

Introduction

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The main goal of this volume is to provide an overview of the conceptual history of critique in modern German philosophy. Such a history would reconstruct the ways in which the concept of “critique” was generated, transmitted, appropriated, and transformed over the course of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries; how it was applied in different parts of philosophy, such as aesthetics, epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, and political philosophy; and the role it played in the self-understanding of philosophical movements and schools like German Idealism, Romanticism, Marxism, Neo-Kantianism, Phenomenology, and Critical Theory. The chapters included in this volume show that the conceptual history of “critique” in German philosophy is long and varied, starting with a Kantian phase in the late eighteenth century that gives way to German Idealism and Romanticism in the early nineteenth century, followed by a Hegelian phase in the middle of the nineteenth century, which concludes in a late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century phase that reformulates and rearticulates central aspects of the two earlier phases. The volume ends with a series of chapters on the legacy of the Frankfurt School and the prospects of critical theory today.

1. Kant and German Idealism

Kant did not introduce the word “critique” (*Kritik*) into German, as some commentators have claimed.¹ The *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, originally

published by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, shows that its use in German predates the publication of the first *Critique* by more than a century.² Nor was Kant the first German philosopher to employ the term. It was already used in the title of *Attempt at a Critical Poetics for the Germans* (*Versuch einer kritischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen*, 1730) by Johann Christoph Gottsched, who insisted that his poetics was “critical” because it was grounded in philosophical principles.³ As Catalina González demonstrates in the chapter that opens this volume, “The Struggle between Dogmatism and Skepticism in the Prussian Academy: A Precedent for Kantian Critique,” there is also ample precedent in German philosophy for many of the philosophical methods, doctrines, and themes that we associate with Kantian critique.⁴ González shows how the members of the Prussian Academy used skeptical arguments to defend religious orthodoxy, blurring the lines between dogmatism and skepticism, and highlighting the need for “mature judgment” about the limits of reason in philosophy and religion. Thus, she concludes, the Prussian Academy’s anti-skepticism can be seen as an important precedent for Kant’s “critical” philosophy.

In her chapter, “Pure Sensibility as a Source of Corruption: Kant’s Critique of Metaphysics in the *Inaugural Dissertation* and *Critique of Pure Reason*,” Karin de Boer traces the development of Kant’s conception of critique from his inaugural dissertation *On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World* (1770) to the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787). Although she sees the two works as largely continuous, de Boer shows how, in his dissertation, Kant sought to purify metaphysics, understood as a science of purely intellectual cognition, by eliminating any contamination from sensible cognition, which, in his view, led to “fallacies of subreption.” Kant continues to exclude sensation from metaphysics in the first *Critique*, but de Boer recounts how he also came to realize that the pure concepts of the understanding depend on sensibility, and, particularly, on time, the form of inner sense, for the schema of their application. This insight allows Kant to identify the sources of metaphysical cognition in pure reason in his critique, while strictly delimiting the extent and boundaries of the science of metaphysics, which Kant planned to survey in subsequent works called *The Metaphysics of Nature* and *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Kant’s critique was merely a propaedeutic to the system and science of metaphysics that would be contained in these works.⁵

Instead of moving to complete his system in the years following the publication of the first *Critique*, Kant dramatically expanded the scope of

his propaedeutic. In his chapter, “Critique in Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*: Why This *Critique* Is Not a Critique of Pure Practical Reason,” Avery Goldman argues that while Kant’s first *Critique* instituted a tribunal to “discipline” pure reason and limit its speculative excesses, his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) begin the construction of a “canon” that will justify the extension of pure reason beyond the bounds of possible experience in Kant’s moral philosophy. Goldman traces the development of this canon from the Third Antinomy of the Transcendental Dialectic in the first *Critique*, where Kant presents a negative demonstration of the possibility of freedom; to Part III of the *Groundwork*, where Kant argues that a positive conception of freedom is essential for uniting the good will and the moral law; to the account of freedom as a fact of pure practical reason in the second *Critique*; and, finally, to Kant’s account of the highest good, which unites an Epicurean conception of happiness with a Stoic notion of moral virtue. Goldman holds that the ideal of the highest good is the culmination of Kant’s canon and the completion of his shift from a negative to a positive conception of critique, because it emphasizes the necessity of presupposing, not only freedom, but also the postulates of pure practical reason—the existence of God and the immortality of the soul.

Later, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), Kant turned from the metaphysics of nature and morality to the *a priori* principles of aesthetic and teleological judgment. In her chapter, “On an Aesthetic Dimension of Critique: The Time of the Beautiful in Schiller’s *Aesthetic Letters*,” María del Rosario Acosta López recounts how Kant’s “Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment” inspired Friedrich Schiller. Schiller first became fascinated by the resistance of beauty to conceptualization in Kant’s aesthetics. However, in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Humanity* (1793–1795), Schiller related this resistance to a particular form of temporality—“lingering” over the beautiful. Acosta López shows that, for Schiller, lingering over the beautiful opens up a critical dimension of aesthetics, in which the experience of beauty resists the violence that characterizes modernity, as well as an aesthetic dimension of critique, which inaugurates another kind of time, outside the causal order of events, in which it becomes possible to “play” freely, and thus critically, with the historical determinations of the present.

