

**Human Self-Creation: Paul Natorp's Theory of Education**  
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## Foreword

My enthusiasm to familiarize myself with Paul Natorp's pedagogical thinking arose in the early 1990s when I was a visiting researcher in Germany with the aim of getting familiar with the German tradition of social pedagogy. During the visiting year, I wrote an extensive treatise in Finnish titled "Idea-Historical Development of Social Pedagogy in Germany," in which I reviewed all significant interpretations of social pedagogy.

Already in the early stages of my career, Natorp and his educational thinking were selected as a special subject of my research interest. In my career, I have become relatively widely acquainted with various educational theories and the history of educational thinking, which gives perspective and a sense of relativity to the examination of academic pedagogical discussions. The interest in Natorp's thinking has remained and actually increased as a result of my exploration of different schools of thought in education.

In this study, I discuss Natorp as a classic of social pedagogy, whose interpretation of social pedagogy embodies an ethical-normative approach and emphasizes the coherence of education and social life. In my opinion, in his educational theory, he used the concept of social pedagogy to express the close connection between education and efforts to build a socially just society. As a researcher of social pedagogy, I see Natorp as a great figure in education: a classic whose interpretation of social pedagogy is not sufficiently known in the field.

It should be mentioned that, in this book, I do not discuss Paul Natorp's educational thought from the point of view of social work, which is topical in the study of the German social work tradition

based on the concept of social pedagogy. Natorp himself did not use the concept of social pedagogy in a social work-specific sense, but considered it to manifest the fundamental communal nature of education in general, and to express the inseparable connection of educational theory with social theory, political philosophy, and social ethics.

I do not think the primary purpose of this book is to make Natorp's educational thinking known, but rather to prompt an academic discussion about the philosophical foundations of pedagogy in educational research communities. I hope that the treatment of the key features of Natorp's educational theory, the basis of his argumentation and thinking, will widely lead to such a discussion.

There is a scarcity of literature in English about Natorp as a pedagogical thinker and his educational theory. Since German is not my first language, and neither is English, I had difficulties in many places interpreting Natorp's thought process expressed in German into English. However, I wanted to write in English, today's *lingua franca*, to reach the wide community of scholars interested in educational theory and its philosophical underpinnings.

I thank Dr. Joanne Jalkanen and John Ryan, MA, PME, for their great help in the linguistic editing of the book. I also thank Professor Dr. Dr. Ralf Evers, an expert in Natorp's educational thinking, with whom I was able to have an inspiring correspondence in the spring of 2021 about some interpretations of Natorp's views. In addition, Dr. Sauli Puukari and Kaisa Wolde, MA, deserve special thanks for commenting on the manuscript in the final stages of the writing process. The contribution by all of you has been very significant.

Considering the magnitude of the educational task and Paul Natorp's exceptional capability to deal with its philosophical

foundations in a sophisticated way, I feel that my own skills are inadequate in presenting the features of his pedagogical thinking. For Natorp, working on the philosophical foundations of education was not only a matter of the mind but also of the heart, which he seems to have devoted himself to with all his energy. The result has been an incomparable all-encompassing reflection on the essence, foundations, and meaning of education for human individual and communal existence.

In its diversity, comprehensiveness, and depth, Natorp's educational theory provides a universally valid, independent-of-time-or-place foundation for both academic educational philosophical discussion and the practical implementation of the educational mission in time and place at all times. Thus, familiarizing myself with the thinking of such a significant intellectual figure like Natorp has been very rewarding for me, even though I do not reach the same level of reasoning, reflection, and argumentation when examining his thinking.

I lay down this treatise in the hope that, despite its flaws, it will inspire readers to reflect on the nature of educational mission and its philosophical foundations in all its grandeur, but also in its ever-increasing demands as a result of expanding complexity of social life.

# 1. Introduction

This book is a form of trans-illumination of Paul Natorp's educational thought with respect to the concept of social pedagogy. At the same time, the book is intended to contribute to the academic debate around the conception of education in the Kantian tradition, emphasizing the definition of concepts and argumentation based on transcendental deduction. Particular attention is paid to the idea of human autonomy as the foundation of the theory of education, which is emphasized in Natorp's pedagogical thought.

As one of the leading figures of Neo-Kantianism and the most prominent Neo-Kantian theorist of education, Natorp offered a significant contribution to the Kantian tradition of educational thinking. It is, nevertheless, necessary to examine Natorp's pedagogical theory-building and argumentation thoroughly to clarify his way of viewing the nature of education. To do so involves the discussion of Natorp's educational thought in its entirety, with respect to the ethical, anthropological, epistemological, and political aspects.

Natorp delineated his theory of education<sup>1</sup> in two comprehensive opuses and in scholarly articles and lectures published as anthologies and readings. In a practical manner, the information he provides in articles is included in the two books, which are systematical introductions to the epistemological foundations of educational reflection as well as to the goals, forms, and methods of educational activity. The two opuses – *Sozialpädagogik: Theorie der Willenserziehung*

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<sup>1</sup> In this book, the English term “education” is used throughout in a wide sense, as a meta term encompassing of all kinds of pedagogical activities aimed at promoting all-round human development.

