

Philosophy in Germany

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SC: Simply as a way of initially organizing our discussion, we both agreed to read a short article by Dieter Henrich that appeared in *Merkur* in his philosophy column, 'Eine Generation im Abgang' ('A Passing Generation').¹ Henrich rightly claims that a change of generations is coming to an end in German philosophy, which is most clearly marked by the retirement of Jürgen Habermas in 1994 and the death of Hans Blumenberg in 1996. But we might also speak of a wider generational change that would include Karl-Otto Apel, Ernst Tugendhat, Michael Theunissen and Niklas Luhmann, as well as figures like Otto Poeggeler and Robert Spaemann. Almost all of this generation are now retired, and it is at the moment unclear who and what will take their place.

As Henrich explains, the oldest and the youngest of this generation are only separated by about fifteen years, and most of them came out of three philosophical schools – Bonn, Münster and Heidelberg. Gadamer's name, and his brand of urbane Heideggerianism, should also be mentioned in this postwar conjuncture, although he precedes the generation we are talking about. Before moving on to the question of how the contemporary philosophical scene looks in Germany, we might perhaps begin with Henrich's description of what the 'passing generation' had in common. First and foremost, despite their obvious philosophical and ideological differences, what they shared was a common context: the overwhelming presence of the trauma and catastrophe of National Socialism. Thinking of Habermas, if one reads a fascinating early piece from 1961 on 'Der deutsche Idealismus der jüdischen Philosophen' ('The German Idealism of Jewish Philosophers'), it reveals the postwar philosophical ambition to reconcile Jews and Germans.² But Henrich puts the issue in the following terms:

With these considerations in mind one has really understood what the first task of young philosophers in postwar Germany had to be: essentially they worked in order to maintain or restore the worldwide credibility of thinking in the German language. Alongside music, philosophy was for a long time the most significant cultural export good of Germany. Since Kant, German philosophy has distinguished itself through a basic style of investigation that always ended in a synthesis in answer to questions of principle, limit and life.³

To this demand for synthesis, we might also add the requirement of universalism and the method of rational argumentation. So it would seem that it is through a rationally achieved synthesis with a universalist scope that German philosophy responds to the catastrophe of National Socialism; and this is combined with an overwhelming fear of relativism and irrationalism, which always seems to go together with the fear of reducing the *wissenschaftlich* ('scientific') character of philosophy, or the reduction of philosophy to what Henrich calls '*Literarisierung*' ('making literary'). In your view, is this a fair characterization of German philosophy in the postwar period?

AH: Yes, I think it is to a certain degree, but maybe it is not broad or differentiated enough. As is indicated by the Habermas article you mentioned, there was not only the search for the restoration of a certain kind of credibility; there was also from the beginning among some of that postwar generation the ambition to address and clarify the moral disaster of National Socialism. There was therefore not only the attempt to regain the great German tradition in the sense of the Kantian heritage but also to regain or overcome the separation from the Jewish tradition, which was highly specific and extremely important for the whole of German

philosophy at the beginning of the century. This was not only an enterprise of Habermas, but others too, who attempted to reconstruct the specifically Jewish element in German philosophy. If you take the example of someone like Michael Theunissen, he spent a lot of energy in his first major work – the book on the Other – reconstructing the work of Martin Buber, and that was intentional.⁴ It was meant to overcome the separation between the Jewish tradition and the German situation after the Second World War. This is something totally excluded from the picture given by Henrich.

The other thing that he underestimates is, let us say, the moral dimension of the early period of German philosophy after the Second World War, after the disaster or catastrophe. This is something best described by Karl-Otto Apel in a famous article which I strongly recommend.⁵ There Apel describes his own enterprise – namely, the search for a universal ground for moral principles of respect and autonomy – as a response to, and a clarification of, the moral dimension of the disaster. So there was also the moral dimension in that whole postwar period, and this is also not clearly enough indicated by Henrich. That is very closely connected with people in Bonn. I mean, if you take the three universities mentioned by Henrich, then one should be careful to differentiate between these places. For example, it is interesting that in Münster from very early on – the middle of the 1950s I think – there were several people trying to come into contact with Carl Schmitt. It is hard to explain why suddenly, in a group of younger people, there was this interest in the work of Schmitt when they were all aware that he had been deeply involved in the fascist juridical administration. These people were no longer connected to the fascist world; they were trying to be liberals, democratic liberals. I think one can explain this interest in Schmitt because he was the only one who participated in fascism who never publicly regretted having done so. This made Schmitt quite singular because all the others – Gehlen and even Heidegger – were either silenced by their involvement, or very quickly became converts to the new regime. So, to complicate Henrich's picture, this interest in Schmitt at Münster, which came out of the circle of Joachim Ritter, led to a very fruitful, although not unproblematic, relation to the prewar past. All I want to say is that Henrich's picture is not differentiated enough. I think it is rather simplistic to say that the main ambition of postwar German philosophy was to regain credibility; there were so many other motives, moral motives. There was also the motive of finding one's place in a culture increasingly influenced by the United States. One should not forget the continuation of the Heideggerian tradition to an incredible degree in the postwar period. In Bonn, where Habermas and Apel were students, the influence of Heidegger was striking. Habermas and Apel started as what we might call left Heideggerians. If one adds these additional elements to Henrich's picture, then I think it is basically correct.

SC: OK. But what about the desire for synthesis that Henrich talks about. Does this define the postwar period of German philosophy?

