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INFINITE MIND: MORALITY, SELF-EXPRESSION, AND IMAGINATION IN GERMAN IDEALIST THOUGHT

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List of Abbreviations

Frequently cited works have been identified by the following abbreviations:

Fichte, Johann Gottlieb

GA *J.G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, edited by Eric Fuchs, Reinhard Lauth, Hans Jacobs and Hans Gliwitzky. Stuttgard-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1964-2012.

Hardenberg, Friedrich von (Novalis)

NS *Novalis Schriften: Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, edited by Paul Kluckhohn, Hans-Joachim Mähl, Heinz Ritter, Richard Samuel, Gerhard Schulz. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1960-2006.

Humboldt, Wilhelm von

WB *Werke in fünf Bänden*, edited by Andreas Flitner and Klaus Giel. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2010.

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Preface

This dissertation offers a reappraisal of the work and influence of Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Starting with the publication of Dieter Henrich's groundbreaking essay *Fichte's Original Insight*, interest in Fichte's philosophy has experienced an international renaissance, resulting in a growing number of articles, book chapters, and full-length monographs devoted entirely to investigating the significance of Fichte's writings and the influence he had on his contemporaries.[1] However, I argue that Fichte's most significant contribution has thus far eluded the grasp of his interpreters, a contribution that consists in having identified the basic form according to which mind structures experience. Only when we see the contours of Fichte's entire project are we in a position to assess his influence on the work of his contemporaries. This is demonstrated in studies of the work of Wilhelm von Humboldt and Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis).

The major limitation in the inherited view of Fichte's work is that it has been interpreted as a theory of human consciousness and self-consciousness, rather than as a theory of human experience as it is shaped by consciousness. Fichte himself is partly to blame for this misconstrual, for he advertised his philosophy as a theory whose central message was the so-called self-positing ability of the human mind, something he first formulated in the 1794 *Foundation of the Entire Science of Knowledge* (hereafter: *Foundation*) as the principle that "the self posits originally and absolutely its own being."[2] In his article *Fichte's Original Insight*, Dieter Henrich took this to mean that Fichte is first and foremost a theorist of self-consciousness, the first, and perhaps the last philosopher of his generation to fully

[1]See: Dieter Henrich, "Fichtes ursprüngliche Einsicht," in: *Subjektivität und Metaphysik. Festschrift für Wolfgang Cramer*, ed Dieter Henrich and Hans Wagner (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1966), 188-232. Other notable studies include: Robert Pippin, "Fichte's Contribution," *Philosophical Form*, 19 (1988), 74-96. Frederick Neuhouser, *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1990. Violetta Waibel, *Hölderlin und Fichte: 1794-1800* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000). Eckart Förster, *Die 25 Jahre der Philosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2011).
[2] "Das Ich sezt ursprünglich schlechthin sein eignes Seyn." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 261).

recognize that standard views of self-consciousness as a reflective act of taking oneself as the object of one's thought cannot do justice to the immediacy and certitude with which conscious beings refer to themselves.[3] Subsequent studies, one by Dieter Henrich himself, have helped to expand this view, drawing out other dimensions of Fichte's theory of consciousness such as the role that imagination and longing play in conscious life, the particular way in which consciousness construes objectivity, and finally the essentially inter-subjective structure of consciousness.[4] However, the current state of research leaves open the extent to which Fichte does in fact have a unifying, developed view of the way in which consciousness structures experience and makes experience of the world present to mind.

My central claim is that Fichte's most significant philosophical insight concerns the division of experience into six basic elements, which in turn form a unity as interrelated aspects of how mind structures experience. According to Fichte, the essential structural features of human experience are sensuous *form* and *matter*, mental *activity* and *rest*, and the unifying principles of *efficient causality* and *rational causality*. These six elements are interlocking dimensions of a single law of mind.[5] Within this encompassing view, mind is something insatiable, that, alternating between active and resting states, shapes the sensuous matter of experience into a limitless array of sensuous forms in its unending

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[3] Henrich summarizes the approach of his article as follows: "Fichtes ursprüngliche Einsicht wird als ein Beitrag zur Theorie des Selbstbewußtseins verstand und diskutiert." See: Dieter Henrich, *Fichtes ursprüngliche Einsicht*, 190.

[4] For Fichte's account of imagination and feeling see chapters 14 and 15 of: Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003). A recent account of Fichte's philosophy as a philosophy of objectivity is found in: Martin Wayne, *Idealism and Objectivity: Understanding Fichte's Jena Project*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). For a recent account of Fichte's theory of inter-subjectivity see: J.M. Bernstein, "Recognition and Embodiment (Fichte's Materialism)," in: *German Idealism: Contemporary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2007), 183-205.

[5] The term "law of mind" is inspired by Charles Peirce and a 1892 article he wrote entitled "The Law of Mind." His so-called law of mind bares striking resemblance to Fichte's law of mind in so far as it differentiates between three mental states – sensation, reaction, and habit – that correspond to the three pairs into which Fichte's six elements are grouped. This resemblance is not entirely accidental. Although Peirce rarely cites Fichte, he was at various points in his intellectual life an active reader of Kant, Hegel, and Schelling. For Peirce's statement of his law of mind see: Charles Sanders Peirce, "The Law of Mind," *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, ed. Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel, vol. 2 (Bloomington: Indiana Universtiy Press, 1992), 312-333.

attempt to understand the totality of its experience as a meaningful nexus of efficient and rational causes. This is the basic structure through which experience becomes available to consciousness.

I show in Chapter 1 that Fichte, throughout his time in Jena, employs this structure as a way of describing the basic form of human experience. My focus on Fichte's Jena period has two motivations. First, Fichte only offered a full presentation of his philosophical system after he had arrived in Jena from Zurich in the Spring of 1794. Second, the revised system that he developed subsequent to departing Jena in summer 1799 and taking up residence in Berlin operates within a fundamentally altered conceptual framework. I do not rule out the possibility that Fichte retains his basic structure of experience in his Berlin philosophy, but because of the differences in terminology and form of argument it would require a great deal of interpretive labor to disclose the continuities between these two phases of Fichte's philosophical work. In Chapter 1, I discuss three texts that together mark the beginning, middle, and end of the Jena period: the 1794/95 *Foundation*, which was the only complete exposition of his system that Fichte published; the 1798 *System of Ethics*; and finally the 1800 *Vocation of Man*, which, although it was completed only after Fichte had left Jena, functions as kind of final reflection on the philosophical system he had worked on in the years prior and which he was about to revise completely. Together these three texts provide us with a cross-sectional view of Fichte's Jena philosophy, allowing us to see how seemingly different philosophical arguments are in fact related formulations of Fichte's single law of mind. In the chapter, I use the notion of 'concept realization' as a way of describing this law of mind. 'Concept realization' refers to the process by which mind shapes sensuous experience so as to bring this experience into agreement with its concepts of both what is and what ought to be.

In Chapter 2, I offer a more detailed account of the two complete versions of the philosophical system that Fichte developed while in Jena, the first being the system presented in the 1794/1795 *Foundation*, and the second being a revision of that first system, the *Science of Knowledge According to a New Method* (*Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*) that Fichte presented in lectures from 1796 to 1799.[6] Of this latter system, only transcripts from his students remain, but they are enough to reconstruct the full arch of the system, which, like the *Foundation*, begins with basic principles about the so-called 'positing' nature of human consciousness and then expands into a full-fledged account of how experience writ large emerges from this positing activity of mind. As the secondary literature has noted, there are obvious differences between the two systems, and the extent to which they are reconcilable with one another is an open question.[7] My aim in the chapter is not to provide any definitive answer to this question, but rather to achieve clarity regarding the comprehensive architecture of each system, to get into view the expansive account that each system provides of the full shape of experience as it becomes present to mind. I argue in this chapter that the main difference between the two systems lies in Fichte's shift in perspective from a universal standpoint in the *Foundation* to a local, practical standpoint in the *New Method*. The former views experience and all it can possibly contain as a unified whole that resides in a so-called "absolute ego" and that only secondarily comes to partial appearance in the actual consciousness of an individual. Meanwhile, the *New Method* conceives of experience as the expression of an individual's finite possibilities for moral action and leaves open the question of how and if these paths of discrete action cohere for the individual into a unified view of the world. As I show in the chapter, this shift reflects Fichte's commitment to defining the law of mind in moral terms. By confining the range of human

[6] The term "Wissenschaftslehre Nova Methodo" derives from the Latin title that announced the lecture series: "fundamenta philosophiae transscendentalis (vulgo, die Wissenschaftslehre) nova methodo…" See the editor's introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre Nova Methodo*: (GA IV/3, 312).
[7] For a discussion of the major differences between the two systems see: Paul Franks, "Freedom, Tatsache, and Tathandlung in the Development of Fichte's Jena Wissenschaftslehre," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 79: 3 (1997), 310-323.

experience to the field of concrete moral action, Fichte circumvents in the *New Method* the difficultly that he had encountered in his first Jena system when he tried to reconcile the broad totality of human experience with the very limited range of individual human action.

The law of mind as Fichte presented it in his 1794/95 *Foundation* thus raised the question of how one can understand the mind's endless shaping and re-shaping of experience in terms that show this shaping to be a meaningful process. Does human experience in fact unfold in the direction of coherence and fulfillment, or is the shaping of experience a futile activity consigned to failure? Fichte always responds to the perceived restlessness of mind by construing this restlessness in moral terms: mind strives toward moral agency and finds its fulfillment in becoming, as Fichte says, "[an] instrument of the moral law."[8] In Chapters 3 and 4 I look at two contemporaries of Fichte, Wilhelm von Humboldt and Novalis, each of whom appropriated the full systematic framework of Fichte's law of mind while also developing their own original conceptions of how and why the restlessness of mind becomes meaningful.[9]

For Humboldt, the redemptive telos of the restless mind lies in human artistic and linguistic self-expression. Drawing on Charles Taylor's conception of Humboldt as a theorist of the expressive dimension of mind, I show in Chapter 3 that Humboldt uses Fichte's structure of experience to

[8] "Ich bin Werkzeug des Sittengesetzes in der Sinnenwelt." In: *Das System der Sittenlehre* (GA I/5, 233).
[9] I borrow this phrase "restlessness of mind" from Jonathan Lear who uses the term to characterize the fact that mind is not perfectly rational, but instead "must be able to make leaps, to make associations, to bring things together and divide them up in all sorts of strange ways." See: Jonathan Lear, "Restlessness, Phantasy, and the Concept of Mind," in *Open Minded* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998) 84-85. I use the term not so much to emphasize an opposition to rationally, as Lear does, for Fichte and Humboldt don't have a strong view of the irrational, but rather to refer to that aspect of mental life that in some way and for whatever reason cannot be immediately integrated into the realm of reason and conceptual determination. It is the middle realm of activity that lies between the sensuous and the conceptual. Charles Peirce's notion of the "second category" of "reaction," "resistance, "or "struggle" that precedes the application of a concept or law captures the notion of restlessness not as something explicitly opposed to the rational, but rather as simply outside of the rational. See: Charles Sanders Peirce, "On Phenomenology," *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2 (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), 150.

articulate the structure of semiotic media.[10] According to Humboldt's conception, both art and language transform the sensuous material of experience into sensuous signs of human expressivity that can then be manipulated so as to facilitate the mind's infinite desire for self-expression. Whereas artistic media derive their expressive power from an engagement with the infinite division and recombination of sensuous matter, linguistic media bracket out some of the complexity of sensuality by establishing basic units of phonemes and words that then facilitate the speed and clarity of thought. The finesse of Humboldt's theory of expressive media lies in his ability to engage with the full structure of Fichte's law of mind without committing himself to any claims about the mental construction of reality. As an empirical realist, Humboldt wants to preserve the notion from Kant's philosophy that empirical experience is in some sense given to mind, rather than merely posited by mind. However, even as he distances himself from a notion of reality as mental construct, Humboldt is nevertheless able to use Fichte's law of mind to identify second-order realms of experience in which infinite mental shaping is manifestly at work.

Whereas Fichte presents the law of mind in moral terms and Humboldt in terms of self-expression, Novalis opens up a third possibility, namely that mind finds fulfillment in the poetic realm of imagination. I argue in Chapter 4 that Novalis conceives of the shaping of experience in terms of an infinitely iterative act of establishing and dissolving relationships of mimetic correspondence. This process of tracing out mimetic correspondence has three major moments. In a first moment Novalis wants to free us from the ossified structures of the understanding that lock the mind into a single way of looking at the world. He does this by employing a second, mimetic moment, which replaces the ossified view of the world with a free and creative act of perceiving one object (a king, for example) as imitating the behavior of another object (the sun, for example). Then, as a final

[10] See: Charles Taylor, "Language and human nature," in: *Human Agency and Language*, vol. 1 of *Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 220-221.

moment, he allows the freedom of the mimetic relationship, i.e. it's lack of necessity, to take control and dissolve that relationship into a realm of infinite possibility. This threefold process of freely instantiated mimesis reflects Novalis's conception of the law of the mind as a negative law, which finds fulfillment in opposing itself to established forms of thought and beckoning toward a transcendent realm of free and infinite association. In this chapter, I show that Novalis arrives at this structure of mind by replacing Fichte's notion of an experience that moves toward moral lawfulness with the notion of a self-active imagination that takes control of experience, quickens it, and finally dissolves it into an intuition of a divine unconditioned ground.

The side-by-side comparison of Fichte, Humboldt, and Novalis helps to reframe Fichte's philosophy and his influence in terms of his argument for a unified view of experience that conceived of the sensuous and the conceptual as two interlocking dimensions of a single activity of mind. As Humboldt's and Novalis's actualizations of Fichte's thought make clear, this model of mind is exceptional both for its structural clarity and for the way in which it foregrounds restlessness as a central aspect of mental life. Fichte's philosophy and its influence show us that reducing mind to its most basic structural elements is, as a project, not anathema to capturing something about the inexhaustibility and endless vicissitudes of mental life. Indeed, basic structural observation, done well, seems to be a condition for making us receptive to the multiplicity and the complexity of the phenomena that experience offers to mind. Fichte's notion of mind as an endlessly restless process of conceptual shaping opened up a shared field of idealist inquiry whose reach extended from a theory of moral action and intersubjectivity in Fichte's own work, to a general theory of art and language that Humboldt developed, and finally to the imaginative fragments and poetry of Novalis. This dissertation attempts to articulate the general conceptual scaffolding that subtends these diverse

intellectual projects and holds them together as far-reaching inquiries into the activity and expression of mind.

Chapter 1:
Fichte's *Science of Knowledge* as a Theory of Concept Realization

1.0 Overview

In the following two chapters I will describe Fichte's Jena philosophy as an ongoing involvement with the question of how concepts realize themselves in the material world. In this chapter, I will first outline the general contours of this philosophical problem and then show the formative influence that this problem exercised on the account of human consciousness and the imagination that Fichte published in 1794 under the title *Foundation of the Entire Science of Knowledge* (hereafter: *Foundation*). My attention will mainly be focused on the second part of this text, the *Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge*, for it is in this most difficult account of how the mind comes to consciousness that the essential features of Fichte's guiding question exhibit themselves.

Due to the extremely abstract and dense presentation of the 1794 *Foundation*, I begin with a discussion of two other texts in which Fichte more clearly addresses his guiding problem of concept realization. The two texts in question are the *Introduction* to the *System of Ethics according to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre* from 1798 and *The Vocation of Man* from 1800. It might seem surprising that these two texts can shed light on the *Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge*, for they were written, respectively, two and five years later. By then, the 1794 *Foundation* had been reworked into the so-called *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (hereafter: *New Method*), which Fichte developed in 1796 and continued to lecture on until his departure from Jena in 1799.[1] The *System of Ethics* and the *Vocation of Man* thus belong to what the secondary literature has termed Fichte's "later Jena

[1] For a very clear and concise account of when Fichte reworked the Wissenschaftslehre see: Daniel Breazeale, "Introduction," in *New Essays on Fichte's Later Jena Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002).

Wissenschaftslehre," distinguishing it from the "earlier Jena Wissenschaftslehre" that Fichte presented in 1794 and 1795.[2] As I will discuss in the second chapter, I believe that this distinction is vital to a proper understanding of Fichte's philosophy. However, one should not employ this distinction at the cost of grasping the underlying continuity of Fichte's Jena project. I argue in this chapter that this continuity can be summarized under the heading of what can be called *concept realization*. This term designates the various ways in which Fichte, throughout his Jena writings, attempted to account for the apparent opposition between the ideality of concepts and their realization in sensuous matter. I will show that his method consisted in manipulating and extending the basic elements that constitute the process of workmanship. The process of workmanship is the process in which a person shapes a physical material into an object that he or she intends to make. This process of workmanship is a concrete case of concept realization out of which Fichte developed various accounts of the interaction between the real and the ideal aspects of human experience.

1.1 Concept Realization in the *Introduction* to the *System of Ethics*

In the *Introduction* to the *System of Ethics* Fichte lists several elements that he considers to be essential to an account of consciousness. He takes as his starting point the following thesis: "I find myself as active in the material world. With this, all consciousness begins."[3] We can call this thesis the principle of *minded causality*. According to this principle, being conscious necessarily entails that one is aware of oneself as a causal agent acting in the world. In Fichte's language, this means that a conscious individual necessarily has a "representation" (Vorstellung) of his or her own causality. Fichte unfolds his brief outline of human consciousness in the *Introduction* by identifying the

[2] Breazeale, Daniel. "Introduction," in *New Essays on Fichte's Later Jena Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), x.
[3] "Ich finde mich, als wirkend in der Sinnenwelt." In: *Das System der Sittenlehre* (GA I/5, 22).

constituent parts that are necessarily "contained" in this representation of one's causality.[4] That is, he believes that minded causality contains more than just the principle of causality, and it is by breaking down this principle into smaller pieces that he is going to arrive at a complete manifold of characteristics that he thinks are required for a theory of consciousness.

It is important to pay close attention to the set of characteristics that Fichte develops here because they provide the constituent pieces for the problem of concept realization that I am arguing is the guiding idea of Fichte's Jena philosophy. This is because *minded causality,* as Fichte describes it in the *Introduction* to the *System of Ethics*, turns out to be an instance of concept realization. Granted, when Fichte first introduces the principle of minded causality, there is no mention of the role that concepts play in the sensuous efficacy that an individual ascribes to himself. All that Fichte's principle immediately seems to imply is that minded causality is distinguished from a blind, mechanical causality, for the agent who embodies causal activity knows himself to be causally active: "I find *myself* [emphasis mine] as active in the material world."[5] However, in the course of the investigation Fichte tells us that an individual cannot ascribe to himself this causal activity unless the activity is thought of as "a causality of the mere concept."[6] The 'mere' here is meant to emphasize the ideality of concepts, the fact that as *merely* immaterial entities, they nonetheless can and do exert their influence in the real world. Fichte's argument is the following: concepts exert their influence in the world through the activity of the conscious subject, who, insofar as he is conscious, ascribes an activity to himself, and this self-ascription of activity necessarily implies that the subject has a "concept of an end" (Zweckbegriff) which this activity is aiming to bring about in the sensuous world.

[4] "Welches Mannigfaltige ist in dieser Vorstellung meiner Wirksamkeit enthalten; und wie mag ich zu diesem Mannigfaltigen kommen?" In: *Das System der Sittenlehre* (GA I/5, 22).
[5] "Ich finde mich, als wirkend in der Sinnenwelt." In: *Das System der Sittenlehre* (GA I/5, 22).
[6] "eine Kausalität des bloßen Begriffs…" In: *Das System der Sittenlehre* (GA I/5, 27).

Understanding this argument in its full ramifications requires more discussion than I will be able to provide here. My main concern is that we appreciate Fichte's ambition to put a version of concept realization at the center of his theory of consciousness. In the *Introduction* to the *System of Ethics*, minded causality is said to be the defining principle of human consciousness, and it turns out that this causality cannot be minded if it isn't an activity seeking to realize a concept. Thus, in addition to the notion of causality (Wirksamkeit) with which Fichte begins his account, we have a second element of minded causality, namely: concepts of ends. This second element makes clear that minded causality can be understood to be an instance of the general problem of concept realization that I am claiming is so central to Fichte's Jena philosophy. The individual who "finds [himself] acting in the material world" is in fact acting according to the concept of an end, and so we can justly call this causal activity a realization of a concept in the material world.

Let us now look at the several additional elements that Fichte claims belong in the "manifold" of "the representation of my causality."[7] In contrast to the "concept of an end", which is only mentioned after several pages of discussion, three other elements are immediately mentioned by Fichte as implicated in the notion of minded causality. They include:

> …a representation of the *stuff* that endures while I am acting efficaciously and that is absolutely unchangeable thereby; a representation of the *properties* of this stuff, properties that are changed by my efficacy; and a representation of this *progressive process of change*, which continues until the shape that I intend is there.[8]
>
> …die Vorstellung des bei meiner Wirksamkeit fortdauernden, und durch sie nicht zu verändernden *Stoffes*, die Vorstellung der *Beschaffenheiten* dieses Stoffes, die durch meine Wirksamkeit verändert werden, die Vorstellung dieser *fortschreitenden Veränderung*, bis die Gestalt da steht, die ich beabsichtigte.[9]

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[7] Strictly speaking, "causality" doesn't belong to the "manifold" of terms that Fichte gives us, but is rather part of the genus, the "representation of my causality" that contains, as it constituent parts, the so-called "manifold". As far as I can see, this slight deviation from the letter of Fichte's text has no serious implications for my argument.
[8] The English translation is borrowed, with minor changes, from the following translation: Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The System of Ethics*, trans. Daniel Breazeale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 9.
[9] *Das System der Sittenlehre* (GA I/5, 22).

We can adopt, with minor alterations, the elements that Fichte gives us here as the remaining key elements of concept realization. Later in the Introduction Fichte tells us that the first two elements, the "matter" or "stuff" that one acts on and doesn't change, and the "property" that does change, are in fact the same thing seen from two different sides, the latter from the perspective of the active subject, the former from the perspective of an unchanging objectivity or "nature" (SS 12). We can thus say that both elements, namely 'stuff' and its 'properties' represent matter, in one case matter in motion, and in the other case matter at rest. Thus from the first two elements we get three: matter, motion and rest. This list makes the final element that Fichte gives us seem redundant, for a "progressive process of change" is just motion expressed under a different name. What we need to retain from this final element is the notion of "Gestalt" that Fichte claims is the intended end of the activity of minded causality.

This modification of Fichte's list provides us with a total of six elements that together provide the contours of the general problem of concept realization. They are: concepts, causality, motion, rest, figure, and matter. We could hew close to Fichte's account here of minded causality and add to this list two more elements that Fichte mentions toward the end of the *Introduction*. For Fichte thinks one cannot be aware of oneself as a causal agent in the world unless one also has a will that endows one's chosen end with efficacy and a physical body that can then carry out this will.[10] These two elements underscore nicely the general problem of concept realization, namely the negotiation between the ideal and the real. The will that sets the body in motion and the motion of the body in the physical world are central to building a bridge between the ideal realm of the concept and the

[10] See section 8 of the *Einleitung* to *Das System der Sittenlehre* (GA I/5, 28-29).

spatial-temporal realm of efficient causality.[11] However, as we will see in the discussion of the *Vocation of Man* and the 1794 *Foundation*, these elements are not essential to the problem, which I am suggesting must be grasped on a very high level of generality. For example, we will see that in the case of the 1794 *Foundation*, the 'concept' that must be realized is not any particular concept of a material end that a willing individual enacts, but rather the infinite, ideal ground of the ego that, in seeking to realize itself, brings forth not a particular object with a particular form, but rather to the entire spatial-temporal realm that is the very precondition for particular figures and matters, objects, and ends.

The six elements that I have identified as essential to the general problem of concept realization are thus capable of extrapolations to cases other than the instance of minded causality we find in the *Introduction*. I have begun, however, with this case because it provides us with the intuitive core that unites all six of the elements into a very familiar case of concept realization. This intuitive core is the idea of workmanship that has a long tradition in Aristotelian philosophy. Basic examples of this idea include a carpenter making furniture, or a sculptor forming his statue. In both these cases, it is just as Fichte describes it: an individual gives a raw material a certain shape according to a concept he has of the object he intends to make. One can, as Fichte does, exfoliate this idea of workmanship into a catalogue of elements that are all aspects of the one idea from which they derive. According to my modified list, these elements are: 1) the *concept* of the object one intends to make 2) the efficient *causation* that makes the said object 3) the *activity* of making 4) the *persistence* or *stasis* of the material on which this activity is exercised 5) the *form* of the object one intends to make and 6) the *material* with which one makes the object.

[11] For a clarifying discussion of Fichte's notion of the body and how Fichte develops his theory of the body as a negotiation between idealism and materiality is found in: J.M. Bernstein, "Recognition and Embodiment (Fichte's Materialism)," in: *German Idealism: Contemporary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2007), 183-205.

Fichte's Jena philosophy attempts to employ these elements, or some slight variation on them, to deliver a theory, not of workmanship in particular, but of human consciousness in general. That is the ambition we observe in the *Introduction* to the *System of Ethics*, where minded causality is said to be the central idea of consciousness. I argue that this ambition is also on display in modulated form in the 1794 *Foundation* and the 1800 *Vocation of Man*. Together, these examples allow us to see the continuity of inquiry that holds together the diverse philosophical writings of Fichte's Jena period.

1.2 Concept Realization in the *Vocation of Man*

My description of concept realization from the *Introduction* to the *System of Ethics* has thus far sought to capture both a tension and a balance between the idealism of the concept and its realization in the sensuous world. The tension is expressed by the transition that must be achieved between the ideal realm of thinking and the material realm in which efficient causes form and transform objects. As Fichte shows in the *Introduction*, and in other writings such as the *Foundation of Natural Right*, the challenge posed by this transition can be answered with a theory of the will and a physical body that, together, succeed in carrying the concept over into the material realm.

