Nicolas de Warren. *German Philosophy and the First World War*. Cambridge University Press 2023. 382 pp. $42.00 USD (Hardcover 9781108423496); $32.99 USD (Paperback 9781108437615).

As Hegel had stated in *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, philosophy is its own time apprehended in thought, thus indicating to philosophers the necessity to compress, on a conceptual level, the flow of historical events. No philosopher, worthy of the name, can avoid thinking about his own historical time, especially when certain events achieve an epochal significance. World War I undoubtedly represented an epochal phenomenon in human history, and there was no philosopher who, during World War I, did not confront himself with the consequences that the war had generated and that it might later generate at its end. The recent volume of Nicolas de Warren, *German Philosophy and the First World War*, discusses the way the leading German thinkers dealt with the event of the World War I. Of course, a comprehensive and more general analysis of the relationship between philosophy and World War I would have proved interesting, given that de Warren's volume is limited to German philosophy, but this would have required not one volume but many more. This ponderous work by de Warren, very stimulating from the historical and theoretical point of view and well-articulated regarding the exposition of the various philosophers examined, has the merit of analyzing the relationship between German philosophy and World War I by posing legitimate questions that serve as a guide for his analyses: "'What has philosophy go to do with the war? And 'What did the war do to philosophy?'" (2). The interesting aspect of de Warren's volume is that he also conceives the phenomenon of World War I as a philosophical "event," which is why he discusses in detail the main German philosophical figures of World War I. In fact, the volume is structured as follows: Introduction: "What's the Seminar Got to Do with the War?" (1-11), Chapter I: The Genius of War, the Genius of Peace: Max Scheler's Demons (12-46), Chapter II: *Deutschtum und Judentum*: Hermann Cohen in the Time of the Nations (47-82), Chapter III: I and Thou: Martin Buber and Dialogical Testament (83-114), Chapter IV: More than Life: Georg Simmel's Philosophical Testament (115-152), Chapter V: The Apocalipse of Hope: Ernst Bloch's Phenomenology of Utopic Spirit (153-185), Chapter VI: The Road to Damascus in the Age of Capitalism: György Lukács and *History and Class Consciousness* (186-225), Chapter VII: From Death into Life: Franz Rosenzweig's Redemptions (226-271), Chapter VIII: "A Journey around the World": Ernst Cassirer, Freedom in Ways of Worldmaking (272-311), Chapter IX: Martin Heidegger and the Titanic Struggle over Being (312-366), Chapter X: The Tragedy of the

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Person: Edmund Husserl at War (367-400). The volume ends with a bibliography (401-419) and an index (420-426).

In the first chapter, de Warren shows how Max Scheler, one of Germany's leading philosophers at the time, was also a prominent supporter of German war intervention. Scheler believed that war – and Germany's eventual victory – would enable the German people to overcome the isolation of modern society and thus reconstitute the lost unity of the people. This emerges from a text of Scheler's, *Der Genius der Kriege und der Deutsche Krieg*, where war represented for him "an original awakening of the German nation, as well, importantly, an exemplification of his own developing ethical thinking" (15). In fact, it was during the Great War that Scheler had the chance to develop a critique of capitalist society as an expression of a materialism far removed from any form of spirituality, although Scheler already criticized the materialist mentality of capitalism coming from Anglo-Saxon countries before the outbreak of World War I. But from his initial enthusiasm for German war intervention, it was not long before that Scheler changed his opinion about the obscenities and devastations of the War. In fact, as early as 1917 for Scheler, war no longer represents merely a necessary and fruitful event, but as the consequence of a kind of collective sin of European peoples. In other words, there is a shift from the genius of war to the genius of peace. In fact, as de Warren writes in the final pages of the first chapter: "Unlike his view of peace as a negative idea and war as a positive value in *Der Genius*, Scheler turns to consider the idea of perpetual peace as the positive value in contrast to the negative value of war" (45).

