) and that *Anschauung* remains the goal of all research. This improved appreciation of reason and clearer

¹⁵ KSG, p. 294.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Regarding this contribution by Goethe, also with reference to the themes and issues raised by Cohn, see W. von Engelhardt, “‘Der Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt und Subjekt’. Goethes Aufsatz im Licht von Kants Vernunftkritik, in *Athenäum. Jahrbuch für Romantik*, 10, 2000, pp. 9-28.

¹⁸ KSG, p. 295.

¹⁹ J. W. Goethe, “Empirical Observation and Science”, in Id., *Scientific Studies*, En. tr. by D. Miller, Suhrkamp, New York, 1988, pp. 24-25, p. 25.

indication of the three stages represents a significant advance on the earlier essay. Schiller recognizes this development and presents it in accordance with the Kantian philosophical scheme. He describes the three stages of Goethe's process of acquiring knowledge as follows: common empiricism, rationalism, and rational empiricism.

For his part, Goethe requires rational empiricism to be critical; according to Cohn, this means allowing different modes of representation to exist alongside one another. Ideas transferred from the realm of thought to that of experience are suited only to a subset of phenomena. As Goethe affirms: "I might say, nature is unfathomable for the very reason that no one man can comprehend it, although humanity, as a whole, might be able to comprehend it. But as dear humanity can never exist at one and the same time, nature, therefore, has the game in its own hands, when wishing to hide itself from us"²⁰.

This thought deeply struck Schiller. It is indeed interesting to observe Goethe's way of thinking with regard to the form that Kantian stimuli ultimately took in him. When Goethe uses the term 'subjectivity of knowledge', he is referring to the influence of the concrete and individual subject. This totality of all human forces takes the place that a philosopher, bound by a rigorous critical method, would assign to the abstract concept of supra-individual consciousness. The participation of the subject and various subjective and individual predispositions in knowledge is no longer seen as merely an obscuring of the object, but rather as a "promoting force" (*fördernde Kraft*)²¹. In a sense, in this way, rationalism still plays a role in the cognitive process, as the spontaneity of the spirit is recognized as part of individual subjectivity. Yet Goethe does not indiscriminately adopt Kantian ideas; he transforms them into concrete concepts. While Kant believed that the activity of the spirit resided in the categorical form of every act of thought, Goethe believed that it resided in the living activity of the researcher. Goethe repeatedly emphasizes that nothing can be gained through passive transmission in scientific research. Rather, everything must be achieved through one's own efforts: "Similarly in the sciences you really know nothing, you always have to do, to act"²². Such action must be purposeful, so it is necessary to understand the tools at one's disposal. For this reason, Goethe demands "a critique of the senses and human intellect"²³. Every force must be aware of its own effectiveness and limitations. Above all, Goethe believes that his own nature is such a force. He defines his inner production as a heuristic, i.e. a means of revealing truths. Even when he says, "I never thought about thinking"²⁴, he sets himself the task of becoming aware of his own scientific ingenuity. Therefore, according to Cohn, this not-thinking-about-thought is true with regard to abstract,

²⁰ Letter from Goethe to Schiller, February 1798, in L. D. Schmitz (ed.), *Correspondence between Schiller and Goethe, from 1794 to 1805*, Georg Bell & Sons, London, 1890, vol. 2, § 437, p. 56.

²¹ KSG, p. 299.

²² J. W. Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, En. tr. by E. Stopp, Penguin, London, 1998, § 415.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ J. W. Goethe, *Gedichte, Goethes Werke*, Sophienausgabe, I/5, Böhlau, Weimar, 1893, p. 92.

theoretical cognitive analysis, whereas Goethe repeatedly attempted to clarify the particularity of his way of knowing and his personal cognitive abilities.

Rather than transforming the phenomena of *Anschauung* into concepts, Goethe orders them into continuous sequences according to their internal affinity, so that the more complex phenomena develop from the simpler ones. As Cohn points out, the correct understanding of the ultimate *Urphänomene*, which cannot be traced back to anything else, remains the main issue for Goethe. Indeed, through his concept of *Urphänomen*, Goethe aimed to develop a clear understanding of what can be defined as the conformity of nature. For him, the law of nature is not an abstract statement or mathematical formula, but rather a specific intuition — an analogy that renders entire groups of other phenomena understandable. Goethe attributes an “exact sensory imagination” (*exakte sinnliche Phantasie*)²⁵ to the artist, which is also the natural gift of the researcher in the artistic field. Kant described the *intellectus archetypus* as an intuitive faculty of judgement. Goethe dared to identify himself with this concept, which was originally conceived as an ideal one. While this approach to understanding his own work diverges from Kantian thought, Goethe nevertheless owes his focus on the autonomous activities of his spirit, and his recognition and appreciation of the dependence of all knowledge on theoretical-cognitive activity, to Kantian influence, always mediated by Schiller.

The term ‘idea’ signifies that the individuality of the subject is present in the results of knowledge as “productive activity” (*schaffende Thätigkeit*)²⁶. However, the term ‘idea’, with its exquisitely polysemic meaning, is not confined to this. Goethe makes a clear and precise distinction between ‘idea’ and ‘concept’: “A concept is summation, an idea is the result of experience”²⁷. The concept of an animal or plant species, for example, simply summarizes what always repeats in a series of individual experiences. The ‘idea’, on the other hand, emerges from the totality of experience as a universal law, which is the basis of all experience in ever-changing forms. According to Goethe, the *Urpflanze* cannot be obtained by mere comparison or summation. Rather, it is observed when the entire variety of plant formations is traced back to a single type. As Cohn notes, for Goethe this intuitive lawfulness of nature is essentially one and the same everywhere.

In this way, the influence of Kant combined with Goethe’s concept of *Naturvergötterung*²⁸. However, according to Cohn, it should be emphasized that Goethe’s concept of nature became increasingly ‘spiritualized’ in his work. When Goethe reread his poem *Die Natur* (1783) many years after writing it, he realized that it lacked a vision of the two great mechanisms of nature: *Polarität* and *Steigerung*. In *Polarität*, unitary nature is divided into opposites and differences are conceived as essential

²⁵ J. W. Goethe, “[Review of] Ernst Stiedenroth: A Psychology in Clarification of Phenomena from the Soul (Part One, Berlin: 1824)”, in Id., *Scientific Studies*, op. cit., pp. 45-46, p. 46.

²⁶ KSG, p. 301.

²⁷ J. W. Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, op. cit., § 1135.

²⁸ KSG, p. 302.

parts of nature, rather than mere negations as in Spinoza. *Steigerung* introduces value into nature, allowing it to be conceived as a preliminary stage of the spirit. Thanks to this concept of *Steigerung*, which he developed through his research in biology, Goethe's conception of nature approaches idealistic philosophy. The spirit is no longer just a random part of nature, equivalent to all other parts; rather, it is growth, the end of nature, and in its cognitive activity it has a kind of 'intuition' (*Ahnung*)²⁹ of the greater being of all things.