*auf der Grundlage der Gemeinschaft*, originally published in 1899, and *Sozial-Idealismus: Neue Richtlinien sozialer Erziehung*, published originally in 1920 – constitute the main materials of this book.<sup>2</sup> These are complemented by Natorp's texts on education published in three volumes of *Gesammelte Anhandlungen zur Sozialpädagogik* in 1907.<sup>3</sup>

While the first main opus, *Sozialpädagogik*, was an effort to create a new discipline combining social science and educational science on a moral philosophical basis, the second one, *Sozial-Idealismus*, was more about educational philosophy with respect to political theory. In both works, Natorp attached the attribute "social" to the terms of "pedagogy" and "education" in the forms of "social pedagogy" and "social education." There was a gap of 20 years between the former and the latter, during which a notable change of social and political circumstances took place. The works, however, deal with the conceptual basis of education from an ahistorical transcendental perspective and adhere essentially to each other. Accordingly, Natorp characterized the later as "an amplification which ... deals with the crisis of the Western culture."<sup>4</sup>

Natorp had published some notable texts concerning the concept of social pedagogy before his first main opus *Sozialpädagogik*, but this was the first work in which he introduced social pedagogy as a comprehensive conceptual system. His work on social pedagogy prior to and after this opus, however, are also useful in completing the picture of his way of understanding education and its foundations

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Natorp, *Sozialpädagogik: Theorie der Willenserziehung auf der Grundlage der Gemeinschaft* (Stuttgart: Fr. Frommanns Verlag, 1899); Paul Natorp, *Sozial-Idealismus: Neue Richtlinien sozialer Erziehung* (Berlin: Verlag von Julius Springer, 1920).

<sup>3</sup> Paul Natorp, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur Sozialpädagogik*, Vol. I–III (Stuttgart: Fr. Frommanns Verlag, 1907) [Zweite, verbesserte und vermehrte Auflage (Stuttgart: Fr. Frommanns Verlag, 1922)].

<sup>4</sup> *Sozial-Idealismus*, iv.



as a specific discipline. Natorp's treatise on the nature of social pedagogy as a specific discipline becomes somehow attached to a distinct branch of educational philosophy.

Among Natorp's other pedagogy texts, other works worthy of mention are *Allgemeine Pädagogik in Leitsätzen zu akademischen Vorlesungen*, which is based on his academic lectures on pedagogy, and *Philosophie und Pädagogik: Untersuchungen auf ihrem Grenzgebiet*, in which he examines the relationship of pedagogy to philosophy, considering that philosophy provides a scientific basis for pedagogy, and emphasizes social-pedagogical perspective in educational theory, describing the relationship between the individual and the community in education as a fundamental problem of pedagogy.<sup>5</sup> In *Allgemeine Pädagogik in Leitsätzen zu akademischen Vorlesungen*, he comprehensively outlined the features of his system of pedagogy in a compact whole.

Natorp is better known as a frontline epistemologist of Neo-Kantian philosophy than a great theorist of education. In the German tradition of social pedagogy, he is regarded as an ignored classic. Nevertheless, his educational system is essentially influenced by Immanuel Kant's philosophy. To examine and introduce Natorp's educational thought intelligibly, it is necessary to discuss it in relation to Kant's philosophical system and thinking. Analysis of this kind is an important aspect of this book.

Simply put, this book provides an analysis of Natorp's educational system and thought, with the aim of clarifying his educational way of thinking by analyzing the nature of his argumentation within the

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Natorp, *Allgemeine Pädagogik in Leitsätzen zu akademischen Vorlesungen* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1905); Paul Natorp, *Philosophie und Pädagogik: Untersuchungen auf ihrem Grenzgebiet* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1909).

conceptual system of social pedagogy. The academic motivation to discuss Natorp's pedagogical theory is associated with the importance of the Kantian tradition of educational philosophy. Epistemologically, Natorp's educational theory-building was based on a transcendental method developed within the Marburg school, in the development of which he himself participated, examining education as a relationship between the prevailing cultural reality and the universally applicable concepts and laws that objectively define it.

Extensive research has been done on Kant's philosophy. Although Natorp's philosophical system and thought are essentially connected to Kant's comprehensive preparatory works, there are good reasons in this book to concentrate on Natorp's own works and avoid the overwhelming deluge of Kant's literary works and research on Kant's philosophy. For the sake of clarity, it is important to emphasize that this book is not concerned with analyzing how Natorp's pedagogic theory is influenced by Kant's philosophy.

Although this book does not discuss in detail how Natorp's educational thought relates to Kant's philosophical system, Natorp's pedagogical system is understandable only in relation to Kant's philosophy, especially Kant's theory of mind, including the classification of knowing, willing, and the ability to form aesthetic judgements. Like Kant, Natorp understood education as the cultivation of the human mind's abilities, either as education carried out by other people or as self-education. He basically emphasized the communal basis of education.

For Natorp, the educational theory is primarily the subject of practical reason related to ethics, but also the subject of theoretical reason related to the laws of valid knowledge, as well as the subject

of aesthetics, as it concerns the aesthetic aspect of human nature, that is, the ability of artistic creativity that embodies aesthetic judgment.<sup>6</sup> According to Kant, in the human mind, reason ensures that intellection is consistent, and argument is formally valid with the rules of logic followed. Respectively, Natorp saw logic as a fundamental element in pedagogical theory-building that monitors the formal validity of reasoning.

Moreover, Natorp emphasized the communal nature of education and, accordingly, the essential connection of educational theory with social ethics. His methodological approach regarding pedagogical conception was closely connected to Kant's *The Critique of Practical Reason*<sup>7</sup> by which his thought, argumentation, and pedagogical system building essentially abided. In effect, Natorp characterized his book *Sozialpädagogik* as an attempt "to lay the foundation for setting a goal by will as well as for education of will ... on which Kant based his ethics."<sup>8</sup> Correspondingly, those works of Kant that are relevant to the topic are used in this book to clarify Natorp's ideas and way of thinking.