AH: Yes. I think what was still very important, and almost seen as self-evident in that period, is that any philosophical enterprise requires synthetic power. I wouldn't reduce that requirement uniquely to Kant's philosophy, as it is a very traditional idea of German philosophy that you have to construct your own system. You have to find your own theory, your own philosophical position. This was a requirement not explicitly formulated but deeply internalized. So it was true that almost all the main figures in the generation we are speaking of had the strong belief that they had to formulate their own systematic philosophical position during the next ten or twenty years. This was indeed as it has been in the prewar period, where you had Husserl or Nikolai Hartmann or Heidegger; where you not only had philosophical teachers and professional philosophers, but strong philosophical positions connected to specific persons. Each one stood for a whole programme, and you could describe the philosophical landscape with reference to persons who represented clearly demarcated positions, discrete forms of synthesis. It was clearly understood that in order to find your own synthetic position, your

own new and original position, you had to rework the philosophical tradition. Originality was the requirement both before and after the war.

The present generation

SC: Let us now turn to the present situation. At the end of Henrich's article, he makes the following observation. First: that the generation that is now coming to an end achieved a remarkable international notoriety, and worldwide recognition. This is most obviously the case with Habermas, but also with Henrich himself and Apel and others. But what of the present generation?

Henrich is extremely critical of the generation that followed his own – your generation – and indeed alludes to a kind of analytic–continental split in German philosophy, between what he sees, rightly or wrongly, as a kind of Derridean playfulness and endless paraphrase on the one side, and an early Putnamian analytic narrowness on the other – what Henrich sees as a bad professionalism. Henrich goes so far as to say that the '68 generation brought up under Adenauer are 'turnshoes', and is rather pessimistic as to whether philosophy can avoid the double threat of *Literarisierung* on the one hand and narrow professionalism on the other. He writes:

If one takes note of the connections I have tried to develop, then it is self-evidently necessary to ask the question as to whether the generation of German philosophers who are now taking up their places will be able to bring about a beginning with long-term effect, or whether they can simply be understood as a distant reverberation of the Weimar Republic in the radically changed conditions of the postwar period. An effective break in motivational history [*Motivationsgeschichte*] would then first enter onto the scene with those who were born after the war, in Adenauer's Federal Republic. It might be able to explain why the surprising success of postwar German philosophy in the wider world finds no continuation for the time being.

Is Henrich right? Is your generation so bad? Is this description at all justified?

AH: That is also a very complicated question. To start with the last sentence, the fact that the younger generation of philosophers – the middle generation let's say – born in the 1940s and early 1950s has not gained such an international reputation or recognition is also due to the fact that it was only after the 1970s that the Anglo-Saxon colonization of the philosophical world began. This situation was something that the earlier generation was not really confronted with. In that time, I would say, there was a kind of multicultural situation in philosophy, albeit a multiculturalism restricted to the Western world. What I mean is that there were strong influences from France on the philosophical agenda in the 1950s and 1960s. Sartre had an incredible influence; French existentialism was one of the main positions at that time. And Merleau-Ponty was famous and widely read. Thus, it was not a situation in which there was a clear hegemony of one tradition: Anglo-Saxon philosophy. So it was maybe a little easier at that time, and the chances of gaining international respect were higher, as well as having cross-national contacts, influences, etc. So that is the first remark I would like to make: that today, under these new conditions where it is obviously the fact (and I don't want to judge this fact) that the analytic tradition is hegemonic, it is much more complicated for people from other countries easily to gain that kind of international respect.

The other remark would be directly concerned with Henrich's description. I think to a certain degree he is right, but maybe it is more complicated to explain why that is the case. I think it is right to say that there is a new tendency to a kind of bad professionalism in German philosophy. If you look at what normally happens in the big meetings of the German Philosophical Association, it is extremely boring, and to a certain degree that is because of professionalism. I don't even see that there are many tendencies towards what he calls Derridean playfulness. I don't really see that in philosophy. Maybe it has a bigger role in other disciplines or in other areas, but not in philosophy. But what Henrich is underestimating, I think, and characteristically underestimating, is that in the 1960s when this generation

received their main influences in philosophy as students there was a new motivation emerging, of which he is not really aware. It is perhaps not surprising that he is not aware of it because, as far as I know, Henrich reacted negatively to what took place in the '68 student movement – namely, that new questions came up which together formed a horizon of motives for younger philosophers. Clearly, the main motive was for the first time a really sharp awareness of the fact that one's own parents – fathers, sometimes mothers – had collaborated in fascism. This was the experience of that generation, I think, and you can still see it in some of the small philosophical enterprises where it functions as a kind of background motivation. I must say that the other strong motive is something beyond Henrich's horizon – the whole question of what Habermas is now calling, in the title of his latest book, *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen* (The Inclusion of the Other).⁶ This is the fact that others are not only playing the role of citizens, but are there in very different roles; that the other has many faces; that it is more of a task to acknowledge or recognize these other spheres of the other. The whole problem of the other is something that was new for that generation. Maybe the title of Theunissen's book already indicated that task, but it became a very strong force behind a lot of the writings of the 1960s' generation, as a background cultural motivation.

