

## Questioning Beyond Subjectivity – Cassirer and Heidegger A Case Study: on the Davos Dispute\*

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**Abstract:** As a significant event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century European thought, the debate of Cassirer and Heidegger at Davos has had a long-lasting impact on a number of disciplines and scholars. My investigations serve the aim of offering an access to various methodological layers of a famous debate and exploring whether this debate can contribute to re-think horizons beyond subjectivity. This problematics is inseparable from the recognition of a new reading of Kant, of human (in)finity and of Cassirer's and Heidegger's two alternative approaches to hermeneutics. First, I offer some basic philological and historical considerations with regard to the development of a better understanding of this debate. Furthermore, I explore the Davos dispute itself as a hermeneutic-phenomenological event, concentrating on its own context and reconstructing the *human condition*, i. e. Cassirer's and Heidegger's return to the single, and main question "What is to be a human being?". Finally, I propose to assess what may be regarded as the main characteristic of these two eminent thinkers' dispute and a sense of this debate for philosophy and intellectual history.

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Conversations of Cassirer and Heidegger began with their meeting at the Hamburg section of the Kant Society in December 1923 and it continued in various forms (e. g. in the form of debates, reviews, footnotes and critical remarks) until Cassirer's death in 1945. The most famous moment of this connection may be regarded the Davos debate, which took place on March 26, 1929 at the second annual meeting of the International Davos Conference in Switzerland. The most accepted text-version of the debate is a collectively prepared protocol by Heidegger's disciple Otto Friedrich Bollnow, and Cassirer's disciple Joachim Ritter. Its authority – as Peter Gordon points out – was

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almost verbatim reconfirmed with a further handwritten manuscript by Helene Weiss.<sup>1</sup> In the late 1920s Heidegger and Cassirer were two of the most prominent philosophers in all of Germany,<sup>2</sup> thus this conference with the participation of colleagues, friends and students attracted great interest across Europe. Emmanuel Lévinas, Eugen Fink, Otto Friedrich Bollnow, Joachim Ritter and Helene Weiss were present as students at the time; furthermore, Rudolf Carnap, Herbert Marcuse and Leo Strauss were among the audience as well. Later, the Davos-dispute was cited or commented by known thinkers like Ludwig Binswanger, Erich Przywara and Heinrich Hermann.<sup>3</sup> All this makes it clear that the Davos-encounter may serve as a prominent reference point in disputes over the past and future European philosophy.

I would like to emphasize that I make a distinction between the general concept of debate and the extreme cases such as, for example, “quarrel,” “wrangling” or “hostility”. The latter cases pass far beyond the function of debate. I consider the debate a more harmless event than the mentioned extremities, namely an event by which I primarily understand coming up for discussion of things. From a hermeneutical perspective, there is a fundamental moment of gradually evolving debates that – based on Gadamer’s earlier analysis of Platonic dialogue – can be summarized by saying that a debate is essentially the space for possibilities and open proceedings whose dynamics give way to modify conditions. Representative debates eventually have happened in the history of philosophy where open questions still arise, which solutions cannot be visible sufficiently enough by one person. However, they may be described at decisive points from a wide variety of viewpoints, and in this sense, one needs to be involved in dialogues, or some kind of co-operation and joint efforts between the individuals and the community. It is not accidental that familiarity with debates plays a decisive role in cultural diplomacy. In the field of diplomacy, a debate is a substantive constituent of improving contact with others because it is able to contribute to the prevention of conflicts or, in the time of crisis, to become a possible mode of exploration and treatment of problems.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Eli Gordon, *Continental divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 109.

<sup>2</sup> Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945), who began his early academic life as one of Hermann Cohen’s and Paul Natorp’s students, was already 55 years old at that time, professor in philosophy at the University of Hamburg and rector of the University from November (1929/1930), as well as a leading representative of the Marburg school of Neo-Kantianism, the chief editor of *Kant-Studien* (which was the most significant philosophy journal of the age) and editor of the new twentieth-century critical edition of Kant’s collected writings (In more detail, see Hans-Ulrich Lessing, “Cassirers ‘Philosophie der symbolischen Formen’ und das Problem der Geisteswissenschaften”, *Existentialia* vol. IX (1999): 97–108.) Heidegger (1889–1976) is a younger thinker than Cassirer, who had recently published the *Being and Time* (1927) and took over Husserl’s chair of philosophy at the University of Freiburg (1928).

<sup>3</sup> For more details about participants, see Dominic Kaegi, “Davos und davor – Zur Auseinandersetzung zwischen Heidegger und Cassirer”, in Dominic Kaegi and Enno Rudolph ed. *Cassirer – Heidegger 70 Jahre Davoser Disputation* (Cassirer-Forschungen; Bd. 9) (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2002) 67–105. here: 68. note 3., and see further Gordon, *Continental divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*, 95.

<sup>4</sup> Let us think of the humanist scholar from the 16<sup>th</sup> century who often entered diplomatic service.

The motif appearing in Gadamer's writings is that we can promote understanding in the place of polemic.<sup>5</sup> According to the hermeneutics of Gadamer, the truth of both participants should be understood with goodwill – in the sense of doing full justice to the author's meaning – during the course of debate,<sup>6</sup> at the same time, it surely does not mean either self-surrender or objective neutrality. Rather the question arises on how we can face an event of debate itself in a philosophical way.<sup>7</sup>

In my paper, I attempt to sketch how it is possible to imagine the fields of philosophical debates and science diplomacy not only in opposition, but in prospect of congeniality and of interrelated options. Within this question, my contribution directs towards the hermeneutical perspective that may be called a possible sense of this philosophical debate and towards what we are to gain or lose through the mentioned debate.

### **Historical remarks – Self-interpretation and the climate of the discussion**

During the Davos conference, organized from March 17, 1929 to April 6, 1929, the major issue was one of the four famous Kantian questions: “Was ist der Mensch?”. While Cassirer held four lectures on philosophical anthropology, more closely on the problem of space, language and death, Heidegger gave a lecture three times on the critique of pure reason and the task of laying the foundation of metaphysics.<sup>8</sup> After their lectures, the emblematic Davos meeting followed. It is of historical importance to the scribing – secretarial – and editing-role of the disciples without whom a text-version of the dialogue living in memories would never have been retained, although the text is philologically problematic.

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<sup>5</sup> See István M. Fehér's analysis: “Szót érteni egymással. Jegyzetek a Gadamer-Derrida vitához” (Coming to an understanding. Notes on the Gadamer–Derrida Debate) in “*Szót érteni egymással*”: *Hermeneutika, tudományok, dialógus*” (Coming to an Understanding. Hermeneutics, Sciences and Dialogue), eds. István M. Fehér, Zsuzsanna Mariann Lengyel, Miklós Nyíró and Csaba Olay (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2013), 21–63.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition, revisions by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marsall (New York: Crossroad, 1989, reprinted London – New York: Continuum, 1999) (the citations refer to the 2006 reprint of the 2004 edition), 443 f, 571, 270–272.

<sup>7</sup> In this sense, our question is whether we can speak about mediation (a middle voice or medial reading) in a philosophical debate? Would any philosophical debate make it possible to provide more viewpoints or to increase our sensitivity to the problems, in this respect to promote openness to dialogue and to other cultures?

<sup>8</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* ed. F.-W. von Hermann (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1991) [hereafter: GA 3] XV. Translation: Idem, *Kant and the problem of Metaphysics* 5<sup>th</sup> enlarged ed. Trans. Richard Taft (Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1997) xviii. Bibliographical note: Heidegger's complete works are cited with the abbreviation GA (*Gesamtausgabe*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, from 1975 onwards) followed by volume number, comma and page numbers. Other works published outside of the *Gesamtausgabe* are cited with full bibliographical data at their first occurrence, then with abbreviations. All emphasis is original except in quotations otherwise specified. If there are references to both the original German text and the corresponding English translation, they are separated for example as follows [GA 3, XV. In English: xviii].