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<sup>6</sup> In this book, the ability of artistic creativity that embodies aesthetic judgment is referred to in a simplified manner as aesthetic judgment. The capability for aesthetic judgment is regarded as a prerequisite for artistic creativity, which in turn is considered a human ability that allows people to orient themselves in life aesthetically and view the world and life through an aesthetic lens, enables the aesthetic experience, and makes it possible for people to include an aesthetic perspective in their work and other activities, and allows them to engage in various artistic activities in the broadest sense of the word.

<sup>7</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (n.p., 1788), in Kants Werke, Band V (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1968), 1–164; available in English, for example:

- Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason* (n.p., 1788), trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott (London: Longmans, Green, & Co. Paternoster Row, 1889), published online: Internet Archive, 2008;
- Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason* (n.p., 1788), trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> *Sozialpädagogik*, 47.

Calling his educational thought social pedagogy and expressing social pedagogy as a theory of moral cultivation<sup>9</sup> in terms of education in the communal context that concerns development of will, Natorp's pedagogy went beyond a purely individual-centered view of education limited to individual development. At the same time, however, he emphasized the development of a person's entire consciousness in the task of education, consisting of intellectual, moral, and aesthetic education in accordance with the basic faculties of the human mind.

Natorp saw pedagogy as "a science of formation (*Wissenschaft der Bildung*), that is, the theoretical basis for deciding questions concerning education (*Erziehung*) and teaching (*Unterricht*)" and distinct from a mere theory of skills.<sup>10</sup> His argumentation was built entirely on deductive reasoning, which can be considered the fundamental common thread of Kantian philosophy. Put differently, he discussed and scrutinized the nature of education by means of theoretical reasoning, following the logic of *a priori* argumentation according to Kantian critical idealism.

As Natorp states, the goal of education is not a concept of nature or a psychological concept but a concept of reason. In other words, it does not concern the empiric reality because it has not yet become real. Consequently, it cannot be defined by empiric research. Nature does not contain consciousness and cannot set out the aim of human development as an idea. Correspondingly, the essence of the idea is not a psychological construct and cannot be conceived on the base of psychological research on mental mechanisms.

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<sup>9</sup> Following Natorp's conception, the term "moral cultivation" or "moral formation" or "moral education" refers predominantly to education of will, which Natorp saw as the essence and main thread of education. The attribute "moral" will not be repeated in this study when using the term "education." The term "education" is used to refer to the whole task of education, covering intellectual, moral, and aesthetic education, and including the idea of education as a form of moral activity.

<sup>10</sup> *Allgemeine Pädagogik*, 1.

While research on physical and psychological reality seeks to identify the order of empiric reality and the laws of nature, the idea, as a concept of human consciousness, belongs to another kind of knowledge realm. In the same way as Kant, Natorp distinguished between theoretical and practical reason as “two aspects of consciousness ... as worlds of intellect and will.”<sup>11</sup> In conclusion, the idea is not a causal concept expressing physical or psychological cause-and-effect chains, but it is an attribute of human consciousness.

With this view of the aim of education as a question of free will instead of a question of empiric knowledge, Natorp leans on Kant’s moral philosophy. The aim of education, in theory and practice, applies *a priori* reasoning and cannot be determined *a posteriori* definition. The experience does not provide us with an understanding of how we should see the purpose and quality of education and how this understanding steers our course of action.

Accordingly, he directs us to discuss and even define the aims, forms, and means of education from this point of view, with respect to the condition of the development of will. As such, it is particularly a question of moral education insofar as morality is a question of will. Moral education, however, is not a field separate from the entirety of education, nor is the faculty of will a separate entity of the human mind.

In the founding of pedagogy, therefore, “it is not just ethics that belong to determining the task of education, but the three philosophical law-based sciences (*Gesetzwissenschaften*)<sup>12</sup>: logic, ethics, aesthetics ... for by developing the entire content of consciousness in its law-

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<sup>11</sup> *Sozialpädagogik*, 25.

<sup>12</sup> The attribute “law-based” does not refer to society’s legislation, but to the epistemological principles of valid deduction. In an epistemological sense, “law” undeniably refers to universal validity of deduction. To avoid confusion, the German term *Gesetzwissenschaften* has been anglicized as “law-based sciences,” not literally “law-sciences.”

based (*gesetzmässig*) structure from the first elements onwards, they, at the same time, describe the natural progression in an objectively universally valid form, that is the normal path of human development ... without requiring the help of psychology, which is rather the science of subjectivity."<sup>13</sup>

Natorp dealt with many of the same themes in his pedagogical writings, repeating many lines of thought and principles. In this treatise, particular attention is paid to Natorp's way of defining the key concepts: to vocalize the deduction rules, to come to conclusions, and to specify the methodological means of argumentation. The attempt is rather to provide an overall picture of Natorp's educational theory than to criticize it or question its justification. This notwithstanding, this book is not just a simplified description of Natorp's multidimensional education theory, which might be possible to a certain extent but not very wise.

Natorp's educational theory contains many pedagogically important cross-cutting themes that are discussed more widely than the mere description of Natorp's thinking would require. In a way, this discussion expands the review outside Natorp's education theory, but in principle it is fundamentally attached to or rises from Natorp's pedagogical thinking.

The outcome is an all-encompassing discussion of Natorp's educational theory worked out in a conceptual system, including reflection on the scientific foundation of pedagogy and the importance of education in human existence, inspired by his thoughts.