The other background motivation I would mention is the problem of freedom, which is obviously the main issue of the '68 movement. We might speak here of the ambivalences of liberalization. What I mean is the fact that freedom is something more radical than seen in earlier times; that freedom is also about cultural roles, sexual roles, gender roles, which is something that this generation created and explored. And I think this also goes some way to explaining why, at the beginning of the 1970s and 1980s, there were still some philosophical figures of my generation who tried to create original work of a synthetic character, who were either ignored by the system, or who became more or less integrated into it, but continued along the same route. To mention one name: Andreas Wildt, who never got a university position, who came originally from Dieter Henrich, and then was an assistant of Michael Theunissen. He wrote a very interesting book on Hegel and Fichte in this synthetic tradition, which is an extremely powerful reinterpretation of the practical philosophy of Hegel and Fichte with the aim of creating a kind of moral philosophy aware of the non-legal relation to others.⁷ This is only an example. It is meant to indicate that Henrich is right in his description of the present generation, but that he is ignoring some stronger energies in that generation which either had the chance to survive the last fifteen years – fifteen years of high professionalization and a boring development in German philosophy – or were repressed by the philosophical system and the philosophical establishment. He is simply overlooking the fact that the philosophical establishment ignored some of the creativity of the '68 movement.

SC: Is there a philosophical establishment in Germany? If so, how would you characterize it?

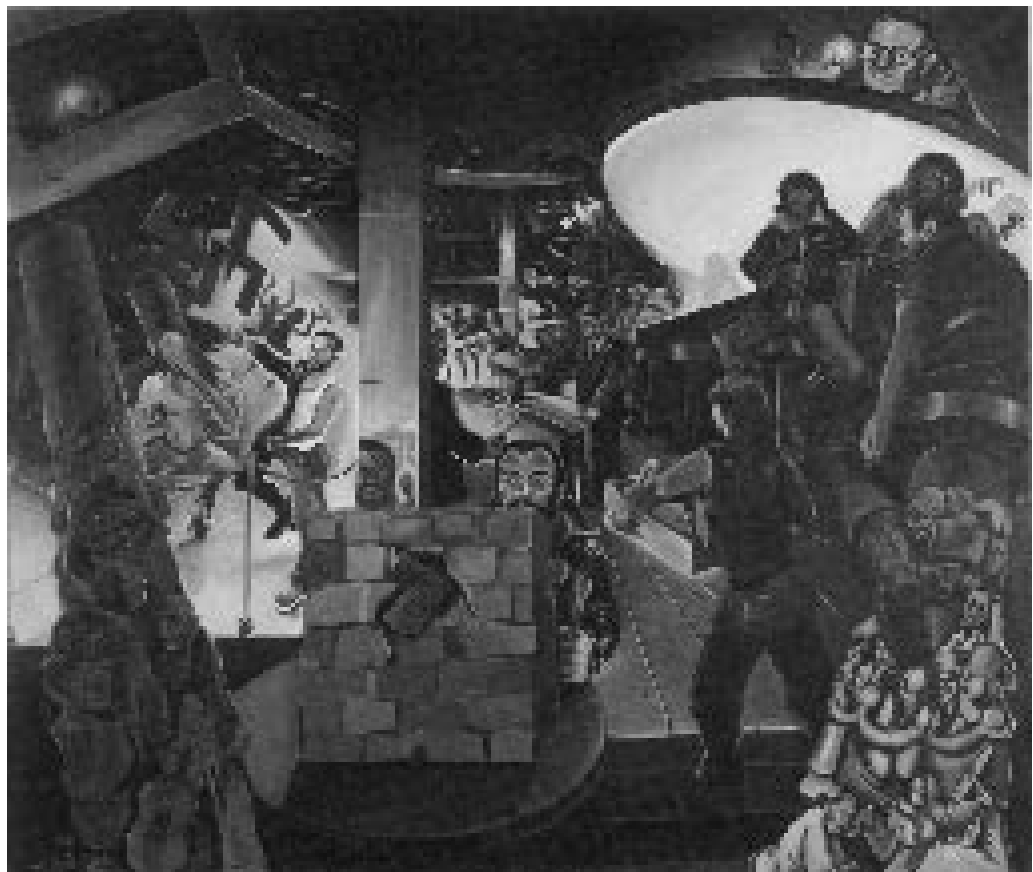
AH: Yes, there definitely is and it is typical that people like Habermas, Apel, Theunissen and Tugendhat never belonged to that establishment. There is an establishment, the members of which are not even very well known in the outside world, who are mainly professionals doing their ordinary jobs, writing more or less interesting or boring books, but who had something like the power of academic philosophy in their grasp. And they are to a certain degree responsible for the fact that more creative persons never had a chance. Take Peter Sloterdijk, who at the outset was quite an interesting philosopher, who very early on wrote an extremely interesting article on Foucault, and then published his book on the *Critique of Cynical Reason*.⁸ Maybe if he had had a chance in the philosophical system, he wouldn't have gone in the direction he is now going – namely, a kind of wild journalism.

SC: You have already begun to answer my next question, which concerns the *Motivationsgeschichte* of contemporary German philosophy. If the motivation of the postwar generation was found in a response to the moral disaster of National Socialism, then the question that Henrich raises concerns the motivation for your own generation. You have answered this

question in terms of the problem of freedom, the questioning of established orders, and, tangentially perhaps, the whole issue of power. Let us push the logic of Henrich's position a little further. What Henrich seems prepared to admit – which is an extremely interesting and un-English thought – is that there has to be some sort of almost traumatic motivation to philosophizing; that philosophy comes out of, and tries to make good on, a traumatic situation. If one were looking for a recent historical event in Germany that might provide such a motivation to philosophizing, then one would obviously think of '89: the *Wende*. Now maybe it is just too soon to tell what is going to happen, if anything, and whether the changes in Germany will have intellectual consequences. Of course, one persuasive diagnosis of what happened in the philosophical profession after '89 is a complete philosophical takeover of the East by the West, which is obviously to do with the peculiar character that philosophy had in the ideological superstructure of the former DDR – that is, its strongly Marxist-Leninist orientation. Do you think that what took place was simply a takeover? And do you think anything will come out of the reunification of Germany as a historical event in terms of a possible motivation for philosophy?

