Introduction
"What's the Seminar Got to Do with the War?"

In his autobiography, *Mein zwanzigstes Jahrhundert*, Ludwig Marcuse recalls:

> Toward the end of July, I encountered one of my respectable seminar colleagues, Hellmuth Falkenfeld, on Goethestrasse [in Freiburg]. He said, despairingly: "Have you heard what's happened?" I said, full of contempt and resignedly, "I know, Sarajevo." He said, "Not that, Rickert's seminar tomorrow is cancelled." I said, alarmed: "Is he sick?" He said, "No, because of the threatening war." I said, "What's the seminar got to do with the war?" He shrugged sadly.[1]

More than a century later, the broader implication of Marcuse's question – what has philosophy got to do with the war? – remains as alluring as ever, and has arguably become more challenging to answer given the sedimentation of established narratives, or lack thereof, that have long shaped our presumed understanding of the relation between European philosophy and – in George F. Kennan's oft-quoted expression – "the original catastrophe of the twentieth century." This question concerning the relation between the First World War and philosophical thought – and more generally, the relation between war and philosophy – does not only take the form of inquiring what philosophers did in the war (military service, observers from the home front, exiled in a foreign country), but of what philosophers intellectually did with the war, of how the war became a catalyst for their thinking, a theme of philosophical reflection, an opportunity for the renewed relevance of philosophy, or an obstacle to philosophical understanding. Of equal (and inseparable) significance is the question of what the war did to philosophers, of how the war impacted philosophical thinking, and, likewise, of how the role and image of the philosopher became affected, indeed afflicted, by the war. The aim of this book is to explore how there is

[1] L. Marcuse, *Mein zwanzigstes Jahrhundert* (Zurich: Diogenes, 1975), p. 30.

no simple or single answer to this tangle of questions, and that, more specifically, one cannot understand the formation of twentieth-century German philosophy – the focus of this study – without returning to the First World War in light of the twin questions: "What has philosophy got to do with the war?" and "What did the war do to philosophy?" Guided by these questions, *German Philosophy and the First World War* orchestrates a series of explorations of the paths taken by central figures in German philosophy in their reaction to, and experience of, the Great War (as it was then often called) in such a way that recognizes the complexity of the philosophical issues that animated their thinking, as well as the existential demands of wartime and its aftermath to which these thinkers responded in both word and deed.

Within weeks after the outbreak of hostilities in August 1914, the First World War was recognized from various philosophical perspectives as a world-historical event that would reveal, condemn, or decide the fate of the twentieth century. For many, the war promised release from the tedium and contradictions of an ever-advancing modernization of life; for others, it was anticipated with fright and foreboding; for yet others, it was welcomed as a fulfillment of revolutionary change and destructive renewal. Regardless of how the war's significance was perceived, none could then fathom the enduring ways in which European civilization – its values, forms of thought, social organization, and political orientations – would be transformed. As Henry James, residing in England, grasped lucidly in 1914:

> The plunge of civilization into this abyss of blood and darkness by the wanton feat of two infamous autocrats is a thing that so gives away the whole long age during which we have supposed the world to be, with whatever abatement, gradually bettering, that to have to take it all now for what the treacherous years were all the while really making for and *meaning* is too tragic for any words.[2]

And yet, words there were aplenty, especially from philosophers, whose loquaciousness during this time of war was historically unprecedented. The guns of August provoked a widespread engagement of philosophers in the principal belligerent nation within the wider spectrum of what Kurt Flasch insightfully calls the "spiritual mobilization" of intellectuals, university professors, artists, and writers.[3] Henri Bergson, Max Scheler, Bertrand Russell, and others took to arms by taking to their pens, for or against national cause and culture, for or against the war itself, for or

[2] Henry James, *Letters*, ed. P. Lubbock (London: Macmillan, 1920), p. 398. Letter of August 5, 1914.
[3] K. Flasch, *Die geistige Mobilmachung. Die deutschen Intellektuellen und der Erste Weltkrieg. Ein Versuch* (Berlin: Alexander Fest Verlag, 2000).