Despite the success of his three *Critiques*, Kant struggled to complete the science of metaphysics and system of pure reason that he promised in the first *Critique*. In his chapter, “From the Metaphysics of Law to the Critique

of Violence,” Peter Fenves attributes these struggles to a “brain cramp,” similar to the one that prevented Kant from completing the transition from his *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786) to “pure physics” in the *Opus postumum* (c. 1796–1801).⁶ J. Colin McQuillan’s chapter, “Not Yet a System, Not Yet a Science: Reinhold and Fichte on Kant’s Critique,” explores the response to the incompleteness of Kant’s critique in the works of two early post-Kantian idealists: Karl Leonhard Reinhold and Johann Gottlob Fichte. McQuillan explains that Reinhold thought Kant had failed to complete his system because his critique was merely a propaedeutic. As such, it had not provided a general account of the faculty of representation, founded on a first principle. The idea that sciences and systems must be grounded in a single principle is not to be found in Kant’s critique, which holds that they could be founded on multiple principles, as long as those principles are *a priori*; yet McQuillan shows that the search for a first principle became a central concern in Reinhold’s *Elementary Philosophy* and Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*.

Reinhold maintains that all of the principles of philosophy and science can be derived from the “principle of consciousness,” which states that “in consciousness, the subject distinguishes the representation from the subject and object and relates the representation to both.”⁷ Because it is a first principle, Reinhold denies that the validity of the principle of consciousness can be demonstrated through any other principle. Consciousness must be accepted as a “fact.”⁸ Recognizing the vulnerability of a system grounded in an indemonstrable “fact,” but accepting Reinhold’s argument that philosophy, as a science and a system, must be grounded in a first principle, Fichte maintains that the first principle of philosophy and science should instead be considered an “act” and, more specifically, a free act of self-positing that determines the subject (I), the object (not-I), and their relation within consciousness.⁹ In his *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte insists that this argument remained true to the idealist spirit of Kant’s critique, which traces our knowledge of objects back to the spontaneous activity of the human mind.¹⁰

By grounding his *Wissenschaftslehre* in a free act of self-positing, Fichte had opposed his critical idealism to determinism, which was, as a result of the Pantheism controversy, associated with Spinozist dogmatism in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century.¹¹ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling stages a confrontation between these two systems in early works like *On the I as a Principle of Philosophy* (1795) and *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795–1796), arguing, further, that

Kant's critique "is destined to deduce from the essence of reason the very possibility of two exactly opposed systems; it is destined to establish a system of criticism (conceived as complete) or, more precisely, a system of idealism as well as in exact opposition to it, a system of dogmatism or realism."¹² G. Anthony Bruno's chapter, "Schelling's Philosophical Letters on Doctrine and Critique," shows how, for Schelling, critique came to represent "the spirit in which one pursues a system," instead of being just one philosophical system opposed to another. Bruno argues that Schelling's conception of critique identifies philosophical systems with the striving to realize them in practice—to live them. Since he recognizes that many, but not all, philosophical systems are livable, Bruno maintains that Schelling defends a kind of meta-philosophical pluralism in his *Letters* and throughout his career.

2. German Romanticism

Despite the influence of Kant's three *Critiques* and the attempts by the early German idealists to complete Kant's system and discover its first principles, many of Kant's contemporaries remained unconvinced by his critique. One of the most vocal critics was Kant's former student, Johann Gottfried Herder, whose *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity* (1784–1791) had been the subject of a series of extremely hostile reviews by his former teacher during the 1780s.¹³ Venting his frustration, Herder complains, in his "Metacritique of the Critique of Pure Reason" (1799), that Kant had misused the term "critique" by calling his investigation of our capacity for *a priori* cognition a "critique" of pure reason.¹⁴ Rachel Zuckert shows, in her chapter, "Critique With a Small C: Herder's Critical Philosophical Practice and Anticritical Polemics," that critique is, for Herder, more appropriately used to describe judgments about the products of human activity—works of art, technological innovations—than it is to cognitive faculties. Zuckert argues that this objection is not as petty as it might seem. In fact, it is based on a respect for ordinary language and social convention that Herder took Kant to have scorned. According to Zuckert, Herder insisted that critique must always be a part of an "intersubjective conversation concerning publicly accessible objects" that relies on "shared criteria, including a shared language, and common natural capacities," instead of involving itself in scholastic disputes.¹⁵

Romantic thinkers like Friedrich Schlegel also questioned whether Kant and his followers were really as critical as they claimed to be. In the