Cohn believes that to correctly understand Goethe, we must grasp the meaning of this *'Ahnung'*. Kant's critical attitude must accord with the reverential respect with which Goethe approached the investigation of nature's secrets. It would be impossible to explore the meaning of the term 'idea' in Goethe's work if we were to overlook the element of unattainability: "A thinking man's greatest happiness is to have fathomed what can be fathomed and to revere in silence what cannot be fathomed"³⁰. This respect for the unattainable prevents Goethe from becoming lost in purely speculative explorations of nature, or from developing a rigid system of natural philosophy. Any attempt to grasp the 'idea' could be considered as a resemblance to the unattainable, but only a resemblance. After all, Goethe could have agreed with Kant that his field was "the fertile pathos of experience"³¹. According to Cohn's, both Goethe and Kant agree that no limits should be placed on research within experience. However, while for Kant the unattainable remains a limiting concept, for Goethe it pervades all experience and can therefore be foreseen, albeit not recognized. This foresight becomes increasingly meaningful the more nature is explored in a diverse and faithful manner. Only in this way can the famous maxim be understood: "If you want to reach the infinite, explore every aspect of the finite"³². Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that there is essentially only one object, and all differences between things are established transcendently by humans.

Let's summarize Cohn's view of Shiller's mediated Kantian influence on Goethe's theory of knowledge. Therefore, Kant's "critical foundation"³³ was transformed by Goethe into a productive disposition of the spirit. Nevertheless, Cohn maintains that the deepest foundation of Kant's thought remained foreign to Goethe. Where Goethe uses Kantian artistic terms, he always reinterprets them in his own way. Although Goethe remained somewhat distant from scientific theories of knowledge, he benefited from them. In particular, from Kant's theory of knowledge he learned to consider the role of the spirit in the cognitive domain. His own personal relationship with the spirit became a matter to be addressed, and Kant's critical method shielded him from metaphysical fervor. Furthermore, by studying philoso-

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ J. W. Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, op. cit., § 1207.

³¹ KSG, p. 303.

³² J. Naydler (ed.), *Goethe on Science. An Anthology of Goethe's Scientific Writings*, Floris Book, Edinburgh, 1996, p. 37.

³³ KSG, p. 303.

phy, Goethe was able to understand his most important contemporaries more fully. However, everything he learned from the critique of reason followed the lines indicated to him by Schiller.

3. *Ethic*

Turning to moral issues, Cohn observes that Goethe's attitude towards Kantian ethics in his youth differed greatly from his attitude towards Kant's theory of knowledge. While the latter was simply foreign to him, the former appeared directly hostile. The sharp Kantian opposition between duty and inclination, morality and nature, seemed to contradict Goethe's natural interiority and moral sense as much as any ascetic morality would. This was how Goethe originally felt. However, Cohn asserts that Goethe's convictions were actually much closer to Kantian ethics than one might think. Unfortunately, there is no material available to trace this process of acceptance in detail. Therefore, to examine the positions Goethe took at a later stage, one must briefly analyze the development of his moral convictions up to his friendship with Schiller.

Like all members of the Sturm und Drang movement, the young Goethe disdained any constraints that could hinder the expression of a free and brilliant personality. For these youth, strength was the ideal, and they cared little about its direction. The aims of bourgeois life were viewed with suspicion. The entire edifice of culture, which the Enlightenment had regarded with such pride, now seemed shaken to its very foundations by Rousseau's criticism. Therefore, personality became the only benchmark of value. Hostility towards social class distinctions and the constraints of bourgeois life led, in Goethe's case at least, only to an aversion towards one aspect of this despised system – never to revolutionary plans. In fact, it was not society, but the individual, that was considered the main issue. These sentiments were certainly far from those of Kant, but, as Cohn points out, they were both influenced by the same source: Rousseau. Like Goethe, Kant was also convinced by Rousseau's argument that cultural progress does not necessarily lead to increased happiness.

For various reasons, Goethe and Kant became opponents of conventional Enlightenment morality, which smoothed out all rough edges in an apparent harmony. For Goethe, this was a period in which all conscious activity was considered to be an effect of nature. This is evident in the words with which he concludes the fragment entitled *Die Natur*, in which he addresses Mother Nature as follows: "She has brought me here and will also lead me away. I trust her. She may scold me, but she will not hate her work. It was not I who spoke of her. No! What is false and what is true, she has spoken it all. The fault, the merit, is all hers"³⁴. Cohn also points out that this religious-style devotion to nature probably intensified during Goethe's trip

³⁴ J. W. Goethe, *Zur Naturwissenschaft, Goethes Werke*, Sophienausgabe, II/11, Böhlau, Weimar, 1893, p. 9.

to Italy. The rich and free nature of the southern hemisphere clashed with the rigid imposition of northern manners.

For Goethe, nature must be honored for everything that is great. According to Cohn, only in this way can we understand why he was deeply hurt by Schiller's 1793 work *Über Anmuth und Würde*. Goethe believed that Schiller had expressed himself irreverently towards 'great mother nature' and felt that certain passages were directed against him. Given that, in *Über Anmuth und Würde*, Schiller sought to mitigate the alleged rigor of Kantian ethics in favor of aesthetic harmony between nature and freedom, Goethe's disagreement with Kant himself becomes even more apparent. However, Goethe changed his mind on this point so quickly that, on 26 October 1794, he wrote that Schiller's *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (1795) coherently and nobly expressed what he had long recognized as right – what he had partly lived and partly wished to live³⁵.

In *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, the relationship between nature and morality is conceived in exactly the same way as in *Über Anmuth und Würde*. Therefore, this sudden change is difficult to explain, especially since we lack more precise and detailed insights. Cohn hypothesizes that Goethe's failure to fully engage with Schiller's philosophical writings, as evidenced by his tendency to skim over individual sentences, may have contributed to his negative impression of *Über Anmuth und Würde*. Thus, it was thanks to his personal relationship with Schiller, that Goethe recognized the true meaning of Kantian ethics and realized that his previous naturalism could not guide his behavior in practical life. By applying Kantian ethical principles of individual action to the sphere of personality as a whole, Schiller made them accessible to Goethe. Duty no longer appeared as something foreign, but rather as an inner law of the individual. Thus, Cohn points out that Goethe adhered to Kantian ethics consistently and admiringly throughout his mature years, and only sought to mitigate its 'rigor' by following Schiller. In Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (1795–96), the moral message is about accepting restraint and voluntarily renouncing. Indeed, the novel's subtitle is *Die Entsagenden* (The Renouncers), which Cohn considers to be a distillation of Goethe's legacy regarding morality.

Goethe certainly follows in Schiller's footsteps when he states: "Duty: where one loves what one orders oneself to do"³⁶. If duty is recognized as the inner law of the self, then its unattainability is no longer frightening. As mentioned previously, the 'idea' is the unattainable goal that nevertheless provides guidance, both in action and in knowledge. "To live in the realm of ideas means treating the impossible as though it were possible", writes Goethe³⁷. The 'idea' can only retain its purity if the awareness of its unattainability persists; otherwise, it becomes 'comically' intertwined with the minor events and impediments of everyday life. The position of the 'idea' is analogous in both the practical and theoretical spheres: it provides guidance

³⁵ Cf. KSG, p. 308 (see also note n. 2 on this very page).

³⁶ J. W. Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, op. cit., § 829.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, § 262.

and must assert itself in every aspect, but it is impossible for it to be realized or to perfectly appear in any single case. As Cohn notices, at times the unattainability and unconditionality of the practical 'idea' leads Goethe so far away from his original naturalism that he contrasts the realms of freedom, values and culture with that of nature in a completely dualistic way, elevating moral will above all natural circumstances.

