

‘Left-Kantianism’ and the ‘Scientific Dispute’ between Rudolf Stammler and Hermann Cohen

Elisabeth Widmer (University of Oslo)

elisabeth.widmer@ifikk.uio.no

Partially sponsored by *KanDem: The Kantian
Foundations of Democracy Project* (University of Oslo)



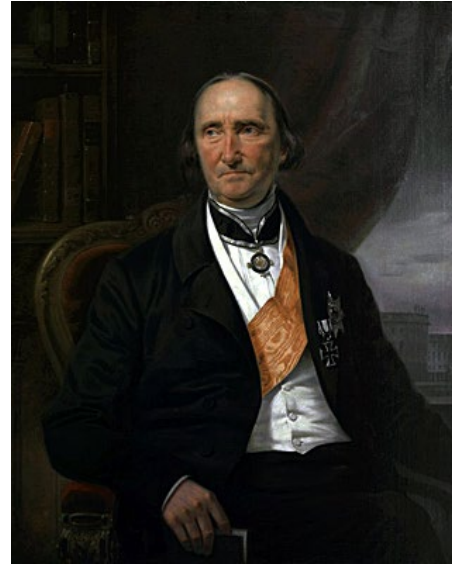
- Usual characterization: Marburg School's "ethical socialism" was a "coherent intellectual movement (Willey 1978, Beiser 2018)
 - My thesis: There are at least two camps within the Marburg School
 - Hermann Cohen's justification of the CI as a foundation to critique capitalism, building on the *natural law* tradition
 - Rudolf Stammler's transcendental justification of law, building on the *historicist* tradition
 - "Scientific Dispute" (Natorp 1913)
- Left-Kantianism

1. Introduction
2. Important Predecessors (Trendelenburg, Savigny, Lange)
3. Cohen's Neo-Kantian Foundation for Ethical Socialism
4. Historicist Tendencies in Rudolf Stammler's Kantian Socialism
5. 'Scientific Dispute' and 'Left-Kantianism'

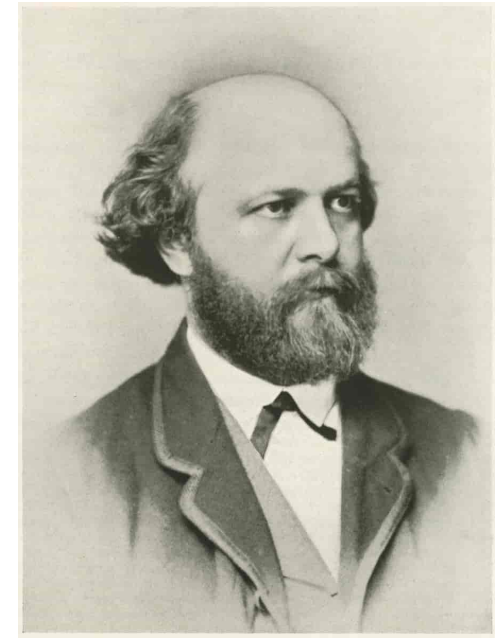
1. Introduction
2. Important Predecessors (Trendelenburg, Savigny, Lange)
3. Cohen's Neo-Kantian Foundation for Ethical Socialism
4. Historicist Tendencies in Rudolf Stammler's Historicist Kantian Socialism
5. 'Scientific Dispute' and 'Left-Kantianism'



Adolf Trendelenburg
(1802-1872)



Friedrich von Savigny
(1777-1861)



Friedrich Albert Lange
(1828-1875)

Adolf Trendelenburg (1802-1872)

- Natural Law theory
- ‘principle of continuity’: A and non-A is both true.
- “While the day is coming, it is already, and it is not yet”
- Trendelenburg argues that “contradictions” are “based on receptive intuitions,” meaning that pure thinking would inevitably rely on an intuitive category of “*coming-into-being*.”



