

Chapter 2

Phenomenology, “Grundwissenschaft” and “Ideologiekritik”: Hermann Zeltner’s Critique of the Erlangen school

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This paper is visibly connected neither to relations between the Erlangen school and logical empiricism, nor to any problems of logic. I will instead be concerned with whether Wilhelm Kamlah and Paul Lorenzen were possibly influenced by the discussion of phenomenological issues by certain philosophers active in Erlangen shortly before or during the development of the so-called Erlangen school in the Mid-1960s. My claim is that there was *no* real discussion or exchange of ideas between the protagonists of constructive philosophy and those in the Erlangen Institute closer to phenomenology, neo-Kantianism, or “new ontology”, although some of them were concerned with similar problems and, like Hermann Zeltner, attempted to establish a dialogue from time to time.

The topic of this local and more traditional context of the Erlangen school has, to my knowledge, not yet been taken up anywhere, and it may well turn out that this omission does not amount to a great loss. My own interest derives of course from the fact that I was once involved on both sides, which also means that I must leave an objective evaluation to others and to the future.

Let me begin with a remark on the title of my paper. Whereas I may assume some common understanding of the word “phenomenology”, the two German words in quotes may need some explanation, and moreover Hermann Zeltner is likely to be unknown to the majority of my readers. I have taken the word “Grundwissenschaft” from Zeltner’s paper “Philosophie als Grundwissenschaft” published posthumously in memory of Wilhelm Kamlah in 1978. I have chosen the term “Ideologiekritik” as a catch-word suggested by Zeltner’s monograph *Ideologie und Wahrheit: Zur Kritik der politischen Vernunft*, published in 1966. I will come back to these terms a little

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later. Let us begin with the context in which Hermann Zeltner appears connected to the Erlangen school, a context I regard as necessary to appreciate his life as well as the thought of his later years.

Of course, philosophy at Erlangen did not start with the vague set of persons later called (by others) the “Erlangen school”. When I began studying at Erlangen in 1956, there was Wilhelm Kamlah, who had taken over the only philosophy chair in 1954. There was also Rudolf Zocher, who had already accomplished his *Habilitation* (the qualification as university lecturer) in 1925 but had made almost no progress in his academic career because he had refused to comply with the demands of the Nazis. There was also Hermann Zeltner, already over 50 but only recently *habilitated*—for reasons I will present in a moment. The bulk of the teaching load was taken by Hans R.G. Günther, a pupil of Eduard Spranger, aged almost 60, who had lost his chair at the German University in Prague and held a poorly salaried position at Erlangen although he had never been a member of the Nazi party. He finally left for Freiburg in 1958 when he was asked to choose where to retire. I attended lecture courses and seminars with all of them, and later also with Wolfgang Albrecht after he had completed his *Habilitation* in 1958. This was the staff and the situation before Paul Lorenzen arrived in 1962 to fill the newly created second philosophy chair. I supplemented my philosophical schedule with lecture courses by Hans Joachim Schoeps, Hans Liermann and Ruprecht Matthaei.

Considering the small philosophy staff, phenomenology was fairly well represented. Zocher, who had published an impressive analysis and critique of Husserl’s phenomenological approach in 1932 offered two graduate seminars on Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*. Albrecht gave a seminar on Husserl’s *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, followed by another on the *Cartesian Meditations*, and Zeltner taught an introduction to phenomenology focussing on Husserl and Heidegger. Remembering Gethmann’s now famous slogan that “constructive philosophy is phenomenology after the linguistic turn” (Gethmann 1991), it is tempting to suspect that this context exerted a strong phenomenological influence on Kamlah even though he had just taken a different turn himself, offering a lecture course on “Begriff, Aussage, Wahrheit, Wissenschaft” and a graduate seminar entitled “Das Wahrheitsproblem”. This suspicion would seem all the more plausible since Kamlah and Zeltner shared a common past. So I must ask the reader’s patience in taking a look at their lives: rather a glimpse in the case of Kamlah who is no doubt better known, and a slightly more explicit overview in the case of Zeltner.