AH: Yes, without hesitation I would even use the word *colonization* to describe what took place in the former DDR. I think it was a takeover. It has to do with the fact that there is a philosophical establishment in the West which was not sensitive enough in the period of reunification towards creative potentialities in the DDR. I mean that there were people who were intellectuals, creative, quite original, but not established. They were forced to write in another kind of language, not that of Western professionalism. I think it would have been better not simply to introduce our professional standards into that new situation, but to open the standards to other forms of talent and other potentialities; or at least try to integrate those people into the new university and economic system. But that was never really tried. In that sense it was a colonization process on both the administrative and intellectual level. Philosophy in the DDR was simply assimilated. I can't really say whether the experience of '89 is a kind of motivational force which could lead to a new kind of philosophical originality. At the present time, I don't see anything like that happening. Maybe there are some new

Jörg Immendorff, *Café Deutschland 1*, 1978



discussions, once again, about how to respect the other, if you understand the former DDR as the other of our own society. And there are some quite interesting debates which try to apply the multiculturalism controversy to exactly that situation. But I don't see that it is really a kind of new horizon which has been opened up by that experience. It has to do with the fact that nobody experienced reunification as a kind of traumatization. It wasn't a traumatic experience. Maybe it will become a traumatic experience for those from the East who had no chance to survive as philosophers or as intellectuals after reunification.

And let me say something else about this whole idea of *Motivationsgeschichte*: I think it is very interesting to use that kind of concept. I think it is quite different from the self-understanding of philosophy in the analytical world and runs against all forms of professionalism. Henrich seems to be convinced that there must be extra motivation behind serious philosophy. I think that's true. At least it is true for the German tradition, where traumatic, or let's just say deep, experiences provide the motivation for the creative synthesis of which he speaks. The clearest case is German Idealism and Romanticism. It is clear that the experience of the French Revolution in Germany was the kind of experience that Henrich has in mind. And the same is true for the First World War, which was a traumatic experience for philosophers like Heidegger. So the question again is whether the fact that there was not something like a deep negative experience in the background and education of my own generation leads to a kind of philosophical emptiness. Although, as I have already said, I think that my generation had its own background motivations which were not negligible.

SC: Of course, the curious thing about trauma is that traumatic neurosis often has a delayed effect, it is always *nachträglich*. If you look at the last fifty years of German history, there was the trauma of the postwar generation, the generation born before the war, that studied in the postwar years and then, in Henrich's words, tried to restore the credibility of German philosophy. But what is interesting about postwar German history is that the trauma took a generation to begin to be worked through, so that it is the '68 generation that in a sense feels the trauma and is visited by the sins of the fathers, where the Holocaust only becomes a significant national issue from the 1960s and a dominating issue in the 1970s. So, in a sense, whether the *Wende* will become traumatic for the following generation is still an open question. But let us go on to our second topic.

German philosophy, Anglo-American hegemony and Franco-German (mis)understanding

SC: For me, it has been an odd but interesting experience being in Frankfurt over the past year. Although I have felt increasingly compelled in recent years by the first generation of the Frankfurt School, a lot of my work, as you know, has been concerned with contemporary French philosophy – in particular, the work of Derrida and Levinas, but more generally with post-Heideggerian phenomenology. This brings me to the question or the relation of philosophy in Germany to other traditions – in particular, the strongly contrasting relation to the Anglo-American and French contexts, where the complete acceptance of the former seems to be predicated upon steadfast refusal of the latter.

I think it would be genuinely surprising to many people concerned with philosophy in the English-speaking world how utterly much contemporary German philosophy is dominated by the Anglo-American agenda. In metaphysics, epistemology and philosophy of mind and language, it is difficult to see any substantial difference between what passes for philosophy in Germany and what a student might expect to find in a mainstream syllabus in Britain. The currency of philosophical exchange is the names of Davidson, Quine, Putnam, Bernard Williams, etc., and there is a considerable interest in post-analytic philosophers like Taylor and Rorty. And many of the younger German students I have met have little knowledge of the German tradition, with the exception of Kant and elements of German idealism. During my time at Frankfurt, no courses were offered on phenomenology, whether Husserlian or Heideggerian; not to mention the absence of Dilthey, the hermeneutic tradition, and obviously the complete absence of French philosophy, with the complex exception of Foucault. For me,

this was both surprising and slightly saddening. Thus, for the visitor from the English-speaking world, philosophy in Germany is characterized by a certain shock of the familiar. On the other hand, two things are on offer in Germany that a student could not expect to find in Britain: the philological tradition of textual study; and also, more importantly, the tradition of social philosophy, which is more or less absent in the UK. We might like to discuss this later.

However, this is not my point, for what is interesting is that there is a complete openness to everything that comes out of the English-speaking world, and to what Henrich calls an *Englischen gewonnene Argumentationskultur* (a culture of argumentation won from the English); whilst there is a complete blindness and antagonism to the French philosophical scene. Again, Henrich is revealing in this regard, for he makes the contrast between the need for 'solid argumentation' and 'evidence', and the French tendency, which he characterizes in terms of the identification of philosophy with literature and the domination of the masters of suspicion – Marx, Nietzsche and Freud.⁹ Of course, one can find many similar statements in Habermas, even in his most recent texts.¹⁰ Such statements are symptomatic, I believe. Do you think that the openness to Anglo-American philosophy has been achieved at the expense of a relative blindness to the French tradition? And how do you see this geo-philosophical picture? What does the French tradition represent for the postwar generation of German philosophers? To my mind, it seems to play the role of a memory of a German tradition no longer acceptable in Germany, a tradition allegedly compromised by fascism. In this sense, French philosophy is a sort of 'return of the repressed' for German philosophy. How do you see this complex set of issues?

