

Carnap and Dilthey

Christian Damböck
Institute Vienna Circle

Workshop “Carnap and the Legacy
of Logical Empiricism”

2010-06-29

Overview

- Why Carnap and Dilthey?
- Dilthey's Epistemology
- „German“ empiricism and non-reductionism in the Aufbau
- Conclusions

Why Carnap and Dilthey?

The historical aspect:

- Carnap studied with Herman Nohl in Jena
- He developed his ideas together with his friends Wilhelm Flitner and Hans Freyer (in Jena and Freiburg)

The systematic aspect:

- The *Aufbau* is based on theoretical elements that we neither find in (Neo-)Kantianism nor in classical empiricism but in the „German“ empiricism of the Dilthey school

- In “Carnap brought home” (2004) Gottfried Gabriel had pointed out that there are some connections between Carnap and the Dilthey-school
- In a letter to Wilhelm Flitner from 11 December 1968 (quoted by Gabriel) Carnap observed that a new book by Arne Naess (*Four Modern Philosophers*, 1968) had shown him “how strong Dilthey’s influence on me in this particular respect [i.e. rejection of metaphysics], via Nohl, really was”. (Gabriel, p. 17)

The Details

- But to observe that there is an obvious influence of the Dilthey school on Carnap is just a first step. – We have to go into the details for a better understanding of Carnap's philosophical background
- First point: Dilthey's philosophy
- Second point: Dilthey and the Neo-Kantians
- Third point: Carnap and the Dilthey school
- All those points have a systematic and a historical side
- In my talk, however, I shall give just a sketch of some systematic aspects of the first and the third point

The strategy

- Illustrate Dilthey's epistemology with two examples („'German' empiricism“ and „non-reductionism“)
- Show how traces of these theoretical elements can be found in the philosophy of Carnap's *Aufbau*

The Sources

- „Introduction to the Human Sciences“ (first volume: 1883)
- The 26 volumes of the just finished edition of Dilthey's „Gesammelte Schriften“ (GS) document the development of the first and the second volume of the „Introduction“.
- Because of the fragmentary character of Dilthey's work a consistent picture of his philosophy has to be based on the whole resources of GS.
- This is especially true for the empiricist aspects of Dilthey's work and for his understanding of the relation between the natural and the human sciences.