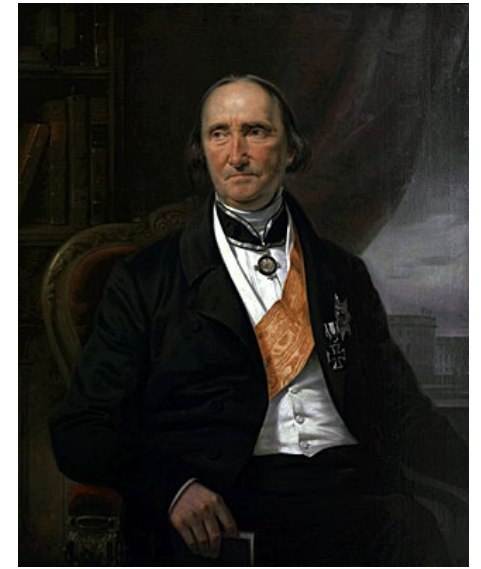
Adolf Trendelenburg (1802-1872)

- Account of historical reason
- We recognize ideas in their transitional state between 'autonomy' and 'heteronomy'
- "Universality" is the "essence of reason"
- The *principle of continuity* in the practical sphere says that we recognize a set of norms in their transitional state between freedom and determinism under the category of an "ethical end".



Friedrich von Savigny (1779-1861)

- The legal sciences (*Rechtswissenschaft*) need to restrict their investigation to inductive investigations of historically formed legal contents.
- General claims are based on recognizing the changing character traits of different sets of legal norms over time.
- Social norms are merely depicted in their coercive, empirical, and external manner.



Trendelenburg

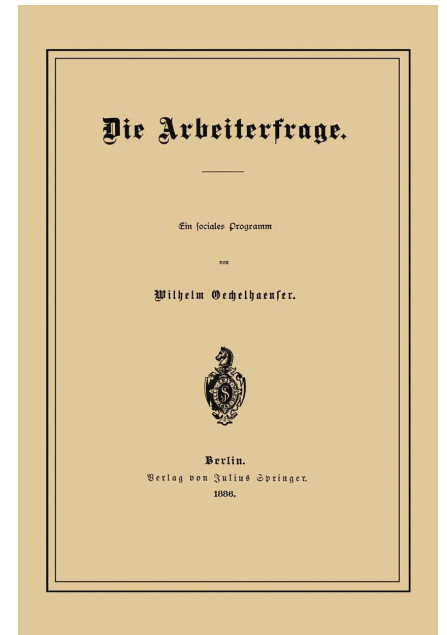
- Identify ethical norms (continuous basis)
- Rejects the distinction of external and internal freedom
- Disentangling the universal element in empirical laws

Savigny

- Refrains from an ahistorical framework
- Focuses merely on coercive laws
- Scrutinizing the historical appearance of the psychology of a "*Volk*"

Friedrich Albert Lange (1828-1875)

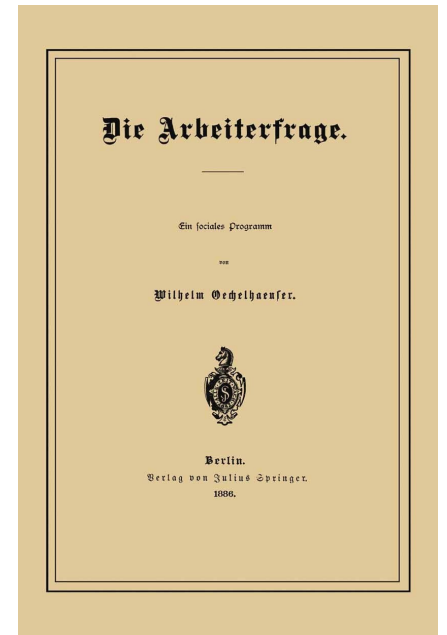
- Understanding the conditions of social experience means scrutinizing the origins of egoistic behavior
 - Vague view on jurisdiction
- Natural law *and* historicist tradition



Friedrich Albert Lange (1828-1875)

Aesthetic Theory (Natural Law)

