
“The summit of Kantian speculation.” Fichte’s reception of the Third *Critique*

“La cima de la especulación kantiana”. La recepción fichteana de la tercera Crítica

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Abstract: Fichte’s admiration for Kant’s Third Critique is well-documented, but how did it actually influence his own philosophy? This question is addressed, first, by examining Fichte’s very early, unpublished “summary” of Kant’s text, and, second, by considering how themes from the latter are present in Fichte’s later published and unpublished writings. These include: the unity of theoretical and practical philosophy and of the sensible and supersensible realms; the purposiveness of nature; the autonomy and heteronomy of the I; the roles of abstraction, reflection, and imagination in philosophizing; and harmony of the drives as a key ingredient in moral deliberation.

Keywords: Critique of the Power of Judgment; aesthetic judgment; systematic unity; abstraction; reflection; purposiveness; heteronomy; power of imagination; genius; harmony.

Resumen: La admiración de Fichte por la tercera crítica kantiana ha sido bien documentada. Sin embargo, queda aún por saber cómo esta obra influyó en la filosofía de Fichte. Se intenta dar una respuesta a esta cuestión examinando, primero, el resumen que Fichte hizo de sus primeras lecturas de la tercera crítica kantiana, y, luego, analizando el modo en que ciertos temas de esta obra están presentes en los escritos y manuscritos posteriores de Fichte. Entre estos temas se incluyen: la unidad de la filosofía teórica y práctica y de los ámbitos sensible y suprasensible, la adecuación teleológica de la naturaleza, la autonomía y heteronomía del sujeto, los roles de la abstracción, reflexión e imaginación en filosofía y la armonía de las pulsiones en cuanto ingrediente clave en la deliberación moral.

Palabras clave: Crítica del Juicio; juicio estético; unidad sistemática; abstracción; reflexión; adecuación teleológica; heteronomía; imaginación, genio; armonía.

RECIBIDO: SEPTIEMBRE DE 2018 / ACEPTADO: DICIEMBRE DE 2018
DOI: 10.15581/009.52.1.113-144

No human understanding can advance further than that boundary recognized by Kant, especially in the Critique of the Power of Judgment—a boundary, however, which he never determined for us specifically and which he declared to be the final boundary of finite knowledge

Preface to *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre*

This passage, which may serve as an epigraph for what follows, has long intrigued me and provoked several questions. What is the “boundary” to which Fichte is here referring? Where does it lie? Why did he credit Kant with its discovery, and why does Fichte associate this discovery specifically with the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*? Why did he subsequently describe this same work as “the summit of Kantian speculation,” and how and to what extent was his own philosophical project influenced by his personal engagement with the third *Critique*? In addressing these questions, I will begin with a survey and summary of Fichte’s explicit comments, both public and private, concerning the third *Critique* and conclude by enumerating some specific parallels between certain features of the third *Critique* and Fichte’s new and improved version of the Critical philosophy.

I

Kant’s *Kritik der Urteilskraft* was published in the spring 1790. On May 5 of that same year Fichte arrived in Leipzig and remained there for nearly a year. His letters from the first half of the summer, including those to his fiancé in Zurich, Johanna Rahn, are filled with lamentations about the failure of his various professional schemes and literary projects—plans that included: taking lessons in public oratory, establishing a literary magazine for women, composing a tragic drama, and writing a romantic novella. Consequently, he had to beg his fiancé to send him money, while cautioning her not to

tell her father.¹ At one point he reported that he was reduced to pawning all of his possessions except for the clothes on his back.² Near the end of the summer, however, he finally began to earn some money as a private tutor of mathematics and Greek.³ Sometime in August he began “to give private lessons on the Kantian philosophy” at the request of a student from the local university, who planned to leave Leipzig at the end of September⁴—this, of course, despite the fact that Fichte himself was not yet directly acquainted with *any* of Kant’s writings.⁵ Fichte met with this student from 3 and 4 p.m. every afternoon of the week and quickly discovered that his main

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1. Fichte to Johanne Rahn, May 14-15, 1790; *GA*, III/1: 113-15. [*GA* = *J. G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. Erich Fuchs, Reinhard Lauth†, and Hans Gliwitzky† (Frommann-Holzboog, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1964ff.)].
 2. Draft of a letter from Fichte to Dieter von Miltiz (the son of the nobleman who had first “discovered” Fichte as a boy and who subsequently supported his education), beginning of August, 1790, *GA*, III/1: 164.
 3. In addition to tutoring an unnamed university student in the Kantian philosophy, Fichte also gave lessons every afternoon in mathematics and Greek to the three young sons of the silk merchant, J. H. Thieriot. He must have been quite an effective Greek teacher—at least according to his December 6, 1790 letter to Johanna, in which he boasts that in just three months he has taught his ten-year-old student enough Greek so “that now he can read Homer” (*GA*, III/1: 199). There is some evidence that Fichte may have begun tutoring even earlier in the summer, inasmuch as he wrote to his *fiancé* on June 8 that “in a few days I will meet with my first student” (*GA*, III/1: 129). We have no further information about this, however.
 4. As Frank Aschoff speculates, the reason Fichte was asked to give private lessons on Kant during the summer of 1790 may have been because Friedrich Gottlob Born, the main representative of Kantianism on the philosophy faculty at Leipzig (and best known for translating the *Critique of Pure Reason* into Latin), did not lecture on Kant during the summer semester of 1790 [*Zwischen äußerem Zwang und innerer Freiheit. Fichtes Hauslehrer-Erfahrungen und die Grundlegung seiner Philosophie*, “Fichte-Studien” 9] (1997 41).
 5. Draft of a letter from Fichte to Dietrich von Miltiz, beginning of August, 1790; *GA*, III/1: 165. As Armin G. Wildfeuer notes, there is circumstantial evidence that Fichte became indirectly acquainted with Kant’s philosophy during his earlier, student days in Leipzig. His teacher at Leipzig, C. F. Pezold, published two articles critical of Kant in 1787, the same year that Fichte was most intensively involved with him [*Praktische Vernunft und System. Entwicklungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu ursprüngliche Kant-Rezeption Johann Gottlieb Fichtes* (Frommann-Holzboog, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1999) 367n.]. It is also quite possible that Fichte had discussed Kant’s philosophy with his good friend Friedrich August Weißhuhn prior to the summer of 1790.

challenge was to make Kant's difficult texts *clear*, both to his student and to himself.⁶

We are all familiar with the "revolution" this serendipitous exposure to the Critical philosophy produced in Fichte's way of thinking, leading him to renounce his former opinion that no philosophy could ever successfully reconcile freedom and morality with natural necessity and that the only theoretically tenable position was Spinozistic rational determinism. As he crowed to his fiancé in his letter of August 12, 1790, "I have [now] thrown myself head over heels into the Kantian philosophy and have a distinct feeling that both my head and my heart have profited from this."⁷

He elaborates on this point in a letter from the same period to his friend F.A. Weißhuhn, to whom he writes:

I have been living in a new world ever since reading the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Propositions have been overturned for me that I thought could never be overturned, and things have been proven that I thought could never be proven—for example, the concepts of absolute freedom and of duty—and I feel all the happier for this.⁸

Fichte then explains the circumstances under which he has become familiar with all three of Kant's *Critiques* and mentions that he had been contemplating publishing an introductory guide for readers of the first *Critique* and indeed had begun work on such a project, only to abandon it upon learning that another author had published a similar guide.⁹

6. Fichte to Johanna Rahn, September 5, 1790, *GA*, III/1: 173.

7. Fichte to Johanna Rahn, August 12, 1790, *GA*, III/1: 166.

8. Fichte to F. A. Weißhuhn, August/September, 1790, *GA*, III/1: 168.

9. The "other" author in question was Johann Gottlieb Peuker, whose *Darstellung des Kantischen Systems nach seinen Hauptmomenten zufolge der Vernunftkritik, und Beantwortung der dagegen gemachten Einwürfe. Besonders zum Gebrauch academischer Vorlesungen* was published in 1790.