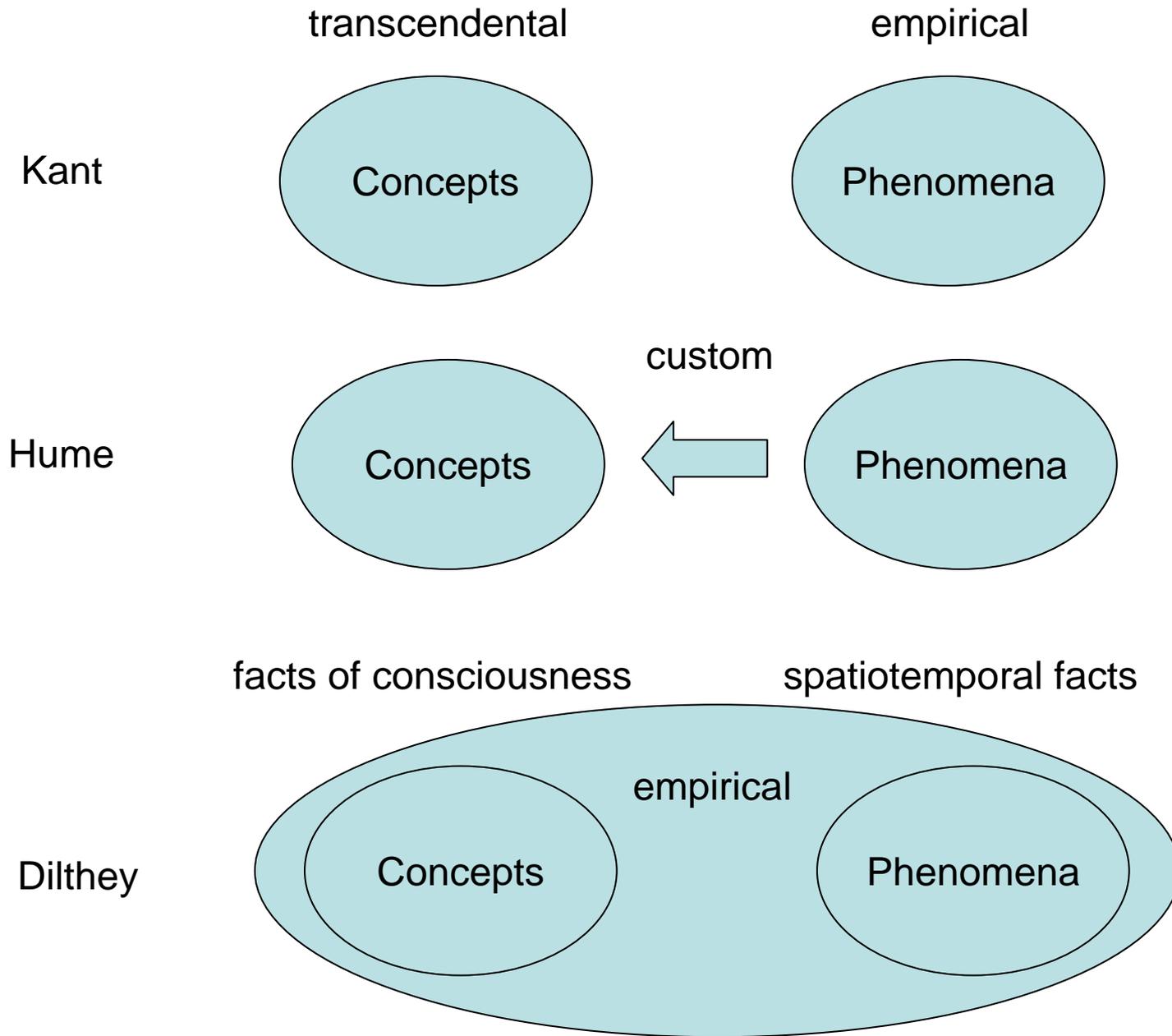
1. „German“ Empiricism

- German philosophers of the 19th Century like Trendelenburg, Ueberweg and Dilthey criticized classical empiricism and developed an own (“German”) alternative:
- Empiricists and Positivists like Mill, Bain and Comte fail to provide an empirical account of concept analysis and of the problems of the so-called moral sciences
- Concepts are ‚Tatsachen des Bewusstseins‘ (facts of consciousness) that cannot be analyzed by means of their physical equivalent
- Both Kant and the German Idealists *and* the philosophers of the empiricist tradition fail to provide a theory that appreciates the empirical character of facts of consciousness

Dilthey's Epistemology

„No real blood flows in the veins of the knowing subject constructed by Locke, Hume, and Kant, but rather the diluted extract of reason as a mere activity of thought.“

„Therefore, I will use the following method in this book: I will relate every component of contemporary abstract scientific thought to the whole of human nature as it is revealed in experience, in the study of language, and in the study of history, and thus seek the connection of these components.“(Dilthey, IHS, XVIII)



Towards a critique of historical reason

- The 'Introduction to the Human Sciences' forms not only an additional chapter in Kant's critical project but it tries to replace the critique of *pure* reason by a critique of *historical* reason
- *The method* to study reason is not a transcendental or a dialectical logic (against Kant and Hegel) but psychology.
- Open question: in what sense is this 'psychology' related to the 'transcendental psychology' of the Marburg School?
- Natorp (in a letter to Dilthey from 9 March 1895): "Wir würden allerdings Psychologie auf Erkenntnistheorie gründen, nicht umgekehrt"

2. Non-reductionism:

„Three fundamental laws concerning the universal connection between the mental and the physical“
(GS XXII, 148ff)