AH: Let me start with the last point. I do not think it is totally fair to describe the role of post-structuralism or deconstructivism as being only a kind of repressed memory of the German tradition. That is simply not true, because it underestimates the strong impact that Heidegger still has on German philosophy. I think that what you say may be true for Frankfurt, and especially true for Habermas. But it is not a fair picture of the philosophical situation in Germany. You shouldn't forget that not only in Freiburg but in many places – Heidelberg and Tübingen, maybe in Munich or Berlin – the role of Heidegger is still quite dominant and is even growing today. One philosophical consequence of the situation after '89 was a kind of broad rehabilitation of Heidegger. So in many ways matters are the reverse of the way you claim. The fact that Habermas is still criticizing a certain Heideggerianism is a result of the growing influence of Heidegger in Germany. The whole vast enterprise of the publication of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* is an indication, an objective indication, of that fact.

I think the more significant fact today is the ever-growing influence of Anglo-Saxon philosophy in Germany. To explain that, I think it is necessary to remember that when we started studying philosophy (and now I am talking about members of my own generation), the German university was in most places, with very few exceptions – Frankfurt being one, Heidelberg and Berlin others – utterly dominated by the philological tradition. My own experience, when I started studying philosophy in Bonn, was that this was an extremely boring kind of philosophy: thousands of lines interpreting Kant again, or Hegel, or maybe Aristotle, or the whole grand tradition in a kind of endless repetition. This is a style of philosophy which is still quite present today and sometimes not really seen from outside because it is so boring. Factually speaking, I am sure that we have more literature on Hegel than any other philosophical culture in the world. But our literature on Hegel is, I would say, simply more boring than that produced in the United States today. We have a strong tradition of philological expertise and excellence, a style which finds its highest expression in Gadamer, because he is brilliant at producing philosophical arguments by reinterpreting classical texts. But normally what is going on is a kind of philological exegesis which leads, I would say, to no significant systematic results.

So that is the background you have to be aware of in order to understand why a lot of members of my own generation, and especially parts of the younger generation, are very attracted by the Anglo-Saxon style of argumentation. It at least produces a kind of philosophical atmosphere in which arguments count; in which you have to produce arguments; and in which

you can have fruitful discussions about where arguments lead. In a philological culture, there are no debates like that at all.

SC: So, you are saying that analytic philosophy in a German context has had an emancipatory effect.

AH: Yes, exactly. It emancipated us from extremely boring teachers, and is still emancipating us from them. Even if you look at our own department in Frankfurt, you can see how fruitful it can be to learn a little bit of the Anglo-Saxon tradition in order to get rid of these boring people who are repeating one sentence after the other without making any point. The consequence of this, and I think that you are right, is a certain and still growing underestimation of the French tradition, which I would not reduce (as Henrich does) to a kind of playfulness or reduction of philosophy to literature. This is simply an unfair description of what has happened in French philosophy in the last fifty years. It is an underestimation of the phenomenological tradition, which is still extremely lively, powerful and fruitful in France. I think it is true that this type of French philosophy is getting lost today in Germany.

The fact that there has been no fruitful dialogue with French philosophy during the last twenty years is more difficult to explain. I think to a certain degree it is a result of a very unfruitful period in German philosophy during the last ten or fifteen years, where Habermas produced a picture of French philosophy as being nothing other than a kind of playful literature. This seems to have had the consequence that in the end nobody really took it seriously, and Henrich is simply repeating what Habermas is saying. I simply think Henrich is no longer aware of what is going on in France. So I reckon that Habermas's intervention has had a very damaging effect and placed the Franco-German relation under the heading: irrationality versus rationality. I think this is a fruitless dualism. It means that we are now in a situation in which this kind of dialogue has been interrupted. Of course, there are exceptions; and it is interesting to see that in some analytical areas of German philosophy an interest in Sartre is growing again – for example, in the work of Peter Bieri. That is, Sartre is being understood and taken seriously as a philosopher of subjectivity. With respect to Henrich, this is interesting because it is his disciples, like Manfred Frank, who are taking Sartre seriously.

SC: Sartre is also an exception in Britain, where he is the so-called continental philosopher who has most often been taught on philosophy syllabuses, and whose concerns seem to have been closest to analytic philosophy. This has often struck me as a curious state of affairs which is premised on simply not reading Sartre's later work.

But I would like to pick up again on the question of social philosophy in a slightly roundabout way. Listening to what you said about the emancipatory function of analytic philosophy in Germany, I think we find ourselves in an oddly paradoxical cultural situation. For your generation of philosophers educated in Germany, the fact that the reading of analytic philosophy had an emancipatory effect contrasts strongly with the experience of that generation of British philosophers (like me) who rather awkwardly call themselves 'continental' or 'modern European', or whatever. In Britain, for good or ill, theories were imported from France and Germany in order to confront the perceived cultural irrelevance and apolitical neutrality or conservatism of the analytic tradition. So we find in Britain and Germany precisely opposing philosophical resources being employed for the same emancipatory goal, which is an odd situation. Perhaps the philosophical grass is always greener on the other side of the cultural fence. But what I would like to emphasize here, which is not properly understood in Germany, is that the interest in continental philosophy often goes together, with certain striking exceptions, with a broadly leftist concern for the social, cultural and political function of the philosopher. This is supported by the British cultural fantasy of the continental intellectual as that person who can address their culture, who speaks out of a public culture, and who speaks to a public culture, who is socially and politically engaged, etc. And this fantasy opposes another – namely, the image of English philosophy as being insulated from cultural and political concerns, hidden

away in the secluded beauty of Oxbridge colleges. I should emphasize that all of what I say in this connection is articulated at the level of cultural fantasy.