It is worth noting, particularly in the light of the emphasis that is often placed upon the strongly “practical” or ethical dimension of Fichte’s appropriation of the Critical philosophy, that he did not move directly from his abandoned effort to explicate the first *Critique* to a similar engagement with the second, but instead immediately began work on an “Attempt at a Clarifying Summary of Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.”¹⁰ This suggests that Fichte was at this point becoming more and more keenly interested in the *systematic unity* of the Critical philosophy, and that this was therefore not a concern that he first acquired from his subsequent encounter with K. L. Reinhold’s *Elementarphilosophie*. In any event, he unquestionably assigned special significance to the third *Critique*, which he describes in his August/September 1790 letter to Weißhuhn as “convincing [*evident*], like everything of Kant’s, though clearer and better written than his previous works.”¹¹ And yet, for all its superior “clarity,” Fichte was also acutely aware of certain obscurities and unresolved tensions within Kant’s text and of the pressing need for further “clarification” of the same, despite that fact that, as he explained in his next letter to Weißhuhn, “nothing in the world is more difficult than clearly presenting Kantian ideas.” Accordingly, he announces in this same letter his intention to compose and to publish a “clearer exposition” of Kant’s text.¹²

Throughout the early fall of 1790 Fichte devoted as much time as was available to his “Clarifying Summary of the *Critique of the*

10. “Versuch eines erklärenden Auszugs aus Kants Kritik der Urteilkraft” (*GA*, II/1: 325–73). According to the editors of *GA*, this manuscript (or at least most of it) was composed between early-August and mid-September of 1790. A marginal note in Fichte’s hand on the first page, however, states that it was composed between September 1790 and the beginning of 1791 and “intended for publication.”

11. *GA*, III/1: 168.

12. “What do you think about a clearer exposition of Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment*? After careful study (previously I only leafed through it, to employ Kant’s expression), it seems to me very much in need of this. Moreover, it contains many things that I either do not understand or which contradict themselves. I intend to write such a book and have already begun to do so, and I am finding this to be a difficult task. Will it also bring me honor? Nothing in the world is more difficult than clearly presenting Kantian ideas. I experience this every day in connection with preparations for my lessons on the *Critique of Pure Reason*” (Fichte to Weißhuhn, *GA*, III/1: 174–75).

Power of Judgment,” spurred on, no doubt, by fear that someone else might once again beat him to this goal and reconciled to the fact that “if I want to publish it before being confronted with a hundred competitors, I will simply have to publish it in a half-finished state.”¹³ The first part of the manuscript was completed sometime in November, at which time Fichte sent it to Weißhuhn, accompanied by a letter explaining the purpose of the project and requesting critical comments on the same. What he was trying to accomplish, he explained, was to eliminate the many repetitions in Kant’s text and to apply what he describes as Kant’s own “synthetic method” not just to the overall argument, but to the individual sub-sections as well precisely in order to make the systematic unity of the whole more perspicuous. In those places where Kant’s text seems clear, Fichte says he will retain Kant’s expressions, despite worries that this might make him appear to be guilty of plagiarism. The most obscure portion of Kant’s book is, he says, the Introduction, to the exposition of which he claims to have devoted special effort. He also reveals that he hopes to finish Part One, on aesthetic judgments, in time for publication at the New Year’s book fair and Part II, on teleological judgments, in time for the Easter fair.¹⁴

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13. Fichte to H. N. Achelis, November 1790 (*GA*, III/1: 195). In this same letter, Fichte repeats the claim that his immersion in the Kantian philosophy has been the remedy for all the persistent ills and defects in his life and character and has produced a complete revolution in his way of thinking, especially regarding questions of morality and duty. He also informs Achelis that, after completing his work on the Third *Critique*, he intends to turn to a popular presentation of Kant’s moral principles (*GA*, III/1: 193-95).
 14. “For some time now I have been particularly occupied with the study of Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, and, since it struck me as rather obscure, I thought that it might well strike others in the same way and that an effort to make it somewhat clearer would not be superfluous. Up to this point, my thoughts were perhaps correct, but was I equally correct in thinking that I could be the person to make them clearer? This is what I wish to learn from you, which is why I am sending you the beginning of the manuscript, that is to say, the portion containing everything about which I am generally clear.—My intention was to omit repetitions and to bring the synthetic method, which Kant, in respect of the whole, implemented in an unrivaled manner, into the individual parts of the same, which often seem to me to be poorly organized. In the case of what is very obscure, I tried to use other—if not better, then at least clearer— words to express it, so that a reader who also has access to Kant’s book can view the matter

Weißhuhn, however, did not immediately respond to his friend's request; instead, he kept the manuscript for more than six weeks, which obviously complicated Fichte's plans for the timely completion of the same.¹⁵ Thus he now informs his fiancé of his hope that his work will appear by Easter of 1791, even though he remains unsatisfied with it and thinks it is still too obscure. Indeed, he declares that he would not publish it at all were it not for various extraneous circumstances.¹⁶

During the ensuing months, however, Fichte's reservations concerning his "Clarifying Summary" appear to have waxed and his enthusiasm for publishing it to have waned. In any event, he does not appear to have done any further work on this project after April of 1791, when he left Leipzig and journeyed to Warsaw, where he

from two sides. In the case of passages that seem to me to be clear enough, I have retained the Kantian expressions as much as possible. Is this plagiarism? I don't think so, so long as the Preface explicitly takes note of this, which it will." "The Introduction seems to me the most obscure part of the book. Of course, I made an effort to illuminate it, but I don't know how well I succeeded. Here and there I departed from Kant's way of presenting things [*Vorstellungsart*], since another way of arriving at the same result seemed clearer to me." "After the fact, it seems to me that I would have done better to depart from Kant in organizing the individual materials. The presentation would have gained in clarity thereby, even if only through the altered point of view. At least it would have looked from the outside more like a scientifically unified whole. If I have the time, I will perhaps send you as an appendix a short presentation of the *Critique* following a different line of thought." "I must blush over the style, which is so uneven, so full of tautologies and repetitions of the same words and contains so many long sentences! But it is harder than one would think to present Kantian ideas in a fluid style of writing, and I did not have time to do more. Even as it stands, I have revised several paragraphs more than five times" (Fichte to Weißhuhn, November 1790, *GA*, III/1: 188-89).

15. As previously noted, the date "September 1790-Beginning of 1791" appears, in Fichte's hand, on the first page of the manuscript, along with the notation, "intended for publication." This suggests that he may well have continued to work on the manuscript after sending a copy of the first portion of the same to Weißhuhn in November of 1790. See *GA*, III/1: 321.
16. See Fichte's December 27, 1790 letter to Johanna Rahn, in which he comments that "I am, by the way, very dissatisfied with my small book, and if I did not have many reasons to do so, I would not publish it. The German public is not so indulgent as the Zurichers. I am also afraid that it remains much more obscure than I intended. [...] Were it not almost necessary to do so, I would not publish it at all" (*GA*, III/1:205).

had obtained a new position as a private tutor.¹⁷ And yet it was still on his mind as he prepared for his interview with Kant in Königsberg in August of that year, listing in a memo to himself his projected “summary of his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*” as among the topics he intended to discuss with Kant.¹⁸

At this point, let us pause to consider in some detail the *contents* of Fichte’s “Clarifying Summary of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*,” a text that is by no means well-known, even to Fichte scholars. Fichte’s summary closely follows the text of Kant’s third *Critique*, paragraph by paragraph, beginning with the vitally important Introduction and continuing through §16 of the “Analytic of the Beautiful.” This amounts to less than one-fifth of the entire book. Fichte retains Kant’s titles for each paragraph, though in a few cases these are slightly modified in the interest of clarity. Generally speaking, the differences between Fichte’s summary and Kant’s text are very minor, and this manuscript is of interest mainly for *what* it chooses to *emphasize* or to *de-emphasize*.

