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OXFORD PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS

The Faculties

A HISTORY



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CHAPTER FIVE

Faculties in Kant and German Idealism

*Johannes Haag*1. INTRODUCTION: THE TRANSCENDENTAL
APPROACH TO FACULTIES

Although at first glance it might seem as if Kant and his successors engaged in the *metaphysical* project of their predecessors, nothing could be further from the truth. In the wake of the methodological turn instigated by the newly discovered *transcendental* approach to important philosophical questions, the cluster of problems surrounding metaphysical categorization in general—and the metaphysical status of faculties in particular—lost its predominance. This development will form the focus of this chapter.

According to the methodological standards set by transcendental philosophy, philosophical theorizing—at least in the realm of theoretical philosophy—is only appropriate in the context of an inquiry into the conditions of the possibility of knowledge or, more generally,

the possibility of our conscious intentional reference to objects. Such an inquiry stands in stark contrast to one that only describes the psychological constitution the human mind is presumed to have. The modality involved is, consequently, quite strong: for something to be established by the method of transcendental philosophy it has to be part of the only possible explanation of our capacity for intentional reference.

The existence of faculties, from the perspective of transcendental philosophy, likewise has to be established by reflecting on the conditions of the possibility of conscious experience. Thus, the metaphysical status of the faculties invoked in this type of reasoning no longer carries any importance. For it is the function that transcendental reflection reveals as needing to be fulfilled that justifies the introduction of a particular faculty.

The first part of this chapter will examine Kant's critical work and show that the concept of a faculty served a twofold methodological purpose. On the one hand it was frequently used to delineate our own epistemic capacities *from within*, insofar as faculties were postulated as conditions of the possibility of these very capacities. On the other hand the concept of faculties proved useful in delineating our epistemic capacities *from outside*, as it were, insofar as they helped to articulate the conceptual possibility of capacities we—as human beings or, broadening the scope of the investigation, as finite rational beings—do not and cannot have for principled reasons.

A case in point for the first methodological strategy is, of course, the passive or receptive capacity to receive sensory impressions, a receptivity that is ascribed to the faculty of sensibility, and the active or spontaneous capacity to synthesize those impressions into conceptually structured representations—a spontaneity that is, in turn, ascribed to the discursive intellectual faculty or the understanding. Since neither of these two faculties, as Kant famously argued, can provide us with knowledge on its own, it is only in their interplay that these faculties become genuinely *epistemic* faculties—an interplay we consequently

have to accept as delineating the epistemic scope of each of them from within.

The second methodological strategy is on display, for instance, in Kant's conception of an intellectual intuition, which specifically contrasts with our own nonproductive epistemic faculties. This limiting faculty, which already figures in the first *Critique*, is complemented in the third *Critique* by the faculty of an intuitive understanding, that is, a faculty of understanding that operates nondiscursively (as opposed to our discursive intellect).

The latter, contrastive approach to faculties was of the utmost importance for the development of post-Kantian, idealist philosophical systems. For in one form or another, all of the German idealists took up one of these contrasting capacities and put it to a quite different use, claiming that we finite beings do, in fact, possess the faculty in question, albeit in a carefully modified sense. In so doing, they transcended the Kantian framework in different, but equally radical ways. Fichte and Schelling took up the faculty of intellectual intuition, while the concept of an intuitive understanding—via Goethe's mediating influence—paved the way for the system presented in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The second part of the chapter will be dedicated to sketching this development, focusing largely on Fichte.

The overall lesson to be learned from the use Kant and his idealist successors made of the concept of epistemic faculties is the following: epistemic faculties should only be admitted insofar as they can be justified by way of transcendental reasoning. For Kant, such reasoning can either take the positive form of reflection on the conditions of the possibility of our empirical knowledge or the negative form of delineating this kind of knowledge from without by introducing limiting faculties as contrastive concepts. The idealists—and Fichte in particular—can then be seen as transforming the contrastive concepts Kant had introduced into concepts of faculties that play an important role in establishing the possibility of empirical knowledge. In so doing, the idealists go beyond the purely negative use Kant made of those

concepts and instead employ them in a positive, constructive argument concerning the possibility of knowledge itself.

2. KANT ON EPISTEMIC FACULTIES

Let us begin with the first task faculties fulfill in Kant's critical philosophy, that is, their delineation of our own epistemic capacities *from within*. To introduce a faculty in this context, one has to show that the faculty in question is indeed a condition of the possibility of knowledge. So which faculties prove to be conditions of the possibility of knowledge in the required sense? For Kant it is, first and foremost, two "stems" of our knowledge that have to be brought into play here: *sensibility* and *understanding*.

2.1. Intentionality and the Two Stems of Knowledge

Why those two stems? Here a variety of reasons might be given, some of them more historical, others more systematic. Since our aim is to prove that these faculties are conditions of the possibility of our epistemic access to the world (of which we ourselves are part), the systematic arguments are of greater interest. There are, generally speaking, two different dimensions to the relevant systematic questions: one concerns the possibility of a priori knowledge, the other the possibility of a posteriori knowledge. Both dimensions are, I would like to argue, of pivotal importance for an adequate appreciation of Kant's systematic reasons for introducing the two stems—and, accordingly, the two *distinct* faculties of sensibility and understanding. Both dimensions are, however, ultimately related to questions we would today subsume under the broader heading of the problem of intentionality. I take the core problem of intentionality to be the question of how we are able to refer to something *as* something—even if this reference should, on certain occasions, turn out to be only *ostensible* reference.¹

¹ For this use of the term "ostensible" see Wilfrid Sellars, "Kant's Transcendental Idealism," *Collections of Philosophy* 6 (1976): 16.

At least initially, Kant thought this question to be problematic only in connection with a priori knowledge. Thus, when he asks in a famous letter to Marcus Herz of 1772: "What is the ground (*Grund*) of the relation of that in us which we call 'representation' to the object?" (AA. 10:130) he is only addressing the a priori dimension of this question.² The corresponding question for our a posteriori ideas or representations did not seem to him to pose particular difficulties at that time. He thought, roughly, that a causal story should suffice to explain how empirical representations (purport to) refer to their objects as such. It is only in the course of answering the question about a priori reference—the official topic of the 1781 *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR)—that empirical knowledge turns out to be problematic in a way that cannot be solved simply by invoking the causal connection between objects and our experience of them.

This becomes obvious once one realizes that this causal relation itself is not something *given* to us, but is rather the way in which we as finite rational beings have to conceive of any reality that is to be thought of as existing independently of our conception. We have to take causality for granted in order to arrive at a concept of a world that exists independently of our representing it. Causality, in other words, turns out to be one of the concepts necessary for a conception of an object as something existing independently of our mental activity. Such concepts, which are necessary in order for us to refer to objects in general, are Kant's forms of thought or forms of the understanding, that is, the categories. One thing these forms have in common is that they cannot be abstracted from experience, though they enable every abstraction from experience in making experience itself possible.

Kant arrived at this view in the course of working on what later became the CPR as he came to realize that it is not only our sensible access to the world that is endowed with a priori forms—as he had already argued in his 1770 *Inaugural Dissertation*—but our conceptual

2. All citations of Kant's works refer to the Akademie-Ausgabe (AA).

access to reality as well. If our knowledge does indeed have two stems, as he postulates in the first *Critique*, they must each be equipped with their own a priori forms: sensibility with the forms of intuition (in the case of human beings: space and time) and the understanding with its forms of thought or categories.

2.2. Sensibility and Understanding

That sensibility and understanding have different sets of a priori forms constitutes an important reason to distinguish between them as faculties.³ Another reason is connected with an ultimately phenomenological distinction that becomes apparent in our way of experiencing the world (and, indeed, ourselves as part of that world). Kant is impressed by the fact that our epistemic access to reality is characterized by a strongly *passive* element. Put simply: we cannot choose what we perceive. Something, at least, is *given* to us in experience. Still, we need a capacity to receive what is given to us. This "receptivity of our mind," indeed a "receptivity of impressions" (CPR A50/B74), is called sensibility. Sensibility is, consequently an essentially receptive faculty.

That something is *given* to us in experience, however, does not preclude what is thus given from being at the same time *taken* in a certain way, to borrow Wilfrid Sellars's helpful expression. The taking has to be something essentially spontaneous—and for Kant the faculty of such spontaneity is the understanding.

Consequently, in his introductory remarks to the *Transcendental Analytic* of the first *Critique*, Kant writes that while objects are given to us in sensibility, it is through the understanding that they are thought.⁴ This is, as I will shortly show, a claim that must be read with some

3 While we have considered a tentative argument in relation to the forms of thought (insofar as those forms are impossible to abstract from experience), no such grounds have so far been given with regard to the forms of sensibility, i.e. space and time. Kant presents these arguments in the *Transcendental Aesthetics* of the CPR. The argument for the necessity of spatial representation may serve as an example: In order to represent something as different from us, Kant argues we have to represent it as external to us. And to represent it, in turn, as external we have to represent it in space. See CPR A23/B38.

4 See CPR A51/B75.

caution. Its interpretation depends on how we understand the remark that objects are thought. Given the overall picture Kant develops in the *CPR*, it could mean either that in so much as representing an object we actively *judge* it as being a certain way or it could mean that taking up an object in conscious experience we already represent it *as* being a certain way, that is, our experience of the object already involves some conceptual characterization on its own.

On the first reading, the understanding would be *essentially* a capacity to judge. But Kant introduces the faculty of judgment as an additional faculty for subsuming one representation under another in a judgment. The representations thus related do not have to be of the same kind. They may be of the same kind, that is, both may be concepts; but more important for our epistemic access to reality are judgments that relate concepts to a very different kind of representation, namely intuitions.

Intuitions are representations that, unlike concepts, relate to their objects immediately. Judgments that subsume intuitions under concepts are, accordingly, the only judgments that contain elements relating directly to the objects given to us in experience. This unique feature allows them to play a foundational role in our picture of empirical reality.