Meanwhile, the balance between the ideal and the real resides in the agreement that the particular concept of the particular end has with the object it creates in the material world. As Fichte describes it in the *Introduction*, the concept of an end has, as its end, an object that is realized in concrete sensual form. The efficacious subject thinks the concept of an end, and this end is then satisfied by the appearance in the world of a particular object with a particular form. It could be, however, that there are central aspects of human experience in which this equipoise between the concept and the

physical object don't apply, and, indeed, the scenario of workmanship may be the only case in which there is a true harmony between the real and ideal.

The potential tensions and disruptions inherent in the idea of concept realization are not a deterrence for Fichte, but rather a source of his philosophical productivity. This is particularly evident in the *Vocation of Man*. In this work, Fichte develops a juxtaposition of three accounts of human experience that distinguish themselves by the specific ways in which they calibrate the ideality of human cognition with the reality of the material world. Only in one of these accounts, the account of theoretical knowledge, does Fichte propose that ideality and reality are in some kind of relative correspondence. This account is very similar to the account of theoretical knowledge from the 1794 *Foundation* that I will discuss later. For now, what interests me in the *Vocation of Man* are the two other accounts of human experience that flank Fichte's description of theoretical knowledge. The first is a description of a strictly deterministic universe, strongly reminiscent of the fatalist account of Spinoza that Jacobi presents in his Spinoza Letters, according to which human action is fully embedded in the causal nexus of nature.[12] The second is Fichte's account of human existence as moral action, according to which the material world loses all significance in the face of a transcendent moral realm. In both these accounts, the ideal and the real are in a state of imbalance. In the case of causal determinism, human consciousness is merely one node within the unfolding of nature, and thus plays no role in actively shaping the material world. In the case of transcendent moralism, it is only in a realm beyond the material world that the ideal aspects of human existence,

[12] We can take as representative of this fatalist view the following passage: "Wenn es lauter würkende und keine Endursachen giebt, so hat das denkende Vermögen in der ganzen Natur blos das Zusehen; sein einziges Geschäffte ist, den Mechanismus der würkenden Kräfte zu begleiten." In: Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*, in *Schriften zum Spinozastreit*, vol. 1.1 of *Werke*, ed. Klaus Hammacher and Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998) 20-21.

such as thinking and willing, fulfill their purpose. In neither case can one say that concepts of ends attain their satisfaction in the material world.

It is all the more striking, then, that we encounter at key junctures in these accounts the six central terms of concept realization that I outlined in the previous section. First, Fichte uses the six terms to construct his account of the causal determinism in *Book 1* of the *Vocation of Man*. Then, at the end of *Book 3*, he transforms this earlier account of the causal nexus of nature into a description of how infinite moral being expresses itself in worldly terms. Both accounts express an opposition between three of the elements of concept realization, namely concepts, movement, and forms, which, as expressions of the life force of the universe, triumph over the inanimate elements of causality, rest, and matter.

Let us begin, then, with how Fichte constructs his account of causal determinism in *Book 1*, describing the universe as obeying a "strict necessity of nature."[13] In this account, Fichte first describes nature as a nexus of efficient causes, but then finds this account deficient because it leads to an infinite regress of causes that cannot arrive at a principle of movement that would animate the nexus. Without completely abandoning this notion of a *nexus effectivus*, Fichte then introduces the idea of an "original force of nature that is self-acting".[14] The purpose of this "force of nature" is to provide a principle of movement which the mere nexus of efficient causes couldn't provide. Fichte employs his six elements of concept realization when articulating the opposition between the infinitely regressive, inanimate *nexus effectivus*, on the one hand, and the 'force of nature' that animates this nexus, on the other.

[13] "Ich selbst mit allem, was ich mein nenne, bin ein Glied in dieser Kette der strengen Naturnothwendigkeit." In: *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (GA I/6, 199).
[14] "…ich bin genöthigt, noch eine besondere, durch sich selbst wirkende, ursprüngliche Naturkraft anzunehmen." In: *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (GA I/6, 197).

Let us begin with the first side of this opposition, which is nature conceived as a causal nexus. In this nexus, the "determinations" of one moment "determine" the following, and so on ad infinitum.[15] Fichte's account here makes something explicit about the notion of causality, namely, that it implies that the effect is external to the cause. In Fichte's causal nexus, this means that the "determinations" of any object in question "have existence and actuality not by means of themselves, but rather by means of something external to them."[16] It is important to see that this relation of externality is inherent to the notion of causality, one of the six elements of concept realization, and not peculiar to Fichte's account of nature. When one identifies a causal relationship one necessarily separates the cause from its effect, as when one says, for example, that a craftsman is the cause of the object he creates. Seeing nature according to these divisions of cause and effect necessarily means drawing the boundary between the cause and effect and thus understanding one thing to cause another. It is only in the case of spontaneous forces, for example the "force of nature" which Fichte later introduces, that this division between the cause and the effect, and thus the notion of causality in general, is not applicable, for something that has its cause in itself collapses the very distinction on which the notion of causality is founded.

Two additional elements of concept realization - matter and rest - enter the picture when Fichte considers what other theoretical elements such a notion of a causal network implies. First, he says that such a network requires a "substrate", or something that, in accordance with efficient causes,

[15] "Die Natur schreitet durch die unendliche Reihe ihrer möglichen Bestimmungen ohne Anhalten durch...Ich trete ein in eine geschlossene Kette der Erscheinungen, da jedes Glied durch sein vorhergehendes bestimmt wird, und sein nachfolgendes Bestimmt." In: *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (GA I/6, 194-5).
[16] "…sie [die Bestimmungen der Gegenstände –ML] [hätten] nicht durch sich selbst, sondern durch etwas außer ihnen liegendes, Daseyn und Wirklichkeit..." In: *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (GA I/6, 195).

assumes the various determinations that are the effects of given causes.[17] Second, he introduces the element of "rest", which is a moment of "staying still" in the constant unfolding of nature, and without which one couldn't talk about the specific properties that a substrate assumes, for these properties would be constantly changing, and thus would never be what one took them to be.[18] This is to say that in so far as one grasps nature as a causal nexus, one holds it still in thought and determines which features of nature give rise to other features. So, to review, the three elements of concept realization that are central to Fichte's notion of nature as a causal nexus are 1) (external) *causality*, which differentiates various determinations of nature as specific causes of specific effects, 2) a *substrate*, or *material*, that is the carrier of these determinations, and 3) the seizure of nature by thought into a state of *rest* that allows one to isolate and identify the various causes and effects that we observe in the substrate.

Having introduced the reader to the notion of a causal nexus, Fichte transitions to the opposing concept of nature, the principle of a "force" or "activity" that is "for and in itself."[19] He accomplishes this transition by pointing out that in a nexus of causes, everything is the effect of something else, which is to say that every moment in the nexus is an "expression of a mere passivity."[20] Another way to say this is that when nature is brought to rest in thought by means of the concept of external causality, it is divested of its animating force. In fact, however, nature is always active, and so the conceived causal network, when it is called on to account for this activity, can only display an endless "passivity" (Leiden), in which the substrate at one point in space and

[17] "…jene Beschaffenheiten [sind] gar nichts an und für sich, sie sind nur etwas an einem anderen;...und eine solches die Beschaffenheit annehmende und tragende, - ein Substrat derselben...wird für die Denkbarkeit derselben immer vorausgesetzt." In: *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (GA I/6, 195-6).
[18] "Ferner, daß ein solches Substrat eine bestimmte Beschaffenheit habe, drückt einen Zustand der Ruhe, und des Stillestehens seiner Verwandlungen, ein Anhalten seines Werdens aus." In: *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (GA I/6, 196).
[19] "Das Prinzip der Thätigkeit, des Entstehens und Werdens an und für sich ist rein in ihr selbst, so gewiß sie Kraft ist." In: *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (GA I/6, 196).
[20] "Der Zustand der Bestimmtheit des Dinges ist sonach Zustand, und Ausdruck eines bloßen Leidens..." In: *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (GA I/6, 196).

time is said to absorb and pass on the activity that is moving through the network. The notion of "passivity" functions in Fichte's account as a bridge that leads from the stasis of the causal nexus as it exists arrested in thought back to the activity that one actually experiences in nature.

Fichte subdivides the spontaneous power that animates nature into three separate "basic powers" that schematize nature according to the remaining three elements of concept realization. Plants display the "formative power" of nature, animals, the "power of motion," and humans, the "power of thought."[21] This tripartite division of nature into form, motion, and thought echoes the workmanship model of concept realization we observed in the *Introduction* to the *System of Ethics*. There, the thought or concept of an intended object was said to guide the activity of the conscious subject into bringing forth a certain form. This minded activity of formation is transformed in *Book 1* of the *Vocation of Man* into the spontaneous force of nature that distributes its constitutive elements across a hierarchy of life forms.

One feature of the hierarchy Fichte constructs is that each life form on the hierarchy also possesses the powers of nature that the lower life forms possess. This means, simply, that an animal is not just endowed with the power of movement, but that it also has a specific figure. Likewise, a human has the power of thought, but it also has a physical form and a power of movement. The significance of this feature of the hierarchy is that Fichte can unite the three elements of concept realization into an account of man as a manifestation of nature. When all three powers of nature are united, they become "the human-forming power" of nature. Fichte describes this unification as follows:

> Figure, motion, thought, in me, are not dependent on each other, and consequent of one other, so that I think and thereby conceive of the forms and motions of surrounding objects in such or such a manner, because they

[21] "Ich bin eine besondere Bestimmung der bildenden Kraft, wie die Pflanze; eine besondere Bestimmung der eigenthümlichen Bewegungskraft, wie das Thier; und überdies noch eine Bestimmung der Denkkraft: und die Vereinigung dieser drei Grundkräfte zu Einer Kraft...macht das unterscheidende Kennzeichen meiner Gattung aus." In: *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (GA I/6, 200).

> are so; or on the other hand, that they are so, because I so conceive of them; rather, they are all simultaneous and harmonious developments of one and the same power, the manifestation of which necessarily assumes the form of a complete creature of my species, and which may thus be called the man-forming power.
>
> Gestalt, eigenthümliche Bewegung, Gedanke in mir hängen nicht etwa von einander ab, und folgen auseinander: so daß ich meine, und mit ihr die mich umgebenden Gestalten und Bewegungen so dächte, weil sie so sind; oder daß umgekehrt sie so würden, weil ich sie so dächte, sondern sie sind allzumal und unmittelbar die harmonierenden Entwicklungen einer und eben derselben Kraft, deren Aeußerung nothwendig zu einem mit sich innig zusammenstimmenden Wesen meiner Gattung wird, und die man Menschenbildende Kraft nennen könnte. [22]

This passage shows that Fichte is working with three of his basic philosophical building blocks that can be slightly varied to produce alternative accounts of human experience. An account of man as an observer of nature, i.e. a theoretical philosophy, would have to explain how thoughts appear to follow from the state of external objects.[23] Meanwhile, a practical philosophy assumes just the opposite, namely that thoughts can come to determine the world, as Fichte describes in the *Introduction* to the *System of Ethics*. As the passage I just quoted demonstrates, Fichte's current account of nature as causal determinism considers neither of these possibilities. Rather, as Fichte says, it is simply by the grace of the spontaneity of nature that thoughts parallel the "forms and motions of surrounding objects", so that thoughts are neither logically prior nor secondary to the external states of affairs they represent. The naïve harmony between thoughts and the world that Fichte is describing here is an indication that he finds the account he is giving flawed and will have to reject it. For everywhere else in his writings, and indeed everywhere else in the *Vocation of Man*, Fichte's central philosophical concern is the fit between thoughts and external affairs. Even in his description of nature as a causal nexus arrested in thought, Fichte broached the question of how man's thoughts are oriented toward the world. He described there how man organizes nature according to distinctions of cause and effect, but he found this account deficient, and was forced to

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[22] *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (GA I/6, 200).

[23] For example, Fichte defines theoretical philosophy in the *Introduction* to the *System of Ethics* precisely in these terms: "Das Subjektive, und Objektive wird vereinigt…so, daß das Subjektive aus dem Objektiven erfolgen…soll: *ich erkenne*. Wie wir zu der Behauptung einer solchen Harmonie kommen, untersucht die *theoretische* Philosophie." In: *Das System der Sittenlehre* (GA I/5, 21). In the 1794 *Foundation*, this is formulated as the investigation of the thesis that: "Das Ich setzt sich, als bestimmt duch das Nicht-Ich." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 287).

supplement it with an account of a mysterious force of nature that is now the inexplicable cause of both human thought and the realm of nature that human thought unproblematically grasps.

Fichte's account of causal determinism, or natural necessity, ends with an uneasy arrangement of the six components of concept realization. He first describes how man grasps natures by bringing it to rest in thought, by attributing to it an underlying material, and by distinguishing cause from effect. However, such an account hardly does justice to man's experience of nature as an active unfolding process, and so Fichte introduces a notion that can fill in the deficiencies of this account, namely the notion of a force of nature. This spontaneous force explains the more elusive elements of nature, namely its active forms, movements, and thoughts. By introducing this notion, Fichte has dispensed with the need to explain the fit between man's thoughts and the objects of those thoughts. Everything is nature, and all puzzling questions that might arise concerning the forms and activities of nature, or concerning the human thoughts that think these forms and activities, ultimately have their ground in an incomprehensible, unifying natural spontaneity.

The deficiencies of this general account of causal determinism are intentional. Fichte's intention is to demonstrate the deficiencies of this account so as to motivate his subsequent account of theoretical philosophy in *Book 2*, and his account of practical philosophy in *Book 3*. For our purposes, it is important to see that one of its deficiencies lies in the unhappy coordination between inanimate and animate nature, an opposition that Fichte composes using the six elements of concept realization. Fichte shows us that the view of nature as a causal nexus of passive material must be supplemented with the notion of an animating force of nature that brings forth not only the forms and activity of nature, but also the human thoughts that apprehend this nature.

Turning now briefly to the end of *Book 3* in the *Vocation of Man*, we see that, after a lengthy discussion of theoretical and practical philosophy, Fichte revisits the account of a spontaneous force of nature from *Book 1*. He reinterprets the significance of this alleged force of nature while reiterating the tripartite division of formation, movement, and thought. These three elements of concept realization, which before displayed nature's vitality, now become expressions of a divine order that transcends the material world. Natural formation and movement are described as aspects of an "eternal stream of life" (ewiger Strom von Leben) that have been "variously sensualized in the eye of a mortal."[24] Thought, meanwhile, is described as the form of eternal life that is closest to transcendence, as something that "hovers from soul to soul" in the "air and ether of the One World of Reason."[25]

The idealization of form, movement, and thought at the end of *Book 3* contrasts with other passages from *Book 3* that devalue matter, rest and causality. Matter is only significant insofar as it is spontaneous matter, or "material that creates and builds itself."[26] Otherwise it is "the dead, heavy mass that only filled out space."[27] Likewise, the only activity in the physical world that has significance is spontaneous activity. Insofar as the activity is not self-causing, but only the passive reception of a chain of material causes and effects, Fichte argues that it has little significance:

> … it is not the act that is mechanically brought forth, but the free determination of free will, for the sake of duty and not for the sake of any other ends, - thus speaks the voice of conscience within us - this alone constitutes our true worth.
>
> …nicht die mechanisch hervorgebrachte That, sondern die freie Bestimmung der Freiheit lediglich um des Gebotes, und schlechthin um keines andern Zwecks willen – so sagt uns die innere Stimme des Gewissens – diese allein macht unsern wahren Werth aus.[28]

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[24] "...dieses Leben fließt, - im Auge des Sterblichen mannigfach versinnlicht, - durch mich hindurch herab in die ganze unermeßliche Natur." In: *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (GA I/6, 306).
[25] "Aber rein und heilig...fließet dieses dein Leben hin als Band, das Geister mit Geistern in Eins verschlingt, als Luft und Aether der Einen Vernunftwelt....In diesem Lichtstrome fortgeleitet schwebt der Gedanke, unaufgehalten und derselbe bleibend von Seele zu Seele..." In: *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (GA I/6, 306-7).
[26] "…sich selbst schaffende und bildende Materie" In: *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (GA I/6, 306).
[27] "Die todte lastende Masse, die nur den Raum ausstopfte…" In: *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (GA I/6, 306).
[28] *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (GA I/6, 279).

An "act that is mechanically brought forth" is nothing other than an act that is subject to physical laws of cause and effect. We can see here that Fichte employs a central element of concept realization – the notion of causation – in order to argue against the idea that the conceptual aspects of human experience can find satisfaction in the real world. The value of one's actions is judged not by the "deed" that is accomplished in the physical world, but rather by the "intentions" and "sentiments" with which the deed is carried out.[29]

As in the account of causal determinism from *Book 1*, Fichte employs the central elements of concept realization in *Book 3* for the sake of creating an opposition. This time it is the opposition not between brute causality and natural spontaneity, but rather between the physical world, broadly construed, and the transcendent moral realm. The forms and movements of nature are incorporated under the umbrella of transcendence because they exhibit spontaneity, even if this isn't the same kind of self-knowing spontaneity that is on display in the case of human thought. Although Fichte's moral philosophy here deemphasizes the significance of the physical world, it is important to note that, nevertheless, the ideal power of moral thinking does influence the physical world through the action of individuals. Said differently, ideality interacts with reality even while it makes a claim to be completely superior to the physical world in which it appears. As we will see shortly, this tension between, on the one hand, the interaction of the ideal and the real, and, on the other hand, the ideal's unconditioned priority over the real, is integral to how Fichte employs the main elements of concept realization in the 1794 *Foundation*.

[29] Fichte describes this thought negatively, saying that in the sensuous world, the reverse is true: "In der Sinnenwelt...kommt es nie darauf an, wie, mit welchen Absichten und Gesinnungen eine That unternommen würde, sondern nur welches diese That sey." In: *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (GA I/6, 279).

1.3 The realization of the infinite in the 1794 *Foundation*

Near the end of the second part of the *Foundation*, the *Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge*, Fichte describes how the apparent duality between mind and world in fact derives from a single mental source. Mind and world are reducible to an unconscious "activity of the ego" that, as a result of a mysterious initial "trigger" (Anstoss), comes to consciousness in the form of mind-world duality.[30] When the mind beholds the world, it is beholding its own activity represented to itself as rest. The dualism of mind and world is thus replaced by a conception of pure mind which then divides, secondarily, into an unceasing activity of mind, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the stable structures of the world that have emerged out of the ceaseless activity of mind, coalescing into a resting state that lends them their apparent stability. In this section I will elucidate this monist account that Fichte offers, and I will show that Fichte conceives of the transition from infinite mind to mind and world as a kind of concept realization.

Fichte's account of mental monism makes two important modifications to the standard workmanship model of concept realization. The first is that it replaces the conceptual element, the thought or concept that is to be realized, with the notion of an unconscious, infinite mind, the so-called "activity of the ego that goes out into the infinite."[31] The concept that is to be realized is not any *particular* concept, but rather mind itself, and the realization of mind is the process by which the mind comes to consciousness. So rather than starting with a conscious agent that is endowed with the power of thought, Fichte begins with unconscious mental activity that will spontaneously realize itself in the form of consciousness, a consciousness both of oneself and the world.

[30] "Auf die ins unendliche hinaus gehende Thätigkeit des Ich…geschieht ein Anstoß…" In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 369).
[31] ibid.

The second modification that Fichte makes to the model of workmanship is that he completely redefines the notion of activity. The workmanship model tells us that activity is an interim phase located in the transition from the concept to its realization. It is the activity of making the intended object, and this activity is *preceded* by a thinking of the intended object, and *succeeded* by the accomplishment of the act of making. In contrast, Fichte's account of mental monism tells us that the activity of the ego is by no means an active shaping of a material substrate. Rather, activity is the basic condition of both the unconsciousness and the consciousness ego. The ego's unconscious activity contains the entire content of the world which, in order to come to consciousness, must assume a stability in time and space that allows it to become present to mind.[32] This means that the apparent stasis of the material world is somewhat illusory; it is a useful fiction by means of which the mind gets a grip on its own activity. In the transition from unconscious, infinite mind, to conscious mind-world dualism, the mind finds conceptual order within its infinite active ground. The apparent stasis of the world derives from the ego's capacity of representation, which orders this activity into the stable array of objects that constitute the world. Beneath this perceived stability, there exists an undercurrent of permanent movement from which the conscious mind has abstracted in order to obtain its representations[33].

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[32] Fichte, for example, speaks of the ego's "absolute capacity of production." ("ein absolutes in das unbegrenzte, und unbegrenzbare hinaus gehendes Produktions-Vermögen") In: *Grundlage der Gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 361). According to my interpretation, he is referring in this passage to an unconscious capacity that manifests its content in consciousness.

[33] This primacy of activity which modifies the model of workmanship is not anything entirely new to how Fichte generally thinks about concept realization. He tells us, for example, in the *System of Ethics*, that all of the elements that he says are included in the "representation of my efficacy", namely all those elements which we have identified as the basic elements of concept realization, are "only appearances," that is, except for one element: "the single absolute, on which all consciousness and all being is based, is pure activity." ("Das einzige absolute, worauf alles Bewußtseyn, und alles Seyn sich gründet, ist reine Thätigkeit." In: *System der Sittenlehre* (GA I/5, 29-30). In this passage Fichte also calls this "pure activity" on which he grounds the entire process of workmanship "self-sufficiency" (Selbständigkeit), a term which implies not only that the active subject is capable of spontaneous activity, but also that it is aware and in control of its spontaneity. In contrast, in the *Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge*, the ego is not in control and not directly aware of its spontaneity.

Thus the spontaneous realization of mind can be described as the transition from unconscious mental activity to activity qua conscious representation. This activity qua conscious representation represents the unconscious activity of the mind in the form of the physical world. In other words, out of the single unconscious activity of the mind, there emerges a dualism between 1) the representing mind and 2) the represented world. The latter, the world, is represented as a collection of stable material that lawfully assumes various determinations which are the causes and effects of other determinations of the material.

1.4 Fichte's account of the infinite active mind in the 1794 *Foundation*

Fichte arrives at his monist account of one single mental activity through an extended investigation into the relationship between mind and world that takes up most of the *Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge*. He presents this investigation as an analysis of what he calls the basic principle (Grundsatz) of theoretical philosophy. This principle is that "the ego posits itself as determined by the non-ego."[34] This starting point is very misleading, for, by the time Fichte comes to the end of the investigation, he is arguing that the non-ego is a construct of the ego. This means that there is no non-ego that could determine the ego, so that any determination of the ego is in fact self-determination.

My argument in this section is that when we look at the thought process by which Fichte investigates his dualist starting point, we find that he systematically employs the six basic elements of concept realization, using them to work steadily toward his monist conclusion. He does this by introducing a series of six conceptual distinctions that are supposed to help him describe the

[34] "das Ich sezt sich, als bestimmt durch das Nicht-Ich." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 287).

particular way in which the mind interacts with the world. He arranges these six conceptual distinctions in a branching tree structure as follows:

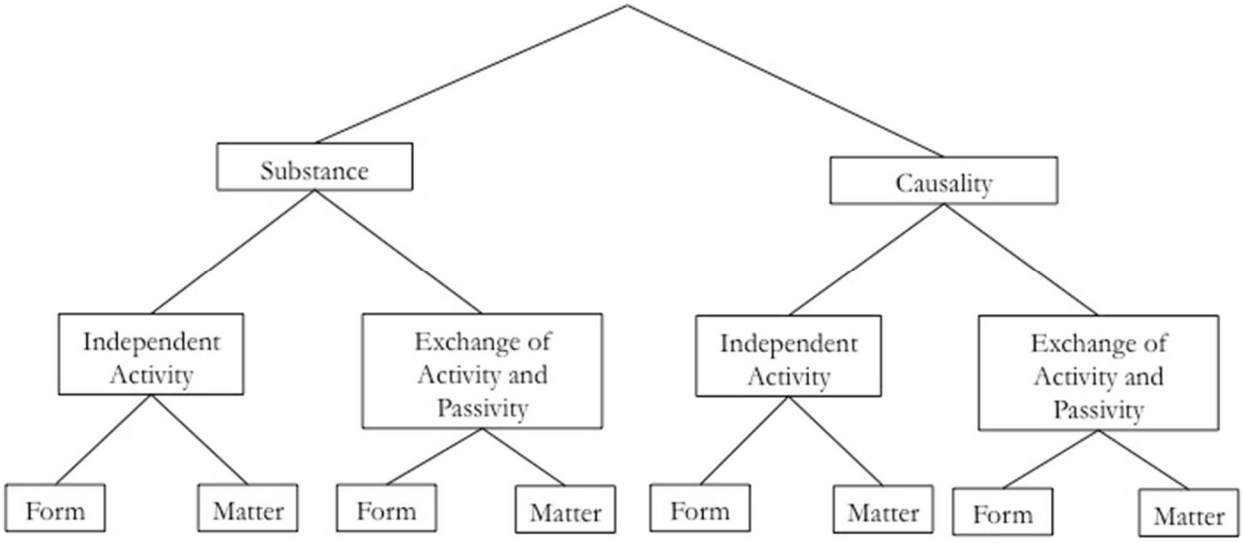

Figure 1: Fichte's distinctions in the *Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge*

The first of these distinctions is between causality and substance, a distinction which very approximately parallels the alternative between dualism and monism. In the causality relationship, there exist two entities, one which is active, i.e. the *cause*, and the other which is passive, i.e. the *effect*.[35] The concept of causality thus assumes a firm distinction between two entities, a distinction without which one could not separate the cause from the effect. By means of the concept of substance, Fichte opens up the possibility for the monist account that he offers at the conclusion of the *Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge*. "Substance" is that which "contains" the "set of all realities", and, in so far as the mind does contain all "realities", it is substance. If the mind does not contain all

[35] "Diese Synthesis wird genennt [sic] die Synthesis der *Wirksamkeit* (Kausalität). Dasjenige, welchem *Thätigkeit* zugeschrieben wird…heißt die *Ursache* …dasjenige, dem *Leiden* zugeschrieben wird…heißt das *bewirkte*, (der Effect, mithin eine von einer anderen abhängende…)." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 294).

realities, then it is an accident of some other thing which is substance.[36] By means of his distinction between the finite, conscious ego, and the infinite, unconscious ego, Fichte will be able to claim at the conclusion of his investigation that the mind does, in fact, contain all realities, for those realities which the mind doesn't consciously contain in its awareness are contained in its infinite, unconscious ground. The notion of substance thus reveals itself to be the notion of the unconscious infinite mind that constitutes the unity of conscious mind and physical reality.