against established conceptions of philosophy. This catalyst for philosophical expression and engagement did not only gravitate around fathoming (or prophesizing) the meaning of the war (culturally, socially, historically, and philosophically); it reflected more pervasively a situation of philosophy *at* war, whether transfigured into the pursuit of war by other means or whether the war set in motion the transformation of philosophical thinking by other means. For many thinkers, the war was seen as in need of philosophical justification and conceptualization. For some, the war appeared as a force capable of bestowing or rejuvenating meaning in a world deemed to be empty of meaningfulness. For others, the war provided a stage for the awakening of philosophical thinking from its dogmatic slumber or skeptical resignation. And for still others, the war revealed the urgency of finding philosophically an exodus or exile from a cultural wasteland and the history of Western civilization with its legacy of endemic conflict. From a variety of approaches and angles, the war was an event that called into question the meaningfulness of it all. Whether for metaphysics, ethics, politics, culture, value, history, modern culture, social theory – indeed, the full range of philosophical concerns – the First World War was experienced as an original catastrophe of philosophical proportions.

What is immediately striking about the wartime invigoration of philosophical thinking across the European continent is its range and diversity, which cannot be reduced to simply being "about" the war inasmuch as the war was not understood as being simply "about" the war. No other European conflict before the First World War, and arguably no European conflict since, including the Second World War, witnessed such an intense and widespread impact in situ on philosophers. This veritable explosion of intellectual activity took on many forms, and was often specific to its institutional and cultural context, including the engagement of philosophical discourse in the war itself, extending from shrill justifications of a nation's war efforts to endorsements of military and political strategy (for example, the support for the implementation of unrestricted submarine warfare in Germany) to rarer instances of calls for pacifism (as with Bertrand Russell). This wartime mobilization of philosophy adopted and adapted a host of literary and rhetorical configurations: public speeches, university lectures, private notebooks, letters, pamphlets, monographs, newspaper editorials, and longer forms of gestation that would only come to fruition decades after the end of hostilities.

Philosophy, however, was not only mobilized in the service of the war. For the war (and its aftermath) provoked the mobilization of philosophy in its own service; namely, as a crucible for philosophical contestation and creativity. As a historical watershed, the war set the stage for the conceiving

of "new thinking" and the composition of original philosophical works that have since become recognized and canonized as defining twentieth-century philosophy: Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Franz Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption*, Martin Buber's *I and Thou,* Ernst Bloch's *The Spirit of Utopia*, and György Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* – to name but a few. Aside from philosophical thinking at war, philosophical thinking became forged *in* war. Moreover, in addition to works written during the war and its volatile revolutionary aftermath, numerous original philosophical works composed during the 1920s and 1930s – Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Henri Bergson's *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* – emerged in the wake of a war that, philosophically, culturally, and psychologically, was far from over and done with. Most famously, under the long shadow of the war's devastation, the 1920s and 1930s witnessed a parting of the ways in twentieth-century philosophy between "Analytic Philosophy" and "Continental Philosophy." Within the shattered intellectual landscape of the interwar years, there occurred, in fact, multiple partings of ways (and contrary to received wisdom, not just one), as one of the war's most profound and enduring legacies, arguably its most defining philosophical aftershock. Conjointly with the reconfiguration of philosophical movements and methods along fault lines of divide, there occurred as well during these turbulent interwar years the forgetting or exiting of philosophical ways of thinking that did not survive the aftermath of war. The eclipse of German-Jewish thinking and destruction of German-Jewish culture in the 1930s and 1940s, the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian space of philosophical thought, and the obliteration of Goethe's paramount significance for German thinkers are examples of how narratives of "the parting of ways" should include a history of forgetting and disappearance as the manifestation of historical violence upon philosophical memory. The historical consciousness of philosophy – the stories told and not told – was itself transformed, giving rise to different genealogies of modern philosophy and its underlying plot (secularization, the end of metaphysics, and so on), canonizations in the historiography of philosophy (the ascendency of Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche, for example), and movements that have since become entrenched in curricula and histories of twentieth-century philosophy (the Frankfurt School, phenomenology, and existentialism at the expense of Neo-Kantianism and British Hegelianism, for example). And lastly, in this all too brief aperçu, it was during the war and its aftermath that novel ways of speaking philosophically entered into circulation: "intentionality," "totality," "the other," "alterity," "the in-between,"

"dialogue," "state of affairs," "facticity," and other examples abound. All in all, not one aspect of twentieth-century European philosophy can be understood without inquiring "What has philosophy got to do with the war?" and "What did the war do to philosophy?"