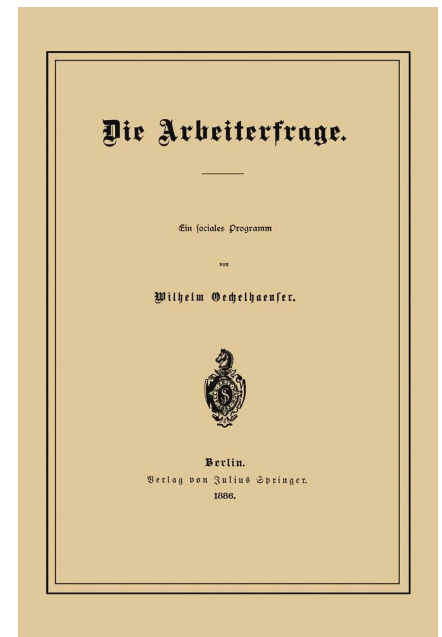
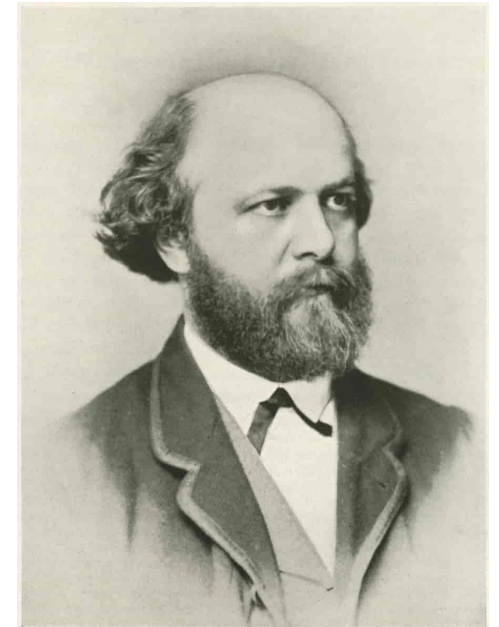
- Aesthetic-ethical ideal of “equality” guiding deliberations about the social realm
- Fictitious Ideal=harmonious order
- “Only through this contrast”, claims Lange, “reality appears evil” (Lange 1866, 22)



Friedrich Albert Lange (1828-1875)

Historicist-Relativist Line of Argument

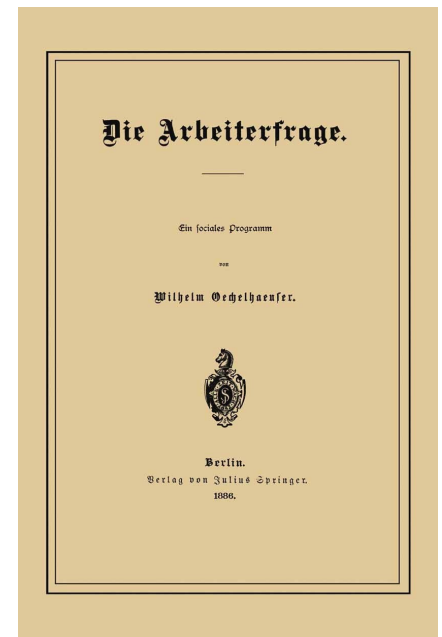
- “Even slavery or the payment of tribute to a robber can be regarded as a contract that was once considered lawful.” (AF, 252)
- “My logic is probability calculation, my ethics are moral statistics, my psychology is based on physiology; I try in one word to move solely in the exact sciences” (Ellissen 1894, 106).



Friedrich Albert Lange (1828-1875)

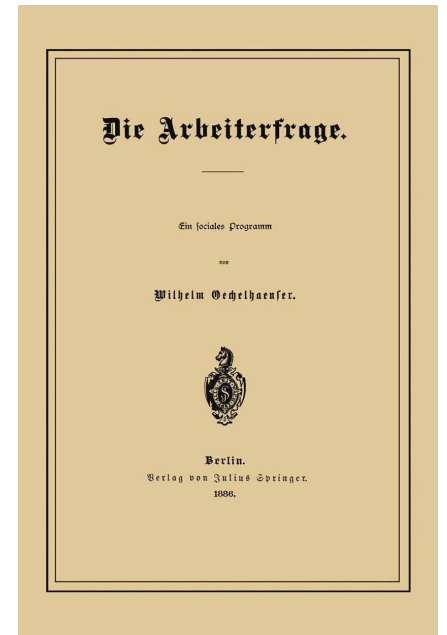
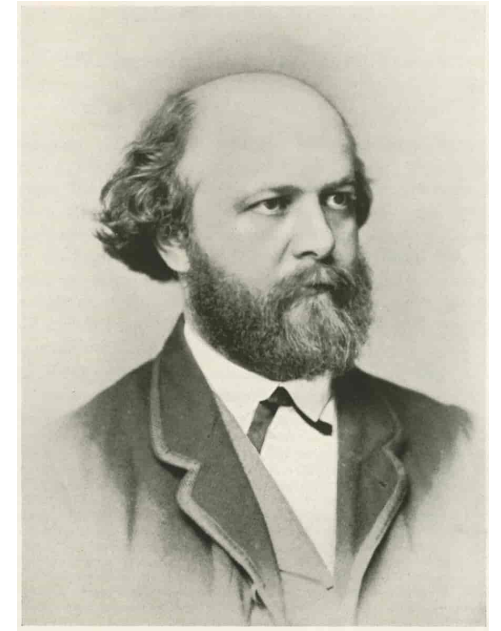
Historicist-Relativist Line of Argument