The next distinction that Fichte introduces is the distinction between an "exchange of activity and passivity" (Wechsel-Tun und Leiden) and an "independent activity" (unabhängige Thätigkeit).[37] In fact, this distinction is another form of the basic distinction in concept realization between *activity* and *rest*. By means of the structure of the branching tree, Fichte combines these two elements with the elements of causality and substance to investigate how activity and rest play out with respect to causal activity and the substantial activity (see Figure 1). The type of activity that Fichte is interested in is spontaneous activity, and so Fichte's guiding question regarding "independent activity" is whether the non-ego, as a spontaneously active entity, determines the ego as a passive recipient, or visa versa. The course of the investigation reveals, however, that this alternative is based on a false, dualist premise that assumes that there even exists a 'non-ego' that can be entirely separated from the activity of the mind. By means of the notion of an "exchange between activity and passivity" Fichte opposes existence to fluctuation, or movement, and concludes that, in fact, nothing can be said to exist unless it is in flux. Thus Fichte writes in the context of causal interaction: "the

[36] "Insofern das Ich betrachtet wird, als den ganzen, schlechthin bestimmten Umkreis aller Realitäten umfassend, ist es *Substanz*. Inwiefern es in eine nicht schlechthin bestimmte Sphäre..dieses Umkreises gesetzt wird, insofern ist es *accidentell*; oder *es ist in ihm ein Accidens*." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 299).
[37] It takes Fichte some time to develop these notions. He develops them in sections E., E.I., and E.II. of the *Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge*. They are first mentioned as reciprocal concepts at the end of the first part of section E. See: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 306).

possibility is denied that one can distinguish being in and of itself from being in fluctuation."[38] In terms of the notion of substance, this thesis of the primacy of activity is formulated this way: "It is not possible to conceive of a persisting substrate, or some carrier of the accidents; each and every accident is always it's own bearer and the bearer of its opposite..."[39] The primacy of activity means that the ego and the non-ego only exist insofar as they are active. Another way to say this is that the predicate of existence is achieved by abstracting from activity and making out of this activity a single entity that persists through time as something that exists. The question of whether an entity is active or passive is then a question that one asks only after one has brought the original activity to rest in thought. The question concerning passivity or activity is a question that tries to reconstruct the original spontaneous activity using the flawed principle of external causality. In fact everything is spontaneously active and the product of one spontaneous activity, and this activity is the unconscious infinite mind, the so-called "activity that goes out into the infinite." Fichte's notion of "an exchange of activity and passivity" is, in light of the monist position he ultimately defends, a flawed concept, a remnant of his dualist staring point. More basic than this notion of an exchange of activity and passivity is the opposition between pure, infinite, unconscious mental activity, on the one hand, and the rest, or stasis of this mental activity in thought, on the other hand, that allows one to predicate existence. If the activity of the mind is not brought to rest in thought, then one cannot even judge there to be an ego and a non-ego in the first place. In other words, the question of whether and when the ego and the non-ego are active and passive assumes the initial coming to rest in thought of the unconscious activity of the original infinite mind, and if the mind doesn't bring its unconscious activity to rest in thought, then there is no non-ego to speak of.

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[38] "Die Möglichkeit, ein Seyn an sich von einem Seyn im Wechsel abzusondern, wird geläugnet." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 331).

[39] "An ein dauerndes Substrat, an einen etwanigen Träger der Accidenzen, ist nicht zu denken; das eine Accidenz ist jedesmal sein eigner und des entgegengesetzten Accidenz Träger…"In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 350).

The final distinction that Fichte introduces in his investigation into the basic principle of theoretical philosophy is the distinction between form and matter.[40] With this distinction, we have the final two elements of concept realization. Following his method of constructing a branching structure, Fichte uses this distinction in a variety of contexts, opposing form to matter first in the case of causal independent activity, then in the case of the causal exchange of activity and passivity, then in the case of substantial independent activity, and finally in the case of the substantial exchange of activity and passivity. Without getting into each of the individual employments of the form-matter distinction, we can observe that two persistent themes emerge. The first is that form is associated with the ego, while matter is associated with the non-ego.[41] The second is that form is associated with an activity –a "mutual impingement" (gegenseitges Eingreifen), "mutual negation" (gegenseitiges Aufheben), "shutting-out" (Ausschließen) – while matter is associated with rest – "the state of essential opposition" (wesentliches Entgegenseyn) and "the all-encompassing sphere" (die umfassende Sphäre).[42] If we consider that the ego embodies the activity of thought, while the non-ego, or the world, is only active through causation, then we can recognize in Fichte's branching structure the opposition of three of the six elements of concept realization with the other three elements. Thought – activity – form is opposed to causality – rest – matter. This is the basic opposition we saw in *Book 1* of the *Vocation of Man*, only that now the spontaneous trio of thought-activity-form is attributed not to the spontaneity of nature, but rather to the activity of the unconscious infinite mind that becomes the conscious perceiving ego.

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[40] This final distinction is most clearly laid out in the beginning of E.III. See: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 319).

[41] The pairing of form with the ego and matter with the non-ego is on display in Fichte's investigations into the "independent activity" of the ego and the non-ego.

[42] The pairing of form with activity and matter with rest is on display in Fichte's investigation into the "exchange of passivity and activity". The quotes of the descriptions of form and matter are from: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 329, 330, 352).

Given that we have described the realization of mind as the coming to rest in thought of the infinite activity of mind, it might appear odd that Fichte associates form with the ego's activity and not with the stasis of the non-ego. For the notion of *form*, when it is employed in relation to *matter*, generally signifies something fixed. If the mind is to behold the form, or figure, of some bit of matter in the world, then the form must be stationary, embedded in the activity of the world that the mind has fixed in thought. However, Fichte would say that although the forms of matter are fixed in thought, form nevertheless reveals to the conscious ego the relative finitude of its thought, the illusion of stability, and the infinite active ground from which his thought originates.

We can call this perspective a claim about the ideality of form. The forms that the matter of the world assumes in consciousness act as a window onto the unconscious, ideal ground of the conscious ego. In the *Foundation*, Fichte makes this argument twice, first with respect to space and then with respect to time. The argument in both cases is the same. It is a variation on Zeno's paradoxes, in which time and space are shown to be infinitely divisible. The so-called *form* of matter is shown to be everywhere and nowhere at once because matter is infinitely divisible in space and time. In other worlds, matter is infinitely reticulate. One can form it in an infinite number of ways. The reason that the form and not the matter is *ideal* is that it is the form of the object, and not the matter, that constitutes the act of thinking the object.

We can explain this as follows. Matter assumes a certain form in space for a certain duration of time. This form allows one to distinguish a specific clump of matter as one specific thing. Thanks to the form of the matter, one can recognize the matter as embodying some form. For example, one sees the form of a table and recognizes the matter that is contained in that form to be a table. Now, the problem that Fichte identifies with this picture is that the existence of the object is limited

in space and time. This means that one can always find a border region (Grenze) in which the matter ceases to be the matter of that one object and becomes the matter of something else. In relation to time, this means that there is some point in time at which the object ceases to be, and so the matter of that object ceases to be the matter of *that* object and becomes the matter of the other object.

Fichte presents this argument in terms of the opposition between light and darkness. We can understand "light" to stand for the existence of the object, and "darkness" to stand for its negation:

> Posit in the continuous space…in point 'm' *light*, and in point 'n' *darkness*: because the space is continuous, and because there is no hiatus between 'm' and 'n', there must necessarily exist a point 'o' that is between the two other points. This point 'o' is at once both light and darkness, which is a contradiction.
>
> Setzet in dem fortlaufenden Raume A im Punkte m *Licht*, und im Punkte n *Finsterniß*: so muss nothwendig, da der Raum stetig, und zwischen m und n kein hiatus ist, zwischen beiden Punkten irgendwo ein Punkt o seyn, welcher Licht und Finsterniß zugleich ist, welches sich widerspricht.[43]

The idea here is that if we move across the sensuous manifold of space, we must encounter a region in which the object we are concentrating on ceases to be. This region in which the object both is and isn't is the 'form' of the object; it is that which one sees when one recognizes that object, not as a collection of matter, but as the object that it is. When, for example, I see the table, the table presents itself to me as having the contour, the figure, the *Gestalt* of a table, and it is this form that communicates the tableness of the object. However, the form of the table isn't something that has its own material reality separate from the material that is contained in the form. I can't isolate the contours of the table as one type of matter distinct from the matter of the table. Rather, the form is just my way of organizing in thought the sensuous material that is before me.

Towards the end of the *Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge* Fichte identifies this paradox of form as resulting from the "wondrous faculty of the productive imagination."[44] In this case, Fichte presents

[43]*Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 301).

the argument in terms of time, demonstrating the infinite divisibility of matter, not in space, but in time:

> In the physical point X in the moment in time "A", posit light, and posit darkness in the moment in time "B" that immediately proceeds it: light and darkness are sharply distinguished from one another, as it should be…Imagine the sharp border between both moments, call it "Z". What is Z? Not light; for light is in Moment A, and Z is not A; neither is it darkness, for darkness is in Moment B. Thus Z is neither of them. – But I can just as much say: both moments are in Z, for if there is no gap between A and B…the two touch one another immediately in Z...And here we have just carried out an experiment with the fantastic faculty within ourselves of the productive imagination…
>
> Setzet in den physischen Punkt X im Zeitmomente A. Licht, und Finsterniß in den unmittelbar darauf folgenden Zeitmoment B: so ist Licht und Finsterniß scharf von einander geschieden, wie es seyn soll...Bildet euch ein die scharfe Grenze zwischen beiden Momenten = Z. Was ist in Z? Nicht Licht, denn das ist im Momente A. und Z ist nicht =A; und eben so wenig Finsterniß, denn diese ist im Momente B. Mithin keins von beiden. – Aber ich kann eben sowohl sagen: es ist in ihm beides, denn wenn zwischen A und B. keine Lücke ist...berühren sie sich in Z. unmittelbar...und es ist hier zugleich ein Experiment mit dem wunderbaren Vermögen der produktiven Einbildungskraft in uns angestellt worden...[45]

Fichte's association here of the ideality of form with the human imagination is highly significant. It is by means of the imagination that one recognizes that the borders that separate the matter of the world have a merely ideal existence. The form of matter allows the mind to give order to its spontaneous activity and hold this activity in thought as consisting of lawful interactions between entities. The imagination sees through the finitude of this way of thinking. It recognizes the infinitely complex ways in which this matter is active. One can always isolate a finer level of formal distinction that describes the interactions of matter. This ubiquity and immateriality of form is a contradiction that points toward the infinite active ground that underlies the particular conceptual contours by means of which the conscious ego apprehends the world.

1.5 Conclusion: On the centrality of the imagination in the 1794 *Foundation*

The imagination plays a central role in Fichte's 1794 *Foundation*. It is responsible for transposing the infinite activity of the unconscious mind into the stable consciousness of a temporal-spatial manifold. For this reason, Fichte describes the imagination as "the capacity that hovers in the

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[44] *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 353).
[45] *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 352-3).

middle between determination and non-determination, between the finite and the infinite."[46] Mind could not become real if it didn't have this imaginative ability to move from oblivious indeterminacy to the determinate form it assumes in consciousness.

This transition, of course, comes at a loss. The mind attains consciousness, but it loses its infinitude. This estrangement of the ego from its infinite ground is crucial for Fichte's early Jena *Science of Knowledge*, for it is on account of the ego's loss of infinitude that the ego must become a moral agent. Only through moral action can the conscious mind demonstrate its infinite capacity. In the third part of the *Foundation*, the *Foundation of the Knowledge of the Practical*, completed in 1795, Fichte calls the moral action of the ego a "striving," and calls that which the ego strives for a "merely imagined object."[47] This shows how important the imagination is for the early Jena system. The imagination is that which connects the ego to its infinite ground, and it can do this in two directions. First, the ego can become acquainted with its infinite ground by recognizing the ideality of sensuous form. This is a philosophical endeavor, accomplished by the arguments of theoretical philosophy which point out the precariousness of firm borders and help the mind peer back into its original oblivion. Second, the ego can use its imagination to direct its moral action in the real world.

As we will see in the following chapter, Fichte later revised this second, moral application of the imagination. In the revision of his philosophy that began in 1795 Fichte decided it was better not to base his philosophy on an imagined infinite ground. He replaced his theory of the realization of infinite mind with an account of the moral constitution of conceptual thinking. Thanks to the

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[46] "Die Einbildungskraft ist ein Vermögen, das zwischen Bestimmung, und Nicht-Bestimmung, zwischen Endlichem, und Unendlichem in der Mitte schwebt." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 360).

[47] "Die Vermuthung, welche sich jedem auf den ersten Anblik darbietet, ist ohne Zweifel diese, daß die endliche objektive Thätigkeit des Ich auf ein *wirkliches*, sein unendliches Streben aber auf ein bloß *eingebildetes* Objekt gehe." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 402). Fichte mentions in a footnote that the striving he is describing is a reformulation of Kant's categorical imperative, and thus we must understand it as a moral striving. See: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 396-7).

general model of concept realization with which he had developed his theory of infinite mind, this new version of his philosophy followed quite naturally from the philosophy of 1794. Fichte was no longer concerned with the realization of an unconscious, infinite mind, but rather with the role that concepts play in articulating and carrying out discrete moral action.

Chapter 2:
Universal and Local Mindedness in the Development of the Jena *Science of Knowledge*

2.0 Overview

In Chapter 1 I demonstrated the continuity of Fichte's Jena philosophy, which is reflected in what we can call the *isomorphic* character of his thought.[1] That is to say that the various philosophical positions that Fichte presents between 1794 and 1800 all exhibit an analogous structure that is intended to negotiate between the ideal and the real aspects of minded existence. This structure I described as *concept realization*. Its distinguishing feature is that it employs, as a unity, six aspects – matter, form, being, activity, efficient cause, final cause – that correspond to the process by which a concept attains sensuous presence. In this chapter I provide a fuller account of what is at stake when Fichte's employs this structure, and what he intends to communicate by doing so.

My focus is on the two employments of concept realization that defined Fichte's Jena philosophy, namely the realization of infinite mind that Fichte describes in the 1794/95 *Foundation* and the minded causality model of consciousness that Fichte most succinctly presents in the *Introduction* to the *System of Ethics*. I argue that while the theory of infinite mind was the defining feature of Fichte's

[1] I borrow this term from Paul Franks, who argues that Fichte is out to demonstrate "the isomorphism of transcendental and normative principles." I disagree about where the isomorphism lies, for I argue that the isomorphism exists not between the transcendental and the normative but more generally between the competing theories of mind that Fichte offers in the *Foundation*, in the later Jena texts, and in *The Vocation of Man*. The most important of these isomorphisms for Fichte's Jena philosophy is that between the early philosophy of the *Foundation* and the revision of this philosophy after 1795. In contrast to Franks, I believe that the distinction that Franks makes between the transcendental and the normative is the wrong distinction to make, too much influenced by a Kantian notion of the transcendental as that which must hold as an a prior condition of experience. Fichte doesn't want to have a transcendental account that can then translate into a normative situation. Rather, he wants to show right from the very beginning of his Jena philosophy that human mindedness is always already normative. Fichte, I claim, largely rejects the distinction between transcendental conditions of possibility and minded actuality, considering it to be an artificial distinction that carries too much weight in Kant's philosophy and which his philosophy seeks to overcome. See: Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005) 325, 347.

early Jena philosophy, which found its distinctive expression in the *Foundation*, the theory of minded causality defined his later Jena philosophy, whose main works include *Foundation of Natural Right* (hereafter: *Natural Right*), the *System of Ethics*, the *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Science of Knowledge* from 1798/98 (hereafter: *Attempt*), and the *New Method*, the lecture series of the revised system that Fichte delivered from 1796 to 1799.

This development of the Jena philosophy can be explained as follows. Fichte began his philosophical career in Jena by articulating a theory of mind that sought to account for the entirety of human experience. He employed the structure of concept realization on the level of infinite mind so as give an account of the unity and totality of human experience, an account in which moral action and the global apprehension of one's experiential universe could be seen as two mutually entwined expressions of the same infinite activity constituting minded experience. However, soon after completing this early system, Fichte saw that such a broad, universal theory of experience neglected to account for the limits placed on individual, conscious subjects. An individual might aspire to infinite knowledge and might yearn for an unlimited ability to reshape her world, but in point of fact human experience is characterized by finite knowledge and an even more limited field of practical action. This consideration of individual human experience explains why Fichte retooled his philosophy in the *New Method* into an account of mind that focuses on the local experience that a minded individual has of possessing *particular* concepts that prescribe or allow for local action within one's immediate vicinity.

We will see in the course of this chapter that the shift from a universalist theory of infinite mind to a local theory of concept-guided, minded causality brings with it a seemingly irreconcilable contradiction. According to the early system, conscious experience has meaning, both for the

philosopher and the conscious individual, only in so far as it is related to the totality of experience. All of experience is taken up and subordinated to one single project, namely the realization of the infinite. In the revised system, conscious experience consists of discrete moral ends that the individual can grasp without having to consider their relationship to the entirety of experience. Under this latter paradigm, the unity of moral and physical existence can only be found in the discrete interactions between individuals, interactions in which individuals cooperatively determine desirable ends that can be carried out in the physical world.

2.1 Setting the Stakes – From God to Man

We can observe the stakes of Fichte's turn from a theory of infinite mind to a theory of minded causality by considering a letter that Fichte writes to Jacobi on August 30, 1795, a letter that lies at the crossroads of Fichte's Jena philosophy. Sometime within the preceding two months, two texts have been published that mark a provisional completion of the *Foundation* that Fichte had begun in 1794: the *Foundation of Knowledge of the Practical*, which is the long-promised third and final part of the *Foundation,* and the *Outline of the Distinctive Character of the Science of Knowledge with respect to the Theoretical Faculty* (hereafter: *Outline*), which explains in more detail aspects of the theoretical philosophy that Fichte had presented in the second part of the *Foundation*.[2] Fichte is sending Jacobi these two texts and mentions in the accompanying letter his current plan to present a theory of 'natural right' (Naturrecht), a project that, as we know from a letter to Reinhold and another to his publisher, he had been working on over the summer.[3] The *Foundation of Natural Right* that Fichte publishes six

[2] The first and second parts of the *Foundation* appeared in installments starting in June 1794 and were then published in their entirety for the *Michaelis-Messe* in Autumn 1794. The third part, the *Foundation of Knowledge of the Practical*, was likely completed before Easter 1795 and first printed in July and August 1795. The *Outline* was also printed in July and August 1795 and had likely completed sometime in the Spring of 1795. See the editorial *Vorwort* to the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* and the Vorwort to the *Grundriß des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre*, particularly the following pages: (GA I/2, 175, 182-186) and (GA I/3, 131-133).

[3] Fichte had planned to lecture on natural right for the Summer Semester 1795 but was sidetracked by the student revolts in Jena in Spring 1795. In a letter to Reinhold from August 29, 1794 and in a letter to his publisher, Cotta, from

months later, in March 1796, would mark a turning point in his philosophical project. In that work, a new perspective emerges that puts the local experience of the individual, and not an infinite activity of an absolute ego, at the center of Fichte's philosophy. This local perspective, systematically worked out in the first six or so paragraphs of *Natural Right*, is then used to present the entire philosophical system in the *New Method* lectures that Fichte first presents in autumn 1796 and continues to lecture on through the spring of 1799.[4]

In the letter to Jacobi, Fichte is grappling with this imminent shift in perspective. He describes the new "practical standpoint of reflection" that he hopes to achieve with *Natural Right* by distinguishing it from the "speculative standpoint of reflection" that he has adopted thus far:

> As long as we regard ourselves as an individual, and this is how we always regard ourselves in life – just not when we are philosophizing and writing poetry –, we see things from a reflective standpoint which I call the practical standpoint (the reflective standpoint which proceeds from the absolute ego I call the speculative standpoint). From this perspective, a world is independently present to us, a world which we can only modify; from this perspective the pure ego, which does not at all disappear for us, is posited outside of ourselves and is called God.
>
> So wie wir uns als Individuum betrachten, und so betrachten wir uns immer im Leben – nur nicht im Philosophiren und Dichten – stehen wir auf diesem Reflexionspunkte, den ich den praktischen nenne (den vom absoluten Ich aus den spekulativen.) Von ihm aus ist eine Welt für uns, unabhängig von uns da, die wir nur modificiren können; von ihm aus wird das reine Ich, das uns auch auf ihm gar nicht verschwindet, außer uns gesetzt, und heißt Gott.[5]

The goal, Fichte says, of his work on natural right will be to "deduce" the individual "from the absolute ego," and by "deducing and recognizing" the practical standpoint of the individual, he will

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November 15, 1795, he mentions the new discoveries in natural right that he made over the summer. See letters #305 and #328 in: *Briefwechsel 1793-1795* (GA III/2, 384, 433).

[4] Noted Fichte scholar Daniel Breazeale mentions that one can debate whether the so-called "later Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*" began with *Natural Right* or with the *New Method* lectures that Fichte completed later. I argue that *Natural Right* marks the break with the early Wissenschaftslehre, although it took Fichte a few months to fully realize the potential and implications of the change, and that realization is the *New Method*. See: Daniel Breazeale, "Introduction," in *New Essays on Fichte's Later Jena Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), x.

[5] *Briefwechsel 1793-1795* (GA III/2, 392).

thereby achieve the "complete reconciliation of philosophy with healthy common sense that the Science of Knowledge has promised."[6]

Fichte's distinction here between a speculative and a practical standpoint and his promise of reconciling these two standpoints would prove decisive for the development of his philosophy, but not in the way that Fichte thinks. Fichte vastly underestimates the enormous chasm that separates the two standpoints, and he can't see that a 'deduction' of the practical from the speculative, as it is presented, for example, in §1-§6 of *Natural Right*, does nothing to clear up the obscurity or lend plausibility to the seemingly broad metaphysical claims of the 1794 *Foundation*. It is little comfort to show that a theory of the absolute ego can "deduce and recognize" the practical standpoint when it is the premise of this deduction, i.e. the theory of the absolute ego, that one doubts. This explains why, in the *New Method*, Fichte would reverse the directionality of his philosophy, attempting to give a philosophical account that begins with the practical standpoint and that he could then work up into a broader account of experience, as opposed to descending from the speculative standpoint into the practical. However, once Fichte adopted this reversal of direction, his Jena philosophy never attained to the speculative unity of the *Foundation*, losing in the *New Method* the thoroughgoing union of the natural world with the moral order.

A second blind spot concerns Fichte's construal of the practical standpoint as non-philosophical. The description of the practical standpoint as a standpoint of life and common sense, comparatively devoid of philosophical theorizing, clearly reflects Fichte's effort to appeal to what he, earlier in the letter, calls Jacobi's 'realism,' which, very broadly stated, refers not to a speculative realism like

[6] "…durch die Deduction und Anerkennung dieses Punktes von der Speculation selbst, erfolgt die gänzliche Aussöhnung der Philosophie mit dem gesunden Menschenverstande welche die Wissenschaftslehre versprochen." *Briefwechsel 1793-1795* (GA III/2, 392).

Spinoza's, but rather to a practical realism, to Jacobi's advocacy of immediate, intuitive experience and his general mistrust of systematic speculative philosophy, Kant's critical philosophy included.[7] However, the exposition of the practical standpoint that we actually find in §1-§6 of *Natural Right* and in later texts is in fact suffused with substantive philosophical claims, claims such that conscious individual experience necessarily involves a normative attitude of what ought to be, and that such an attitude, and therefore consciousness itself, can only come about through an inter-subjective 'summons' by another, conscious being. Fichte turns everything he can get his hands on into part of his philosophical system, and this means that strong philosophical claims emerge even when Fichte is focusing on supposedly simple or immediate conscious experience.

Despite these caveats regarding Fichte's mistaken hopes and characterizations of his developing philosophical project, we should nevertheless take very seriously Fichte's statement in the letter to Jacobi that the philosophy of his *Foundation* is speculative and his claim that, going forward, he will incorporate the individual perspective of practical, lived common sense into his philosophy, for this is indeed the direction that his philosophy will take. Not only is there a certain accuracy to Fichte's self-assessment of his philosophy and his preview of his work to follow, but his characterization of his speculative standpoint thus far and the practical standpoint to come provides us with context for understanding why Fichte initially adopted the former, and why he would in the future turn to the latter. The benefits of adopting the practical standpoint have already been mentioned: what is won is an appeal, if not to plain common sense, then at least to a comprehensibility that is achieved when one derives one's philosophical claims from the experiences that one actually has as an individual and not, for example, from the alleged machinations of an elusive absolute ego turned God.

[7] The relevant passage from the letter: "Sie sind ja bekanntermaßen Realist, und ich bin ja wohl transcendentaler Idealist, härter als Kant es war." *Briefwechsel 1793-1795* (GA III/2, 391).