That there are judgments that can play such a foundational role does not, however, mean that the Kantian picture of empirical knowledge as a whole is a foundationalist one. To see how Kant can avoid what Wilfrid Sellars famously castigated as the "Myth of the Given,"⁵ we have to turn to intuitions—and to the second way of reading the Kantian remark that objects given by sensibility are thought through the understanding.

Thinking, according to this reading, should be interpreted simply as having conscious representations of objects *as* objects (of a certain

⁵ Wilfrid Sellars, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 1 (1956): 253–329.

kind, even if this "kind" is sometimes very general).⁶ Intuitions would be just such representations. While concepts are general and only indirectly related to their objects (via judgments), intuitions are singular and relate directly to their objects.⁷ We can think of intuitions as representations that refer to their objects demonstratively. As such, they are the joint products of sensibility and understanding. It is the understanding that guarantees that intuitive representations refer to objects. Yet the activity of the understanding that secures this object-reference cannot be judgment, since judgment already presupposes conscious representations to subsume under concepts. Kant calls the joint activity of sensibility and understanding that generates such conscious representations in the first place *synthesis*.

Synthesis unites, in a manner yet to be explained, the sensory impressions of receptivity and concepts—and it does so either a priori or a posteriori. The primary a priori concepts that synthesis unites with the deliverances of sensibility are, of course, the categories or forms of the understanding. Accordingly, Kant writes in a notorious passage:

The same function that gives unity to the different representations in a judgment also gives unity to the mere synthesis of different representations in an intuition, which, expressed generally, is called the pure concept of understanding. (*CPR* A79/B104/5)

This complicated passage at the very least makes clear that the empirical judgments that directly relate concepts to intuitions do not thereby relate concepts to something given to us independently of any conceptual structuring. Concepts are essentially involved in the process of synthesis itself—and empirical judgments, if correct, only make explicit what is already implicit in the conceptual structuring of an intuition.

⁶ Just how general or specific this classification will be in a given case depends on our individual abilities to classify the object given—which depend, in turn, on our background knowledge and the information available to us.

⁷ *CPR* A320/B376.

One worry that might arise about the Kantian picture of the interplay of faculties developed so far would be that it somehow fails to capture the sense in which our knowledge is *objective*.

Things are further complicated by the fact that, on Kant's account of the a priori forms of sensibility and understanding, experience only presents us with *appearances* (empirical reality), which are to be contrasted with something that appears, that is, things-in-themselves (noumenal reality). We have no epistemic access to things-in-themselves, due to our a priori way of forming the sensory manifold or manifold of sensibility given to us in experience. Reality as it is in itself is consequently inaccessible to us.

Nevertheless, those things-in-themselves are a condition of the possibility of the appearances: by affecting our receptivity a certain way (an affection we can only conceive of as causal, but of whose "true nature" we can likewise know nothing), things-in-themselves provide us with the sensory manifold we take up in the complex synthetic activity that generates conscious experience of objects, that is, appearances.

Appearances are representations that are perceived (in the prevailing technical sense, i.e., cognized) *as* objects existing independently from our perception of them.⁸ To perceive appearances in that way, we have to abstract from all properties that the purported objects can only have in relation to perceiving subjects. Those properties cannot be objective properties in the required sense, since they belong to the objects only *as perceived*. Thus, for instance, no perspectival property can be a property in the required sense: objects are perceived from a certain perspective, but they do not themselves have perspectival properties.

In order to develop a conception of objectivity Kant has to elaborate this distinction. This elaboration is one of the central aims of the *Transcendental Analytic* in the first *Critique*. Its result is the doctrine of the categories or forms of the understanding I introduced earlier. Ultimately, categories are the necessary characteristics of our intentional

reference to objects as objectively existing. They serve as the conceptual scaffolding, as it were, of our construction of objectivity.

Kant's deployment of the concept of things-in-themselves, then, ensures that this conception of objectivity is not grounded in the reality-constructing activity of the perceiving subject alone. Thus, Sellars observes,

the [manifold of intuitions] has the interesting feature that its existence is postulated on general epistemological or, as Kant would say, transcendental grounds, after *reflection on the concept of human knowledge as based on, though not constituted by, the impact of independent reality*.⁹

This impact of an independent reality corresponds to the "guidedness" of our perceptual content.¹⁰ This guidedness, for Sellars, is ultimately phenomenologically grounded in the *passivity* of our experience.¹¹ Kant, as I already indicated, throughout his critical writings emphasizes this passivity with respect to the content of our experience.¹² There has to be something that explains the basic phenomenological fact that we are passive with respect to the actual content of our experience. For Kant (as for Sellars) this guidance has to be strictly "from without" the conceptual order. Independent reality, the Kantian thing-in-itself, guides us from without via the impressions of sheer receptivity.¹³ Only the

⁹ Wilfrid Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes* (London: Routledge, 1968), 9 (emphasis added).

¹⁰ This is Sellars's concept; see Wilfrid Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes* (London: Routledge, 1968), 9. It is taken up in the literature on Kant for instance by Robert Pippin, *Kant's Theory of Form* (New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 46ff., and John McDowell, "Sellars on Perceptual Experience," 22, and "The Logical Form of an Intuition," 38-40, both in McDowell, *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

¹¹ See Wilfrid Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes* (London: Routledge, 1968), 16.

¹² See e.g. A 50/B 74; Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, 4:452; Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, 7:141.

¹³ For more on this notion, see Wilfrid Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes* (London: Routledge, 1968), 16. Sellars thinks that Kant unduly neglects the idea of sheer receptivity; but see 2.3 here.

⁸ See, for example, CPR A190/B235.

latter are immediately accessible to the workings of our spontaneity. Yet even this immediate contact with sense-impressions is nevertheless guidance "from *without*" the conceptual order in the sense that these impressions are not given as what they are in themselves, but are always synthesized.

These all too sketchy remarks give us a first clue as to how the conception of an objectively existing reality can be spelled out in a Kantian framework even though the idea of such a reality cannot be equated with the notion of things-in-themselves, which, according to the doctrine of a priori forms, are not possible objects of our knowledge. To give a more detailed account, we have to considerably extend the theoretical framework presented so far. In particular, we have to invoke two further faculties, the faculty of *imagination* and the faculty of *apperception*; and we have to further differentiate our conception of a faculty already at hand, that is, the receptive faculty of *sensibility* or *sense*. At one point at the very beginning of the *Transcendental Deduction* of the first edition of the CPR (the so-called A Deduction), Kant brings the three ultimately required elements together in the following way:

There are three original sources (capacities or faculties of the soul) which contain the conditions of the possibility of all experience, and cannot themselves be derived from any other faculty of mind, namely, *sense*, *imagination*, and *apperception*. Upon them are grounded (1) the *synopsis* of the manifold *a priori* through sense; (2) the *synthesis* of this manifold through imagination; finally (3) the *unity* of this synthesis through original apperception. All these *faculties* have a transcendental (as well as an empirical) employment which concerns the form alone, and is possible a priori. (CPR A94)

2.3. *Synopsis of Sense and Sheer Receptivity*

In the foregoing quotation, synopsis of sense is sharply distinguished from any kind of synthesis: synthesis is always a function of the imagination

that in turn, as I shall show shortly, is a function of the understanding in a certain application. Synopsis on the other hand, being a function of sense, does not require any synthetic activity. The synopsis of sense functions as sheer receptivity.

Synopsis nevertheless seems to involve *some* kind of structuring of the given sensory material, as Kant makes clear in his sole subsequent appeal to synopsis shortly afterward:

If each representation were completely foreign to every other, standing apart in isolation, no such thing as knowledge would ever arise. For knowledge is a whole in which representations stand compared and connected. As sense contains a manifold in its intuition, I ascribe to it a synopsis. But to such synopsis a synthesis must always correspond; receptivity can make knowledge possible only when combined with spontaneity. (CPR A97)

If synopsis *corresponds* to synthesis insofar as it is a faculty that unites otherwise distinct and isolated representations, we can certainly conclude that some order is already imposed on the manifold "in intuition" by the synopsis of sense.

This characteristic receptivity of the mind is an innate disposition to receive sensory affection.¹⁴ It is a mere disposition to react (in no sense spontaneously but merely passively) when acted on by things-in-themselves. This is the sense in which even the synopsis of sense can be a priori.

One might be tempted to think about this passive reaction as the shaping of a piece of wax when a seal is pressed on it. But this picture would be misleading, because it would neglect the important fact that this disposition to react to a given affection of sense with the forming of the material thus given has "a strong voice in the outcome,"¹⁵ in

¹⁴ See AA. 8:222.

¹⁵ Wilfrid Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes* (London: Routledge, 1968), 16.

terms of giving this input some structure. A better picture might be light falling through a grate:¹⁶ in this case the shape of the grate would stand for the specific form of the receptivity—in our case (something that systematically relates to) spatial and temporal order. The light would represent the sensory input that, by falling through the grate, is structured in a certain way. Resulting from this process are synoptically structured impressions that present a manifold “for intuition,” that is, a manifold that has to be “given *prior to* any synthesis of understanding and *independent of it*” (CPR B145; my emphasis). Kant’s picture of sensory consciousness, on this reading, implies the existence of sensory structured *material* that is completely non-synthetic, nonspontaneous, and, a fortiori, neither conceptual nor intentional—namely, the synoptically structured impressions of sheer receptivity.¹⁷

The products of synopsis would be sensations completely located below the line that separates the realm of spontaneity from sheer receptivity.¹⁸ As such, they cannot be structured by space and time as forms of intuition in the sense elucidated above. For such forms of intuition are themselves products of an a priori synthesis, whereas sheer receptivity is precisely marked by the absence of spontaneity.

But what, then, is the nature of those forms of *sheer* receptivity? Again, we have to restrict our claims to what can be founded on transcendental reasoning. We consequently have to explain why we need to invoke a synopsis of sense in the first place. Now, the passivity of experience and reflection on the need for guidance from without only give us reason to assume affection by things-in-themselves, so these considerations cannot furnish us with an argument for the

¹⁶ I owe this metaphor to Eckart Förster.