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It is therefore surprising that while the impact of the First World War on literature and the arts – and on culture, institutions, and values more generally – has been the subject of inquiry and interpretation, the question of whether and how the war induced a fundamental change in philosophical thinking remains relatively unexamined, often misunderstood, or simply taken for granted. Aside from a handful of specialized studies of individual philosophers and their biographies, the rare monograph, and an occasional collection of conference papers, the First World War's impact on European philosophy, during the years of conflagration and interwar years leading to the Second World War, has passed into a veritable historical as well as philosophical oblivion.

This forgetting of the war within philosophical memory can in part be accounted for by the controversial "war philosophy" mobilized during 1914–18, mainly but not exclusively in Germany (one thinks, for example, of Bergson's wartime writings, speeches, and diplomatic activity). Aside from a handful of minor studies of individual philosophers, predominantly Martin Heidegger, the few exceptions that have taken up German philosophy during the First World War, and in particular *Kriegsphilosophie*, in a more concerted fashion are (nearly) unanimous in their sweeping judgment that German philosophers during these years of conflict succumbed to "self-deceit" and "ideology."[4] Such a judgment is bolstered by the manner in which wartime intellectual support embraced its role as propaganda and, indeed, pioneered modern propaganda in a highly literate culture of mass media and robust political identification.[5] Max Scheler, Rudolf Eucken, Hermann Cohen, and others produced philosophical writings (books, public and university lectures, pamphlets, newspaper pieces) in support of the German war effort that are routinely dismissed as paradigmatically "unphilosophical." On such a judgment, these philosophers were swept away by the prevailing tides of

[4] H. Lübbe, *Politische Philosophie in Deutschland* (Munich: DTV, 1974); Sebastian Luft, "Germany's Metaphysical War: Reflections on War by Two Representatives of German Philosophy: Max Scheler and Paul Natorp," *Themenportal Erster Weltkrieg* (2007), www.erster-weltkrieg.clio-online.de; Peter Hoeres, *Krieg der Philosophen: Die deutsche und Britische Philosophie im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2004).

[5] Extensively studied in H. Fries, *Die große Katharsis. Der Erste Weltkrieg in der Sicht deutscher Dichter und Gelehrter* (Konstanz: Verlag am Hockgraben, 1994); see also Flasch, *Die geistige Mobilmachung*.

nationalism and chauvinist prejudice. This argument for the collapse of philosophy into ideology extends to what is undoubtedly the most studied aspect of the impact of the war on philosophy, namely, the development of a German conservative revolution and reactionary modernism during the 1920s and 1930s in the writings of Heidegger and Carl Schmitt (among others). The long shadow of complex (and contentious) questions regarding these two German mandarins has arguably eclipsed the wider and more diverse impact of the war on philosophy during the interwar years, with the question remaining open whether the *Kriegsphilosophie* of the First World War is only to be seen as evidence of an absence of philosophy in a time of war.

There is a further reason for the paucity of research in and understanding of the relation between the First World War and European philosophy that reflects an entrenched conceit exemplified in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy 1870–1945*. This collection of essays on the development of philosophy from 1870 to 1945 is organized around the dividing marker of 1914–18, thus ascribing a decisive significance to the First World War. And yet, although it is acknowledged that the question of whether the war "induced a significant shift is addressed in English surprisingly rarely," and is "not a simple one," the editor concludes that the consequences of the war were "primarily external to the internal dialectic of philosophy." On this view, an answer to the question of whether "philosophy in any way internalized the experience of the war" must receive a "primarily negative response": The war did not "produce new understandings but rather called into question older ways of thinking […] *without providing replacements.*"[6] This claim, however, is implausible given the numerous attestations among "the who's who" of interwar thinking in search of a "new thinking," "the renewal of philosophy," and "another beginning for reflection." Whereas the war transformed poetry, literature, and the arts, philosophy would have remained internally unfazed. The strangeness of the amnesia expressed with such a claim can aptly be formulated with Kurt Flasch's contention: "While no one would dare to write an history of painting or literature in our century without reference to the First World War, German historians of philosophy have confirmed once again their monkish extraterritorial autonomy […] Post-War German historians of philosophy have forgotten the war."[7] A comparable forgetting of the war can be ascribed to historians of twentieth-century philosophy more generally.

[6] *The Cambridge History of Philosophy 1870–1945*, ed. T. Baldwin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 377 (my emphasis).
[7] Flasch, *Die geistige Mobilmachung*, p. 369.