17. In his previously cited December 27, 1790 letter to Johanna Rahn, Fichte expressed reservations about the “obscurity” of his work and confided his reservations about publishing it. But in his March 1, 1791 letter to her he reports that “my poor little work has, until now, remained on the back burner and is now in the claws of the rapacious publishers.” He also reports that he withdrew it from consideration by another publisher because of the insulting low honorarium he was offered (*GA*, III/1: 218). By March 5, 1791, however (that is, only four days after his March 1 letter to Johanna Rahn) Fichte had already abandoned any immediate plans to complete and to publish his “Clarifying Summary.” As he explained to his brother, Samuel Gotthelf, “I began a work concerning this philosophy, a work that will probably never be published, since I never completed it; yet to this work I still owe my happiest days, as well as a very profitable revolution in my head and in my heart” (*GA*, III/1: 222). Though unmentioned by Fichte, one possible reason he eventually abandoned work on this project may well have been the publication, in 1791, of two introductory works devoted to the third *Critique*: F. W. D. SNELL’S *Darstellung und Erläuterung der Kantischen Critik der ästhetischen Urtheilskraft* (Schwann and Gösz, Mannheim, 1791) and KARL SPAZIER’S *Versuch einer kurzen und faßlichen Darstellung der teleologischen Principien - ein Auszug aus Kants Kritik der teleologischen Urtheilskraft* (Johann Ludwig Gehra, Neuwied, 1791).

18. *Zur Vorbereitung auf die Visite*, July 4, 1795, *GA*, II/2: 11.

Let us begin with the *Introduction*:

I. *On the Division of Philosophy*. Philosophy is “the science of the principles of rational cognition of *things* through concepts,” organized according to the fundamental distinction between our “objective” concepts of nature and our equally “objective” concepts of freedom, each of which has as its “principle” a different type of causality and each of which establishes the domain for a distinct branch of philosophy. This section is simply an abbreviated paraphrase of Kant’s, with the addition of a new example of a “technical-practical precept,” viz., rules for mastering one’s anger. Fichte was, of course, all too clearly aware of the great difference between the “causality of freedom” and the “causality of nature” long before becoming acquainted with Kant, and was deeply and personally preoccupied with the problem of “reconciling” these two kinds of causality—something which, prior to his study of Kant, he had concluded to be impossible. Indeed, this prior interest helps explain Fichte’s special preoccupation with the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, since this is the text in which Kant himself most explicitly addresses this issue.

II. *On the Domain of Philosophy in General*. Here again, in what is for Fichte perhaps the most significant section of the Introduction, he summarizes Kant’s presentation while departing considerably from the letter of the same. In formulating the problem of relating the natural and the moral realms, for example, he endorses, even more urgently than Kant himself, the need to postulate some sort of underlying principle of unity, one that is neither “theoretical” nor “practical.” While faithful to the original, Fichte’s summary of this section nevertheless frames this issue in a light that—in retrospect, of course—seems presciently and distinctively “Fichtean” and illuminates Fichte’s subsequent claim that it was only in the third *Critique* that Kant finally arrived at the “ultimate boundary of all human understanding.”¹⁹ Consider, for example, the following passage from Fichte’s summary:

19. This is from the *Preface to Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre*, written in the spring of 1794 (*GA*, I/2: 110).

Our entire power of cognition has two domains, that of *the concept of nature* and that of *the concept of freedom*, for it legislates a priori through both. [...] Even though these two legislations are infinitely different, both in their aim and in their domain, they nevertheless have one and the same territory [*Boden*], namely, the realm of experience in its entirety; they must, therefore, ceaselessly interact with one another [*in einander greifen*], if not in their respective legislation, then in the effects of the same, which occur in one and the same sensible world. [...] Even though an unbridgeable gulf is fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, the sensible domain, and the supersensible domain of the concept of freedom, the causality of freedom nevertheless *ought* to realize within the sensible world a goal assigned by its own laws, and do so not by prescribing these laws of freedom to the sensible world, yet nevertheless in harmony with the laws proper to the latter. This, however, would be impossible if the same nature that is determined by the laws of the concept of nature, which takes no account whatsoever of the goals of freedom, could not, as it were, somehow agree with the goals according to the laws of freedom; it would be impossible if both legislations, each of which follows its own path, independently of and without taking any notice of the other, did not have somewhere a common point of union. [...] The point of unity can therefore lie nowhere but in that supersensible [realm] that is thought of as underlying nature.²⁰

Comparing this with Kant's original, one notes that whereas Kant denies in no uncertain terms the possibility of *any* cognition of the postulated supersensible ground of nature and freedom, Fichte denies only the possibility of any "direct cognition" of the same. He is also much more explicit than Kant in emphasizing that the empirical efficacy of the moral law would be impossible in the absence of such a supersensible ground, which unlike Kant, Fichte describes as an

20. *GA*, II/1: 328-30.

“explanatory” principle. He also goes beyond Kant in asserting not merely that there must be a “common root” of pure understanding and practical reason but also in maintaining that these two types of a priori legislation “reciprocally determine” one another.²¹

III. On the Critique of the Power of Judgment as the Means of Joining the Two Parts of Philosophy into a Whole. Here Fichte follows Kant in identifying the power of judgment as an “intermediary” power of the mind, entrusted with the task of mediating between the claims and laws of the understanding, which legislate a priori for our cognition of nature, and those of reason, which can determine our power of desire a priori, in accordance with the practical laws of freedom. The power of judgment is also “intermediate” in a second sense, since it legislates a priori for the soul’s “intermediate” capacity for feeling pleasure and displeasure. Though any claims resulting from the application of the power of judgment would have to be considered “theoretical,” in the broader sense of the term (which includes both natural science and philosophy), they would nevertheless belong to a separate, “higher” branch of philosophy: the critique of the power of judgment, which is concerned solely with the system of reason itself and the general powers of the mind in their systematic relationship to one another.

IV. On the Power of Judgment as a Power that Legislates a priori. Though this section contains nothing new, it is nevertheless longer than Kant’s original, which suggests that Fichte was keenly aware of the crucial importance of this section for the project described in the preceding ones, and particularly appreciative of the significance of Kant’s distinction between “determinative” and “reflective” (or “reflecting,” *reflectierende*) judgment.

A “judgment” is here described simply as a way of thinking some particular (whether a concept, an intuition, or a manifold of intuitions) under a higher, more universal concept. One way to do this is to begin with a universal concept and then “apply” the same to some particular or set of particulars, which is thereby “subsumed under” the wider concept. It is the task of the understanding to

21. On this point see A. WILDFEUER, *op. cit.*, 426.

make “determinative” judgments of this sort, whether pure (a priori) or empirical (a posteriori). But one can also proceed in just the opposite manner; instead of descending from the universal to the particular, one can begin with the particular and then “seek out” some universal under which it can, in turn, be “subsumed.” Fichte follows Kant in assigning this essential task not to the understanding, but to the power of reflective judgment [*reflectierende Urteilkraft*], since it is only by “reflecting” upon the particulars in question that we are able to envision some higher concept (or principle of unity) to which they may—or may not—conform. This power of reflection enables reason to legislate for itself not only within the practical domain, but also within the theoretical.