Athenaeum Fragments (1798), Schlegel suggests that “the philosophy of the Kantians is probably termed critical *per antiphrasin*; or else it is an *epithet ornans*.”¹⁶ The philosophy that prides itself on being “critical” is, in other words, a form of dogmatism that boasts about its depth, profundity, and insight, without taking the time to look critically at itself and understand its limitations. Schlegel makes the same point in his essay “On Incomprehensibility” (1800), which parodies Kant’s claim that his age is “the genuine age of criticism” by adding “soon now everything is going to be criticized, except the age itself.”¹⁷ Karolin Mirzakhani shows, in her chapter “Irony and the Possibility of Romantic Criticism: Friedrich Schlegel as Poet-Critic,” that Schlegel sought to escape this dogmatism through a new form of romantic criticism, which was to be both ironic and poetic. Through irony, Mirzakhani argues, Schlegel hoped to help the reader adopt a more critical stance, which would help them consider contradictory claims simultaneously and, ultimately, “to inhabit different worlds, views, and interpretations.”¹⁸ Mirzakhani argues that Schlegel’s essay “On Incomprehensibility” is ironic in this sense. Instead of explaining the fragments that had baffled so many readers and fixing their meaning, Schlegel intensifies the irony of his fragments by writing ironically about their irony. This way of writing also exemplifies Schlegel’s conception of poetic criticism, which does not merely analyze a work of art, but completes it and fulfills the work by repeating what is most essential to it.

Extending romantic criticism from art to nature, Elizabeth Millán Brusslan shows, in her chapter, “Alexander von Humboldt: A Critic of Nature,” how the German naturalist immersed himself in careful empirical studies of the natural world, which allowed him to include a wealth of quantified, empirical data in his descriptions of nature, while still savoring the “free enjoyment of its charms and the awe of its power.”¹⁹ Humboldt’s writings combine empirical science with aesthetic appreciation in a way that is similar to the early German romantics, who also sought to overcome the boundaries between art, philosophy, and science. The proximity between Humboldt and Romanticism is perhaps most evident in works like *Views of Nature*, in which Humboldt employs a literary form, the *Naturgemälde*, that is central to his critique of nature. Millán Brusslan points out that, for Humboldt, *Naturgemälde* is meant to create an “impression of nature” (*Natureindruck*) on the reader, similar to that of a landscape painting. The form also helps to incorporate empirical details into scientific writing in a way that highlights their aesthetic relevance, so that readers gain a greater appreciation of the significance of knowledge about nature, while also

developing an appreciation for its aesthetic value. The task of a critique of nature is, for Humboldt, to combine knowledge and enjoyment in a way that will guide the public toward a more serious engagement with and appreciation for nature.

3. Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche

The Kantian conception of critique that dominated the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century also served as a starting point for Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's dialectical conception of critique. As Angelica Nuzzo shows in her chapter "Critique, Refutation, Appropriation: Strategies of Hegel's Dialectic," it was not only by refuting, but also by critically appropriating Kant's and Spinoza's systems—and, moreover, Kant's and Spinoza's conceptions of philosophy as a system—that Hegel gave shape to his own dialectical systematicity. Nuzzo argues that, for Hegel, dialectical systematicity replaces transcendental critique, but only after it has adopted and understood transcendental critique as an essential moment of the system as a whole. Any act of critical refutation is, thus, an exercise in self-refutation, since it is only by appropriating and transforming philosophy's own history that critique can incorporate the moments of the system and bring them to a completion that is also a new beginning. Contrary to interpretations that see Hegelian dialectics as an appropriation that totalizes without remainder, or as a refutation that replaces the truths of the past with its own, Nuzzo shows that dialectical critique is only truly complete, for Hegel, when it leaves refutation behind and lets go of what it has appropriated, setting it free "in its own right."²⁰ This is, Nuzzo claims, the standpoint of the absolute or, better yet, the absolute standpoint that philosophy adopts whenever it approaches completion. Thus, philosophy, as critique, begins by taking on the task of comprehending its history, preparing and liberating the present for an "unprecedented way of acting and being" that is, in Nuzzo's words, "not yet there, not even in outline . . . but must be entirely invented, imagined anew."²¹

Understood in this way, Hegel's conception of critique can serve as a model for the conceptual history of critique during the nineteenth century. Consider, for example, Karl Marx's rejection of what he calls "the German ideology"—the systems of Kant, Hegel, and other German philosophers, which abstract from the material conditions under which human individuals live and idealize the forms of their social relationships.²² Against this

ideology, Marx asserts that there is only one true science, history, which concerns itself with “real individuals, their activity, and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity.”²³ Keeping Nuzzo’s interpretation of Hegel in mind, we can see that Marx not only refutes but also transformatively appropriates Hegelian idealism to orient his philosophical critique and to formulate his historical materialism. For Marx, it is historical determinateness that provides the framework and the content for philosophy, keeping in mind that history, in turn, can itself be dialecticized through critique and set into motion toward the actualization of the possibilities that are already embedded within, but have not yet been explored by, the contradictions at the heart of the present.