Wilhelm Kamlah was born the son of a Lutheran parson on September 3, 1905 in Hohendorf an der Bode. After graduating from the *Domgymnasium* in Halberstadt, he studied theology, and later also musicology, history and philosophy at Marburg, Tübingen, Heidelberg and Göttingen. Among his teachers, Kamlah specifically recalled Rudolf Bultmann and the young provocative Martin Heidegger in Marburg, as well as Hans Lipps in Göttingen. He calls Heidegger his philosophy teacher even after the renunciation of his partisanship in 1954, and mentions Hans Lipps along with Arnold Gehlen as forerunners for his own philosophical anthropology in 1982 (Kamlah 1982). For a short time, one of his fellow students was Zeltner, perhaps in musicology where Kamlah worked on his edition of Heinrich Schütz’s *Geistliche*

Chormusik between 1928 and 1935, which was later incorporated into Schütz’s collected works. Zeltner paid tribute to this achievement in his 1973 paper entitled “Anfang und Ausgang der Schütz-Bewegung” (Zeltner 1973).

In 1932, Kamlah married Kläre Nohl (1908–1988), one of four daughters of the pedagogue Herman Nohl. After the Nazis came to power, the Nohl family was considered “jüdisch versippt” (i.e., related by marriage or ancestry to jews). Kamlah lost his post as assistant in the historical seminar in 1936, and 1 year later also that of director of the academic orchestra. A difficult period for the family followed, their only income being that from Kläre Kamlah’s violin lessons (one of her pupils was Margarethe Zeltner, Hermann Zeltner’s wife). Although Kamlah was drafted in 1939, sent to the front and severely wounded, he managed to win the support of sociologist Eduard Baumgarten at the University of Königsberg and to obtain his *Habilitation* in the winter semester of 1941–1942. In 1945 he was able to transfer to Göttingen as *Privatdozent*, was promoted to university reader in 1950, and in 1951 became associate professor at the Technical University of Hannover. He began to engage in logic and in a philosophical critique of language, perhaps based on a lingering stimulus from Hans Lipps (killed in action in 1941), but in my opinion more likely due to discussions with Paul Lorenzen, whom he had met and come to know just in those years. Kamlah accepted a call to become chair of philosophy at Erlangen in 1954, and later developments are well documented. For an excellent biographical and intellectual survey I refer the reader to Martin Langanke’s paper “Fundamentalphilosophie und philosophische Anthropologie im Werk Wilhelm Kamlahs” (Langanke 2003).

Hermann Zeltner was born on July 5, 1903 in Nürnberg to the physician Dr. Edwin Zeltner and his wife Maria, née Altmann. He graduated from the Melanchthon-Gymnasium with his *Abitur* in 1922 and studied theology, philosophy and musicology in Erlangen, Munich, Tübingen, Göttingen and Münster. He first prepared for a theological profession, entering the *Predigerseminar* in Nürnberg, but decided to add three semesters in philosophy from 1928 to 1929 in Göttingen. There, he obtained his doctorate *summa cum laude* with a dissertation entitled “Schellings philosophische Idee und das Identitätssystem” (Zeltner 1929), supervised by the phenomenologist Moritz Geiger, who accepted Zeltner as a candidate for *Habilitation* early in 1933.

Geiger, who was Jewish, and moreover had involved himself in a fight over the Göttingen International Office with Hans Lipps, who was an ardent national socialist, was removed from his professorship at the end of 1933. Georg Misch was willing to step in for Geiger as far as Zeltner’s *Habilitation* was concerned, but he was likewise dismissed in 1934. Zeltner nevertheless applied for the *venia legendi* in 1935, presenting his work “Studien zur Logik der existentiellen Reflexion” to Herman Nohl, who would have awarded him the desired qualification. But Nohl was also considered politically unreliable (in fact he was discharged in 1937), and so Hans Lipps (who was at that time filling Misch’s chair) was asked to assess Zeltner’s *Habilitationsschrift*. Lipps told Zeltner that he was by no means willing to accept the thesis, and that he considered a revision of it useless. Zeltner was forced to withdraw his thesis and his application. It is not without irony that, in the same

year, Karl Jaspers recommended Zeltner's appointment to the philosophy chair at the University of Frankfurt despite his still lacking the *venia legendi*, and that this chair was finally filled by none other than Hans Lipps.