Given the apparent contradiction between Goethe's ethics and his view of nature, it's important to remember that he was not a systematic thinker. He consciously pursued different lines of thought in different fields all at once. Therefore, one can never fully understand Goethe by ignoring positions such as the following: "What culture has gained from nature must not be relinquished, must not be given up at any price. Thus, the concept of the sanctity of marriage is a valuable cultural achievement of Christianity, even though marriage is unnatural"³⁸. An example of the contrast between Goethe's naturalism and his ethical and spiritual tendencies, especially as applied to marriage, is found in the novel *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809) – the only large-scale work in which Goethe aimed to depict a radical "idea". As Cohn points out, the prevailing opinion (not only among Goethe's contemporaries) was that this "idea" was entirely naturalistic: just as chemical elements break old bonds under strong constraints to form stronger bonds, human bonds are left at the mercy of inexplicable sympathies. Indeed, the title of the work, inspired by Goethe's ongoing work in chemistry, could lead to such an interpretation. However, Cohn points out that, in the introduction, Goethe emphasizes the underlying ethical roots of the chemical metaphor, attempting to trace it back to its spiritual underpinnings.

According to Cohn, one can only understand the tragic ending of the novel within the context of a morally rigorous conception of marriage and duty. Goethe introduces two contrasting characters: Eduard, who enters into an illicit relationship with frivolous cheerfulness, undisturbed by his conscience; and Ottilie, who condemns herself to death by her own hand because she has allowed Eduard's passionate love to carry her away toward sinful desires. Ottilie represents the dignity of human nature, which manifests itself forcefully through terrible torment, discomfort, and pain. The novel essentially expresses the idea that an inexplicable natural affinity attracts human beings to one another, dissolving bonds that our morality demands be indissoluble. If an individual places himself on a higher moral ground and allows these inclinations to take over, he can only preserve his true nature through earthly ruin. In this work, Goethe depicted the tragic, eternal inner conflict between the force of natural passions and the unconditional precept of morality more deeply than ever before. Therefore, Cohn considers the book a testament to Goethe's approach toward addressing moral issues:

³⁸ J. W. Goethe, *Gespräche*, eds. by F. Biedermann, Biedermann, Leipzig, 1910, vol. 4 (Vom Tode Karl Augusts bis zum Ende: 1828 Juni bis 22. März 1832), p. 216.

The poet wants and should inspire understanding, empathy, and love, not cold judgment or judicial severity. If he intends to convey a moral idea, it should be reflected in the characters and their fates rather than in the poet's judgment of them. When Goethe describes the sanctity of marriage as an idea of *Wahlverwandtschaften*, it does not mean that he wrote the book with the intention of defending the sanctity of marriage. Rather, he experienced these ethical convictions and conflicts within himself and portrayed them³⁹.

4. *Aesthetics*

At the core of the third part of the essay, Cohn places the relationship between "idea" and "appearance". This topic became a fundamental problem for Goethe, in both the spheres of nature and morality, as well as that of art, only thanks to Schiller. Cohn focuses on the transition from *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung* (1777-1785) to *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Ultimately, it was Schiller, and not Goethe himself, who expressed the "idea" behind the latter work with the following words: "he [Wilhelm] steps from an empty and undefined ideal into definite, active life, but without losing any of his idealizing power"⁴⁰. However, it should be noted that when Schiller wrote these words, the book was already finished. Only the eighth part was still being revised. In a letter to Schiller dated July 7, 1796, Goethe wrote:

If it accords with your mind, you cannot fail to see your own influence in it, for I should certainly never have been able to finish it – at least not in the way it is done – had it not been for the friendly relation which subsists between us. A hundred times when I was talking to you about theory and practice, my mind was dwelling upon the situations which you have now lying before you, and I was silently judging them according to the principles upon which we were agreed⁴¹.

The change in Goethe's way of thinking, as seen in the eighth book of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, only became apparent to the poet a year later during his trip to Frankfurt and Stuttgart en route to Switzerland. Specifically, in a letter sent to Schiller from Frankfurt on August 16, 1797, Goethe describes a turning point: He writes that he has discovered "a sort of sentimentality towards the objects"⁴² within himself. Things are no longer as they once were when individual impressions stimulated intense feelings in him. Now, Goethe remains "calm", almost indifferent to particular things, while a general poetic mood reigns within him. Although "the old realist is still so powerful in him that he ascribes a significant role to objects when it comes to this general emotional state"⁴³, in his reply, Schiller rightly points out

³⁹ KSG, p. 315 *emph. mine*.

⁴⁰ Letter from Schiller to Goethe, 8 July 1796, in *Correspondence between Schiller and Goethe*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, § 187, p. 192.

⁴¹ Letter from Goethe to Schiller, 7 July 1796, in *ibid.*, vol. I, § 186, p. 187.

⁴² KSG, p. 320.

⁴³ KSG, pp. 320-321.

that the cause of this *Sentimentalität* does not lie in the objects themselves but in the temperament of the observer, as any object that encounters such a disposition of the spirit can arouse similar feelings and considerations.

According to Cohn, the most striking aspect of this change is that, in Goethe's work, the individual development of the characters becomes almost irrelevant. At the same time, the genericization of characters leads to a decline in interest in individual details. It's not that Goethe becomes more concise in his descriptions of objective details. Rather, individual aspects randomly come to the fore, as in the battle scene in Act IV, Part II of *Faust* (1808), or in the description of the weavers in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Characters and things no longer arouse the poet's passionate interest in and of themselves. His spirit no longer inhabits them completely, but seems to detach itself momentarily and 'float' above them in a free vision. However, as the mature style emerges, characters and objects are no longer considered in isolation, but rather reflect a deeper meaning. As Cohn notes, they are not allegories that express something other than what is expressed directly. Rather, they exist within the poet's awareness as representatives of a general relationship that is elevated to an exemplary 'idea' through their individual cases.

Together, the two works serve as a means of expressing the wisdom that Goethe derived from his own life and a tradition spanning millennia. This wisdom is not conveyed through sparse words, but rather through mysterious images rich in omens. According to Cohn, this is because even thought itself is transformed into poetry in Goethe. Indeed, the neo-Kantian philosopher observes that:

It has often been lamented that his later works lack the freshness and passion of youth, the vivid clarity and perfection of his prime; but this loss is not a consequence of his richness of thought, but rather a consequence of age. The experiences are no longer as new and vivid to the poet as they once were; they derive their meaning primarily from the significance his spirit attaches to them⁴⁴.

The aesthetic views of Kant, Schiller and Goethe focus on immediate and spontaneous creative genius. However, this does not mean that the abundance of ideas in Goethe's later works merely echoes the philosophy of Kant and Schiller. Rather, it is the product of Goethe's entire life. Encountering Kantian philosophy stimulated Goethe to explore creative activity and the purpose of the human spirit. According to Cohn, there is a profound connection between the change in style and the 'metamorphosis' of aesthetic theory after Goethe encountered Schiller. In the 'sentimental' approach, the self-conscious spirit becomes effective in relation to things; likewise, the creative force of the artist gains increasing recognition in Goethe's theoretical reflections.

Schiller and Goethe both faced the same problem: how does art, understood in its autonomy, relate to the extra-artistic realms of nature and spirit? Bearing this in mind, one can trace the changes in Goethe's point of view. Initially, the simple imitation of nature appears as a modest preliminary stage, from which the great

⁴⁴ KSG, pp. 322-323.

artist progresses to style. However, even style is viewed as a representation of nature; indeed, at this higher stage, the artist perceives the true essence of things beyond the random appearances of reality. Cohn argues that this distinction between truth and reality is largely mediated by the Platonic doctrine of ideas, which probably came to Goethe via Winckelmann:

Just as *simple imitation* depends on a quiet regime and comfortable surroundings, and *manner* has a facility for grouping superficial appearances, so style is based on the profoundest knowledge, on the essence of things insofar as we can recognize it in visible and tangible forms⁴⁵.