Working within this new framework in her chapter, “Abstraction and Critique in Marx: The Case of Debt,” Rocío Zambrana shows how Marx’s fundamental orientation toward the material conditions of existence gives rise to a multidimensional and intersectional conception of critique, particularly in the critique of capitalism in Marx’s mature writings on political economy. Zambrana develops an account of Marx’s critique that highlights the multiple ways in which capitalism is not merely an economic system, but also, following Nancy Fraser, “an institutionalized social order.”²⁴ This allows Zambrana to show how Marx’s critique of capitalism can elucidate “the structural links between the economy *and* racial and gender oppression, political domination, and ecological degradation.”²⁵ These links become evident, in Zambrana’s argument, through Marx’s analysis of debt and the corresponding critique of “anti-value,” which has recently been rearticulated in the work of David Harvey. Thus, Zambrana shows how Marx’s critique of capitalism and his analysis of economies of debt remain essential for an historical and materialist critique of financialized capitalism today—a critique that, by tracking the ways different forms of oppression become entangled with one another, can denounce and dismantle capitalism’s gendered, racialized, and ecologically destructive forms of expropriation.

Although he insists that psychology, rather than history, was “the queen of the sciences,” Friedrich Nietzsche echoes Marx’s critique of the idealist prejudices of German philosophy.²⁶ Psychology is, for Nietzsche, an investigation of human drives, interests, and motives, particularly as they relate to values, so it is easy to see the “critique of moral values” that he presents in *The Genealogy of Morals* as a psychological critique of the interests and drives that have led, over the course of Western history, to “morality”—a system of values that presents itself as “good in itself.”²⁷ Nietzsche presents

his critique of morality in the *Genealogy* as a “re-evaluation of all values” (*Umwertung aller Werthe*), but, as Daniel R. Rodríguez-Navas points out in his chapter, “Nietzsche’s Project of Reevaluation: What Kind of Critique?,” it remains unclear what kind of critique this “re-evaluation” is supposed to be. Rodríguez-Navas argues that contemporary interpretations of Nietzsche’s critique, particularly those that try to determine whether his *Umwertung* constitutes an “internal” or “external” critique of moral values, remain too close to the form of traditional Western moral rationality and, as a result, Rodríguez-Navas argues, they overlook some of Nietzsche’s most important insights into the experience of value. To uncover this experience, Rodríguez-Navas shows that Nietzsche situates his critique within a historical genealogy, which is not identical to his critique, but which helps Nietzsche formulate a “typology of morals.” This typology allows Nietzsche’s critique to re-evaluate morality’s claim to being good in itself and to reveal the structures of rationality and moral justification that lie at the foundations of our (historically determined) experience of value. By genealogically tracing the origin of those structures, Nietzsche is able to render them visible in their contingency, to radically break with traditional conceptions of values, and to open up other forms of rationality that have remained silent or invisible, or even unconceivable, given our already saturated, overdetermined, and to a certain extent, as Rodríguez-Navas insists, incapacitating conceptions of critique.

4. Neo-Kantianism, Phenomenology, and Critical Theory

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century saw a return to transcendental critique in both Neo-Kantianism and Phenomenology. Neo-Kantians like Hermann Cohen regarded the *a priori* principles that Kant derived from the faculties of sensibility and the understanding in the first *Critique*—the pure forms of intuition (space and time) and the pure concepts of the understanding (the categories)—as formal conditions of experience, whose universality and necessity were guaranteed by the laws of mathematics and physics.²⁸ Along with his students Paul Natorp and Ernst Cassirer, the later Cohen sought to formulate an *a priori* logic that would demonstrate the objectivity of both the natural and human sciences (*Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*).²⁹ Taking a different route, Edmund Husserl characterized phenomenology as a form of transcendental idealism in his *Cartesian Meditations* (1931),

because it is “nothing more than . . . an explication of my ego as subject of every possible cognition, and, indeed, with respect to every sense of what exists, wherewith the latter might be able to *have* a sense for me.”³⁰ Even Martin Heidegger characterized his project, in his early lectures, as a “phenomenological critique” and, later, identified his own fundamental ontology as a kind of transcendental philosophy in *Being and Time* (1927).³¹

Despite their preoccupation with *a priori* principles, transcendental subjectivity, and, more generally, philosophy “as a rigorous science,” Neo-Kantians and phenomenologists did not neglect the social and historical world. Indeed, it was in these contexts that they made some of their most important contributions, as Rudolf Makkreel demonstrates in his chapter “Kantian Critique, Its Ethical Purification by Hermann Cohen, and Its Reflective Transformation by Wilhelm Dilthey.” Makkreel begins by distinguishing three kinds of critique in Kant: a constitutive critique that seeks the conditions of the possibility of experience; a regulative critique that orients us toward theoretical and practical ideals; and a reflective critique that is normative, but, instead of orienting us toward ideals, considers our judgments in relation to others and seeks consensus. Makkreel shows that Kant presents a reflective justification for property rights in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, which Cohen replaces with a regulative defense of legal rights, based on the ideal relation between the parties to a contract—mutual consent. Cohen argues that this principle lies at the foundation of “the idea of socialism” and uses it to distinguish states that promote the interests of the dominant classes through might (*Macht*) and those that are justified by the principles of right (*Recht*). In the last section of his chapter, Makkreel presents an alternative formulation of the basis of right, which is found in Wilhelm Dilthey’s ethics. Dilthey grounds right in what Makkreel calls “a reflective ethics of cooperation.”³² Dilthey’s ethics is reflective because it eschews the legislative model employed by both Kant and Cohen, focusing, instead, on “setting contextually appropriate priorities.”³³ Emphasizing both the social nature of these contexts and their basis in human solidarity, Dilthey’s ethics of cooperation promotes a kind of “reciprocal fidelity” that acknowledges what we have in common, while respecting our differences.

