

## Fichte's Reception of Kant's Third Critique

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Expositions recounting Fichte's philosophical development in relation to Kant characteristically derive the primary motivation for the *Wissenschaftslehre* from Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*. The *Wissenschaftslehre* is commonly viewed as a creative *sequitur* to and transformative reworking of Kant's Solution to the Third Antinomy, the famous footnote in Section III of the *Groundwork* which talks of the necessity of acting under the Idea of freedom (Ak 4:448n), and the Second *Critique*'s account of the Fact of Reason (Ak 5:31). Fichte is consequently regarded (depending on one's reading) either as integrating the edifices of theoretical and practical reason with one another, or as subsuming Kant's transcendental idealism under his practical philosophy: either Fichte begins with the I "as such" and advances to its theoretical and practical differentiation, or he begins with the I of practical reason and extrapolates its theoretical counterpart.

This account agrees with Fichte's own claim that the *Wissenschaftslehre* provides a unitary solution to problems in Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy which threaten to leave Kant's insights indefensible in the face of its many forcible critics, and which must be solved either jointly and interdependently, or not at all. My aim in this chapter is not to contest but to enrich this picture, by showing what is gained by factoring in Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* as no less formative for the development of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. The issue has both historical and systematic aspects. My approach will comprise an examination of Fichte's earliest writings, followed by a broader account of how the *CJ* shapes and gives definition to Fichte's philosophical project. What I will chiefly try to bring out is the extent to which the *Wissenschaftslehre*, in the 1794–95 *SK*

and its later presentations, pursues a philosophical end which, on Fichte's understanding, Kant had set himself in the Third Critique but failed to realize.

### **1. Aims of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790)**

At the end of the Introduction to the Third Critique, Kant defines a task which, he invites us to think, his previous works in Critical philosophy have not fulfilled, concerning the unification of the domains of Freedom and Nature, between which there lies "a great chasm," *eine unübersehbare Kluft* (Ak 5:195). Completing the task will involve, as Kant presents it, no revision of the First Critique's epistemology and metaphysics, nor of the Second Critique's analysis of morality and deduction of the moral law; nor will it require revisiting the solution to the problem of the compatibility of Freedom and Nature given in the Third Antinomy.

The need for further work is not immediately obvious, but as Kant explains it in the Introduction to the Third Critique – an exceptionally intricate piece, pitched at a high synoptic level – it centres on the extent to which his theoretical and practical philosophy can be said thus far to jointly form a systematic whole. In some respect, Kant grants, this is something that remains to be established. What it amounts to is best easily understood in retrospect, once we have seen how Kant attempts to execute his newly defined task.

What affords Kant opportunity for his new undertaking are two determinate species of judgment not yet treated in Critical philosophy, each of which requires a critique of its own: aesthetic judgments (of beauty and sublimity, in nature and fine art), and teleological judgments (of natural organisms, in both ordinary thinking and the life sciences). In these regards, the Third Critique comprises a supplement, extending the range of Critical philosophy and thereby fortifying the case for it. The contribution of Kant's new critiques

of aesthetic and teleological judgment to the overarching purpose of the work, however, lies in the way that each is shown to combine, in its own distinctive way, elements from the two domains of Freedom and Nature: aesthetic experience and organic nature, on Kant's analysis, interlace Freedom and Nature in ways that have no analogues in empirical cognition of mechanical nature, or in moral and other practical judgment. What does undergo revision in the Third Critique is the claim, sketched in the First Critique and treated at length in the Second, that the theological postulates of God and personal immortality are sufficient to unify Freedom and Nature with respect to their competing claims on our practical reason. The Third Critique does not revoke their necessity as a condition for securing the unity of virtue and happiness which constitutes for us the Highest Good, but it does impose a further condition, namely, that we must have positive grounds, firmer than those offered by Kant, for believing that Nature will cooperate with our moral strivings.

In relation to Fichte, the most important points concerning Kant's execution of his project in the Third Critique may be summarized as follows. Kant now isolates the power of judgment, in abstraction from its specifically theoretical and practical forms, as a topic for investigation, and draws a fundamental distinction between its two fundamental species, called determinative and reflective. The former subsumes intuitions (of particulars) under given concepts (universals), while the latter seeks concepts for given intuitions. Kant asks what principle might belong to the power of judgment itself, and answers that it is the principle of the *purposiveness of nature for our power of judgment* (hereafter, PNJ). This principle, though presupposed for all judgment, is most clearly manifest in the two spheres where the reflective dimension of judgment is to the fore, namely the aesthetic and the teleological, for these are contexts in which experience presents us with particulars that strike us as too rich in their significance to be encapsulated

under the principles of the understanding. Aesthetic judgment, or more precisely the sub-form of *reflective* aesthetic judgment that constitutes the judgment that an object is beautiful, evidences PNJ in *feeling* – an element in our cognitive life which, like judgment itself, has hitherto not received independent treatment, but which Kant now identifies as a power of its own, and which he specifies narrowly as a capacity for feeling either pleasure or displeasure. The connection of PNJ with pleasure in the beautiful is established *via* Kant’s innovative thesis that satisfaction in the beautiful consists in the consciousness of an object’s mere *formal purposiveness*.

Teleological judgments of particular objects, living beings, as “natural ends” (*Naturzwecke*), in which the relation of the parts to the whole is reciprocal and cannot be reduced to relations of mechanism, manifest PNJ in a different form, which is conceptual and objective rather than intuitive and subjective: natural organisms are such that their constitution can be grasped, Kant maintains, only on the model of a rational agent’s active realization of a concept of an end in the production of an object. That is to say, organisms must be treated as instances of purposiveness, even though, Kant labours to emphasize, we are not to take them as theoretical *evidence* for the existence of a Divine Author.