The naive belief that true artists grasp the essence of things collapses under the influence of Schiller. However, the analogy between scientific research and art persists. In both fields, the Platonic 'idea' is replaced by the 'idea' in the sense of Kant and Schiller. Rather than receiving an objective 'idea' that presents itself as already complete through passive observation, man now elaborates it in the workings of the spirit. The unity of spirit and nature remains Goethe's fundamental conviction. However, nature itself is increasingly spiritualised, and unity is no longer an obvious presupposition, but rather the ultimate goal of knowledge, which can never be fully attained. According to Cohn, this development in both natural science and art theory enables Goethe to still treat both as a unity, even in his mature years.

Although Goethe's intention remained to unite art and scientific research, the relationship between the two fields became more problematic precisely because of the deeper understanding gained through critical philosophy. Those who recognize the productivity of the spirit in the 'idea' must also consider that the artist and the natural scientist approach production differently. Indeed, alongside the question of the relationship between spirit and nature in artistic creation, another question arises: that of the relationship between artistic and scientific spirit. According to Cohn, Goethe only became aware of these two issues thanks to Schiller. This newfound awareness is also evident in Goethe's contributions to the *Propyläen* journal (1798-1800). In the introduction to the first issue, Goethe seeks to justify his intention to include topics from the natural sciences in his journal for the benefit of artists. Ten years earlier, this would have seemed obvious, Cohn argues. Afterwards, however, he felt that a well-founded motivation was necessary. Goethe praises the importance of anatomy for the artist's work, equating the "deep inner" (*tiefe Innere*) of every living being with the "spiritual deepening" (*geistige Vertiefung*)⁴⁶. For Goethe, these two aspects are indeed connected, as a deeper understanding of the human body can only be achieved through knowledge of what lies beneath the skin. However, for the artist, nature is always and only a treasure trove of raw materials.

⁴⁵ J. W. Goethe, "Simple imitation of Nature, Manner, Style. *Der Teutsche Merkur*, February 1789", in J. Gage (ed. by), *Goethe on Art*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1980, pp. 21-24, p. 22.

⁴⁶ KSG, p. 327.

In his 1798 essay *Über Wahrheit und Wahrscheinlichkeit der Kunstwerke*, the distinction between natural truth and the inner truth of things is clarified through exemplary cases drawn from fields ranging from theatre set design to opera. In a work of art, consistency of execution is what matters. Only the naïve and uneducated spectator, like the sparrows in Zeuxis's famous painting⁴⁷, satisfies their desire by being content with the illusion of the work of art. However, even for the connoisseur, something natural remains in the work of art. As Cohn notes, Kant also emphasized this when he argued that art is beautiful when we recognize it as art, even though it appears to us as nature. In line with this Kantian approach, Schiller developed his doctrine of freedom in relation to the technical-artistic sphere. Goethe shares similarities with both thinkers, except that he maintains a metaphysical conception of the unity between the human spirit and nature. As a product of the human spirit, the finished work of art is simultaneously a work of nature. However, it is only through the harmonizing and ennobling activity of the spirit that it transcends nature.

According to Cohn, it is here that the Kantian-Schillerian view of the creative power of the artist and the normative and constitutive nature of art becomes significant. In this context, we can see how the new perspectives derived from critical philosophy coalesced with Goethe's early beliefs. The outcome of this fusion can be seen in a coherent series of maxims written in prose and published posthumously. Goethe explicitly states that anyone wishing to write or discuss art must understand what philosophy has achieved and continues to achieve. As we will see below, this philosophy is precisely that of Kant, who provides the means to counter naturalism and enlighten the artist with regard to their own work.

That said, the question of how the 'idea' is expressed in the final form of the artwork has yet to be addressed. The fact that the idea is unattainable implies that it cannot be a simple and direct representation, nor can it be considered an ordinary similarity. Instead, it is a very special relationship that can only be described by the term 'symbol'. Considering the importance of this term in Goethe's later works, Cohn emphasizes that it does not appear before Schiller's influence. In particular, Cohn remarks:

The oldest place where I can find evidence of this is in Chapter 7 of Book 8 of *The Apprenticeship Years*. Its use became more frequent after 1797. In Goethe's correspondence with Schiller, the word "symbol" appears for the first time on August 16, 1797; a month later (September 13, 1797), his diary shows that Goethe distinguishes between symbol and allegory⁴⁸.

According to Cohn, Goethe's concept of 'symbol' can only be fully understood when considered in relation to its Kantian origins and subsequent development by Schiller. Kant's fundamental position is that 'pure thought' in itself cannot pro-

⁴⁷ This refers to an anecdote narrated by Pliny the Elder: the painters Parrhasius and Zeuxis took part in a competition, and Zeuxis created a painting of grapes that was so realistic that birds flew up to it, mistaking it for the real fruit (Pliny, *Natural History*, Book XXXV, pp. 65-68).

⁴⁸ KSG, p. 332.

vide human beings with any knowledge; it must always be combined with intuition. Within the framework of schematism, the categories, or pure forms of theoretical thought, become applicable only when integrated with the pure form of intuition relating to time. The "visualization" (*Veranschaulichung*)⁴⁹, which is necessary for a rational idea to become effective, in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, is provided by natural law.

Through the form of unconditional legality, the law becomes the 'type', or as Goethe also puts it, the 'symbol' of morality. By contrast, in *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, beauty presents itself as a 'symbol' of the moral realm. Once again, the symbolic power lies in particular formal aspects. The universality, necessity, disinterest and freedom of beauty symbolically express pure morality. To define this concept of 'symbol' more precisely, three points must be considered: what is symbolically represented in beauty; the means by which it is represented; and how the mediation between the represented and the intended representation should be conceived. What is symbolically represented is morality, or the 'idea' of practical reason. The means of representation are the specific formal features of beauty. Goethe describes the type of mediation as intuitive. This definition suggests that, in symbolic intuition, the 'idea' is grasped immediately, whereas in allegory, intuition must be abandoned in favor of discursive, comparative judgements to understand the meaning.

Among the formal analogies that Kant establishes between aesthetic and moral judgements, one in particular becomes decisive for Schiller: through beauty, the freedom of our sensory imagination is presented in accordance with the legality of the intellect. Similarly, through moral judgement, the freedom of the will is conceived as concordance with the general laws of reason. Schiller reformulates this idea by applying the principles of symbolization from aesthetic judgement to the aesthetic object. Accordingly, beauty is defined as that which appears to be the result of an internal freedom acting in accordance with a norm that is not forced. Schiller then broadens the scope of what is symbolically represented. For example, the higher principle of landscape painting and poetry is established through reference to the symbolic. According to Cohn, there are two ways in which inanimate nature can symbolize human nature: through the representation of 'ideas', which fits with Kant's positions, or through the representation of sensations. The focus shifts from the expressive value of beauty to the meaning of the work of art as something typical, and to the artist's ability to express a general law in a single example.

Goethe constantly emphasizes the intuitive nature of symbolism without ever using the word itself. His concrete thinking enables him to provide a more precise illustration, based on his own practical experience, of what Kant had mainly stated in general terms. Similarly to Kant, Goethe clarifies his position by contrasting 'symbol' and allegory. In particular Cohn refers to two of Goethe's most famous quotations:

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Allegory transforms an object of perception into a concept, the concept into an image, but in such a way that the concept continues to remain circumscribed and completely available and expressible within the image⁵⁰.

Symbolism transforms an object of perception into an idea, the idea into an image, and does it in such a way that the idea always remains infinitely operative and unattainable so that even if it is put into words in all languages, it still remains inexpressible⁵¹.