The method of reflective judgment is not logical deduction, but rather *experimental thinking*. This is a process of trial and error, which involves making and testing hypotheses. Only in this way can the power of judgment “seek out” (*aufsuchen*) that higher unity that it begins by postulating or assuming. The principle that guides the power of judgment in its efforts to discover ever higher forms of unity in the theoretical domain is the rational idea (*Idee*) of a higher understanding that provides us with a natural realm that *can* be unified by scientific understanding. Hence the legislation of the power of judgment with respect to our cognitive power is always only regulative and hypothetical, directing us to consider nature as a whole and all of the specific, empirical laws of the same, *as if* these were produced by a higher intellect *in order to* make it possible for us to advance in our efforts to grasp nature as a rational whole. But in doing this we treat nature itself as produced according to the concept of a goal (*Zweck*) and thus as “purposive” for our understanding. The general principle guiding the employment of the power of judgment is therefore that of “purposiveness” (*Zweckmäßigkeit*).

This is more or less a direct paraphrase of Kant’s text, but Fichte is even more forceful than Kant in reminding his intended readers that such reflective judgments by no means assert the actual existence of any “higher understanding”; on the contrary, he writes, “by means of this principle the power of judgment only gives to itself a *subjective* law of *hypothetical* validity: [a law that prescribes] how

it *must* proceed *if* it wishes to order this manifold in a single systematic experience, and how this manifold must be viewed *if* cognition of the same is to be possible for us.”²²

V. The Principle of the Formal Purposiveness of Nature is a Transcendental Principle of the Power of Judgment. Fichte's main innovation in this section, which is only half as long as Kant's original text, is to introduce at the appropriate point the subtitle, “transcendental deduction of the concept of the formal purposiveness of nature,” But, as Rolf-Peter Horstmann has pointed out, what Fichte actually offers here is not only not a “transcendental deduction” in any Kantian sense, it is not even a good argument, inasmuch as it consists simply of affirming the consequent of the hypothetical argument: *if* our understanding demands that we unify all of our experiences systematically, *then* we must assume that we can grasp these higher laws of nature.²³

We can pass quickly over sections VI, VII, and VIII as containing very little beyond a paraphrase of Kant's text, though in section VII Fichte does introduce a useful distinction between (1) the sensible content or “matter” of a representation of an object of intuition, (2) the spatiotemporal “form” of the same, and (3) the “the *essence* [*Wesen*] of the same, which is cognized by referring it to a determinate concept of the understanding,” whereas Kant distinguishes only between “matter” and “form.”

IX. On the Connection of the Legislation of Understanding and of Reason by Means of the Power of Judgement. This, the concluding section of Kant's Introduction contains some of his most explicit and provocative, albeit still hedged and tentative, speculations concerning the systematic unity of the mind and the interrelations between its various powers or “faculties” (understanding, judgment, and reason). Important as these remarks undoubtedly were as inspiration for Fichte's own future project, his summary is disappointingly brief (less than half the length of Kant's original) and, again, consists

22. *GA*, II/1: 333.

23. R.P. HORSTMANN, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft: Eine Untersuchung zu Zielen und Motiven des Deutschen Idealismus* (Beltz Atheneum, Weinheim, 2005, 2nd ed.) 202.

mainly of nearly direct quotations from Kant, including his table of the various faculties of the mind, along with their principles and domains of applications.

The specific problem emphasized in Fichte's summary is the one thematized in the "Aphorisms on Religion and Deism" he composed in August of 1790, just as he was beginning his study of Kant: namely, how to conceive of the powers of understanding and (practical, moral) reason as co-existing with one another, or, in Fichte's preferred idiom (borrowed from Jacobi), how to reconcile the demands of the "head" (here associated with philosophical deism based on reason) with those of the "heart" (associated with "religion" based on sentiment).²⁴ For Fichte, the problem is to discover a way of thinking of nature as at least *compatible* with freedom, yet without violating the experienced, causal order of the former. Hence, he enthusiastically endorses what he takes to be Kant's solution: namely, to employ one's power of judgment in order to reflect upon nature as a whole as "purposive" and possessing an external "ground" in the free will of a higher form of intelligence and thus in harmony with our morally postulated "causality through freedom."

"The law of freedom," writes Fichte, "thus ought to produce its effect within nature in complete agreement with the laws of nature. But this cannot not even be thought of as possible, except by means of the principle of the power of reflective judgment,"²⁵ that is, the principle of the purposiveness of nature. This, of course, is precisely the same insight that underlies Fichte's entire account of the relationship between the pure I and the finite Not-I in the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*, which might therefore be interpreted as a sustained effort to flesh out and make good on the proposals and suggestions put forward by Kant in section IX of his Introduction to the third *Critique*. The task of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, after all, is precisely to *demonstrate* that the "pure I" is the "supersensible substrate" of both the empirical, finite I and of nature, the domain of the "Not-I"—and, in a step beyond anything ever imagined by Kant himself, to

24. *Einige Aphorismen über Religion und Deismus*, GA, II/1: 287-91.

25. GA, II/1: 345-46.

do so by *deriving* both the limited I and limited Not-I as conditions for the possibility of that original, free and ungrounded act of self-positing with which the system begins.

X. *Brief Overview of this Introduction.* This concluding section, which summarizes the preceding nine sections, was added by Fichte. Though it provides nothing new, it does provide a useful overview of the entire introduction.

The rest of Fichte's manuscript is devoted to a partial summary of Book One of Part One of the Third *Critique*. Accordingly, he dutifully summarizes the first 16 numbered paragraphs of Book One, which include the First, Second, and Third "Moments of Aesthetic Judgment" (according to quality, quantity, and relation), breaking off one § short of the end of the Third Moment. This portion of his "Clarifying Summary" follows Kant's text even more closely than does his summary of the Introduction and relies even more heavily upon direct quotations and paraphrases. Yet there are still some differences between Fichte's version and Kant's original, and a few of these are worth mentioning. One example occurs in his summary of § 9, in which Fichte emphasizes the crucial role of the "free play of the power of imagination" in a judgment of taste (whereas Kant, of course, speaks of the free play of the faculties or mental powers, including, but not limited to the power of imagination). It is also worth noting that Fichte here employs the term "*Schweben*"²⁶ to describe the activity of the power of imagination as it "oscillates" between or "floats" or "hovers" above various concepts of the understanding—a term employed by Kant later in the third *Critique*, though not in this section).²⁷

26. In fact, Kant does use the term "*Schweben*" in § 17 (not included in Fichte's summary) to describe the way in which the "*Normalidee*" or "standard idea" or "image" (*Bild*) or "archetype" (*Urbild*) of an entire species or kind "oscillates between" all the individual intuitions of individuals. According to this same account, it is the power of imagination that produces these images. Kant, however, does not describe the power of imagination as itself "oscillating" or "floating"; it is only the product of the same, the image, that he describes in this way.

27. "This state of mind [that accompanies any reference of a representation to any object whatsoever, taken by itself, in abstraction from its object] is the combination of the manifold in a given intuition by means of the *power of imagination*, in accordance with one or another concept of the understanding; therefore,

The final section of Fichte's incomplete summary of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (§ 16) commences with a note explaining that the author has found it necessary, in this and the following sections to depart substantially from Kant's own method of presentation, "for reasons that will become evident from my presentation itself." But in fact, § 16 follows Kant's text quite closely and the "following sections" to which he refers appear never to have been written.