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<sup>13</sup> *Allgemeine Pädagogik*, 5–6.

## 2. Paul Natorp as a theorist of education

### 2.1. Portrait of Natorp as a philosopher

Paul Natorp (1854–1924) was a central figure of the Marburg school of Neo-Kantian philosophy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Better known as an epistemologist than educational philosopher, he is portrayed as a philosopher in-between Neo-Kantianism and phenomenology. However, he never entered into phenomenological epistemology in its proper sense.

Natorp focused his studies on classical philology and philosophy. His doctoral dissertation for Ernst Laas in 1876 was in the field of philosophy of history and his habilitation dissertation in 1881 for Hermann Cohen was in the field of philosophy of science. He was appointed Professor of Philosophy and Pedagogy at the University of Marburg in 1885 and Professor of Ordinary Studies in the same target area in 1893.

Along with his academic achievements, Natorp committed himself to political debates as a protagonist of socialist social order in terms of the ideals of the French Revolution. As an educational philosopher, he emphasized the interconnection between educational and social philosophy, and combined the Kantian vision of the Enlightenment with the political ideals originating from the French Revolution.

After studying history, classical philology, and philosophy, in his postgraduate studies, Natorp oriented himself to the philosophy of history and philosophy of science. He worked as a Professor of Philosophy and Pedagogy at the University Marburg from 1885 until his death in 1924, collaborating with Hermann Cohen, another central figure of German Neo-Kantianism. In addition to Kant's philosophy,

Natorp was also known as an expert on Plato's philosophy. In the field of pedagogy, he was an avid proponent of Pestalozzi's ideas.

Natorp had several students who achieved significant academic careers or were influential figures in cultural and political fields. These students included Ernst Cassirer, Edmund Husserl, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Martin Heidegger, and Karl Barth. Several other prominent non-German figures of the twentieth century, for example Boris Pasternak and Mikhail Bakhtin in Russia<sup>14</sup> and Émile Durkheim, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Pierre Bourdieu in France,<sup>15</sup> were influenced to varying degrees by Neo-Kantian philosophy.

It has been stated that "the chief task for any account of Natorp's philosophy, then, is to make sense of his notion of rational autonomy" in relation to the "transcendental method of the philosophy of science and cognition" as well as the "unifying principle of science and ethics, in particular as the concept of law (*Gesetz*)."<sup>16</sup> Thus, the concept of law refers to the universally valid explanation of both nature and morals based on the rules of logical thinking. In addition to the philosophical context, the concept of reason's autonomy was a fundamental element of Natorp's theory of human nature and played an important role in his pedagogical and political thought.

Profiled academically as a Neo-Kantian epistemologist, politically Natorp asserted himself as a protagonist of idealist socialism in the sense of "a vision of an ethically justified optimum society based on shared responsibilities and providing equal opportunities for

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<sup>14</sup> Craig, Brandish, "Bakhtinian Bildung and the Educational Process: Some Historical Considerations," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 49, no. 9 (2017): 867–878.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Redding, "Pierre Bourdieu: From Neo-Kantian to Hegelian Critical Social Theory," *Critical Horizons* 6, no. 1 (2005): 183–204.

<sup>16</sup> Alan Kim, "Paul Natorp," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/natorp/>.



education and participation.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, his influence was not limited to educational philosophy but, in a broader sense, concerned the influence of Neo-Kantian philosophy in the social, cultural, and political domains and respective intellectual fields of the academic world.

Natorp’s theory-building was based on a transcendental method developed within the Marburg school, examining education as a relationship between the prevailing reality and the universally applicable concepts and laws that objectively define it.<sup>18</sup> His ambition as an educational philosopher was to create a universal theory of education in the frame of the Kantian theory of ethics. He considered education as a form of human action aiming to make people intellectually and morally capable of reasonable individual and social self-creation, and he saw that this mission was about the cultivation of human consciousness as the core of individual and societal development.

Consequently, he made a significant effort to gestate a wide-ranging conceptual foundation for this mission. Moreover, his intention was not only a comprehensive theory of education; he, in fact, intended to create a new discipline combining educational and social scientific perspectives of humanity. With the view of education fundamentally as a form of social action occurring only in the social context, he called this new discipline, and his own conception of education, social pedagogy. According to Natorp, all pedagogy should be social pedagogy. In later works he moved further away from this idea and described social pedagogy as a distinct perspective of education.

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<sup>17</sup> Takeo Matsuda and Juha Hämäläinen, “Launching Paul Natorp’s Sozialpädagogik in Japan in the Early Twentieth Century,” *History of Education* 50, no. 3 (2020): 291–312.

<sup>18</sup> Kim, “Paul Natorp,” online.

Natorp problematized and discussed education as the cultivation of human will, seeing this as an elemental aspect of education within the cultivation of entire consciousness. Consequently, he prioritized the moral philosophical perspective in educational theory-building. He saw that education, as a form of human action, is a moral issue concerning both the pedagogical will and the will of those at whom the educational influence is targeted.

As far as Natorp pursued a universal theory of education, there are reasons to reflect upon the requirements and restrictions of such a conception. Efforts to create such a complete theory of education were made, for example, in the tradition of the Enlightenment to which Natorp and other Neo-Kantian scholars belonged. Correspondingly, the study on Natorp's deduction may provide information about the nature of the Enlightenment view of education as a possible "myth by which we live" and "as one of the grand narratives through which we structure our culture."<sup>19</sup>

Thus, as an educational philosopher, Natorp applied pressure to the moral philosophical perspective based on the Kantian deontological theory of ethics, which he considered a solid epistemological and anthropological foundation of educational theory-building. Moreover, he was inspired by Plato's theory of forms, and he applied Plato's virtue ethics, aspiring to create a universal theory of education based on an unshakable view of humanity in its entirety.