Having shown how the concept of purposiveness gets its initial purchase on Nature in the contexts of aesthetics and teleology, Kant conjoins this new thesis with the argument he had used earlier to support his moral theology – his proof of the necessity of postulating God and immortality as conditions of the Highest Good – and extrapolates the notion that Nature can be seen under the aspect of a “moral teleology”: which is to say that the natural world can and must be regarded as receptive to our endeavours to realize our moral ends, in some empirically indefinite yet practically significant sense.

One final element, which has no neat linear place in Kant’s argument but arguably represents the high point of the Third Critique as a whole, is of supreme importance for

Fichte. In the course of attempting to show the compatibility of teleological with mechanical judgments of Nature, Kant introduces in §§76–77 (*Ak* 5:401-410) – passages of vital importance for Schelling and Hegel as well as Fichte – the concept of an “intuitive intellect”: a mode of cognition, by implication attributable to God alone, in which cognition of the Whole necessarily precedes cognition of individual parts, and for which there is no distinction of the actual from the possible, hence, no distinction of Is from Ought.

## **2. Fichte’s first Kantian project: getting to grips with the *Critique of Judgment* (1790–91)**

Fichte’s letters from 1790, in which he describes his conversion to Kant’s philosophy, make clear that it is above all the moral part of Kant’s philosophy that has effected a revolution in his way of thinking (*EPW* 357 and 360 [*GA* III/1, no.63 and no.70a]).<sup>1</sup>

Evidence of its decisiveness is provided by comparison of Fichte’s correspondence in the autumn of 1790 with the brief summation of his theological views that he had composed earlier that summer. In these “Einige Aphorismen über Religion und Deismus. Fragment” (“Aphorisms on Religion and Deism: A Fragment”) Fichte had asserted that unrestricted necessitarianism is unavoidable, a conviction he had held for several years,<sup>2</sup> and claims that the best possible case to be made for human freedom is the one to be found in the argument for the Thesis given in Kant’s Third Antinomy, but that this at most explicates the concept of freedom in the weak sense of showing it to be *coherent*, while falling short of *proving* it to be an actual human attribute. No such claim, Fichte argues, can possibly be derived from the first principles of human knowledge (*ARD*, *GA* II/1:289–290 Anm.). However, in a letter to Weißhuhn from August/September 1790, having

completed his education in Kantianism, these reservations have been eliminated: “Things have been proven to me which I thought never could be proven – for example, the concept of absolute freedom, the concept of duty, etc.” (*EPW* 357 [*GA* III/1, no.63]). Fichte had therefore, within an extraordinarily short timespan utterly changed his view of what comprises the first principles of human knowledge (and presumably also of what counts as philosophical proof).

In the same letter, the Third Critique is hailed as no less convincing than Kant’s other Critiques, and Fichte shortly thereafter selected it as the topic of what was intended to comprise his first philosophical publication, a relatively unambitious elucidation and defence of the Third Critique on the model of a recently published guidebook to the *CPR* which Fichte had found impressive.<sup>3</sup> The limited (surviving) portion that Fichte completed – *Versuch eines erklärenden Auszugs aus Kants Kritik der Urteilskraft (Attempt at an Elucidation of Part of Kant’s Critique of Judgment)* (1790–91) [*VKdU*, *GA* II/1:324-373] – covers only the Introduction and the Analytic of the Beautiful, and reads as a largely faithful summary exposition of Kant’s text, giving little sign of the intense difficulties that Fichte had in fact encountered in his engagement with the work, which he describes in later letters to Weißhuhn as obscure and at points seemingly contradictory (*GA* III/1, no.65 and no.69). Unsurprisingly, Fichte complains in particular of the Introduction as posing difficulties of understanding and as requiring distillation. Though Fichte’s initial intention for the book had been modest, he begins to talk of finding another route to Kant’s results, and of offering an alternative (albeit not necessarily superior) perspective on the same ideas, and of a methodological reorganization which would disclose the wholeness at which Kant had aimed in the *CJ*. Having devoted nearly six months to the project, but failed to secure a publisher, Fichte effectively abandoned it in April 1791.<sup>4</sup>

The sources of Fichte's frustration with the *CJ*, and his notion of what might be needed to resolve them, can be extrapolated from the points in his treatment of the *CJ*'s Introduction where – though he does not signal any departure from Kant – he either nudges Kant's ideas in certain directions or amplifies Kant's reasoning.

Fichte reaffirms Kant's claim that there is a gulf between Freedom and Nature, which it is the task of the Third Critique to traverse, but with an important change of emphasis. Making clear something that, if intended in any robust sense, Kant would have rejected, Fichte asserts that the transition from the mode of thinking appropriate to the domain of Freedom to that of Nature can be made intelligible *only if* we possess a *contentful concept* of the *unitary ground* of both domains, and that our concept of this “*Vereinigungspunct*” (point of unification) must be *neither theoretical nor practical* (*VKdU*, *GA* II/1:329-330 and 345-346). We can arrive at this concept only through the principle of reflective judgment, which, equipped with the concept of purpose, is appropriately intermediate between the two domains, and which allows us to postulate a grounding of Nature in Freedom (as its *Grund* rather than *Ursache*), which will allow us to regard the laws of nature as purposive for the final end of Freedom, reassuring practical reason that our moral self-determination will have effects in the sensible world (*VKdU*, *GA* II/1:345-346).

The crux concerns what Fichte takes to support the idea that Nature at its base is susceptible to being brought into agreement with the legislation of Freedom. Fichte attempts to meet this challenge by showing that PNJ is as much of a genuinely transcendental principle as those which the understanding legislates to mechanical nature. Taking the argument right back to the Transcendental Deduction of the First Critique, Fichte argues that the primary elements of our cognition are atomic, i.e. without any internal or strictly given relation to one another, but that their interrelation is required for

the unity of self-consciousness, and that this interrelation requires that their content exhibit lawfulness, i.e., systematicity (*VKdU*, *GA* II/1:335-337). Nature's purposivity is therefore a condition for the "I think": without it, the *Kluft* that Kant describes as separating Freedom from Nature would reappear *between each of our representations*. What distinguishes PNJ as a transcendental condition from the principles of the understanding, is therefore only the relative *indirectness* of the route by which it brings what is given to us *a posteriori* into agreement with what is required *a priori*. The strategy of grounding the unity of Freedom and Nature on the fundamental unity of the I itself, rather than reducing it to relations among the powers and principles of the subject, anticipates of course the *Wissenschaftslehre*.