In this respect, it is not uninteresting to note Heinrich Rickert's contemporary exchange of letters with Heidegger. While Rickert expressed his dismay concerning Heidegger's understanding of Neo-Kantianism shortly after the debate, in his response, Heidegger referred with friendly intention to the fact that the protocol of the Davos debate had been formulated by others, and he had not received any text for proofreading.<sup>9</sup> One moral of this may be summed up as follows: there is the problem of authenticity in the case of every oral debate, and the task of the historian of philosophy includes evaluating not only what has been said but also the source itself insofar as he wishes to reconstruct the texts of the past. In his Kant-book, Heidegger reminds us that no written authorial manuscript was produced by Cassirer or Heidegger, moreover, in the protocol by Bollnow and Ritter there was no word for word transcription of a tape recording, but the record of a public session which was regarded as a reconstruction based on lecture notes of the two disciples.<sup>10</sup> All this may confirm that, in a philological respect, there is no authentic source of the debate. It also means that in the documentation of the Davos debate the two philosophers' thinking could not have been mirrored, but only the way how a philosophical debate was to be retained in the memories of the contemporaries. In the dialogue of *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, with regard to the Hegel-edition, Heidegger also formulated that "transcripts are, of course, uncertain sources".<sup>11</sup>

The centre of the debate between the two philosophers going on from 1923 to 1945 was the Davos dispute; however, the whole scope of debate passed far beyond that of what was to be central to it. The documents available related to their relationship are various. They met in person only three times (Hamburg, 1923; Davos, 1929; Freiburg, 1930), however, their debate proceeded not only in the form of living dialogue but further in their different writings. The very first meeting occurred at the Kant Society, where Heidegger held a lecture on "Tasks and Ways of Phenomenological Research" (1923).<sup>12</sup> This was followed by the Davos debate (1929)

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger and Heinrich Rickert, *Briefe, 1912 bis 1933, und andere Dokumente*. ed. Alfred Denker (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2002), 60–63. here: 61.: As Heidegger writes: "the 'Stenogram' was reproduced arbitrarily in a shortened form without me having a chance of proofreading the whole text despite my clearly expressed request to do so." ("Was das Manuskript der Davoser Diskussion betrifft, [Heidegger writes] so ist nach Ihrem Brief schon eingetreten, was ich kommen sah. Das 'Stenogramm' wurde in verkürzter Form Willkürlich vervielfältigt, ohne daß mir, trotz ausdrücklichen Verlangens, Gelegenheit gegeben wurde, das Ganze zu überprüfen. Rein durch Weglassungen, von anderem zu schweigen, sind Entstellungen entstanden.") The letter from Rickert is dated July 17, 1929, the response by Heidegger is dated 25 July 1929. Cited by Gordon, *Continental divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*, 140.; cf. also *ibid.*, 392, and the reference in note 4.

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger, GA 3, XV.

<sup>11</sup> Cited by István M. Fehér, "Primal Christian Life Experience and Eschatological Time. Martin Heidegger's Early Lectures on the Phenomenology of Religion", *Philobiblon* XVI 1 (2011): 203–229, 204. See Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959), 91.: "Nachschriften sind freilich trübe Quellen".

<sup>12</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 17<sup>th</sup> ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993) 51. and the reference in note 1. Translation: Idem, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

and finally Cassirer, invited by Heidegger, held a lecture in Freiburg in 1930.<sup>13</sup> The Davos debate is only a shortened form of that which had already been elaborately discussed in Heidegger's review on the second volume of Cassirer's magnum opus in the *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* (1928) as well as in his Kant-book (1929), and in Cassirer's review of Heidegger's Kant book in the *Kant-Studien* (1931). As an addition, we can also read Heidegger's well-known footnote to Cassirer in § 11 of *Being and Time* (1927) and Cassirer's six footnotes to Heidegger in the third volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1929). Cassirer's unpublished critique of Heidegger was edited by John M. Krois (1983).<sup>14</sup> Based on the scholarly literature, we may say that the relationship between Cassirer and Heidegger was commented in several important respects, yet the topic has received new impulses in recent years – primarily due to the renaissance of text editions and Cassirer scholarships.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, in an interpretive respect, there is a philological difficulty (a missing link) which has no solution so far. As it is known, the manuscript of Heidegger's Davos lectures, which was organically connected to the Davos dispute, was not preserved. Only a short summary remained, that was composed by Heidegger for the *Davoser Revue*, while Cassirer's lecture series also remained unpublished at Yale University as Cassirer's Legacy.<sup>16</sup>

The two debate partners knew each other's previous works relatively well: Cassirer thoroughly studied Heidegger's *Being and Time* and vice versa, Heidegger also knew well the volume I-II of Cassirer's *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* (PSF, I-II) on *Language* and *Mythical Thought*, though, they could not see each other as we have the opportunity to see them today (as two complete lifeworks). Unlike his debate partner – who was well-prepared in *Being and Time* –, Heidegger was a few steps behind, since he could not have known the core of Cassirer's philosophy. He

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<sup>13</sup> For more details, see Reinhard Margreiter, "Aspekte der Heidegger-Cassirer-Kontroverse", in Helmuth Vetter ed. *Siebzig Jahre Sein und Zeit. Wiener Tagungen zur Phänomenologie* (1997) (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 1999), 109–134, especially: 110–113.

<sup>14</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger: "Davoser Disputation zwischen Ernst Cassirer und Martin Heidegger", in Martin Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, Gesamtausgabe Vol. 3, ed. Von F.-W. von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1991), 271–296; Martin Heidegger, "Ernst Cassirer: Philosophie der symbolischen Formen. 2. Teil: Das mythische Denken. Berlin 1925 (Rezension)", *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* (Berlin), Neue Folge 5/1928, Issue 21, 1000–1012 (reprinted Heidegger, GA 3, 255–270); Martin Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*. Gesamtausgabe Vol. 3, ed. F.-W. von Hermann (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1991); Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 51, in note 1; Ernst Cassirer, "Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik: Bemerkungen zu Martin Heideggers Kant-Interpretation (Rezension)", *Kant-Studien* XXXVI/1931: 1–26; Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen. Drittel Teil: Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2010), 167, 184, 189, 196, and in note 215., 125; J. M. Krois, "Cassirer's Unpublished Critique of Heidegger", *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 3 (1983): 147–159.

<sup>15</sup> On the state of the Cassirer scholarship, see Hans-Ulrich Lessing, "Cassirers 'Philosophie der symbolischen Formen' und das Problem der Geisteswissenschaften", *Existentialia* IX (1999): 97–108, here: 98.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Davoser Vorträge: Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft und die Aufgabe einer Grundlegung der Metaphysik (Zusammenfassung)", *Davoser Revue* IV 7 (1929): 194–196, reprinted see: Heidegger, GA 3, 271–273.

based his arguments on the first two volumes of Cassirer's major work, which gave an incomplete image of his philosophy. The third volume, the *Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis*, which provided an essential exposition of Cassirer's thinking and a key to his philosophy, was published only a few months after the Davos dispute. In the light of this volume, a novel image unfolds about the Cassirerian philosophy, although it may eventually be one of the reasons why Heidegger never returned to Cassirer's thought after Davos. Originally, he intended to write a review of the third volume of Cassirer's *magnum opus*, however, it was never completed.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, in his own way, Cassirer engaged in a more in-depth confrontation with Heidegger's thinking after Davos, including political reflections which discussed Heidegger's relation to National Socialism in the 1940s.<sup>18</sup> According to Kaegi's interpretation, however, Heidegger also proceeded a latent debate with Cassirer in a later volume on Kant, that is his 1935/36 winter semester course on *Die Frage nach dem Ding. Zu Kants Lehre von den transzendentalen Grundsätzen*.<sup>19</sup>

It is clearly visible that the Davos debate is one of those topical issues where the context may not be entirely ignored because neither a historical nor a philological reconstruction is superfluous in terms of understanding. Yet, I cannot undertake the task of presenting all the points of possible connection and divergence that are essential for the Davos meeting in Cassirer's and Heidegger's thinking.<sup>20</sup> It should be mentioned here that the volume composed of contributions at the representative Heidelberg symposium (1999) clearly signifies that achievement of philological research can transform our understanding of the Davos dispute.<sup>21</sup> Despite the difficulties, it is worth appealing to the debate from two aspects: firstly, its conceptual content is concerned with the major themes of the history of philosophy; and secondly, the Davos dispute is a good example of how debate manifested itself in philosophizing because it illustrates from a debate theoretical viewpoint how different perspectives ramify from each other.<sup>22</sup>

### **Re-thinking the human being – Heidegger versus Cassirer**

From the very beginning, Heidegger opposed the practice of philosophical conferences, nevertheless, he himself also regularly accepted conference invitations. The participants of the Davos dispute were also invited, so it is not to say that a debate broke out in a spontaneous way, but the event was organized in the frame of a conference.

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<sup>17</sup> Margreiter, "Aspekte der Heidegger-Cassirer-Kontroverse", 115.

<sup>18</sup> See: Gordon, *Continental divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*, 257–322.

<sup>19</sup> Kaegi, "Davos und davor...", 72.

<sup>20</sup> On this issue, there are excellent monographies. See Gordon's already mentioned volume (of 2010) and Michael Friedman, *A Painting of the Ways. Carnap, Cassirer, and Heidegger* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> Dominic Kaegi and Enno Rudolph ed., *Cassirer – Heidegger 70 Jahre Davoser Disputation*, Vol. 9 of Cassirer-Forschungen (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Gordon analyzed this debate from both one and the other points of view, but for him the second viewpoint does not mean a debate-theoretical approach, but rather the approach of this philosophical debate in a historical context, how it can be reconstructed through the eyes of a historian. See Gordon, *Continental divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*, 2 f.