AH: Let me say something about social philosophy, because it is an intellectual field that allows philosophers to play the role you just referred to. I think this is one really specific element of the German tradition which to a great extent has to do with the Jewish influence on the German tradition. I would say it is a kind of Jewish-German heritage and it starts, I think, with German Idealism, especially in Hegel, but also in Fichte, if you think of how some of the latter's writings are concerned with a diagnosis of his times. This tradition stems from a Protestant movement, but then goes over to a secularized Jewish culture in Marx and from that time has been part of the philosophical heritage in Germany. If you take people like Georg Simmel or Martin Buber, or the early sociologists in Germany; if you take Benjamin and Adorno; then this is something that I would describe in a very broad sense as social philosophy. And there are even other influences which come together in this connection: some of Max Scheler's writings offer a diagnosis of the time we are living in. So this is a heritage which was quite powerful and which to a certain degree could survive, and is still an important element of German philosophy in those places that are not dominated by a kind of empty professionalism. In this connection, I would mention also Theunissen, who at a certain period was doing nothing that one would call social philosophy; obviously Habermas; but also a Catholic philosopher like Robert Spaemann, who I think is doing a kind of social philosophy, in so far as he is offering a kind of critical understanding of certain social pathologies in our present society. Although he would describe himself as a philosopher of language and morality, Ernst Tugendhat could be understood as a social philosopher in this sense. So this is a very important element of German philosophy and I would think it is one of the main tasks of the younger generations to keep this tradition alive. If Henrich is right, if the situation of my generation is really torn between empty professionalism and a kind of empty playfulness, then the tradition of social philosophy would die out, and that would be dreadful.

What is *critical* in contemporary Critical Theory?

SC: That brings us neatly to our third and final topic. For if there is a tradition where social philosophy is maintained, it is the intellectual tradition and school associated with the city in which we are having this conversation, namely Frankfurt. One has become accustomed to speak of three generations of Critical Theory: that of Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse as the first, and that of Habermas and Apel as the second. One also speaks, much more nebulously, of a third generation, the most prominent member of which would be yourself.

But there is an interesting philosophical question for me in how the Habermasian impulse of Critical Theory is to be continued, or not continued, supplemented or whatever. To my mind, there are two possible routes being taken both here in Frankfurt and elsewhere. One of these would see Critical Theory become part of mainstream political philosophy, what I would call a sort of 'left Rawlsianism' – a tendency that would seem to be exacerbated by Habermas's recent work on legal theory. The other route is to adopt the Habermasian discourse ethics framework as offering a powerful theory of justice, but to claim, as you do, that it overlooks the whole Hegelian dimension of the dialectical struggle for recognition, and in particular what you call the first level of recognition – namely, the question of the private sphere, of the development of the subject, questions of love, the family, or whatever. Before we go any further, despite the interpretative violence of what I have said, does this sound like a fair representation, in terms of these two routes?

AH: Yes, I think it is a fair description. But I would see more than you in the implications of these two routes. The first route, which you describe more or less as 'left Rawlsianism', to my mind does entail a definitive end to the tradition of Critical Theory. It no longer really represents the broader aims of that philosophical culture or school, because it would mean

that Critical Theory is introduced into mainstream political theory or political philosophy and would then give up its own identity. Maybe this is not a mistaken development. I do not want to say it is wrong. I only want to say that this route would lead to the end of the tradition of Critical Theory. But maybe that is a fruitful result; maybe that tradition is over. Maybe it is simply an artificial aim to try to continue the tradition of Critical Theory, to continue it in a world that has not only radically changed both socially and politically, but which has also been transformed philosophically. Maybe it was even Habermas's indirect and unstated intention to indicate in his later writings that this tradition can't be artificially kept alive any longer. We should therefore combine the best elements of this tradition with mainstream political philosophy and defend some stronger theory on this new terrain – what you would call 'left Rawlsianism'. So this is one possible development. My only point is that it would no longer make any sense to speak of this development in terms of Critical Theory.

The other route, which I would see myself as espousing, is to maintain and keep open some of the broader ambitions of Critical Theory. I would call that a philosophically informed social theory, which means that we are interested not only in describing or criticizing certain important injustices of our society, but also in certain pathologies of our society. And I would say that the main ambitions of the first generation of Critical Theory can be understood in that way, even the extreme interest in art which is common to Adorno, Benjamin, Marcuse and even Horkheimer. I take it that the link between art and social pathology is that the former can be seen as a kind of representational medium of the latter, or is a medium that is to some extent free of these pathologies. Art is a placeholder for social pathologies.

So I would say the only chance we have to keep the tradition of Critical Theory alive is to continue that kind of enterprise – namely, the social-philosophical enterprise of a kind of diagnosis of our present culture, the pathologies of that culture, of a certain capitalist culture. And that means a great deal; I mean it requires a lot of philosophical work. So I think your description is right, and yet the consequences of these two directions are more radical than you allow. The first route entails a dying out of the Critical Theory tradition; the second involves the ambition to keep it alive. I don't want to suggest that it is easy to keep that tradition alive, but I think it's the only chance we have if we want to do it.