### **3. Fichte's second Kantian project: Freedom and Nature in the *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* (1792–93)**

Fichte's *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* (*ACR*) (1792; 2nd edn. 1793), ostensibly concerned with a theological topic, concentrates intensively on the problem of Freedom and Nature, which Fichte considers more acute than Kant has realized, and gives him opportunity to develop the ideas he had begun to form in his study of the Third Critique.

If Fichte is right, then even if the *CJ* contains what is needed to solve the problem as Kant chooses to conceive it, it does not solve the deeper problem to which it nevertheless points. This helps to explain Fichte's selection of revelation as a topic for his first published exercise in Kantian philosophy, and also the somewhat surprising upshot of what presents itself as an arch-Kantian work: namely that religion – understood in Fichte's particular way – is of greater importance than Kant had supposed. What Fichte believes can be salvaged from Christian religion with respect to its true *meaning*, rather than its



doctrines, goes beyond what Kant himself, in his forthcoming *Religion* book, will shortly claim.

The crucial point lies in moral motivation.<sup>5</sup> Without saying as much, Fichte implies that Kant's reconciliation of the competing demands of the moral law and our need for happiness is inadequate. The antinomy of practical reason in Fichte's amplified version takes the following form: The moral law accords a *right* to all that is *not forbidden*. Thus if the law is silent regarding a certain drive or impulse (*Trieb*) or what Kant calls inclination (*Neigung*), then it is implicitly *justified*: "To everything that is *not wrong*, *I have a right*" (ACR 24 [GA I/1:150]). The justification that reason accords inclination can be expected to be incorporated *within* it: though the law's own determination is "negative" and not "positive," since it does no more than give permission, it thereby *conditions* the inclination, in such a way that the moral law gives rise to "lawfulness of impulse." But of course the demands of the moral law may conflict with inclination; duty may require the sacrifice of one's life. The problem in such cases is not that natural drives clash with reason's directives, but that reason's law threatens to contradict *itself*: having granted a right to life and happiness (in so far as inclination is *worthy* of happiness, i.e. has allowed itself to be conditioned by the law), reason cannot without inconsistency revoke it.

Transcendental idealism offers itself as a first attempt at a solution: if the objects of sensuous inclination are appearances, not things in themselves, then there is a sense in which the loss involved in moral sacrifice is not ultimately real. Fichte affirms accordingly that transcendental idealism is "just as surely a postulate of practical reason as a theorem of theoretical reason" (ACR 25 [GA I/1:150]). However, though necessary, transcendental idealism is not sufficient to remove the contradiction, for, Fichte reminds us, the law justifies the inclination "as such," i.e., precisely *as* appearance: "His impulse to life, justified by the law, demands back the right as appearance, hence in time" (ACR 26 [GA

I/1:151]). We now see that what is required for a full solution is something further, and which belongs squarely within the orbit of the *CJ*:

The lawfulness of impulse, then, requires the complete congruency of the fortunes of a rational being with his moral behaviour [..., i.e.] that that appearance always ensue which would have had to ensue if the impulse had been determined legitimately by the moral law and had been legislative for the world of appearances. (ACR 26-27 [GA I/1:152])

This is, Fichte declares, “the first postulate of practical reason applying to sensuous beings” (ACR 26 [GA I/1:152]) and it resolves what he describes as a hitherto unnoticed and unresolved problem in Kantian philosophy, concerning “how it is possible to relate the moral law, which in itself is applicable only to the form of will of moral beings as such, to appearances in the world of sense” (ACR 27 [GA I/1:152]). Fichte’s differences from Kant, it is now clear, go deep: Fichte has claimed that the *moral form of nature* is a primary assumption for our reason as a whole; it constitutes an integral part of the solution to the Third Antinomy, and it cannot be merely annexed late in the day in the form of a merely regulative moral teleology. What was merely hinted at in the *Versuch CJ* has thus received more definite formulation.

Modifying the order followed by Kant, the next step of Fichte’s argument yields theology, or rather, for Fichte emphasizes the distinction, *religion*, which connects belief directly with the will: in consequence of having accorded inclination a right to satisfaction, reason is also committed to the “assertion,” *Behauptung*, of this right, meaning that morality must “not only command” but must also “prevail” in Nature (ACR 29 [GA I/1:21]). The enforcing of this right – in which “moral necessity and absolute physical

freedom are united” – can only be the effect of a self-active moral being. Hence, “there *is* a God” (*ACR* 29 [*GA I/1:21*]).

One crucial modification to Kant that Fichte makes in completing the final step of this argument reflects his internalization of the *CJ* (*ACR* 32-38 [*GA I/1:23-30*]). Kant’s exposition of his moral theology in the *CJ* tends to blur, as commentators have noted, two considerations which Fichte neatly separates out. One concerns what is required by my egocentric commitment to fulfilling my duty, given the impossibility of silencing the voice of Nature within me. Another concerns the moral fate of the world at large. Fichte explicates the latter – my concern that, aside from what *I* do and suffer, Right should prevail *in general* – by reintroducing, but on new grounds, Kant’s notion of a moral-teleological world-view:<sup>6</sup> an apprehension of the world which of courses presupposes an original volitional commitment to the moral law, since a being lacking moral motivation would be unable to see the world under the aspect of right or wrong, but which is at the same time disengaged from my will; necessarily so, since the moral condition of the world does not depend on my actions alone.

