KAILA AND REICHENBACH AS PROTAGONISTS OF ‘NATURPHILOSOPHIE’

INTRODUCTION

Eino Kaila (1890–1958) brought new ideas to Finnish philosophy and psychology. He studied at the University of Helsinki in 1908–10 and made study visits, first to Paris in 1911, where he listened to Henri Bergson’s lectures, and also to Berlin in 1914. Kaila’s dissertation, Über die Motivation und Entscheidung, appeared in 1916. He worked as a critic of theatre and literature and as a dramatist in the Finnish National Theatre, before being nominated professor of philosophy in 1921 to the newly founded University of Turku. There he initiated the founding of the first Finnish institute of experimental psychology. In addition to philosophical works, he published works in psychology. Kaila stayed in Turku until 1930, when he became professor of theoretical philosophy and psychology at the University of Helsinki. In 1948 he was invited to become a member of the recently established Academy of Finland. One may speak of Kaila’s Turku period (1921–1930) and his Helsinki period (1930–1958).

Kaila considered himself a philosopher of nature, whose task is to articulate, using all available means of science, a coherent conception of the world and of mind’s place within it. As fellow of the Finnish Academy, he devoted himself to a great project in natural philosophy. The project had two components: first, a rigorous systematic study aiming at a unitary conception of nature, and second, the explication of this conception in a style accessible to a broader audience. The systematic study was to be realized in three volumes; only the first of these (Kaila (1956)) appeared before his death. As to the more popular work, it was meant to be divided into four parts, of which only the first is complete. The entire planned work was entitled as Hahmottuva maailma (“The world as a structuring whole”). Its first part is devoted to the problem of reality; it concerns the perceptual and conceptual components of everyday experience, and it has been translated from Finnish into German (cf. (Kaila (1962)).

Among the influences that Kaila mediated to Finland was the new, empiricist, scientific philosophy that developed at the beginning of the century and was advanced by the Moritz Schlick-led Vienna Circle, and by the Gesellschaft für wissenschaftliche Philosophie, which can also be called the “Berlin Group”. It was led by Hans Reichenbach (1991–1953). These circles were established in 1929. Kaila had a contact to Reichenbach and Schlick already before that. The
Viennese and the Berlin group cooperated in the organization of congresses, and in the journal *Erkenntnis*, which was jointly edited by Reichenbach and Carnap. (Cf. R. Haller/F. Stadler (1993) and F. Stadler (1997)). There were some differences between the Viennese and the Berlin philosophers. In his *Experience and Prediction* (1938), Reichenbach sees that the basic divergence is rooted in the controversy between realism and positivism (cf. especially chapters 17 and 25 of that work).

Reichenbach first studied engineering at Stuttgart in 1910. (He worked in 1917–1920 as a physicist in the radio industry). In 1911–15, he studied philosophy, mathematics, physics and pedagogy in Berlin, München, and Göttingen. He received his doctorate in 1915 at Göttingen, and his habilitation work was accepted in 1920 at Berlin. In 1926 the University of Berlin gave him the place of an extraordinary professor of natural philosophy. Reichenbach worked in that position until 1933, when he was expelled from the university. Soon later, he fled Germany. These events were due to the terror of the National Socialist regime. He continued his career in exile; in Istanbul from 1933 to 1938, and in Los Angeles from 1938 until his death. While in Istanbul, he began to write mainly in English, occasionally in French, and published only a few articles in his native German.

This article focuses on how Kaila and Reichenbach developed natural philosophy. Two main points must be stated at the outset. First, they were committed to critical realism – in other words, the distinction between reality itself and our knowledge of it. Second, they believed that natural philosophy required both detailed scientific analysis and a broad philosophical perspective. This study will follow how Kaila pursued the ideas that transformed philosophy in Vienna, in Berlin and elsewhere.

Kaila was influenced early on by Reichenbach. For his first Turku monograph (1925), he had studied Reichenbach’s dissertation (1916), habilitation (1920) and philosophical criticism of probability calculus (1920b). Kaila not only admits that he is “much indebted to the inquiries by Reichenbach”, but also states that “there is in essential points a full agreement between our basic ideas.” (Cf. Kaila (1925), p. 62). This indicates a remarkable affinity. That these philosophers were in many respects congenial thinkers did not, however, prevent Kaila from stating his disagreement with some of Reichenbach’s views. In particular, Kaila was dissatisfied with certain details in Reichenbach’s dissertation and with Reichenbach’s view on the relation between causality and chance. In the philosophers’ correspondence, as well as Kaila’s other works, one can detect additional influence from, and criticism of, Reichenbach’s ideas.

Kaila and Reichenbach shared the following main topics: (1) probability and causality as these appear in nature and in our knowledge; (2) space and time, in the cosmos and as we perceive them; (3) the microcosmic world and quantum mechanics. As to the research methods, Kaila uses the expression “Erkenntnislogik” (cf. the subtitle of (1925)), whereas Reichenbach speaks of “analysis of science” (cf. (1920), p. 5 and (1938), p. 8). Essentially, the basic orientation is the same.