

Ernst Cassirer

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Ernst Cassirer (/kɑːˈsiərər, kə-/^[2] German: [kaˈsiːrə]; July 28, 1874 – April 13, 1945) was a German philosopher. Trained within the Neo-Kantian Marburg School, he initially followed his mentor Hermann Cohen in attempting to supply an idealistic philosophy of science; after Cohen's death, he developed a theory of symbolism and used it to expand phenomenology of knowledge into a more general philosophy of culture. He is one of the leading 20th century advocates of philosophical idealism.

Contents

- 1 Biography
- 2 Work
 - 2.1 History of science
 - 2.2 Philosophy of science
 - 2.3 Philosophy of symbolic forms
 - 2.4 The Cassirer–Heidegger debate
 - 2.5 *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*
 - 2.6 *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*
 - 2.7 *The Myth of the State*
- 3 Partial bibliography
- 4 References
- 5 Further reading
- 6 External links

Biography

Born in Breslau in Silesia (modern-day southwest Poland), into a Jewish family, Cassirer studied literature and philosophy at the University of Marburg (where he completed his doctoral work in 1899 with a dissertation on Descartes's analysis of mathematical and natural scientific knowledge entitled *Kritik der mathematischen und naturwissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis*—*Critique of Mathematical and Scientific Knowledge*) and at the University of Berlin (where he completed his habilitation in 1906 with the dissertation *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit: Erster Band*—*The Problem of Knowledge in Philosophy and Science in the Modern Age: Volume I*).^[3] After working for many years as a Privatdozent at the Friedrich Wilhelms University in Berlin, he was elected in 1919 to the philosophy chair at the newly founded University

Ernst Cassirer



Born	July 28, 1874 Breslau, Silesia, Prussia (now Wrocław, Poland)
Died	April 13, 1945 (aged 70) New York City, New York, U.S.
Alma mater	University of Marburg (Dr.phil., 1899) University of Berlin (Dr.phil.habil., 1906)
Era	20th-century philosophy
Region	Western Philosophy
School	Neo-Kantianism
Notable ideas	Philosophy of symbolic forms Ontic structural realism ^{[1]}
Influences	
Influenced	

of Hamburg, where he lectured until 1933, supervising amongst others the doctoral theses of Joachim Ritter and Leo Strauss. Because he was Jewish, he left Germany after the Nazis came to power in 1933.

After leaving Germany he taught for a couple of years in Oxford before becoming a professor at Gothenburg University. When Cassirer considered Sweden too unsafe, he applied for a post at Harvard, but was rejected because thirty years earlier he had rejected a job offer from them. In 1941 he became a visiting professor at Yale University, then moved to Columbia University in New York City, where he lectured from 1943 until his death (due to a heart attack) in 1945.

His son, Heinz Cassirer, was also a Kantian scholar.

Work

History of science

Cassirer's first major published writings were a history of modern thought from the Renaissance to Kant. In accordance with his Marburg neo-Kantianism he concentrated upon epistemology. His reading of the scientific revolution, in books such as *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (1927), as a “Platonic” application of mathematics to nature, influenced historians such as E. A. Burtt, E. J. Dijksterhuis, and Alexandre Koyré.

Philosophy of science

In *Substance and Function* (1910), he writes about late nineteenth-century developments in physics including relativity theory and the foundations of mathematics. In *Einstein's Theory of Relativity* (1921) he defended the claim that modern physics supports a neo-Kantian conception of knowledge. He also wrote a book about Quantum mechanics called *Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern Physics* (1936).

Philosophy of symbolic forms

At Hamburg Cassirer discovered the Library of the Cultural Sciences founded by Aby Warburg. Warburg was an art historian who was particularly interested in ritual and myth as sources of surviving forms of emotional expression. In *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923–1929) Cassirer argues that man (as he put it in his more popular 1944 book *Essay on Man*) is a "symbolic animal". Whereas animals perceive their world by instincts and direct sensory perception, humans create a universe of symbolic meanings. Cassirer is particularly interested in natural language and myth. He argues that science and mathematics developed from natural language, and religion and art from myth.