The Davos dispute can be characterized from many perspectives, since several questions surface in it (e. g. the task of philosophy, freedom, (in)finity, imagination, truth, humanism, the Enlightenment, etc.). At the same time, the initial point for each partner was to offer his own particular Kant-interpretation. The topic was not previously determined, but within the frame of the conference, almost in a natural way from the achievements of the former lectures, the question “what is man?” developed in the light of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Naturally, they differently approached Kant’s critical period, therefore his “Copernican revolution” also became the guiding thread in two ways of interpretation. Generally speaking, the Davos dispute was about what the task of philosophy itself was, and the answer to it could not have been rendered independent from the participants’ own philosophical positions (with Heidegger from the perspective in *Being and Time*, while with Cassirer from the worldview in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*).

Cassirer’s opening remarks started with the serious critique of Heidegger’s previously held three lectures on Kant, highlighting that his debate partner misunderstood Neo-Kantianism, especially Herman Cohen’s legacy. Connected to this, John M. Krois draws attention to the fact that the situation of the participants can be better understood if we reconstruct the meta-philosophical background of the dispute.<sup>23</sup>

For Cassirer’s situation, it is essential to know that Bruno Bauch, a professor of philosophy from Jena, backbit Cassirer’s master in the journal *Das Panther* of 1916 saying that “Cohen, being a Jew, cannot understand the German philosopher, Kant.”<sup>24</sup> Cassirer’s written response to it has not been published by *Kant-Studien*, since Bauch – a co-editor at the journal – resigned from the editorial staff. This earlier incident in itself – notes Krois – would not have had significance if a similar event had not happened on February 25, 1929, before the Davos conference. On that day, a report was published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* which declared that Otmar Spann, a professor from Vienna, had called in a Munich lecture two Neo-Kantians (Cohen and Cassirer) “strangers” [*Fremde*] who misinterpret Kant. This intellectual climate could have an influence on Cassirer’s *habitus* as a thinker in Davos. “The public attack – writes Krois – presumably created such an atmosphere which must have made it very difficult, if not impossible for Cassirer to have a differentiated and relaxed discourse on Neo-Kantianism. In the situation where Heidegger [...] criticized Neo-Kantianism, Cassirer could only express his solidarity with Cohen.”<sup>25</sup> The tension of this situation is further increased by the fact that Cassirer’s thoughts, still philosophically keeping with Cohen, are directed exactly to the sharpest contextual counter-point with Heidegger – namely to Heidegger’s idea of finitude and “thrownness” [*Geworfenheit*].

For Heidegger, however, it has special importance to note that – as Gordon also emphasizes referring to a 1929 letter of Heidegger to Rickert (on July 25) – at the time many colleagues indeed attacked Heidegger for his remarks, although: “he

<sup>23</sup> John M. Krois, “Warum fand keine Davoser Debatte zwischen Cassirer und Heidegger statt?” in *Cassirer – Heidegger 70 Jahre Davoser Disputation*, ed. Dominic Kaegi and Enno Rudolph, Vol. 9 of *Cassirer-Forschungen* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2002), 234–242, here: 242.

<sup>24</sup> Bruno Bauch, “Leserbrief”, *Der Panther. Deutsche Monatsschrift für Politik und Volkstum* 4, (1916/6): 148–154. See also: Gordon, *Continental divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*, 55 f.

<sup>25</sup> Krois, “Warum fand keine Davoser Debatte zwischen Cassirer und Heidegger statt?”, 240; also see: 238 f.; 241.

himself has never used the term of 'Neo-Kantianism', what is more, marked explicitly during the oral dispute that he has solely intended to expose the way Neo-Kantians understand the introductory part of the *Critique of Pure Reason* as 'epistemology', especially Transcendental Aesthetic and Analytic." Heidegger then added as follows: 'no one had doubt about this'.<sup>26</sup>

Both Cassirer and Heidegger lead the critique of the Neo-Kantian conception gradually to two basic different directions. It was with the help of the strategy of destruction that Heidegger pointed out what kind of unspoken and prevailing tendencies had motivated the emergence of the Neo-Kantian understanding. In the case of Cohen, Windelband and Rickert, their return to Kant was initiated by an epistemological perspective, more precisely it was revived by the question where philosophy has a place (and whether there is still a place for it) among the sciences. Thereby the true task of philosophy would be a theoretical science, in other words, it would be restricted to research and verification of the conditions of scientific knowledge. Neo-Kantians only saw a critique of metaphysics in Kant's critique of reason and considered German idealism's movement beyond Kant as a decline. Heidegger expressed his dissatisfaction with this view because the Neo-Kantians neglected the real core of Kant's metaphysics and its positive problem.

Cassirer found that the novelty of Neo-Kantianism lay in reactualizing the original insights of Kant's philosophy to a special direction so that the dimensions of history and culture can be embedded in Kantian worldview. The world of ethical act was extended to hitherto unknown dimensions for the Enlightenment, and the outstanding representatives of Neo-Kantian movement dealt with defence of autonomy of these historic-cultural dimensions against the natural sciences. This does not mean that Cassirer would have identified himself with Neo-Kantians. Rather he differed from its certain tendencies, too.<sup>27</sup> Neo-Kantianism appeared as a decisive paradigm for Cassirer, but it was not the wholeness of the problem insofar as Cassirer connected with Kant's striving to represent the transcendence by means of practical philosophy. He saw the philosophy of ethical entrance into infinity in Kant's philosophy,<sup>28</sup> therefore he attempted to reconcile Kant's critique of reason with the critique of culture. In his thought he already mobilized his worldview in three volumes of his major work. (I–III; 1923, 1925, 1929). Cassirer was already aware of the common deficiencies in both Neo-Kantianism and phenomenology. Before 1929 he had elaborated a new philosophy which was able to unify both Neo-Kantianism and phenomenology. Cassirer expressed, there is "absolutely no essential difference"

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<sup>26</sup> For the citation from Heidegger, see Gordon, *Continental divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*, 140; cf. 392, in note 4. Martin Heidegger, *Briefe, 1912 bis 1933, und andere Dokumente*, ed. Alfred Denker (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2002), 60–63. The date of Rickert's letter is July 17, 1929. The date of Heidegger's reply is July 25, 1929.

<sup>27</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 275. (In English: 194.): "this can only serve as a paradigm, and not as the whole of the problem", says Cassirer.

<sup>28</sup> As he writes, "the restrictedness to a determinate sphere suddenly falls away. The ethical [das Sittliche] as such leads beyond the world of appearances. Yet this is so decisively metaphysical that a breakthrough now follows. It is a matter of the transition to the *mundus intelligibilis*." (Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 276. [In English: 194]).



between the two great contemporary traditions.<sup>29</sup> Although he probably did not conceive this as a criticism of Heidegger, rather as a hidden reference to his own philosophical system, it must have been irritating for the debate partner. For Cassirer, Neo-Kantianism was not perceivable in a “dogmatic system” but in the direction of questioning, which Gordon calls “a special kind of philosophical creativity”.<sup>30</sup> On Cassirer’s view, the common direction with phenomenology lay in the fact that they were directed towards exploring a priori structures by questioning beyond the facts, therefore he heartily welcomed Heidegger’s transcendental-philosophical attitude.<sup>31</sup>

It is important to see, however, that Cassirer mobilized his own worldview in such a form that it was left completely unspoken in the course of debate. Based on the writings available at the time, Heidegger could not even have seen the plausibility of Cassirerian thought, therefore he regarded him with good reason a follower of the Marburg school of Neo-Kantians who, being unable to react to the crisis points of modern philosophy, moved within the frames of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophy. By all means, the primary target of Heidegger’s critique was centred on Neo-Kantian view and not on Cassirer’s, even so Cassirer felt that it was necessary to express his distance from Cohen as well: “Naturally, in the course of my work, much else has emerged”.<sup>32</sup>

By the way of turning against the Neo-Kantian epistemological approach, Heidegger endeavours to structure his own ontological understanding of Kant. He sees the very core of Kant’s ontological sight in the chapter on Schematism. Based on this, Heidegger asserts that Kant never gave up on metaphysics but interpreted “the task of ...*Critique of Pure Reason* as laying the ground for metaphysics”.<sup>33</sup> He thinks that by means of the operation of schematism Kant described the *world-forming* character of our finite human being, which is nothing other than exploring transcendence. The traditional meaning of transcendence was, of course, transformed in his philosophy; it did not imply a movement beyond the world of appearance, but primarily referred to the idea that *Dasein* is characterized by being-in-the-world, who is always already beyond itself. In his *a priori* relation to the world, “Dasein” who understands being is equal to transcendence itself. The notion of transcendence here describes the occurrence of the meaning of being emerging through life experience. Heidegger does not follow Kant on the way of Transcendental Deduction where the operation of schematism utterly falls outside the centre of Kant’s critical philosophy, and where the concepts of understanding become productive powers. In Kant’s view, it became emphatic that categories (the pure concepts of understanding) are *notios* (i.e. with their help we think of concepts [such as God, immortality and freedom] which extend over all our occurring experiences). The reason why Kant’s *notios* were problematic to him was because they did not imply schemes of time, concrete relations of time that were concerned with the knower. The chasm between the world of appearance and “being-in-itself” is in fact unbridgeable.