Natorp's theory of education has been characterized as "a requirement and mission to combine the task of popular education and education of young people, as well as individual education and cultivation, with categories of community and society, and express this as a

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Uljens, "The Idea of a Universal Theory of Education – an Impossible but Necessary Project?", *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 36, no. 3 (2002): 353–375 [353].

pedagogical program.”<sup>20</sup> His educational thought is regarded as “a conscious counterargument to Herbart” based on the Kantian ideas of epistemology and ethics as well as political and social theoretical criticism around the contemporary debate on the social question.<sup>21</sup> On the question of “Kant or Herbart,”<sup>22</sup> Natorp opposed Kantian and Herbartian philosophical systems as conceptual foundations of pedagogical thought and theory-building.

The critique of Herbart was essentially based on Kant’s way of processing the aim of education, Pestalozzi’s way of considering methods, and, in part, Pestalozzi’s and, in part, Fichte and Schleiermacher’s ways of adumbrating organizational issues.<sup>23</sup> Leaning particularly on Kant’s system of practical philosophy and Pestalozzi’s insight of cultivation embodying human nature as instantiating Kant’s way of thinking, Natorp directed the criticism especially at Herbart’s conceptions of ethics and psychology as elements of pedagogical theory. As a critic of Herbart and advocate of Kantian philosophy, he adduced philosophical arguments against Herbart based on the Kantian ethics and theory of consciousness.

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<sup>20</sup> Gerhard Michael Gottschalk, *Entstehung und Verwendung des Begriffs Sozialpädagogik: Extrapolation systematischer Kategorien als Beitrag für das Selbstverständnis heutiger Sozialpädagogik*. Eichstätter Sozialpädagogische Arbeiten. Band 16 (Eichstätt: diritto Publikationen), 336.

<sup>21</sup> Bernd Dollinger, *Die Pädagogik der Sozialen Frage: (Sozial-)Pädagogische Theorie vom Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zum Ende der Weimarer Republik* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006), 215; Norbert Jegelka, *Paul Natorp: Philosophie, Pädagogik, Politik* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1992), 190–192.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Natorp, “Kant oder Herbart? Eine Gegenkritik,” in Paul Natorp, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur Sozialpädagogik*. Zweite, verbesserte und vermehrte Auflage (Stuttgart: Fr. Frommanns Verlag, 1922), 147–187.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Natorp, “Herbart, Pestalozzi und die heutigen Aufgaben der Erziehungslehre. Acht Vorträge, gehalten in Marburger Ferienkursen 1897 und 1898,” in Paul Natorp, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur Sozialpädagogik*. Zweite, verbesserte und vermehrte Auflage (Stuttgart: Fr. Frommanns Verlag, 1922), 7–146 [8]. The original version: Paul Natorp, *Herbart, Pestalozzi und die heutigen Aufgaben der Erziehungslehre: Acht Vorträge, gehalten in Marburger Ferienkursen 1897 und 1898* (Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommanns Verlag, 1899).

Natorp discussed the mission of education in the light of the political ideals of social justice and democracy. His political vision was a social order based on cooperation, equal opportunities, and shared responsibilities. He participated in political debates of the times on the issue of schools, advocating an open and unitary educational system providing equal opportunities for an adequate education.<sup>24</sup> He saw education as an essential means in fighting against poverty and other social problems connected to early industrialization and urbanization.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, as a social and educational philosopher, Natorp was profiled as a protagonist of social reforms in terms of “idealistic socialism” and “ethical socialism” referring to the “socialism of cultivation” in the sense of equal educational opportunities.<sup>26</sup> Standing for a critical approach in the sense of social, political, and cultural criticism, Natorp saw his educational thought and educational theory as a counter-force to social evil and an adequate basis of appropriate regeneration of the societal order.<sup>27</sup> In effect, he tended to see the entire Neo-Kantian philosophy as such a power: functional social, political, and cultural development in accordance with desirable ideals.

Natorp was primarily a qualified and highly respected academic philosopher and a central figure of the Neo-Kantian movement, but he was also a protagonist of radical political action to improve the living conditions of working people. He was both “a cultural critic” and “a cultural warrior,” seeing the Neo-Kantian Enlightenment program

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<sup>24</sup> Franz-Michael Konrad, “Sozialpädagogik und Volksschulreform: Paul Natorp in den Schulpolitischen Kämpfen seiner Zeit,” *Zeitschrift für Sozialpädagogik* 2 (2004): 338–360; Joachim Henseler, “Paul Natorp (1854–1924),” in *Klassiker der Pädagogik: Die Bildung der modernen Gesellschaft*, ed. Bernd Dollinger (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2012), 179–195.

<sup>25</sup> Christian Niemeyer, *Nietzsche, die Jugend und die Pädagogik: Eine Einführung* (Weinheim; München: Juventa Verlag, 2002), 169.

<sup>26</sup> Dollinger, 100–103.

<sup>27</sup> Christian Niemeyer, *Klassiker der Sozialpädagogik: Einführung in die Theoriegeschichte einer Wissenschaft*, second edition (Weinheim: Juventa, 2005), 108.

as a moral mission in the sense of a categorical imperative of moral duty.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, he regarded the Kantian philosophical tradition as a fundamental element, even the foundation, of this mission.