But why, then, should Fichte have adopted the speculative standpoint in the first place? In the letter to Jacobi, Fichte describes speculative philosophy as an endeavor that stems from man's unquenchable desire to grasp the totality of his predicament:

> What's the use of the speculative perspective, and along with it all of philosophy, if it does not exist for the sake of living? If humankind had not tried this forbidden fruit, then it could have done without all of philosophy. But it is implanted in mankind to want to behold those regions beyond the individual not merely in a reflected light, but also immediately; and the first one who raised a question regarding God's existence broke through the limits, rattled humanity in its deepest foundational supports, and set it into a conflict with itself, a conflict which is not yet resolved and which can only be resolved by boldly advancing to the highest point, from which the speculative and the practical appear unified. We began to philosophize out of pride, which cost us our innocence; we behold our nakedness and philosophize since then out of necessity for our salvation.
>
> Wozu ist denn nun der spekulative Gesichtspunkt und mit ihm die ganze Philosophie, wenn sie nicht für's Leben ist? Hätte die Menschheit von dieser verbotenen Frucht nie gekostet, so könnte sie der ganzen Philosophie entbehren. Aber es ist ihr eingepflanzt jene Region über das Individuum hinaus, nicht blos in dem reflektirten Lichte, sondern unmittelbar erblicken zu wollen; und der erste, der eine Frage über das Daseyn Gottes erhob, durchbrach die Gränzen, erschütterte die Menschheit in ihren tiefsten Grundpfeilern, und versetzte sie in einen Streit mit sich selbst, der noch nicht beigelegt ist, und der nur durch kühnes Vorschreiten bis zum höchsten Punkte, von welchem aus der spekulative und praktische vereinigt erscheinen, beigelegt werden kann. Wir fingen an zu philosophiren aus Uebermuth, und brachten uns dadurch um unsre Unschuld; wir erblickten unsere Nacktheit, und philosophiren seitdem aus Noth für unsere Erlösung.[8]

Two aspects in this passage are relevant to understanding the stakes of Fichte's speculative position. The first concerns the necessarily global aspiration that Fichte attributes to speculative philosophy, a feature that sheds light on the scope of Fichte's 1794 *Foundation*. The second concerns the complex, even contradictory relationship that Fichte envisions ought to exist between the speculative and the practical standpoint. It is this troubled relationship that Fichte and his generation would spend considerable energy trying to work out, and which Fichte reflects on here perhaps for the first time.

Let us begin with the first aspect, the characterization of what Fichte variously calls the speculative standpoint, or the standpoint of philosophy in general. The crucial idea here is that speculative thinking attempts to grasp the entirety of the human existence once certain doubts about God, the God that is supposedly the ground of all existence, have been raised. Fichte's theory of the absolute ego is an answer both to the Enlightenment drive to extend one's knowledge to ever farther limits

[8] *Briefwechsel 1793-1795* (GA III/2, 392-3).

and to the quasi-religious drive that searches for salvation. These two drives, the former expressing human hubris, the latter human piety, are two aspects of the same quest, namely the quest to resolve the cosmic, existential questions of human experience. It is this quest that, according to Kant, theoretical reason, or speculation, is engaged in when it is exercised in its pure, transcendental capacity. According to Kant, a "transcendental concept of reason is directed always solely towards absolute totality in the synthesis of conditions, and never terminates save in what is absolutely, that is, in all relations, unconditioned."[9] The "ideas" that Kant's theoretical reason settles on in its search for the unconditioned, i.e. the soul, the cosmos, and God, are of the same universal order as the objects of inquiry that Fichte associates with speculation, namely the absolute ego, the "regions beyond the individual," God, and salvation. However, having observed this similarity between Kantian theoretical reason and Fichtean speculation, a crucial difference must be noted. For Kant, transcendental ideas are totalities that reason aspires to, but reason can nevertheless not attain any objective knowledge regarding these totalities. Fichte, meanwhile, bases his monist account in the 1794 *Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge* on just such a totality, that which he describes as the "activity that goes out in the infinite," and which he later, in the *Foundation of Knowledge of the Practical* calls the absolute ego, and then, in the letter to Jacobi, claims is God. Whereas Kant argues that reason can have no objective knowledge of transcendental ideas, Fichte has deduced a ground of all conscious experience that appears to be the kind of totalizing entity that Kant would call a transcendental idea.

This difference between Kantian reason and Fichtean speculation sharpens when we consider the second aspect of this passage just quoted, the supposed resolution between the speculative and the practical that Fichte claims is possible. A problem, namely, emerges with Fichte's claim from earlier in his letter that the absolute ego of the speculative standpoint becomes God when seen from the

[9] Kant, Immanuel. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A326/B382.

practical standpoint. For there is an inherent incompatibility between these two perspectives. The practical observer believes in God, and to him the speculative standpoint is *either* completely superfluous because the absolute ego is just another, perhaps misleading, name for God, *or* downright blasphemous if it turns out that this absolute ego is something other than God. Meanwhile, the speculative observer, versed in the ways of the absolute ego, knows the practical observer to be naïve, if not downright deceived. If the practical observer could raise himself to a higher, speculative, standpoint, then he would see that that which he had naively been calling God is in fact the absolute ego.

Kant's solution to the clash of these perspectives is to distinguish knowledge from belief. According to Kant, we can have no knowledge of the existence of God, but we ought, for practical matters, to believe in God. Fichte is not content with these restrictions on theoretical philosophy. While Fichte wouldn't say that we can prove the existence of God along traditional scholastic lines, he thinks that we can, as philosophers, at least say something about the unconditioned ground of human experience. This unconditioned ground of human experience looks similar enough to God that Fichte can outright say in the letter to Jacobi that "the pure ego… posited outside of ourselves…is called God."[10]

Fichte's problematic distinction between the speculative and the practical standpoint is the result of a balancing act between, on the one hand, Kantian transcendental ignorance, and, on the other, Jacobi's unyielding critique of such ignorance, mistrust of systematic philosophy, and preference for the immediacy and intuition that is exhibited in local human experience. Jacobi thinks that no speculative standpoint, a standpoint that he associates with systematic philosophy, is justified. Kant,

[10] "…das reine Ich…außer uns gesetzt…heißt Gott." In: *Briefwechsel 1793-1795* (GA III/2, 392).

meanwhile, distinguishes between practical belief in certain transcendental ideas and theoretical ignorance with respect to our knowledge of them. A defense of this Kantian distinction between faith and knowledge is inspiring Fichte to draw the distinction between the practical and the speculative. Meanwhile, Jacobi's influence on Fichte is unwittingly pushing these two standpoints together so that there is only one standpoint, the standpoint of immediate experience, and the individual of immediate experience holds certain things, such as the existence of God, to be either true or false, and not true in one sense and unfounded in another.

As far as the question of the existence of God is concerned, this dissonance in Fichte's distinction between the speculative and the practical is ultimately going to pull Fichte into the famous atheism dispute of 1798-1799.[11] The more immediate and, I would argue, far reaching consequence of Fichte's attempt to reconcile the two standpoints is the shift in his philosophy, beginning with *Natural Right*, from the 1794/1795 *Foundation* to the *New Method*. However, rather than characterizing Fichte's revision of his philosophy along the terms offered in his letter as a shift from the speculative to the practical, I will describe this as a shift from the universal to the particular. My reason for adopting terms different from those Fichte offers us in the letter is that Fichte's philosophy is never *purely* speculative or *purely* practical. As we will see, the supposedly non-philosophical practical perspective that is displayed in the *New Method* is worked out through systematic philosophy that makes speculative claims regarding the self-activity of ego as the source of minded experience. Meanwhile, the speculative *Foundation* from 1794 already reflected the Jacobian point that transcendental ignorance – our reliance on a so-called "affectation" from a "thing-in-itself" – is an

[11] For an excellent discussion of the relationship between Jacobi and Fichte in the atheism dispute see: George Di Giovanni, "From Jacobi's Philosophical Novel to Fichte's Idealism: Some Comments on the 1798-99 'Atheism Dispute'," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 21:1 (1989): 75-100. Di Giovanni's discussion of the relationship between Fichte and Jacobi would benefit from a sharper distinction between Fichte's early and later Jena philosophy and the influence that Jacobi had on this shift. Such a revision would show that Fichte's thought is even more intertwined with Jacobi's than even Di Giovanni suggests and that the atheism dispute was one stage in what was already a complex interaction between the two.

untenable position because, if a philosophical account is to be at all intelligible, then the terms with which we construct the account must be terms that we are familiar with from our own experience.[12] The 1794 *Foundation* sought to revise the Kantian transcendental story about the affectation of the transcendental subject by a thing-in-itself into a story organized around the more intuitive aspects of concept realization. According to this story in the *Foundation*, infinite mind tries to realize itself in the sensuous world in a manner that is analogous to the process by which concepts attain sensuous realization in daily life. As I argued in the first chapter, this notion of concept realization provides the intuitive basis of the speculative system of 1794.

Thus, it is a matter of recalibrating the mixture of these two standpoints, of a shift in emphasis from the earlier to the later Jena philosophy. My claim is that the dominance of the speculative standpoint produced a universal perspective on mind, whereas the dominance of the practical after 1795 resulted in the local perspective of the *New Method*. The remainder of this chapter provides a more detailed account of this shift – it draws out the universalist claims of the 1794 *Foundation*, the local core of the *New Method* that grows out of Fichte's shift to the practical, and the contradictions that emerged between these two accounts.

2.2 The Universalism of the 1794/95 *Science of Knowledge*

The universalist position of Fichte's early Jena philosophy relies on two structural features that together give the system its overall shape. We have already been introduced to the first feature in

[12] "Indessen wie sehr es auch dem Geist der Kantischen Philosphie zuwider seyn mag, von Gegenständen zu sagen, daß sie Eindrücke auf die Sinne machen und auf diese Weise Vorstellungen zuwege bringen, so läßt sich doch nicht wohl ersehen, wie ohne diese Voraussetzung, auch die Kantische Philosophie zu sich selbst den Eingang finden und zu irgend einem Vortrag ihres Lehrbegriffs gelangen könne. Denn gleich das Wort Sinnlichkeit ist ohne alle Bedeutung, wenn nicht ein distinctes reales Medium zwischen Realem und Realem, ein wirkliches Mittel von Etwas zu Etwas darunter verstanden werden und in seinem Begriff, die Begriffe von auseinander und verknüpft seyn, von Thun und Leiden, von Causalität und Dependenz als realer und objektiver Bestimmungen schon enthalten seyn sollen..." In: Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *David Hume über den Glauben oder Idealismus und Realismus. Ein Gespräch*, in *Schriften zum Transzendentalen Idealismus*, vol. 2.1 of *Werke*, ed. Klaus Hammacher and Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Meiner, 2004), 109.

Chapter 1. It is the notion of infinite mind, that which Fichte refers to toward the end of the *Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge* as the "activity that goes out into the infinite," and which he calls the "absolute ego" (absolutes Ich) both in his letter to Jacobi and in the *Foundation of Knowledge of the Practical*.[13] The second feature is the *circular* path that, according to Fichte, infinite mind travels in its journey through human consciousness, back to itself. The beginning of the circle is described in Part II of the *Foundation*. The circle begins once the infinite activity of mind is 'checked,' thereby inciting the imagination to hover in its attempt to attain the realization of infinite mind under the condition of finitude. Fichte then describes the closure of the circle in the first paragraph of Part III of the *Foundation*, §5. The ego, namely, strives by means of its moral activity to complete the circle and thereby return to infinitude. This circular path of infinite mind marks out the universalist scope of Fichte's early Jena philosophy. According to this systematic model of mind, the conscious minded experience of the individual is a mere passing episode of finitude within the broader context of the infinite, which itself comprises the universe of possible experience.

Before we look at Fichte's characterization of this circular path, it is necessary to address the difficulty that it is not always clear when Fichte is referring to something like infinite mind. Indeed, this is why I use my own terminology for the concept. The main ambiguity of this concept regards whether or not the ego that is presented in the first principle of the *Foundation*, which talks of an ego that "posits originally…its own being" (setzt ursprünglich sein eigenes Seyn), is referring to an empirical, self-aware, and therefore finite ego, or to the infinite ground of consciousness that is in some sense mind, but lacks self-consciousness.[14] In §1 of the *Foundation* which presents the first principle, Fichte refers to the ego as an "absolute subject," which might suggest the infinite mind

[13] For Fichte's mention of the "absolute ego" in *Part III* of the *Foundation* see: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 386, 391-392, 405, 409).
[14] *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 261).

reading, but he also describes this subject in terms of its capacity for apperception, expressed in the assertion "I am," and in terms of its capacity to make identity judgments of the form "A is A."[15] These characterizations of the ego as spontaneous within the act of cognition seem to imply that he is talking about the finite ego, which, although it may indirectly manifest infinite or absolute powers, is not to be equated with infinitude. It is only well into the middle of the *Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge*, once Fichte starts to offer his monist account of the "activity that goes into the infinite" that he talks about an infinite, mental activity that is active before the advent of consciousness and therefore unavailable to consciousness.[16] Fichte then unambiguously calls this unconscious infinite activity an "absolute ego" only in the *Foundation of Knowledge of the Practical* when he tells us that the "absolute ego" that first made its appearance in the first principle is not the "ego given in actual consciousness….but rather an idea of the ego… that is however unreachable for our consciousness, and thus can never occur in our consciousness immediately."[17]

In my opinion, we can understand this initial ambiguity in *Part 1* of the *Foundation* as to whether the absolute ego is fully present to empirical consciousness and Fichte's direct answer to this question in *Part III* as a sign of his gradual embrace of the notion of an infinite mind that is not and cannot be accessible to consciousness. We know from Fichte's own correspondence that the first two parts of the *Foundation* were written section for section, so that it is very possible that the monist account of

[15] "In dem Satze: A = A ist das erste A dasjenige, welches im Ich, entweder schlechthin, wie das Ich selbst, oder aus irgend einem Grunde, wie jedes bestimmte Nicht-Ich gesetzt wird. In diesem Geschäfte verhält sich das Ich als absolutes Subjekt; und man nennt daher das erste A. das Subjekt. Durch das zweite A wird dasjenige bezeichnet, welches das sich selbst zum Objecte der Reflexion machende Ich, als in sich *gesetzt*, vorfindet, weil es dasselbe erst in sich gesetzt *hat*." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 259).

[16] Fichte does not explicitly say in *Part II* of the *Foundation* that this original world- and self-positing activity is not present to consciousness. However, it is implied when he, for example, says that only once the hovering of the imagination is stabilized does there emerge a "representation of one representing" (Vorstellung des Vorstellenden), which we should understand to mean self-consciousness. See: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 361).

[17] "Hier erst wird der Sinn des Satzes: *das Ich setzt sich selbst schlechthin*, völlig klar. Es ist in demselben gar nicht die Rede von dem im wirklichen Bewußtseyn gegebenen Ich...sondern von einer Idee des Ich...die aber für unser Bewußtseyn unerreichbar ist, und daher in demselben nie unmittelbar...vorkommen kann." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 409).

infinite mind that emerges from his analysis of mind-world dualism in *Part II* of the *Foundation* only became apparent to him as he was writing it.[18] Meanwhile, *Part III* was published in summer of 1795, nearly a year after the first two parts had been completed in late-summer, early autumn of 1794, meaning that Fichte had time to reflect on, and respond to questions and criticisms regarding the content he had presented in the first two parts.

The *Outline* that appeared alongside *Part III* provides further evidence that, following the completion of the first two parts of the *Foundation*, Fichte was concerned with elaborating and building upon his discovery of infinite mind that we find in *Part II* of the *Foundation*. In the *Outline*, Fichte immediately starts his discussion with the initial "check" that is said to occur on the "original activity of ego," and he proceeds from that point on to explain the emergence of empirical, self-apperceptive consciousness in time and space. Similar to *Part III* of the *Foundation*, the *Outline* contains numerous statements emphasizing that the ego cannot be conscious of its activity that is involved in the generation of empirical experience.[19] In contrast, it is only at the very end of *Part II* of the *Foundation*, in the section called the *Deduction of Representation*, that Fichte explicitly tells his reader that "the ego cannot be conscious of its activity in the production of the intuited."[20] Thus we can say that together the *Outline* and the *Foundation of Knowledge of the Practical*, the publication of which directly precede Fichte's claim in his letter to Jacobi that the absolute ego is God, mark a highpoint

[18] The improvisational, exploratory composition of the *Foundation* is testified to in a letter to Reinhold from July 1795: "Bedenken Sie, daß das bis jetz gelieferte Handschrift für meine Zuhörer ist, zusammengeschrieben neben Vorlesungen…und neben tausenderlei sehr heterogenen Beschäftigungen, so gaß der Bogen jedesmal fertig ware, wenn der vorige zu Ende ging," and also as in a letter from September 1794 to Goethe: "Wenn Ein Bogen durchgelesen war, musste ein andrer erscheinen; und dann muste ich es gut sein laßen." *Briefe 1793-1795* (GA III/2, 203 347).

[19] For example: "[das Ich] wird demnach der aufgezeigten Tätigkeit sich nicht bewußt, sondern vergißt sich selbst gänzlich, und verliert sich im Objekte derselben; und wir haben demnach hier wieder die oben geschilderte äußere (die aber noch nicht *als* äußere gesetzt ist) erste ursprüngliche Anschauung, aus welcher aber noch gar kein Bewußtsein, nicht nur kein Selbstbewußtsein...sondern selbst kein Bewußtsein des Objekts entsteht." In: *Grundriß des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/3, 171).

[20] "Ferner ist klar, daß das Ich seiner Thätigkeit in dieser Produktion des angeschauten, als eines solchen, sich nicht bewußt seyn könne..." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 371).

of Fichte's embrace of the concept of infinite mind, a concept whose full implications only emerged in the course of writing and lecturing on the first two sections of the *Foundation*.

Tracing out the circular movement in the *Foundation* requires that we take into account this gradual disambiguation of the "absolute subject" that we find in the first principle of the first part of the *Foundation*. This is because Fichte, most notably in his introductory text *On the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre*, describes his system as a circle on which one begins from and gradually returns to a first principle, a structure that is supposed to demonstrate the unity of the system and its completeness.[21] By the time Fichte is completing the circle in *Part III* of the *Foundation*, it is clear that the absolute ego as beginning and endpoint is not being characterized by the achievement of, say, self-apperception or identity judgments which are discussed in §1 and which only occur under the finite conditions of consciousness, but rather by an unreachable infinitude from which the ego came and towards which it strives to return.[22]

This infinitude as beginning and end-point of the 1794/1795 system establishes the universalist scope of Fichte's early Jena philosophy. Conscious finite experience is what occurs when infinite mind, having been subjected to a check and thereby to the condition of finitude, is busy trying to

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[21] Fichte's clearest statement regarding the circular structure of his philosophy is contained in *On the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre*: "Die Wissenschaft ist ein *System*, oder sie ist vollendet, wenn weiter kein Satz gefolgert werden kann….wir bedürfen eines positiven Merkmals, daß schlechthin und unbedingt nichts weiter gefolgert werden könne; und das könnte kein anders seyn, als das, daß der Grundsatz, von welchem wir ausgegangen wären, das letzte Resultat sey." In: *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 130-1). The circular macro-structure of the system is just one of the various ways in which argumentative circularity plays an important role in Fichte's philosophy. For an extended discussion of the various uses of argumentative circularity see: Daniel Breazeale, "Circles and Grounds," in: *Thinking through the Wissenschaftslehre: themes from Fichte's early philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 272-300.

[22] Frederick Neuhouser offers an alternative reading of the first principle. Whereas I argue that Fichte clarifies the ambiguity of the first principle in the course of *Part II*, Neuhouser argues that the meaning of the first principle changes between the first two parts of the *Foundation* and *Part III* of the *Foundation*. Neuhouser's account is, in general, deflationary, for he argues that in its original statement, the first principle is about "self-awareness," and that in *Part III* it becomes a statement about "self-sufficiency." Neither of these descriptions capture the universalizing, world-encompassing nature of absolute positing. See: Frederick Neuhouser. *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 52.

return to infinitude. Precisely because it is diametrically opposed to the infinite, Fichte uses consciousness to lend structure to his circular system: the *Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge* describes the emergence of consciousness as a movement away from the infinite, while the *Foundation of Knowledge of the Practical* starts with conscious experience and describes the ego's moral action in the world as a movement toward the infinite. Graphically, this can be represented as a clock-wise movement from the infinite, half-way along the circumference to consciousness and then back again to the top:

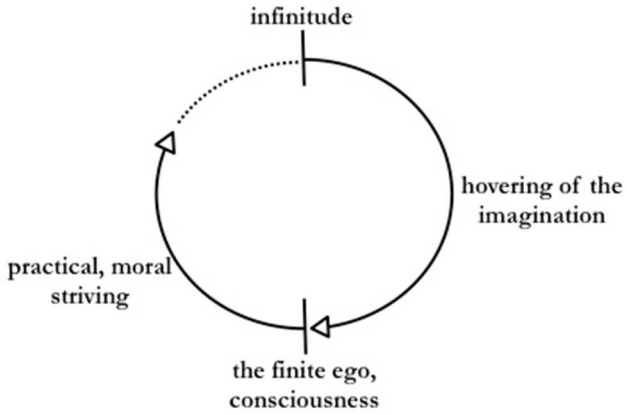

Figure 2: The structure of the philosophical system in the *Foundation*

The attractiveness of this model lies in its unity, which is to say the way in which it presents the ego's conscious, self-aware action in the world as a continuation of the process that brought the world to consciousness in the first place. The emergence of knowledge *about* the world and the actions that morality demands of the individual *in* the world are both part of a single, unified process of realizing the infinite. We can see this when we compare the dynamics of "hovering," Fichte's main term for describing in *Part II* the process of world-emergence, with the dynamics of "striving", Fichte's main term in in *Part III* of his account for the moral action of the ego. Both actions of the ego – its hovering activity, which it carries out under the guise of the imagination, and its striving in the world, which occurs under the guise of the moral individual – are processes that attempt to assert the original infinitude of the ego in the face of a limitation that has been placed on it.

In the case of the hovering imagination, this limit is the check on the infinite activity, the activity that "goes out into the infinite". The check initiates in the ego a process of reflection, whereby it seeks to posit – were positing means here something like putting forth and thereby beholding or making present to itself – its own infinite activity. It is, however, impossible for the ego to behold or exhibit its own infinitude because any reflection of its own infinite activity is subject to the condition that its activity has been limited by a check, and thus that it is robbed of infinitude. The ego is only capable of reflecting its limited activity, its activity that has been checked. It doesn't, however, completely relinquish its claim to infinitude, but rather places this infinitude outside of itself and outside of conscious experience in form of a horizon of infinite possibility that might one day realize the desired infinitude. The horizon of infinite possibility is the temporal-spatial substrate in which all experience occurs and which takes on the actual determinations of the world. This, at least, is my understanding of Fichte's description of the imagination which "now attempts to take up the infinite in the form of the finite, now, repulsed, posits it [the infinite] outside of that form," a process that Fichte describes as a hovering "between the infinite and the finite" that produces both time and space.[23] The ego wants to place before itself its own infinitude, and instead ends up bringing itself into time and space, and thereby into finite, self-apperceptive existence. In finite, self-apperceptive existence the world assumes its actual determinations, a state which Fichte refers to as the "complete determination of (here theoretical) reason" and there emerges the self-apperceptive

[23] This language is found in the following passages: "…das Ich…[versucht] jetzt das unendliche in die Form des endlichen aufzunehmen, jezt, zurückgetrieben, [sezt] es wieder ausser derselben..." and "Die Einbildungskraft ist ein Vermögen, das zwischen…Endlichem und Unendlichem in der Mitte schwebt." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 359-60). Fichte's refers to the fact that this hovering deduces time and space in the following passages: "Dieses Schweben der Einbildungskraft zwischen unvereinbarem, dieser Widerstreit derselben mit sich selbst ist es, welcher…den Zustand des Ich in demselben zu einem *Zeit*-Momente ausdehnt," and "In diesem Streite verweilt der Geist, schwebt zwischen beiden; schwebt zwischen der Forderung und der Unmöglichkeit, sie zu erfüllen, und in diesem Zustande, aber nur in diesem, hält er beide zugleich fest, oder, was das gleiche heißt, macht sie zu solchen, die zugleich aufgefaßt und festgehalten werden können – giebt dadurch, dass er sie berührt, und wieder von ihnen zurückgetrieben wird und wieder berührt, ihnen im *Verhältniß auf sich* einen gewissen Gehalt und eine gewisse Ausdehnung, die zu seiner Zeit als Mannigfaltiges in der Zeit und im Raume sich zeigen wird. Dieser Zustand heißt der Zustand des *Anschauens*. Das in ihm thätige Vermögen ist schon oben productive Einbildungskraft genannt worden." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, , 360, 367).

moment of consciousness, the "representation of the one who is representing," i.e. finite self-representation of the ego.[24]

The moral striving of the ego in *Part III* then picks up at the point of self-awareness, where the hovering has stabilized into a representation of the world that exhibits actual, and not merely possible determinations. It takes as its starting point the world, or not-ego, which has been brought into space and time by the hovering of the imagination, and which now constitutes the limit that infinite mind must work to overcome. At this point, the world has permanency for the ego as the world, and since only the ego itself is infinite, the ego can never bring the world into a state of identity with itself. This is why Fichte, when he introduces the concept of striving, calls it "a mere tendency, a striving toward determination" of the world.[25] This inability for infinite mind to realize itself holds on a global level, which is to say that even considering all determinations of the world that are even conceivable, if not practically possible, the world could never reflect the ego's infinitude back to itself, for the world is, qua represented world, finite. In contrast, on a local level, that is, from the perspective of the finite, practical ego, this striving manifests itself as the categorical imperative that is constitutive of discrete moral action, and which Fichte describes as an "agreement of the object with the ego" which the ego "demands" as an "absolute demand," and which has its origin in the absolute ego.[26]

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[24] "…und so geht es fort, bis zur vollständigen Bestimmung der (hier theoretischen) Vernunft durch sich selbst, wo es weiter keines begrenzenden B ausser der Vernunft in der Einbildungskraft bedarf, d. i. *bis zur Vorstellung des Vorstellenden*." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 361).

[25] "…es ist bloß eine *Tendenz*, ein *Streben* zur Bestimmung, das dennoch völlig rechtskräftig ist; denn es ist durch das absolute Setzen des Ich gesezt." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 397).