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<sup>29</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 274. (In English: 193.)

<sup>30</sup> Gordon, *Continental divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*, 137.

<sup>31</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 274. (In English: 193.): Cassirer says “as I had not expected to find it in him, I must confess that I have found a neo-Kantian here in Heidegger.”

<sup>32</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 275. (In English: 194.)

<sup>33</sup> Heidegger GA 3, 1. (In English: 1.) Cf. Heidegger GA 25, 10. especially § 3.

For Heidegger the solution means that categories are inherently schematized, they include concepts of time as well, and we can dissociate from these only through abstraction. The task of Schematism is to describe how knowledge of being is generated by the interplay of two complementary faculties of understanding and sensibility (*Verstand, Sinnlichkeit*) or concept and intuition/perception (*Begriff, Anschauung*). While the synthesis of knowledge clearly traces back to the activity of understanding in the chapter on Deduction, in Heidegger's view, synthesis emerges from the operation of schematism by dissolving the intuition and thinking in a "common root". It is the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) that is responsible for this schematism operating in experience. Imagination appears not as an accidental activity but as a fundamental form of our relation to being, and as such it proves more decisive for life than rationality. By means of imagination operating in schematism, Kant described the *worldforming* character of our finite human being, which was nothing else than uncovering transcendence. For Heidegger, the operating of imagination was not just another name for human subjectivity but a way of avoiding the concept of subjectivity itself. Schematism is "an art hidden in the depths of the human soul,"<sup>34</sup> it does not mean, however, that subjectivity stands in focus. On the contrary: it rather means that schematism cannot be founded on the self-activity of a human being, but its purpose is something beyond subjective as it directly reveals itself.<sup>35</sup> In Heidegger's view, the event of ontological understanding may be considered only if we come to understand how time and change build into our schemes, and how schemes of our thinking are able to crack open or modify by temporality. This is an event which cannot be evoked by the subject from a Heideggerian perspective. Accordingly, Heidegger naturally did not eliminate the notion of truth, but preserved its validity. Truth exists, but he was more interested in *its relation to reality* than *its concept formation*. Instead of absolute (indisputable, transcendent) truths, he was interested in the truth of finite human existence and how transcendence (emergence of the meaning of being) can be involved in human being. Heidegger explored how far Kant reached in the field of metaphysics in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and in this respect, the humanness of reason, i. e., the finitude lying within the human became essential. For Heidegger, it is primarily intuition (*intuitio*) that carries this finite experiential knowledge.<sup>36</sup>

This is where I would like to touch upon the precursor of the Davos debate which belongs to the problematization of *intuition*: the concept of "viewing" (*Anschauung*). As a matter of fact, the Cassirer–Heidegger debate was not an isolated event; in retrospect, they continued Paul Natorp's and Edmund Husserl's controversy which had burst out at the turn of the century after the publication of the first edition of the *Logical Investigation*, and had arisen together with the question of intuition being possible or not. Natorp and the Neo-Kantians have rejected the possibility of intuition, and, by contrast, intuition appears as a source of knowledge at the root of Husserl's

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<sup>34</sup> Heidegger SZ, 23. and in note 1 (In English: 20. and in note 1 above); also see Kant: *Critique of Pure Reason*, 273. (A 141 / B 181)

<sup>35</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, p. 280; (In English: 197.)

<sup>36</sup> "Knowledge is primarily intuition." Heidegger GA 3, 27. Cf. also *ibid.* 21. (In English: 19., cf. also *ibid.* 15.)

investigations. Husserl distinguished between the two kinds of intuition: (1) *categorical intuition* involves seeing the essence (*Wesenschau*), (2) *sensuous intuition* belongs to the perceiving of external things. While in seeing the essence, the mode of givenness of conscious experience is whole and given to consciousness in its completeness; the perceiving of external things is only fragmental. For Husserl, the fact that the things' perception is unable to provide a whole, unmediated and intuitive knowledge of things shifts the focus to the limits of phenomenality. Thus at this point, on the limits of phenomenality, Kant assumed the difference between divine and human. He proposed that besides finite human intuition (*intuitus derivativus*) there is the possibility of another mode of consciousness called *intuitus originarius* that differs from the human's, and that is inaccessible for us.

Basically, Heidegger has got an insight by Husserl's legacy that intuition does not play an essential role in the Neo-Kantian view of reality, but rather, concepts turn into productive forces by which objective reality is organized.

Cassirer expressed his appreciation concerning Heidegger's interpretation both in the Davos debate and in his review.<sup>37</sup> He even asserted that the whole problem of metaphysics with Kant does not merely comprise the problem of schematism (which is solely central to the chapter on Transcendental Analytic, while having no role in Ethics), so Heidegger simply overinterprets Kant towards Schematism. If we investigate Kant's entire philosophy from a Cassirerian viewpoint, the problem of freedom comes to a central point: *to be human* means *to create freely* worlds of meaning. While in Cassirer's view, the task of philosophy is to free man from anxiety, in Heidegger's view the task of it is to throw man back into facticity and the hardness of his fate (*in die Härte seines Schicksals*).<sup>38</sup> Instead of the Cassirerian self-liberation (*Selbstbefreiung*), for Heidegger, freedom means "becoming free for the finitude of Dasein" (*frei zu werden für die Endlichkeit des Daseins*), coming into the thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) of our Being.<sup>39</sup> The common point is, however, that the critical philosophy is not limited to epistemology for Cassirer and Heidegger, and accordingly, both of them emphasize the metaphysical feature of Kant's philosophy, at the same time what they mean by metaphysics is very different: it means ontology to Heidegger as it can be the metaphysics of Dasein, while it means transcendence of finitude to Cassirer. According to Wolfgang Röd, it seems that Heidegger followed Kant, while Cassirer rather followed Spinoza, because Kant never regarded philosophy as a sphere

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<sup>37</sup> As Cassirer writes: "The value of Heidegger's book should in no way be denied or diminished. Like all the writings of Heidegger, his book on Kant carries the stamp of a genuinely philosophical attitude and genuinely philosophical work. He proceeds to his work with true inner enthusiasm. He does not stop anywhere with the interpretation of words and sentences but places us everywhere in the vital center of the problems and grasps these problems in their real power and genuine originality. And one will be able to say nothing better in praise of Heidegger's book than that it shows itself quite equal to the problem that it develops before us. It remains at the apex of the task it sets itself." (Cassirer, "Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik: Bemerkungen zu Martin Heideggers Kant-Interpretation" (Rezension), 25. Translation: Idem, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, in *Kant Disputed Questions*, ed. and trans. Moltke S. Gram (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1967), 156.

<sup>38</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 287., 291. (In English: 201, 204.)

<sup>39</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 289. (In English: 203.)

that can open access to *mundus intelligibilis*, to a reality beyond our possible experience, but he only suggested that we should assume the existence of such an intelligible world and act in doing this. So, it does not play any essential role in domains of our knowledge, but it serves as a regulative function for our morality.<sup>40</sup> Referred to István M. Fehér's article, we may note that both Heidegger's and Kant's philosophy are in full harmony with each other in the sense that both of them are far from the *Schwärmerei* defined as a form of romantic fantasies (*enthusiasm*), and that in this respect, Cassirer's perspective is not devoid of wishful thinking, which is dangerous and against which Kant turned since his earliest years.<sup>41</sup> In Heidegger's view, Cassirer may be criticized for missing a fundament for metaphysics, and in this way it remains only the field of daydreams: "For Cassirer, the *terminus a quo* [the starting point] is utterly problematical."<sup>42</sup> It is the operation of schematism that lays the foundation of finite human being.

Cassirer accused Heidegger of missing a transcendental dimension, and he argued that Heidegger's weakness was the *terminus ad quem* (finishing point). Without this dimension, Heidegger was unable to explore the objective aspects of human being.

Similarly to Husserl, Cassirer thought that Heidegger provided a merely anthropological description.<sup>43</sup> Heidegger's notion of human *Dasein* from Cassirer's perspective could have been nothing else than passivity and a human disposition which is incapable of independent act, free being and responsibility involved in it. This is why Cassirer did not see any philosophical meaning in the formations of human finitude (more closely death, anxiety and fate). In his review of Heidegger's Kant book (1931) he affirms that Heidegger neglected the difference between *phenomena* and *noumena* (the crucial point of Kant's philosophy). The elimination of the Kantian dualism is not open to the infinite, and stays close to finitude itself. In his view, Kant wants to lay the

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<sup>40</sup> For this, see: Wolfgang Röd, "Transzendentalphilosophie oder Ontologie. Überlegung zu Grundfragen der Davoser Disputation", in Dominic Kaegi and Enno Rudolph, ed., *Cassirer – Heidegger 70 Jahre Davoser Disputation*. Vol. 9 of Cassirer-Forschungen (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2002), 16.