- 1. Law (embeddedness): Facts of consciousness cannot be isolated from the psycho-physical unity ('psycho-physische Lebenseinheit') in which they are situated.
- 2. Law (Parallelism): a fact of consciousness exists only as a thing that 'supervenes' (in modern terminology) a particular physical event.
- 3. Law (Incommensurability): facts of consciousness and physical facts are not only parallel but also incommensurable. We have to notice „the total difference between the way in which mental things are interconnected and the way in which we determine physical phenomena through matters of reasoning (Denkmittel).“

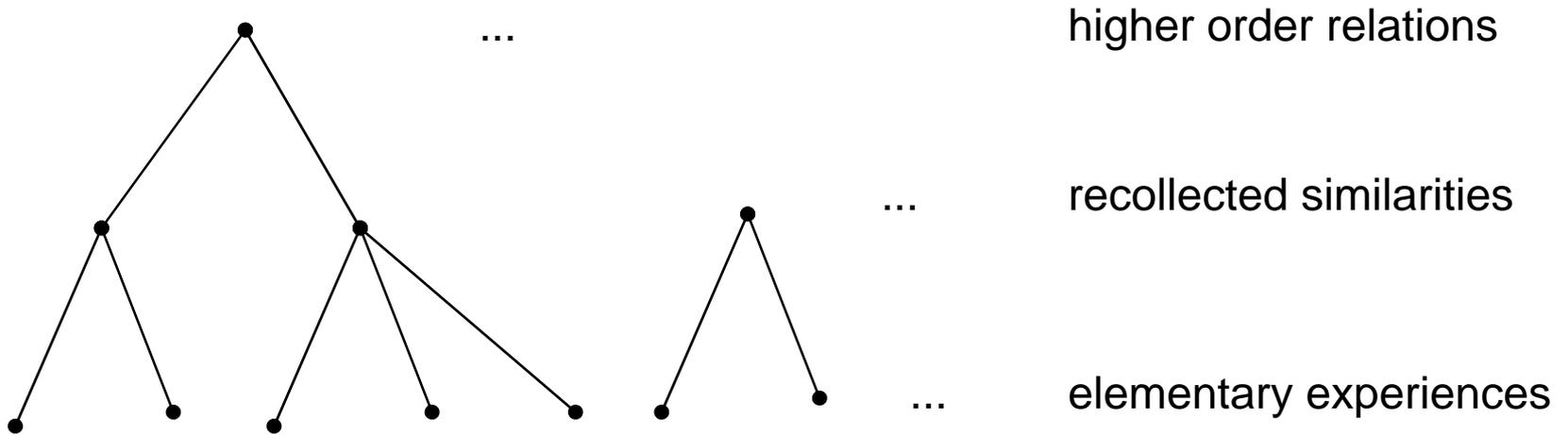
1. „German“ empiricism in the *Aufbau*

- The *structure* that is reconstructed by the constitutional system is a purely empirical thing.
- Elementary experiences (Elementarerlebnisse) and recollections of similarity (Ähnlichkeitserinnerungen) form a complex relation that must already contain every relational structure that we constitute via quasi-analysis later on

- The neo-kantian interpretation (Friedman, Richardson) claims that the whole structure of the constitutional system, i.e. the whole complex relation that is given by means of ‘Ähnlichkeitserinnerungen’ must have some transcendental background
- Beside of that aspect of the constitutional system (that I do not want to discuss here) it seems obvious that *inside of the system* every relation that we obtain via quasi-analysis must have the same epistemological status

Carnap

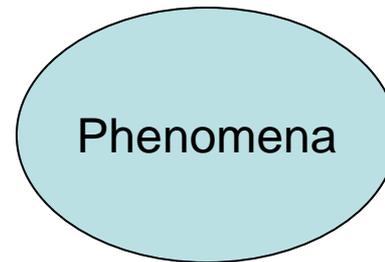
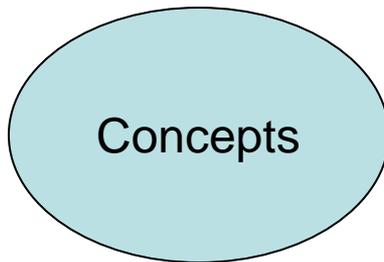
phenomena & concepts