In the 'symbol', the 'image' and the 'idea' are essentially one and the same. Through it, the work of art reveals its deepest, most profound meaning, while the naive viewer merely sees the image itself. As Goethe writes, "This is true symbolism, where the particular represents the general, not as dream and shadow, but as a live and immediate revelation of the unfathomable"⁵².

While Kant found the concept of 'symbol' to be a uniform feature of all aesthetic phenomena, Goethe, as an artist, examined the specific problems of different modes of representation more closely and thus separated symbolic art from other forms.

In his 1798 essay *Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst*, Goethe distinguishes between two modes of representation: one primarily oriented towards the object, and another in which the artist's spirit is expressed more autonomously. In the latter case, the objects in the work of art coincide with the most significant and superior real-life objects thanks to a profound feeling, and for this reason become symbolic. Allegory is criticized because it erases interest in representation and causes the spirit to close in on itself. In allegory, the concept remains autonomous. Consequently, as soon as the concept is grasped, the representation is neglected; in contrast, the meaning of a symbol can only be understood by immersing oneself completely in the spirit and form of the artwork.

In a series of pivotal passages, Cohn returns to the theme of the 'idea', clarifying that, in Goethe, it signifies both realized morality and the potential foreshadowing of unity between humanity and nature. However, one might argue that, compared to its predominant position in Kant and, until 1796, in Schiller, morality is in some way 'set aside' by Goethe. For him, a divine truth is hidden in every natural phenomenon and can only be understood symbolically. The connection between Goethe's conception of nature and his conception of art also falls within the concept of 'symbol'.

Through the *Urphänomen*, one intuitively perceives the legality of the all-encompassing nature. Here, the individual case represents the Allgemeine, which is not an abstract concept, but a concrete unity of nature. The *Urphänomen* is therefore "symbolical because it understands all cases, [it is] identical with all cases"⁵³. It is something 'superior' to mere intellectual knowledge. Although this expansion of the

⁵⁰ J. W. Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, op. cit., § 1112.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, § 1113.

⁵² *Ibid.*, § 314.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, § 1369.

symbolized content appears to diverge from Kant's standpoint, Cohn argues that it remains Kantian thanks to Goethe's interpretation of the 'idea'. The Allgemeine, as a conceptual approximation of the "idea", is not as intuitive as the latter and can only be represented through the symbolic, even if it is not as unattainable as the "idea" in the strict sense of the term. It is not an allegory, since the symbolic "is the thing without being the thing, and yet it is the thing, an image condensed in the spiritual mirror and yet identical with the object"⁵⁴.

In summary, intuitive mediation is the fundamental characteristic of symbolism. The range of things that can be symbolized spans the entire spectrum, from ideas in the highest sense, to representable objects that cannot be correctly intuited except within the stylistic framework of a specific work of art. For Goethe, the concept of 'symbol' thus becomes the means of reconciling science and art after overcoming naive metaphysics. The artist's highest productivity is both unconscious and valid, and conveys the greatest possible knowledge. According to Cohn, prior to Kant's influence, Goethe conceived of the cognitive purpose of art as an immediate understanding of true nature. Following Schiller's influence, however, this was reframed as grasping and displaying the 'idea' in the form of the symbol.

5. *Philosophy of religion*

As we have seen, the 'symbol' is one of the central concepts in Goethe's thinking. It connects aesthetics and the philosophy of nature, and also plays a key role in the examination of religious issues. According to Cohn, this application of the term 'symbol' to the religious sphere is certainly found in Kant, but not in Schiller. This is significant when considering Schiller's influence on the development of philosophical themes in Goethe's work. Nevertheless, despite having much less direct influence on Goethe with regard to religious issues, Schiller's impact in this area is still worth a brief assessment.

Religious issues were more important to Goethe than to Schiller, as Goethe had strong religious feelings towards nature from an early age. He felt gratitude and adoration for the fact that his existence and creativity were subject to a great unknown energy which he did not perceive as foreign, but rather as something that revealed its presence within him as it did within everyone else. What Cohn calls "sense of devotion" (*Gefühl der Ergebenheit*)⁵⁵ played a lesser role in Schiller, who was a man of strong will and conscious strength, and who defied nature by pushing his suffering body to its limits in the service of the 'idea'. This does not mean that Schiller was devoid of religious sentiment, merely that, for Goethe, every higher aspiration

⁵⁴ J. W. Goethe, "Philostrats Gemähde. Nachträgliches. I", *Goethes Werke*, Sophienausgabe, I/49, Böhlau, Weimar, 1818, pp. 136-142, p. 142.

⁵⁵ KSG, p. 341.

was permeated by a feeling of religious obedience and unity with the divine. Cohn therefore states that:

Therefore, Schiller had less to offer his friend in this regard, as religious questions rarely arose in their correspondence. On one occasion, however, Schiller attempted to persuade Goethe to be fairer in his assessment of Christianity. He noted that the distinctive features of the Christian religion, or rather what a beautiful soul could make of it, had not yet been given their due in *The Confessions of a Beautiful Soul* [the title of the sixth book of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*]⁵⁶.

6. Conclusions

When we look at Cohn's essay, it becomes clear that his main intention was to carefully and rigorously clarify that Goethe "was never a Kantian"⁵⁷, but that he was nevertheless significantly influenced by the philosopher from Königsberg. With the sole exception of the field of philosophy of religion, these influences "can all be traced back to Schiller"⁵⁸. While Goethe's thinking was originally directed towards nature, the objects and the unity of the external world, he later became interested in the thinking, willing and creative spirit. Thanks to the mediation of Kant and Schiller, the significance of the question of subjectivity emerged. Cohn suggests that only then Goethe realised that overcoming duality in unity was not at all obvious, but rather a constant challenge for human beings that could never be fully resolved.

From a certain point of view, it seems clear that, in Cohn's critical perspective, Schiller's role is presented primarily as a 'transitional figure' who hands the baton of Kant's philosophy to the young Goethe, enabling him to embrace and transform it within his own personality. This approach prioritises Goethe over Schiller, implicitly celebrating the former while overlooking the latter. In fact, the title of the *Kant-Studien* issue in question was *Schiller als Philosoph und seine Beziehungen zu Kant*, clearly stating the intention to present studies on the relationship between Kantian and Schillerian philosophy. However, while Cohn's essay analyses various significant aspects of Kantian critical philosophy, it does not do the same for Schiller's philosophy. Therefore, it seems accurate to argue that Cohn's contribution does not really participate in the rediscovery of Schiller's philosophy, but rather in the broader late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century movement that elevated Goethe's personality and work to the North Star of German culture in literature, philosophy, and science⁵⁹.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ KSG, p. 344.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Let us mention essays such as those by Hermann von Helmholtz (*Über Goethe's naturwissenschaftliche Arbeiten*, 1853 and *Goethe's Vorahnungen kommender naturwissenschaftlicher Ideen*, 1892); Kuno Fischer (*Goethe's Faust. Über die Entstehung und Composition des Gedichts*, 1878); Emil Du Bois-Reymond (*Goethe und kein Ende*, 1882); Ernst Haeckel, (*Die Naturanschauung von Darwin, Goethe und*

If we trace the theoretical development of concepts from Kant via Schiller to Goethe, we find a striking example of the way in which rigorous philosophical thinking proves effective. This is an aspect of the history of ideas – its *Wirkung* – that Cohn investigates and seeks to highlight. Alongside the individual sciences, religion and poetry are the true intermediaries “between *philosophy* and *popular thinking*. In this way, the concepts must lose *sharpness* and *definiteness* but gain *concreteness* and *applicability*”⁶⁰. In other words, the fundamental point for Cohn is that “the effectiveness of our concepts depends on them being reintroduced into *life*”⁶¹.