Likewise, in her chapter “Transcendental Phenomenology as Radical Immanent Critique: Subversions and Matrices of Intelligibility,” Andreea Smaranda Aldea argues that transcendental phenomenology provides “powerful tools for critically investigating the historical forces shaping our present reality, doing justice not only to their epistemic weight, but also to their normative weight.”³⁴ Drawing on Husserl’s later work, from

the 1930s, Aldea points out that the experiential evidence with which the phenomenologist is concerned derives from the lifeworld, which is constituted over time by the sedimentation of theoretical accomplishments and practical commitments. Aldea does not think the origin of this evidence in the lifeworld compromises its legitimacy as evidence for transcendental phenomenology. On the contrary, she maintains, it is by sifting through the different layers of epistemic and normative sedimentation in this evidence that phenomenologists distance themselves from their own sense of “lived possibility”—the conditioned set of possibilities they come to expect from their own historical world. Aldea characterizes the phenomenological analysis of lived possibility, and the limits of what is conceivable, possible, necessary, and impossible in the context of the lifeworld, as a kind of “immanent critique.” By undertaking this critique, phenomenologists adopt a “critical” rather than a “normalizing” stance toward lived possibility, exposing the sedimentation of meanings that constitutes the lifeworld without naturalizing or reinforcing them. Through this critique, the phenomenologist gains the ability to distinguish what is historically conceivable from what is transcendently necessary, advancing the cause of transcendental phenomenology at the same time as they uncover the historicity of experience.

In his chapter, “From the Metaphysics of Law to the Critique of Violence,” Peter Fenves goes “back to Kant” in a very different way than we find in either Neo-Kantianism or Phenomenology. Recounting Kant’s attempt to ground the doctrine of law in his *Metaphysical Foundations of the Doctrine of Right*, the first part of the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), Fenves shows that Kant’s difficulties constructing the conceptual foundation of the law derive from his need to reconcile “universal reciprocal coercion with everyone’s freedom” without reducing law to either “physical supremacy” or “wild lawless freedom.”³⁵ The inconsistencies in the text of the *Doctrine of Right* represent, for Fenves, Kant’s unresolved struggle to unite two things—coercion and freedom—that are mutually exclusive and yet essential to the law. Fenves then turns to Walter Benjamin, an astute reader of Kant’s late writings, and shows how he takes up Kant’s problem in his early works. Unlike Kant, Fenves argues, Benjamin will admit that the conceptual construction of law “bars the way to justice.”³⁶ However, the solution Benjamin presents in his essay “Towards a Critique of Violence” (*Zur Kritik der Gewalt*, 1920–1921) is itself modeled on Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*. Just as Kant denies that the second *Critique* is a critique of “pure” practical reason, so too Benjamin will argue that

there can be no critique of “pure” *Gewalt*.³⁷ And as in Kant’s conception of pure practical reason, pure *Gewalt* is what Benjamin’s critique aims to promote, even though it would be unrecognizable whenever and wherever there would be an instance of such a *Gewalt*. Ultimately, for Benjamin, this would amount to a critique of an unrecognizable and un-possessable form of *Gewalt* that would guarantee the (always unjustifiable, arbitrary) step from law to justice that Kant had failed to complete. Fenves’s chapter not only establishes a clear connection between Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals* and Benjamin’s critique of violence, it also highlights a novel conception of critique that was being developed by one of the most important thinkers associated with the Frankfurt School, even before Horkheimer published his programmatic essay “Traditional and Critical Theory.”