After this failure at a university career, Zeltner became a librarian and was in the Prussian library service at Halle-Wittenberg from 1935 to 1945, including military service from 1939 to 1945, when he was discharged by the Soviet military administration. A difficult time followed. Zeltner had married in 1931 and had four children. He had to eke out a living as a piano teacher, chorus leader, synodal secretary and teacher at an ecclesiastical girls school in Frankonia. Finally, he was accepted into the Bavarian library service in 1948, and promoted to vice-director of the university library of Erlangen in 1949. He was entrusted with teaching philosophy courses at the University in 1951, wrote a second habilitation thesis and finally got his *venia legendi* in 1955 at the age of 52. Zeltner quit the library service and was appointed to an unsalaried professorship in 1961. He spent the winter semester of 1966–1967 as visiting professor at the University of Bern in Switzerland, substituting for Wilhelm Kamlah at Erlangen twice, before and after this foreign appointment. Zeltner retired in 1968 and died in Erlangen in 1975.

Zeltner is not widely known today, and wasn't either during his life-time. The only philosophical dictionary with a short entry on him is Kröner's *Philosophisches Wörterbuch*, since its 19th edition published in 1974 (Schischkoff 1974). This neglect may be due to his position outside of any philosophical movement, and to the fact that he did not produce a pioneering or epoch-making *opus magnum*, probably as a consequence of his broad field of activities. I remember his colloquium for advanced students on information theory, half of the participants in which were staff members from philosophy or related disciplines. I regret having missed another colloquium that he conducted jointly with Finnish physiologist and philosopher Yrjö Reenpää, nuclear physicist Wolfgang Finkelburg and bio-cybernetics-pioneer Wolf-Dieter Keidel. Even the formal sciences cast a spell on him, as shown by an unpublished manuscript of 75 pages, quoted in Zeltner's CV and entitled "Logik und Mathematik" that I have tried to re-discover, so far without success. Most significant perhaps, Zeltner was for many years a highly competent reviewer and critic of concerts and other music performances for local newspapers and journals, his contributions to which number in the hundreds.

A survey of his work in philosophy proper is somewhat easier, since among numerous contributions there are two clear foci. The first is Zeltner's research on Schelling and his presentation of it to the educated public. Manfred Schröter, the pope of Schelling scholarship, as it were, praised Zeltner's book on Schelling (Zeltner 1954) as "the best introduction to Schelling in existence".¹ Zeltner used it (I assume on Kamlah's advice) as his *Habilitationsschrift* in Erlangen. He was involved in the critical Academy edition of Schelling's works, the first volume of which he co-edited. Volume II is dedicated to the memory of Hermann Zeltner.

¹Closing statement of the short description as a blurb for Zeltner's book, printed on its dust-cover: "die beste Einführung in Schelling, die wir besitzen."

The second focus is social philosophy, with emphasis on the theory and critique of ideology. It is not only expounded in the monograph *Ideologie und Wahrheit* (Zeltner 1966), but also developed in several papers, and last but not least in Zeltner’s contribution to the *Festschrift* for Paul Lorenzen, published only posthumously in 1978. Like Zeltner’s contribution to the volume *Vernünftiges Denken* (Zeltner 1978b), originally intended as a *Festschrift* for Wilhelm Kamlah, but transformed into a memorial volume by the vicissitudes of life.

Before taking up, or rather digging up, Zeltner’s relations to Kamlah and Lorenzen, let me return for a moment to his Göttingen period and to the role of his academic teacher and *Doktorvater* Moritz Geiger (1880–1937). Zeltner held him in highest esteem. He owned all or nearly all of his writings, and in his office one could see a portrait of Geiger, marked on the back side as Zeltner’s property. And he published an unusually long commemorative paper on Geiger in the *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* in 1960 (Zeltner 1960). Geiger had studied in Munich with Alexander Pfänder and Theodor Lipps (who supervised his dissertation). He was co-editor of Husserl’s *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* and succeeded Husserl as chair in Göttingen in 1932. One would expect his relevance to the philosophy of mathematics as well as to constructive philosophy because of two of his writings. First, the monograph *Systematische Axiomatik der Euklidischen Geometrie* (Geiger 1924), summarized in a lecture before the *Göttinger Mathematische Gesellschaft* 1 year later (Geiger 1926). Geiger is claiming here that Hilbert’s axioms of geometry are perfect for the derivation of geometry as a discipline, but lack the perspicuity and simple internal structure of our intuition of space, which one would expect them to represent as nicely as Peano’s axioms represent the calculatory basis of arithmetic.² The second pertinent text is a very detailed review of Oskar Becker’s *Mathematische Existenz* (Becker 1927) in the *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen* of 1928 (Geiger 1928), prompting a similarly detailed defensive reply from Becker (Becker 1929). But Geiger did not pursue these studies any further, moving instead towards phenomenological aesthetics and beyond. Herbert Spiegelberg, in his well-known survey on *The Phenomenological Movement* (Spiegelberg 1961), could give the paragraph on Geiger the heading “From Phenomenological Esthetics toward Metaphysics”. He found it difficult “to tell how far phenomenology was and remained the core of Geiger’s philosophy” (*op. cit.* I 206). I would not have gone into so much detail myself if I had not felt obliged to ask the same question about Zeltner: to what extent was he a phenomenologist, either regarding the subject of his investigations, or regarding the methods employed?