- Class struggles indicate that a system promoting egoism is in place
- “If [...] one complains of lack of promotion, and others regard him as a vain miser, both parts are often right in a certain sense; only the former should realize that the greater part of his reproach strikes at the social institutions existing at the time, and the latter should bear in mind that real forces are hidden behind such feelings, namely unsatisfied needs” (AF, 49)



Friedrich Albert Lange (1828-1875)

- Natural Law Line of Argument
 - Idea of harmony provides continuation
- Historicist-Relativist Line of Argument
 - Egoist structures are responsible for normative demands



1. Introduction
2. Important Predecessors (Trendelenburg, Savigny, Lange)
3. Cohen's Neo-Kantian Foundation for Ethical Socialism
4. Historicist Tendencies in Rudolf Stammler's Historicist Kantian Socialism
5. 'Scientific Dispute' and 'Left-Kantianism'

Hermann Cohen (1842-1919)

- parallels to Trendelenburg's 'principle of continuity'
- "This book attempts to present Kant's epistemological justification of ethics in the psychological *movement* (Bewegung) in its developments" (ERW, vi)
- "The *movement* in law and state contains an immanent appeal to an external forum [...]. We shall later claim the concept of history for this purpose" (ERW, 439)
- "It is history on which the idea of perpetual peace is grounded, and it vouches for the *continuous movement*" (454)



Hermann Cohen (1842-1919)

Principle of continuity

“No person is allowed to be used ‘merely as a means.’ Every person must always, at the same time in the administration of the moral world, be treated as ends in themselves.” (KBE, B279-280)

→ “Allheit”



Hermann Cohen (1842-1919)

- Shows similarity with Lange with regard to the *critical* aspect of philosophy
- “Harmonious order” → “Moral law” as a concept with which immoral developments in the empirical social world can be detected

→ Reform-based socialism



1. Introduction
2. Important Predecessors (Trendelenburg, Savigny, Lange)
3. Cohen's Neo-Kantian Foundation for Ethical Socialism
4. Historicist Tendencies in Rudolf Stammler's Historicist Kantian Socialism
5. 'Scientific Dispute' and 'Left-Kantianism'

Rudolf Stammler (1856-1938)

- Distinction between the “formal” and “material” side of sociality.

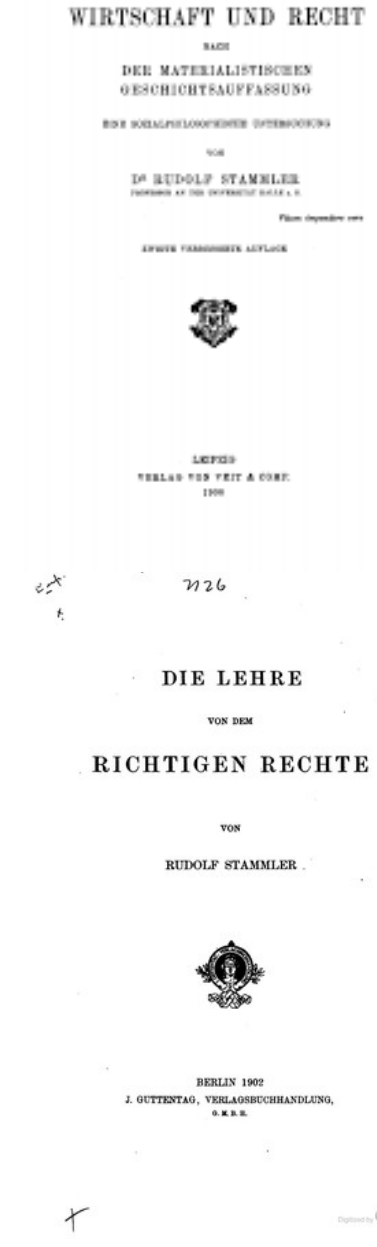
→ Echoes Savigny and Lange’s historicist line of argument