In terms of its systematic place, this moral-teleological world-vision intermediates between aesthetic satisfaction and actual agency, and on Fichte’s account it is crucial for the deduction of God: the concrete requirements of the moral law “in a nature like ours” would fail to engage our will, if we had no assurance that the moral law has *universal* efficacy, i.e., efficacy with respect not merely to the “*right in us*” but also to “*the right outside us*” (*ACR* 35 [*GA I/1:27*]). Though Nature is not, and can never become, *intrinsically* moral, the rule of morality must nonetheless be “universally effective for” it (*ACR* 37 [*GA I/1:28*]).

By way of justification for what might seem a hyperbolic estimate of what morality requires, Fichte argues that moral requirements will otherwise appear chimerical,

since theoretical reason, having no reason to think moral concepts of possible relevance to Nature, will judge that it is irrational to seek to “make possible something that is impossible” (*ACR* 36 [*GA* I/1:27]). The resulting conflict of practical and theoretical reason would leave moral motivation dependent on psychological disposition, i.e., a contingent matter of which of the two faculties, reason and inclination, happens to predominate in one’s psyche.

We see that Fichte has raised the stakes, with the result that the project of unifying Freedom and Nature needs to be extended further than it had been in *CJ*. If theoretical and practical reason are not to contradict one another, and if what Kant calls “the sole fact of pure reason” (*Ak* 5:31) is not to be allowed to shrink to a mere *psychological* fact, destroying the moral law,<sup>7</sup> then Nature must have moral form in a stronger sense than Kant affirms.<sup>8</sup> What stands in question is how things “*ought to be*,” as distinct from what we ought to *do* (*ACR* 33 [*GA* I/1:24]), and in so far as *being* is at issue, theoretical reason is implicated. Transcendental idealism must not be compromised, yet there must be more to Nature – in its background or *Grund*, if not at its phenomenal surface – than the Aesthetic and Analytic of the *CPR* have provided for. The net effect (to some degree already intimated by Fichte’s claim that it is possible to ground transcendental idealism in practical reason) is to impose on theoretical reason demands which it is obliged to accommodate, *contra* Kant, who had supposed that the results of theoretical philosophy can be held constant throughout the subsequent exposition of practical philosophy. Thus, although Fichte’s explicit terms of reference in *ACR* stick to a bipartite division of philosophy into the practical and theoretical, Fichte is veering towards a philosophical system with the triadic shape projected in outline, but not filled out, in the *CJ*.

The concept of revelation which *ACR* aims to validate, we see, has two aspects. One concerns the official topic of the work: the miracles and suchlike of Scripture, where

the supersensible is conceived as intervening in the sensible world in the shape of an external happening cognized *a posteriori*. The other concerns an *a priori* unity of Freedom and Nature. The conception of God as grounding the moral law by way of command, which revealed religion associates with the miraculous, presupposes what Fichte calls an “alienation of what is ours [eine Entäusserung des unserigen]” (ACR 41, translation modified [GA I/1:33]). This transposition and externalization of our subjectivity into something outside us, Fichte argues, is rationally defensible, but only in indirect and conditional respects:<sup>9</sup> what is primary, and philosophically fundamental, is instead the *a priori* form of revelation. The true meaning and warrant of religion consists therefore in consciousness of the *necessary unity of Freedom and Nature*.<sup>10</sup> (Note that, in so far as this implies that religion has no definite doctrinal content or necessary institutional reality, the *Atheismusstreit* is already in the making.)

An orthodox Kant might fairly object that the stronger version of Kantianism that Fichte has indicated he considers necessary is, thus far, merely programmatic. What motivates and enables Fichte to take the huge, further step involved in constructing the *Wissenschaftslehre* is his engagement with the deep issues raised by Maimon and Schulze regarding Kant’s theoretical philosophy and Reinhold’s *Elementarphilosophie* (Philosophy of the Elements). Here too the *CJ* conditions Fichte’s perception of the task he faces: Fichte regards the *CJ* as having raised the measure of philosophical adequacy from the level at which it stood in the earlier *Critiques*, heightening the significance of the problems of Kant’s theoretical philosophy. A correspondingly large-scale resolution is demanded: what is required to rescue the *CPR* from its critics converges on what is required by Kant’s practical reason.<sup>11</sup> Thus when Fichte in his *Eigne Meditationen über ElementarPhilosophie* (*Private-My Own Meditations on the Philosophy of the Elements*) (1793–94) examines Reinhold’s system – which, significantly, had been developed before the Third Critique

appeared – we see him drawn to the idea that philosophical systematicity must be triadic in the sense of resting on a *Vereinigungspunct* which is neither merely theoretical nor merely practical.<sup>12</sup>

#### 4. Freedom and Nature in *The Science of Knowledge* (1794–95)

In the *ACR* Fichte formulates his concept of the ground of the unity of the domains of Freedom and Nature BY WAY reflection on religion.<sup>13</sup> In the *The Science of Knowledge*, it is reconceived in terms of the absolute *Ich*. Without embarking on an exposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, some general observations can be made concerning the respects in which it is shaped by the *CJ* – as Fichte signals in his programmatic prospectus for its first presentation, *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre*, published in May 1794:

The author remains convinced that no human understanding can advance further than that boundary on which Kant, especially in the *Critique of Judgment*, stood, and which he declared to be the final boundary of finite knowing – but without ever telling us specifically where it lies [die er uns aber nie bestimmt]. (*EPW* 95 [*GA* I/2:110])

We may start with Kant’s notion that certain principles are fit for only “regulative” or “reflective” use, by which he signals a suspension of ontological commitment. The strategy of reconstruing judgments which are naturally taken as affirming the reality of the objects to which they are directed, as functions of the subject’s mode of cognition, or of the internal relations of its components, is employed initially in the First Critique’s treatment of *Vernunft*, but it returns, in a stronger form, in the Introduction to the *CJ* when it is

reaffirmed that the power of judgment's own principle, PNJ, is connected first and foremost with the power of *feeling*, a species of representation which lacks objective purport and rests on a self-relation.