However implausible, the claim (and conceit) that philosophy did not "internalize" the experience of war and "produce replacements" for old ways of thinking can nonetheless be seized as both an opportunity and a provocation to undertake a reframing of the question of whether and how the First World War induced any significant transformation in philosophical thought. Limiting itself to German philosophy, the aim of this book is to delineate and develop an original approach to this question (in fact, a tangle of questions) based on the guiding thought that the war's impact on philosophy does not have one general "meaning," "effect," or "significance," and thus does not admit of one *kind* of answer. Rather than assume a generic or generalized "answer," *German Philosophy and the First World War* seeks instead to examine the question of the war's impact on philosophical thinking *in the plural*, and, through this multifocal lens, critically to reassess the transformations of German philosophy during the First World War and its aftermath. In this respect, *German Philosophy and the First World War* is not an intellectual history of German philosophy nor a biographical study of German philosophers. The endeavor has not been to write a history painted in broad strokes and told in swift narratives of philosophical ideas. The aim is likewise neither to present a comprehensive historical-cultural account of *Kriegsphilosophie* nor to offer a sociology of knowledge for the wartime mobilization of German academic mandarins, although certain thinkers discussed in this book contributed to the phenomenon of *Kriegsphilosophie* (whether early or later in the war, or throughout the war).

The ambition here is at once broader and more nuanced, namely, to think about philosophy in the time of war, about how the war impacted German philosophers in their thinking as well as their personal attitudes (the two of which are inextricable). This ambition must necessarily fall short of any claim to exhaustiveness; many thinkers who could have been included – Walter Benjamin, Gershom Scholem, Karl Jaspers, Carl Schmitt, and Rudolf Eucken (to name but a few) – have been set aside due to considerations of space. *German Philosophy and the First World War* likewise excludes from consideration sociologists (with the exception of Georg Simmel), theologians, historians, and other intellectuals and artists, although many of these figures, such as Max Weber and Oswald Spengler, are discussed parenthetically. For reasons of space and, more importantly, historical-cultural context, other constraints have been imposed on the remit of this study: German-language thinkers of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Ludwig Wittgenstein, Fritz Mauthner, and Sigmund Freud, for example) have been left aside (with the exception of György Lukács), as

have members of the Vienna Circle, the origins of which, however, cannot be understood without the First World War.

German Philosophy and the First World War is organized around studies of Ernst Bloch, Martin Buber, Ernst Cassirer, Hermann Cohen, György Lukács, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, Franz Rosenzweig, Max Scheler, and Georg Simmel. This gallery of philosophical portraits is not fashioned into a unified image of "German thought" and parsed into a menu of different "movements," nor are they meant to be viewed as museum pieces of antiquarian curiosity. On the other hand, these portraits are not haphazardly or eclectically brought together without intersecting relations and resonances among the chapters of the book. A reader is invited to view these portraits as forming together a philosophical kaleidoscope; variable combinations of different portraits can be rotated to produce different overall images or gestalts of central themes running through various thinkers ("modernity," "secularization," and so on). The effort throughout these portraits is to exhibit and explore how these thinkers thought in different rhythms (at times in tune with the war, at other times out of tune) and at different speeds of intellectual innovation. Rather than a linear narrative connecting these portraits in a one-dimensional sequence, this gallery of portraits embodies Ernst Bloch's notion of "the simultaneity of non-simultaneity" as characterizing the temporality of modernity in which philosophical thought, in each of the cases studied here, sought to find, or lose, its way.

The thinkers here on view often moved in the same circles, wrote for the same venues, and reacted to one another's philosophical initiatives. Most substantially, of course, these thinkers experienced the war, and yet did not experience the war in the same manner, from the same place, and, crucially, with the same experience of its unfolding and impact on their philosophical thinking. The kaleidoscopic composition of *German Philosophy and the First World War* moves at variable speeds and configurations through a shared space of concerns, with overlaps that reappear (or disappear) through different registers of significance and implication. In this manner, this kaleidoscopic topography allows for complex resonances and dissonances to emerge across a plurality of (often) intersecting and conflicting – combative – narratives. This orchestration accordingly serves as an important antidote to other approaches to the history of twentieth-century philosophy, such as one finds among cultural historians or historians of philosophy, that tend to absorb the particularity of these thinkers into an overarching narrative that would seek to arrive at a global answer to the question of the philosophical impact of the First World War.