<sup>41</sup> I have borrowed the *Schwärmerei*-thought from István M. Fehér concerning the Cassirer-Heidegger debate. In this respect, I owe a lot to his thorough and deep analyses, a part of which was presented in his *Hermeneutics, Democracy, Pluralism, Community* lecture in December 2010 at the "Hermeneutics and Democracy" conference organized by Miklós Nyíró in honour of István M. Fehér. Another part of that was published, in more detail see István M. Fehér, "Metafizika és észkritika" (Metaphysics and Critique of Reason). *Világosság* 10-11-12 (2004): 51.

<sup>42</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 288. (In English: 202.): With Cassirer the problem of foundation does not arise here yet, later however it will take shape in the question how transcendence can be integrated into finite human being. Cassirer planned to elaborate the answer to this question in volume 4 of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, which was published only after his death, and in which Cassirer elaborated the concept of "basis-phenomenon"; and its earlier version can already be read in volume 3 of his major work. For this, see: Margreiter, "Aspekte der Heidegger-Cassirer-Kontroverse", 113, 128 f.

<sup>43</sup> On this issue, see Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 278. (In English: 195 f.): "Now my question is the following: Does Heidegger want to renounce this entire Objectivity, this form of absoluteness which Kant advocated in the ethical and the theoretical, as well as in the *Critique of Judgment*? Does he want to withdraw completely to the finite creature or, if not, where for him is the breakthrough to this sphere?"

grounds of human finitude in Transcendental Analytic not only to get knowledge of this finitude, but to find the place of transition (*metabasis*) to the topic of infiniteness. According to Cassirer, Kant's original intention is to explore the possibility of human freedom within the frames of practical philosophy, and thereby to go beyond the finitude of temporal existence.

Heidegger emphasized that Cassirer did not take into account Kant's insight according to which there is a basic distinction between the two modes of intuition: human and divine. It was Heidegger's major argument that the neo-Kantians neglected the human finitude and gave preference to intellectual construction over intuition, making man into a sort of God, as if our concepts were creating the world. In this way, Cassirer could not find a foundation for the existence; consequently, he had no access to being that he described, which is why Cassirer was unable to discover the transcendence within the frames of human existence.

We may say: in the field of sciences, a debate can be the place where varying perspectives and results are presented, and the aim of debates (in dynamics of verification and falsification) is to test these through a process of justification so that it can turn out whether a thesis is reliable and scientifically acceptable knowledge or not. However, philosophical debates are not just about presenting pro and con arguments. It may also be regarded as an event where the logic of discovery is in progress, and the participants can leave with the impression that they are gifted with something in the course of debate. While the former works in the form of algorithmic logic, for the latter, heuristic (discovering) is indispensable. Every debate can be described as gaining experience but it does matter what its centre is. The Davos debate raised questions rather than gave answers. In the debate, Kant seemed to be only seemingly a common root from where both thinkers were guided by the connecting points. They in fact confronted only limits of each other. The essential characteristic of the Cassirer-Heidegger debate did not lie in the justification (affirmation or opposition) but in the fact that from the sharply different (Kant)-interpretations, the discussion reached the ultimate questions of philosophy.

### **A debate-theoretical outlook**

The Davos debate has already been characterized by various terms: in English the expressions "*debate*," "*encounter*," "*confrontation*" and "*controversy*" mostly appear in the terminology of literature; the same subject is coupled with the concepts of "*Debatte*," "*Auseinandersetzung*," "*Streitgespräch*," "*Kontroverse*" in German commentaries. However, if we go back to the original source text, we find that the term *Disputation* is used in the title of the German record.<sup>44</sup> Besides, Margreiter and Gordon devoted attention to the fact that the work between Cassirer and Heidegger proceeded as the final event of the conference, originally within the frames of an "*Arbeitsgemeinschaft*," *working seminar* (or *workshop*, *work team*), "which was later designated as a 'Davos dispute'" in reports and memoirs.<sup>45</sup> While according to Safranski, "the participants could have felt themselves as if they had been in a

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<sup>44</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger, "Davoser Disputation...", in GA 3, 271–296.

<sup>45</sup> Margreiter, "Aspekte der Heidegger-Cassirer-Kontroverse", 110; also see: Gordon, *Continental Divide. Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*, 136, 92.

legendary medieval dispute,”<sup>46</sup> Gordon clearly distinguishes the Davos *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* from the type of dispute, which he traces back to the martial arts (public joust of clericals) as a scholastic form of debate. In opposition to the former, *working seminar* is regarded as a relatively new form of German academic life, which made it possible to develop a relatively non-structured, dialogical style – compared to the classic tradition of the monologue structure of a conference, inaugural or academic lecture. By its nature it offers the possibility of self-examination and revision, as well as polarized and polemic forms.<sup>47</sup>

We might wonder why the debate of Cassirer and Heidegger is still called a *disputation*. If we take a closer look at it, this name seems to be relevant because first, aspects apart from philosophy (e.g., later added political overtones or other strategies such as manipulation or negotiation) did not play a role in Davos. The encounter seemed to be a pure philosophical debate according to eye witnesses where the essential issue was the thing itself;<sup>48</sup> second, it informs us what kind of philosophical debate it could have been, since the dispute itself is not a medieval memory, but a still living form of philosophical debate with the characteristic of movement within limits.

As an activity – in Jacques Le Goff’s approach – disputes had two kinds of functions at medieval universities: on the one hand, as a preferred part of teaching and examinations within the university and beyond, as it was directed towards the inner personal development of scientific and philosophical thinking. On the other hand, it appeared how the community of scholars and students enacted their academic life.<sup>49</sup> The task of elevating and legitimizing the debate adequate to the scientific and philosophical thinking is completely connected with the community of universities, which contributed in the beginning to institutionalize the disputes. Seeing from a dramaturgic perspective, it was not about debates among persons, but among (personalized) concepts on some philosophical topics. The search for good *arguments for each side* had special importance – since these processes enabled training in culturally different ways of viewing and experiencing, in case of juridical and religious debates, too. This process eliminated dogmatic attitudes on account of which a position became inaccessible for any kind of discussion. To sum up, disputes encouraged critical thinking – with the help of appropriate thinking strategies –, including familiar with research and exercise of developing, formulating and testing our innermost personal viewing. The performance of disputes became widespread mostly among scholars in the world of law and theology, but more importantly participants were introduced into knowledge how to discuss special philosophical issues. As Le Goff

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<sup>46</sup> Rüdiger Safranski, *Egy némethoni mester. Heidegger és kora* (A Master from Germany. Heidegger and His Times), trans. Péter Rácz, Gábor Schein and Sándor Tatár (Budapest: Európa, 2000), 269.

<sup>47</sup> Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*, 92 ff.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Gordon, Wolfgang Röd are also of this opinion. Wolfgang Röd writes that “die Auseinandersetzung hatte rein philosophischen Form”. See Wolfgang Röd, “Transzendentalphilosophie oder Ontologie? Überlegungen zu Grundfragen der Davoser Disputation”, in Dominic Kaegi and Enno Rudolph, ed., *Cassirer – Heidegger 70 Jahre Davoser Disputation*, Vol. 9 of Cassirer-Forschungen (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2002), 2.

<sup>49</sup> See Jacques Le Goff, *Az értelmiség a középkorban* (Intellectuals in the Middle Ages) (Budapest: Osiris, 2000), 114–122.

writes, the origin of disputes is interpretation. Originally, the free exchange of views sprung from interpretation of texts, but the participant of debates, “the university master is not an exegete any more but a thinker. He experiments with independent solutions, and creates something new.”<sup>50</sup> The structure of ordinary (governed by strict rules and highly formalized) disputes is similar to dissertation defences today. Participants became involved in a dispute on the grounds of specific topics proclaimed in advance through a well-known logic of questions and answers. Moreover, there was another prominent medieval form, the *quodlibet dispute* as well, which proved to be a more dangerous situation for the academic master who was responding. In this case, a session of debate passed without any pre-announced direction in which any question could be posed, so for this reason the outcome of the debate was completely settled when the disputant was able to maintain his composure with an almost universal competency. Naturally, these kinds of disputes were also framed by structures. The master (*defendants*) presented the truth of his thesis, which the opponent (*obiiciens*) had to attack, but debate meant freely disputing the questions, and someone had to win. Following the event, the *determinatio*-records taken by attendees summarized the result of the dispute, the whole of what was called Disputed Questions (*quaestiones disputatae*). The final text was not a literal transcription of the oral dispute, but a conclusive *exposé* composed by listeners. The case of the Cassirer-Heidegger debate can also be compared with the *quodlibet-dispute*, not completely unfounded.