The result is to introduce a new and stronger sense in which human cognition is subjective: objects of cognition are transcendently ideal not only in the sense of being given in space and time, with all that that implies regarding the categories and principles of possible experience, but also in the *further* sense that *even* the constitutive employment of concepts of the understanding stands under the more basic condition that Nature is assumed to be purposive for our cognition – a principle which is however *itself* merely reflective, i.e., validated exclusively by the needs and interest of our power of judgment. This is a deeper Copernicanism than that which Kant had propounded in the (B-)Preface to the *CPR*, where his claim was only that *knowable* objects must conform to our cognition (*Ak* 3:xvi): the stronger claim of the *CJ* is that this very relation – the reference of knowable objects to our mode of cognition – must be understood in terms of our mode of cognition's *relation to itself*.

The *Wissenschaftslehre* can be understood as extending this strategy to the limit and making its implications explicit – to a point where, if Fichte is right, transcendental idealism throws off its subjectivism and abandons Kant's rhetoric of epistemological modesty, at the same time disposing of the idea that the domain of Freedom is in any way ontologically deficient in relation to that of Nature: if *all* relations to objects *simpliciter* are understood as self-relations in the way proposed in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, then the Copernican shift to subjectivity involves none of the recessing from reality that Kant supposes it to require. It follows in addition – if self-relations are primary and determine comprehensively what it is for us to be *related* to objects, and what it is for objects as such

to themselves have *being* – that there can be no fundamental sense in which the reality of the practical objects which populate the domain of Freedom is inferior to those of Nature.

This development can be made more definite if we attend to the ways in which Fichte recasts the two key concepts employed in the Introduction of the *CJ*, reflective judgment and purposiveness.

When judgment is exercised in its reflective capacity, following Kant's definition, we find ourselves presented with objects in intuition for which we seek concepts, while the principle of reflective judgment assures us that relevant concepts can be found, whereby it is implied – though not asserted as such, since it does not belong to the actual *content* of the principle – that *there is a ground* for this epistemological necessity (if not, then the principle would reduce to a mere reassertion of epistemological need). In the Introduction to the *CJ*, the ground itself remains completely indeterminate: our only routes of approach to it are *via* the idea of Nature as a law-governed systematic totality, and *via* whatever concept we may be able to form of the ground that makes possible a transition in our mode of thinking from the domain of Freedom to that of Nature.

Connectedly, with regard to the concept of purpose too Kant draws a limit to what can be done with it. The fully general concept of purpose is that of an idea, concept, or representation's causing the existence of an object which it subsumes, or in which it is realized. Deployment of this concept in the Third Critique leaves us in the following position. On the one hand we know the morally good will (or humanity *qua* the moral law) to be the only thing that we can represent as an end in itself. On the other hand we are also, on Kant's account, required to employ the concept of purpose without moral reference, as we do in our conceptualization of natural organisms, and in reflective judgment's overarching PNJ. To be sure, we can think of the ultimate end of our use of theoretical reason as lying in practical reason, and to that extent the morally Good can serve as a final



unification point for a system of purposes; but in saying this we continue to presuppose a non-moral concept of purpose, in so far as systematicity has been invoked as the justification for according the morally Good this privileged role. It is clear that the concept of purpose cannot be identified with that of the morally Good: our original situation of confronting a *Kluft* between Freedom and Nature that needs to be straddled is not purposive, and the existence of this *Kluft* is a precondition of the morally Good, so the morally Good cannot make it purposive. It follows that whatever understanding we might achieve of how the growth of natural scientific knowledge, the cultivation of fine art and so on, contribute to the moral Good, we will never be able to conceive the original *differentiation* of our cognitive powers – the division of their domains – as purposive. The concept of purpose that we employ when we say that theoretical reason exists “for the sake of” our practical vocation cannot therefore be resolved fully into moral concepts. (The ultimate explanation of the impossibility of a full systematic unification of the concepts of purpose and the morally good is that moral goodness, on Kant’s account, cannot be identified with unity or wholeness; this distinction was a condition for his emancipation of morality from rationalist perfectionism.)

For the reasons just given, no general system of purposes, encompassing both theoretical and practical reason, is thinkable in Kant’s terms: the concept of an unconditioned totality of ends is incoherent. This does not, however, make Kant’s system inconsistent, nor does it undermine Kant’s claim to have united the domains of Freedom and Nature, to the qualified extent that Kant thinks required. It does mean, however, that the *CJ* leaves us with two distinct and disjointed end-points and a corresponding philosophical double vision: on the one hand, we know that the good will is the only thing we can represent as an end in itself, and on the other, that our rational powers in their entirety operate under a concept, that of purpose, which must be taken as given and which

it cannot in principle take *itself* to realize; whatever unity our cognitive faculty may achieve by *using* the concept of purpose, it cannot grasp itself as *being* its own purpose.

The points just indicated, at which Kant sets a limit to systematic unification, are eliminated or sublimated in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, in a way which removes the double vision (and restores something of rationalist perfectionism). The role that Kant had assigned to the principle of reflective judgment is overtaken in the *Wissenschaftslehre*'s derivation of Nature from its three fundamental principles, while the transition from the unsolved contradictions of the Theoretical Part of the 1794–95 *SK* to the Practical Part allows the purposiveness of Nature for our cognition to be understood in terms of the purposiveness *of the subject for herself*. The absorption of object-relations *überhaupt* into a self-relation makes possible a contemporaneous deduction of Nature and of Freedom in the form of the moral law. And this self-relation has a single, final characterization: its *concept* is simply that of the *pure I*, whose *principle* is “*I am absolutely, because I am [Ich bin schlechthin, weil ich bin]*” (*SK* 99 [GA I/2:260]). It can accordingly be understood why, in his reading of the *CJ*, the concept of formal purposiveness should have struck Fichte as of special importance: the necessary formal purposiveness of nature which Fichte had deduced in *VKdU* becomes *Ichheit* in the *Wissenschaftslehre*.