¹⁷ On this reading (contra both Wilfrid Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes* (London: Routledge, 1968), and John McDowell, “The Logical Form of an Intuition,” in McDowell, *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009)), Kant not only has the conceptual resources to account for Sellars’s “sheer receptivity,” but explicitly invokes such sheer receptivity in his notion of the synopsis of sense.

¹⁸ For this metaphor see John McDowell, “Sellars on Perceptual Experience,” in McDowell, *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 5.

necessity of a synopsis of sense. Why do we need to posit sensory input that is *structured* by our receptivity alone? Why, in other words, is this synopsis a “condition of the possibility of all experience” (CPR A94)?

The reason, ultimately, is that our forms of intuition are, as John McDowell puts it, a “brute fact about our subjectivity.”¹⁹ For we are aware that other forms of intuition are at least logically possible. We can conceive of finite, rational beings whose sensibility is distinct from our own but is, on account of their finitude and rationality, nevertheless subject to the same categories of the understanding, albeit in an alternatively schematized form.²⁰

Our own spatiotemporally structured empirical reality is therefore only one particular way to structure reality (by schematizing categories accordingly and providing a framework for the spatial and temporal location of objects of experience). Indefinitely many other structures are logically possible. This *specificity* of the way objects are given to us in experience therefore stands in need of explanation. And the forms of sheer receptivity are introduced by a purely functional characterization to explain just this specificity.²¹

Before moving on, let me note by way of conclusion that the introduction of this faculty of sheer receptivity is motivated solely by reference to the conditions of the possibility of our experience. It can therefore serve as a particularly convincing example of the methodological turn the treatment of the faculties underwent under Kant’s hands: sense as sheer receptivity serves to delineate our own epistemic capacities *from within* insofar as it is introduced as a condition of the possibility of our

¹⁹ John McDowell, “Hegel’s Idealism as a Radicalization of Kant,” in McDowell, *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 85.

²⁰ See CPR B 148.

²¹ Paul Franks refers to the importance of that distinction between “receptivity in general and specifically human sensibility,” and he points out that the specific features of our sensibility cannot be “derived from the forms of the understanding” (Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005], 58). Thus he is aware of this “brute fact” about our sensibility without, however, attempting to give a further explanation in Kantian terms of how exactly it is to be understood.

knowing relationship to a reality of which we conceive ourselves to be a part.²²

2.4. *Synthesis of Imagination*

I can now turn to the next element Kant mentions in his list of the "three original sources (capacities or faculties of the soul)" (CPR A94). Imagination was introduced in the list of the three original sources or faculties as a capacity to subject the synoptically given sensory manifold to a process Kant calls *synthesis*. In this section I would like to throw some light on how this process (and the faculty responsible for it) is to be understood.

We already know not only that the imagination takes up the sensory manifold into consciousness, but that it furthermore fulfills this task by subjecting this manifold to the conceptual forms of the understanding, thereby guaranteeing that the synthetic process itself is structured by concepts. In short, it connects sensibility and understanding in a way that applies conceptual representations to sensible representations already in the construction of intuition—and thus ultimately allows for intuitions to be explicitly subsumed under concepts in judgments.

Kant in one place calls imagination a "forming [bildendes] faculty of intuition" (AA. 28.1:235). It is the task of the imagination "to bring the manifold of intuition into a picture" (CPR A120). It does so by synthesizing this manifold into complex representations. Synthesis is introduced as "the action of putting different representations together with each other and comprehending their manifoldness in one cognition" (CPR A77/B102/3). The concept of synthesis is, accordingly, the idea of merging different given representations (which are, as such, unconscious) into a conscious representation of something (as something). Note that it is the resulting complex representation that is sup-

22. For a more detailed account of synopsis of sense see Johannes Haag, "Kant on Imagination and the Natural Sources of the Conceptual," in *Contemporary Perspectives on Early Modern Philosophy: Nature and Norms in Thought*, edited by Martin Lenz and Anik Waldow (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 76–82.

posed to be conscious and not the process of synthesis itself. Through this process, the representations engraved, as it were, by the forms of sheer receptivity become spontaneously (as opposed to receptively) united in such a way that the resulting representations are epistemically accessible to us. Without this capacity it would still be possible for the passive senses to produce sensory impressions—but those impressions would be a merely unconnected manifold and, as such, "nothing to us" (CPR A120), "less than a dream" (CPR A112).

The products of the synthesis of the imagination are, in the first place, mere images of objects, but not yet the intuitions they will eventually become. In his description of what he calls the "threefold synthesis," Kant explains how to understand the details of this synthetic process.²³ The individual aspects of this "threefold" synthetic process are, however, best understood as three aspects of one complex synthesis neither of which would be possible without the others.

Kant himself illustrates what those aspects are supposed to contribute to this complex synthesis by way of example. He asks the reader to think of intuiting a line in space. This intuition, he argues, presupposes a "running through" (or, alternatively, a "taking up" of) a set of impressions into the mind. This running through is what he calls the *synthesis of apprehension*. However, it is not enough to run through the impressions: every impression taken up into this process has to be constantly reproduced—otherwise only the actual impression would be present to the mind and consequently no complex representation would be possible. In other words, we would not have a representation of a line, but only impressions of points, as it were, one following the other. This is the reproductive aspect of the threefold synthesis or the *synthesis of reproduction*. And finally, the representing subject needs to be able to separate the represented object from the objects in its vicinity. For the process of synthesis to involve such differentiation, the representing

23. See CPR A97/8. This description is to be found in the *Transcendental Deduction* in the first edition, CPR A98–110.

subject has to conceptually classify the object in question. She must, therefore, synthesize the manifold in accordance with a concept under which the object could, in principle, be explicitly subsumed in a judgment. This is what Kant calls the *synthesis of recognition in a concept*.

This complex threefold synthesis results in spatiotemporally structured, perspectival images of empirically real objects. As such they are not only subject to spatiotemporal structuring, but are already informed by the categories of the understanding (and, at least in the ordinary case, empirical concepts as well). The pivotal role of the faculty of imagination in this context should by now be obvious: even in its empirical activity it is not merely reproductive but essentially productive.

The categorical structuring at this point of the synthetic process is, however, restricted to the so-called mathematical categories of quantity and quality, that is, categories that concern solely the sensible properties of empirical objects and their ordering. At this point the dynamical categories of relation (for instance causality and substance-attribute) and modality (possibility, actuality, necessity) are not yet part of the picture. The latter rather relate to the dispositional and causal properties associated with our conception of objects. It is only once these properties come into play that we are able to take the images produced by the synthetic process up to this point *as images of objects existing independently from our picturing them*.

To get to this level of truly objective reference we have to invoke another objectifying step that can be contributed solely by the conceptual faculty we have called understanding. Yet this particular contribution is, once again, a process that applies representations to other representations in a way that is distinct both from the work of the imagination in its threefold synthesis and from the subsuming activity of judgment.

It is important to remember that, from a transcendental perspective, appearances are just representations and do not really have this independent existence: it is only in *taking them to be* objects that we can construe them as proper objects of reference that constitute an empirical

reality.²⁴ In intuition, it follows, sensible and conceptual properties are inextricably intertwined.

To make this possible, we have to restrict the categories to the specific forms characteristic for our human sensibility, that is, space and time. For instance, we can represent the mathematical category of quantity only as magnitude in space and time, that is, as a juxtaposition of impressions in space. And we can represent the mathematical category of causality only in space and time, that is, as a temporal ordering of cause and effect. (The categories thus restricted to our forms of sensibility are the *schematized* categories.) Only when they are thus restricted can the categories play a determining role in the synthetic process that produces images of objects *and* (by way of the schematized dynamical categories) in the further objectification of those images as transcendental objects of our intuitive representations. In order to account for this further objectification Kant introduces another faculty, which I have yet to consider: the faculty of apperception.

2.5. *A Priori Synthesis and the Question of Objectivity*

Recall that the passage from the beginning of the A Deduction, which structured our deeper investigation of the interaction between sensibility and understanding, indicates that imagination (like the other faculties it mentions) "has a transcendental (as well as an empirical) employment which concerns the form alone, and is possible a priori" (CPR A94). To this transcendental employment I now turn, in order to further our understanding of the complex interplay of those faculties as well as to flesh out our assessment of Kant's conception of objectivity. In some of the central passages of the A Deduction, Kant points out that the empirical employment of the imagination would be impossible without its a priori employment.²⁵

²⁴ See for example A190/B235–A191/B236.

²⁵ See e.g. CPR A123.

Kant is very clear that it is one and the same faculty that has both an empirical and an a priori function. In its a priori function, the imagination is truly transcendental in that it makes its empirical activity possible. In this a priori function, it has "as its aim in regard to all the manifold of appearance... nothing further than the necessary unity in their synthesis" (CPR A123). Kant's insistence on the *necessity* of the unity in question serves his aim of securing a substantial conception of objectivity. Without such objectivity, Kant argues in the *Transcendental Deduction*, neither consciousness of objects nor self-consciousness would be possible. In effect, Kant argues that the self-ascription of mental states is a condition of the possibility of *having* conscious mental states.²⁶

The categories, Kant emphasizes, are applied by a thinking (i.e. representing) subject—a subject that consciously refers to objects precisely by applying the categories. It is therefore the subject herself who, by means of this structuring of the empirically given, lends *objectivity* to her reference to objects, namely by making it *lawful*.

This structuring of representations, Kant argues, is only possible if our representations can be treated as belonging to *one and the same* consciousness. We can unite unconnected mental states into representations *of objects* by means of the categories only if we can conceive of them as the mental states of a unitary subject, that is, only if we are able to ascribe them to one and the same subject.²⁷

In this way, the conscious subject constitutes a point of reference for the self-ascription of representations and thereby furnishes the empirically given with the unity necessary for consciousness of objects: the standing possibility of consciously referring to a unitary subject of representations, which is characteristic of all our conscious life, is, as it

²⁶ There are countless attempts to reconstruct the argument in the *Transcendental Deduction*. Among the most influential are the discussions of Peter Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Methuen, 1966), and Dieter Henrich, *Identität und Objektivität: Eine Untersuchung über Kants transzendente Deduktion* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1976). For my own take of the details of this argument see Johannes Haag, *Erfahrung und Gegenstand: Das Verhältnis von Sinnlichkeit und Verstand* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2007), ch. 6.