transcendental

empirical

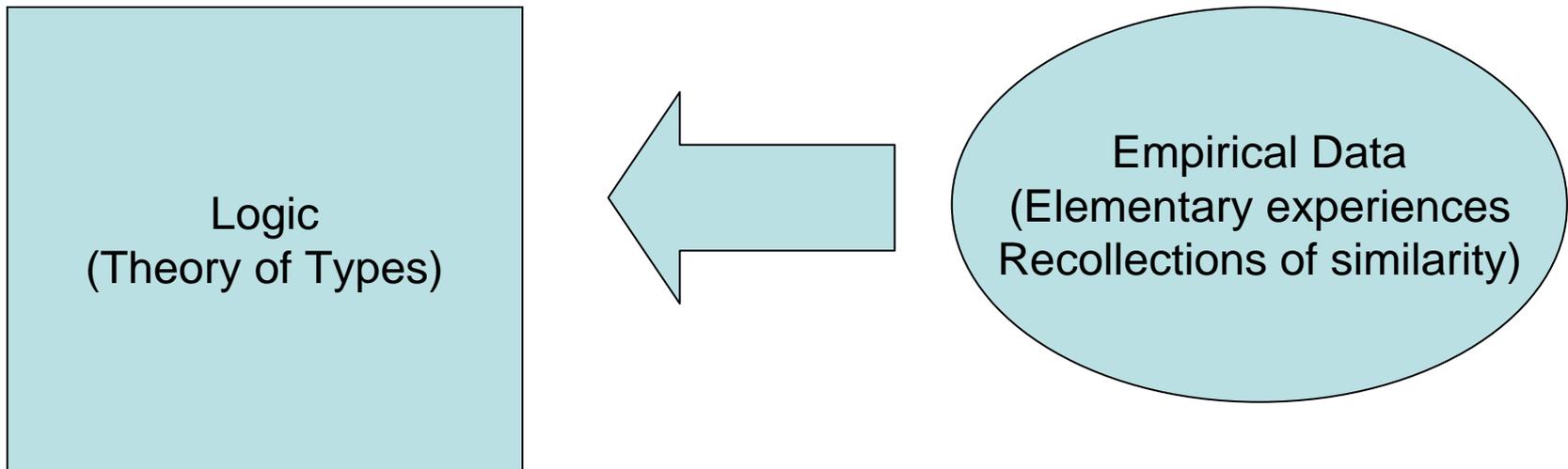
Kant



Dilthey and Carnap: Example I

Logic merely *reconstructs* the data
It allows us to find more systematic
and better organized presentations
of the data –
but it does not add any structure!

The complete structure of
the system is already
given by the empirical data



- The similarity with Dilthey lies in the fact that there is no distinction between a world of empirical phenomena and a world of non-empirical concepts.
- In other words: Carnap's conception is (in that respect) neither a Kantianism nor a classical empiricism but a version of "German" empiricism as we can find it in the philosophical tradition of the Dilthey-school

A Diltheyian form of “psychologism”

- The “internal questions” of the constitutional system (to use a later terminology of Carnap anachronistically) are (in a sense) not “formal” or “transcendental” questions but rather psychological ones (and in a sense they are purely formal questions)
- The epistemic basis of the constitutional system is neither a transcendental logic ((Neo-)Kantianism) nor a platonic heaven (Frege)
- Gestalt psychology (§67), no distinction between “Sinn” and “Vorstellung” (§44)

2. Non-Reductionism in the *Aufbau*

- One of the most puzzling features of the constructional system of the *Aufbau* is that it seems to argue both for reductionism and non-reductionism (cf. §§ 4, 25, 41)

Dilthey and Carnap: Example II

§ 4: „Wenn ein Konstitutionssystem der Begriffe oder der Gegenstände ... in der angedeuteten Art möglich ist, so folgt daraus: die Gegenstände zerfallen nicht in verschiedene, unzusammenhängende Gebiete, sondern *es gibt nur ein Gebiet von Gegenständen und daher nur eine Wissenschaft.*“