[26] "Also, es wird die Uebereinstimmung des Objects mit dem Ich gefordert; und das absolute Ich, gerade um seines absoluten Seyns willen, ist es, welches sie fordert." A footnote that Fichte attaches to this sentence identifies what he has just described as "*Kants* kategorischer Imperativ." Fichte then continues in the main text: "…diese Forderung ist im absoluten Seyn des Ich gegründet." Another sentence later he describes this "Forderung" as "die absolute Forderung." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 397).

It is from the perspective of the practical, finite ego that the extreme openness, one could even say *chaos* of the hovering imagination attains meaning and directionality. The horizon of infinite possibility that constitutes the backdrop of the ego's actual world is only meaningful is so far as out of this reservoir of the possible the ego might strive to bring about the best of all possible worlds. From the purely theoretical perspective, infinite mind might be characterized as a capacity to posit any- and everything, and this is a seemingly empty idea unless one brings to the conception of this capacity the idea that infinite *possibility* is what facilitates the *actual* achievement of the good, even if it is beyond the ego's powers to fully realize the good. Thus the hovering of the imagination and the moral striving of the ego must be thought together as part of a single process, according to which the former is the condition of possibility for the latter. Fichte himself implies this necessary entanglement of imaginative hovering and moral striving in the very beginning of his account of monism in *Part II* when he uses the expression "striving outwards" to describe the activity of the absolute ego, thereby anticipating the moral "striving" that continues within consciousness the process that the imagination begins as consciousness emerges.[27]

It is, however, as a consequence of tying moral striving to the infinitude of the absolute ego that Fichte obscures in *Part III* the finite perspective of moral subjectivity even while he is trying to account for it. This can be seen, on the one hand, in how Fichte handles, or rather, doesn't handle, the issue of free-will and, on the other hand, in the theory of the ego's "yearning" (Sehnen) that he develops in subsequent passages. Both the neglect of a theory of willing and the development of a theory of yearning are symptoms of the same problem, namely that the particular, finite action of

[27] "…es müste demnach angenommen werden, daß jener Anstoß nicht ohne Zuthun des Ich vorhanden wäre, sondern daß er eben auf die Thätigkeit desselben im Setzen seiner selbst geschähe; daß gleichsam seine weiter hinausstrebende Thätigkeit in sich selbst zurückgetrieben, (reflektiert) würde..." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 356).

which the ego is capable in the world loses its significance in the face of an infinite end that is necessarily unachievable.

The topic of willing arises twice in *Part III* of the *Foundation*, first as a promissory note to explain the spontaneity of the will, and then later on in a passing comment that in Fichte's philosophy, the ego's representations depend on the will.[28] The fact that Fichte, in *Part III*, doesn't make good on his promise to deliver an account of the spontaneity of the will is significant when one considers the particular context in which the promise arises. Fichte, namely, says that he will show that the spontaneity of the will is derived from the ego's spontaneous act of relating its "pure activity," which is another term for the infinite activity of the ego, to an "objective activity."[29] In the theoretical sense, an "objective activity" is the activity of an object in the world that becomes stabilized for the ego as a particular object in the world. In the practical sense, an "objectivity activity" is an activity that the ego knowingly directs at a particular object with the intention to modify it according to some desired end. It is in terms of this latter, practical meaning of objective activity that a theory of the will would enter the picture, for both with respect to Kant's categorical imperative that Fichte cites in §5 of the *Foundation*, and with respect to the theory of the will that Fichte presents between 1795 and 1799, starting with *Natural Right*, the will is exercised in relation to some particular action and particular end that the action is intended to achieve.

However, Fichte's system constructs a wide arch from finite consciousness to the striving for the infinite that skips over the description of the piecemeal moral actions of the will that Fichte's

[28] "…auf ihr [der absoluten Handlung des Beziehens der reinen Thätigkeit auf die objektive Thätigkeit–ML] absolutes Seyn gründet sich die absolute Spontaneität der Reflexion im Theoretischen, und die des Willens im Praktischen, wie wir zu seiner Zeit sehen werden." Also: "…hier [wird] gezeigt....daß wiederum das System unsrer Vorstellungen, von unserm Triebe, und unserm Willen abhänge..." See: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 398, 424).
[29] "…diese reine Thätigkeit…muß….durch eine gleichfalls absolute Handlung des Ichs, auf die des Objekts…bezogen…" See: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 398).

concept of infinite striving is meant to encompass. The direct bridge from finite conscious experience toward the infinite is expressed in Fichte's characterization of striving as an "infinite …objective activity," by which he means an infinite activity that nevertheless, because it takes finite consciousness as its starting point, must be directed at, or have as its end, particular objects or states of affairs in the world.[30] As Fichte admits, this creates a contradiction insofar as no object can satisfy an infinite demand.[31] Infinite striving, in so far as it is infinite, cannot be a "striving for a determinate causality (determined by a determinate not-ego)" but must rather be a "striving for causality in general," which is to say that it is an activity "that goes beyond an object."[32]

Fichte's neglect of a theory of the will is part of his larger bias in the *Foundation of Knowledge of the Practical* toward theorizing the infinite end of moral action at the cost of providing an account of how actual, achievable moral ends present themselves. This bias becomes especially apparent in his suggestion that moral striving is directed toward realizing an "imagined object," a formulation that reaches back to the theory of the imagination from *Part II* of the *Foundation*, according to which the imagination mediates between the infinite and finite.[33] An "imagined object" is, however, a contradiction in terms, because in hovering between the infinite and the finite, the imagination alone doesn't bring forth any particular object but rather the spatial-temporal substrate of infinite possibility that provides the material out of which objects will only emerge by means of the understanding. In the realm of the practical this means that the "imagined object" of moral striving

[30] "Nunmehr...ist die unendliche Tätigkeit selbst, als ein *Streben*, bezogen auf das Objekt, mithin insofern selbst objektive Tätigkeit." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 402).
[31] "Also die Zusammensetzung *unendlich* und *objektiv* ist selbst ein Widerspruch. Was auf ein Objekt geht, ist endlich; und was endlich ist, geht auf ein Objekt. Dieser Widerspruch wäre nicht anders zu heben, als dadurch, daß das Objekt überhaupt wegfiele; es fällt aber nicht weg, außer in einer vollendeten Unendlichkeit." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 403).
[32] "Es muss sich nicht bloss ein Streben nach einer (durch ein bestimmtes Nicht-Ich) bestimmten Kausalität, sondern ein Streben nach Kausalität überhaupt aufzeigen lassen, welches letztere das erstere begründet."In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 404).
[33] "Die Vermuthung, welche sich jedem auf den ersten Anblik darbietet, ist ohne Zweifel diese, daß die endliche objektive Thätigkeit des Ich auf ein *wirkliches*, sein unendliches Streben aber auf ein bloß *eingebildetes* Objekt gehe." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 402).

makes any *particular* moral end that the ego *could* achieve fade into insignificance. In focusing on what, a few pages later, is called, "the idea of a… completed infinitude" that "hovers before us and is contained in the inner-most of our being," Fichte completely ignores the finite ends and actions of which conscious experience is in fact composed.[34]

Fichte's emphasis on the infinite end of striving leads to a situation in the *Foundation of Knowledge of the Practical* in which the moral subject is described merely in terms of the various "drives" and "feelings" (Gefühle) that make up her moral existence, rather than in terms of what one should expect in a post-Kantian account of morality, namely the individual's conceptual capacity to grasp the moral import of her available actions. The theory of the feeling of "yearning" that Fichte presents in the final two paragraphs of *Part III* is particularly important in this respect because it defines yearning precisely in terms of the ego's inability to attain a conceptual grasp of her moral striving. According to Fichte's account, the infinitely striving, conscious ego, seeks to "reflect," or bring up to the level of conscious awareness, what is now a merely ideal "drive," or aspiration, for infinite activity:

> However, this activity of ego is directed toward an object which the ego can neither *realize* as a thing, nor *portray* by means of ideal activity. It is thus an activity *that has no object at all*, and yet is irresistibly driven towards an object, an activity which is merely *felt*. One calls this kind of determination in the ego a *yearning*; a drive toward something completely unknown, toward something that manifests itself by means of a *need*, a *discomfort*, by means of an *emptiness* that seeks fulfillment, and doesn't indicate from where such fulfillment could come.
>
> Aber diese Thätigkeit des Ich geht auf ein Objekt, welches dasselbe nicht *realisiren* kann, als Ding, noch auch *darstellen*, durch ideale Thätigkeit. Es ist demnach eine Thätigkeit, *die gar kein Objekt hat*, aber dennoch *unwiderstehlich getrieben auf eins ausgeht*, und die bloß *gefühlt* wird. Eine solche Bestimmung im Ich aber nennt man ein *Sehnen*; einen Trieb nach etwas völlig unbekanntem, das sich bloß durch ein *Bedürfniß*, durch ein *Misbehagen*, durch eine *Leere*, die Ausfüllung sucht, und nicht andeutet, woher?[35]

Like the hovering imagination that could not itself bring forth any particular object, but rather only the spatial-temporal substrate of infinite possibility that forms the existential ground of empirical

[34] "Dennoch schwebt die Idee einer solchen zu vollendenden Unendlichkeit uns vor, und ist im Innersten unsers Wesens enthalten." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 403).
[35] *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 431).

objects, the yearning moral subject is also incapable of conceptually grasping any finite object that would satisfy its infinite moral aspiration. This strictly negative determination of what Fichte, a few pages later, calls the "object of yearning" or "the ideal," confirms my claim that the "imagined object" of striving that Fichte refers to earlier in the *Foundation of Knowledge of the Practical* cannot be an object at all, for every object is by definition finite, whereas both the imagination and the moral subject strive for the infinite.

The parallel between the moral yearning in *Part III* and the imaginative hovering in *Part II* of the *Foundation* resides in their shared orientation toward the infinite and the resulting negative expression of infinitude in finite human consciousness. This parallel also has consequences for how Fichte concludes the *Foundation of Knowledge of the Practical*. Fichte, namely, describes the manifold of moral experience in terms of how the various "sensations" [Empfindung] of subjective experience, sensations such as "sweet, sour, red, yellow," alternate in the subject's experience so as to engender feelings of "approval" (Beifall) or "disapproval" (Missfallen).[36] These sensations make up the material of experience, and thus, as the material of experience, exhibit the property of infinite divisibility that Fichte's experiment with the imagination was intended to demonstrate in *Part II*. Indeed, Fichte, referring back to the theory of imagination from *Part II*, argues in his account of sensation in the penultimate paragraph of *Part III* that the sensate "stuff" of experience "can only be put forth or thought by means of the imagination."[37]

[36] See: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 439, 450-451).

[37] "Dann, wie kommt ihr denn dazu, noch ein Inneres des Körpers zwischen den Flächen anzunehmen, das ihr doch nicht fühlt? Dies geschieht offenbar durch die produktive Einbildungskraft. – Doch haltet ihr diesen Stoff für etwas objectives, und das mit Recht, weil ihr alle über das Vorhandenseyn desselben übereinkommt und übereinkommen müßt, da sich die Produktion desselben auf ein allgemeines Gesetz aller Vernunft gründet." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 440).

What makes this account of infinitely divisible sensation an account of the ego's *moral* experience are the feelings of approval and disapproval that give a moral charge to the chaotic manifold of imaginative possibility. The ego can make its way in the world by changing the sensate manifold of experience and attending to the moral feelings of approval and disapproval that such change engenders. This system of alternating sensations and the moral feelings accompanying the alternations allow the ego to effect moral good in the world in spite of the fact that the ego is unable to represent to itself the object of its yearning. Although the ego cannot *positively* represent to itself the object of its yearning, its yearning, negatively defined, can be effective on a local level. Once Fichte has introduced the manifold of sensation that makes up subjective experience, he redefines the "object of yearning" as "something other, something opposed to what is present."[38] This local, negative expression of yearning results in a "drive toward alternation in general," a drive that expresses itself in the ego's own manipulation of the manifold of sensation which engenders the moral feelings of approval and disapproval.[39]

If this account of moral existence seems more empiricist than idealist, it is because of the universalist aspiration of Fichte's system, which tries to break down experience into an infinitely divisible manifold in order to allow for the unlimited possibilities of theoretical observation and practical action that human experience contains. In stark contrast to an empiricist account of experience as mere sensation, Fichte wants to draw our attention to the seemingly unlimited potential for meaning and moral action in human experience. The ego's moral striving is intended to redeem the apparent chaos of infinite possibility that the imagination provides by giving meaning to, and improving on, the actual state of affairs. This improvement requires both the theoretical determination of the

[38] "…das Objekt des Sehnens ist *etwas anderes* dem Vorhandenen *entgegengesetztes*." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 444).
[39] "Wir können ihn insofern nennen *den Trieb nach Wechsel überhaupt*." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 444).

manifold that results in the cognition of the world and the practical manipulation on this determined manifold that then achieves a better state of affairs. Neither act is possible without an imaginative ground of possibility that allows for the ego to be receptive to all that experience has to offer and to be capable of imagining a better world that is drawn from the reservoir of experience.

However, although this account is clearly not empiricist in its aspiration for a global realization of the infinite, Fichte's reduction of finite human experience to a manifold of infinitely divisible material does have one serious, thorough-going flaw: it forgoes an account of the ego's ability to perceive and act by means of concepts. The concept is that unit of mind that occupies a middle ground between the infinite totality of existence that human striving seeks to realize and the vanishingly small points of sensation that constitute the substrate of spatial-temporal experience. While the human mind might desire to grasp the totality of experience, in actuality it is master of a very limited domain, and concepts are the finite mental units according to which it perceives and acts within that limitation.

The neglect of an account of concepts is evident both in the theoretical philosophy of *Part II* of the *Foundation*, as well as in the practical philosophical of *Part III*. In the practical philosophy this neglect is reflected in the absence of a theory of the will and in the "yearning" doctrine that locates the goal of moral striving in an unrealizable, infinite object. As far as the theoretical philosophy of the *Foundation* is concerned, Fichte does have something to say about the finite, conceptual determination of particular objects of experience, but only during the critique of dualism that precedes his monist conclusion.[40] Once Fichte starts talking about an "activity that goes into the infinite," the conceptual objects that populate experience are dissolved by means of the theory of

[40] Fichte's example of a finite object in *Part II* of the *Foundation* is a magnetic piece of iron, an example to which he returns several times in §4. Cf: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 314, 340, 343).

the ideality of form that we know from Chapter 1, according to which the particular conceptual contours of sensual objects are shown to have a merely ideal existence.

Under this monist regime that follows the critique of dualism in Part II of the *Foundation*, Fichte defines the "understanding," that intellectual capacity which in Kant's philosophy is responsible for synthesizing the manifold of experience into discrete conceptual objects, as "a resting, inactive capacity of the soul, the mere container for that which is brought forth by the imagination and which has been determined and will be further determined by reason."[41] Fichte's rationale for describing the understanding as inert and for contrasting it with the activity of imagination and the activity of reason (Vernunft) is that only reason and the imagination reach for the totality of experience. The finite concepts of the understanding and their sensual instantiations on the manifold of intuition can never satisfy the striving of infinite mind. This rationale, according to which only the imagination and reason are said to be active, is the same rationale motivating Fichte's theory of the ideality of form. Fichte argues for the mere ideality of the contours of experience in order to dissolve the given conceptual orderings of experience into a mere manifold of sensation and thereby maximize the possibilities according to which the sensuous manifold could be recombined as a way of reaching towards the infinite.

This overview and critique of the early Jena system suggests that the new 'practical standpoint' to which Fichte refers in his letter to Jacobi, and which he adopts starting with the publication of *Natural Right*, isn't simply a new way of presenting the same philosophical ideas, but rather an attempt to correct a serious defect of the early system. The problem with the early system is that, in

[41] "Der Verstand ist ein ruhendes, unthätiges Vermögen des Gemüths, der bloße Behälter des durch die Einbildungskraft hervorgebrachten, und durch die Vernunft bestimmten und weiter zu bestimmenden..." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 374).

describing the human aspiration to intellectually grasp the entirety of existence and to redeem the contradictions of this existence through practical activity, Fichte forgoes a recognizable account of human finitude. The ego is caught between an infinitesimal manifold of material, or sensation, on the one hand, and an unrealizable infinitude on the other. There is no account here of what lies between the manifold of sensation and the totality of experience, namely a conceptual order and ordering that the ego brings to experience, an order that consists of discrete, perceivable objects and objectives. Nor is there a consideration of the very practical, physical constraints placed on the ego, by which I mean the fact that the ego can only manipulate a very narrow slice of its entire experience and can only achieve limited results within that zone of access.

2.3 The local perspective of the *New Method*

Fichte's revision of his philosophical system compensates for the lack of a theory of conceptual determination and limited practical action in the most direct way possible. It makes the principle of minded causality the key idea of the new system, and, as we know from Chapter 1, the principle of minded causality says that to be conscious is to find oneself in the world as a causal agent who acts in accordance with concepts of what one intends to bring about through one's actions. This reorientation to the acting, concept-exercising individual re-envisions the world as a repertoire of actions that the conscious individual can potentially undertake, actions which the individual grasps both intuitively by means of her sensuous perception of the world and intellectually, or conceptually, by means of concepts that organize and work through the broader ramifications of the various possible actions that the individual has at her disposal.

The general strategy of this revised Jena philosophy is to start with an account of self-aware, concept-guided action and to show that everything human experience has to offer is inextricably

linked to the exercise of this core capacity. In contrast to the first Jena system, in which the universe of human experience is immediately captured in the totalizing concept of infinite mind, the revised system unfolds by gradually assembling the various parts that are required to explain the existence of a minded causal agent who carries out actions in accordance with concepts. The system is complete once Fichte has identified and shown the inter-relations between the various components that allow for and contribute to the exercise of concept-guided action, thereby unifying in one single aggregate the "range of everything that necessarily must occur in consciousness."[42] [43]

The textual basis for this new Jena system is considerably clearer than the textual basis of the older system. Whereas the early Jena system only comes into its own midway through *Part II* of the *Foundation* and is still pushing for greater clarity in *Part III* of the *Foundation* and in the *Outline*, there is one single source, namely the transcripts of the *New Method* lecture Fichte delivered from 1796 to 1799, which outlines the new system from start to finish as one cohesive body of thought. Even more convenient for an illustration of this new system is the fact that in the final three paragraphs of the lecture, paragraphs 17, 18, and 19, Fichte collects the many ideas he had worked out in the previous paragraphs and further develops them by organizing them around a "fivefold synthesis," a nexus of five elements that, when taken together, display the system as a single, unified whole.[44]

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[42] This quote comes from the conclusion of the lecture series where Fichte summarizes his results and says: "Der Umfang dessen, was nothwendig im Bewußts: vorkommen muß ist erschöpft." In: *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (GA IV/2, 261).

[43] Our main sources for these lectures are from students who attended Fichte's lectures. There are two extended transcripts of these lectures, a so-called "Halle transcript" found in Series IV, Volume 2 of the Fichte *Gesamtausgabe* under the title *Wissenschaftslehre nach den Vorlesungen von Hr. Pr. Fichte*, and a "Kraus transcript" found in Series IV, Volume 3 of the *Gesamtausgabe* under the title *Vorlesungen über die Wissenschaftslehre, Gehalten zu Jena im Winter 1798-1799*. I will as a rule quote the Krause transcript, except when a passage from the Halle transcript fits better. In either case, I use the work designation *Wissenschaftslehre Nova Methodo* for both sources. For a discussion of these two transcripts and the history of these lectures in general see: Daniel Breazeale, "Editor's Introduction" in: Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, and Daniel Breazeale. *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy (Wissenschaftslehre) Nova Methodo (1796/99).* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 1-49. While I have consulted this English-language edition, the translations here are my own.

[44] Fichte explicitly mentions the fivefold synthesis on the following pages: *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (GA IV/3, 477, 500, 502, 509).

Fichte constructs the fivefold synthesis of the *New Method* by variating and combining two organizing structures that he used in the earlier Jena system, namely the branching tree structure and the circle. In the old system, the tree structure was used to differentiate out into three reciprocal pairs the six elements of concept realization and then recombine them in such a manner as to first critique mind-world dualism and thereafter present a monist account of minded existence as the processual realization of infinite mind. In the new system, we also observe a branching tree structure of reciprocal pairs that multiply outward and that Fichte then attempts to recombine, or "synthesize" into a single unity. Four of the five elements of the synthesis are generated by combining two distinctions: first the distinction between the "ideal" and "real" aspects of conscious existence and then the distinction between the "determinate" (das Bestimmte) and the "determinable" (das Bestimmbare).[45] This yields four elements: ideal determinateness, ideal determinability, real determinateness, and real determinability:

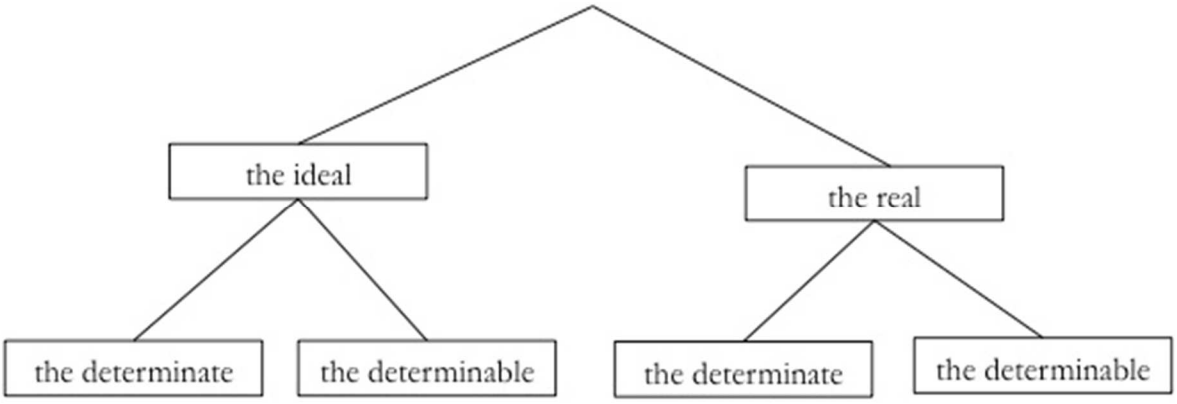

Figure 3: Fichte's distinctions in the *New Method*

[45] There is no single passage in which Fichte neatly mentions all of these four terms at once, but they are clearly implied by the distinctions he makes in various passages. The following passage might be the closest he comes to listing them all: "…wir hatten das ideale und reale Denken selbst als vollkommene Synthesis aufzustellen, dieß ist geschehen; das Bestimmbare in beiden ist angegeben, beide sind durch einander bestimmt, ß-γ ist vereinigt, die Bestimmtheit meiner selbst mit dem Reiche der Vernunft überhaupt, auch B und G, die Bestimmtheit meines Würkens als sinnlicher Act mit dem Object worauf dieses mein Würken geht G..." *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (GA IV/3, 507-8).

These two pairs of distinctions must be understood on their own terms as distinctions that are more general, and therefore flexible, than the six aspects of concept realization that make up the branching structure in the *Foundation*. We know, for example, from Chapter 1 that Fichte, throughout the Jena period, employs the ideal-real distinction in order to organize the six aspects of concept realization into a more general opposition of conceptuality versus sensuality. The distinction between determinability and determinateness is similarly very general and, depending on the specific issue in question, can help to differentiate two particular aspects of concept realization. It is first introduced in the *New Method* lectures in §2 as a re-description of the distinction between the resting activity, or capacity of the ego, on the one hand, and the activity of the ego in actu, on the other.[46] This makes it seem that what Fichte has in mind when he distinguishes between determinateness and determinability is simply the distinction between activity and rest that we are already familiar with. However, later, in the midst of presenting the fivefold synthesis in §18, Fichte uses the distinction between real determinateness and real determinability to mark the distinction between sensuous form, which is the ego's causal activity that has been arrested in thought, and sensuous matter, which is the mental substrate on which this activity can act, so that, at least when it is combined with the "real" in the fivefold synthesis, the determinate-determinable opposition can be used to mark a form-matter distinction.[47] The distinctions of concept realization certainly play an important role in this new setup of branching concepts, but they are engaged in with a flexible fashion by means of the more general distinctions of the ideal and the real and the determinate and determinable.[48]

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[46] *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (GA IV/3, 353).

[47] I discuss this particular form-matter distinction from the *New Method* in more detail on page 64. For the mention of this distinction in the lectures see: *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (GA IV/3, 504-5, 507-8).