²⁷ CPR A123/4 and similarly, B137.

were, the constant element in the steady flow of the empirically given. And that is the sense in which consciousness of objects is not possible without self-consciousness—the unity of apperception.

On the other hand we can become conscious of ourselves only in this spontaneous activity of structuring: in bringing the empirically given to a unity that we can consciously experience, we simultaneously experience ourselves as subjects of those conscious experiences of unity.²⁸ We experience ourselves as that which applies the same structuring principles over and over again in connecting its representations. Without consciousness of objects, therefore, there could be no self-consciousness.

If it is possible to fill in the details of the argument thus outlined, then consciousness of objects and self-consciousness will, indeed, be mutually dependent: one must ascribe states of consciousness to a subject *because* one would not be conscious of objects if one were unable to thus ascribe them.

In this sketch of an argument, one can discern the activities of at least two of the faculties I am concerned with: imagination and apperception. Apperception is the faculty that gives unity to the activity of the imagination in subjecting this activity to a priori rules. The faculty of apperception gives "the *unity* of this [i.e. the imagination's] synthesis" (CPR A94). Apperception is the faculty that applies the forms of the understanding (the categories) to the activity of the imagination in synthesizing the a priori manifold of sensibility. While it is the productive imagination without which "no concepts of objects would converge into an experience," it is the "the standing and lasting I (of pure apperception)," the "all-embracing pure apperception" (CPR A 123), that enables the productive imagination to accomplish this, by making "its function intellectual" (CPR A124).²⁹

It is therefore the function of concepts of objects to transform an appearance into an (as yet undetermined) object of intuition. To this

²⁸ CPR A108 and similar: B135/6.

²⁹ See the similar reasoning in sec. 2.4 of the B Deduction.

end, such concepts have to be related by the activity of the imagination to the sensible manifold both a posteriori and a priori. The imagination, therefore, is able to relate sensibility and understanding empirically, in its productive role of generating images of objects, only because it also operates a priori in relating the a priori representations of sense (i.e. the formal intuitions of time and space) and the a priori representations of the understanding (i.e. the categories).³⁰

With transcendental apperception I have now covered all the faculties operative in our epistemic access to empirical reality. The two stems of knowledge, sensibility and understanding, produce knowledge (both empirical and a priori) only in working on synoptically given sensible material (*faculty of sense*), which guides "from without" the synthetic activity that transforms the sensible manifold thus given into a conscious, complex image of an object (*faculty of imagination*). The latter faculty, in turn, takes its unity from an intellectualizing activity that guides the process of synthesis "from within" by subjecting it to mathematical categories and that, by means of rather different, purely conceptual activity, turns the images of objects into representations of transcendental objects that are taken to be subject as well to the dynamical categories, like causality and substance (*faculty of apperception*).

The objectivity of representation, and hence the possibility of knowledge, is thus secured by a complex process "from without" and "from within." The result is the concept of an empirical reality that exists independently of being represented, and hence objectively, without existing in-itself.³¹ Knowledge is consequently restricted to the reality thus conceived. In other words, I have shown how the faculties that Kant introduced simply in order to outline the conditions of the possibility of knowledge serve, at the same time, to delineate our own epistemic capacities *from within*. The limitations of the faculties thus introduced are the limitations of our epistemic access to reality.

³⁰ The special form of transcendental synthesis required to achieve this aim is called *synthesis speciosa* or figurative synthesis. See B 151/2.

³¹ See Wilfrid Sellars, "Kant's Transcendental Idealism," *Collections of Philosophy* 6 (1976), sec. 2.4.

3. STRANGE (FORMS OF) FACULTIES AS LIMITING CONCEPTS

As indicated at the outset of this investigation, Kant finds the concept of a faculty useful in delineating our epistemic capacities not only from within but also *from without* by outlining the conceptual possibility of capacities we—as human beings or, broadening the scope of the investigation, as finite rational beings—do not and cannot, in principle, possess.

This methodological strategy is employed throughout Kant's critical philosophy, but usefully pinned down in a section of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (CPJ) from 1790 that proved of immense importance for the post-Kantian idealists. In section 76 of this work, Kant outlines how such *concepts of limiting faculties* serve the important purpose of making apparent the limitations of three of our faculties: understanding, reason, and the power of judgment. In contrasting our own faculties with each of those limiting faculties, we become aware of our limitations as the finite rational beings we happen to be.

Kant has already employed a similar strategy in his argument for the specificity of our human forms of sensibility. It is, he argued, at least conceivable that other forms of sensibility, different from our own spatiotemporal forms of intuition, might serve the purpose of intuitively forming the manifold of sensibility in other finite, rational creatures. Accordingly, we must not take our own forms of sensibility to correspond to the order of things-in-themselves.

In section 76 of the CPJ, Kant addresses this methodological approach explicitly, for purposes of illustration, before applying it to our forms of understanding, reason, and, ultimately, our power of judgment. Let us consider the three limiting faculties and their human counterparts in the order Kant discusses them.³²

- (1) *Intellectual intuition*. In discussing our own, discursive understanding, I have already detailed the epistemic limits that are due to the dual

³² In what follows I am deeply indebted to Eckart Förster's discussion of sec. 76 in *The 25 Years of Philosophy: A Systematical Reconstruction*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), ch. 6.

dependence of our knowledge on understanding *and* sensibility. I did not, however, explicitly invoke the categories of modality, that is, possibility, actuality, and necessity. It is harder to see how these categories contribute to our concept of an object as compared to, for instance, relational categories such as substance or causality. Consequently, concepts like possibility, actuality, and necessity may not seem to be specific to finite rational beings like us, but rather seem to pertain to distinctions among things-in-themselves.

It is exactly at this point, Kant tells us in section 76, that we have to invoke the limiting concept of an *intellectual intuition* in order to show that such modal distinctions likewise rest on our finitude as epistemic subjects who have to rely on something being sensibly given to them in order to apply the concepts of the understanding. This property of our mind makes our understanding *discursive*: it has to start from the particular—given in sensibility—and subsume it under the conceptually general or universal.³³ This necessary reliance on sensible intuition, Kant argues, accounts for the distinction between actuality and possibility:

For if understanding thinks it [i.e. a thing] (it can think it as it will), then it is represented as merely possible. If understanding is conscious of it as given in intuition, then it is actual without understanding being able to conceive of its possibility. (CPJ 5:402)

But we can at least conceive of a being that does not likewise depend on something being sensibly given to it in order for it to apply its conceptual resources. This would be a being whose understanding was productive in its very act of thought: it would, as it were, generate the actuality of something merely by thinking it. What it would think would be actual in and through its mere act of thought. Kant calls this faculty

intellectual intuition.³⁴ The conceivability of a being equipped with this faculty contrasts with our own intellect in a way that highlights the limitations of our epistemic capacities:

The propositions, therefore, that things can be possible without being actual, and thus that there can be no inference at all from mere possibility to actuality, quite rightly hold for the human understanding without that proving that this distinction lies in the things themselves. (CPJ 5:402)

The concept of an intellectual intuition is merely problematic for our understanding, in the sense that it transcends the limits set by our discursivity. Yet it is nevertheless an “indispensable idea of reason” that we have “to assume some sort of thing (the original ground) as existing absolutely necessarily, in which possibility and actuality can no longer be distinguished at all” (CPJ 5:402).

(2) *Holy will*. Reason, however, as a faculty can be viewed not only from a theoretical perspective—as the faculty of both inferential reasoning and regulative principles (ideas)³⁵—but also from a practical perspective. From a practical perspective reason “presupposes its own unconditioned (in regard to nature) causality, i.e., freedom, because it is aware of its moral command” (CPJ 5:403). Here, we are confronted with the limitations of a *practical* faculty: we are aware of the moral command only as a command, and not as a law, because we perform the actions that are commanded of us under the condition that we are part of empirical reality (nature) and are thus constituted by understanding *and* sensibility. Under these conditions, the moral command does not and cannot express

³⁴ See e.g. CPJ 5:409.

³⁵ It should be noted that it is possible to distinguish and order the faculty of imagination (as informed by concepts), the power of judgment, and the faculty of reason by reference to the increasing complexity of their respective products: intuitions, judgments, and inferences.

³³ See CPJ 5:407.

what *is* (*ein Sein*), but only what *should* be (*ein Sollen*)—something that, even if it does turn out to be the case, obtains merely accidentally *sub specie* the laws of nature. But we can also conceive of an alternative faculty of practical reason:

If reason without sensibility (as the subjective condition of its application to objects of nature) were considered, as far as its causality is concerned, as a cause in an intelligible world, corresponding completely with the moral law, where there would be no distinction between what should be done and what is done, between a practical law concerning that which is possible through us and the theoretical law concerning that which is actual through us. (CPJ 5:403/4)

Again, this conceivable practical faculty need not be real; we only need to conceive of it in order to recognize the limitations of our own practical faculty and, at the same time, to accept the guidance of our action by what, in our case as finite rational beings (i.e. as dependent on sensibility in general), can be only a moral command. Through the contrastive use of the concept of a limiting faculty, we can see that what is a command for beings like us would be a law for a “holy will” (AA. 18:469).