One reason the manuscript breaks off at this point may well have been that Fichte was unsure about the extent and character of his contemplated "departures" from the original text. In its unfinished state, however, his summary of Book One of the *Analytic of the Beautiful* contains very little that is new or original and provides precious little "elucidation" of Kant's text, even if it does manage, here and there, to "clarify" his arguments and conclusions a bit. For the most part, however, Fichte's "clarifying summary" consists of little more than close paraphrases, interspersed with direct, but unacknowledged quotations. His worry that he might be accused of plagiarism when his summary was published appears to have been well-justified.²⁸

it is an *agreement of the two powers* [of imagination and understanding]." "If the representation of this state [of mind] is to remain merely subjective and not to become objective by being referred to some determinate concept, then the power of imagination cannot be limited to any *particular concept*, according to which it connects the manifold, but it will oscillate [*Schweben*] in a *free play* between all the concepts of the understanding. It will not combine [the manifold] in accordance with this or that concept, but simply *in a manner conformable to concepts* in general.—(The power of imagination grasps the mere form, as an already *determinate* limitation of an object, whether limited for outer or for inner sense, just as it is given and without borrowing the rule for the connection of the same from any concept of the understanding. Since the connection has not occurred in accordance with concepts, the power of judgment cannot have the function of subsuming the representation that arises in this way under a concept of the understanding; it nevertheless involuntarily compares the form that is taken up by the power of imagination with [its] *referability to concepts in general* and discovers that the former is conformable to the latter. It thereby discovers that something is combined in the power of imagination—combined in a manner not determined by the understanding, but, as it were, by accident—just as it would have to be combined were this determined by the understanding. It thereby discovers that the power of imagination and the understanding are in accidental agreement with one another.)" (*GA*, II/1: 361).

28. Fichte to Weißhuhn, August–September, 1790, *GA*, III/1: 188–90.

As noted, Fichte's "Clarifying Summary" contains numerous problematic passages and mistakes concerning Kantian terminology and fully deserves Rolf-Peter Horstmann's characterization as "the work of a beginner," both in the sense that it is the work of someone just becoming acquainted for the first time with the Critical philosophy *and* in the sense that it is the work of beginner in philosophy itself.²⁹ This, however, does not mean that one should endorse Horstmann's rejection of the "Clarifying Summary" as contributing nothing to one's understanding of the genesis of the *Wissenschaftslehre* or concur with his claim that the third *Critique* is really not as important as authors such as Hegel have maintained for the genesis of post-Kantian philosophy in general and of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* in particular.³⁰

On the contrary, a close reading of Fichte's manuscript suggests that Kant's Introduction provided him with a new and much deeper appreciation of the *speculative* and *systematic* issues underlying his own, long-standing preoccupation with the task of reconciling freedom and necessity. Whereas he had previously treated this as a problem that could be addressed only "practically" and not philosophically, he was now convinced not only that this task is not philosophically impossible, but that the key to solving it lies in the identification of the common ground or root of the domains of both nature and freedom and that the proper instrument for exploring this new territory is the power of reflecting judgment.³¹

29. R.-P. HORSTMANN, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft: Eine Untersuchung zu Zielen und Motiven des Deutschen Idealismus* (Beltz Atheneum, Weinheim, 2nd ed., 2005) 201.

30. See R.-P. HORSTMANN *cit.*, 195-298. Concerning Hegel's influential interpretation of the third *Critique* as the true font of post-Kantian speculative philosophy, see his discussion of "Fichtean Philosophy" in Part C of *Glauben und Wissen*.

31. Armin Wildfeuer makes a similar point when he notes that Fichte's engagement with the third *Critique* both gave him a new, comprehensive view of the Critical philosophy as a systematic whole and suggested a new possibility for the presentation of the same (*op. cit.*, 422).

His engagement with Kant's Introduction also seems to have persuaded him that, just as the first *Critique* had to be understood in the light of the second, so both the first and the second had to be reinterpreted in the light of the third—or rather, in the light of that *systematic whole* the outline of which could be at least dimly discerned therein. This led to an appreciation of the intimate connection between two issues that might at first have appeared to be altogether unrelated to one another: viz., the problem concerning the unity of the divided human self, split between the dictates of the head and the demands of the heart, and the systematic unity of philosophy itself. Whereas Fichte's earlier speculative efforts had generally led him to stress the *opposition* between theory and practice, nature and freedom, etc., following his initial encounter with the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* his new project was to grasp and to articulate the underlying *unity* of the human subject and of the complete system of transcendental philosophy. As Wildfeuer observes, Fichte's interest in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* was *systematic* in nature from the start, and he clearly intended to emphasize this aspect of the text in his "Clarifying Summary."³²

Fichte's systematic concern with the "original unity"—of reason, of experience, of philosophy, and indeed, of the human self—launched him upon a new quest to discover the "supersensible ground" that unites what appear, within experience, to be absolute opposites. At this early date, of course, he had not yet discovered that the unifying principle in question is that of selfhood as such. Nevertheless, it seems safe to maintain that he would have been unlikely to make such a "discovery" had he not been impelled toward it by his careful study of the third *Critique* in the late summer and fall of 1790 and by his ultimately unsuccessful effort to compose and to publish a "clarifying summary" of the same, an enterprise which he nevertheless described as "responsible for a very profitable revolution in my head and heart."³³

32. See A. WILDFEUER, *op. cit.*, 222.

33. Fichte to Samuel Gottthelf Fichte, March 5, 1791, *GA*, III/1: 222.

Before enumerating some of the many ways in which Fichte appears to have been influenced by his study of the third *Critique*, let me complete this survey of what Fichte had to say about this work in the years following his initial engagement with it. Long after he had abandoned his plan to publish a reader's guide to this text he continued to refer to it in the most positive terms and to insist upon its importance not simply for understanding aesthetic and teleological judgments, but for understanding the possibility and limits of *systematic philosophy as a whole*.

The influence of Fichte's engagement with the third *Critique* is easy to detect in his writings during the winter of 1793-94, when he was living with his new wife in Zurich. It was during this time that he worked intensively on a long and complex manuscript entitled *Eigne Meditationen über ElementarPhilosophie/Practische Philosophie*,³⁴ in which he re-examines the foundations and systematic structure of the entire Critical system under the direct influence of K. L. Reinhold's effort to do the same in his own *ElementarPhilosophie*. Though the third *Critique* is mentioned by name only twice in this manuscript, it is in fact replete with indirect references to Kant's text and makes frequent use of terminology derived from the same. This is especially true of the portion entitled "Practical Philosophy," which Horstmann describes, somewhat hyperbolically, as "a systematic commentary on the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*."³⁵

During this same period he also composed his review of Leonhard Creuzer's *Skeptische Betrachtung über die Freiheit des Willens [...]*, which was published in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* in October 1793. Though the third *Critique* is not mentioned by name in this review, it is quite clearly alluded to in an important passage

34. *GA*, II, 21-266.