Another fundamental issue concerning Germany during the period of World War I is the delicate relationship between Jews and Germans. This aspect is addressed by de Warren in the second chapter of his work, in which he analyzes the important figure of a Jewish thinker like Hermann Cohen, one of the founders of the Neo-Kantian Marburg School along with Paul Natorp. For Cohen, *Deutschtum* and *Judentum* find themselves united by the same spiritual destiny, to the point of making Germany the true home of Judaism. For these reasons, Cohen sees the war as "a historical opportunity to realize in thought and deed the 'ethical spirit of our people'. […] Cohen considers the hatred against Germany culture peddled by Allied propaganda to be analogous to hatred against Jews" (54). Compared to Hermann Cohen, quite different is the position of Martin Buber, who was more inclined not so much to remark the affinity between Germanism and Judaism, but to favor a kind of Zionism strongly opposed by Hermann Cohen. It was during the war years that Buber was able to develop the fundamental thinking behind the work *I and Thou*,

although, as de Warren writes, "*I and Thou* is not a book 'about' a theory or a doctrine of dialogical thinking; rather, it bespeaks dialogical thinking in a text woven from poetical images, aphoristic, pronouncements, bursts or rhapsodic prose, moments of sober analysis, and sprightly neologisms" (89).

Another central figure during the war years is that of the philosopher Georg Simmel, whom we can include among those who adhered to the climate of enthusiastic acceptance of World War I in which the entire German academic elite was involved. Simmel, like many other philosophers of his time, saw in the World War I, a positive shock and the possibility of change, as Simmel had occasion to point out in a 1914 public lecture entitled *Deutschlands innere Wandlung*. As de Warren writes in this regard, "in this war, Germany must become radically other, and even if no positive image can yet be formed for the Germany to come, Simmel assures his audience that it shall not be a restoration of 'old Germany', but the fulfillment of 1871 on an 'entirely new basis'" (121). Of course, Simmel quickly realized that the war would lead to the suicide of Europe, but nevertheless – just like Max Weber – he did not cease to support Germany and wish for its victory. After World War I, Simmel began to inquire about general issues, such as to the factor "culture." In this context, a set of forms of meaning such as art, ethical values, institutions, etc.; however, while these forms previously appeared to be connected by a transcendent idea, such as God in the case of medieval Christianity, now modern culture appears fragmented. An emblematic expression of this situation is America itself. For such reasons, writes de Warren, "Even without the war, Simmel acknowledges that the future of Europe will be American, which, as with Max Weber, represented the epitome of the modern disenchantment of the world. Europe, and not just Germany, would ultimately be the loser of the war" (125).

In the case of Ernst Bloch, the situation is quite different, in fact there is no initial enthusiasm for the war and its potential to awaken the spirit of the Germans. As is well known, Bloch, with the help of Max Weber, escaped to neutral Switzerland in 1915, where he was able to meditate on the misfortunes of war, which Bloch interprets in terms of inner impoverishment, especially in the important 1918 work, *The Spirit of Utopia*. Bloch's position on war is well illustrated by the following passage from de Warren, who writes that "what distinguishes Bloch's critique is its emphasis on the foreclosure of the future as the consequence of war's aftermath. Despite a frightful cost in lives, collective stupidity, and the hypocrisy of European values, the war did not provoke a fundamental transformation of human existence *for the better*" (154). Similarly to Bloch, György

Lukács can also be placed within that group of thinkers who – unlike Simmel or Weber – expressed no enthusiasm for the First World War. And indeed, Lukács saw the war as the most genuine outcome of capitalism and imperialism, including German imperialism. After all, in his writing *The German Intellectuals and the War*, Lukács "critiques the war-time seduction of German intellectuals, for whom the war arrived like a 'gust of fresh air' and escape from 'the intolerable situation' of modern life" (192).

Pretty unusual, on the other hand, is the case of Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig's reflection on the war, in which he actively participated as petty officer. In his major work, the ponderous *The Star of Redemption* published in 1921, Rosenzweig questions the metaphysical nature of the Jewish people. As de Warren writes, Rosenzweig's *opus magnum* "is neither 'a Jewish book', nor a 'philosophy of religion', nor a philosophical work in any conventional sense. It develops a systematic philosophy […] where the meaning of philosophy becomes recast into a metaphysical thinking of the interactive relations between God, the world, and the human existence, without the reduction of each other, nor isolation of one from another" (229). From this point of view, the distinction, or contrast, between Christianity and Judaism in Rosenzweig's thought proves to be of central importance. In fact, if Christianity, for Rosenzweig, "seeks to master time and the world through the immanentization of eternity" (266), on the other side, the Jewish people "exist 'trans-historically', given their orientation toward a redemption of creation in eternity, lived from the standpoint of present" (267).