- (3) *Intuitive understanding.* Kant’s discussion in section 76 determines this contrastive limiting concept only negatively. We are to conceive of an understanding that does not “go from the universal to the particular” (CPJ 5:403). For our discursive understanding commits us to an attitude toward nature that distinguishes between a mechanistic explanation of natural phenomena and the teleological explanation we are forced to give of some very peculiar appearances, namely living beings or organisms. Both ways of explanation are—in a sense yet to be determined—necessary for us to adopt, and both are, ultimately, ways of completely explaining nature. Unfortunately, the two are not compatible with each other

and thus lead to an antinomy that can only be resolved by treating the maxims that employ them as merely reflective or regulative.³⁶

But this distinction should not be dismissed as an ad hoc solution to the antinomy.³⁷ We should rather try to understand Kant’s compelling reason for treating the maxims in question as regulative. And this reason can be found, once again, in the contrastive concept of a limiting faculty—this time in the concept of an understanding that is not discursive, but intuitive. The conclusion this concept should warrant is that teleological description of the phenomena in question, that is, organisms, “is necessary for the human power of judgment in regard to nature but does not pertain to the determination of the objects themselves, thus a subjective principle of reason for the power of judgment which, as regulative (not constitutive), is just as necessarily valid for our human power of judgment as if it were an objective principle” (CPJ 5:404).

In order to understand Kant’s argument we need to further elaborate the relevant antinomy and the details of its solution as they are presented in section 77 of *CPJ*. The purpose of this section is to resolve the difficulties that arise from the fact that experience presents us with a class of objects that seem to defy the mechanistic description of nature: namely, living beings or organisms.

Mechanical explanation is always an explanation in accordance with our discursive understanding, that is, an explanation that explains a given entity as the sum of its parts. But organisms are not mere sums of their parts:

In such a product of nature each part is conceived as if it exists only through all the others, thus as if existing for the sake of the others and on account of the whole, i.e., as an instrument (organ), which is, however, not sufficient (for it could also be an instrument of art, and

³⁶ See CPJ 5:387.

³⁷ Similarly Henry Allison, “Kant’s Antinomy of Teleological Judgment,” in *Kant’s Critique of the Power of Judgment*, edited by Paul Guyer (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 226.

thus represented as possible at all only as an end); rather it must be thought of as an organ that produces the other parts (consequently each produces the others reciprocally), which cannot be the case in any instrument of art, but only of nature, which provides all the matter for instruments (even those of art): only then and on that account can such a product, as an organized and self-organizing being, be called a natural end. (CPJ 5:373–74)

This mutual causality of whole and part we encounter in organisms is, as Kant clarifies, “strictly speaking... not analogous with any causality that we know.” It is “not thinkable and not explicable even through an exact analogy with human art” (CPJ 5:375).

It is, for a discursive understanding like ours, only graspable by a “remote analogy” (CPJ 5:375) with a causality we do know, that is, a final causality in which the representation of the end precedes the result of the process of production. In this case the representation of the whole does indeed precede the existence of the parts: we first form the idea and only afterwards work on its realization.

The analogy, however, is not only remote, but, “strictly speaking” (CPJ 5:375), not an analogy at all, since the object in question is at the same time represented as a natural object, that is, as an object that exhibits this causality in itself, and is not caused by a rational being external to it. (Otherwise it would indeed be an “analogue of art” (CPJ 5:374).) We conceptually struggle with this phenomenon, since the mutual causality of whole and part does not fit within the constraints of our conceptual system and we have to contend ourselves with the construction of an auxiliary, mongrel concept that does fit this framework—at least by analogy with the familiar concept of intentional final causation.³⁸

³⁸ This is the point at which Hannah Ginsborg’s influential criticism of Peter McLaughlin’s interpretation seems to go astray: “But for Kant there is no less of a need for teleology in understanding a machine such as a watch, than there is in understanding an organism.” Ginsborg, “Two Kinds of Mechanical Inexplicability,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42 (2004), 37. This would only be

So, our use of the concept of a natural end is not only necessary, given our cognitive constitution, it is, at the same time, experienced as ultimately failing to fully do justice to the phenomena to be explained. The concept of a natural end is, in other words, inevitably formed by the understanding in reaction to certain phenomena intuitively given by the synthesizing activity of the imagination. In the special case of organisms, we find that the synthesized material cannot be understood through empirical concepts we already possess. Consequently, the understanding has to react with the formation of a new concept, that is, the concept of a *natural end*.

In doing so, however, we find that the resulting empirical concept aims to integrate two different kinds of dependence that cannot ordinarily be united in one and the same object: namely, a dependence of the whole on the parts *and* a dependence of the parts on the whole. This dependence can be conceived by a *discursive* understanding like our own only by analogy to the teleological dependence of the artefact on its creator’s idea of it: organisms have to be conceived as *ends*. Yet since organisms, unlike artefacts, are *natural* objects, that is, products of nature and not products of thinking beings, we have to think of organisms as *natural ends*. The mongrel concept of a *natural end*—a concept that we cannot help but construct in the face of certain phenomena that the imagination presents us with in intuition—therefore “includes natural necessity and yet at the same time a contingency of the form of the object (in relation to mere laws of nature) in one and the same thing as an end” (CPJ 5:396).

But this concept of a natural end, even if it does not contain an outright contradiction, is still only a “problematic concept” (CPJ 5:397) in the Kantian sense, since it cannot be abstracted from experience.³⁹

right if organisms did indeed exhibit a causality “analogous to a causality we know,” i.e. the final causation of intentional action.

³⁹ See CPJ 5:408.28/9. Since the concept could not simply be abstracted from the objects in question—organisms—it had to be formed, as we have seen, by an *analogical* transformation from the concept of an end.

Thus, due to the limited constitution of our understanding, our concept of a natural end must draw on another faculty for its construction, namely the faculty of *reason*. To conceive of something as an *end* involves an essential appeal to the faculty of reason as the faculty that is responsible for the explanation of intentional action, that is, the faculty responsible for teleological explanations. Thus the concept of an end, which has its home in the explanatory discourse surrounding intentional action, is here united with the principle of mechanical explanation in the concept of a *natural end*.

If that is right, then teleological judgment is by no means optional: we are compelled to introduce forms of teleological explanation not only in our overarching scientific pursuit of a unified empirical reality, but even in the synthetic construction of some of our intuitions of appearances (namely organisms).

Yet however necessary these teleological judgments are, in rendering explicit the contents of our intuitions of natural ends, they remain as problematic as the intuitive representations they describe and are based on, since we cannot understand how it is possible for natural ends to exist in empirical reality in the first place. We cannot, in other words, distance ourselves from the concept of a natural end: we are forced to synthesize objects in accordance with it, for natural objects are ineluctably represented in imagination as exhibiting (*darstellen*) the concept of objective purposiveness. The step from heuristic judgment (an exercise of our faculty of judgment) to intuitive presentation (an exercise of our faculty of imagination) consequently leads to an *antinomy*, that is, an "unavoidable illusion" forced upon us by a "natural dialectic."⁴⁰

This antinomy is supposedly resolved by the distinction between reflective (or regulative) judgment and determining judgment. To ultimately understand why this move is not ad hoc, we have to recall Kant's distinction between *discursive* and *intuitive understanding*. Eckart Förster convincingly argues that we have to distinguish not only two, but four

different concepts that are subsumed under that labels in different places of Kant's work:⁴¹

- (1) intellectual intuition as a nonsensible intuition of things-in-themselves
- (2) intellectual intuition as a productive unity of thought and reality
- (3) intuitive understanding as the ground of all possibilities
- (4) intuitive understanding as a synthetically universal intuition of a whole as such.

While the first concept does not play an important role in the argument of sections 76 and 77 of the *CPJ* (though it is important in the first *Critique* as a limiting concept for our own inability to perceive things-in-themselves),⁴² the other three will turn out to be of considerable importance for the solution of the antinomy presented here.

How can a peculiarity of our mind contribute to this solution?⁴³ First, we have to recall that, at root, the concept of a natural end is a marriage, not of convenience, but of necessity—one predicated on a "remote analogy with a causality we know" whose sole purpose it is to unite mechanism and teleology in a single concept. But such a unification is only desirable or even necessary for discursive beings. Only discursive beings feel the conceptual pressure resulting from the two modes of explanation that are, *for them*, incompatible. And that compels them to think of a supernatural point of reference, an intuitive understanding qua cause of the world (3) or a being capable of intellectual intuition (2).

⁴¹ See Eckart Förster, *The 25 Years of Philosophy: A Systematical Reconstruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), ch. 6.

⁴² See Eckart Förster, *The 25 Years of Philosophy: A Systematical Reconstruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 120.

⁴³ While the following interpretation is inspired by Eckart Förster's reconstruction in ch. 6 of *The 25 Years of Philosophy: A Systematical Reconstruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), it differs in some important details, in particular with regard to the role of an intuitive understanding in the solution of the antinomy.

Such a concept of a supernatural substratum (*Urgrund*) dissolves the difference between mechanistic and teleological explanation by providing a common root for both in the unity of thought (idea) and being (reality):

But since it is still at least possible to consider the material world as a mere appearance, and to conceive of something as a thing in itself (which is not an appearance) as substratum, and to correlate with this a corresponding *intellectual intuition* (even if it is not ours), there would then be a supersensible real ground for nature, although it is unknowable for us, to which we ourselves belong. (CPJ 5:409; emphasis added)

We would thus be justified in judging nature “in accordance with two kinds of principles, without the mechanical mode of explanation being excluded by the teleological mode, as if they contradicted each other” (CPJ 5:409). And this part of the conclusion would be justified by the conceivability of such a “real ground for nature,” be it (infinite) intuitive understanding or intellectual intuition.

The second step in the solution would be to invoke the intuitive understanding in its finite guise, that is, (4) an understanding that is able to have an intuition of a synthetic universal (i.e. a whole) as such and to go “from the whole to the parts” that is, an understanding “in which, therefore, and in whose representation of the whole, there is no contingency in the combination of the parts, in order to make possible a determinate form of the whole” (CPJ 5:407).