[48] For simplicity's sake, I am also ignoring the fact that the notion of the "real" and the "ideal" as it is used in the fivefold synthesis at the end of the *New Method* is different from the real-ideal distinction that occurs earlier in the lecture, where Fichte distinguishes between real and ideal "activity." Here, in the fivefold synthesis at the end of the lectures, the distinction is described as the distinction between real and ideal "thought." For an extremely lucid discussion of this shift from real-ideal activity to real-ideal thought in the *New Method* see: Günter Zöller, "Original

We can attain a better sense of how these terms interact when we bring the second structural feature of the fivefold synthesis into the picture – the circular, universalizing path of mind. In the old system, the circle began with infinite mind, descended into consciousness, and gradually returned back to the starting point. In the new system Fichte has rotated the circle 180 degrees, so that we begin with the self-conscious finite ego, the most important element of the five elements of the synthesis, and simultaneously extend outward in two directions, into the ideal and the real:

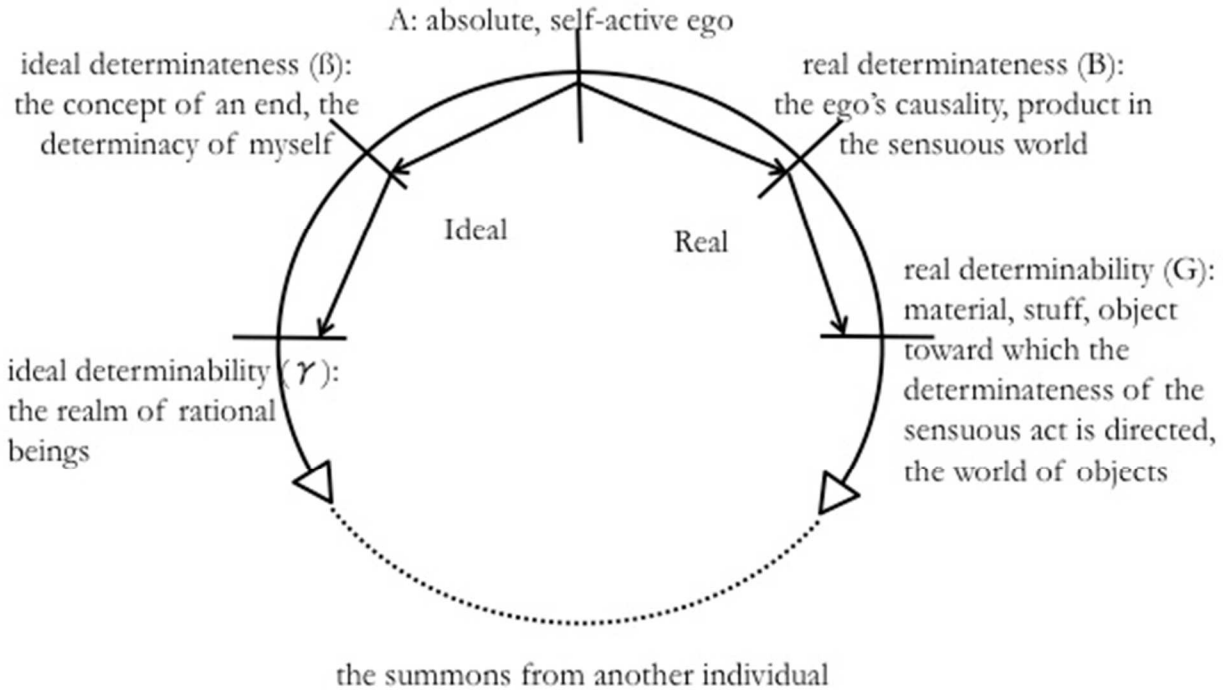

Figure 4: The structure of the philosophical system in the *New Method*

The four other elements are then arrayed along this circle, with the two determinate elements closest to the ego and the determinable elements farther away. The determinate is that which is

Duplicity: The Real and the Ideal in Fichte's Transcendental Theory of the Subject." in: *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy*, ed. Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 115-130.

immediately within the ego's intellectual or sensuous grasp, while the determinable is that which lies beyond this grasp. The result is the following descriptions of the five elements of the synthesis:

> -"A," the "middle," the "mid-point": the "absolute ego," the "merely self-active ego," the "absolutely active ego."
> -"ß," ideal determinateness: "the concept of an end," "the determinacy of myself," "thinking of my determining, of my concept of an end, of my willing," "I, an individual, determined by my duty"
> -"B," real determinateness: "the concept of causality," "the determinacy of the sensuous act," "my efficacy and, as a result of this, the product of the efficacy," "my product in the sensuous world"
> -"γ" ideal determinability: "a realm of rational beings," the "mass of reason in general"
> -"G," real determinability: "stuff," "the object toward which the determinacy [of the sensuous act] is directed," "dead nature, persisting in itself," "the sensuous world in which I as an individual imprint myself"

> -"A," "Mitte,","de[r] Mittelpunkt: "das absol. Ich.," "das bloß selbstthätige Ich," "das absolute[] thätige[] Ich."
> -"ß," die ideale Bestimmtheit: der "Zweckbegrif," "die Bestimmtheit meiner selbst," "Das Denken meines Bestimmens, meines Zweckbegriffs, meines Wollens," "Das Höchste bin Ich Individuum durch meine Pflicht bestimmt"
> -"B," die reale Bestimmtheit: "de[r] Begriff der Causalität," "Die Bestimmtheit des Sinnlichen Acts," "Mein wirken u. zufolge dieses ein Product desselben," "mein Produkt in der Sinnenwelt"
> -"γ" "das bestimmbare zu der idealen Reyhe": das "Reich vernünftiger Wesen," die "Vernunftmaße überhaupt"
> -"G," "das Bestimmbare in der realen Reyhe": "der Stoff, das "Obj. worauf die Bestimmtheit deßelben [des sinnlichen Acts -ML] geht," "die todte für s bestehende Natur," "die Sinnenwelt in welcher ich mich als Individuum abdrücke"[49]

We can further elucidate these five elements and their interrelation by understanding the changes that Fichte makes to his earlier circular model of infinite mind. As we have mentioned, the most important change is the shift from infinite mind to the finite ego. Fichte might call the ego that comprises the center of his fivefold synthesis the "absolute ego", but he is invoking absoluteness here in the sense of a finite spontaneity present within cognition, and not in terms of an infinite ground of the totality of experience. Just as Fichte promised Jacobi in his 1795 letter, this shift begins with *Natural Right*, the first six paragraphs of which present a systematic exposition of how it is that an individual posits herself as an individual.[50] The other major theoretical texts of the later Jena philosophy continue to take this conscious act of self-relation as their starting point. In the *System of Ethics*, Fichte begins his investigation by pointing out the moral act of willing that is

[49] *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (GA IV/2, 234, 238, 240, 241, 242, 246, 258), (GA IV/3, 477, 493, 500, 504-5, 508).
[50] Fichte has various terms for the individual, depending on which aspects of the individual he is discussing, for example: "ein endliches vernüftiges Wesen", "Individuum, "eine Person." See: *Grundlage des Naturrechts nach Principien der Wissenschaftslehre* (I/3, 329, 361, 365).

contained in the self-relational act of "thinking oneself."[51] Meanwhile, both the *New Method* and the *Attempt* begin by describing an immediate act of conscious self-relation which Fichte famously calls "intellectual intuition."[52] Fichte doesn't use this term for the fivefold synthesis in the *New Method* because the synthesis is interested in how the ego's self-relational activity is enmeshed within experience, whereas the concept of intellectual intuition deliberately isolates this activity from its context of interaction in and with the world.

If we ask where the absolute, qua infinite, ego of the old system is to be found within the new circular structure that begins with the finite ego, then we come up against the most serious shortcoming of the new system. There is nothing akin to infinite mind in the new system, meaning that there is no single concept that can provide a unified account of experience taken as a whole. This is a direct consequence of scaling the model of conceptual realization down from the order of infinite mind to the order of finite concepts. In the old system, the physical and the moral world were two sides of a single process of realizing the infinite. In the revision of this model, some of this synthesis between the moral and physical is preserved, for the physical world exhibits the realizations of my concept-guided actions and is thus the 'real' aspect of my 'ideal' conceptual existence. However, there is nothing in the new model that tells us how these various conceptual-physical units themselves hang together to form a totality. Fichte unifies the various goals that I as an individual together with other individuals aim to achieve by introducing the concept of a "world of reason," or "reason in general," but he provides a very hazy account of this totality of reason and does not consider how this totality of reason could be related to the totality of the physical world.[53] The most significant problem with the *New Method* is that it ends by reaffirming Kant's distinction between the

[51] *Das System der Sittenlehre* (GA I/5, 37).
[52] see: *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (GA IV/3, 350) and *Versuch einer neuen Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/4, 278).
[53] For Fichte's references to a "reason in general" and a "world of reason" see: *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (GA IV/2, 246, 259).

mundus sensibilis and the mundus intelligibilis, which is the very opposition that Fichte is supposed to be working against in presenting a unified idealist system.

Before we can examine this problem of dualism in more detail, it is necessary to introduce two theoretical innovations in the new system, neither of which succeeds in overcoming the global tension between reason and sensuality, but both of which nevertheless open up new possibilities for thinking about the unity of human mindedness. The first innovation is a new theory of the human body, which seeks to explain how the concept-guided life of the individual translates into physical bodily action that in turn gives rise to the sensuous experience of the world. The second innovation is Fichte's theory of the "summons" (Aufforderung) which brings a new inter-subjective, social dimension to the concept of mind by arguing that consciousness can only arise insofar as an individual is called on by another individual to do something, thereby bringing the individual to self-awareness and effecting a kind of meeting of the minds in the mutual understanding of a desired end.

Neither of these theories can be solely attributed to the new Jena philosophy, for in his *Some Lectures on the Vocation of the Scholar*, which he held in the summer of 1794 while he was still developing the first Jena system, Fichte had mentioned that a philosophy of natural right required both a theory of embodiment and a theory of inter-subjectivity.[54] Additionally, in his language essay *On the Capacity and the Origin of Language*, published in spring 1795 and therefore roughly contemporaneous to his work on *Part III* of the *Foundation*, Fichte again experiments with a theory of social interaction. The *Lectures* and the language essay are evidence of the fact that Fichte was developing his 'practical

[54] In Alexis Philonenko's classic study arguing for the continuity of Fichte's Jena philosophy and suggesting that inter-subjectivity is a central concern not only of the later Jena philosophy, but also of the *Foundation*, this mention in the *Some Lectures on the Vocation of the Scholar* is a central piece of evidence. Cf: Alexis Philonenko, *La Liberté humaine dans la Philosophie de Fichte* (Paris: Libraire Philosophique J. Vrin, 1966) 21-22.

perspective' of his philosophy parallel to the 'speculative' philosophy of infinite mind that he was working out in the *Foundation*. However, it is only in *Natural Right* that we first find a rigorous theory of embodiment and a rigorous theory of mind that shows inter-subjectivity to be a central part of minded experience, and both of these theories are then found again with relatively minor variation in the *New Method* and the *System of Ethics*. The consistencies between these three later Jena works suggest that it was through his work on *Natural Right* that Fichte realized that the practical perspective of his philosophy was not just a side-show to his philosophy but could be used to present his entire system. The interest Fichte expressed in embodiment and inter-subjectivity before *Natural Right* and the prominence of these topics in the first six paragraphs of *Natural Right* indicate that these topics were central in helping him transition to the new practical perspective of his philosophy. It is thus no surprise that both of these theories play a central role in the *New Method*.

Let us start with embodiment. For now, I am only interested in Fichte's account in the *New Method* of how being an embodied individual affects one's first-person experience of the physical world, an account that is worked out primarily in §17 and §18. Both in §17 and in previous sections, Fichte develops the idea that the human body is a bridge that leads from the ideal, internal realm of thinking and willing into the outside world of physical causality. It does this by providing the ego both with a "system of sensibility" that makes the ego receptive to external, physical constraints, and with a "sensuous force" that the ego controls by means of its will.[55] As one expects in this new system, which shifts its account of consciousness from infinite mind to the finite concept, Fichte uses this theory of the locally active body as a starting point for explaining how it is that the ego achieves a sensuous perception of the world at large. This is captured in the following account of sensuous form, or "Gestalt", and its relationship to the imagination:

[55] *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (GA IV/3, 395-6, 484-5).

> …The form…[exists – ML] by means of the imagination. It is, however, only the confused representation of all of the possible actions that are expressed in the object, everything that I could make out of it. I begin now to act on it and change the form of the object. What is it that persists here throughout the time of my action? Merely my thinking, along with the confused representation of everything that I could do, and of which I always only do one thing. [Take], for example, a tree, from which one can cut off one piece after the other.
>
> …die Gestalt aber [ist – ML] durch die Einbildungskraft; sie ist aber nur die verworrene Darstellung aller Handel[n]smöglichkeiten, die in dem Dinge ausgedrückt wird, alles was ich daraus machen könnte. Nun fange ich darauf an darauf zu handeln, und verändere die Gestalt des Dinges ganz? was ist denn nun welches durch die Zeit des Handelns durch dauert? bloß mein Denken, mit der verworrenen Darstellung alles deßen was ich thun könnte, unter welchen ich aber bloß immer das Eine thue, Beispiel von einem Baume, von dem man ein Stück nach dem anderen abschneiden kann.[56]

The "confusion" in the sensuous representations of the imagination refers to the way in which the spatial-temporal matrix constitutes an intuitive perception of a broad repertoire of possible actions, none of which are discursively evaluated by the thinking intellect. These actions are intuitively held together in sensuous perception by the imagination as co-existent possibilities that the embodied individual could act out.

As in the early system, the possibilities for how the embodied individual can act are infinite, meaning that the theory of sensuous form and its imaginative generation is founded on an observation about the infinite divisibility of matter. Fichte's example of the form of a tree shows that certain contours of matter appear more prominent than others. For example, the form constituted by the branches of the tree features more prominently in my perception of the tree than the minute contours of its bark. This is because the form of the branches reflects those contours of resistance that are most relevant to the activity that I can physically and with intention bring about in the world. But, just as in the 1794 *Foundation*, the particular sensuous form that brings forth a particular object of cognition is part of a network of infinite divisibility. Fichte illuminates this infinitude using the example of a straight line: "between every two points in a line between which a body is supposed to move, between X and Y, there exists infinitely many points."[57] This geometric argument for the infinite

[56] *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (GA IV/3, 507).
[57] *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (GA IV/3, 487).

divisibility of space (and also time) is then re-described in terms of the ego's activity and the determinate-determinability distinction that is used in the five-fold synthesis:

> what is then the mere determinable, the initially determinable, from which my consciousness of my determination proceeds? It is an infinite divisibility of possible ways of acting;…this is grasped by means of the imagination…
>
> was ist denn nun das bloß bestimmbare, das erste Bestimmbare, von welchem erst das Bewustsein meines Bestimmens ausgeht; es ist ein unendlich theilbares der Handel[n]smöglichkeit; dies wird aufgefaßt durch die...Einbildungskraft…[58]

This characterization allows us to understand the relationship between real-determinateness and real-determinability of the fivefold synthesis as a relationship between the actuality and potentiality. Nearly identical to the imagination of the *Foundation*, which generates a spatial-temporal matrix of infinite possibility, the imagination of the *New Method* provides the sensuous, non-intellectual representation of an infinite number of possible actions.

The crucial difference between this account of the imagination and the account in the *Foundation* is that in becoming tied to the local, embodied action of the concept-exercising individual, infinite possibility loses its universal dimension and instead becomes subject to the finite determinations of concepts. In the *Foundation*, the hovering of the imagination was a consequence of mind trying to realize the infinite, of trying to "take up the infinite in the form of the finite."[59] At stake was the emergence into consciousness of a single, monolithic "non-ego," a world that stands in opposition to the mind. This meant that the infinitude of possibility that is contained in the temporal-spatial matrix of experience is secured both by the infinitesimal divisibility of the manifold, i.e. its infinite recombination in miniature, *and* by the totality of this manifold as an unending realization of this aspiration within the infinite expance of space and time. The imagination of the *Foundation* holds the entire world, the non-ego, in a suspended state: "only determinability, and the unattainable idea of

[58] *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (GA IV/3, 488).
[59] *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 359).

determination is present, not however determination itself."[60] In the *New Method* we revisit this suspended state of determinability, but now expressed only in terms of an infinitesimal infinitude: "the object of the imagination is divisible ad infinitum."[61] The object that Fichte has in mind is not an infinite, unrealizable object, nor is it the world conceived as a totality, but rather a finite physical object accessible to the finite, embodied ego: "every object [Ding] is related to our possible efficacy and to nothing other than the reestablishment of the quantum of this efficacy."[62]

This revised theory of the imagination is to be understood as a logical consequence of the shift in Fichte's perspective from infinite mind to the minded, and we can say now, embodied causality of the finite ego. Under this revision, consciousness is first and foremost the awareness of our efficacy as individuals, of the concepts guiding and determining the moral consequences of this efficacy, and finally of the sensuous product of this efficacy in the physical world. It is within this narrow bandwidth of conceptual determination and embodied efficacy that the imagination maintains its role from the earlier system of providing the finite ego with an unlimited reservoir of potential actions and objects that the ego has not yet subsumed under concepts and discursively evaluated.

Whereas the theory of the body reflects the limited physical scope of the finite ego in the *New Method*, the second great theoretical innovation of the later Jena philosophy (and perhaps the greater of the two), the theory of the summons, provides a fuller picture of the finitude residing in the conceptual side of the equation.[63] Generally stated, the theory says that in order to be a conscious

[60] *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 360).
[61] *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (GA IV/3, 489).
[62] *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (GA IV/3, 507).
[63] The theory of the summons has received a lot of attention in the secondary literature. Paul Franks has gone so far as to say that the theory of the summons is "the central concept of the 1796-99 works," a claim that I generally agree with, for, as we will see, Fichte's uses his account of the summons to unify his fivefold synthesis. I prefer, however, to take the notion of the finitude, or constrained infinitude, of the ego to be the central idea of the later Jena works, since it is from this concept that we can see the doctrine of the summons and the doctrine of embodiment unfolding. For Frank's

individual, the ego must be "summoned" (aufgefordert) by another individual to carry out a certain act, and this summons implies that the ego which has been summoned attains both a concept of itself as a determinate individual called on to act and a concept of the action that it has been called on to carry out.[64] Similar to the theory of embodiment which found a medium between finitude and infinitude by circumscribing a restricted sphere for the ego's action on the one hand, and describing the infinite possibility for action within this sphere, on the other, the theory of the summons is consistently presented in the later Jena works as a theory that resolves the contradiction between the finite cognitions and actions of everyday life and the spontaneity driving these thoughts and action, which, as spontaneity, implies an absoluteness that, in point of fact, isn't fully expressed in consciousness.[65] In contrast to the body, which is a physical manifestation of the ego's finitude, the two elements that together constitute the finite spontaneity of the ego are conceptual in nature: the ego attains a *concept* of a finite end and a *concept* of itself as the finite individual called on to carry out the end.[66]

As part of the solution to the contradiction between constraint and freedom, the theory of the summons also argues that the ego's act of self-constraint allows the ego to participate in a larger,

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characterization of the summons see: Paul Franks, "Freedom, Tatsache and Tathandlung in the Development of Fichte's Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*." *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 79: 3, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1997), 321-2. For a classic treatment of Fichte's theory of the summons as it appears for the first time in Fichte's oeuvre in *Natural Right* see: Axel Honneth, "Die transzendentale Notwendigkeit von Intersubjektivität. Zum zweiten Lehrsatz in Fichtes Naturrechtsabhandlung," in: *Johann Gottlieb Fichte »Grundlage des Naturrechts«*, ed. Jean-Christophe Merle. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001) 63–80.

[64] Thus Fichte writes in the *New Method* that the "summons to free activity" gives one "knowledge of the fact that one has been given a purpose" and that "individuality appears as a summons to free activity, individuality is given to me by means of this summons" *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (GA IV/3, 469-70).

[65] It is not in the scope of this paper to elucidate the similarities and differences between the presentations of the theory of the summons in *Natural Right*, the *System of Ethics*, and *New Method*. I will just note that all of these works present the theory of the summons as a resolution to a vicious circularity between the free activity of the finite ego and the limitations on this activity, both of which require the other as a condition of their possibility. See: §3 of *Natural Right*, §18 of the *System of Ethics*, and §13 of *New Method*.

[66] In *Natural Right*, these two elements are succinctly captured in the following passages: "Es [das Subjekt] bekommt den Begriff seiner freien Wirksamkeit…als etwas, das im künftigen seyn *soll*" and "Es [das Subjekt] konnte, um sich als *Object* (seiner Reflexion) zu finden, sich nicht finden, als sich *bestimmend* zur Selbstthätigkeit…sondern als bestimmt dazu durch einen äusseren Anstoss, der ihm jedoch seine völlige Freiheit zur Selbstbestimmung lassen muss: denn ausserdem geht der erstere Punct verloren, und das Subject findet sich nicht als Ich." *Grundlage des Naturrechts* (GA I/3, 342-3).

external principle of reason that reveals itself through the power of normative, and ultimately moral thinking. In the act of the summons, the ego grasps the concept of the end because it has been called on or challenged to act by means of another individual's appeal to reason. Reason is the measure by which individuals challenge one another and respond to these challenges. As Fichte describes it, the summons results in "a moral boundedness…the boundednesss of my power of what I am allowed to do."[67] This appeal to morality and the binding force of moral reasoning reveals to the ego a realm external to himself according to which he can and should orient his free activity. It is due to the moral desirability of ends that the ego freely submits himself first to contemplate a given end and then to carry it out, and moral desirability arises not by virtue of an ego's fiat, but rather as the result of the ego's mutual participation with another individual in the exercise of reason.

Equipped with Fichte's theories of the embodiment and the summons we are now in a position to understand the synthesis of the five elements of minded experience that Fichte argues for at the conclusion of the *New Method*. At stake in this synthesis is the question of whether the finite perspective of embodied, individual consciousness can provide a convincing account of the totality of minded experience. Based on the way in which Fichte sets up his five elements, with the finite ego at the center of a division between the ideal and the real, the division that must be overcome is that between moral and sensual experience. The unity of the ideal and the real on the local level of determinateness is ensured by the new system's emphasis on the minded causality of the finite ego. The core argument of the new system is that the ends that are grasped by the ego's capacity for thought find their sensuous realization in the intentional physical activity of the ego, and that these aren't two separate acts, but rather mutually constitutive. Thinking and acting are two sides of the

[67] *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (IV/2, 250).

same coin. We can now add to this the insight that the original unity of ideal thought and real action is evinced by the human body, which provides the primordial matter which the mind manipulates during the development of its conceptual capacity. This means that sensuous perception in general is an extended mapping of the body's possibilities for action.

More problematic in this fivefold synthesis is the question of whether there is a thoroughgoing relationship between ideal and real determinability, between the broad world of reason in which the ego participates and the sensuous world at large. The answer in the *New Method* is that there is only a punctuated synthesis between reason and sensuality, and it occurs for the ego in the experience of being summoned by another individual. Fichte describes the synthesis between ideal determinability – the "world of reason" – and real determinability – "the world of sensuous objects" – in §19, the final section of the *New Method* lectures.[68] In his account, Fichte first identifies an active moment and then a stationary moment of the summons. The former is the act of being summoned, and the synthesis of the ideal with the real lies in the fact that reason requires some sensuous conduit in order to become present to the ego. In a move that harkens back to his description of the phenomenology of the summons in *Natural Right*, Fichte's example of this sensuous-moral activity of the summons is language: the ego is asked a question and finds himself called on to give an answer.[69] Language is thus shown to have not only an intellectual content but also a materiality that communicates this content (an insight that will be especially relevant in the discussion of Humboldt's language theory in Chapter 3).[70]

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[68] *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (IV/3, 518). §19 is the final section not counting the "Deduction of the division of the Wissenschaftslehre" that follows this paragraph.

[69] *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (IV/3, 519). For Fichte's description of the summons as language in *Natural Right* see: (I/3, 368, 372-3, 377).

[70] Fichte doesn't tell us in the *New Method* what exactly the material aspect of language is. However, in *Natural Right*, he describes the material of language as "fine material" or "subtle material" in contrast to "tough" or "durable" material. It is difficult pinpoint exactly what kind of material Fichte intends to signify with his concept of subtle material, an issue that is dealt with in: Scott F. Scribner, "The 'Subtle Matter' of Intersubjectivity in the *Grundlage des Naturrechts*," in: *New*

The second, stable synthesis between ideal and real determinability is the body of the summoning individual who appears before the ego as a physical instantiation of a rational being. The summons thus provides the ego both with a first person experience of the human body, since it is only through the summons that the ego finds himself in the first place, and with a third person experience of the human body. Fichte goes on to argue in the remainder of §19 that it is by virtue of the ego's experience with both of these bodies – his own and that of the other individual – that the ego's arrives at the idea of nature as an organized totality. The argument, which is very cursory in the *New Method* and which we need not evaluate here, is that these bodies comprise organized totalities and since the bodies are products of nature, this implies that nature itself is a power that creates organized totalities, of which the largest one is the entire universe.[71] What this shows is that Fichte does not see a way to unify the totality of reason with the totality of sensuous objects. The ego can extend the concept of natural, physical organization that he observes in the body to arrive at an idea of a totality of the physical world, but the extension of physical holism from the body to the universe happens along a path of inference and experience that is distinct from the immediate relationship between the individual exercise of reason and the experience of reason in general. This splitting of ways between the experience of the physical world and the experience of the moral world stands in contrast to the account in the *Foundation*, in which the emergence into consciousness of the physical world was the beginning of a process of realizing the infinite, a process that is moved toward completion by the moral striving of the ego.

Essays on Fichte's Later Jena Wissenschaftslehre, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 65-82.

[71] *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (IV/2, 259).

2.4 From Imagination to Reason

Now that we have worked out the systematic architecture of the early and late Jena philosophy we can see that Fichte's shift from the 'speculative' to the 'practical' standpoint of philosophy indeed entailed a significant and irreconcilable change in his account of minded experience. In changing his perspective, Fichte drew up a very different account of what it means to be a minded subject. In the first system, the ego's cognitions and actions are unified by their striving to realize the infinite ground of mind. This grounding, world-positing and action-guiding activity is both pervasive and global: the striving for the realization of the infinite mind motivates all particular cognitions and actions, and it can only be satisfied in so far as experience, as a totality, manifests the desired infinitude. We can say, borrowing from Claude Lévi-Strauss's description of the "primitive thought" expressed in myth, that according to Fichte's picture, human action and world-apprehension is guided by a mythic impulse, by the desire to achieve through cognition and through redemptive practical action a *total* understanding of the world and the individual's place within this world.[72] In contrast, the practical perspective of the later Jena works results in a picture of minded experience in which interaction with other human beings, the establishment and enactment of finite, realizable ends, and the local movement of the human body come together to form discrete unities of experience in which cosmic questions are an after-thought and the divergent horizons of moral and physical existence pose little worry.

