

**WITH WHAT RIGHT IS KANT'S
CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON
CALLED A THEORY OF
EXPERIENCE? INAUGURAL-
DISSERTATION**

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With what right is Kant's Critique of pure reason called a theory of experience? Inaugural-dissertation by John Henry Bell

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JOHN HENRY BELL

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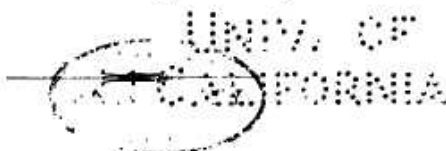
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Ever since the first appearance of Cohen's „Kant's Theorie der Erfahrung“, the subject of this paper might very properly have received formal treatment. As a matter of fact, the substance of what belongs in the discussion of the question has found its way to a greater or less extent into recent Kantian literature, especially that in which the problem of the Critique as such receives distinct consideration. That which has given rise to the discussion of the question in the present instance is the article of E. Adickes in the „Kant Studien“ (Bd. I. 1897): „Die bewegenden Kräfte in Kants philosophischer Entwicklung und die beiden Pole seines Systems.“ In this article, S. 47 ff., Adickes combats the interpretation of Cohen, Caird and Vaihinger, in particular, and maintains the view which, while conceding that the problem of experience as such occupies an important place in the Critique, is far from recognizing that the Critique itself can be legitimately regarded as a theory of experience.

The aim of this paper will therefore be, first (I), to present an review of the works of Cohen, Caird and Vaihinger, so far as the subject under consideration is concerned; second (II), to do the same as regards the attitude of Adickes toward the works just mentioned; and third (III), to draw a few independent conclusions from the general controversy. We proceed at once to the review of Cohen, where the chief interest will be to observe how he

comes to assume the position from which the Critique presents itself to him in the form of a „Theorie der Erfahrung.“

I.

1. „Kant's Theorie der Erfahrung“, Hermann Cohen. I. Aufl., Berlin 1871 (S. 270); II. Aufl., Berlin 1885 (S. 610). We shall confine ourselves to the second edition of this work, for the large increase of matter, as will be seen, is due to the fact that Cohen seeks, (1) to lay more broadly the foundation of his interpretation and (2) to develop a greater systematic accuracy, and is not due to any radical alteration in the author's grasp of the Critique. In the preface to the second edition, after stating how he had endeavored to relate himself as objectively as possible to the first edition of his work in order thus to be made the better able in a second edition to improve it both systematically and historically, Cohen proceeds: „Diese Verbesserung musste in systematischer und in historischer Hinsicht angestrebt werden, und diese beiden Rücksichten mussten verbunden wirken, wie die Vorrede zur ersten Auflage solches gefordert hat. Die systematische Verbesserung musste im Gebiet der Erfahrungslehre versucht, zugleich aber auch nach den Grenzen der Ethik gerichtet werden. Es war demgemäss die Ideenlehre in die Erfahrungslehre aufzunehmen, etc.“ The term „Erfahrungslehre“ stands for the Transcendental Aesthetic and Analytic, the term „Ideenlehre,“ for the Transcendental Dialectic, although it is to be observed that it was the author's purpose the latter in the former „aufzunehmen,“ so that, methodically considered, they are related as the two sides or phases of the one Theorie der Erfahrung. Even this statement hardly represents the true relation of the parts. The preponderating interest centers in the Erfahrungslehre which occupies at least four fifths of the book. (Chaps. I—XII). The last chapter (XVI) is a general characterization under six hea-

ings of the method and spirit of the Kantian system throughout, while the intervening three chapters (XIII—XV) cover the Ideenlehre.

The „Verbesserung in historischer Hinsicht“ which Cohen sought after in his second edition is incorporated in the Introduction to which we now turn our attention.

Cohen maintains that in order to comprehend Kant one must know both the material and the historical data which lie at the basis of the Kantian system. The material data „lassen sich in dem Einen Namen Newton zusammenfassen und bestimmen,“ and with special reference to Newton's scientific method rather than to his results. The historical data are of two classes, first, that relation to predecessors and contemporaries of which Kant was not only conscious but which he himself in the case of the Englishmen and especially of Hume exaggerated; second, that real relation of which Kant was not so conscious, that order of historical succession in which he truly belongs, and is alone determined by the character and spirit of his work. From this latter standpoint, Kant belongs in the circle of Plato, Descartes, Galileo, Newton and Leibniz by reason of that which distinguishes them from Aristotle in ancient philosophy, and the English school of Locke in the modern period. The characteristic feature of the first named is their interest in the worth, the certainty, the validity of knowledge. Plato was the founder of „Erkenntniskritik.“ In that his interest lay in knowledge as to the measure of its validity of which mathematics represented the highest degree, and in that he distinguished between reason and sensibility not on the basis of an original distinction of faculties but on the basis of their respective contributions to the quality and worth of knowledge, is he closely related to Kant. Plato's successors in the modern period are they who recognize the close relation between philosophy and mathematics and mathematical physics, they who recognized the problem of philosophy to be the deter-