For an intuitive understanding thus conceived there would not even be any tension between mechanism and teleology to dissolve. Such an understanding would be able to *explain* organisms as natural products. This contrastive concept of a limiting faculty has a merely problematic status: it is a concept we think up in order to illustrate the possibility of a *mechanistic* explanation (broadly conceived) of organisms *within nature*—an explanation that is impossible for a discursive understanding

such as our own to deliver. An intuitive understanding is consequently characterized as one “in relation to which, and indeed *prior to any end attributed to it*, we can represent that agreement of natural laws with our power of judgment, which for our understanding is conceivable only through ends as the means of connection, as necessary” (CPJ 5:407; emphasis added). An understanding like that, I would like to suggest, should not be identified with an infinite intellect to which we attribute ends.⁴⁴

Accordingly, Kant shortly thereafter identifies this understanding as one concerned with the synthetic-universal, that is, as the intuitive understanding that is to be contrasted with our discursive intellectual faculty. It is the intuitive understanding thus conceived that is able to “represent the possibility of the parts (as far as both their constitution and their combination is concerned) as depending upon the whole,” while “given the very same special characteristic of our understanding, this cannot come about,” for this would be “a contradiction in the discursive kind of cognition” (CPJ 5:407). That is why *we* need to construe this dependence in teleological terms, that is, “by the representation of a whole containing the ground of the possibility of its form and of the connection of parts that belongs to that” (CPJ 5:407/8). We have to resort to a teleological explanation—unlike an intuitive understanding.

Within the complex argument of section 77, the function of the contrastive concept of a synthetically universal or intuitive understanding is, therefore, as follows: it is designed to show that the teleological principle “does not pertain to the possibility of such things themselves (*even considered as phenomena*) in accordance with this sort of generation, but pertains only to the judging of them that is possible for our understanding” (CPJ 5:408; emphasis added). In the absence of any conception of this limiting faculty, we might think of this principle

44 For a different reading see Eckart Förster, *The 25 Years of Philosophy: A Systematical Reconstruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 153.

(and its contrasting mechanistic maxim) as a *determining* principle—and the antinomy resulting from the tension between mechanistic and teleological explanation would be irresolvable.

The synthetically universal understanding's experiences, just like our own, take place in a world of phenomena—in fact, in our world. The positive analogy of the finite intuitive understanding to the discursive understanding is a strong one. However, the finite intuitive understanding is construed as an understanding that works with an *expanded concept of causality*—a concept of causality that is not unidirectional, but is able to incorporate a mutual dependence of cause and effect that can be used to mechanistically explain the dependence of the parts on the whole. Mechanistic thought, accordingly, cannot be in this context restricted to efficient causality as we understand it. It is instead characterized, purely negatively, as “a causal connection for which an understanding does not have to be exclusively assumed as a cause” (CPJ 5:406): such a connection could be put to a different use by finite beings different from us.

Those beings would, of course, have to be endowed with different forms of sensibility. For only then could the category of causality be nontemporally schematized—an alternative schematization that is of the utmost importance for the possibility of this alternative conception of causality. The temporal schematization of our category of causality consists in fixing the temporal order of cause and effect and it, accordingly, prohibits the mutual dependence of cause and effect required by the alternative conception of causality.⁴⁵ But this possibility of alternative forms of sensibility and, accordingly, an alternative way of schematizing categories was in play all along, as I showed in my discussion of the faculty of sense in the *CPR*.

Let me offer the following summary by way of conclusion. The organisms we find ourselves confronted with in nature give rise to an

antinomy for us, inasmuch as they seem to demand incompatible explanations—a mechanistic explanation insofar as they are parts of nature, and a teleological explanation insofar as they are thoroughly organized wholes. In order to reconcile mechanistic with teleological explanation, Kant introduces the contrastive concept of an *intellectual intuition* as a faculty generating unity of thought and being (or, alternatively, the concept of an infinite intuitive understanding). The cognitive activity of such a faculty would serve to ground a supersensible substratum in which teleology and mechanism are one. Due to the discursivity of our understanding we have to think of nature as an end of this supernatural ground. The contrastive concept of a finite, synthetically universal *intuitive understanding* on the other hand serves to restrict this assumption—and with it the necessity for a teleological description of the phenomenal world—to finite beings *of a certain kind*, that is, finite beings incapable of this kind of intuitive access to the world. In this way the contrast between mechanical and teleological description of nature can justifiably be ascribed to the reflective as opposed to the determining use of our power of judgment. Only together can these concepts of limiting faculties dissolve the antinomy of teleological judgment.

In post-Kantian German idealism, however, these limiting concepts are separated and put to use quite independently from each other. I will now turn to outlining some of the developments resulting from this separation.

4. GERMAN IDEALISM

4.1. *Transcending Critical Philosophy*

The transition from Kantian philosophy to the great systems of post-Kantian German idealism had a number of sources, which have been quite thoroughly investigated in the literature on the epoch. One of the most prominent reasons for this development was the criticism first raised by Karl Reinhold and soon shared by many of his contem-

⁴⁵ See Rachel Zuckert, *Kant on Beauty and Biology: An Interpretation of the Critique of Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 135–39.

poraries: that the Kantian philosophy was *incomplete* in a way that threatened the whole system.

This charge is sometimes simply reduced to the claim that Kant did not manage to realize one of the central aims he explicitly set for himself in the *Analytic* of the *CPR*—an aim he characterized as a privileged feature of all transcendental philosophy, that is, that it “find its concepts according to a principle” (*CPR* A67), where “a principle” is taken to mean “exactly *one* principle.”⁴⁶ In the Kantian system, so the criticism goes, such a unifying principle is nowhere to be found.

There have been many different suggestions as to how to understand this criticism and, consequently, there are as many different ways of outlining the transition from Kant’s critical philosophy to the systems of the German idealists.⁴⁷ One way to understand this criticism, which is particularly relevant to my present purposes, is as the claim that Kant’s system provides no point of unification for the diverse faculties he has to postulate in the course of prosecuting his critical enterprise. Is this criticism justified?

There are two main divisions in the Kantian system that, at least at first glance, might seem particularly susceptible to this charge: one is the division between sensibility and understanding within the theoretical faculty of knowledge, and the other is the even more fundamental division between theoretical and practical faculties I briefly touched upon in discussing the *CPJ*’s limiting concept of a holy will.

I shall take up these potential sources of difficulty in turn. Kant’s critical philosophy, as I have shown, does indeed rest on the doctrine of the two stems of knowledge. Sensibility and understanding are two

46 See the telling remarks in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, AA. 5:90/1, and the analysis in Eckart Förster, *The 25 Years of Philosophy: A Systematical Reconstruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 166–67.

47 See for example Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism 1781–1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760–1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). I follow Eckart Förster, *The 25 Years of Philosophy: A Systematical Reconstruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), as far as the overall picture is concerned.

distinct but necessary ingredients in our intentional or representational relationship to the world we conceive ourselves to be a part of. Now, one might argue that this distinction, far from being a problematic feature of the Kantian system, serves, among other things, the important philosophical purpose of explaining what Kant took to be the essential discursivity of our intentionality, while simultaneously providing a clear separation between the conceptual and the nonconceptual elements in our experience.

However, the idea that finite rational beings like ourselves have a discursive intentional relation to the world is not something we should take for granted in light of the development of the philosophy of German idealism. For the starting point for much of this development is precisely the denial of the essential discursivity of the understanding, which Kant was so convinced of. Given that one can indeed specify nondiscursive modes of representation and lend plausibility to the claim that we, as subjects of experience, can or even have to employ such nondiscursive modes of representation, Kant seems to have underestimated our epistemic capacities.

Furthermore, Kant did not show how the two stems of knowledge—sensibility and understanding—hang together, apart from noting that they may have a “common root that is, however, unknown to us” (*CPR* A15). Kant’s inability to identify a common root of sensibility and understanding can thus be seen to indicate to a troublesome incompleteness in his system, since he cannot show whether and, if so, how these two sources of knowledge can have a common origin. Yet his own concept of a transcendental subject—at least in its theoretical guise—is the idea of a conjunction of representations that could not have any existence independently of the representations thus united.⁴⁸

As such it is unfit to serve as a point of unification of the theoretical and the practical faculties either. Consequentially, it seemed to the

48 See Eckart Förster, *The 25 Years of Philosophy: A Systematical Reconstruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 170.

German idealists that Kant had failed to reveal the common ground of theoretical and practical philosophy.⁴⁹ This charge may, at first glance, seem to be a wholly unfounded conclusion to draw from the aforementioned incompleteness. After all, in his *CPJ*, Kant does, at least to his own satisfaction, achieve a unity of theoretical and practical philosophy, in arguing that our power of judgment leads us to “look beyond the sensible and to seek the unifying point of all our faculties *a priori* in the supersensible: because no other way remains to make reason self-consistent [einstimmig mit sich selbst]” (*CPJ* 5:341).

This solution may, nevertheless, strike one as unsatisfying on a number of counts. First, it is only *reflective*, not constitutive, judgment that leads to this conclusion. Consequently, our anticipation of this point of unification cannot constitute *knowledge*, but must remain an assumption we are aware arises from the specific constitution of our mental faculties.⁵⁰ More important, this “point of unification” is not made comprehensible in any detail. We feel that we have to postulate it “to make reason self-consistent” (*CPJ* 5:341), but this is not an illuminating way of understanding what it actually involves. We have no way of exploring this point of unity and are, therefore, incapable of understanding it. We cannot reason our way to any identification of its structure as, for instance, we are able to do in practical philosophy with regard to our nonempirical self. (Though we are nonetheless on firmer ground in speaking of the unity of the practical and the theoretical than we are in talking about the “common root of sensibility and understanding.” The latter conjecture was *mere* guesswork.) In the case at hand, creatures like us are compelled to quest after the supersensible as soon as they reflect on the possibility of certain phenomena (notably, organisms) *sub specie* their inexplicability by means of discursive understanding. Yet one may wonder just how safe these grounds are.

49 Eckart Förster, *The 25 Years of Philosophy: A Systematical Reconstruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 163.

50 See Eckart Förster, *The 25 Years of Philosophy: A Systematical Reconstruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 163.

All in all, one can understand the dissatisfaction of the post-Kantian philosophers with the completeness of the Kantian system. On the one hand it seemed to them incomplete insofar as it neglected nondiscursive faculties of genuine knowledge. On the other hand it seemed to provide no unified point of origin for the diverse faculties it postulated in the course of transcendental reasoning. It turned out that the resolutions to both these problems were intimately connected and that, by acknowledging the reality of such nondiscursive faculties, one would also provide the means to solve the problem of a common origin of the faculties.