Fichte's theory of the *I* is as much a development of Kant's model of the aesthetic subject of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment, as it is of the self-legislating subject of the Second Critique. Kant's practical self-relation expresses an opposition between the self as it is, and the self as it ought to be, which is sublated in Kant's account of the experience of beauty as a condition in which the object- and self-directed sensible and intellectual faculties are in harmony: the internal harmony itself, and the subject's cognition thereof, sustain one another. This model of the aesthetic subject reappears at two different points in the *Wissenschaftslehre*: in the concept of the absolute *Ich*, whose self-relation, if brought to

full consummation, would place it beyond the sphere of the practical (it would be *neither* theoretical *nor* practical); and in the later Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*'s theory of the self as a unity of the ethical drive and *Naturtrieb*.

The *Wissenschaftslehre* can also be understood as carrying over the intuitive intellect of §§76–77 of the *CJ*. We saw that in the *VKdU* Fichte made the formal purposiveness of Nature a condition for the “I think.” And in this context he also affirmed that an intuitive intellect must be presupposed: since our own understanding is not what gives Nature its laws, which can only be discovered *a posteriori*, it must be assumed that these have already been given by another *Verstand*; so the principle of the reflective power of judgment requires us to judge the manifold of empirical perception as if it arose in accordance with certain laws which have been given with the intention of our making out of them a connected whole in experience (*VKdU*, *GA* II/1:333). And if the formal purposiveness is necessary and sufficient for us to avoid the *Kluft* which would otherwise destroy the *Ich*, and if the intuitive intellect is a condition for this formal purposiveness, then the intuitive intellect is a condition for *Ichheit*.

The next question concerns the exact way in which *Ichheit* is related to the intuitive intellect. They cannot be simply identified, for although the *Ich* may take over the dimension of the intuitive intellect described in §77 – that of providing a prior Whole out of which parts are carved (*Ak* 5:407) – it does not exhibit the dimension described in §76 – the sublation of the distinctions of the actual from the possible, and hence of Is from Ought (*Ak* 5:402–403): since the 1794–95 *SK* concludes with the knowledge that all thought and volition stand under an overarching *Sollen*, Fichte upholds the final separateness of Is and Ought. At the same time, however, Fichte has reinterpreted this distinction: what may be said, if we allow ourselves to momentarily employ Spinozistic vocabulary to elucidate Fichte, is that the *Ich* grasps the intuitive intellect under the *attribute* of Ought, or

alternatively, that the I is the intuitive intellect *qua* Oughtness-to-Be, *Seinsollen*;<sup>14</sup> in a manner characteristic of Fichte's metacritically self-conscious raising of Kantianism to a higher power, a distinction that Kant treats as subordinate – Kant regards the distinction of Ought from Is as merely derived from our cognitive limitation – has been shifted up a level.

In conclusion, what the 1794–95 *SK* has achieved in relation to the *CJ* may be understood as follows. Kant asks for “a concept of a ground of the unity” of Freedom and Nature, but leaves it undecided which concept in the Third Critique is supposed to play this role. Several concepts of the supersensible are employed: in the First Introduction, a supersensible ground of the lawfulness of Nature is mentioned (*Ak* 20:218); later the sublime is said to “lead the concept of nature to a supersensible substratum (which grounds both it and at the same time our faculty for thinking)” (*Ak* 5:255); in the Solution to the Dialectic of Aesthetic Judgment (*Ak* 5:340-342), Kant posits a relation between the supersensible ground of Nature and that of the moral human subject; and in the Solution to the Dialectic of Teleological Judgment, he posits a supersensible ground of the unity of mechanism and teleology in Nature (*Ak* 5:412-415). But none of these can *be* the concept which the Introduction asks for. It seems therefore that we have, on Kant's account, no *single* concept of *the* supersensible: the most that can be said regarding the relations of Kant's several supersensibles is that we are *permitted* to identify them, an identification for which, however, we have no positive contentful concept. To the extent that any concept of a ground of unity is supplied in the Third Critique, it is that of the purposivity of nature for all our cognitive powers. This concept has various correlates – our several ideas of the different supersensibles, and of the intuitive intellect, which belong to a single architectonic – but the concept itself adds little to the simple operation of the power of judgment: “taking nature to be purposive” appears to be only notionally distinct from

simply engaging in the activity of judging. Kant may have amplified in the Third Critique our understanding of the different forms that judgement may take, but he cannot be said to have supplied insight into the *ground* of judgment as such. In this light, Kant's solution to what at the outset seemed to set a task of considerable magnitude, seems vanishingly thin.

Returning now to Fichte, we can see immediately how substantial is the achievement of the *SK*. The *Wissenschaftslehre* unifies at a stroke the Kantian manifold of supersensibles and absorbs Kant's concepts of reflective judgment and purposivity: the concept of a ground of unity we have been seeking is the concept of the pure *Ich*, in which *Zweckmäßigkeit* is realized,

### **5. Freedom and Nature in the later Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* (1796–99)**

The later Jena presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre* does not conform to the same pattern as the 1794–95 *SK*, but works forwards from the original construction of the concept of the I – *via* the ideas of self-reverting activity, self-determination, drive, feeling, and so on – to the conception of oneself as an embodied practically striving being located in space, subject to an “ought” and summoned to freedom. The final upshot – the “complete synthesis” with which the task of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is “fully accomplished” – reads as a direct answer to the question which Kant had posed in the Introduction of the *CJ*:

Both the rational world and the sensible world interact with themselves; again, they reciprocally interact with each other, and they also appear {to us} to do so. First of all, nature and freedom mesh with each other within articulated bodies. This occurs by means of the freedom of the individual, and this is how freedom as a whole operates within the whole of nature. Conversely, articulated bodies are first

produced by nature; therefore, as judged from the usual viewpoint, nature produces the very possibility of reason and {consequently} intrudes into the realm of rational being. (*FTP* 464 [*GA* IV/2,H:260])

At a much later date, when the *Wissenschaftslehre* had entered yet another phase of development, Fichte looked back and gave his final assessment of the *CJ*:

The way his decisive and only truly meaningful works, the three critiques, come before us, Kant has made three starts. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, his absolute (x) is *sensible experience* [... In the *CPrR*] we get the second absolute, a moral world = z. Still, not all the phenomena that are undeniably present in self-observation have been accounted for; there still remains the notions of the beautiful, the sublime, and the purposive, which are evidently neither theoretical cognitions nor moral concepts. Further, and more significantly, with the recent introduction of the moral world as the one world in itself, the empirical world is lost, as revenge for the fact that the latter had initially excluded the moral world. And so the *Critique of Judgment* appears, and in its Introduction, the most important part of this very important book, we find the confession that the sensible and supersensible worlds must come together in a common but wholly unknown root, which would be the third absolute = y. I say a *third* absolute, separate from the other two and self-sufficient, despite the fact that it is supposed to be the *connection* of both other terms; and I do not thereby treat Kant unjustly. Because if this y is inscrutable, then while it may indeed always contain the connection, I at least can neither comprehend it as such, nor collaterally conceive the two terms as originating from it. If I am to grasp it, I must grasp it immediately as absolute, and I

remain trapped forever, now as before, in the (for me and my understanding) three absolutes. Therefore, with this final decisive addition to his system, Kant did not in any way improve that which we owe to him, he only generously admitted and disclosed it himself. (SK<sub>1804</sub> 31-32 [GA II/8:27,30-32])

Fichte's verdict, though harsh in tone, simply spells out a view that, we have seen, he had formed in his very first encounter with the *CJ*, confirming the key role it had played in leading Fichte to the elevated point he later took himself to occupy.

Of the several topics in Fichte's Jena writings which deserve discussion on account of the way in which they transform relations of Freedom and Nature which Kant had allowed to remain contingent into relations of necessary harmony – Fichte's aesthetics, concept of *Naturtrieb*, and theory of natural teleology<sup>15</sup> – I will conclude with some remarks on a topic whose relation to the *CJ* has received little attention, namely Fichte's theory of intersubjectivity.

In Kant's practical philosophy, intersubjectivity is subordinated to a self-relation: my relation to others is conceived under the aspect of my self-legislation. The theme comes into its own, however, in the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment, where intersubjective claim-making – placing demand on others – is identified as what most fundamentally distinguishes taste from pleasure in the merely agreeable. In the aesthetic sphere we relate to one another first and foremost as sharing a *sensus communis* (§40, *Ak* 5:293-296): it is part of the sense of a judgment of taste that it is directed, not at the object judged beautiful (in praising the rose, we do not *address* it), and not originally at oneself (aesthetic judgment is not a case of self-determining or self-knowing), but towards other human beings. This notion is incorporated in Kant's thesis that it is precisely recognition of the *universal communicability* of the feeling of pleasure in the beautiful that allows the

judgement of taste to be considered ~~an instance of~~ universally valid, in spite of its reflective merely aesthetic judgment basis.

This conception of a judgment of taste becomes, in Fichte's ground-breaking treatment of intersubjectivity in *FNR* (1796–97), the primitive *Aufforderung* that at once facilitates consciousness of myself as an effective agent, and cognition of the existence of others, a communicative act which, though deriving from freedom and reason, must necessarily realize itself in natural form. The general notion of acting on others in a way that renders me present to their consciousness, yet has no coercive quality and instead elicits their own actualization of their own freedom, had in point of fact been employed by Fichte prior to his encounter with Kant's philosophy,<sup>16</sup> but there can be no doubt that, before it appeared fully formed in the *FNR*, Kant's *Analytic of Pure Judgments of Taste* assisted Fichte in giving it theoretical articulation. Fichte transforms Kant's judgment of taste in the following way: in the case of a judgment of the beauty of an object, my vision remain fixed on the rose or whatever, and the other-directedness of my judgment shows itself obliquely, as a horizontal intentionality; in the case of Fichte's *Aufforderung*, by contrast, I turn and face squarely the other who summons me. Yet in both cases one agent acts on another in a way that seeks to *freely set them in free harmony with themselves* (*FNR* 31 [*GA* I/3:342]) – i.e., to put them in a condition which presupposes my intervention, and which carries over my own self-relation, but which subtracts nothing from their *Ichheit*, and which is orthogonal to the opposition of I and Not-I.<sup>17</sup> On Fichte's picture, the reciprocal attunement of individuals which Kant postpones to a late stage of human development, when fine art is subject to cultivation, is located right at the beginning, as a transcendental condition of human community and of its establishment of a realm of right, through the medium of which our self-referring pursuit of our moral vocation is directed. Kant's conception of beauty as a relatively frail meeting point of



sense and reason – an adjunct to the project of practical reason which is not underwritten by any strict necessity, whence its character as a “favour [Gunst]” bestowed by Nature (*Ak* 5:380) – gives way in Fichte to a picture which interlocks human subjects as free and natural beings, reciprocally interrelated in a shared natural world, before the activity of explicit practical deliberation has so much as begun.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On Fichte’s early philosophical formation, see the illuminating accounts in La Vopa 2001, Chs. 1-2, and Kühn 2012, Chs. 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> Absorbed from Ulrich and Platner, his philosophical instructors at respectively Jena and Leipzig in the 1780s.

<sup>3</sup> Peuker 1790, which preceded publication of the *CJ*, and which also does not discuss Kant’s practical philosophy.

<sup>4</sup> Concerning the composition history of *VKdU*, see the editorial Vorwort in *GA* II/1:321-324.

<sup>5</sup> The relevant passages comprise Sect. III of §2 and the first half of §3 (*per* the section renumbering in the 2nd edn. of *ACR* in 1793) (*ACR* 24-38 [*GA* I/1:149-153 and 19-30]).

<sup>6</sup> This conception can be thought of as taking up two items in the *CJ*: the intuitive intellect’s cognition of the world as an identity of Is and Ought (*Ak* 5:403-404), and the concept of the beautiful as the sensible *Darstellung* of rational ideas (*Ak* 5:351). The latter also provides Fichte with a prototype for revelation as a sensuous stimulus which determines sense “to let itself be determined by the moral law”: *ACR* 64 [*GA* I/1:47].