The Davos debate was described several times in painting as an arena, but if – as Margreiter writes – the majority of literature emphasized that “Heidegger came out of this dispute as winner, and Cassirer as loser, then they rely on the adjustments of the admirers of Heidegger who were present”. It is also important to realize that “in a sense of history of philosophy, the Davos debate was transmitted in memory of Heidegger’s school and became a part of the tradition,” while Cassirer’s school does not exist.<sup>51</sup> In the interpretations the question has been argued even nowadays whether only one party, namely Cassirer’s attitude can be characterized as being completely adequate for a hermeneutic (understanding and mediation seeking) perspective (Enno Rudolph),<sup>52</sup> or it would be more appropriate to speak about the confrontation of two different hermeneutic approaches (Rudolf Bernet).<sup>53</sup> However, from a debate-theoretical-perspective, John M. Krois’s proposal is the most differentiated, since in his essay he says “there was really not a Davos debate; instead, two ships were floating away from each other in the darkness”.<sup>54</sup> Expectations were not fulfilled according to the Davos participant (Ernst Howard), who also felt compelled to mention afterwards: “Instead of

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<sup>50</sup> Le Goff, *Az értelmiség a középkorban* (Intellectuals in the Middle Ages), 118.

<sup>51</sup> Margreiter, “Aspekte der Heidegger-Cassirer-Kontroverse”, 127.

<sup>52</sup> Rudolph, Enno: “Freiheit oder Schicksal? Cassirer und Heidegger in Davos”, in Dominic Kaegi and Enno Rudolph, ed., *Cassirer – Heidegger 70 Jahre Davoser Disputation*, Vol. 9 of *Cassirer-Forschungen* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2002), 37.

<sup>53</sup> Rudolf Bernet, “The Hermeneutics of Perception in Cassirer, Heidegger, and Husserl”, in *Neo-Kantianism in Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Sebastian Luft (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 2010), 41–58, here: 42. Through a new reading of Kant – said Bernet – the hermeneutics of subjective experience was elaborated by Heidegger, while the hermeneutics of work of objective spirit by Cassirer.

<sup>54</sup> Krois, “Warum fand keine Davoser Debatte ...statt?”, 234.

having seen two parallel worlds beside one another, one might have enjoyed the stage effect how a very kind man performed his monologue, while a very temperamental man did it so too, who also tried to be kind with all his efforts.”<sup>55</sup> No supplementary annotation of Cassirer has been bequeathed to us, however, Heidegger’s account also confirms the sense of lack: “From a factual, philosophical perspective, I didn’t gain anything,” “in the course of discussion (...) Cassirer was extremely polite and almost too obliging. Thus I encountered very little resistance, which prevented the problems from being articulated in the necessarily clear form,”<sup>56</sup> as he wrote to Elisabeth Blochmann. Considering, however, the influences of this debate, they might have been productive in a sense that the Kant book is said to be directly grounded on Heidegger’s preparatory notes for his Davos dispute; and the debate was also the main motivation for Cassirer, who himself planned that an in-depth confrontation with Heideggerian phenomenology should be written as the closing chapter of his major work (PsF III, 1929), and finally, only a first draft and notes were completed.<sup>57</sup>

If we formally investigate the transcript of the Davos dispute, prepared from notes by Bollnow and Ritter, we may say that both Cassirer and Heidegger claimed meta-statements concerning the nature of their philosophical debate. The different language use, the “debate theoretical” self-interpretations signify that in the course of debate both disputants had an insight into their own debate styles.

Both Cassirer and Heidegger went beyond the Neo-Kantian perspective, yet offered radically different Kant-interpretations. For Heidegger, the *terminus a quo* as the starting point of his own paradigm was the problem of finitude (*Endlichkeit*), however, Cassirer’s philosophy was directed towards the finishing point of his own conception (*terminus ad quem*) in the sense of philosophy of culture. While with Cassirer the finishing point became visible and the starting point remained completely blurred. Heidegger conceived of his own philosophy as such in which the starting point is the central problem, the dispute moves in domains of the *terminus a quo*, and the *terminus ad quem* is what it stands in a latent correlation with.<sup>58</sup>

It is relevant to mention a Dutch philosopher, Hendrik J. Pos’s intervention, whose words sounded in the protocol as follows: “Philological remark: both men speak a completely different language”.<sup>59</sup> Even if the moderator did not claim that the possibility of debate is missing there, it still had, by all means, its limits and dangers. Originally, there were expectations attached to the conference that the ideas of

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<sup>55</sup> Cited from Dominic Kaegi, “Davos und Davos – Zur Auseinandersetzung zwischen Heidegger und Cassirer”, 67; also see: Ernst Howard, “Betrachtungen zu den Davoser Hochschulkursen”, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 10. 4. 1929.

<sup>56</sup> Martin Heidegger and Elisabeth Blochmann, *Briefwechsel 1918–1969*. Ed. by J. W. Storck, (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsches Literatur Archiv, 1989), in note. 29 above.

<sup>57</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Zur Metaphysik der symbolischen Formen. Nachgelassene Manuskripte und Texte. Vol. 1*, ed. by John M. Krois in collaboration with Anne Appelbaum, Rainer A. Bast, Klaus Christian Köhnke and Oswald Schwemmer. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1995), XIII.

<sup>58</sup> In Heidegger’s argumentation, this logical contrast is supported with theological arguments as well. For the relation of finite and infinite and that of divine and human intuition, see e.g. Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 280. (In English: 197.) Cf. Gordon, *Continental divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*. 165.

<sup>59</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger, “Davoser Disputation...”, in GA 3, 287. (In English: 202.)



debating partners would allow for translation into the other language, or if not, at least differences would come out in a sharp contrast. “For us, it is a matter of extracting something common from these two languages. An attempt at translation was already made by Cassirer (...) We must hear the acknowledgement of this translation from Heidegger (...) Should it be found that there is no translation for these terms from both sides, then these would be the terms to differentiate the spirit of Cassirer’s philosophy from Heidegger’s.”<sup>60</sup>

In Heidegger’s works several reflections may be found in reference to the concept of translation. Even in the Natorp-essay of 1922 the thought arises that translation is an interpretative activity,<sup>61</sup> a possible way of accessing tradition and “reality”. Nevertheless he does not believe that it would be feasible any more here.

This debate was described as *Auseinandersetzung* by Heidegger’s language use,<sup>62</sup> which means the term “*confrontatio*” in Latin, the expression “*polemos*” in Greek and the words of *confrontation* and *debate* or *discussion* in English, while in his review of Heidegger’s Kant book in 1931 Cassirer regards the Davos debate as a *conversation* with Heidegger (*Gespräch mit Heidegger*).<sup>63</sup> The main reason of this discrepancy may actually be that for Heidegger, “*polemic*” is about the fact that philosophical debates should be kept to the point, i. e. the essential issue is *the things themselves* and the devotion to *the things themselves* is what is more substantial rather than personality. What is more, personal aspects should be away from the debate: “do not occupy yourselves with Cassirer and Heidegger. Rather the point is that you have come far enough to have felt that we are on the way toward once again getting down to our work on the central question of metaphysics”.<sup>64</sup> From Cassirer’s language use, it turns out that the debate must be regarded as a conversation *with someone* the purpose of which is to “see not only himself but the other as well” while remaining with his own viewpoint,<sup>65</sup> to “learn to *see* the oppositions correctly, ...[seeking] to *understand* each other just in this opposition.”<sup>66</sup>

So Cassirer and Heidegger conceived philosophical debates completely differently. This is probably due to the fact that Cassirer takes part in the debate as an interpreter (Cohen’s, Kant’s, Cassirer’s and Heidegger’s interpreter), while Heidegger puts forward his own philosophical system of views, and appears as an independent thinker. In terms of methodology, Cassirer is committed to the research (which can be philologically justified) and the text interpretation, in opposition to this, Heidegger is

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<sup>60</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger, “Davoser Disputation...”, in GA 3, 287. (in English: 201 ff.)

<sup>61</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle: Indication of the Hermeneutical Situation”, *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* ed. by Theodore Kisiel and Thomas Sheehan. IX (2009): 144–182, here 168.: Heidegger points out concerning Aristotle that: “The translation of the interpreted texts, and above all the translation of their crucial basic concepts, have developed from the concrete interpretations [...]”.

<sup>62</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 296.

<sup>63</sup> Cassirer, “Kant und das problem der Metaphysik”, 26. (In English: 157.)

<sup>64</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 296. (In English: 204.)

<sup>65</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 292. (In English: 349.)

<sup>66</sup> Cassirer, “Kant und das problem der Metaphysik”, 26; [italics in original] (In English: 157. [English translation modified.])

guided by the methodology of destruction, what means the appropriation of tradition through critique and seeking motivation.