§ 25: „Die später darzustellende Konstitutionstheorie wird daraufhin geprüft werden müssen, ob sie in dem von ihr aufzubauenden Begriffssystem, dem ‚Konstitutionssystem‘ ... den hier angeführten Gegenstandsarten [i.e. physische, psychische, geistige Gegenstände etc.] einen Platz zuweist.“

Dilthey and Carnap: Example II

§ 41: „Aus der Konstitution auf Grund derselben Grundgegenstände folgt, daß die Aussagen über alle Gegenstände umformbar sind in Aussagen über diese Grundgegenstände, so daß die Wissenschaft der logischen *Bedeutung* ihrer Aussagen nach von nur éinem Gebiet handelt. Das ist der Sinn der ersten These. [§4] Die Wissenschaft macht aber in ihrem praktischen Verfahren keineswegs immer Gebrauch von jener Umformbarkeit, indem sie etwa alle ihre Aussagen auch wirklich umformte. Sie macht vielmehr ihre Aussagen hauptsächlich in der Form von Aussagen über konstituierte Gebilde, nicht über die Grundgegenstände. Und diese konstituierten Gebilde gehören verschiedenen Konstitutionsstufen an, die alle unter einander sphärenfremd sind. Der logischen Form ihrer Aussagen nach hat es Wissenschaft daher mit vielen selbständigen Gegenstandsarten zu tun. Das ist der Sinn der zweiten These. Die Vereinbarkeit beider Thesen beruht darauf, daß es möglich ist, verschiedene, einander sphärenfremde Stufen aus denselben Grundgegenständen zu konstituieren.“

- There are different spheres of objects that are independent and not reducible to each other
- But the constitutional system must provide a tool to relate the object spheres to each other in such a way that every object of a sphere x has a clearly defined counterpart in the basic sphere b of the system
- How does this work?

Definitions in use

An *explicit definition* identifies an object a of sphere s' with objects b, c, \dots of a different sphere s , so that one may substitute every instance of a with b, c, \dots and therefore eliminate s' .

Usually s' is a type of relations over s and the explicit definition identifies the objects of the sphere s' as sets of objects of the sphere s . For that purpose we need only a 'logical translation rule' that replaces an object of type s' by a set of objects of type s .

A *definition in use*, on the other hand, identifies an object a of sphere s' with objects b, c, \dots of a different sphere s and the identification is established by a *non-logical translation rule* t that forms a function from s to s' . One may substitute then every instance of a with $t(b, c, \dots)$, because $t(b, c, \dots)$, like a , is an object of type s' .

Dilthey and Carnap: Example II

explicit definition

Formula ... a ...



Formula ... b,c... ...
(with some 'logical translation')

definition in use

Formula ... a ...



Formula ... t(b,c...) ...

Explicit definitions are *a special case* of definitions in use (where the translation rules can be formulated by means of the logical or set-theoretical vocabulary).

Non-reductionism

In the case of a definition in use the sphere s' cannot be *reduced* to s . Both the sphere s' and the translation rules remain to be non-eliminable non-logical elements of the language.

Nevertheless, a definition in use defines a clear *counterpart* in s for every object of s' . It *constitutes* s' on the basis of s without *reducing* it to s .

Dilthey and Carnap: Example II

- This is a formal version of the informal message of Dilthey's non-reductionism:
- Objects are embedded into a different sphere via definitions in use (Law 1)
- Definitions in use establish a parallelism between two spheres (Law 2)
- But the two spheres that are related via definitions in use are nevertheless incommensurable (Law 3)

Conclusions

- There are similarities between Carnap's *Aufbau* program and some typical theoretical elements of the Dilthey school
- It is obvious that both the Dilthey school and the Neo-Kantians played an important role in Carnap's intellectual development
- In order to understand this intellectual background of Carnap's philosophy better we have to develop a more comprehensive picture of the philosophies of the Dilthey school and of the Neo-Kantianisms (at least) of the southwest German and the Marburg school
- My project is intended as a further step in that direction