The surprising absence of a definition of “critique” in Horkheimer’s essay leads Richard A. Lee Jr. to ask, in his chapter, “Is There Critique in Critical Theory?” While traditional theory not only naturalizes historical and contingent features of social relations, but also covers over this very same operation of naturalization, critical theory, Horkheimer argues, must resist and expose this operation. Thus, in order to understand what makes theory critical, and what prevents it from becoming, in Horkheimer words, “inhuman,” Lee argues that one needs to contrast Horkheimer’s Marxist conception of critique with Kant’s. While Kant’s critique sought to constrain the speculative excesses of reason, Horkheimer’s critique draws on Marx’s attention to the material and social conditions of human existence and, in particular, the way they are presented as “given.” Thus, Horkheimer’s critique seeks to “rein in the pretension of what is socially given” and its claims to “rationality or even reasonableness.”³⁸ It is this same conception of critique, Lee argues, that inspired Adorno “to hold metaphysics to its promise.”³⁹ Adorno will insist that there can only be critique where there is transcendence, because it is only where one can point out the tension between the factual and the transcendental, and the failure of the factual to live up to its ideal, that one can pose an “otherwise” that differs from what is given. As Lee points out, the difficulty is that such an “otherwise” is already a social fact. As such, metaphysics must be held accountable for the ways in which it has fallen short of its promise, while holding open the possibility of an “otherwise,” whose “index” is happiness. Adorno’s conception of redemption reminds us that, in Lee’s words, “the only form of critique that belongs to critical theory is a Marxist social critique that risks being metaphysical for the sake of a happiness that is the very promise of metaphysics.”⁴⁰

Whether the promise of metaphysics can be saved from metaphysics itself is a question that has led Amy Allen to challenge the presuppositions of the early critical theorists in her most recent work, oriented by the question of what kind of responsibility is called for in our reception of this theory today.⁴¹ In her contribution to the volume, “Critique as Melancholy Science,” Allen goes back to the question of redemption, this time to highlight the continuity between Adorno’s critical theory and Foucault’s conception of critique. Against interpretations that take Adorno’s naturalism to be incompatible with Foucault’s historicism and constructivism, Allen argues that, despite their differences, Adorno and Foucault share a similar conception of critique—one that is attentive to the cracks and fissures of social reality and remains entirely immanent while sustaining a kind of transcendence. Allen will even argue that, given Adorno’s singular conception of nature as nothing other than ontology—an ontology that, following Benjamin, needs to understand itself, and nature, as radically historicized, instead of being “naturalized”—Adorno’s “critical naturalism” has much in common with Foucault’s historical ontology. Thus, in a way that is continuous with Lee’s contribution, and by means of a productive comparison with Foucault, Allen shows to what extent Adorno’s commitment to metaphysics, understood through the psychoanalytical concept of “melancholy,” is not a renunciation but rather an intensification of critical theory, and of a profoundly historical, social and materialist conception of critique.

5. Critical Theory Today

The final chapters in this volume are dedicated to the current state of critical theory in the work of a second and third generation of critical theorists, namely Jürgen Habermas and Christoph Menke. In her chapter, “Reality and Resistance: Habermas and Haslanger on Objectivity, Social Critique, and the Possibility of Change,” Federica Gregoratto puts the later works of Habermas in dialogue with Sally Haslanger, a contemporary American philosopher who was trained as an analytic metaphysician, but whose investigations of “social kinds” has led her to formulate her own version of critical theory in recent years. Gregoratto shows that Habermas’s and Haslanger’s approaches to social critique are complementary in a number of ways.⁴² She argues that the pragmatic conceptions of truth and objectivity that Habermas articulates in later works like *Truth and Justification* (1999/2004) can be enriched by Haslanger’s analyses, in *Resisting Reality* (2012), of the social

construction of categories like race and gender, which show that we do not have to reject realism and objectivity in order to acknowledge their construction. At the same time, Haslanger's analyses can be supplemented by Habermas' account of the intersubjectivity of experience, since it is the violation of intersubjectively shared norms concerning interpersonal communication, social interaction, and dealing with the objective world that motivates critique. To this account, however, Gregoratto argues, we should add Haslanger's conception of "resisting reality," which explains why social critique is so difficult. The social world we inhabit is "congealed, reified, opaque," so it "resists our attempts to conceptually penetrate the structural layers that enable and reproduce injustice and oppression and to practically change even some of them."⁴³ Despite these difficulties, Gregoratto argues, critical theory has the potential to illuminate the nature of social reality and to challenge the kinds of social injustice that arise from the way the social world has been constructed.

Extending the arguments he began to formulate in his book *Recht und Gewalt* (2012), and has more recently continued in *Kritik der Rechte* (2015), Christoph Menke's chapter, "The Critique of Law and the Law of Critique," reflects on the paradoxical ways in which critique and law are intertwined, focusing, this time, on the consequences of this paradox for critique.⁴⁴ If critique is to be fully consistent, Menke argues, it must always engage in a critique of itself, and thus, of its own law. Every critique must therefore be, to a certain extent, "the critique of the legality of critique, and thus, a critique of law."⁴⁵ However, critique is also fundamental for law's operation. Indeed, one could say that the operation of law is nothing but the practice of critique, insofar as the law imposes, rationalizes, and systematizes normative distinctions and decisions. So, how can there be critique at all, if every critique is a critique of the law, but critique is, at the same time, constitutive of law's operation? Such is the aporia that leads Menke to ask whether there is, perhaps, a non-legal form of critique that would put an end to this apparently vicious circle. To answer this question, Menke considers what he calls a "romanticizing" and "genealogical" form of critique. Following Adorno back to Marx and Marx back to Schlegel, Menke describes a form of critique that concerns itself with the genesis of forms while attending simultaneously to their presentation. Such a critique would, Menke argues, take both the product and the act of production into consideration, showing the genealogy of the forms of the present, their production of reality as presentation, and the presentation of this reality as ideological—that is, as hiding the fact that it has been produced.