In what follows, I will illustrate this way of introducing the problem and answering it by principally concentrating on Fichte's work. Schelling and Hegel, the other philosophers who worked out comprehensive idealist systems, will be discussed only by way of conclusion. This preferential treatment seems justified both by the fact that Fichte's philosophical system was the first of the three great idealist systems to be established and by the fact that, later on, his system served as a point of reference for the other German idealists, thereby laying the ground and setting the standards for future criticisms of Kant's philosophical system.

4.2. Fichte

Although Fichte was initially very sympathetic to Reinhold's demands,⁵¹ he soon came to realize that no single proposition (or a family of propositions) expressing *a fact* could serve as a foundation of an entire critical system. Propositions expressing facts always presuppose, Fichte argued, a differentiation between subject and object, which has to be established by transcendental reasoning in the first place.⁵² Consequently, it is this differentiation itself, conceived of as a *process*, to which any serviceable First Principle must give voice. Hence, Fichte's own approach sharply differed from Reinhold's way of solving the problem: since no

51 See Fichte, *Aenesidemus*, SW 1, 20.

52 See Fichte, *Aenesidemus*, SW 1, 9.

sentence describing a *fact* can do the trick, we must instead turn to an *act*. Accordingly, the original *Thathandlung* is an act of self-positing, not a fact.

Assuming that Fichte's turn to an act as opposed to a fact was indeed the right choice, might this spell trouble for Kant? Not necessarily. For the Kantian term "judgment" (*Urteil*) is itself ambiguous as to whether it designates a fact, for instance the uttered sentence, or an act (or activity), such as the utterance of a sentence. At the same time, Kant's focus on the activity of *judging* does presuppose that representations are given in advance. Both in the case of judgments and in the case of intuitions these would be *conscious* representations. But Fichte argues that no representations may be presupposed as given; they must rather be successively deduced from a first *act* that truly deserves to be called a first principle.⁵³

FICHTE'S THATHANDLUNG AND INTELLECTUAL INTUITION

Fichte attempts to derive both theoretical and practical faculties from the very same original *Thathandlung*. His 1794 *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* outlines a complete circular movement of thought that starts with the act of self-positing and then moves back to this *Thathandlung* in a twofold manner, one covering the theoretical faculties, and the other the practical faculties of the subject that undertook this original act. He thereby lives up to his own methodological maxim that a principle is only completely exhausted if "the circle is really completed, and the investigator [Forscher] is left at exactly the point where he started."⁵⁴

In what follows, however, I shall not try to sketch this complete circle.⁵⁵ I will instead concentrate on the theoretical branch of this twofold

circular movement—and, in particular, on some central aspects of Fichte's derivation of the forms of thought, which seem to me to highlight the differences between Kant's and Fichte's endeavors and thereby throw Fichte's particular treatment of faculties into greater relief.

Given that it is the task of theoretical philosophy to explain the possibility of objective representation, Fichte argues in a Kantian spirit, one must not presuppose any representations as given. But neither, Fichte argues, may the transcendental philosopher presuppose the existence of objects the representations would be representations of. Their existence must likewise be established through reflection on the conditions of the possibility of conscious experience, that is, by the method of transcendental philosophy.

This conception of an object, however, includes the conscious subject qua object of a self-representation. The reason for this is that, as soon as we become conscious of ourselves *as* ourselves, we turn ourselves into an object for ourselves. (We might term this the reflexive analysis of subjectivity.)⁵⁶ However, this transformation of the self into an object of thought seems to leave out the self qua subject. And this is unacceptable, since, as Fichte puts it,

I can be conscious of any object only on the condition that I am also conscious of myself, that is, of the conscious subject. (*Attempt*, SW 1, 526/7)

In other words, consciousness of something as something—even consciousness of myself as myself—*presupposes* "real" or "pure" self-consciousness. The reflexive analysis of self-consciousness therefore takes for granted the antecedent separation of subject and object. But, again, this amounts to an illicit assumption given the methodological framework of transcendental philosophy. For this separation itself is supposed

⁵³ See Fichte, *Aenesidemus*, SW 1, 9.

⁵⁴ Fichte, *Begriff*, SW 1, 58/9.

⁵⁵ Eckart Förster took upon himself a careful analysis of the single steps that Fichte employed in his (not excessively clear) outline of this circle. See Eckart Förster, *The 25 Years of Philosophy: A Systematical Reconstruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), chs. 8 and 9.

⁵⁶ Fichte's critique of the reflexive analysis of consciousness was first reconstructed in detail by Dieter Henrich, "Fichtes ursprüngliche Einsicht," in *Subjektivität und Metaphysik: Festschrift für Wolfgang Iser*, edited by Dieter Henrich and Hans Wagner (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1966), 193–97.

to be established through reflection on the conditions of the possibility of representation—and, ideally, through reflection on a *single principle* from which one begins and to which one returns in an argumentative circle. Since, as I have already pointed out, both Fichte and Kant require this principle to be an *act*, an act of real or pure self-consciousness would seem to be a promising candidate.

So, how can we uncover a real or pure consciousness that does not separate subject and object? In the *Grundlage* from 1794, Fichte presents us with a method for uncovering this *real* or *pure* consciousness in a systematic manner by abstracting from a given fact of empirical consciousness. In this way, he hopes to establish an original act of consciousness that he calls a *Thathandlung* one that is not itself just another fact of *empirical* consciousness but “rather lies at the basis of all [empirical] consciousness and alone makes it possible” (*Foundations*, SW 1, 91). This *Thathandlung* has to be an act of consciousness that does not separate between subject and object and, consequently, does not presuppose representations of any kind.⁵⁷

Fichte’s method of abstraction leads him to uncover the pure activity of positing oneself that underlies the basic proposition “I am.”⁵⁸

The self’s own positing of itself is thus its own pure activity.... It is at once the agent and the product of action; the active, and what the activity brings about; action and deed are one and the same, and hence the “I am” expresses an Act [Thathandlung]. (*Foundations* SW 1, 96)

So the original act of positing is a *Thathandlung* of pure consciousness. This consciousness is *pure* since we abstracted from all its empirical

⁵⁷ A more detailed outline of Fichte’s argument can be found in Johannes Haag, “Fichte on the Consciousness of Spinoza’s God,” in *Spinoza and German Idealism*, edited by Eckhard Förster and Yitzhak Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 100–120. The following reflections are a shorter version of the reconstruction of Fichte’s argument in the *Foundations* presented there.

⁵⁸ For a more detailed account of Fichte’s abstraction see Johannes Haag, “Fichte on the Consciousness of Spinoza’s God,” in *Spinoza and German Idealism*, edited by Eckhard Förster and Yitzhak Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 104–7.

features. It is not a fact (*Thatsache*), since facts are already posited. And yet it is not a mere act (*Handlung*), since the act itself constitutes the existence of the self. Since the *Thathandlung* is unconditioned or absolute, Fichte calls the subject of this positing a *pure* or *absolute* self.

In this absolute *Thathandlung*, the separation of subject and object has not yet been carried out: it cannot have been, since all separation requires determinateness of the things to be separated. Thus the determinate consciousness of a self requires the positing of something that is *not* this self—a positing that is an act of *opposition* or *counter-positing*, that is, the second part of the complex tripartite original activity required for empirical consciousness. This act is likewise an *absolute* or *unconditioned* act, since the act of positing in no way entails the act of opposition. This act of counter-positing gives us a “mere contrary (*Gegentheil*) in general” (*Foundations* SW 1, 103), a *not-self*, and it is therefore, as I mentioned, a crucial aspect of the determination that is, in turn, necessary for empirical consciousness.

Counter-positing, though a condition of the possibility of determination, cannot itself be an act of determination. With positing and counter-positing we just have two acts of absolute positing related to each other in a way that is, as yet, *undetermined*.⁵⁹ What is needed, therefore, is a third step in the reconstructed generation of self-consciousness that somehow reconciles the two acts of positing and counter-positing and thereby determines both of them—thus providing us with empirical consciousness. The task for this third step is set through the first two acts: since the first two positings are *absolute* positings, they threaten the unity of the conscious subject in negating each other. The third step, accordingly, must consist in finding a way to reconcile positing and counter-positing that preserves the unity of the conscious subject. To do this, both acts have to be *limited* with respect to one another. In this way, the unity of consciousness is saved from the threat of disintegration. The resulting unity contains both a determinate self

⁵⁹ See *Foundations*, SW 1, 109/10.

and a determinate not-self and can thus serve as a unity of consciousness in which empirical consciousness is possible as a consciousness of a determinate object—be it a limited not-self *or* a limited self.

This consciousness of the act of continuous self-positing, however, cannot be discursive or conceptual consciousness. For that would make it into reflexive consciousness of the self as an object again. It must instead be a nondiscursive form of knowledge or consciousness. Nondiscursive knowledge does not determine anything conceptually, but amounts to an undetermining awareness of something, that is, an awareness that cannot be an awareness of something *as* something.

Consequently, for this peculiar form of awareness we need a special kind of nondiscursive faculty. It has to be an awareness of something that would not be there as such without being the object of awareness. In this respect, although it is not creative in the way a divine intellect would be in producing the objects of its thought, it still bears a striking resemblance to Kant's limiting concept of an intellectual intuition as a productive unity of thought and being. For through this form of awareness we actualize a capacity that consists in this very act of actualizing. Fichte therefore concludes that this initial act of self-determination is given to us in the act of an *intellectual intuition*.⁶⁰

But this act of awareness cannot be distinct from the *Thathandlung* it makes us aware of—for that would precisely lead us back into the regress we wanted to avoid. The intellectual intuition that makes us aware of the *Thathandlung* is, accordingly, itself just the *Thathandlung as carried out by subjects like us*. As Fichte writes in the later *Attempt*, "I am this intuition and nothing else. And this intuition itself is me" (SW I, 529). We do not produce an object through this act, we rather actualize a subject-object that *is* consciousness in virtue of the specific kind of *Thathandlung* characteristic for subjects like us: a *Thathandlung*

60 Paul Franks helpfully puts this contrast in terms of Fichte's intellectual intuition, like Kant's, being *self-actualizing*, but, unlike Kant's intellectual intuition, not *creative*. See Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 311.

that *proceeds by intellectual intuition* and produces a self that is nothing but pure consciousness.