By examining how Kantian criticism was received by Goethe through the figure of Schiller, Cohn attempts to investigate the extent to which the most influential outcomes of modern philosophical and scientific thought were translated into active repercussions during that epochal laboratory of creative enterprise known as the great German Neoclassical-Romantic period. For Cohn, this primarily involves revisiting the relationship between *Anschauung* and *Begriff*, and challenging the conventional epistemological perspective that *Anschauung* invariably leads to *Begriff* in something of a ‘one-way’ and ‘irreversible’ manner. Through his work, Cohn seeks to reverse the terms of the question and update them in accordance with critical philosophy. Thus, he highlights that the direction can be reversed and, more importantly, that it functions in both directions (as Kant already outlined in *Kritik der Urteilskraft*)⁶². Consequently, Cohn argues that the value of science must be reconsidered in broader terms – not merely as a theoretical and cognitive activity of conceptualization, but as a feedback loop between *Anschauung* and *Begriff* that transforms our reality and therefore has a fundamental *Kulturbedeutung*⁶³.

In light of this, Cohn argues that what we experience and what becomes real and effective for us – out of the possible *Anschauungen* – always depends on the points of view “under which our mind regards *experiences* and *things*”⁶⁴. This clarifies the

Lamarck, 1882); Wilhelm Windelband (*Aus Goethes Philosophie*, 1899); Friedrich Gundolf (*Goethe*, 1916); Heinrich Rickert (*Die Wetten in Goethes Faust*, 1921, *Die Einheit des Faustischen Charakters. Eine Studie zu Goethes Faustdichtung*, 1925 e *Goethes Faust. Die dramatische Einheit der Dichtung*, 1932); Johannes von Kries (*Goethe als Psycholog*, 1924). For more on the reception of Goethe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially by natural scientists, see the recent volume by Dietrich von Engelhardt, *Goethe als Naturforscher im Urteil der Naturwissenschaft und Medizin des 19. Jahrhunderts: Themen, Texte, Titel*, Heidelberg, Metzler, 2024. I would like to thank Edoardo Massimilla and Christian Krijnen for their valuable insights on these issues during the discussion following my presentation at conference the “The Neo-Kantian Reception of Schiller” in Naples.

⁶⁰ KSG, p. 345, *emph. mine*.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, *emph. mine*.

⁶² As is well known, the bibliography on these topics and issues is extensive, to say the least, and new studies continue to be published today, offering updated and expanded critical perspectives. I will therefore just refer to one notable work on the topic, which I believe is still worth reading: G. Carchia, “Le rovine della rappresentazione. Lettura della *Critica del Giudizio*”, in *Id.*, *La legittimazione dell'arte. Studi sull'intelligibile estetico*, Guida, Napoli 1982, pp. 139-169.

⁶³ KSG, p. 345, *emph. mine*.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, *emph. mine*.

meaning of an expression that, as Cohn reminds us, Germans should not utter without reverence: *Weltanschauung*. Grasping the whole world in a single *Anschauung* is an 'idea' as grandiose as it is impossible. Cohn argues here that replacing this unity with an encyclopedic collection of the results of all the individual sciences can only lead to partial knowledge, never to the totality of *Anschauung*. Indeed, for Cohn, "ultimately the general and strict *concepts* of *critical philosophy*, in themselves, can form *convictions* [*Überzeugungen*], but not *Anschauungen*"⁶⁵. Nevertheless, concepts and convictions organize our *Anschauung*, guide us in choosing what is important, and determine our 'way of seeing'. The term *Weltanschauung* can only refer to a specific and consistent approach to viewing the entirety of things, whose supposed unity is termed 'world'. Therefore, if the meaning of the word is defined in this way, Cohn asserts that *Weltanschauung* becomes the highest personal *goal* of every critical thinker.

Cohn concludes his account by discussing the meaning of 'Weltanschauung' to emphasize Goethe's unique way of thinking, which is not incompatible with that of critical philosophy. As he writes, a *Weltanschauung* combines "scientific and personal elements, the provable and the unprovable. *Concept* and *feeling* are inextricably linked. In this sense, Goethe had a *Weltanschauung*, not a philosophy in the strict sense of the word. Indeed, one might think that the term *Weltanschauung* was coined for him"⁶⁶.

⁶⁵ Ibid., emph. mine.

⁶⁶ Ibid., emph. mine.

Abstracts

FREDERICK C. BEISER, *Schiller versus Post-Modernism*.

This paper is an examination of the post-modernist interpretation of the aesthetic writings of Friedrich Schiller (*Anmut und Würde*, *Kallias Briefe* and *Aesthetische Briefe*). The paper covers three topics: Schiller's style or exposition; his objective aesthetic; and his concept of the aesthetic state. Regarding Schiller's exposition, it counters the post-modernist claim that the aesthetic writings should be understood as rhetorical and poetic rather than logical and systematic. The main evidence for this reading is Schiller's statement that he is more poet than philosopher. But this statement, while true, is insufficient to justify the post-modernist reading. It ignores Schiller's philosophical education at the *Karlschule*; and it neglects his critique of the Romantics. Regarding the objective aesthetic, Schiller's claim that there must be a quality of the object to justify an aesthetic judgment is defended against the post-modernist claim that all qualities of the object are irrelevant. Of two qualitatively identical objects, both must be beautiful or ugly; one cannot be beautiful or ugly and not the other. Finally, regarding the aesthetic state, post-modernists claim that this concept supports authoritarianism or fascism; but this argument is questionable insofar Schiller holds that the citizen of the aesthetic state must be a beautiful soul who cultivates moral and civic virtue.

SABATO DANZILLI, *Kuno Fischer: Schiller as a Bridge between Kritizismus and Romantik*.

This paper analyzes Kuno Fischer's positioning of Friedrich Schiller as a crucial philosophical bridge between Kantian *Kritizismus* and Romanticism. The study highlights how Schiller's aesthetic theory, particularly the concept of the *Spieltrieb* (play drive), is interpreted as a mechanism for resolving the dualisms of sense and reason. The central argument is that Fischer identifies Schiller's Aesthetic State as the essential medium, the missing step for advancing from the "State of Necessity" to the "State of Reason" after the failure of the French Revolution. By historicizing this work, Fischer elevates Schiller as a central figure of German Idealism.

PAOLO PECERE, *Materialism, Ideals and Political Myths. Friedrich Lange's Interpretation of Schiller and its Legacy.*

In this chapter, I reconsider Friedrich Albert Lange's neo-Kantianism by focusing on his interpretation of Schiller and its philosophical and political implications. Against the standard reading of Lange as a proponent of "physiological Kantianism", I argue that his engagement with Schiller reveals his broader project centered on aesthetics, ideals, and mythology. By transforming metaphysics into poetic and symbolic forms, Lange sought to preserve the motivating power of ideals while rejecting their metaphysical truth claims. I show how this strategy informed Lange's response to materialism, his critique of Kantian morality, and his attempt to articulate a secular, politically effective "new mythology", whose legacy proved both influential and deeply ambivalent.

CHIARA RUSSO KRAUSS, *Friedrich Albert Lange's Project of Schillerian Kantianism as the Philosophy for the Industrial Revolution.*

The essay clarifies Lange's assertion that Schiller's concept of "aesthetic redemption" is essential to solving the social question. The author analyzes how Lange uses Schiller to purify Kantian ethics of metaphysical elements, bringing it into the realm of aesthetics. Through this approach, Lange posits that only beautiful ideals can realize freedom, inspire moral action, and secure social progress. Ultimately, the study emphasizes Lange's conviction that the power of ideals is crucial for overcoming ethical materialism and channeling the industrial revolution for the benefit of humanity.