Critique, understood in this sense, is always transformative, because it is “a co-presentation of its own form of presenting.”⁴⁶ In its operation, Menke argues, critique not only reveals the contingency of the existing order, but also reconceptualizes the normative, legal dimension of critique. This is the case because, in its way of operating, it confronts the legality and non-legality of critique, puts them in relation, and renders a judgment that is no longer legal, or better, a judgment that reveals the other, non-legal, and, hence, Menke adds, violent side of the law. This, Menke insists, is the fundamental and often overlooked or misinterpreted gesture of critical theory. Critique means, in this context, to consider a given form as the presentation of the paradox that lies at its foundation, while also allowing us to understand the reasons why this paradox assumes a specific social and historical form. This form of critique seems to escape the aporia present in more traditional, and, as Menke points out, dogmatic, conceptions of critique. Not because it conceives of an *alegal* form of critique, but because critique can recognize and make evident the fundamental paradox at the heart of all legality, even at the heart of the law of critique. Genealogical critique, Menke concludes, dissolves the dogmatism of normative critique while also explaining its necessity. In doing so, it produces a different, less aporetic, and perhaps less violent form of critique, though one that is no less paradoxical, since it always, by the nature of its legal character, decides in the name of undecidability.

This introduction, as well as this volume as a whole, provides only a brief sketch of the conceptual history of “critique” in modern and contemporary German philosophy. There is much more to say about the figures and works, ideas and arguments that contributed to this history than we have mentioned, and those that we have not mentioned, as will become evident in the chapters that follow. While a complete history remains beyond the scope of a volume like this one, we think the following chapters provide an account of history of the concept of “critique” in German philosophy that is accurate, nuanced, and, above all, critical. At a time where our very notions of critique are being radically challenged and called into question, and rightly so, by non-Western, decolonial, and feminist criticism, as well as new perspectives coming from critical race theory and gender studies, we are hoping that a volume that re-examines the traditional Western—and, in this case, specifically German—history of this concept can help to make visible both the strengths and the limitations of that tradition for contemporary philosophy and our critical accounts of the present.

Notes

1. See Norman Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (1918; repr., New York: Palgrave, 2003), 1.

2. See the entry on “*Kritik*” in Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Leipzig: Hirzel Verlag, 1873), 5:2334. The most recent, online edition of the Grimms’ Dictionary is available at <http://dwb.uni-trier.de/de/die-digitale-version/online-version/> and the entry on *Kritik* is at <http://woerterbuchnetz.de/cgi-bin/WBNetz/genFOplus.tcl?sigle=DWB&lemid=GK14447>. See also Claus von Bormann, Giorgio Tonelli, and Helmut Holzhey, “*Kritik*” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter et al. (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 1976), 1249.

3. Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Versuch einer kritischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen* (Leipzig: Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf, 1730).

4. The similarities between Kant’s views and those of his German contemporaries are also explored in Corey W. Dyck and Falk Wunderlich, eds., *Kant and his German Contemporaries*, vol. 1, *Logic, Mind, Epistemology, Science, and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), and Daniel O. Dahlstrom, ed., *Kant and his German Contemporaries*, vol. 2, *Aesthetics, History, Politics, and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

5. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Axi. All references to Kant’s first *Critique*, here and throughout the volume, use the standard A/B pagination of the first (1781, A) and second (1787, B) editions. References to Kant’s other works are accompanied by a parenthetical reference, cited as *Ak.*, to the volume and page number of the passage in Immanuel Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften (Akademie Ausgabe)*, ed. Royal Prussian (later German) Academy of Sciences, et al. (Berlin: Georg Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter, 1900–).

6. See Fenves, “From the Metaphysics of Law to the Critique of Violence.” See also Eckart Förster, *Kant’s Final Synthesis: An Essay on the Opus postumum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), and Oliver Thordike, *Kant’s Transition Project and Late Philosophy: Connecting the Opus postumum and the Metaphysics of Morals* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

7. Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Beiträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Mißverständnisse der Philosophen*, ed. Faustino Fabbianelli (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2004), 1:113. See also Martin Bondeli, *Das Anfangsproblem bei Karl Leonhard Reinhold* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1995), and Elise Frketch, “The Starting Point of Reinhold’s *Elementarphilosophie*” (forthcoming).

8. Reinhold, *Beiträge* 1: 98–100.

9. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 64. This is also discussed in Bruno, “Schelling’s Philosophical Letters on Doctrine and Critique.”

10. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 51–52. This is also discussed in Bruno, “Schelling’s Philosophical Letters on Doctrine and Critique.”