There are good reasons to posit that Natorp's political activism embodied his philosophical thought rooted in Kantian epistemology and ethics. As Natorp saw that education and science were crucial elements of social and cultural development, his efforts to clarify the epistemological and ethical basis of education and science as philosopher were essentially linked to his political and cultural aspirations as an advocate of the labor movement.

Natorp's political views can be seen as deriving from – in Kantian words – his practical reason in terms of moral obligations. Similarly, his educational theory can be regarded as embodying the connection between pedagogical will and action in accordance with the same practical reason. Thus, the philosopher and the activist are intertwined as one. Hence, Natorp saw that adequate philosophy provides a proper foundation for all-round social and cultural progress. This is a fundamental principle of the Neo-Kantian system.

Like Neo-Kantians in general, Natorp too was a protagonist of Kant's paradigm of philosophy based on the method of critical idealism. Along with the Neo-Kantian efforts "to counter scientific positivism and *weltanschaulich* [ideological] materialism," "Natorp's works in social and pedagogical philosophy ... stood under the banner of 'idealism' (hence 'Social-Idealism' and 'Social Pedagogy')." <sup>29</sup> Accordingly, his educational thought is understandable and must be considered in the context of his philosophical system in its entirety.

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<sup>28</sup> Bruhn, Nils. *Vom Kulturkritiker zum "Kulturkrieger": Paul Natorps Weg in den "Krieg der Geister"* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann).

<sup>29</sup> Sebastian Luft, "Editor's Introduction to *The Neo-Kantian Reader*," in *The Neo-Kantian Reader*, ed. Sebastian Luft (New York: Taylor & Francis [Routledge], 2015), xx–xxxi [xx, xxiv].

Natorp, of course, identified himself neither as a social work researcher or social scientist, as our perspective today suggests, nor certainly as an educator or a teacher, even though his original professorship suggests it, and for this reason, the implicit examination of theoretical pedagogical questions, namely the question arising from philosophy, is what we can acquire.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, Natorp's educational thinking must be examined from his own orientation, taking as his starting point his internal field of meanings, worldview, and perceptions of human nature, society, morality, and knowledge.

In conclusion, Natorp was primarily a leading Neo-Kantian epistemologist with a special interest in pedagogy. As a protagonist of socialism and advocator of the labor movement, he participated actively in political debate, especially education policy. He stood for the educational rights of the labour movement and was committed to an integrated system of education in the name of the idea of educational equality. His theory of education essentially embodied the Kantian ideas of human nature, ethics, and theory of mind.

## 2.2 The Neo-Kantian perspective of education

Although Neo-Kantianism was not a monolithic philosophical movement, there are reasons to discuss a specific philosophical trend which influenced Germany between the 1870s and 1920s. Several common features of Neo-Kantian philosophers have been identified, such as adhering to Kant's key ideas and arguments; distinguishing between philosophy and psychology; applying the transcendental method of philosophy focusing on human culture and – as a central element of modern culture – the epistemology of

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<sup>30</sup> Ralf Evers (a German theologian, educationalist, and social scientist, extensively familiar with Paul Natorp's pedagogical thought, especially the religious aspect of Natorp's concept of social pedagogy); correspondence information, April 28, 2021.

science; aiming at an objective validity of deduction; and seeing the history of philosophy as an essential reference point of philosophical reflection.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, Neo-Kantianism arose “on the ruins of Hegelianism” as a philosophical movement aiming to take forward Kant’s ideas in theory and practice in tension to early Positivism, in both physical and social sciences.<sup>32</sup> It was primarily an academic faction of philosophy, but also a form of cultural movement regarding philosophy as a fundament of societal progress. With the view that human cognition, reason, is the highest denominator of truth and right, the protagonists of Neo-Kantianism emphasized the importance of strengthening people’s intellectual capacity for individual and collective self-creation through cultivation.

Principally, the Neo-Kantian movement embodied the central aspirations of Enlightenment. A central political aim was cultural refinement by means of cultivation. Historically, it was simply a continuum of the current of thought called Enlightenment in which the power of reason was seen as a fundamental element of societal development. The Neo-Kantian philosophers found Kant’s intellectual heritage a relevant groundwork for the efforts concerned. Natorp had a pivotal role among Neo-Kantian philosophers in the development of educational theory in this spirit. He was “the Neo-Kantian who wrote most about the process of *Bildung*,” that is, about the nature and conditions of purposeful education.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Jeremy Heis, “Neo-Kantianism,” *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/neo-kantianism/>.

<sup>32</sup> Melissa Lane, “Positivism: reactions and developments,” in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought*, ed. T. Ball and R. Bellamy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 321–342.

<sup>33</sup> Brandish, 872.

Although Kant saw education as a very important leg of human existence, the examination of educational themes in his own literary production is mainly limited to the work *Über Pädagogik* based on loose lecture concepts edited as a book by his student.<sup>34</sup> This work was not a systematic whole, although it provided an overview of Kant's pedagogical views. In any case, Kant considered education to be the greatest challenge of humanity, and the philosophy of creating human nature in his writing was linked to the themes of education in many ways, even though he wrote little about pedagogy.<sup>35</sup> Closely connected to the academic interest in Kant's philosophy and the endeavor to take action for developing Kant's philosophy further, the Neo-Kantians saw Kant's philosophy as an adequate frame for social and cultural progress.