It is an open question whether there exists some ultimate reconciliation between these two accounts – whether and how the supposed underlying tendency of the mind's search for a global unity of

[72] In *Myth and Meaning* Lévi-Strauss describes "primitive thought," along these lines of a totalizing impulse: "…its [primitive thought's] aim is to reach by the shortest possible means a general understanding of the universe— and not only a general but a *total* understanding. That is, it is a way of thinking which must imply that if you don't understand everything, you can't explain anything." see: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning.* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 17.

experience can exist alongside the discrete inter-subjective interactions and the local satisfaction of finite ends in the physical world. In any case, Fichte ended up producing two very different philosophical systems, despite the fact that in his letter to Jacobi he did not think that the change in perspective would result in dissonant accounts. As we have seen, it is a dissonance that makes itself most felt in the respective roles that the imagination and that concepts play in each system. In the *Foundation,* the imagination provides both the ground of the entirety of experience and the telos of moral action. In the *New Method*, the imagination can only operate within the limited ambit of the finite concepts of finite ends, and these concepts and their exercise by the ego constitute the defining feature of minded experience.

As a final note, we can observe that this devaluation of the imagination and the accompanying reevaluation of conceptual exercise in the switch to the revised Jena system corresponds perfectly to a revision that we can observe in how Fichte thought about the process and method of doing philosophy. Before his revision, we find multiple statements by Fichte regarding the importance of using one's imagination to do philosophy. The most concise, and perhaps the strongest of these statements is found in the *Part III* of the *Foundation* in which Fichte says of his philosophy that:

> its basic ideas must themselves be brought forth in everyone who studies it by means of the productive imagination; as it cannot be otherwise with a science that is directed at the final grounds of human knowledge, and because the entire business of the human mind proceeds from the imagination and imagination cannot be grasped save by means of the imagination.
>
> …ihre Grundideen [müssen] in jedem, der sie studirt, durch die schaffende Einbildungskraft selbst hervorgebracht werden...; wie es denn bei einer auf die letzten Gründe der menschlichen Erkenntniß zurückgehenden Wissenschaft nicht anders seyn konnte, indem das ganze Geschäft des menschlichen Geistes von der Einbildungskraft ausgeht, Einbildungskraft aber nicht anders, als durch Einbildungskraft aufgefaßt werden kann.[73]

[73] *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 415). Another, extended discussion of the importance of the imagination in doing philosophy is found in Fichte's lectures notes for the 'Kolleg' he gave 'de officiis eruditorum' in 1794 and from which *Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten* also originates. We read in these notes, for example, the following: "Die ganze TransscendentalPhilosophie soll, u. kann nichts anderes seyn, als ein getroffenes Schema des menschl. Geistes überhaupt. Wer sieht nicht, daß dies der Einbildungskraft ein ganz neues, u. ungeahntes Geschäft gibt…" In: *Von den Pflichten der Gelehrten (Vorlesungen und Entwürfe)* (GA II/3, 328). Fichte also mentions the role of the philosophical imagination in a letter to Reinhold from July 1795: "Der Eingang in meine Philosophie ist das

As this passage makes clear, Fichte believes that the method of doing philosophy is inextricably tied to the philosophy of mind that this method unfolds. It is because the imagination is so important to cognition that it must also be used to produce a philosophical theory of this cognition. There exists, in other worlds, a circularity between method and philosophical content, and it can be difficult to say whether ultimately the mind as an object of study determines the method or visa versa.[74]

The method of the later Jena system can be described not only as an unfolding of philosophy from the practical perspective, but as an account that strives for a firmness in its claims, an account that reflects in its method the mind's core capacity to determine conceptually conscious experience. This can be seen in the following comment that Fichte makes in the *Attempt* while he is explaining to the reader the notion of self-consciousness:

> Here you see immediately in what sense the thinking of the ego was asked of you. The signs of language, namely, have gone through the hands of thoughtlessness and have taken on some of its indeterminacy; one cannot use them to come to a sufficient understanding…do what I do tell you and you will then think what I think.
>
> Hier ersiehst du zugleich, in welchem Sinne dir das Denken des Ich zugemuthet wurde. Die Sprachzeichen nämlich sind durch die Hände der Gedankenlosigkeit gegangen, und haben etwas von der Unbestimmtheit derselben angenommen; man kann durch sie sich nicht sattsam verständigen... Thue, was ich dir sage, so wirst du denken, was ich denke.[75]

Fichte's expressed need here to make the reader understand him and to bring a conceptual determinacy to his concept of the ego is part of his revised conception of the mind's power to understand and think determinate concepts.

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schlechthin *unbegreifliche*; dies macht dieselbe schwierig, weil die Sache nur mit der Einbildungskraft, und gar nicht mit dem Verstande angegriffen werden kann…" *Briefe 1793-1795* (GA III/2, 344).

[74] A prominent case where Fichte argues in one direction, namely that the philosophical intention provides the justification for the content of the philosophy, and not the other way around, is in the *First Introduction*, to the *Attempt*, where Fichte argues that it can only be decided by one's personal interests (Interesse) whether one is an idealist or a dogmatist. See: *Versuch einer neuen Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/4, 191-5).

[75] *Versuch einer neuen Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/4, 272).

The ego's constitution in the *New Method* as a concept-exercising agent entails a new understanding of the philosopher, as one who, rather than inciting the imagination, determines the (philosophical) understanding. It is a methodical revision that is again reflected in the *System of Ethics* when Fichte argues that for the "republic of scholars" there can be "no possible symbol," where "symbol" refers to the "beliefs of the community" that are present not in a "determinate" manner, but as "enshrouding images." Instead, in the ideal state, "one must, in the republic of scholars, be able to present everything of which one believes oneself to be convinced."[76] Fichte's rejection of the scholarly use of an "enshrouding image" is in direct contradiction to his advocacy in 1794 and 1795 for the philosophical employment of the image-producing imagination. However, if we consider this characterization of the expressive freedom of the scholar independently from Fichte's critique of symbols and images, then we can recognize a characteristic that is common to both the early and later philosophy. Namely, in both periods of thought, Fichte made his conviction known with great earnestness and enthusiasm, regardless of whether that conviction proclaimed the supreme power of the imagination, as in the first system, or expressed the unrivaled authority of conceptual determination, as in the revision.

[76] *Das System der Sittenlehre* (GA I/5, 218-9, 224).

Chapter 3:
Fichte's Philosophical Framework in the Work of Wilhelm von Humboldt

3.0 Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to show the organizing influence that Fichte's theory of mind had on Wilhelm von Humboldt's far-ranging investigations into human cultural expression. My claim is that after being introduced to Fichte's philosophy in Jena, Humboldt was, for the remainder of his life, deeply committed to the view of human experience Fichte presented according to which the individual is taken to be an insatiable source of self-activity seeking to realize itself in the sensuous world. I argue that Humboldt adopted this as his guiding model for how to think about the expressive capacities of human subjectivity. It is the work of this chapter to demonstrate that the systematic cohesion of Fichte's theory of mind provides the key to recognizing the cohesive theory of human expression that Humboldt is working out in his various writings on art and language.

My account is organized according to the three main conceptual dimensions that I identified in Chapter 1 as forming the basic structure of Fichte's Jena philosophy, namely the dimensions of 1) the mind as the single, unifying element of human experience 2) activity, rather than stasis as the basic principle of minded experience 3) sensuous form as the mode in which mind realizes itself. It is only with reference to the systematic interrelation of these concepts as they appear in Fichte's philosophy of mind that I believe we can attain a sufficient grasp of the unity of Humboldt's intellectual endeavors. I will show that Humboldt engages extensively with all of these conceptual dimensions, and that, like Fichte, he always has in mind their systematic interrelation. However, I argue that he also takes this conceptual model in a new direction, away from Fichte's focus on

empirical cognition and moral action, and toward a theory of human subjectivity as first and foremost a capacity for expression.

Before I embark on this account, it is necessary to say a brief word about the formative influence that three other thinkers, namely Goethe, Schiller, and Kant, had on Humboldt's philosophical outlook and what I take to be the specificity of Fichte's contribution within this field of intellectual influence. As I will explain below, Humboldt's expressivist appropriation of Fichte's theory of subjectivity is largely motivated by an interest in cultural phenomena and the desire to treat cultural artifacts with an appreciation for their respective idiosyncratic complexities. The speculative acumen and the systematic rigor that Humboldt drew from Fichte's philosophy complete just one side of what is always a balancing act in Humboldt's writing between the abstracting schematizations of philosophical thought and the unyielding attention to the richness of phenomena. In this account, I am focused primary on the philosophical side of this equation and the lines of Humboldt's thought that lead from the general philosophical considerations toward the phenomenal. It would be the task of another investigation to outline the central role that both Goethe and Schiller played in nourishing Humboldt's appreciation for phenomenal complexity and in helping him link this appreciation back to his more systematic philosophical meditations.[1]

Kant's influence, meanwhile, is well within the stated focus of my investigation, but I nevertheless think that we get a sharper view of the systematic cohesion of Humboldt's thought when we draw

[1] The topic of Goethe's influence on Humboldt has been provisionally addressed by Michael Böhler in his *Nachwort* to *Schriften zur Sprache*: "Es wäre ein reizvolles Unternehmen, die grundsätzliche Übereinstimmung von Goethes naturwissenschaftlichen Studien und Humboldts sprachwissenschaftlichen Studien im Detail nachzuweisen…" See: Michael Böhler, "Nachwort" in: Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Schriften zur Sprache* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1973), 257. Manfred Geier also addresses this topic, arguing that Goethe's anatomical studies and the search for an 'anatomical type' that would demonstrate a higher principle of unity among the diversity of animal forms exercised a decisive influence on both Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt. See: Manfred Geier, *Die Brüder Humboldt* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 2009), 178-181. As is common for the secondary literature on Humboldt, both Böhler and Geier do not mention the role that Fichte played in the constellation of thinkers from the 1790s that influenced Humboldt.

the necessary parallels to Fichte. This has to do with Humboldt's and Fichte's shared status as post-Kantian thinkers. Both Fichte and Humboldt were committed Kantians, individuals who accepted Kant's philosophy as the foundation of their philosophical outlook and who took it as their intellectual mission to clarify, improve, or extend the project that Kant had begun. As I argue below, they not only shared a commitment to Kant's philosophy, but they also largely agreed on the kind of revision that was required. Fichte's revision of Kant's dualist philosophy into a monist theory of the subject provided Humboldt with precisely the kind of unified conceptual framework that he was looking for in his ruminations about the holistic nature of human experience and his critique of Kant's dualism.

At the same time, Humboldt would always remain wary of the tilt in Fichte's philosophy toward what he terms an "absolute Idealism," or the tendency to give too much explanatory weight to the activity of the subject at the cost of ignoring the apparent givenness of the phenomenal world.[2] Kant's philosophy provided for Humboldt the necessary counterweight to this tendency because it argues for an empirical reality that is given to the subject by means of the subject's receptivity to the so-called thing-in-itself. Humboldt's interests in aesthetics and language were significantly shaped by his desire to affirm the idealist picture of mind espoused by Fichte while still affirming the Kantian notion of an empirical reality that is at least in part given to the subject in experience and not entirely the product of the subject's mental activity. Both art and language fulfill the dual requirement of

[2] This combination of wariness and admiration that Humboldt had for Fichte's system is expressed in a letter to his friend Brinkmann from November 3, 1794 in which Humboldt says that he "exceptionally admires" Fichte "on account of his great speculative mind" and comments on the recently published *Theoretical Part of the Foundation* as follows: "There has perhaps never been something more sharp-witted, perhaps also more sophistic. I also don't want to decide if the system that he sets up will prove to be correct. It appears, namely, that it tends toward an absolute Idealism, and a certain D. Weishuhn here…is supposedly writing against it. But even if this opponent is right, it is always a great pleasure to behold such a mind in such a sharp-witted and consistent system, and certainly, even if things are that bad, individual aspects of philosophy have much to gain from it." See: Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Wilhelm von Humboldts Briefe an Karl Gustav von Brinkmann*, ed. Albert Leitzmann (Leipzig, Karl W. Hiersemann, 1939), 79-80.

exhibiting a Fichtian Idealism without infringing on Kantian realism: they are manifestly products of human activity which bring about a kind of second-order experience within the self-made worlds of aesthetic and linguistic expression. As second-order realms of experience, language and art affirm the Fichtian ability of the mind to actively create experience, while also not infringing on the first-order realm of the empirical world that is given to the subject in experience. Thus, we can think of Humboldt's intellectual project as providing a partial elaboration of Fichte's theory of subjectivity, an elaboration that emerges against the backdrop of the former's commitment to some version of Kant's empirical realism.

3.1 The mind as a capacity for expression

We saw in the previous two chapters that Fichte's Jena philosophy is guided by the notion of the subject as a moral agent who carries out actions in the sensuous world that are in accordance with the dictates of the moral law. I want to show in this section that Humboldt likewise conceives of the subject as an agent of change in the sensuous world, but that he shifts the focus away from morality as the telos of this action towards an account of self-expression as the guiding principle of action. Once we recognize that the self-expression of mind forms the centerpiece of Humboldt's engagement with Fichte's theory of subjectivity, then we can understand his theories of art and language as two related investigations into the sign-theoretic logic of this self-expression.

Although Fichte's theory of inter-subjectivity as presented in *Natural Right* would play an important role in Humboldt's conception of language as a dialogical phenomenon (most obviously in his essay

Über den Dualis[3]), Fichte seems to have most impressed Humboldt by the account he offers at the conclusion of the *Theoretical Part* of the *Foundation* of how the mind comes to consciousness following the initial "check" that halts its oblivious, forward-moving activity. Humboldt echoes various aspects of this account in a number of writings between 1794 and 1800: first in an unfinished essay from the end of 1794 commonly given the title *Theory of Human Bildung*, then in a short list of theses on language from the summer of 1795, referred to by contemporary editors as *On Thinking and Speaking*, then again in his theory of the artistic imagination that he presents both in his 1799 treatise *Essays on Aesthetics* and in a companion article published in French in the Parisian *Magasin Encyclopédique*, and finally in a letter that he writes Schiller in September 1800 concerning the latter's *Wallenstein* trilogy.

In all of these texts, Humboldt is reaching for the expressivist strain in Fichte's thought that reveals itself fleetingly but forcefully in the *Foundation*. Fichte's expressivism lies in his argument that the telos of the mind's activity subsequent to the advent of the "check" is the positing of its infinite ground. As Fichte describes it, the mind's desire to display to itself its own infinitude is what generates the "exchange of the ego in and with itself, as it posits itself to be both finite and infinite."[4] Whereas the ego only has a finite capacity to posit, the desideratum of the ego's finite acts of positing is an infinite positing, and this impossibility for a satisfactory act of positing results in a continuous process of the ego trying and retrying to display to itself its own infinitude.

Taken out of context, it might sound like Fichte is describing here the dynamics of human expression. We can use a distinction offered by Charles Taylor between designative and expressive

[3] For example, we can read the following thesis as drawing its inspiration from Fichte's theory of the summons: "Es liegt aber in dem ursprünglichen Wesen der Sprache ein unabänderlicher Dualismus, und die Möglichkeit des Sprechens selbst wird durch Anrede und Erwiederung bedingt... " See: "Ueber den Dualis" (WB 3, 138).
[4] *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 359).

meaning to clarify what I mean here by expression. According to Taylor, designative acts of signification (Taylor speaks here specifically of language, but we can apply the idea to any act of signification) are "explained by their relation to things or states of affairs in the world." In contrast, in expressive acts of signification, "the expressive meaning cannot be fully separated from the medium, because it is only manifest in it. The meaning of an expression cannot be explained by its being related to something else, but only by another expression."[5] Now, it seems that the ego's finite positing of the infinite that Fichte describes falls neatly into the category of an expressive act. The ego cannot point to its infinite ground in an act of designation because this infinite ground is not as such present to the ego. Instead, it must make do with its finite representations that cannot display or represent the inexpressible, but are nevertheless all that the ego has to work with.

This expressivist understanding of what Fichte is describing has a certain validity. Its validity is confirmed, for example, by the fact that in his essay *On the Sprit and the Letter in Philosophy* Fichte will experiment with how this model of the mind as an expressive capacity could be used to develop a theory of art. However, within the immediate context of the theory of mind that Fichte is presenting in the *Foundation*, this account of the ego's attempt to posit its own infinite ground is put to the very specific use of explaining the ego's position as a moral agent within a causally ordered spatial-temporal reality. The account is a two-step process. In the first step, the theoretical moment, Fichte characterizes the iterative process of positing as a "hovering of the imagination" (Schweben der Einbildungskraft) that creates space and time for the ego, thereby allowing for the ego's sensuous intuition of an empirical world that unfolds across space and time[6]. This hardly qualifies as a case of human expression in the sense that Charles Taylor uses it because it is entirely pre-

[5] Charles Taylor, "Language and human nature," in: *Human Agency and Language*, vol. 1 of *Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 220-221.
[6] *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 360, 367)

conscious, an activity that makes conscious experience and action possible in the first place. In the second step, the practical moment, the ego, now conscious, continues trying to realize its infinite ground through its action as a moral agent, working in the sensuous world in accordance to the dictates of the categorical imperative[7]. In this case it also doesn't make sense to call the moral action 'expressive,' because, as Fichte sees it, the moral law is at any point in time unambiguous: it dictates a specific course of action that one can refer to and execute.

Humboldt, however, in his various appropriations of Fichte's account of the ego's iterative self-positing, consistently moves the account in an expressivist direction. We can observe this by moving in chronological order from Humboldt's unfinished 1794 essay on *Bildung* through to his *Wallenstein* letter to Schiller and observing how he puts Fichte's terminology to use.

a. The *Theory of Human Bildung*

The essay on *Bildung*, likely written in late 1794, at most a few months after Humboldt had read the *Theoretical Part* of the *Foundation*, marks Humboldt's first attempt to use the terms of Fichte's philosophy to clarify his own research project. In this essay, Humboldt is following up on an intention he had voiced in a letter to Körner from 1793 to develop a theory of the formation of the self that would use the Kantian focus on the capacities and activities of the individual as a way of providing an organizing lens through which to sift through the enormous diversity of the world and thereby determine the potential avenues of engagement with the world that could contribute to the development of the modern individual. Fichte's influence is apparent in this essay in Humboldt's characterization of human experience as definable in terms an "interaction" (Wechselwirkung) that occurs between the human subject (Mensch) and the world (Welt). At one point, Humboldt even

[7] *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 396)

goes so far as to call the world the "Not-human" (NichtMensch), a riff on Fichte's distinction between the "Self" and "Not-self."

We will recall two things about the *Theoretical Part* of the *Foundation*. First, its main concern is to accurately describe the general structure of mind-world interaction. Second, as I have just described in the last few pages, the final monist model of interaction that Fichte settles on, namely his conception of the conscious self and the empirical world as finite positings of an infinite mind, has a nascent expressivist tendency insofar as it describes the ego as striving towards the realization of something it cannot fully comprehend. We can only call this a nascent tendency toward expressivism because the attempt to posit an infinite ground produces two forms of experience, empirical cognition and moral action, neither of which reveal to the self their underlying infinite ground that motivates their coming to be in conscious experience.

Humboldt, however, gives an account of mind-world interaction that makes the incomprehensibility of the self a central part of conscious life and that thereby begins to articulate an expressivist theory of the subject:

> The final task of our existence is to provide the concept of humanity that is contained within our person with as great a content as possible, both during the time of our life, and beyond this time by means of the traces that we leave behind of our lively effectivity. This task can only be fulfilled by connecting our Self to the world in the most universal, active, and freest interaction. Indeed, this alone is the true measure according to which we can assess the work being done in all branches of human knowledge.
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> Die letzte Aufgabe unsres Daseyns: dem Begriff der Menschheit in unsrer Person, sowohl während der Zeit unseres Lebens, als auch noch über dasselbe hinaus, durch die Spuren des lebendigen Wirkens, die wir zurücklassen, einen so grossen Inhalt, als möglich, zu verschaffen, diese Aufgabe löst sich allein durch die Verknüpfung unsres Ichs mit der Welt zu der allgemeinsten, regesten und freiesten Wechselwirkung. Dies allein ist nun auch der eigentliche Massstab zur Beurteilung der Bearbeitung jedes Zweiges menschlicher Erkenntnis.[8]

Humboldt's choice of words indicates that there is limitless breadth to how one can realize "the concept of humanity that is contained within our person." In Kantian terms we can say that he is

[8] "Theorie der Bildung des Menschen" (WB 1, 236).

referring to a regulative idea of the self that both 1) forms the basis of every individual's existence – every individual already contains qua individual this concept of humanity, albeit in an unrealized, nascent form – and 2) serves as a limiting concept of an unreachable totality that accumulates meaning in the course of human experience, but is never fully satisfied. In Fichtean terms we can say that Humboldt conceives of the "concept of our humanity" as the infinite, inexhaustible ground of conscious life which humans continuously attempt to realize in the course of living. In contrast to Fichte, however, Humboldt believes that the infinite concept of the self can be approached along many avenues, only one of which is moral action. Such an emphasis on the pluralistic expression of the human spirit is already indicated by Humboldt's comment that "all branches of human knowledge" feed into this central task of realizing one's humanity. As we will see, Humboldt's theories of art and language articulate the artistic and linguistic means by which such realization can progress.

b. *On Thinking and Speaking*

In the case of *On Thinking and Speaking*, the title given to the sixteen theses on language that he wrote in the summer of 1795, Humboldt is using Fichte's own account from the *Foundation* concerning the self's transition from oblivion to consciousness in order to argue against a designative view of the language that Fichte had presented in an essay published in the spring of 1795 entitled *On the Linguistic Capacity and Origin of Language*. According to the view Fichte espouses in this essay, language has the strictly denotative function of referring to thought so as to communicate the thought to another individual.[9] In this conception, there is no problem of expression – language as

[9] We can see Fichte's designative conception of language in his notion that language comes about through an arbitrary act of naming: "*Sprachfähigkeit* ist das Vermögen, seine Gedanken willkürlich zu bezeichnen." It is also clear in the essay that this means that thought occurs largely independently, and prior to the exercise of language. Even in the case of abstract thinking like, say, philosophizing, Fichte believes that language is rather incidental to thought: "Ich beweise hier nicht, daß der Mensch ohne Sprache nicht denken, und ohne sie keine allgemeinen abstracten Begriffe haben könne. Das kann er allerdings vermittelst der Bilder, die er durch die Phantasie sich entwirft. Die Sprache ist meiner

a system of signifiers points to discrete thoughts that individuals already have and then decide to share with one another by means of their linguistic utterances. Humboldt, in contrast, argues that it is only by means of language that individuals have any thoughts in the first place, and that thought only constitutes itself in the act of linguistic utterance. He makes this argument by refashioning Fichte's account of how the ego comes to consciousness into an account of how linguistic utterance allows for the advent of a conscious, thinking subject. According to Humboldt's account, language provides the means by which the subject halts its "progressive activity" in order to achieve its "first act of reflection," where "reflection" is defined as "distinguishing the thinker from the thought" and said to constitute the essence of thinking.[10]

This characterization of language as an ingression into conscious life recalls Fichte's account in the *Foundation* of the absolute ego who attains finite conscious after its "activity that goes out into the infinite" is halted by an initial "check". Indeed, Humboldt even uses the term "check" ["Anstoss"] when he says that the first word that a subject utters is "so to speak, the first check [Anstoss] that man gives to himself to suddenly stand still, look around, and orient himself."[11]

It is typical of Humboldt's engagement with Fichte that all of these terms – reflection, activity, check – have a slightly different meaning than they do in Fichte's own system. In the *Foundation*, the act of reflection is an act of reverting back towards oneself, of the subject attempting to grasp at something

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Ueberzeugung nach für viel zu wichtig gehalten worden, wenn man geglaubt hat, daß ohne sie überhaupt kein Vernunftgebrauch Statt gefunden haben würde." See: "Von der Sprachfähigkeit und dem Ursprung der Sprache" (GA 1/3, 103).

[10] These are quotes from the first, second, and seventh thesis: "1. Das Wesen des Denkens besteht im Reflectiren, d.h. im Unterscheiden des Denkenden von dem Gedachten. 2. Um zu reflectiren, muss der Geist in seiner fortschreitenden Tätigkeit einen Augenblick still stehn, das eben Vorgestellte in eine Einheit fassen, und auf diese Weise, als Gegenstand, sich selbst entgegenstellen...7. Die Sprache beginnt daher unmittelbar und sogleich mit dem ersten Act der Reflexion..." See: "Über Denken und Sprechen" (WB 5, 97-98).

[11] "…so wie der Mensch aus der Dumpfheit der Begierde, in welcher das Subjekt das Objekt verschlingt, zum Selbstbewußtsein erwacht, so ist auch das Wort da - gleichsam der erste Anstoß, den sich der Mensch selbst gibt, plötzlich stillzustehen, sich umzusehen und zu orientieren." ibid.

about itself that has previously elided its own comprehension. Humboldt's notion of reflection, meanwhile, refers to a state of contemplative mental sobriety, a moment of being able to "distinguish" and being able to "stand still, look around and orient oneself."[12] Similarly, in contrast to Fichte's notion of the unconscious activity of the absolute ego, Humboldt's notion of a pre-reflective "progressive activity" contains a certain amount of mental awareness: "In order to reflect, the mind, in its progressive activity, must stand still for a minute, *grasp in a unity that which it has just represented* [emphasis mine], and set it in this way as an object in counter-position to itself." The unreflective state that Humboldt describes is not entirely unconscious, but rather has representational contours, and resembles what one could perhaps call an animalistic state of being, for at one point Humboldt describes it in terms of "the dullness of the appetites wherein the subject devours the object." Finally, Humboldt gives Fichte's notion of the "check" a very concrete meaning, defining it as an event of linguistic utterance and arguing that it is something which "man gives to himself," as opposed to the mysterious event in Fichte's account that simply "happens" to the ego.[13]

Humboldt is also describing something very different from what Fichte describes in the *Foundation*. The check that happens to the ego in Fichte's account and the iterative self-positing that this engenders is meant to explain the emergence of a self-conscious individual who finds himself within the empirical world of space and time. Humboldt, in contrast, is describing the entrance of the ego into the realm of linguistically mediated thought. He is interested not in the cognition of empirical objects existing in space and time, but rather in the way in which "certain portions of one's thought"

[12] ibid.
[13] We'll recall Fichte's formulation of the event of check, as cited in previous chapters: "Auf die ins Unendliche hinausgehende Tätigkeit des Ich...geschieht ein Anstoß..." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 369).

are apportioned into conceptual objects and manipulated through the exercise of language.[14] These are not empirical objects, but rather single unities of thought that have their realization in language as single, signifying words that may or may not correspond at any given time to the unities of sensuous objects existing out there in the world. In the initial act of linguistic utterance, the language-object and the empirical object may coincide, but there exists an inherent tendency for the linguistic object and the empirical object to go their separate ways as the mind continues to do its work of thinking: "As man looked for linguistic signs, his understanding had the task of distinguishing. He thereby further constructed united wholes that weren't actual things, but rather concepts and therefore allowed for a free treatment, for renewed division and new combination."[15]

As this last quote makes clear, we can also say that despite the many divergences from Fichte's account of the ego's emergence into a state of empirical cognition, Humboldt still retains a very general structure that Fichte offers in the *Foundation*, namely the progression first from a pre-conscious state to an initial state of consciousness, and then onwards towards a further, fully conscious interaction between the subject and his world. *On Thinking and Language* is almost exclusively concerned with the first transition from oblivion to consciousness, but Humboldt's description quoted in the preceding paragraph of a transition from the first linguistic utterance into a state of self-sustaining linguistic thought foreshadows his mature work on linguistics, which views language as a unique means by which fully conscious individuals engage with each other and the world.