11. On the pantheism controversy, see Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 44–108.

12. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *The Unconditioned in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays 1794–1796*, trans. Fritz Marti (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1980), 169.

13. See Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Robert B. Loudon and Günther Zöllner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 121–142 (*Ak.* 8:45–66). See also John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Jennifer Mensch shows that Kant’s campaign against Herder continued into the 1790s in Jennifer Mensch, “Kant and the Skull Collectors: German Anthropology from Blumenbach to Kant,” in *Kant and His German Contemporaries*, vol. 1, *Logic, Mind, Epistemology, Science, and Ethics*, ed. Corey W. Dyck and Falk Wunderlich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 192–210.

14. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Werke in zehn Bänden*, ed. Ulrich Gaier et al. (Deutsche Klassische Verlag, Frankfurt, 1985–2000), 8:318.

15. Zuckert, “Critique with a Small C.”

16. Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments*, ed. and trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 167.

17. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Axi; Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments*, 261.

18. See Mirzakhani “Irony and the Possibility of Romantic Criticism.”

19. See Millán, “Alexander von Humboldt.”

20. See Nuzzo, “Critique, Refutation, Appropriation.”

21. See Nuzzo, “Critique, Refutation, Appropriation.”

22. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* (Chadwell Heath: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975–2004), 5:31. On the distinction between ideology and science in Marx, see also Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2005), 13–14.

23. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 28.

24. Nancy Fraser, “Expropriation and Exploitation in Racialized Capitalism,” *Critical Historical Studies* 3, no. 1 (2016), 163. See also Zambrana, “Abstraction and Critique in Marx.”

25. Zambrana, “Abstraction and Critique in Marx.”

26. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), §23.

27. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Carol Diethe, ed. Keith Ansel Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 7 (Preface, §6). On Nietzsche's psychology, see Paul Katsafanas, "Nietzsche's Philosophical Psychology" in *The Oxford Handbook on Nietzsche*, ed. John Richardson and Ken Gemes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 727–755; John Richardson, "Nietzsche's Psychology" in *Nietzsches Wissenschaftsphilosophie*, ed. H. Heit, G. Abel, and M. Brusotti (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 311–328; and Robert Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 1–21.

28. Hermann Cohen, *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (Berlin: Dümmler, 1871/1885). See also Klaus Christian Kohnke, *The Rise of NeoKantianism: German Philosophy Between Idealism and Positivism*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 178–197; Andrea Pomona, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, trans. John Denton (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 6–20; and, more recently, Frederick Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism, 1796–1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 482–491.

29. Hermann Cohen, *System der Philosophie, Erster Teil: Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1920). See also Paul Natorp, *Logik: Grundlegung und logischer Aufbau der Mathematik und mathematischen Naturwissenschaften in Leitsätzen zu akademischen Vorlesungen* (Marburg: Elwert, 1910) and Ernst Cassirer, *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, trans. S.G. Lofts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

30. Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 86.

31. Martin Heidegger, *Toward the Definition of Philosophy*, trans. Ted Sadler (London: Continuum, 2002), 103–109. See also Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), §4–§8. Theodore Kisiel traces Heidegger's famous *Destruktion* (often translated as "destruction," "destructuring," or "deconstruction") of the history of ontology back to his earlier conception of "phenomenological critique." See Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 59–61.

32. Makkreel, "Kantian Critique, Its Ethical Purification by Hermann Cohen, and Its Reflective Transformation by Wilhelm Dilthey."

33. Makkreel, "Kantian Critique, Its Ethical Purification by Hermann Cohen, and Its Reflective Transformation by Wilhelm Dilthey."

34. Aldea, "Transcendental Phenomenology as Radical Immanent Critique."

35. Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, 459 (*Ak.* 6:316). See also Christoph Menke, *Recht und Gewalt* (Berlin: August Verlag, 2011), 7; Christoph Menke, *Law and Violence: Christoph Menke in Dialogue*, trans. Gerrit Jackson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 3; and Fenves, "From the Metaphysics of Law to the Critique of Violence."

36. Fenves, "From the Metaphysics of Law to the Critique of Violence."

37. See Goldman, "Critique in Kant's Critique of Practical Reason." See also Fenves, "From the Metaphysics of Law to the Critique of Violence."
38. Lee, "Is There Critique in Critical Theory?"
39. Lee, "Is There Critique in Critical Theory?"
40. Lee, "Is There Critique in Critical Theory?"
41. See Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).
42. On Haslanger's conception of critical theory, see her 2015 Spinoza Lecture, published as Sally Haslanger, *Critical Theory and Practice: Spinoza Lectures* (Amsterdam: Koninklijke van Gorcum, 2017).
43. Gregoratto, "Reality and Resistance."
44. Menke, *Recht und Gewalt*, has recently been translated into English in Menke, *Law and Violence: Christoph Menke in Dialogue*. See also Christoph Menke, *Kritik der Rechte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2015).
45. Menke, "The Critique of Law and the Law of Critique."
46. Menke, "The Critique of Law and the Law of Critique."