Largely under Natorp's direction, the Neo-Kantian movement aspired to contribute to education and science policies, seeing themselves as the creators of the intellectual foundation of social and cultural development. The central goal of Neo-Kantian philosophy was to develop a sphere of culture philosophy based on Kant's philosophical heritage in terms of a transition from philosophy

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<sup>34</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Über Pädagogik* (n.p., 1803), in *Kants Werke*, Band IX (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1968), 437–572; available in English:

- Immanuel Kant, *On Education (Über Pädagogik)* (n.p., 1803), published in English: *Kant on Education*, trans. Annette Churton (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd., 1899), published online: Internet Archive 2008;
- Immanuel Kant, "Lectures on pedagogy," in *The Cambridge edition of the works of Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History and Education*, ed. and trans. Robert B. Louden and Günter Zöller. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 434–485 (published online 2013).

Unless otherwise noted, quotations in this book are from the version translated by Churton, accompanied by adequate bibliographical information also from the version translated by Louden and Zöller.

<sup>35</sup> Klas Roth and Chris W. Surprenant, "Introduction: The Highest Good – the Moral Endeavour of Education," in *Kant and Education: Interpretations and Commentary*, ed. Klas Roth and Chris W. Surprenant (New York: Routledge, 2011), ix–xxiv.



of science to philosophy of culture.<sup>36</sup> The culturalist view was essentially connected to the idealist perspective on the nature and conditions of social progress, providing a philosophical base for the Neo-Kantian conception of education.

As a “cultural project,” the Neo-Kantians challenged the positivist epistemology called “naïve realism” or “copy theory” which had become common with the strong development of the natural sciences, and developed an alternative to it based on Kant’s theory of knowledge, especially for two reasons: first, Kant’s philosophy gave reason “to doubt the underlying philosophical commitments of positivism,” and, second, it offered “a more satisfying analysis of how knowledge, whether in mathematics, natural science, or philosophy, is possible at all.”<sup>37</sup> Their relationship to cultural philosophy was first and foremost epistemological, particularly regarding the basis of valid knowledge in understanding historically shaped cultural values, norms, beliefs, and practices.

Methodologically, Neo-Kantian cultural philosophy relied on the transcendental approach of Kant and Hegel, extending the mind-centered perspective to the philosophy of the cultural sphere, which looked at the characteristics of the prevailing culture in an effort to identify the intentions it contained about what is desired. In other words, the Neo-Kantian idea of cultural philosophy concerned expressions of the will contained in culture, ideas expressing the will for cultural development.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the historical shaping of culture, which makes it decisively different from natural phenomena,

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<sup>36</sup> Sebastian Luft, *The Space of Culture: Towards a Neo-Kantian Philosophy of Culture* (Cohen, Natorp, and Cassirer) (Oxford University Press, 2015; Online Oxford Academic).

<sup>37</sup> Samantha Matherne, “Marburg Neo-Kantianism as Philosophy of Culture,” in *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer: A Novel Assessment*, ed. J. Tyler Friedman and Sebastian Luft (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 201–231 [202–203].

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.; Heis, “Neo-Kantianism,” online.

posed an epistemological and methodological challenge to the Neo-Kantian efforts to settle the grounds for comprehending the essence of cultural objects in terms of objectively valid judgements.

Contrary to empiricism, the “fundamental thesis” of Neo-Kantianism was that “the ultimate grounding of knowledge must lie in reason alone,” seeing that “reason cannot be divorced from that which thinking and rationally acting subjects do in the course of history” as then “the world is a world of human production ... it is culture,” “reason is itself subject to a dynamic development,” “human activity constructs the world,” and “philosophy has the task of reconstructing this dynamic development.”<sup>39</sup> Providing an epistemological counterforce to naïve realism, the Neo-Kantian metaphysically oriented critical idealism embodied a different understanding of the nature and mission of education as a factor of social and cultural development, too.

Accordingly, the Neo-Kantians, like Kant himself, regarded reason – the ability of the human mind to think, understand, and construct robust judgements logically – as the fundamental source of knowing and morality. Thus, the Neo-Kantian concept of education embodied an essentially rationalist epistemology, according to which reason is the fundamental principle and criterion of the truth and what is right. Neo-Kantians tended to see that the social and cultural decline of Western civilization was a consequence of the wrong epistemology. The Neo-Kantian movement aspired to provide a philosophical basis for proper civilizational criticism to promote desirable social and cultural development. Education was a key element therein.

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<sup>39</sup> Sebastian Luft, “Germany's Metaphysical War. Reflections on War by Two Representatives of German Philosophy: Max Scheler and Paul Natorp,” in *Clio, Internet Portal on History: Themenportal Erster Weltkrieg* (Marquette University: Philosophy Faculty Research and Publications 37, 2007), 1–28. [https://epublications.marquette.edu/phil\\_fac/37](https://epublications.marquette.edu/phil_fac/37)

The Neo-Kantian outlook was indeed optimistic. The movement contributed significantly to the development of the Enlightenment mindset, which became the broadly accepted base of the social and cultural current of thought of the twentieth century, although, afterwards, "it is this Enlightenment faith in progress that is today called into question."<sup>40</sup> There are reasons to try to explain this optimism, which is done in this book to some extent, but it has not been considered necessary to deal with the question of whether the Neo-Kantian view of education is relevant nowadays. It seems that Neo-Kantians themselves were not skeptical about the meaningfulness, rationale, and necessity of their Enlightenment mission.