A PRAGMATIC HISTORY OF THE MIND: THE INTRODUCTION OF A FACULTY

Until the third step, which involves the synthesis of the acts of positing and counter-positing, we had not yet assembled or justified the elements necessary for an intentional relation to *any* determinate entities. Neither determinate objects nor determinate subjects were possible before this act of mutual limitation and, hence, determination. With the third step, we have achieved just that, though not (yet) in any explicit way. For it turns out that, from the perspective of the philosopher reflecting on it, the unelucidated form in which this synthesis is first introduced is insufficiently robust: on reflection it leads to a whole series of contradictions that must ultimately be resolved in order to make the original synthetic act self-consistent.

This elucidation in the *Foundations* proceeds by way of a dialectical process that runs through a whole series of successive acts of synthesis that turn out, in the end, to be but parts of the original act, whose proper elucidation they result from. Only after this process has been completed can Fichte say of his three foundational acts of positing: "What held good before in purely problematic fashion now has an apodictic certainty" (*Foundations* SW I, 218).

The possibility of this kind of elucidation is obviously necessary if Fichte is to achieve his self-set aim of deducing the whole of the original conceptual inventory that characterizes the self-conscious subject. It would obviously exceed the limits of this chapter to even give an outline of the details of this extremely complex inquiry—an inquiry that, it turns out, theoretical philosophy could not finish on its own anyway, since a "full circle" must not only move through all of the theoretical faculties but also proceed through all the capacities that constitute the practical faculties as well. Only in this way can the common root of both theoretical and practical faculties truly be established

and the worry about the unity of systematic philosophy finally laid to rest.⁶¹

Instead, I would like to address the turning point of the argument, that is, the point at which the synthetic-deductive reflection of the first chain of reflection—which consists exclusively of resolving the contradictions that arise from the third aspect of the original *Thathandlung*—is brought to an end by reaching noncontradictory rock bottom, whereupon the second chain of reflection begins. This second chain is now operating, as it were, on safe ground. It has a proper object to reconstruct, namely the consciousness of the thinking self (and not just the thinking self of the self-reflecting philosopher). In a way, the philosopher, from this point on, simply “observes” the motions of an I that has to go all the way back to a reflected consideration of the original *Tathandlung*. In the course of this process, the thinking self reenacts the actions that are presupposed in every conscious thought. Fichte calls this chain of reflection, accordingly, a “pragmatic history” (*Foundations* SW 1, 222) of the human mind or human consciousness.

The turning point that marks the beginning of this pragmatic history is the introduction of the faculty of imagination. Why is this faculty introduced at all? Fichte is adhering here to precisely the transcendental methodology he explicitly subscribes to. According to this methodology, a faculty (or ability) may only be introduced into our philosophical reconstruction if it is indeed a condition of the possibility of our being conscious of (i.e. representing) objects. And, after the first two steps—which consisted merely in acts of positing of indeterminate “somethings”—the third step had to unite the utter opposites that were posited and counter-positied.

Now, a condition of the possibility of such a unification of complete opposites is a faculty that is introduced solely for that purpose.⁶² And it is this faculty that Fichte calls imagination. It has to be conceived as

61 See Eckart Förster, *The 25 Years of Philosophy: A Systematical Reconstruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), ch. 9, for the details of the practical side of the circle.

62 See *Outline*, SW 1, 386.

oscillating between opposite states of the subject—a state that Fichte figuratively describes as a “hovering” (*Schweben*; see *Foundations*, SW 1, 217). Imagination thus establishes the possibility of limitation and hence the determinability of an object⁶³—it is not, as Fichte insists, the determination itself that precisely brings the “hovering” to an end. Such determination—as a *fixation*, a cessation of hovering—can only be a product of reason.⁶⁴

The introduction of the imagination marks, in Fichte’s exposition, the transition to the “pragmatic history of the mind.” Fichte seems fully aware that, according to the methodological standards set by transcendental philosophy, a cognitive faculty may only be introduced in the context of a *quid iuris* question—that is, a question that asks for conditions of possibility as opposed to a *quid facti* question, which calls for a description of the presupposed psychological constitution of the human mind.

In Kant’s philosophy, the imagination is introduced as the faculty that can both bridge the gulf between conceptual and nonconceptual representations and unite the manifold of sensibility, thus giving rise to conscious representations. Fichte, however, rightly insists that the very notion of representation (much less the distinction between conceptual and nonconceptual representations) may not be presupposed in this context *unless* it can be shown to be a condition of the possibility of conscious representation.

And, given Fichte’s own work in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, it is no longer convincing that representation meets this criterion. For Fichte has, at least by his own standards, offered a plausible alternative explanation of the possibility of conscious representation without resorting to any ingredients that are not themselves justified by the demands of transcendental philosophy. This alternative invokes the faculty of imagination only as a unifier of opposites that in turn have been generated, *not* presupposed, by the thinking subject.

63 *Outline*, 1, 215.

64 See *Foundations*, SW 1, 216.

Of course, this alternative is viable only if Fichte's abstractive reconstruction of the original *Thathandlung* and the corresponding faculty of intellectual intuition can be convincingly established. But, again, Fichte provides arguments that can ultimately be understood as reflections on the possibility of experience—arguments that should therefore at least be taken into account by philosophers who subscribe to the methodology of transcendental philosophy.

5. CONCLUSION

Even sympathetic readers of Fichte tend to credit him with having found only the *subjective* dimension of the common root uniting being and consciousness: namely, insofar as the being of a self-conscious subject is founded in an original act of self-positing of this very subject. But given the Kantian background this problem has an *objective* dimension as well.⁶⁵

The objective dimension can be brought into focus by grasping a common supersensible origin of nature and mind in order to account for the teleological structure we find in nature. For Kant, no such explanation can be hoped for, since this teleological description of the world is a consequence of the peculiar limitation of our epistemic faculties and, therefore, only a function of our reflective power of judgment. Schelling—and, following him, Goethe and Hegel—came to question this restriction.

It soon turned out, however, that the function of intellectual intuition in the subjective domain of self-actualizing consciousness could not simply be transformed into the positing (and hence the epistemic accessibility) of objective nature. For in thinking of nature as objective, we must precisely *abstract* from the activity of the thinking or positing subject. It is therefore impossible for us to intellectually intuit *objective*

⁶⁵ A detailed account of the development sketched in the following remarks can be found in chs. 9–14 of Eckart Förster, *The 25 Years of Philosophy: A Systematical Reconstruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

nature.⁶⁶ In a sense, we overreach in applying the concept of this limiting faculty directly to the whole of nature, for we thereby undermine the very objectivity of nature that we sought to make intelligible by invoking intellectual intuition in the first place. In its application to nature as a whole, the concept of intellectual intuition, as Kant clearly recognized, can only serve as contrastive concept that highlights our own epistemic limitations.

But Kant himself employs a different limiting faculty in his solution to the antinomy of teleological judgment, namely the faculty of (finite) intuitive understanding. Such a faculty operates with a synthetically universal intuition of a whole as such and thereby provides for the possibility that a finite rational being might enjoy an alternative mode of epistemic access to natural phenomena and, ultimately, even nature as a whole—though, for Kant, such a faculty could not be available to *discursive* rational beings like us.

It was left to none other than Johann Wolfgang Goethe to take up this idea of a faculty of intuitive understanding, unite it with Spinoza's idea of a *scientia intuitiva*, and thus try to uncover a method of observation that would allow even us finite beings to enjoy an intuitive understanding of nature and therein a supersensible reality of ideas. Hegel can then be seen as transforming these methodological insights in a manner that allowed him to apply this intuitive method in discovering the transitory world spirit—a “phenomenology of spirit”—and, thereafter, supersensible reality as a whole.

Fichte's early *Wissenschaftslehre* can thus serve as a prime example of the manner in which the German idealists were able to considerably extend the conception of our cognitive faculties, as finite rational beings, while simultaneously (at least in the early years) operating within the limits set by Kantian methodological constraints. And even in later stages of this development, including Hegel's 1807 *Phenomenology of*

⁶⁶ See Eckart Förster, *The 25 Years of Philosophy: A Systematical Reconstruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), ch. 10.

Spirit, Kant's limiting concepts can be seen to structure much of the philosophical argumentation. Yet, in the case of intellectual intuition or intuitive understanding, what started as purely contrastive concepts of limiting faculties were recast, in the full course of this development, as actual faculties of finite rational beings like us.

Reflection

FACULTIES AND PHRENOLOGY

Rebekka Hufendiek and Markus Wild



In Quentin Tarantino's western *Django Unchained* (2012), the southern slave owner Calvin Candie, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, explains to his guests the unwillingness of slaves to rise up and take revenge by putting the skull of a recently deceased slave on the dinner table. "The science of phrenology," Candie candidly explains, "is crucial to understanding the separation of our two species." After partly sawing off the back of the skull, he points to what looks like a sizable cavity and clarifies that this part of the brain associated with "submissiveness" is significantly enlarged in black people. It seems that they are naturally submissive and therefore born to be ruled by white men. The science of phrenology explains and justifies slavery, or so the Europhile Candie points out with a grand illustrative gesture. Candie is neither a learned man nor very intelligent. He is a talkative, clever, emotionless, ruthless, and sadistic egoist who is fond of imitating European high culture. Phrenology appeals to this man not only because it justifies his way of life and his existence but also because it lends itself to visual corroboration and public display.

Why is phrenology so appealing? First, it rests on an easy line of reasoning: moral and mental faculties are to be found in specific organs of the brain, just as the perceptual faculties are connected