Rudolf Stammler (1856-1938)

Formal side of sociality

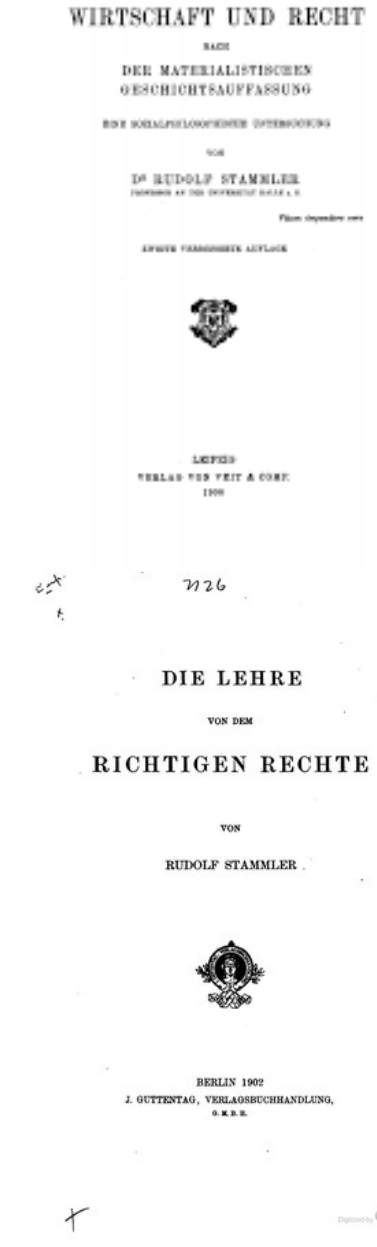
- “Natural” law:
- “By natural law, I understand legal propositions which contain the *theoretically correct law* under *empirically conditioned* circumstances; which do not yet have positive force merely because of this insight but function as a source of law demanding a change or reorganization of the law in force” (WR, 185)



Rudolf Stammler (1856-1938)

Formal side of sociality

- “Natural” law:
- “By natural law, I understand legal propositions which contain the *theoretically correct law* under *empirically conditioned* circumstances; which do not yet have positive force merely because of this insight but function as a source of law demanding a change or reorganization of the law in force” (WR, 185)



Rudolf Stammler (1856-1938)

Formal side of sociality

- The “theoretically correct law” requires rendering empirical facts under the idea of systematicity.
- Three-fold function
 - Explains how knowledge is possible
 - Grounds the principle of cultural progress
 - Normative principle



Rudolf Stammler (1856-1938)

Material side of sociality

- Scientific scrutiny of economic relations
- “The lawfulness of the social life of people is, according to the doctrine of social materialism, a regularity of economic phenomena” (WR, 29)
- Methodology: Inductive and deductive reasoning



Rudolf Stammler (1856-1938)

- “[N]ot the exact collection of isolated data is what makes a good historian, but rather the right synthesis of the universal concept of law.” (WR, 23)
- Savigny → understands the legal realm as a reflex of an economic system
- Lange → we need to understand and scrutinize class struggles



1. Introduction
2. Important Predecessors (Trendelenburg, Savigny, Lange)
3. Cohen's Neo-Kantian Foundation for Ethical Socialism
4. Historicist Tendencies in Rudolf Stammler's Historicist Kantian Socialism
5. 'Scientific Dispute' and 'Left-Kantianism'

Cohen

- rejects the separation of law and morality
- Empirical facts → deductive reasoning
- Socialism: Bottom-up → human right