So, the idea of Enlightenment was an essential element of Neo-Kantianism. Accordingly, the educational aspect was an integrated part of the Neo-Kantian philosophy, according to which philosophy is absolutely the determining factor of societal development, providing the intellectual grounds necessary for cultural reconstruction. Of course, the academic philosophy was focused on essential scientific themes with a specific interest in higher education, but there was an idea of wider connection and contribution to education, covering all aspects of education in its entirety.

Pedagogical will is an essential element of the aspiration to provide an intellectual foundation of appropriate social and cultural development: the understanding of what should be pursued by means of education. The Enlightenment mission was intrinsically a pedagogical endeavour embodying the aspiration to cultivate people, make society more civilized, and promote responsible citizenship. Moreover, the mission was to make people aware of and strengthen their capability towards rational self-determination in the sense of individual and collective self-cultivation. This was the

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<sup>40</sup> Uljens 2002, 357.

vision of Neo-Kantianism, manifesting Neo-Kantian Enlightenment, seeking pedagogical will.

The pedagogical will to cultivate was essentially about awakening the will of the people to become cultivated by means of science and education to make them aware of the possibility of and disposed towards self-cultivation. The Neo-Kantians followed the way paved by Kant for spiritual emancipation, internal freedom in the sense of mature use of reason. As a current of thought, this idea was named Enlightenment. Comprising several philosophical schools of thought, Enlightenment became the mainstream of education policy in Europe and worldwide. Before the First World War, the role of Neo-Kantianism was remarkable and significant in this trend, particularly in Germany.

Thus, as an expression of pedagogical will, the Neo-Kantian mission primarily concerned the will to cultivate, secondly the will to become cultivated, and thirdly the will to self-cultivation. It is an essential pedagogical issue in theory and practice to combine these three aspects or forms of will, even to reconcile them appropriately with one another. In addition, the social and cultural aspect of human existence with respect to the educational mission and the forms of pedagogical will must be considered within this consolidation. Education, self-education included, does not take place in a social and cultural vacuum.

The Neo-Kantian movement regarded their philosophy as an intellectual foundation, necessary for purposeful social and cultural development in terms of appropriate societal order. Natorp's idea that a revolutionary change in the philosophy of education is needed for inducing essential societal reform was largely advocated by the Neo-Kantian scholars "committed to the broader project of offering

deliberation. The power of reason was considered a key element of intellectual creativity and mature moral discretion. Well-educated, rationally oriented citizens were considered as the potential, even a necessary and sufficient precondition, of comprehensive sound social and cultural development. In this sense, the Neo-Kantian movement “understood itself as a form of cultural-philosophical idealism.”<sup>44</sup>

In conclusion, Neo-Kantianism provided a foundation for the gestation of new paradigms of research on culture and society, or even, moreover, efforts to explain the nature of humanity and human action. In this sense too, it contributed to the paradigmatic renewal of the social sciences and humanities, including sundry criticism of the Enlightenment view of education.

### 2.3 Studies on Natorp’s educational theory

Natorp called his educational approach “social pedagogy” (*Sozialpädagogik*), expressing the inalienable interconnection of educational and social aspects of human existence. However, he was not the first German scholar to use this term. There was a diverse academic debate around the concept of social pedagogy, and several German educational theorists had developed educational theory in this respect.

The concept of social pedagogy has arisen and been developed particularly in the German-speaking context. As such, Natorp’s educational thought has been examined mainly by a handful of German theorists of education, who have viewed it particularly as a special school of social pedagogy. In the German tradition of social pedagogy, Natorp has been described as a “forgotten theorist,”

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<sup>44</sup> Nachtshiem, 136.

because his way of using the concept of social pedagogy, despite its intellectual depth and comprehensiveness, never became a mainstream school.<sup>45</sup>

The studies on Natorp's educational thought are mainly authored by German scholars and published in the German language. In several general introductions to the history of education in Germany, especially works on the nature and history of social pedagogy, Natorp has been portrayed as a Neo-Kantian philosopher who created a distinct theory of education around the concept of social pedagogy. These publications are usually relatively rough descriptions of the key elements of Natorp's educational theory.

Another group of writings introducing Natorp's educational thought in brief are scholarly articles, which focus directly on Natorp as a theorist of education, aiming to explain the main features of his philosophy of education. Some of these articles are published in compilations on major educationists,<sup>46</sup> and a few more articles on Natorp's educational thought have also been published in national and international scientific journals. In addition, studies of Natorp's relationship to religion are worthy of note and also help to explain his educational thinking.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, there are material works about Natorp's philosophical thought and Neo-Kantianism that provide relevant background information for discussing his theory of education.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Niemeyer 2005, 89.

<sup>46</sup> Eg. Joachim Henseler, "Paul Natorp (1854–1924)," in *Klassiker der Pädagogik: Die Bildung der modernen Gesellschaft*, ed. Bernd Dollinger (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006), 179–195.

<sup>47</sup> Judy Saltzman, *Paul Natorp's Philosophy of Religion within the Marburg Neo-Kantian Tradition* (Hildesheim, New York: Olm, 1981); Todd Gooch, "Paul Natorp 'Between the Ages'," *Journal for the History of Modern Theology / Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte* 25, no. 1–2 (2018): 129–151; Ralf Evers, *Religion und Soziale Pädagogik: Der Beitrag Paul Natorps zur Begründung einer kritischen Sozialpädagogik* (Weinheim; Basel: Beltz Juventa, 2019).

<sup>48</sup> Alan Kim, "Paul Natorp," online; Ulrich Sieg, *Aufstieg und Niedergang des Marburger Neukantianismus: Die Geschichte einer philosophischen Schulgemeinschaft* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1994).