GERALD HARTUNG, *Wilhelm Windelband on Schiller's Transcendental Idealism as a Cultural Philosophy.*

Wilhelm Windelband was one of the leading university philosophers in the German-speaking world around 1900. In the guise of a major philosophical work, he left behind a series of essays, which were first published in 1884 under the title *Preludes – Essays and Speeches on Philosophy and its History*, and subsequently appeared in numerous editions and translations. One important essay deals with Schiller's transcendental idealism (from the fourth edition of *Preludes* in 1911 onward). The first publication of this essay can be found in Volume 10 of *Kant-Studien* (1905), which is dedicated to commemorating Schiller on the centenary of his death and exploring his continued relevance. This volume includes contributions from prominent figures in German-language philosophy around 1900 (Vaihinger, Liebmann, Eucken, Cohn, Bauch, and others). The second publication appeared in 1906 as a *Festschrift* for *Kant-Studien* (edited by Vaihinger and Bauch). In my study, I will analyze Windelband's treatise on Schiller's transcendental idealism in its various contexts. My hypothesis is that we read this treatise differently depending on whether we encounter it in a scholarly journal, a commemorative publication, or a fragmented monograph by the author.

ROBERTO REDAELLI, *On the Margins of Neo-Kantianism. Schillerian Traces in the Baden School.*

This chapter investigates the neo-Kantian reception of Schiller, with a particular focus on the most prominent representatives of the so-called Baden School: Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert, and Emil Lask. The chapter does not aim to provide an exhaustive account of these authors' reception of Schiller's work, but rather to examine selected aspects of that reception concerning Schiller's notion of the whole man. To this end, we examine a selection of annotations and lecture notes by Lask, Rickert, and Windelband, along with several major works. Through this investigation, we aim to show how Schiller's concept of the whole man served as a significant source of inspiration for the development of different themes within this philosophical movement.

GIOVANNI MORRONE, *A "Disciple of Kant"? On the Strategies and Limits of the Baden Neo-Kantian Appropriation of Schiller.*

This contribution examines the reception of Schiller within Windelband's philosophical thought and his historiography of philosophy. First, it identifies the presence of cultural-critical motifs and arguments of Schillerian provenance in the formulation of Windelband's early philosophical program. Second, it reconstructs Windelband's interpretation of Schiller, showing how the emphasis on "Schiller as an idealist" results in an inadequate appraisal of the anthropological dimension of his thought.

DOMENICO SPINOSA, *Schiller as Kantian Vermittler for Goethe in Jonas Cohn's Critical Account.*

This contribution aims to address Jonas Cohn's interpretation of the relationship between Schiller and Goethe in connection with the legacy of Kantian thought. In *Das Kantische Element in Goethes Weltanschauung. Schillers philosophischer Einfluss auf Goethe* (1905), Cohn regards Schiller's work in the context of its connection to Goethe. In addition to re-examining aspects of Schiller's *Wirkungsgeschichte* typical of 19th-century German philosophical and scientific culture, Cohn highlights some "lines of continuity" between the two great thinkers, tracing them back to Kant, in an approach that emphasizes points of contact over fractures. With regard to Kant's legacy (in particular the reception of the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*), Cohn's essay can be seen as an attempt to revise the general field of aesthetics from the perspective of a philosophy of values based on the principles of neo-Kantianism of the Baden school. This is a goal Cohn had pursued since the publication of his important book: *Allgemeine Ästhetik* (1901). In a previous contribution dedicated to Hegelian aesthetics, published in 1902, Cohn clarified his reworking of aesthetics, stating: "I dared to attempt to continue in the wake of Hegel's thought, to which Kant's and Schiller's are connected".

CHRISTIAN KRIJNEN, *Actualizing Freedom. On Schiller's Relevance for South-West Neo-Kantianism.*

In his analysis of Schiller's transcendental idealism, Windelband touches shortly upon an issue that has shown to be of the utmost importance for the development of German idealism: the problem of actualizing freedom. He holds that Schiller prepares a conception as we can find it in Hegel's distinction between "subjective morality" and "objective *Sittlichkeit*". I shall show that this indication of Windelband concerns a core interest of Bauch's philosophy of values, particularly his ethics; a core interest that Bauch develops innovatively by integrating Schiller's view, criticizing Kant, and finally establishing the concept of the "imperative of culture" as the concept of realizing validity, i.e. actualizing freedom. This conception, however, is both consequent within the framework of transcendental idealism and problematic against the background of Hegel's speculative idealism.

STEFAN KLINGNER, RUDOLF MEER, *The Beautiful Soul: Schiller's Rupture with Kant from a Neo-Kantian Perspective.*

Nineteenth-century receptions of Schiller often emphasize the continuity between his concept of the beautiful soul and Kant's doctrine of the primacy of practical philosophy. There were however dissenting voices that critically exposed Schiller's misrepresentations of Kant's fundamental principles. Most notably, Kuno Fischer and Bruno Bauch clearly articulated Schiller's rupture with Kant. This paper examines Schiller's transformation of Kant's practical philosophy. Drawing on Kant's texts and current scholarship, the positions of Fischer and Bauch in the Kant-Schiller debate can be substantiated. They show that Schiller's view is not a mere quantitative extension but a revision of Kant's philosophical foundations.

GIAN PAOLO CAMMAROTA, *"True Idealism Is Realism". Schiller as the Poet of the Ideal in Hermann Cohen.*

The paper highlights how Hermann Cohen's interpretation of Schiller is based on Platonism and Kantianism. Schiller is considered by Cohen to be "the poet of the ideal", the true successor to Kantian aesthetics, who clearly understood the simple, profound and eternally true meaning of the Kantian method of philosophizing. Schiller embodies the true meaning of philosophy, which not only identifies with Platonic idealism, but also understands authentic idealism as realism. For Schiller, in fact, the ideal and form are not opposed to reality, since, on the contrary, it is they, through idealisation, that constitute reality as form, that is, as idea.

SCOTT EDGAR, *Noumenal Affection and Play in Hermann Cohen's Schillerian Aesthetics.*

Hermann Cohen's aesthetics, from his *Kant's Foundation of Aesthetics* (1889), are deeply indebted to Friedrich Schiller. This paper seeks to show that by developing a detailed interpretation of Cohen's use of the concept of play. That account reveals that Cohen's account of play draws self-consciously on Schiller in three ways: in

Cohen's view that play involves moral consciousness; in the details of Cohen's use of the concept of "universal communicability"; and in Cohen's conception of play as a rational ideal.

EZIO GAMBA, *Aesthetic Education and Self-Consciousness of Humankind. Friedrich Schiller in Hermann Cohen's Thought.*

Hermann Cohen examined Schiller's thought primarily in his two major works on aesthetics: *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* (1889) and *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls* (1912). The central focus of Cohen's reflections on Schiller is the role of aesthetics within the philosophical system and the relationship between aesthetics and the first two parts of the system. However, this topic evolves significantly between the two works. This shift is also reflected in a change of attitude toward Schiller's concept of aesthetic education.