35. R.-P. HORSTMANN, *op. cit.*, 204. Even though he maintains that Kant here helps himself to the entire structure and apparatus of the third *Critique*, Horstmann still downplays the influence of the same upon the development of Fichte's philosophy and points out that he never, in the manuscript on "Practical Philosophy," explicitly identifies the third *Critique* as the key for proceeding beyond Kant. For a close reading of the *Practische Philosophie* manuscript in the light of the third *Critique* see A. KUBIK, *Auf dem Weg zu Fichtes früherer Ästhetik. Die Rolle der Urteilskraft in der Kritik der Urteilskraft*, "Fichte-Studien" 33 (2009) 7-16.

discussing the relationship and harmony between the domain of the thing in itself, here understood as the realm of freedom, and that of appearance, i.e., the natural, sensible world.³⁶

Fichte's first explicit public mention of Kant's third *Critique* comes in the *Vorrede* to the first edition of *Ueber den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre*, which was published in May of 1794 and which includes the declaration with which I began.³⁷ What is intriguing about this passage is not only its extraordinarily high praise for the third *Critique* but also its implicit suggestion that much more remains to be said concerning that "boundary" which Kant recognized but failed to determine adequately.

At about the same time, in his June 17, 1794 letter to Kant, Fichte confides that it was only in the third (and not in the second) *Critique* that he discovered "a harmony with my own convictions concerning the practical portion of philosophy."³⁸ Fichte refers

36. How, asks Fichte, can we conceive of the relationship between a spontaneously free act of willing and the natural world in which it supposed to have its effect—a realm of determinate being, in which every appearance has its sufficient ground in a preceding one? How can the latter be in harmony with the free determination of the will for the sake of the moral world order? The ground of the harmony in question, Fichte concludes, can lie neither in nature nor in freedom, "but only in a higher law, which subsumes both freedom and nature—in, as it were, a pre-determined harmony of determinations through freedom with determinations through the law of nature." (*GA*, I/2: 11). Though we possess no theoretical insight into this higher law, we can at least grasp we are unable to grasp it, and this, insists Fichte, is Kant's view as well. Kant's well-known assertion that freedom possesses causality within the sensible world must therefore be interpreted as no more than a preliminary statement of his true opinion, according to which "purposiveness is the principle of the reflective power of judgment, which connects both legislations (the possibility of which can be comprehended only with reference to a third, higher type of legislation)" (*GA*, I/2: 12). The allusion to the third *Critique*, though implicit, is impossible to miss. Instead, on this point Fichte refers his reader to Kant's published critique of Eberhard's Leibnizian attack upon the Critical philosophy, *Ueber eine Entdeckung nach der all neue Kritik der reinen Vernunft durch eine ältere entbehrlich gemacht werden soll*, as well as to the first essay in Kant's recently published *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*.

37. "The author remains sincerely convinced that no human understanding can advance further than that boundary recognized [*gesteht*] by Kant, especially in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* —a boundary, however, which he never determined for us specifically and which he declared to be the final boundary of finite knowledge" (*GA*, I/2: 110).

38. *GA*, III/2: 138.

again to the third *Critique* in his letter to Reinhold the following summer, in which he boasts that in his new system he has succeeded not merely in establishing the systematic unity of the first *Critique* but also in unifying in a single system all three *Critiques*.³⁹

A month later, in his August 3, 1795 letter to Gottlieb Hufeland regarding books Fichte had already agreed to review in the Jena *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, Fichte reports that he will be able to complete his assigned review of the third and fourth editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason* only if he is permitted to provide a completely new interpretation of the same. Only recently, he explains, as a result of his study of Hume, has he come to realize what is really at stake in the first *Critique* and to recognize what Kant was actually trying to accomplish in this work—as well as why he failed to do this. This realization, he continues, explains why and how Kant was driven far beyond the standpoint of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, first in the second *Critique* and then especially in the third.⁴⁰ Here once again Fichte plainly suggests that his own project involves a reinterpretation of Kant's entire Critical philosophy in the light of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.

Two years later, in his July 4, 1797 letter to Reinhold, Fichte concedes that there might well seem to be a contradiction between the *Wissenschaftslehre* and some of Kant's explicit statements. But this, he adds, really indicates only a contradiction within Kant's own work. Granted, certain passages in the first *Critique* suggest that he was committed to the absurd notion that sensations are produced within the human mind by the causal efficacy of unknowable things in themselves, but, says Fichte, Kant himself has at least pointed toward the solution to the problem concerning the origin of external sensations, “especially in the Introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*,” even though he has failed to develop this suggestion any further and seems content to reject such questions as unanswerable.⁴¹

39. Fichte to Reinhold, July 2, 1795, *GA*, III/2: 346.

40. *GA*, III/2: 359.

41. *GA*, III/3: 70.

Fichte's next reference to the third *Critique* occurs seven years later, in his March 31, 1804 letter to Jacobi, in which he writes: "In my view there are no less than three Critical philosophies of Kant, each of which has a different absolute, the best [*vorzüglichste*] of which is that of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*."⁴² That same month, in his *Aphorismen für Mme de Staël*, prepared for the private use of the visiting French literary celebrity, Fichte distinguishes two different ways of proceeding in philosophy: One can begin with certain fundamental distinctions discovered within empirical consciousness and then *assert* (but not *prove*) the systematic unity of these distinguished elements. As an illustration of this method, he refers to Kant's Introduction to the third *Critique*, "in which he stands at the summit of his speculations" [*in welcher er auf den Gipfel seiner Spekulation steht*].⁴³ Or, on the other hand, one can, in the manner of the newest presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, begin with something that is, in its absolute, inner quality, neither being nor consciousness.

A similar description of the third *Critique* recurs in Fichte's May 8, 1806 letter to Jacobi, in which he compares his conception of ethics (*Sittenlehre*) with that of Jacobi, insisting that, "no *Sittenlehre* can be anything other than what is for Kant and for me. *Sittenlehre*, however, is something very limited and subordinate. I have never considered in any other way, nor has Kant, at least in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, which is the summit of Kantian speculation."⁴⁴

42. *GA*, III/5: 237. This passage continues as follows: "And yet, as I see it, one cannot grasp Kant from what he says, but only in what he does not say (or indeed, when others say it, opposes), but which must nevertheless be tacitly presupposed in order to arrive at what he first said."

43. *GA*, II/7: 247.

44. *GA*, III/5: 355-56.

Finally, in the second lecture in his 1807 presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, which includes a lengthy discussion of Kant, Fichte repeats his early claim that each of Kant's *Critiques* has its own distinctive "absolute." But now he elaborates a bit on this obscure claim, explaining that the absolute for the *Critique of pure Reason* is sensible experience and for the *Critique of practical Reason* the moral world. Neither of the first two *Critiques* has any place for the absolute embraced by the other, nor can either of them account for certain important phenomena of self-observation, which are neither theoretical cognitions nor categorical moral concepts, such as the beautiful, the sublime, and the purposive. The relation of the sensible to the supersensible world is, claims Fichte, most explicitly discussed by Kant in the Introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, which he describes as "the most all-important part of this very important book."⁴⁵ Hence the absolute for the third *Critique* is the common root of both the sensible and supersensible domains, an absolute that Fichte describes as sufficient unto itself and separate from the other two. Of course, Kant believed this absolute to be forever uncognizable by finite intellects, and this is why he failed to grasp adequately his own, final absolute and why he was unable to show *how* both the sensible and supersensible worlds proceed from it—which is precisely what Fichte claims the *Wissenschaftslehre* can do.⁴⁶

II

Following this rather exhaustive (but I hope not exhausting) survey of Fichte's explicit references to and comments on Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, I propose to conclude on a rather different, comparative note. In what follows I will simply be mentioning—*ex cathedra*, as it were—the various ways in which Fichte's project appears to me to have been decisively influenced by his engagement with Kant's third *Critique*. Each of those thirteen points should be

45. *GA*, II/8: 31.