Cassirer's power is rooted in his historical erudition as well as in his mastery of annotation, what are especially present as he applies (actual or possible) Kantian arguments, since he knows exactly where Heidegger and the Neo-Kantians deviated from Kant and how Kant would argue. In contrast to Heidegger, his investigation is not directed towards attacking the Kantian thinking at the weak points much rather considering them in the strongest forms possible. Beyond this, Cassirer's hermeneutic situation seems extremely complex: 1. While representing himself, his purpose was to reconcile Neo-Kantianism with the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger. By a novel account of philosophy he thought this to be possible in a way that differences of opinion could get transformed into a consent; 2. However, not sharing Heidegger's view at certain points where he (Cassirer) was linked to Neo-Kantianism (e. g. the ethical conception of culture); 3. And *vice versa*, regarding certain questions where he had already detached from the Neo-Kantian perspective before the Davos debate, it would have been possible for him to agree with Heidegger. Cassirer endeavoured to do justice to all opposing parties, but it seems as if his interpretive approach pulled him out of the debate rather than facilitated him integrating into the centre of it. Namely, he did not conceive the situation of the interpreter in the sense of Gadamerian hermeneutics but in a Kantian sense. Cassirer thereby insisted that he himself should avoid of taking part in the process of debate as one of the parties, but rather wanted to assist Heidegger's debates with Cohen, Kant, and others, as if in cases he were in the position of a judge (hearing a witness) in the justice process.<sup>67</sup> Heidegger's mentality had a solid idea: at times he wanted to step into the background, considering Cassirer's viewpoint. However, as he started speaking, he represented himself in his Kant-interpretation, so his viewpoint in the debate coincided with his own philosophical system of views. Heidegger's powers lay in his consistency, more precisely in the fact that his philosophical system and philosophical attitude were in accordance with each other.

Both disputants tried to represent the other's viewpoint. They took turns at disregarding sometimes their own perspectives by reconstructing the other's, then going on the stage by mobilizing their own views. In doing so, approaches of Cassirer and Heidegger were significantly separated, even though this disparity did not constitute a form of opposition. Their perspectives would have been oppositional if one of them had denied the same concepts while the other affirmed them. But that is not what happened. Both of them accepted the productive power of imagination, freedom, (in)finitude and truth, but conceived all these in the light of utterly different paradigms. It should be noted that both participants agreed that the Davos dispute could not be

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<sup>67</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 274. (In English: 193.): "I have found a neo-Kantian here in Heidegger."; Ibid. 275; (In English: 194.): "One only understands Cohen correctly if"; Ibid. 275; (In English: 194.): "On one point we agree"; Ibid. 276; (In English: 195.): "this ties in with Heidegger's arguments"; Ibid. 278; (In English: 195 f.): "Now my question is the following: Does Heidegger want to renounce [...] Does he want to withdraw completely to [...] or, if not, where for him is the breakthrough to this sphere? I ask this question because I really do not yet know. *The fixing of the point of transit, then, lies first with Heidegger. I believe, however, that Heidegger cannot be capable of abiding by it, nor can he want to. He must first pose these questions himself, and then, I believe, whole new problems emerge.* (italics added)

reduced to the sphere of logics and arguments but it was rather about a *paradigm debate*.<sup>68</sup> One of Heidegger's sentences refers to this: "Mere mediating will never amount to anything productive,"<sup>69</sup> instead of interpretation, emphasized the need for polemic, at one point he spoke of a "radical bursting-open" (*radikale Sprengung*) of the Kantian starting point.<sup>70</sup> Cassirer claimed: "We maintain a position where little is to be accomplished through arguments which are merely logical." Nobody can be compelled to take up a current position through logics or cold reasoning.<sup>71</sup> Their statements recommended that another requirement should be involved in paradigm debates than logical debates. The question is whether we can speak about hermeneutics in this case, and if so, on whose part? How is a hermeneutical perspective possible at all?

We can understand Heidegger's attitude this way: in the course of argumentations or interpretations it is advisable to (ex)change viewpoints or perspectives, for it is necessary that we should study the things from several various sides (by justification and falsification), in the case of paradigm debates, a change in viewpoints however is problematic. To shift perspectives within a paradigm means: to complete our aspect-seeing in multiple ways; although this also refers to a way of shift, but the emergence and understanding of a new paradigm requires more than the former: a radical and complete change of our worldview. Paradigms only exist until they cannot be translated into one another. Being global, it is a part of paradigm shifts that they should be replaced by each other. If a paradigm could be somehow translated, then it would lose its validity. In other words, the essence of a paradigm always lies in what cannot be seen from the other paradigm, or at least not in the same way. The relation of paradigms to each other can be described from the angle of dimensional shifts rather than through translation and searching for a common centre. Newtonian and Einsteinian physics moves within very different paradigms. If the Davos dispute was really a paradigm debate, then Heidegger's viewpoint – according to which the changes in viewpoints (the skips from viewpoint to viewpoint) here would equal to the decline of a philosophical debate – seems realistic.<sup>72</sup> On the one hand, Heidegger emphasized the difference of positions that is for him, "the differentiation of standpoints is the root of the philosophical endeavor".<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, Cassirer's purpose is to find consent between two different ways of thinking (in Gordon's words, this is "unity in diversity"): "I believe that where the disagreement lies has already become clearer. It is not fruitful, however, to highlight this disagreement again and again. [...] We must search again for the common center, precisely in the

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<sup>68</sup> Rudolph has also spoken about "philosophical paradigm debate (*philosophischer Paradigmenstreit*). Rudolph, "Freiheit oder Schicksal? Cassirer und Heidegger in Davos", 27.

<sup>69</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 295. (In English: 207.): "Das bloße Vermittlung wird nie produktiv weiterbringen."

<sup>70</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 288. (In English: 202.)

<sup>71</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 292. (In English: 204 f.)

<sup>72</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 284. (In English: 200.): "Is a determined world-view not taken as a basis for metaphysics? I would misunderstand myself if I said that I gave a philosophy free of points of view. And here a problem is expressed: that of the relationship between philosophy and world-view. Philosophy does not have the task of giving world-view, although, again, world-view is the presupposition of philosophizing."

<sup>73</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 296. (In English: 207.)

disagreement.”<sup>74</sup> He actually asks for what is impossible. In Cassirer’s consideration, it is to be inspiring that he must have recognized that it was about a paradigm debate, even so there was something reason for his attempt to apply the rules of rational-logical debates. We may say that in Heidegger’s view this would mean the following: 1) the disputant is not aware of the fact that he is taking part in a paradigm debate, 2) he really knows that he is taking part in a paradigm debate but knows nothing of the highest principles and laws governing such a debate, 3) he hopes for a consent while being aware of both points 1 and 2. In a debate like this, however, no consensus exists in a way that both paradigms remain valid; both of them will be operative only while – without a common centre or translation – the disparateness will be sustained. If consent occurs, and one paradigm can be translated into another, it means that in fact only one paradigm exists (the other collapses). In the case of disparateness encouraged by Heidegger, every paradigm has just the same right to exist, while the process of the Cassirerian consensus would inevitably result in victory and defeat. Whatever happens, Cassirer’s endeavour invalidates one of the two confronting paradigms: he either sacrifices himself, or defeats the other. Seen from this perspective, Cassirer’s consensus-seeking was not motivated so much by understanding the other but rather by arguing against a case for relativism, which is more an epistemological way of conceiving than a hermeneutic one.

This is why Heidegger advocates that translation between the two viewpoints at essential points is not possible; instead he emphasized the ontological significance of *polemos* (Πόλεμος) in the Davos dispute. In his later work *The Origin of the Work of Art*, it also becomes emphatic that the happening of truth can be interpreted as a “debate”-process.<sup>75</sup> Both Heidegger and Cassirer reflected upon the concept of polemic, but did not speak about the same thing. Cassirer identified polemic with the deficient mode of debate, therefore a debate like this made no sense for him. In his 1931 critical review of Heidegger’s Kant book, he later discussed this debate theoretical question in more detail again. Any form of philosophical debate is possible for him in the case of a critique that is based on interpretations – if it is able to arrive at understanding a standpoint expressed by the other – while he dismissed all polemic debates, since he conceived it as a play-off of “mere opposition of ‘standpoints’,” as a continuous talking at cross purpose, which is not productive.<sup>76</sup> Cassirer expressed a rather negative opinion on the way of reading and discussing what is suitable for characterizing his debate partner: he speaks about Heideggerian violence wresting from Kant, where Heidegger no longer appears as a commentator, but as an usurper (*usurper*) who “invades the Kantian system by force of arms in order to subjugate it

<sup>74</sup> See Gordon, *Continental divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*, 197; Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 290. (In English: 204 f.)

<sup>75</sup> Martin Heidegger, *A műalkotás eredete (The Origin of the Work of Art)*, trans. Béla Bacsó (Budapest: Európa 1988), 98–99. Translation: Idem, “The Origin of the Work of Art (1935–36)”, in *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julien Young and Kenneth Haynes, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1–85. here: 27., 36. ff., 42. f.: The German words *Auseinandersetzung* and *die Bestreitung des Streites* can be translated into the English as “setting apart” and “striving of the strife”/ “fighting of the flight”.