MATTIA PAPA, *The Presence of Schiller in the First Period of Natorp's Philosophy.*

The paper aims to reconstruct Schiller's presence in Natorp's philosophy, focusing on the role of Schiller's aesthetics in the first period of Natorp's writings (1880-1914). Its purpose is to show that, in the development of Natorp's thought, particularly from a theoretical standpoint, Schiller was as important to him as Kant. The paper then examines how aesthetics plays a crucial role within Natorp's theoretical perspective, especially in relation to his effort to identify the "ultimate unity" on the objective side of knowledge. Finally, it seeks to indicate, through a brief outline, how this is central to understanding Natorp's conception of the individual as a concrete moment of objectivity and its relation to with his critical psychology.

LUIGI LAINO, *"The Realm of Shadows": the Presence of Schiller in Cassirer's Philosophy of Science.*

This paper explores the largely overlooked influence of Friedrich Schiller on Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of science. While Schiller is seldom cited in Cassirer's epistemological writings, his ideas significantly inform two central aspects of Cassirer's thought: the rejection of the copy theory of knowledge and the development of theoretical holism. Through a historical and systematic analysis, the study traces Cassirer's references to Schiller from early works (1907) to major texts such as *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff* (1910), *Freiheit und Form* (1916), and *Zur Einsteinschen Relativitätstheorie* (1921). It argues that Schiller's aesthetic idealism and his notion of the "power of the soul" anticipate Cassirer's conception of knowledge as an active, constructive process rather than a passive reproduction of reality. This perspective underpins Cassirer's interpretation of relativity theory, where scientific concepts are seen as functional relations within a holistic network rather than isolated representations of empirical facts. Finally, the paper examines Cassirer's appeal to Schiller in *Determinismus und Indeterminismus* (1937) to defend moral autonomy against the misapplication of physical indeterminism to ethics. By highlighting these connections, the study reveals a deep continuity between Cassirer's epistemol-

ogy and Schiller's idealism, showing how aesthetic principles shape the neo-Kantian philosophy of science.

GIUSEPPE GUASTAMACCHIA, *The Unified Human Being: Schiller's Legacy in Dilthey's Critique of Mathematical Psychology*.

This article examines Friedrich Schiller's influence on Wilhelm Dilthey's conception of descriptive psychology as the methodological foundation for the human sciences. Between the 1840s and 1870s, German psychology diverged into competing traditions: Herbartian psychology, which treated mental representations as quantifiable forces, and the emerging neo-Kantian tradition, which defended qualitative distinctions in mental life and consciousness's spontaneous character. Dilthey's encounter with Schiller occurred precisely as this alternative crystallized. Schiller's aesthetic epistemology – emphasizing holistic contemplation of living totalities rather than analytical dissection – provided Dilthey with both a philosophical alternative to Herbartian mechanistic psychology and a positive model for studying consciousness without fragmenting its vital unity. Tracing Dilthey's development from 1852 through 1865 to the 1894-1895 *Ideen*, this paper demonstrates how Schiller's promotion of the unified, organic human being constituted the epistemological template for Dilthey's descriptive psychology.

FRANCESCO PISANO, "Only in Error There Is Life". *Nature and Idealization in Vaihinger and Schiller*.

The paper investigates Vaihinger's use of Schiller within the neo-Kantian critique of monistic naturalism. Vaihinger's appeal to Schiller plays a decisive role in this critique by framing idealization as a psychologically grounded yet normatively oriented practice, thereby sustaining a Kantian dualism between nature and idea. Both Vaihinger's and Schiller's perspectives on the matter are reconsidered in light of a close examination of Vaihinger's scattered references to the poet. As a result, fictionalism's internal tension between constructivism and psychologism emerges. Vaihinger's (sometimes concealed) reliance on Schiller is thus shown to both support and destabilize his attempt at a neo-Kantian pragmatism.

EDOARDO MASSIMILLA, *Schiller in Max Weber? An Open Question*.

The essay examines the alleged connection between Weber's concept of the "disenchantment of the world" (*Entzauberung der Welt*) and Schiller's concept of the "de-godded nature" (*entgötterte Natur*), a connection that has been contested by recent Weberian historiography. Through a detailed analysis of explicit quotations and references to Schiller in Weber's works and correspondence, the study reveals Weber's familiarity with the German poet and suggests that Weber viewed him as an example of a heroic "*ganzer Mensch*" (total human being).

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STUDIES IN NEO-KANTIANISM

Following the post-idealist identity crisis and the advent of nihilism, which dominated the European cultural scene after

the fall of the great systems of thought, philosophy underwent a decisive transformation under the impetus of a movement that rallied its best minds around the famous call “zurück zu Kant!”. This call had first been uttered by Eduard Zeller and then resounded throughout Europe, and soon found its place in the strongholds of scholarship which were the Universities of Heidelberg, Freiburg and Marburg, where various schools of thought took shape, united by the intention to meet the intellectual challenges of the present day with renewed forms of criticism. Prominent representatives of these schools, among them Windelband, Rickert and Lask in the Baden school, Natorp, Cohen and Cassirer in the Marburg school to name only the most famous, sparked a radical redefinition of the European philosophical and cultural scene in the 20th century and impacted disparate fields of study: from the theory of knowledge to aesthetics, from anthropology to the doctrine of values, the breadth of the horizons unlocked by the work of these authors became a cardinal reference point for successive generations of philosophers. The crucial role that this movement played in the genesis and development of twentieth-century philosophical thought is examined in the series *Studies in Neo-Kantianism*, whose goal is to provide an international platform for contributions from leading scholars in this current. Specifically, the series aims to collect historical-philosophical studies written in the major European languages with the purpose of investigating the multiple forms that neo-Kantianism has assumed, while remaining open to the thematization of the impact of this school of thought on the methods of the various cultural sciences, without excluding from its scope more explicitly theoretical works that highlight the contemporary relevance of certain issues raised by this current. The series also intends to include editions and translations of classic Neo-Kantian texts. In this mission, the series has a clear international vocation, strengthened by the collaboration with the Centre for Studies in Neo-Kantianism at the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität in Erlangen-Nürnberg. In keeping with the work of investigation and dissemination promoted by the research centre, the series seeks to restore the spirit of Neo-Kantianism by bringing together specialised works that are the fruit of international collaboration between leading scholars in this current of thought.

1. *Neo-Kantianism and Cultural Sciences*, edited by Giovanni Morrone and Roberto Redaelli
2. *Costellazione Max Weber. Studi in onore di Edoardo Massimilla*, a cura di Giovanni Morrone, Chiara Russo Krauss, Domenico Spinosa, Roberta Visone
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5. Lorenzo De Stefano, *Tra cielo e terra. Eugen Fink e l'interpretazione fenomenologica dei Pre-socratici*
6. Friedrich Albert Lange, *Le poesie filosofiche di Schiller*, traduzione e cura di Chiara Russo Krauss

7. Ernst Cassirer, *La vita della forma. Scritti su Schiller*, traduzione, cura e saggio introduttivo di Luigi Laino, prefazione di Chiara Russo Krauss
8. *The Neo-Kantian Reception of Schiller*, edited by Chiara Russo Krauss
9. Kuno Fischer, *Schiller filosofo*, presentazione di Chiara Russo Krauss, saggio introduttivo di Sabato Danzilli, traduzione di Lorenzo Licciardi

During the second half of the nineteenth century, several members of the Neo-Kantian movement became interested in Schiller. For the first time, he was regarded not only as a poet and dramatist, but also as a philosopher – and, above all, as a Kantian philosopher. The authors of the contributions collected in this book reconstruct how various Neo-Kantian thinkers engaged with Schiller. Thus, the book illuminates the pivotal role that neo-Kantianism played in the discovery of Schiller’s philosophy as well as the pivotal role that Schiller’s philosophy played in the shaping of neo-Kantianism.



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