SC: You have already begun to answer a related question that I wanted to pose, but let me specify this a little further. It has become something of a truism to say, as I have heard you say yourself, that Critical Theory moves between the poles of Kant and Hegel, recalling the famous *Kant oder Hegel* debates of the 1980s. Now, in terms of the two routes I delineated, one way of looking at what I call 'left Rawlsianism' is in terms of an increasingly Kantian development in Critical Theory, whereas the other route could easily be seen to represent a much more Hegelian tendency. So Critical Theory moves between the poles of Kant and Hegel. But the question that I want to come back to, which was suggested by Elliot Jurist, is the issue of what is *critical* in Critical Theory. If it moves between the poles of Kant and Hegel, then what role do the three great 'masters of suspicion' continue to play in the project of Critical Theory? Marx, Freud and Nietzsche: each of these thinkers, in distinct and nuanced ways, plays an organizing function in the first generation of Critical Theory, most obviously in Adorno. What role do the critiques of capital, of bourgeois morality and primacy of consciousness, continue to play in the project of Critical Theory?

AH: That, I think, has to do with how one describes these two possible routes that Critical Theory can take today. If it takes the Kantian route, then I think you would be right that the masters of suspicion would no longer play an important role, perhaps with the exception of Marx. Even the Habermas of contemporary legal theory is still very aware not so much of Marx as of a Marxist tradition of critical economy. If there is ever to be something like a 'left Rawlsianism', then it would have to be highly influenced by the insights of a Marxist critical economy. If I speak of the Hegelian route, my understanding of this tradition (which is not to say it is there in Hegel himself) would include those components you mentioned – namely, the

critical insights of the Nietzschean and the Freudian traditions. According to my own understanding of these matters, if you take a Hegelian route then you have a much more complex understanding of the subject – that is, a richer account of the motivating drives in a society. To adopt the picture of social pathologies means to include psychoanalytic components, and maybe even components of Nietzsche’s moral psychology. I am acutely aware of that. For example, if you speak of recognition you can’t be so naive as not to see the negative side of it, which Nietzsche was aware of when he spoke of resentment. I think you have to broaden out the moral psychology of Critical Theory, and you can do that only by incorporating Freudian and Nietzschean elements. Taking the Hegelian route seriously would sooner or later mean including the task of incorporating insights of that critical tradition. So I would say that it is only the consequence of the present situation that these elements are not really strongly enough represented.

But in describing the picture in the way you do, I think you underestimate the fact that Critical Theory is not only represented by Habermas and his disciples. Even here in Frankfurt there are other groups, other philosophers, who try to keep that critical tradition alive in a more powerful way. If you think of somebody like Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, who is responsible for the collected edition of Horkheimer’s work, then I think he is now doing serious and interesting work on Nietzsche’s moral psychology and keeping that tradition alive within Critical Theory.¹¹ So my hope would be that in taking a Hegelian route, which for me does not mean reducing Critical Theory to the enterprise of political philosophy defined by liberal principles of justice, Critical Theory would include elements of tradition you mentioned and keep alive the memory of Freud and Nietzsche.

SC: But do you think the language of pathology is sufficient to capture what you are after? I suppose I have a rather naive problem with the language of social pathologies in so far as pathology would seem to imply a dysfunctional behaviour. What I mean is that the language of pathologies always seems to presuppose some normative conception of how these pathologies might be overcome, or normalized – that is, that we could correct the social dysfunctioning and return to a fully integrated *Lebenswelt*.

AH: I guess I think you can’t do it without the language of pathologies. And even in Adorno and Horkheimer, and especially Marcuse, although they would never talk of normal life or normal society, the Critical Theory of society presupposes some vision of a society that would exclude the sorts of damage they describe. So this kind of normative underpinning of an enterprise like the critique of social pathologies is always there. I am fully aware of the difficulties of the notion of pathologies, especially its roots in the quite complicated history of which Foucault was most acutely aware: the deeply ambivalent history of normalization. In this sense, pathology was mainly a conceptual means for creating or excluding subjects. On the other hand, I simply don’t have a better word for describing what Nietzsche was doing when he described nihilism not only as a fruitful starting point for one’s own enterprise, but also as the disastrous situation of European culture. Or what Freud was doing in his more sociological writings in describing the situation of this present culture. I think one way to approach this would be to describe such analyses as a diagnosis of social pathologies. Maybe there are better words, but I would say that the task remains the same even if you find a better word to describe it.

SC: Let us go to the last set of questions. If we (according to you) maintain the Hegelian impulse in Critical Theory – that is (according to me), maintain the critical impulse in Critical Theory – then the question this raises has to do with the nature of the philosophical task. I would, first, want to assume against Rorty that there is a task for philosophy, and that this task cannot be reduced to the business of literary criticism and journalism (not that these are such bad things). What I mean is that critical impulse of Critical Theory – and not just Critical Theory, but also in my view phenomenology and deconstruction – was always linked, and rightly to my mind, to the emancipatory function of philosophy. Critique and utopia were

two ends of the same piece of string, in the sense that the critical impulse is maintained in relationship to a utopian, transformative, emancipatory hope for thinking and for the world.

Now the first issue would be whether you agree with that, whether there is a philosophical task and how the philosophical task of critique is linked to the question of emancipation and the utopian element in Critical Theory. And the second question, if one accepts that, is how the question of emancipation changes the philosophical task. What I mean by this is that it seems to me that one of the things that the Frankfurt tradition inherits from Marx is a certain conception of the poverty of philosophy. That is, if philosophy is going to be in the business of reflecting upon what prevents and enables human emancipation, then it has to be linked – essentially – to *non-philosophy*, whether we conceive that as sociology, aesthetics, psychoanalysis or whatever. How do you see this set of issues?