<sup>76</sup> Cassirer, “Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik...” (Rezension), 5.: “Das bloße Gegeneinanderausspielen der ‘Standpunkts’...” (In English: 136.)

and force it to serve his own set of problematics”.<sup>77</sup> He points out the negative aspects of Heidegger’s destruction, especially the dangers of over-interpretation. Cassirer faced with this usurpation of rights against which he demanded *restitution*.

In contrast, the idea of *polemos* is absolutely positive for Heidegger, since it gains completely other meaning at Davos and in his major lectures of 1940s as well: it is understood as *Auseinandersetzung* (*con-fronting* or *struggle*), that is, as a linguistic event where it becomes possible to make a difference. In other words, it first brings to separation what has to be separated and this is what enables something to come to presence. This con-fronting is more the field of simply separating, not at all war like in Greek mythology. We only reach the concept of things in a way that each one gets isolated from all the others. Everything in the world becomes that what it is only in this separating. In *polemos* – as Heidegger writes in *Introduction to Metaphysics* of 1935 concerning his favorite Heraclitus’s fragment 53: distances and perspectives open themselves up – “boundary” as such (*horos*) comes into being, which at the same time defines the name “concept” in the Greek sense. We cannot think of the boundaries without thinking of what is beyond them. *Polemos* thereby does not block off, much less destroys something, but that is what builds a world and gathers together. The meaning “boundary” consists of both: “Πόλεμος and λόγος are the same,” writes Heidegger.<sup>78</sup> For Heidegger, dialogue does not spring from the restriction of debate, just on the contrary: from the encounter with the difference or unknown. While Cassirer is distrustful of debates, Heidegger places the debate back into the process of thinking and knowing. Consensus makes no sense for him in a paradigm debate, because it would be a corruption with self surrender and having no viewpoints involved in it.

Although Cassirer’s concepts, e.g. “common center,” “seeing the other as well,” “bridge,” are not too auspicious in a paradigm debate,<sup>79</sup> I think that the Cassirerian perspective goes far beyond itself, it is more than mere consensus-seeking.<sup>80</sup> This is also marked by sentences in which Cassirer asks questions going beyond differences and identities. There is something in which both the common and the difference can be made visible – this is language for Cassirer. There is a common

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<sup>77</sup> Cassirer, “Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik...” (Rezension), 17. (In English: 149. [translation modified]). Also see Ibid. 21. (In English: 152.): According to Cassirer “Heidegger did, to be sure, enter his analysis [...] as something which is similar to an hypothesis. And hypotheses are, as Kant remarks, strictly speaking forbidden merchandise in the area of transcendental philosophy... [However] they are [...] admissible ‘not in dogmatic but rather in polemical employment’; they are ‘permitted in the field of pure reason only as a weapon, not so that a right can be grounded on them but only for the defense of that field.’ (Kant: *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 804 f.) Should Heidegger’s hypothesis not also be such a weapon? Do we not perhaps stand with it, instead of on the foundation of the analysis of Kantian ideas, in the middle of the polemic against these ideas?”

<sup>78</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), 65.

<sup>79</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 292. (In English: 205.)

<sup>80</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 292. (In English: 204.): “I do not want to make the attempt — says Cassirer — to break Heidegger from his position, to force him into another direction of seeing. Instead, I want only to make his position understandable to me.”

*linguistic medium*.<sup>81</sup> This presumption of Cassirer goes beyond the aspirations for consensus and assimilation, and for a moment, a field of view flashes. Cassirer's view did not proclaim, but therein lies that a central question is the quest for mediation in a paradigm debate, and is also what we mean by mediation hermeneutically. Difference also can be mediated. The point is that language is not the vehicle of consensus (*contrary to* polemic) but that of mediation. It seems that Cassirer well refers to this as he asserts that "we tread on a common ground. We assert this first of all as a postulate. And in spite of all deceptions, we will not become confused about this claim."<sup>82</sup> This assumption is confirmed by the fact that according to Cassirer's review of 1931, a philosophical debate is not merely the terrain for defending and attacking standpoints but it is a participation in the general case of human reason, where we search for what pertains to the whole.<sup>83</sup> Cassirer thereby formulates something based on Kant that could be regarded as *medial ethics* in a paradigm debate.

Some of Heidegger's works also deal with the problem of mediation, and based on these we could say that his philosophical perspective is pervaded with the approach springing from the idea of mediation. His conception about mediation is expressed in the above cited sentence of his summer lecture course of 1935 related to fragment 53 by Heraclitus, which goes as follows: "Πόλεμος and λόγος are the same".<sup>84</sup> Language is *polemos*, and *polemos* is language, an event in which the differentiation of things occurs, however, while clefts open themselves up, a world comes to be. On Heidegger's view, *polemos* may be interpreted as being in service of birth of the language itself between the confronting paradigms, without which the other's world would not be visible.

## Conclusion

Maybe it is not exaggerating to say that Cassirer and Heidegger moved towards the field of mediation, both being ambassadors, mediators of differing paradigms. In the medial participation all that makes the debate hermeneutic can first appear: understanding, connecting, etc. This is opposed neither to Heidegger's *polemos*, nor to Cassirer's view on conversation. The reason why, in the audience, a sense of lack increasingly remains at the end of the Davos debate is that the parties weakened one another. The discussion did not become completed either in directions encouraged by Cassirer or by Heidegger. Nonetheless, it seems that to some extent, Heidegger might have well met the requirements of a paradigm debate. During the debate, Cassirer's consensus-seeking attitude was weakening the chances of a paradigm debate since it

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<sup>81</sup> Cf. Gordon, *Continental divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*, 204.

<sup>82</sup> Cassirer/Heidegger GA 3, 293. (In English: 205.)

<sup>83</sup> "'In judging the writings of others one must choose the method of participation in the general cause of human reason and search out that which pertains to the whole from the attempt. If one finds it worthy of examination, one should offer the author, or rather his best representative a helping hand and treat the errors as secondary.' ...under this maxim. I should not like to have it understood as a defense of or an attack on any kind of philosophical 'standpoint' but would rather ask that the reader consider and judge it in the spirit of the 'method of participation in the general cause of human reason'" (Cassirer, "Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik..." (Rezension), 5. (In English: 136.)

<sup>84</sup> Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 65.

was a failed attempt to achieve the form of mediation, while Heidegger's *polemos* reinforced these chances insofar as the mediation of differences between paradigms was at least accomplished.

As Pos noted, Cassirer offered his hand to his partner at the end of the debate, however, Heidegger refused to shake hands with Cassirer in a demonstrative way.<sup>85</sup> According to Tony Cassirer's memoirs, thereby Heidegger's goal was "to annihilate [Cassirer's philosophy] if possible,"<sup>86</sup> but in a philosophical sense it only meant that both Cassirer and Heidegger also experienced the closing as part of the debate, and their acting was an attitude perfectly adequate to their own very different philosophical thoughts. Their activities were strongly related to the way how they understood the task of philosophy, or how they imaged the hermeneutical sense of a debate and how each of them conceived their own philosophical identity. This end is thus to be considered as a sign of thinking of both sides' maintained self-consistency by this way of participating in the debate. The debate failed to reach a consensus, at the same time nobody concluded the debate with victory or defeat at Davos either. Finally, in this way everyone has just the same right to exist.

The political background to the debate among partners often distorted the philosophical disputes in history, because it was conducted as a war, however a philosophical debate is not merely the terrain of war and the presentation of pro and counter arguments, but we attempt to think of a debate in another way, in terms of the middle voice. The focus is not on the two poles but on the space of the balance between the two poles. The emphasis lies on the locality of the subject, it points to a topography. The Davos debate invited a new way of thinking where a philosophical discussion is similar to a strategic debate in diplomacy. The middle voice exists, although it is not only mediation, but what I call "mediality". The core of mediality is a subtle balance between the event of understanding (which happens to the subject) and the subjects, and it can be described for example with Gadamer's notion of play. It is noteworthy that the humanist scholar who often entered diplomatic service from the 16<sup>th</sup> century did nothing other than trained the art of interpretation (*ars interpretandi*). It means his task was an exploratory reading of the world and ourselves, and in addition to this, in the majority of cases the mission of revealing the truth as well.

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<sup>85</sup> See Kaegi, "Davos und Davor", 69, and in note 10 above. See further Hendrik J. Pos, "Recollections of Ernst Cassirer", in *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*, ed. by Paul Arthur Schilpp (Evanston, Ilionis: The Library of Living Philosophers, Inc. 1949), 63–72, here: 69.: "The conclusion was not without human symbolism; the magnanimus man offered his hand to his opponent: but it was not accepted."

<sup>86</sup> Kaegi, "Davos und Davor", 69., and in note 10 above.