mination of the principles of the certainty and validity of scientific truth. To a very special degree Galileo and Newton were the „Erzeuger der Wissenschaft“ while Descartes and Leibniz surpassed them in its philosophical relation and determination. Descartes' use of the term „innate“ does not indicate a psychological but an epistemological interest. It is for him the criterion of certainty. To be sure this is inadmissible and involves him in confusion and contradiction, but this does not alter the fact of the main tendency of his thought. Leibniz is a kindred spirit. As Descartes began with mathematics so also Leibniz. As Descartes was the „Erfinder der analytischen Geometrie,“ so was Leibniz der Erfinder der Infinitesimalrechnung. Leibniz however took umbrage both at Descartes' conception of substance, and at his conception of thinking, and though he grasped both ideas more sharply and keenly than Descartes yet in the development of his Monadology he discarded the epistemological for a dogmatical interest, and thus laid himself open to Kant's later criticism. The point to be observed and emphasized in his Monadology, however, is that he bases matter upon thought and grounds therein the principle of its determination and so of its production. His great blunder, however, was his reduction of mathematics to logic as the basis of all truth. Nevertheless, in that he regarded the problem of philosophy to be the criticism and proof of science he stands as a true as he is the immediate predecessor of Kant.

As to the other list who do not represent the true spirit of the Kantian undertaking, Cohen remarks how Aristotle's interest was chiefly psychological. He laid stress upon sense-perception and experience, and so gave rise to the idealistic-sensationistic controversy. His service to the progress of thought consists in the fact that he emphasized the importance of the inquiry concerning the origin of the various stages or degrees of knowledge in psychical life. His achievement in this regard may be

characterized as biological, but, in that he estimated lightly mathematics and failed to recognize the connection between it and philosophy therefore is it clear that he „die Philosophie von der rechten Bahn abgelenkt hat.“ Aristotle's successors in the modern period are the „Sensualisten“ Locke and Hume who had no sense for science as such, whose service is to be regarded rather as a protest against the disregard of sensation on the part of the „Intellektualisten“ in the knowledge of nature. Locke's psychological analysis of consciousness is important although his distinction between Sensation and Reflection is not clearly or consistently carried through, and his use of the term experience exhibits the superficiality of the entire system. Hume appears to have taken up Leibniz's distinction of *vérités de fait* and *vérités de raison*, modified „truth“ into „object of thought“, and in so far at least identified „matter-of-fact“ with „truth“, as to deny any necessary connection in thought. Thus the principle of causality is reduced to a product of experience or indeed of custom. Hume appealed to experience because the intellectuallists onesidedly held the formal, logical principle of sufficient reason as adequate for the explanation of nature. In his opposition to them Hume went to the opposite extreme and reduced all ideas even that of causality to sense-impression. The following utterance of Cohen with which he closes his historical sketch is important as touching the use of the term experience before Kant. „Enthält nun schon in Humes Analyse die in derjenigen Lockes der Ausdruck der Erfahrung eine bestechende Zweideutigkeit für die Erklärung des Ursprungs der Begriffe, so ist für die Geltung derselben, für den Wert ihres Inhaltes, das Wort Erfahrung ein vollständiges Räthsel. Newton will Erfahrung lehren; bedarf aber zu derselben der Speculation. Leibniz will die Thatsachen schlechterdings auf Vernunft-Wahrheiten gründen; verallgemeinert dieselben aber auf logische Gesetzmässigkeiten, unter denen jene alles ihres speziellen Inhalts und Characters

endledigt werden. Und Hume endlich reißt die Kluft auf zwischen den Relationen unter unsern Ideen und den Thatsachen; glaubt sie aber verengern und schliessen zu können durch Reduction der Ideen auf Impressionen, als welche uns auch die Thatsachen liefern. Also ist auch die Causalität eine Impression oder aber ein unklarer Begriff bei dem sich nichts vorstellen lasse. Bei dieser Aufklärung jedoch löst sich der Newtonische Begriff der Kraft in populäre Muskel-Empfindung auf; wie die Spekulation, auf welcher Newtons Erfahrung mitberuht, in Impressionen untergehen muss.“ S. 54.

The material data upon which Kant built is the fact of the Newtonian science. Unlike his predecessors Kant proceeds to distinguish and specify the conception of science and to limit it to knowledge in the sense of mathematics and mathematical physics. He distinguishes first theoretical and practical knowledge, but that is not sufficient. „So einfach liegt die Frage der Wissenschaft nicht.“ The conception of theoretical knowledge must be at least so far enlarged as to cover the various branches of the „beschreibende Naturwissenschaften“ which also perform their part in constituting nature. Where now is there a term to cover this enlarged sphere? „Da bot sich ihm nun zwar nicht ein scharfer Begriff, aber ein populärer Name dar, den die Alten schon philosophisch geprägt hatten, den die Neueren, und zumal die Zeitgenossen zu einem Alles erklärenden Schlagwort machen. Erfahrung ist der vielversprechende Name, der sowohl die Methode wie das Objekt bezeichnet, und in beiderlei Sinn vorzugsweise auf die Naturgeschichte passt, aber doch selbst von Newton und seinen Anhängern für die Mechanik angerufen wird. So fasst Kant das Problem der Philosophie zunächst bei diesem Namen, indem er alle theoretischen Beziehungen der philosophischen Frage auf die Legitimation der Erfahrung richtet.“ S. 58, 59. Kant's next step after the introduction of this general term was its distinct determination in the specific