The Cassirer–Heidegger debate

In 1929 Cassirer took part in an historically significant encounter with Martin Heidegger in Davos. Cassirer argues that while Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* emphasizes human temporality and finitude, he also sought to situate human cognition within a broader conception of humanity. Cassirer challenges Heidegger's relativism by invoking the universal validity of truths discovered by the exact and moral sciences.

Philosophy of the Enlightenment

Cassirer believed that reason's self-realization leads to human liberation. Mazlish (2000) however notes that

Cassirer in his *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1932) focuses exclusively on ideas, ignoring the political and social context in which they were produced.

The Logic of the Cultural Sciences

In *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences* (1942) Cassirer argues that objective and universal validity can be achieved not only in the sciences, but also in practical, cultural, moral, and aesthetic phenomena. Although inter-subjective objective validity in the natural sciences derives from universal laws of nature, Cassirer asserts that an analogous type of inter-subjective objective validity takes place in the cultural sciences.

The Myth of the State

Cassirer's last work, *The Myth of the State* (1946), was published posthumously; at one level it is an attempt to understand the intellectual origins of Nazi Germany. Cassirer sees Nazi Germany as a society in which the dangerous power of myth is not checked or subdued by superior forces. The book discusses the opposition of logos and mythos in Greek thought, Plato's Republic, the medieval theory of the state, Machiavelli, Thomas Carlyle's writings on hero worship, the racial theories of Arthur de Gobineau, and Hegel. Cassirer claimed that in 20th century politics there was a return, with the passive acquiescence of Martin Heidegger, to the irrationality of myth, and in particular to a belief that there is such a thing as destiny. Of this passive acquiescence, Cassirer says that in departing from Husserl's belief in an objective, logical basis for philosophy, Heidegger attenuated the ability of philosophy to oppose the resurgence of myth in German politics of the 1930s.

Partial bibliography

- *Substance and Function* (1910) and *Einstein's Theory of Relativity* (1921), English translation 1923 (at archive.org) (<https://archive.org/details/substanceandfunc033163mbp>)
- *Kant's Life and Thought* (1918), English translation 1981
- *The Problem of Knowledge: Philosophy, Science, and History since Hegel* (1919), English translation 1950 (online edition (<http://www.questia.com/read/56851373?title=The%20Problem%20of%20Knowledge%3a%20Philosophy%2c%20Science%2c%20and%20History%20since%20Hegel>))
- *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923–29), English translation 1953–1957
- *Language and Myth* (1925), English translation 1946 by Susanne K. Langer
- *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (1927), English translation 1963 by Mario Domandi
- *Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1932), English translation 1951
- *Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern Physics: Historical and Systematic Studies of the Problem of Causality* (1936), English translation 1956
- *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences* (1942), English translation 2000 by Steve G. Lofts (previously translated in 1961 as *The Logic of the Humanities*)
- *An Essay on Man* (written and published in English) (1944) books.google.com (<https://books.google.com/books?id=x46qiaccZLYC>)
- *The Myth of the State* (written and published in English) (posthumous) (1946) books.google.com (https://books.google.com/books?id=0QNxMcwNu7cC&source=gbs_book_similarbooks)
- *Symbol, Myth, and Culture: Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer, 1935-1945* ed. by Donald Phillip Verene (March 11, 1981)

References

1. "Structural Realism" (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/structural-realism/#Rel>): entry by James Ladyman in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
2. "Cassirer" (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/cassirer>). *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*.
3. A second volume appeared in 1907, a third one in 1920, and a fourth one in 1957.