At the beginning of his paper “Philosophie als Grundwissenschaft” (Zeltner 1978b), Zeltner explains that he is far from claiming any foundational role for philosophy in the realm of science *as such*, but will investigate whether philosophy can supply foundations or justifications for *specific* disciplines. Hugo Dingler

²Bernays, in his short notice of the book in the *Jahrbuch über die Fortschritte der Mathematik*, saw in it “... the first undertaking to motivate a significant axiom system from internal reasons” (“... das erste Unternehmen [...], ein bedeutendes Axiomensystem aus inneren Gründen zu motivieren.”)

believed that this could be done for geometry, and Kant, in his *Prolegomena*, was convinced that pure mathematics and pure natural science would get a philosophical foundation by exhibiting the conditions of their possibility. The question of whether a similar procedure might be effective in the humanities, say for law or for social philosophy, alerts us to the problem that an attempted foundation might turn out to be no more than an ideological underpinning, and therefore something that would bear the name of *foundation* unjustly. Closer analysis shows that a “Grundwissenschaft”, which may be translated approximately as “basic science” or “foundational knowledge”, cannot take the form of an *ontology* as in Plato’s doctrine of ideas, nor the form of an *epistemology* like Kant’s in the case of, say, ethics or anthropology. Zeltner’s proposal is a third way, based on an elucidation (but also a critique) of Lorenzen’s foundation of geometry. He aims to show that in following the prescriptions of geometrical norms, we must internalize (“mitvollziehen”) their meaning as prescriptions of *actions* in the physical world, in order to grasp the real meaning of mathematical propositions. Zeltner thinks that Lorenzen’s approach is valuable but still insufficient, since it may well lead to practical geometry as we find it already with the ancient Egyptians, but not yet to a well-founded structure or system of mathematical propositions. As Zeltner does not elaborate this argument any further, I will not delve into this question either. Zeltner’s point is that we need a kind of reciprocity between a discipline and the co-ordinated part of “Grundwissenschaft”. In reflecting e.g., on geometry, we pick the *philosophically* relevant aspects of the geometer’s actions, remembering with Kant that space is not a concept but pure intuition. I do not know whether Zeltner and Lorenzen ever made any attempt to discuss these particular foundational questions.

It is a great pity that Zeltner’s unexpected death at the end of 1975 prevented a discussion of his paper published posthumously in the *Festschrift* for Lorenzen in 1978–1979 (Zeltner 1979). Zeltner cites, analyzes and cautiously criticizes passages from Lorenzen’s “Rules of Reasonable Argumentation” (Lorenzen 1974) (in the 1974 version of *Konstruktive Wissenschaftstheorie*) and from Lorenzen and Schwemmer’s *Konstruktive Logik, Ethik und Wissenschaftstheorie*, published in 1973. Although we have not yet reached Lorenzen’s late political philosophy here, I would find it fascinating to see the early struggles for a consistent and fertile concept of “*normative genesis*” confronted with Zeltner’s historically underpinned proposals for exposing, dismantling and finally overcoming *ideologies*. It is true that the terminologies of these would-be dialogue partners are light-years apart from each other, and Zeltner’s argumentation is complex and often terse. But in my view the two philosophers have nowhere else been closer to a bulk of common questions (and therefore to each other). Already, the title is significative and promising: “Klopfzeichen. Normative Genese und Ideologiekritik—Fernerer zum Kallikles-Gespräch (Platon, Gorgias 481 C ff.)” (Zeltner 1979).

