

**Nicolas de Warren and Andrea Staiti, eds.** *New Approaches to Neo-Kantianism*. Cambridge University Press 2015. 336 pp. \$102.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781107032576).

Some narratives are just too entrenched to let go, and that seems to be the case with Neo-Kantianism. The typical narrative told about Neo-Kantianism is that it sprung up as a reaction towards the dominance of German Idealism that took over the German philosophical world after the arrival of Kantian philosophy. Disheartened by German Idealism's apparent rejection of the natural world and confronted by science's supposedly ever more successful attempts to understand that natural world, some thinkers claimed it was necessary to go 'back to Kant' as a way to reconcile philosophy with the rapid rise of science. Thusly began Neo-Kantianism's hold on German academia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, this prominence did not last.

Even though how the beginning and ending of Neo-Kantianism occurred is still up in the air, what has been generally agreed upon by mainstream philosophical opinion, at the very least tacitly, is the 'insignificance' of Neo-Kantianism (4). This insignificance comes in two forms. The first is that Neo-Kantianism as a philosophical movement has been largely ignored in the typical telling of the historical development of western philosophy (Sebastian Luft, *The Neo-Kantian Reader*, Routledge, 2015). The second is that the themes and philosophical problems the Neo-Kantians were concerned with are irrelevant to us as thinkers because philosophy has somehow moved on from them (4).

This is the background by which *New Approaches to Neo-Kantianism* takes a stand to dispute the supposed insignificance of Neo-Kantianism. De Warren and Staiti have gathered together 14 articles by leading scholars of Neo-Kantianism which have the general theme, implicitly or explicitly, of trying to argue that a more serious consideration of the work that Neo-Kantians have produced needs to take place. The book is divided into three sections: Neo-Kantianism and Philosophy, Ethics and Culture, and The Theory of Knowledge. Neo-Kantianism and Philosophy deals with Neo-Kantianism's take on the limits and scope of philosophical inquiry (Ch.1), the relationship between philosophy and history (Ch.2), the connection to and influence of Neo-Kantianism on analytic philosophy (Ch.3), and Neo-Kantianism's convergence and divergence with Husserlian phenomenology (Ch.4). Ethics and Culture provides a critical examination of Neo-Kantianism's insistence that philosophy should be understood as a philosophy of culture and that ethics play a greater role in the whole of philosophy than just being a subsection of it (Ch.5-6). Chapters 7-10 detail Neo-Kantianism's contributions to contemporary discussions on philosophy of law, science, art, and religion. In The Theory of Knowledge, the principles and aims of the Marburg School, Paul Natorp's take on psychology, the importance of Cassirer's philosophy of science in the context of his philosophy of culture, and Kantian and Neo-Kantian contributions on mathematics and logic are given an elucidation (Ch.11-14).

In the rest of this review, for the sake of brevity and the impossibility of covering all 14 chapters, I will focus on only two chapters that I found to be rather insightful. I highlight these subsequent articles because they are exceptional counterarguments against the two aforementioned charges of insignificance.

Staiti's chapter, 'The Neo-Kantians on the meaning and status of philosophy,' attempts to show how Neo-Kantians conceived of the limitations, domain, and focus that are proper to philosophical inquiry. Staiti begins by showing how contemporary philosophers like McNaughton and Kitcher, who can be grouped in the predominant analytic tradition of philosophy, lament the tendency of analytic philosophy to preoccupy itself with 'solving crossword puzzles,' or seemingly

trivial problems with solutions that in no way form a cohesive picture that helps us understand ‘our place in the world’ (21). Staiti notices how these two thinkers point out how recent philosophy attempts to divvy up the world into separate fields of inquiry without considering the wholeness of that world. The Neo-Kantian conception of philosophy is thus offered as a way to come to understand that wholeness of the world juxtaposed with another kind of inquiry, namely science that tries to understand the world only through segments and specialization. The key presupposition here is that the predominant philosophical climate of today and science share this partitioning attitude.

Staiti tells us that Neo-Kantianism, through the words of Beneke, conceives philosophy as having ‘no *single* object; its object is all or nothing, it is the totality, the whole in its highest unity’ (24). How exactly philosophy is to consider the wholeness of the world is contested among Neo-Kantians, but what prevails is that philosophy should be focused on that wholeness. Beneke considers philosophy to be the ‘universal science’ that oversees and ‘regulates’ all the other sciences that are preoccupied with their own segment of the world (24). This regulation of science is argued to be necessary because science is understood as having its own domain, but it also has the tendency to shift its focus from what is proper to science and tries to apply its principles and methods to the rest of the world (24). Similarly, Rickert warns us of the risk that the wholeness of the world endures if we allow one certain perspective or presupposition to dominate how we understand that whole. Over and against the worldview and historical philosophies of Dilthey and Simmel, Rickert claims that philosophy should not hold itself hostage to one perspective or personality, but give itself the freedom to explore the wholeness of the world intellectually by overcoming ‘the daily concerns and chores of our existence’ (31). He specifically attacks the notion that the world is comprised solely of the physical matter that science tends to concern itself with. If this assumption is accepted, it cuts off from the world objects that have their own kind of existence, namely values which are non-empirical entities that the prevalent scientific perspective ignores and thus cannot give us an accurate representation of the wholeness of the world in the way that philosophy can (33-4). Staiti concludes with the claim that the linguistic turn in philosophy has caused exactly what Rickert warned us against, presupposing that philosophy should only consider ‘linguistic meaning-configurations,’ while excluding other possible meaning-configurations such as values (37). Staiti successfully shows why it is that many analytic philosophers feel stifled when it comes to philosophical investigation: they simply have lost the forest for the trees. While it may be the case that the typical narrative of western philosophy ignores the fruits of Neo-Kantianism, philosophy can no longer afford to ignore them if it wishes to find a way out of its current splintered state.

Gordon’s chapter on ‘Religion since Kant’ shows how Kant’s principle of rational precedence in relation to religious revelation has been interpreted in two distinct manners. The first is that the relation is internal, meaning the principle of rational precedence is that which allows the ‘religion of reason’ to break away from where it is typically found—a ‘historically revealed religion’—when, for example, the historically revealed religion demands the faithful to commit some immoral action (204). The second interpretation is that the relation is external, which means that reason itself can decide whether it is necessary to keep revealed religion a viable way for people to stay moral. Gordon argues that while the external relation is heavily represented in the history of philosophy by such figures such as Rawls and Habermas, the internal relation has been underrepresented (207). Gordon points toward Cohen, one of the most consequential figures of Neo-Kantianism and the Marburg school, as a representative of the internal relation interpretation. Cohen argues that compassion and suffering do not develop purely from an ethical conception of humanity, but from the religious conception of a person as an individual. Ethics would lack that all too important characteristic of charitability that tries to end the suffering of a fellow human being if moral reasoning were not developed and maintained through revealed religion (209). This is an effective article because it

shows Neo-Kantianism providing an underrepresented or not as familiar take on Kant that can enter a conversation with more popular philosophers such as Rawls and Habermas. The problems that Neo-Kantians dealt with are very much still our own.

If the goal of *New Approaches to New-Kantianism* was to provide an accessible way for readers who are not that familiar with Neo-Kantianism, but are familiar with other areas of philosophy and are curious to see what Neo-Kantianism says about a given topic, then it suffices. However, I argue that *New Approaches to New-Kantianism* goes beyond that and accomplishes, at the very least, raising doubts about the narrative of the irrelevancy of Neo-Kantianism, if not actually moving towards the dissolution of that narrative.

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