<sup>7</sup> Clearly anticipated here in *ACR*, then, is Fichte’s conception of what is at stake in the choice between idealism and dogmatism in the 1797 “[First] Introduction” to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (*IWL* 7-35 [*GA* I/4:186-208]).

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<sup>8</sup> Though Fichte does not amplify the point – and perhaps does not yet see the implication – he is in fact denying that Kant’s claim that “merely practical” yet also “objective” “cognition” of the “reality” of the Ideas of reason which are employed in the postulates suffices for them to play their assigned role (*CJ*, *Ak* 5:175 and 484-485).

<sup>9</sup> The representation of God as giving us moral reason by virtue of his commanding the moral law is in effect reduced by Fichte to our simple direct conformity with the self-given moral law: we respect God (*qua* commander) only *qua* his *own* agreement with that law; God is subject to the principle of autonomy and affirms the moral law for the very *same reason* that we do (*ACR* 42 [*GA* I/1:34]). This is either to eliminate the holy will or to give it a different meaning from that which it has in Kant.

<sup>10</sup> In his *LE*<sub>1812</sub>, returning to the topic of revelation, Fichte puts it in exactly such terms: see *LE*<sub>1812</sub> 150 [*GA* II/13:379]. At this very late stage, Fichte has adopted a new idiom, which allows (the “genuine doctrine of”) revelation to be described as the *original breakthrough* of “the concept” to moral consciousness (*LE*<sub>1812</sub> 156-157 [*GA* II/13:382]); philosophy itself “rests upon the factual ground of a revelation” (*LE*<sub>1812</sub> 169 [*GA* II/13:391]).

<sup>11</sup> An important contributory factor here, requiring a separate discussion, concerns the problems of Kant’s theory of freedom, again made more visible by Reinhold, and on which Fichte had made a start in the “Theory of the Will” which he inserted as §2 of the expanded second edition of *ACR*.

<sup>12</sup> Also noteworthy is the respect in which, in his *Eigne Meditationen über ElementarPhilosophie* (*Private Meditations on the Philosophy of the Elements*) (1793–94), what Fichte identifies as missing from Reinhold’s account of cognition mirrors what, on Fichte’s construal, Kant in *CJ* confesses to be missing from the conjunction of his theoretical and practical philosophies: Reinhold’s *Elementarphilosophie* describes a *relational* unity of subject, representation, and object, but it does not grasp the *supra-*

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relational unity which the relational structure presupposes. Again we find Fichte mapping Kant's problem of the Freedom/Nature *Kluft* and the unity of self-consciousness onto one another. It is worth adding that the two major topics of the *CJ* – aesthetics and teleology – are discussed at length in the notes that followed *EM*, entitled *Practische Philosophie* (1794), where Fichte's focus is no longer on Reinhold: see *PP*, *GA* II/3:197-227 (on aesthetics) and *GA* II/3:244-263 (on teleology).

<sup>13</sup> Note however Fichte's affirmation of forthcoming philosophical innovations in the Preface to the Second Edition (1793), where he introduces a new *category* of philosophical concept not found in Kant, viz., "ideas of reflection," *Reflexions-Ideen*, and carefully modifies a formula employed by Kant in the Introduction to the *CJ* in such a way as to raise the status of *ACR*: whereas Kant spoke of merely *annexing* the newly articulated conceptions of the *CJ* to the theoretical and the practical parts of philosophy, Fichte describes *ACR* as offering not a "separate adjacent structure," *Nebengebäude*, but as "inseparably united with" the whole, *unzertrennlich mit ihm vereiniget* (*ACR* 5 [*GA* I/1:133]); in effect setting it in the position of a mediating term, *Mittelglied*, between Freedom and Nature.

<sup>14</sup> This is exactly the formula that Fichte will later employ and endeavour to explicate in the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*. The task is defined in Lecture 17: see *SK*<sub>1804</sub> 128-133 [*GA* II/8:258-271]).

<sup>15</sup> See *SL* (1795) [*GA* I/6:333-361] on Fichte's aesthetic theory. On *Naturtrieb* and teleology in nature, see *SE* (1798), §§8-12 (*SE* 98-145 [*GA* I/5:102-143]), which employs key elements from the *CJ*, and *FTP* 460-466 [*GA* IV/2,H:256-261].

<sup>16</sup> See *ATJ* (1786[?]) [*GA* II/1:53-98]. It is also in Fichte's *PL* (1791), postdating his exposure to Kant: the Last Supper is a single communicative act of Christ's [*GA* II/1:419-

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432]. A trace is also present in the sublime in *VKdU* [GA II/1:348]: it is what is felt when a natural object's form is taken to be determining us by means of the laws of freedom.

<sup>17</sup> Fichte's modelling of intersubjectivity on the Kantian aesthetic subject is explicit: self and Other are related in “*free reciprocal efficacy* [*freier Wechselwirksamkeit*]”, whereby they constitute “*partes integrantes*” of an “undivided event [einer ganzen Begebenheit]” (*FNR* 33 [GA I/3:344]); our recognition, *Anerkennung*, of the Other instances reflective judgement, the topic of which is “cognition itself [die Erkenntniß selbst]” (*FNR* 35-37 [GA I/3:345-347]), in parallel with the Kantian judgement of taste. Concerning the influence of *CJ* on *FNR*, see Scott Scribner 2006.

<sup>18</sup> For further consideration of Fichte's relation to the *CJ* in general terms, see Farr 2001, Horstmann 1995, 191-208, Roy 2012/13, and Zöllner 2006, 315-334. Pippin 1997, though focussed on Hegel, has interesting bearing on Fichte. On Fichte's aesthetics, and the importance of Kant's aesthetics for Fichte, see Piché 2002, and the essays in Radrizzani and Coves 2014.

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