There is no doubt that many Germans conceived the First World War as an opportunity for the defense of German culture. In contrast, the philosopher of symbolic forms Ernst Cassirer, an eminent neo-Kantian who formed himself at the Marburg School founded by Cohen and Natorp, was among the few who showed no enthusiasm for Germany's intervention in the war. It was this circumstance that contributed to the circulation of the image of Cassirer as a thinker disinterested in purely political issues. This prejudice turns out to be unfounded for several reasons: first, Cassirer was deeply shaken by the War and followed its developments with great attention, and second, during World War I he had the opportunity to write several essays and volumes with which Cassirer claimed a liberal, republican, and cosmopolitan conception, which he never abandoned until his death (April 13, 1945). After all, in an important work such as *Freiheit und Form* of 1916 Cassirer "grasped that what hung in the balance was whether the German spirit would collapse into pathological nationalism or elevate itself to cosmopolitan significance" (276).

Diametrically opposed to Cassirer's is the question of the relationship between philosophy and politics in Heidegger and the impact that World War I had on the author of *Sein und Zeit* (1927). Heideggerian references to World War I are rare indeed, if we consider the gigantic number of pages in the edition of the complete works (*Gestamtausgabe*). Yet, there is no doubt that the experience of World War I disclosed several questions concerning the human conditions, which Heidegger certainly absorbed and pondered in the elaboration of the language later employed in *Sein und Zeit*. It is the condition of soldiers in the trenches that affects Heidegger, as he himself writes in his letters addressed to his fiancée Elfride. In fact, soldiers are the ones who experience boredom, a new dimension of temporality and longing for the "ultimate things". For these reasons, as de Warren writes, the aim of *Sein und Zeit* "is not to answer the question of the sense of Being, but rather to discover and launch this question regarding 'ultimate things' as the future for philosophical thinking, yet without delivering an answer or solution" (326). Moreover, Heidegger saw World War I as the fulfillment of the Western technical rationality, and it is for these reasons that the advent of Hitler's National Socialism was regarded by Heidegger as an opportunity to raise the destiny of the German spirit in opposition to an eventual Bolshevik danger. As is well known, Heidegger later – especially in his controversial *Black Notebooks* – would talk about the so-called rectorship "error", that is, the rector's position he obtained under the Nazi government, since for him, too, Hitler's Germany was nothing but itself an expression of the technical rationality of the Western metaphysical tradition, but that's another story.

In the final chapter, de Warren considers the philosopher Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology. To properly understand Husserl's position toward World War I, two moments must be kept in mind: the death in combat of his youngest son Wolfgang and, after this, the three 1917 lectures delivered to an audience of soldiers on Fichte and the ideal of humanity. Husserl, despite the death of his son – which undoubtedly devastated him deeply – sees in the war a possibility for the renewal of the German spirit – in fact, Husserl had supported Germany in the war conducted against the Anglo-French. At the beginning of his lectures, Husserl extols that tradition from the Lutheran Reformation to the Goethe-Zeit. German thought for Husserl was threatened by modern objectivism, so that it was a matter of hoping for the rebirth of a new idealism. For these reasons Husserl will devote himself to the development of his phenomenology, the purpose of which is to arrive at "a priori knowledge and eidetic insights over the entire spectrum of possible experience" (390). But Husserl's hopes for the possible renewal of Germany

through the event of war vanished at the very end of the world conflict. In fact, because of the war, hate between nations had become more and more widespread, which was not the case before the world conflict. This will lead Husserl to think more and more in terms of cosmopolitanism, rather than in nationalistic terms. Indeed, the war had not only accentuated German nationalism as hate toward other nations but had also favored the rising of anti-Semitic tendencies. Husserl would deal with such issues in his last major work, *The Crisis of the European Sciences* (1936), but the 1930s also constituted the period in which Husserl with increasing dedication faced specifically ethical issues. In the 1936 work, Husserl outlines an image of Europe understood not as a mere geographical reality, but as an idea constituted a revolutionary potential and, as de Warren writes, "this revolutionary potential for humanity resides in nothing less than the demand for the radicalism of a life dedicated to reason in its theoretical, practical, and axiological manifestations, to lead a life, in other words, *in* truth" (391). However, alongside this teleological optimism of Husserl there is also another aspect that seems not to collimate with Husserl's other ethics, marked by the death of his son Wolfgang. In other words, a tension emerges between the grief caused by the death of the son and the son's "beautiful" death for the motherland. In this regard, de Warren concludes his important volume with the following words: "What, then, remains for the possibility of a blessed life given this intolerable oscillation at the heart of love? It is a question that, attested his unfinished ethics, Husserl himself took to the grave" (400).

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