AH: That is a most complicated question.

SC: That's for sure, which is why I asked it. Let me restate it more directly and slightly nostalgically: how do you understand the relation between philosophy and *praxis*?

AH: I would like to answer in two steps. As a first step, I would simply like to say that even the more conventional tasks of philosophy – for example, conceptual clarification of structures of our practical behaviour – are kinds of emancipation. I think it would simply be nonsense to say that philosophy in this sense is not internally linked to a kind of human emancipation, if you understand emancipation as a process in which we gain autonomy by clarifying our own as yet unknown dependencies and the elements of our situation. In that respect, this is a kind of Habermasian answer: namely, that all philosophy represents a kind of emancipatory interest of the human species.

But I think you have in mind a more restricted notion of emancipation, namely social emancipation, and in that respect I also strongly believe, against Rorty, that there is a task for philosophy today because there is no other place, and there is no other theoretical or intellectual medium which allows us, with a certain intention of universality, to reflect on systematic deficiencies of our own culture, our own society. I think it is wrong to say, as Rorty does, that this is only a task for literature. It is clear that you can understand literature in such a way, as a kind of medium for violations, deficiencies and ruptures of our life.

SC: For example, if we think of Rorty's rather good discussion of George Orwell.¹²

AH: Right. You could even say all literature is of that kind. It reflects or imagines or demonstrates, by means of aesthetic mediation, those deficiencies, ruptures or traumas of everyday life. But by definition that kind of literature is extremely subjective, and is meant to be so. It is only fruitful as long as it represents an extremely radicalized subjective perspective on those deficiencies. The question is: are there places, are there mediums, are there intellectual spaces, in which we together as members of a society have the chance to find justifiable articulations of those deficiencies? And I must say that the social sciences, which maybe in the beginning played more or less that role, can no longer do so because of an excessive professionalization. So I think this task goes over to philosophy. I think there has been a kind of change in the intellectual division of labour in the last hundred years. If you look at the situation in which sociology started, if you look to the first generation of famous sociologists – Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, Georg Simmel – I would say that they started as social philosophers. There was no really clear differentiation between philosophy and sociology in their work. They started as theorists interested in a diagnosis of certain deficiencies, pathologies or crises of our own culture. The professionalization of sociology has led it into other directions – piecemeal work of a certain kind, very fruitful sometimes, less fruitful sometimes. But it no longer represents the kind of conceptual space in which you can articulate those common and intersubjectively articulated crises or deficiencies. So I think this role reverts to philosophy, which is where it started from originally.

It's an interesting historical process which you can observe from, let's say, Rousseau until today. Rousseau was a kind of sociologist – his critique of culture is the first moment of sociology – but he understood himself as a philosopher. Then you have a long period of philosophy doing exactly that job. I mean that Hegel did that job, but not only Hegel; a lot of his generation played that role, and we have John Stuart Mill in your own tradition. Then that role goes over to sociology and was kept alive there for fifty years or so. But since the Second World War, the professionalization of sociology has been so radical that now I think it is a very necessary task of philosophy to resume that role. As I said, the role is one of opening up a conceptual space in which we together can debate certain deficiencies of our own life-world and culture with at least the hope for universality.

SC: And where would that lead? *Wozu*, as they say over here?

AH: To the opposite of what Rorty wants. That this task can't go over to literature. That there is a necessary task for philosophy.

SC: So in that sense, if Rorty argues for the subordination of philosophy to democracy, then you, like me, would want to make the opposite case.

AH: I would argue for a fruitful dialogue between a philosophy of the kind I have discussed and a democratic culture, a democratic public. It would mean to say that we are the specialists for the deficiencies of society – that we are, in a sense, the doctors of society. If we want to be in dialogue with the public, then we cannot only be specialists. I think the whole idea of subordination is wrong, whether it is a subordination of one type or the other.

SC: So philosophy is an essential moment of democratic reflection.

AH: Exactly. It's a wonderful last word.

Conversation recorded in Frankfurt am Main, 7 January 1998

Notes

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1. Dieter Henrich, *Merkur*, vol. 49, 1995, pp. 1055–63.
2. Habermas, *Philosophisch-politische Profile*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1981, pp. 39–64.
3. Henrich, p. 1060.
4. Michael Theunissen, *The Other*, trans. C. Macann, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1984.
5. See Karl-Otto Apel, 'Zurueck zur Normalitaet? Oder Koennten wir aus der nationalen Katastrophe etwas Besonderes gelernt haben', in *Diskurs und Verantwortung*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1988, pp. 370–474.
6. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1997.
7. Andreas Wildt, *Autonomie und Anerkennung: Hegels Moralkritik im Lichte seiner Fichte-Rezeption*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart, 1982.
8. *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. M. Eldred, Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis, 1987. Sloterdijk's early essay on Foucault is 'Michel Foucaults strukturelle Theorie der Geschichte', *Philosophisches Jahrbuch*, vol. 79, 1972, pp. 161 ff.
9. Henrich, p. 1059.
10. See Habermas's almost self-parodic characterization of Heidegger and postmodernism as part of a critique of the reflexive modernization hypothesis in Beck and Giddens in his 1997 lecture, 'Jenseits des Nationalstaats? Bemerkungen zu Folgeproblem der wirtschaftlichen Globalisierung' (unpublished typescript).
11. In this regard, see Schmid Noerr's article on Horkheimer in *A Companion to Continental Philosophy*, edited by S. Critchley and W. Schroeder, Blackwell, Oxford and Cambridge MA, 1998, pp. 362–9.
12. *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 169–88.