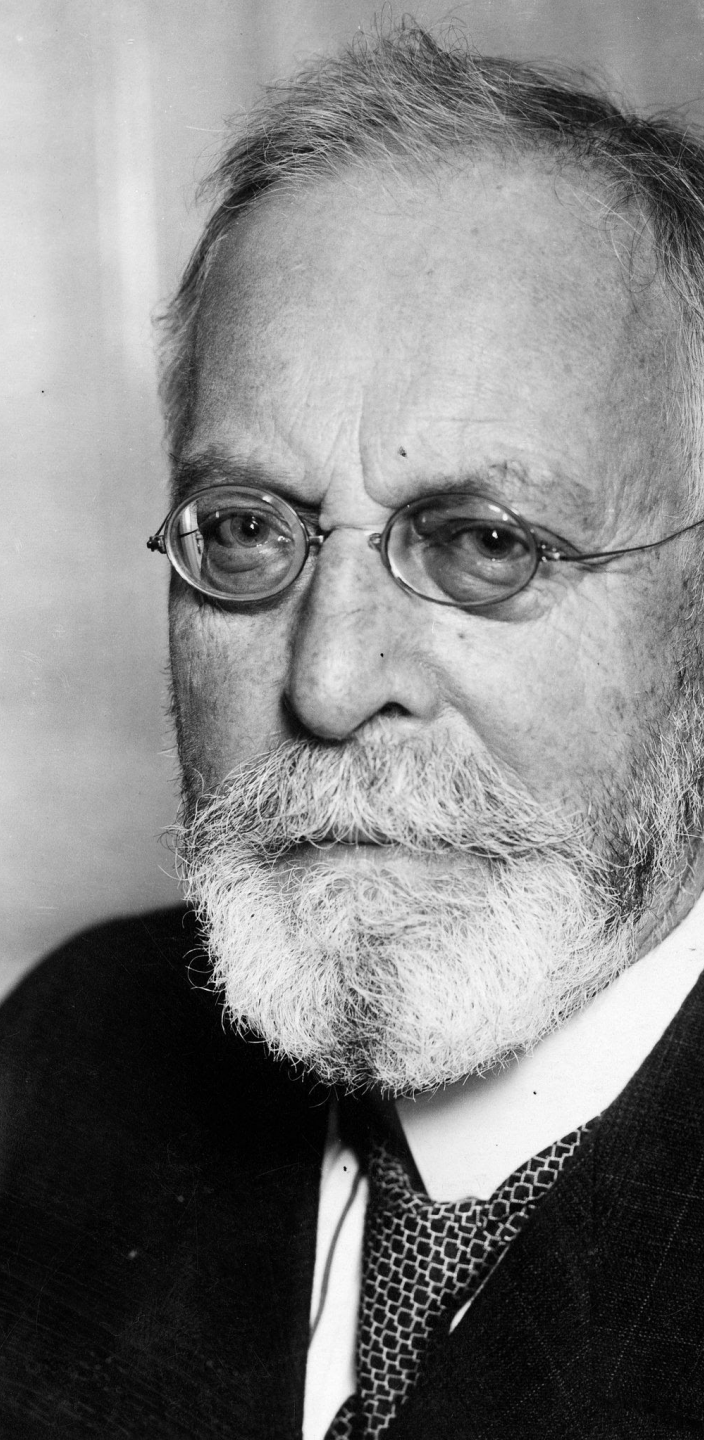
Stammler

- Accepts the coercive nature of law, and thus the separation of law and morality
- Empirical facts → deductive and inductive reasoning
- Socialism: Top-down → centrally organized

Cohen and Stammler were not the only ones providing a novel Kantian account of socialism!

- Max Adler
- Conrad Schmidt
- Ludwig Woltmann
- Karl Vorlaender
- Franz Staudinger

→ *Left-Kantianism*



‘Left-Kantianism’ and the ‘Scientific Dispute’ between Rudolf Stammler and Hermann Cohen

Elisabeth Widmer (University of Oslo)

elisabeth.widmer@ifikk.uio.no

Thank you!

Partially sponsored by *KanDem: The Kantian Foundations of
Democracy Project* (University of Oslo)