“Klopfzeichen” are rapping sounds or signs exchanged by prisoners in neighbouring cells, aiming at establishing communication, or to send each other messages later on. Zeltner obviously wanted to indicate that he felt, in the Erlangen institute, like a prisoner deprived of contact with his fellow sufferers. At the same time he intended to send a signal that he wished to change this situation. It was no doubt

an invitation to an exchange of ideas, and the pairing of the terms “Normative Genese” and “Ideologiekritik” shows clearly where Zeltner located the common ground. The second title refers back to Zeltner’s paper “Ideologie und Idee: Zum Kallikles-Gespräch” in *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 1974 (reprinted, like Zeltner 1979, in Zeltner 1978a). Kallikles is one of Socrates’ dialogue partners in Plato’s dialogue *Gorgias*, and in Zeltner’s view the first literary person to express a suspicion of ideology (*Ideologieverdacht*) at work in his discussion of the needs of individuals and of the polis, and of the appropriate kind of order for an ideal social community. The older text was originally written for a *Festschrift* for Helmut Berve (one of the great historians of ancient Greece), and uses a historical background to reflect theoretically on the normative questions hidden in traditional ways of thinking. By contrast, the “Klopfschreiben” explicitly compare the argumentation in the *Gorgias* with Lorenzen’s proposals for finding justified norms for people living together in a community, by constructing a normative genesis in contradistinction to the factual genesis we find in actual history. Implicitly, contemporary debates on “freedom from repression” in such a common endeavour are taken into account, and Zeltner’s doubt about the possibility of an “herrschaftsfreier Diskurs” goes nicely with reflections in the Erlangen school on the equity of rights in a rational dialogue, the necessity of expert advice, and the consideration of the interests of non-participants. A lively discussion between these “locked-in” philosophers would indeed have been a great event, perhaps with a valuable outcome. That Lorenzen, in turn, read Zeltner’s writings carefully, is documented by his annotations in the nine offprints he received from Zeltner, most of them with short but friendly dedications (among which “dem treuen Erlanger” on the first page of a 1966 paper probably refers to Lorenzen’s decision to stay at Erlangen and decline three nearly simultaneous calls to other universities).

Little is known about the personal relations of Zeltner to Kamlah and Lorenzen. About the relations between Zeltner and Kamlah I do not know anything. Andreas Kamlah (one of Wilhelm Kamlah’s two sons) stated in a letter to me dated 6 November, 2008, that his parents had not had any personal relationships with Hermann Zeltner, and that he did not recall ever having seen him in the Kamlah family’s house. Admittedly, I know almost as little about Zeltner and Lorenzen. The friendly dedications mentioned above point to good relations but nothing is known about a closer relationship, say, in the form of mutual private invitations or discussions, as between Kamlah and Lorenzen in their “untroubled” time.

Correspondence is lacking, small wonder between persons living in the same town and seeing each other often in their shared place of study. I do not interpret Zeltner’s outspoken protest against my definition of “foundational debate” and “foundational crisis” in my Habilitationsschrift—he had been asked to be the second referee of it—as an attack on Lorenzen or on myself, even though it led to a request for two further assessments by Kamlah and the sociologist Werner Mangold.

A last word on Gethmann’s description of methodical constructivism as “phenomenology after the linguistic turn”. I have, earlier in this paper, supported the judgment that Geiger was no full-blooded phenomenologist, while Misch, as forceful defender of Wilhelm Dilthey’s philosophy of life against Husserl and Heidegger, should be counted rather as what he is: a proponent of *Lebensphilosophie*.

Gethmann, as an expert both on phenomenology and on Lebensphilosophie, cannot have mixed them up, not even by misinterpreting the title of Misch's book *Phänomenologie und Lebensphilosophie* (Misch 1931). Only Wilhelm Kamlah, who has some superb phenomenological analyses of *Lebenswelt* and the general *condition humaine* in his book *Der Mensch in der Profanität* of 1949, probably wrote under the impression of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*. Yet even here, we do not find a *dependence* on Heidegger if we focus our attention on the concept of "Lebenswelt" and its role in the oft-quoted formulation of scientific thought as a "refining stylization of that which has always constituted the practical life of men and women."³ Returning to the situation at Erlangen, the information so far available seems to corroborate my claim (in answer to the question posed at the beginning of this paper) of the absence of any significant discussion or exchange between the constructivists and the more traditional thinkers in this potential market-place of philosophical ideas.

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³Paul Lorenzen, (1974, 5): "... eine Hochstilisierung dessen, was man im praktischen Leben immer schon tut".

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