Further reading

- Barash, Jeffrey Andrew. *The Symbolic Construction of Reality: The Legacy of Ernst Cassirer* (2008) (excerpt and text search (<http://www.amazon.com/dp/0226036863>))
- Folkvord Ingvild & Hoel Aud Sissel (eds.), *Ernst Cassirer on Form and Technology: Contemporary Readings*, (2012), Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan (ISBN 978-0-230-36547-6).
- Friedman, Michael. *A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer, and Heidegger* (2000) (excerpt and text search (<http://www.amazon.com/dp/0812694252>))
- Gordon, Peter Eli. *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (2010)
- Steve G. Lofts. *Ernst Cassirer: A "Repetition" of Modernity* (2000) SUNY Press, ISBN 978-0-791-44495-5: at Google Books (<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=zP0IX5Tgu7wC>)
- Krois, John Michael. *Cassirer: Symbolic Forms and History* (1987)

Magerski, Christine. "Reaching Beyond the Supra-Historical Sphere: from Cassirer's Philosophy of Symbolic Forms to Bourdieu's Sociology of Symbolic Forms." *Pierre Bourdieu and the Field of Cultural Production.* Ed. J. Browitt. University of Delaware Press (2004): 21-29.

- Schilpp, Paul Arthur (ed.). *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer* (1949) archive.org (<https://archive.org/details/philosophyoferns033109mbp>)
- Schultz, William. *Cassirer & Langer on Myth* (2nd ed. 2000) (excerpt and text search (<http://www.amazon.com/dp/0815324650>))
- Skidelsky, Edward. *Ernst Cassirer: The Last Philosopher of Culture* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 288 pp. ISBN 978-0-691-13134-4.
- Hardy, Anton G. "Symbol Philosophy and the Opening into Consciousness and Creativity" (2014)

External links

-  Quotations related to Ernst Cassirer at Wikiquote
- Friedman, Michael. "Ernst Cassirer" (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cassirer/>). *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Background of Ernst Cassirer (<http://metastudies.net/pmg/index.php?n=Main.BreslauToBerlin>)
- History of the Cassirer family (<http://cassirer.info/>)
- Ernst Cassirer biographic entry (<http://ernst.cassirer.info>)
- Centre for Intercultural Studies (<http://www.cis.arts.gla.ac.uk/cassirerproject.htm>)
- Works by Ernst Cassirer (<https://www.gutenberg.org/author/Cassirer,+Ernst>) at Project Gutenberg
- Works by or about Ernst Cassirer (<https://archive.org/search.php?query=%28%28subject%3A%22Cassirer%2C%20Ernst%22%20OR%20subject%3A%22Ernst%20Cassirer%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22Cassirer%2C%20Ernst%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22Ernst%20Cassirer%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22Cassirer%2C%20E%2E%22%20OR%20title%3A%22Ernst%20Cassirer%22%20OR%20description%3A%22Cassirer%2C%20Ernst>)

[%22%20OR%20description%3A%22Ernst%20Cassirer%22%29%20OR%20%28%221874-1945%22%20AND%20Cassirer%29%29%20AND%20%28-mediatype:software%29\)](#) at Internet Archive

Retrieved from "https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ernst_Cassirer&oldid=776992660"

Categories: [Kantian philosophers](#) | [1874 births](#) | [1945 deaths](#) | [People from the Province of Silesia](#) | [People from Wrocław](#) | [Humboldt University of Berlin alumni](#) | [Humboldt University of Berlin faculty](#) | [University of Hamburg faculty](#) | [Academics of the University of Oxford](#) | [Columbia University faculty](#) | [Yale University faculty](#) | [University of Gothenburg faculty](#) | [20th-century German philosophers](#) | [German historians of philosophy](#) | [German Jews](#) | [Phenomenologists](#) | [German semioticians](#) | [Continental philosophers](#) | [Jewish philosophers](#) | [Jewish emigrants from Nazi Germany to the United States](#) | [Jews and Judaism in Hamburg](#)

-
- This page was last edited on 24 April 2017, at 16:18.
 - Text is available under the [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License](#); additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). [Wikipedia®](#) is a registered trademark of the [Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.](#), a non-profit organization.