46. *GA* II/8: 27–35.

viewed simply as a theme for further research, since I will be unable on this occasion to develop any of them in any detail.

1. *The unity of philosophy.* One of the more conspicuous features of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is the way it thoroughly integrates the “theoretical” and “practical” portions of the system of transcendental philosophy as a whole and derives the first principles of both from a common root or single starting point—the unconditioned self-positing of the pure I. Here there is no question of treating either portion in isolation from the other, since, for Fichte, willing is just as constitutive of cognition as cognition is of willing—a point made explicitly in the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* but more perspicuously in the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*.

2. *The unity of the supersensible and sensible realms, of freedom and nature.* One of Fichte’s main objectives in constructing his new system was to take up Kant’s suggestion that the teleological view of nature in relation to moral ends allows us, for the first time, to make sense of our necessary belief in the sensible/practical efficacy of free, supersensible determinations of the will. On the one hand, Fichte derives the sensible from the supersensible realm, that is, he derives both the finite I and the finite Not-I from the pure, absolute I with the concept of which he begins. On the hand, his transcendental derivation also demonstrates that the supersensible realm *necessarily* presupposes its own sensible expression. The only *actual* I is finite.

3. *The common root of the sensible and supersensible realms.* The common root postulated by Kant of both nature and freedom, as well as of theoretical and practical philosophy, can only be that spontaneously self-positing fact/act or *Tathandlung* which constitutes the essence of subjectivity, a subject that is always an object for itself. To be sure, Kant had already declared in the second *Critique* that “the concept of freedom, insofar as its reality is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason, constitutes the keystone of the entire structure of a system of pure reason, even of speculative reason.”⁴⁷ However, it was by no means obvious either *what* such a system would actually look like or *how* the proposed “keystone”

47. *Critique of Practical Reason*, AA, V, 3-4.

could function as such. These questions are addressed more fully in the second half of the third *Critique*, in which Kant shows how the concept of the purposiveness of nature (the sensible realm) must be grounded in that of freedom (something supersensible). This allows us to enrich our concept of nature beyond the limits of theoretical reason alone—even if only for the purposes of what Kant calls “practical cognition”.

The goal of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is to show that this Kantian model is not merely a practical conjecture or postulate but is a reflection of the fundamental structure of I-hood as such, as demonstrated in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, in which an unconditioned, spontaneously self-positing pure subject-object, can posit itself as such if and only if it also posits a realm of finitely free individuals and another of finite, causally interacting sensible things. Absolute freedom or self-sufficiency, in the sense of the spontaneous self-positing of the pure I, is what Fichte calls “the ultimate point of origin of all reason,” and freedom is therefore, for him, not simply an article of practical faith but is at the same time “a theoretical principle for the determination of our world.”⁴⁸ Only in the *Wissenschaftslehre* does Kant’s characterization of freedom as the keystone of the entire system of pure reason finally receive an adequate explanation. But in order to provide such an explanation Fichte had to recast the results of the first two *Critiques* in the light of the third in accordance with a new method of philosophical construction.

4. *Nature’s purposiveness.* Fichte’s concept of nature, as developed in the *Foundations of Natural Right* and *System of Ethics* is, like Kant’s, thoroughly teleological and incorporates Kant’s concept of natural organisms and of nature itself as an organism, the ultimate purpose of which is to be an appropriate instrument of the will and an effective means for advancing the ultimate end of the same (complete self-sufficiency).⁴⁹ Fichte’s account of the final, moral end of nature is deeply indebted to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and may well have been directly inspired by a footnote from § 83

48. *System of Ethics*, GA, I/5: 77.

49. See GA, I/4: 377–79 and I/5: 139ff.

of the third *Critique*, in which Kant remarks that the only criterion for determining the final purpose of nature is “[the] value that we ourselves give to our lives through what we not only do, but do purposively and so independently of nature that even the existence of nature can be a purpose only under this condition.”⁵⁰ “Therefore it is this [moral] legislation that enables man to be a final purpose to which all of nature is teleologically subordinated.”⁵¹ Fichte expands this into the explicit doctrine that the external world as a whole and everything in it exists simply “in order to constitute a sphere for freedom” and can therefore be described as “the material of our duty made sensible.”⁵² But he rejects Kant’s insistence that such a teleological view of nature is merely “regulative,” inasmuch as he maintains that this is a theorem derived from the highest principles of his system.

5. *Heautonomy and autonomy of the I*. Though Fichte does not adopt Kant’s term (from section V) of the *Introduction* to the third *Critique*,⁵³ he nevertheless recognizes the difference between the “autonomy” of the I, understood as its capacity to act freely and to modify the sensible realm of the Not-I, and the “heautonomy” of the same, that is, its capacity to *determine itself* freely and in accordance with its own, supersensible laws and norms. The self-referential character of this Kantian concept of heautonomy may therefore, as Henry Allison suggests, well have had a direct influence upon the development of Fichte’s conception of the self-referential, self-reverting, and self-legislative character of the I.⁵⁴

6. *Abstraction in philosophy*. Fichte appears to have been inspired by Kant’s account of how the general ideas of “common sense,” like the “normal ideas” produced by aesthetic genius, require *abstraction* from various particulars, and this process of abstraction is what un-

50. *KU*, V, 434n.

51. *KU*, V, 335-6.

52. “On the Basis of our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World,” *GA*, I/5: 353.

53. See I. KANT, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, *AA*, V, 185-86.

54. H. E. ALLISON, *Reflective Judgment and the Application of Logic to Nature: Kant’s Deduction of Purposiveness as an Answer to Hume*, in H. E. ALLISON, *Essays on Kant* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012) 188.

derlies the universality of such concepts. According to Kant, *sensus communis* is “the idea of a sense *shared* [by all human being], i.e., a power to judge, which, in reflecting, takes account (a priori), in our thought, of everyone else’s way of representing [something], in order *as it were* to compare our own judgment with human reason in general.” And we obtain to this standpoint by “comparing our judgment not so much with the actual as rather with the merely possible judgments of others, and [thus] put ourselves in the position of everyone else, merely by abstracting from the limitation that happen to attach to our judging, and this in turn we accomplish by leaving out as much as possible whatever is matter, i.e., sensation, in the representational state.”⁵⁵ It is difficult for a student of Fichte’s philosophy to read these lines without thinking at once of that act of global abstraction with which the *Wissenschaftslehre* begins, which is similarly intended to insure the universality and objectivity of all the claims that follow.

7. *Reflection in philosophy.* A second source of inspiration for Fichte’s new philosophical method was Kant’s notion of “the power of reflecting judgment,” the kind of thinking that proceeds from particulars to universals and does so by way of a combination of imaginatively inspired experiments and circumspect awareness of the results of the same, which Fichte calls “reflection.” Just as the philosopher must begin by abstracting from all that is “Not-I,” so must he constantly remain clearly aware of, that is “reflect upon,” what he is doing in this act of abstraction and upon the product of the same. Indeed, Fichte often employs the same term Kant had used to describe the operation of the reflecting power of judgment—namely, *aufsuchen* or “seeking out”—to describe his own method of philosophizing. Thus he appears to have drawn from Kant’s remarks on reflecting judgment new and original ideas concerning *both* the experimental *strategy* of philosophy and the distinctive *method* of the same. Fichte characterized his method of close self-observation following radical abstraction in various ways—as attentiveness (*Aufmerksamkeit*), observation, and (most notoriously) “intellectual intuition”—but his usual name for his method of philosophizing

55. *AA*, V, 291ff.

is simply “reflection.” Just as Kant thought that aesthetic ideas can only be “intuited,” so too, according to Fichte, can that process of a priori construction by means of which philosophy comes into being only be reflected upon.⁵⁶

8. *The power of imagination in philosophy.* Just as the artist is described by Kant as “seeking out” his higher concepts (so-called “aesthetic ideas”) by means of the power of imagination rather than by the application of any algorithm or set of rules, so Fichte thinks that the philosopher requires a similar creative use of the power of imagination in order to advance *genetically* or *synthetically* from one act of necessary positing to another. In this process he is directed by no rules, but is guided only by what Fichte calls “spirit in the narrower sense” or the “sense of truth,” a matter of *feeling* rather than of *thinking*. My suggestion is that Fichte borrows Kant’s account of the function of the power of imagination in both artistic production and in judgments of taste and makes it central to his account of the synthetic method of philosophical construction.