Although *German Philosophy and the First World War* eschews an encompassing metanarrative through its kaleidoscopic configuration, many concepts and concerns do recur throughout, such as the critique of capitalism and the alienation of modern culture, the rejection of secularization, and the war as renewal or as the crisis that leads to renewal. Rather than organize the portraits in this book directly along these lines, the three recurring themes of "wartime," "philosophy in war," and "transformation" provide cardinal points of bearing for the discussion, argument, and interpretations of each chapter.

Wartime. Each portrait begins with the outbreak of the war, but does not end its discussion with a uniform date ("1918," for example). This variability regarding the reach of each chapter reflects not only the fact that for the thinkers here explored the war, in its philosophical and personal significance, did not uniformly end at a common moment or event, nor indeed with the November Armistice of 1918. This flexibility in temporal scope allows (in many chapters) for the interwar dimensionality of the war's aftermath during the 1920s and 1930s to enter into view; spiritually, the war did not end in 1918. In some chapters, death during the war provided a natural cut-off point (Simmel and Cohen, who both died in 1918 before the war's end); for others, the impact of the war is followed along a longer arc of development (Cassirer, Husserl, Heidegger, Scheler), but even here the endpoint is variable (the discussion of Heidegger, for example, does not extend beyond the middle of the Second World War); for others, the appearance of a major work immediately after the war (Bloch, Buber, Lukács, Rosenzweig) marks the terminal point of discussion. In each case, the discussion of each thinker begins in situ with the outbreak of the war in 1914. For reasons of approach and space, this book does not offer a preliminary panorama of nineteenth-century German philosophy, nor a detailed summary of a thinker's intellectual evolution before the war (nor, in most instances, after the war until their death). As examined as well, the experience of wartime varied according to location and movement during the war (service in the field, at the home front, in exile). Lastly, assessing the situation of philosophy in wartime is further complicated for several thinkers (Heidegger, Cassirer, Bloch, Buber, Lukács) by the Second World War, which arguably would have to be included in an assessment of the First World War's impact, thus bringing both wars into an overarching narrative.

Philosophy in war – philosophy at war. The twin questions "What has philosophy got to do with the war?" and "What did the war do to philosophy?" form the central axis of *German Philosophy and the First World War*. Not only does philosophical thinking find itself *in* war, but in several instances

philosophical thinking finds itself *at* war, and not only with its mobilization within the broader phenomenon of *Kriegsphilosophie* (Scheler, Husserl, Cohen, Simmel). For several thinkers, the imperative of philosophical thinking was emphatically understood against the war (Bloch, Lukács) or against a certain narrative of the war's perceived significance (Cassirer, Rosenzweig). For many, war becomes a compelling figuration of philosophical thinking itself, whether in its contestation against other philosophical movements or in search of another beginning, a radically other future, or exodus from the contemporary wasteland of a world at war. For others, the war is given a philosophical voice, as it were, in grasping the war (and being grasped by the war) as an event calling for and calling upon a new philosophical thinking. For many, the seismic center of "the war" varied as well: outbreak of the war in 1914, cataclysmic defeat in 1918, the Russian Revolution of 1917, the German Revolution of 1919. To this consideration of "which" war is in play needs to be added the ways in which the war alternatively served as the foreground or background for a thinker's philosophical transformation; whether war is the stage upon which philosophical thinking was changed or whether it was philosophical thinking itself that served as the stage for a transformation of the war's perceived significance.

Transformation. A common denominator running through this gallery of portraits is transformation. As with the themes of "wartime" and "philosophy in war – philosophy at war," the transformation of philosophical thinking did not occur uniformly, with the same significance and consequence, nor to the same degree and promise among these thinkers. In some instances there is "a conversion," or "a turning," or "a change of heart," or even an irresolvable conflict or contradiction. In other cases there are multiple ruptures and moments of transformation, not all of which were clearly discernible or understood by the thinkers themselves. But in all of the portraits gathered in this book, philosophical thinking underwent a transformation, in different senses, that drew from a variety of catalysts, provocations, and influences. Across the multiple narratives presented here, what emerges is how German philosophical thinking seeks to transform itself into something other, or ends up finding itself somewhere other than imagined, or fails to become other than itself, despite its searching. In each case, transformation is animated by the desire for a "new thinking" and, in several cases, a new form of life for the philosopher as well as for the world that they felt the historical urgency to renew.

As a kaleidoscope, the portraits in this gallery can be viewed in any order. Each chapter unfolds along its own narrative and philosophical path in such a way that it moves from the historical situation and experience