9. *“Genius” in philosophy.* For this reason Fichte explicitly rejected Kant’s claim that the obscure imaginative capacity called “genius” has no place in philosophy. On the contrary, he insisted that that act of abstraction with which philosophy must begin must occur spontaneously in accordance with no rules. And the same applies to the philosopher’s “seeking out” of new constitutive acts of the mind, this too is a process guided only by creative imaginative and the philosopher’s inchoate “sense of truth.”⁵⁷ On analogy with Kant’s

56. It should also be noted that Fichte, in the *System of Ethics*, fully endorses Kant’s account of the role of reflective judgment in identifying both natural organisms and nature as a whole as an organic unity. In addition, however, he also treats our ordinary reference of our representations to external objects as their cause as an application of “the reflecting power of judgment.” See *GA*, I/5: 110.

57. “The human mind makes various experiments. By blind groping it succeeds in reaching the dawn, and only then does it emerge into the bright light. It is led at first by obscure feelings [...] and if we had not begun with obscure feelings of things we did not clearly recognize until later, we should still have no clear concepts to this day.” The history of philosophy teaches us how, in this manner, philosophers have groped their way ever nearer to their goal: to separate the intellect’s necessary manner of acting from any accidental accompanying conditions (*Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre*, *GA*, I/2: 144).

notion of aesthetic genius, Fichte calls this “obscure feeling for what is right” *philosophical genius* and views it as indispensable.⁵⁸ He elaborates on this point in the *Foundations of Natural Right*, where he defines philosophical genius as:

[...] the talent, even while engaged in acting, to discover not only what arises as a result of this action but also acting itself, considered as such—the talent to unify these two completely opposed views within a single comprehension and thereby to apprehend one’s own mind ‘in the act,’ as it were, thereby obtaining an utterly new domain for consciousness.⁵⁹

10. *The “hovering” of the poser of imagination.* “*Schweben*” is an ordinary German word meaning “float,” “hover,” or “oscillate,” often used to describe the way an idea one is considering may be said to “float before” one’s mind. This is also, of course, the technical term employed in the *Foundations of the entire Wissenschaftslehre* to describe the way in which the synthetic power of imagination is able to reconcile and unite opposites by “hovering” above them or “oscillating” between them. It is not clear where Fichte obtained this usage, but I would suggest that a good candidate is § 17 of third *Critique*, where Kant describes the power of imagination as “hovering” or “oscillating” as it tries to hit upon a determinate concept for an aesthetic form that it has apprehended via sensible intuition, a concept Kant calls the standard idea [*Normalidee*] of the beautiful and describes as “an image for the entire kind, hovering between the singular and multiply varied intuitions of the individuals”.⁶⁰

11. *Art and aesthetic ideas.* Directly inspired by Kant, Fichte developed his own view of art as a propaedeutic, something that mediates between the sensible and supersensible.⁶¹ But whereas Kant

58. *GA*, I/2: 142.

59. *GA*, I/3: 316.

60. I. KANT, *AA*, V, 234.

61. In the *System of Ethics* Fichte describes aesthetic *feeling* as occupying a middle position between the feeling of sensual pleasure and that of moral respect, and

suggests that aesthetic experience might be viewed as a propaedeutic to moral experience, Fichte treats it as a propaedeutic to *philosophy* and claims that the artist and philosopher both occupy the same transcendental standpoint, though the former does so only unconsciously. One of the things that distinguishes Fichte's treatment of art from Kant's is that, whereas the latter was primarily concerned with *judgments of taste*, Fichte is almost exclusively concerned with the *production of aesthetic ideas* and the role of the power of creative imagination therein. The real objects of what Fichte calls "the aesthetic drive" are always internal images or ideas and not the physical exhibition of the same in the sensible world.⁶²

12. *The categorical imperative as harmony with oneself.* Readers of Fichte's *Lectures on the Scholar's Vocation* will be familiar with what appears to be his radical revision of Kant's categorical imperative, namely: "Act so that you could consider the maxims of your willing to be eternal laws *for yourself*," or "the will ought always to be at one with itself."⁶³ As distant as this may seem from Kant's well-known discussion of the categorical imperative in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, it is in fact simply a restatement of a claim put forward in § 59 of the third *Critique*, namely: "In a moral judgment we think of the freedom of the will as the will's *harmony with itself* according to universal laws of reason".⁶⁴

13. *Duty as a feeling of harmony among the drives.* One of Fichte's more surprising appropriations of material from the third *Critique* is found in his account, in the *System of Ethics*, of moral deliberation as a process that ends only when one discovers some object of a "natural drive" to be in harmony with the pure drive's demand for complete self-sufficiency. This produces a distinctive *feeling*, not of aesthetic pleasure, but rather of moral obligation. Thus, what Kant

thus as a feeling that can help the individual to overcome the tension between his experiences of the sensible and intelligible worlds. See *GA*, I/5: 137.

62. For discussion of Fichte's theory of art, see D. BREAZEALE, *Against Art? Fichte on Aesthetic Experience and Fine Art*, "Journal of the Faculty of Letters, The University of Tokyo, Aesthetics" 38 (2013) 25-42.

63. *GA*, I/3: 30, emphasis added.

64. *AA*, V, 354, emphasis added.

says about judgments of taste in the Introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* also applies to Fichte's account of moral judgment, namely that in this case "judgment decides by feeling rather than by harmony of concepts."⁶⁵ Since the two drives in harmony with one another in Fichte's account are the same in everyone, the ensuing feeling of duty can be described as universal and objective, just as Kant describes the feeling of pleasure produced by the harmonies of the two cognitive faculties that are the same in everyone.⁶⁶ Indeed, Fichte himself explicitly compares the feeling of conscience to the aesthetic feeling of disinterested pleasure and the process of moral judgment to aesthetic judgment.⁶⁷

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65. AA, V, p. 194.

66. Fichte's debt here to Kant's account of judgments of taste is striking enough to justify Paul Redding's characterization of Fichtean conscience as "a quasi-aestheticized form of moral consciousness in that an immediately *felt* assurance is taken as critical for the goodness or purity of the will." "The feeling involved in conscience testifies to the purity of the will in a way analogous to the way that feeling testifies to the beauty of some presentation in aesthetic experience" [Hegel, *Fichte, and the Pragmatics of Moral Judgement*, in E. HAMMER (ed.), *German Idealism: Contemporary Perspectives* (Routledge, London and NY, 2007) 227].

67. See *System of Ethics*, GA, I/5: 157 and 155-56, where Fichte asserts that "all aesthetic feelings are similar to the feeling that we have described here in that they arise from the satisfaction of a drive in accordance with a determinate representation," though in the case of conscience the feeling that is produced is not one of pleasure but only of "cold satisfaction."

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