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[14] "Die sinnliche Bezeichnung der Einheiten nun, zu welchen gewisse Portionen des Denkens vereinigt werden, um als Teile andern Teilen eines größeren Ganzen, als Objekte dem Subjekte gegenübergestellt zu werden, heißt im weitesten Verstande des Wortes: Sprache." See: "Über Denken und Sprechen" (WB 5, 97-98).

[15] "Als der Mensch Sprachzeichen suchte, hatte sein Verstand das Geschäft zu unterscheiden. Er bildete ferner dabei Ganze, die nicht wirkliche Dinge, sondern Begriffe, also eine freie Behandlung, abermalige Trennung und neue Verbindung, zulassend, waren." See: "Über Denken und Sprechen" (WB 5, 98-99).

c. Humboldt's Theory of the Imagination

Whereas Humboldt's essay on Bildung and his language theses are short, fragmentary works that offer only general outlines of the inspiration that he drew from Fichte's *Foundation*, his *Essay on Aesthetics* from 1799 and the accompanying French article he wrote on the poetic imagination demonstrate Humboldt's ability to work out in detail the expressivist potential that he saw in Fichte's theory of mind. In these two writings, which I'll consider here as comprising one body of work, Humboldt argues that artworks are created and experienced by means of the exercise of the imagination, and that it is therefore by developing a theory of the cognitive faculty of the imagination that one can develop a general theory of aesthetic experience. The theory of the imagination that Humboldt presents takes Fichte's account of the productive imagination in the *Foundation* as a general model for capturing the expressive aim of artistic engagement.

As Fichte describes it, the imagination generates spatial and temporal extension through its activity of 'hovering' between the finite determinations of the empirical world and the infinite ground of the perceiving subject. As I argue in Chapters 1 and 2, Fichte makes this argument by pointing to the fact that the sensuous material of empirical experience is capable, at least in thought, of infinite division and recombination. Fichte demonstrates this fact by showing that both space and time form an infinitely divisible continuum. It is thanks to this structural feature of the pure forms of intuition that the practical self has an unconstrained ability to think about how the sensuous material of existence could be manipulated so as to bring the world into better agreement with moral dictates.

Admittedly, the Fichtean philosopher must give a rather elaborate account of how it is that one starts with a rather banal mathematical fact about the theoretically infinite divisibility of sensuous material and ends up with an elaborate tale about an absolute ego that hovers between its finite

realizations and its unrealizable, infinite ground. One possibility is to do what I did in Chapter 1 and rehearse the argument of the *Foundation* about the spontaneous, monistic quality of mind. Another less laborious and more illustrative possibility is to invoke Humboldt's theory of the artistic imagination. For Humboldt is out to demonstrate that aesthetic experience is a mode of mind-world interaction in which the mind is consciously working through the tension that Fichte identifies between its own infinite ground and the limits of sensuous experience. According to Humboldt's thinking, artistic activity is an act of working through and expressing in conscious daily life that tension between infinite mind and sensuous reality that Fichte points to in the *Foundation* as the basis of all human experience.

We can begin to recognize this Fichtean take on artistic expression in several formulations that Humboldt offers us concerning the task of the poet. According to the French article, the poet must engage the imagination in order to "bind our physical and sensuous nature to that nature which seems to announce a more noble origin."[16] The "noble origin" that Humboldt is referring to here is the origin of our subjectivity, our origin as subjects, which, in Fichte's terms, is the infinitude that constitutes the one side of the finite-infinite polarity between which the imagination hovers. The opposite pole, finite empirical determination, is captured in Humboldt's reference to "our physical and sensuous nature."

This structural opposition that Humboldt borrows from Fichte proliferates in the *Essays on Aesthetics* into a number of parallel oppositions that use roughly synonymous terms to capture various aspects of the polarity:

[16] "…lier notre nature physique et sensible à celle qui semble announcer une origine plus auguste…" Wilhelm von Humboldt, "*Essais Æsthétiggues de M. Guillaume de Humboldt*," in: Müller-Vollmer, Kurt. *Poesie und Einbildungskraft: Zur Dichtungstheorie Wilhelm von Humboldts* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1967), 134.

> For it is the beautiful task of the poet to lead the mind to a high and broad standpoint by means of individual images of fancy, to bring forth an unlimited and infinite effect by means of the thoroughgoing limitation of his material, to do justice to an idea by means of an individual and to open up from out of a single point an entire world of appearances.
>
> Denn durch einzelne Bilder der Phantasie den Geist auf einen hohen und weitumschauenden Standpunkt zu führen, ist die schöne Bestimmung des Dichters, vermittelst durchgängiger Begränzung seines Stoffs eine unbegränzte und unendliche Wirkung hervorzubringen, durch ein Individuum einer Idee Genüge zu leisten und von Einem Punkt aus eine ganze Welt von Erscheinungen zu eröfnen.[17]

The first and last of these oppositions (i.e. individual images vs. high and broad standpoint, world of appearance vs. a single point) recall the world-generating quality that Fichte attributes to the imagination, something that, according to Humboldt, the artist recovers by 'leading the mind' *back* to its originary standpoint and then repeating in the artistic act the way in which the mind can "open up from out of a single point an entire world of appearances." We can say that in Humboldt's conception, an artwork recovers the ineluctably first-person standpoint of human consciousness by making visible to the beholder of the artwork the lens of transcendental subjectivity through which all experience must necessarily be accessed. This reverse directionality of the recovery of the originary act of world-apprehension is reflected especially clearly in the second of his oppositions, the "unlimited and infinite effect by means of the thorough-going limitation of…material." Whereas for Fichte, the finite limitation of sensuous experience is an effect of the infinite ground of subjectivity, here, the infinitude has become the effect of working with sensuous limitation in a specific manner. In Kantian terms, it is the project of working with the sensible forms of intuition, which, qua intuitions are "individuals" that cannot be subsumed under general concepts, and using this mode of sensuous intuition as a means to help us understand the "idea" of our spontaneity, or the transcendental ground of minded existence that, qua "idea," can necessarily find no adequate expression in the realm of empirical representation. According to Humboldt, this seemingly impossible task of 'doing justice to an idea' is best accomplished in art, because, as he says in the

[17] *Über Göthes Herrmann und Dorothea* (WB 2, 135-136).

French article, "if there is a faculty of our soul which possesses an evident spontaneity, it is the imagination."[18]

Before I conclude this section, I want to emphasize that Humboldt is not casually using Fichte's terminology as it suites him, but is rather engaging with the entirety of both Fichte's and Kant's philosophical systems. His fidelity to the systematicity of transcendental philosophy is exhibited, for example, in how he places the faculty of the imagination in systematic relation to the faculty of the understanding (or judgment) and the faculty of reason:

> We can distinguish three general states of our soul, in which all of her various powers are similarly active, but in which they are subordinated to one particular power as the dominant one. We are occupied either with the collection, ordering, and application of mere knowledge of experience, or with seeking out concepts that are independent of all experience; or we live in the middle of our limited and finite reality, but in such a way as if it were for us unlimited and infinite. One sees easily that this last state can only belong to the imagination, the only one of our faculties, which is capable of combining contradictory qualities.
>
> Wir unterscheiden drei allgemeine Zustände unserer Seele, in denen allen ihre sämmtlichen Kräfte gleich thätig, aber in jedem Einer besondern, als der herrschenden, untergeordnet sind. Wir sind entweder mit dem Sammeln, Ordnen und Anwenden blosser Erfahrungskenntnisse oder mit der Aufsuchung von Begriffen, die von aller Erfahrung unabhängig sind, beschäftigt; oder wir leben mitten in der beschränkten und endlichen Wirklichkeit, aber so, als wäre sie für uns unbeschränkt und unendlich. Der letztere Zustand kann, das begreift man leicht, nur der Einbildungskraft angehören, der einzigen unter unsern Fähigkeiten, welche widersprechende Eigenschaften zu verbinden im Stande ist.[19]

The schema that Humboldt presents here exhibits an original mix of Kantian and Fichtean elements. The first state corresponds to the gathering and ordering of empirical knowledge, which, in Kant's system, is accomplished by the combined work of the understanding, which synthesizes the sensuous manifold into discrete objects of knowledge, and by the faculty of judgment, which further investigates and orders these objects of empirical knowledge. The second state is that of doing philosophy, which in Kant is achieved through the exercise of theoretical reason. The third and final state is found neither in Kant's nor Fichte's philosophy, but it uses Fichte's definition of the imagination as "a capacity that hovers between determination and indetermination, between the

[18] "S'il y a une faculté de notre âme qui possède une spontanéité évidente, c'est l'imagination." See: Wilhelm von Humboldt, "*Essais Æsthétiggues de M. Guillaume de Humboldt*," 124.
[19] *Über Göthes Herrmann und Dorothea* (WB 1, 138).

finite and the infinite" in order to single out aesthetic experience as one of the three basic modes of human experience.[20]

Humboldt repeats this triadic division of the modalities of the soul in the French article, this time with an emphasis on the degree to which each modality is dependent on the facts of human experience:

> The historian, although he must tie together the facts which he recounts, relies entirely on one thing, namely if they were at one time true; and he directs us ceaselessly to the original, of which he only gives a copy. The philosopher, although he is more independent, establishes his reasoning on facts to which his reader, together with him, must always have recourse. The artist alone bases himself on nothing; by means of only the flight of his genius, he holds himself hovering, so to speak, in the void.
>
> L'historien, quoiqu'il doive lier les faits qu'il nous raconte, se repose entièrement sur une chose, c'est qu'ils ont été véritable ; et il nous conduit sans cesse vers l'original, dont il ne donne que la copie. Le philosophie, quoique plus indépendant, établit son raisonnement sur des faits auxquels sons lecteur doit toujours recourir avec lui. L'artiste, seul, ne se fonde sur rien ; par l'essor seul de son génie il se tient planant, pour ainsi dire, dans la vide.[21]

This last formulation of "hovering in the void" captures unmistakably the dramatic context in which the imaginative hovering described by Fichte is occurring, namely in a realm outside of the empirical universe, outside of space and time altogether, for, in Fichte's account, it is the hovering activity that is making space and time available in the first place. The dramatic space of the void is re-accessed by the artist, who, as Humboldt says in the ensuing lines, "leads us back so minimally to the reality of objects that he in fact detaches us from reality…A beautiful stature recalls nothing but itself, nature vanishes next to it…it appears to only exist through itself."[22] In detaching itself from a dependency on what is given in reality, the artwork must constitute itself from out of the so-called "void" of unconstrained spontaneity, coalescing into a seemingly autonomous whole.

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[20] *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 360).
[21] Wilhelm von Humboldt, "*Essais Æsthétigques de M. Guillaume de Humboldt*," 146.
[22] "…nous ramène si peu à la réalité des objets, qu'il nous en détache plutôt. Une belle statue ne rappelle rien qu'elle-même, la nature disparoît à côté d'elle…elle semble n'exister que par elle et pour elle seule." See: ibid.

I note in passing that Humboldt's tri-modality of the soul corresponds neatly to the three Kantian modalities of possibility, actuality and necessity, where art is the exploration of the possible, history or natural science is the investigation of the actual, and philosophy is the explication of those truths that hold by necessity. Humboldt only obliquely draws this connection to the Kantian modalities, describing aesthetic experience as occurring within the "domain of the possible," and arguing that "the realm of the fantastic is directly opposed to the realm of actuality." In other words, he ignores the concept of necessity and instead focuses on the opposition between possibility and actuality as a way of articulating the way in which the mode of aesthetic experience is opposed to the experience of reality.

Humboldt's opposition between the possible and the actual and the association that he makes between the imagination and the experience of the possible is deserving of a final remark because it is deeply indebted to Fichte's theory of mind. Fichte explicitly connects the activity of the imagination to the modality of possibility, saying that the activity of the "hovering of the imagination" is "grasped in the understanding as *possibility*."[23] Fichte is saying here that once the world takes on the contours that it does, it is only through a virtual recombination of the manifold of sensibility into other possible combinations that one can reconnect with the imaginative activity that brought forth the world in the first place. In the larger context of Fichte's system, it is clear that this realm of imaginative possibility is not a merely mechanical possibility of indifferent recombination, but rather a space of possibility motivated and directed by a moral mission. In equating the engagement with possibility to aesthetic experience, Humboldt is moving away from Fichte's strictly moral conception of experience but retaining the idea from Fichte that the

[23] "Das Gegentheil dieser durch ein Leiden bedingten Thätigkeit ist eine freie, angeschaut durch die Einbildungskraft als ein Schweben der Einbildungskraft selbst zwischen Verrichten und Nicht-Verrichten einer und ebenderselben Handlung; Auffassen und Nicht-Auffassen eines und ebendesselben Objectes im Verstande; aufgefasst in dem Verstande, als *Möglichkeit*. " In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 378).

exploration of the possible only makes sense in so far as it is not about brute mechanical recombination, but rather about a quest for meaning that is rooted in the infinitude of mind.

d. The Wallenstein letter

My final example of Humboldt's engagement with the expressivist dimension of Fichte's philosophy of mind is found in a lengthy letter he sends to Schiller in September 1800 on the occasion of having just read the *Wallenstein* trilogy. Towards the end of the letter, Humboldt offers some general reflections on human language that are inspired by his reflection on Schiller's poetic work, and the secondary literature on Humboldt has rightfully argued that these reflections mark a watershed in his intellectual development.[24] It is a point at which Humboldt realizes, once and for all, that the diverse strands of his intellectual development can find their harmonious fulfillment in a comprehensive study of language, a project that will occupy him for the remainder of his life. For our purposes, it is important to note that Humboldt had once again studied several of Fichte's works the summer before he wrote the letter, and that we find, once again, that Fichte's account from the *Foundation* about the movement of the ego between infinitude and limitation is transformed into an account of human expression[25]:

> Our entire finitude arises from the fact that we cannot recognize ourselves immediately by means of ourselves and as we inherently are, but rather self-recognition can only occur when we set some other thing over and against ourselves. This finitude consists in an eternal division: of our being into individual forces, of the world into individual objects, of humanity into individual humans, of existence into transient periods of time. Since this finitude cannot be overcome in reality, it must be overcome in an idea; since that can't happen in a divine manner, it must happen in a human manner. However, it is the essence of the human to recognize oneself in another being; that is where man's need and love comes from. The only thing left to do is therefore to collect into one moment as densely as possible any direction of one's inner force and all the strength that one has ever achieved by whatever manner. For although no moment can come in which this force would be infinitely

[24] In Jürgen Trabant's formulation: "Die linguistische Weltumrundung [Humboldts] beginnt aber recht eigentlich erst in dem Moment, in dem er die ‚symbolische Verschmelzung' von Sinnlichkeit und Verstand und die Vereinigung des Philosophischen und Poetischen in der Sprache voll erfasst hat. Dieser Moment ist die denkende Auseinandersetzung mit Schiller, die Lektüre des *Wallenstein*." See: Jürgen Trabant, *Weltansichten* (München: C.H. Beck, 2012), 66.

[25] We know Humboldt had read Fichte that summer because he says it in a letter to Goethe from October 10, 1800: "Fichte habe ich diesen Sommer aufs neue studiert und er hat mir sehr gefallen. Sein Naturrecht ist ein wirklich großes Werk, und auch der Stil hat eine originelle Seite. Bei der Bestimmung des Menschen habe ich manchmal lächeln müssen. Das relative Ich spielt darin hie und da eine närrische Rolle." See: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe's Briefwechsel mit den Gebrüdern von Humboldt. (1795-1832.) Im Auftrage der von Goethe'schen Familie* (Leipzig, F. A. Brockhaus, 1876), 172.

> effective and fuse with an infinite object, the force can still try to overtake a moment in which this effectivity occurs in relation to a larger object and through more intimate contact with it. Language, however, is the only sensuous means by which to achieve this and the most human, as it originates from the innermost core of humanity and is only possible among humans.
>
> Alle unsere Endlichkeit rührt daher, dass wir uns nicht unmittelbar durch und an uns selbst, sondern nur in einem Entgegensetzen eines anderen erkennen können, besteht in einem ewigen Trennen: unseres Wesens in einzelne Kräfte, der Welt in einzelne Gegenstände, der Menschheit in einzelne Menschen, des Daseins in vorübergehende Zeiten. Da diese Endlichkeit des Menschen nicht in der Tat aufgehoben werden kann, so muß sie es in der Idee, da es nicht auf göttliche Weise geschehen kann, so muß es auf menschliche. Des Menschen Wesen aber ist es, sich erkennen in einem anderen; daraus entspringt sein Bedürfnis und seine Liebe. Das einzige was daher übrigbliebt, ist, alle zu irgendeiner Zeit und auf irgendeine Weise erlangte Stärke und jegliche Richtung der inneren Kraft so eng in einen Augenblick zu versammeln, dass, da einmal keiner erscheinen kann, in dem sie unendlich und in Verschmelzung mit einem unendlichen Objekt wirke, sie doch immer einen ereile, in dem es voller, an einem größeren Objekt und in innigerer Berührung mit demselben geschehe. Dahin aber zu gelangen, ist die Sprache das einzige sinnliche – und als aus der innersten Menschheit stammend und nur in ihr möglich – menschlichste Mittel.[26]

The connection to Fichte's *Foundation* is clear – the human self is by definition a finite being that is nevertheless always striving to gain access to an infinitude to which it has no direct access, but which nevertheless structures and directs its experience.[27] The difference is also familiar. In Fichte's account, the ego's quest to posit its infinitude diffuses into the matrix of time and space, only to be locally reactivated through discrete moral action. Humboldt, in contrast, is looking for a mode of conscious human activity in which the self's boundlessness can be recouped and made present to the ego in its full intensity. In Humboldt's terms, it is the "gathering up in one moment" of one's "inner power," and the release of this power into the singular linguistic utterance.

In concluding this section, I want to suggest that the expressivist strand of Fichte's philosophy that we have been tracking in Humboldt's writing bifurcates into two separate but related theories, namely an expressivist theory of natural signs that finds its articulation in the *Essays on Aesthetics* and the French article, and an expressivist theory of arbitrary signs, which consists of Humboldt's many

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[26] Friedrich Schiller and Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Friedrich Schiller und Wilhelm von Humboldt*, ed. Siegfried Seidel, vol. 2 (Berlin Aufbau-Verlag, 1962), 208.

[27] Humboldt is also referencing Fichte's theory of inter-subjectivity and using that to touch on the role that language plays in enabling and structuring human connection ("Des Menschen Wesen aber ist es, sich erkennen in einem andern, daraus entspringt sein Bedürfnis und seine Liebe."). This, of course, coincides with the enthusiasm he expresses in the letter to Goethe about Fichte's *Natural Right*.

studies on linguistics. There has been a tendency in the secondary literature to fold Humboldt's theory of art into his theory of linguistics, either combining the theory of the imagination that he develops in the *Essays on Aesthetic* with his language theory, or viewing the former as a kind of prolegomena to the latter.[28] However, I believe that these two projects derive much of their insights from an opposition that they build between the signifying power of sensuous material versus the signifying power of language. This opposition between art and language is a transformation of the Enlightenment distinction between natural and arbitrary signs, or signs that derive their meaning from the natural order of things versus those whose meaning is established by human institution.[29] Humboldt re-appropriates that distinction under the banner of transcendental philosophy, refashioning it into the distinction between signification whose effect is primarily achieved through the manipulation of sensuous material versus signification that is targeted directly at the super-sensuous, conceptual side of human consciousness.

We can see this is the case by first attending a general sign-theoretic comment that we find in Humboldt's writing prior to his engagement with Fichte in which Humboldt is actively employing the natural-arbitrary distinction. In a letter to Georg Forster from 1789 he writes:

> It is perhaps very rhapsodic to only view the sensuous world as the manner in which the non-sensuous world appears, to view it as only an expression, a cipher of the non-sensuous world that must be puzzled out; however, it is nevertheless a very interesting idea and, when one really imagines it, a beautiful hope to think that we can decode this language of nature more and more. In doing this we would be heightening, ennobling, and refining our enjoyment – for the signs of nature provide more joy than those of convention, just as viewing something provides more joy than talking–, we would be eliminating base sensuality, which is intrinsically

[28] Both Tilman Borsche and Jürgen Trabant exhibit this tendency to view Humboldt's aesthetics as a kind of way-station on his path to his mature work view on linguistics: "Am *Beispiel* der Kunst…ist Humboldt auf die allen menschlichen Äußerungsweisen zugrundeliegende Sprachlichkeit des Geistes geführt worden." See: Tilman Borsche, *Sprachansichten* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 200. Jürgen Trabant's formulations are more careful, but nevertheless in the same spirit: "Mit dieser Synthesis ist Sprache also – und das ist die Erkenntnis, bei der Humboldt durch den *Wallenstein* angekommen ist – eine Form der Einbildungskraft…Sie sitzt sozusagen mitten im Kern der Einbildungskraft…Nun wird sie [die Sprache] als die sublimste Form der Einbildungskraft erkannt." See: Jürgen Trabant, *Weltansichten* (München: C.H. Beck, 2012), 59.

[29] For a concise overview of this distinction between arbitrary and natural signs in the Enlightenment see: David Wellbery, *Lessing's Laocoon: Semiotics and aesthetics in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), particularly the sections: "The arbitrary signs of language" and "Classification of signs: natural signs."

> disposed to find only the sensuous in the sensuous, and we would be cultivating more and more our aesthetic sense to be the true mediator between the mortal way of looking at things and the immortal primordial Idea.
>
> Es mag wohl viel Schwärmerei darin liegen, die ganze Sinnenwelt so nur als eine Art anzusehn, wie die unsinnliche erscheint, nur als einen Ausdruck, einen Chiffre von ihr, den wir enträthseln müssen; aber interessant bleibt die Idee doch immer, und wenn man sich recht hineinträumt, schön die Hoffnung immer mehr zu entziffern von dieser Sprache der Natur, dadurch – da das Zeichen der Natur mehr Freude gewährt, als das Zeichen der Konvention, der Blick mehr als die Sprache –den Genuß zu erhöhen, zu veredeln, zu verfeinern, die grobe Sinnlichkeit, deren eigentlicher Charakter es ist, im Sinnlichen nur das Sinnliche zu finden, zu vernichten, und immer mehr auszubilden den ästhetischen Sinn, als den wahren Mittler zwischen dem sterblichen Blick und der unsterblichen Uridee.[30]

This passage is a wonderful illustration of how the 'natural' aspect of the natural sign undergoes a transformation under the new perspective of transcendental philosophy. Natural signs are no longer natural by virtue of residing in a world free of human intervention and artifice. Rather, they are natural on Humboldt's account because they operate in the 'world of the senses,' which is to say through the medium of our sensibility. It is the organ of apprehension, 'sight' and the sensuous medium in which sight happens, which makes these signs separate and distinct from the signs of convention.

Significantly, Humboldt describes in his letter to Forster his enthusiasm for a way of engaging with natural signs that can "eliminate" "brute sensuality" and develop in its place an "aesthetic sense." This line of thought finds a reformulation a decade later in the French article on the imagination: "In effect, the artist must destroy nature as a real object and remake it as a production of the imagination."[31] This correlation between his earlier reflections on the value of natural signs and his theory of the imagination is representative of Humboldt's larger conception of artistic experience as a human practice defined by its engagement with the medium of natural, as opposed to arbitrary

[30] Georg Forster, *Briefe an Forster*, vol. 18 of *Georg Forsters Werke*, ed. Brigitte Leuschner, et. al (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1982), 363.
[31] "En effet, l'artiste doit anéantir la nature comme objet réel, et la refaire comme production de l'imagination." In: Wilhelm von Humboldt, "*Essais Æsthétigques de M. Guillaume de Humboldt*," 146.

signs.[32] This is the motivation, for example, for his characterization of language in the *Essays on Aesthetics* as a "means that, because it is originally formed only for the understanding, has to be refashioned in order to find access to fantasy…"[33] It also explains why sculpture, a plastic art form, "conforms most of all to the pure concept of art," for art is for him most essentially about the forming of sensuous material.[34] Last but not least, it explains why he formulates his praise for Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea* in the way he does, saying that the poem, "recalls more the demands and the essence of art in general and the plastic arts in particular than the particular nature of poetry."[35]

Starting from about 1800, when he writes down his thoughts on language in his letter to Schiller, Humboldt's fascination for natural signs gives way for a new appreciation for the logic and complexity of the arbitrary sign. He realizes in the letter to Schiller that language is interesting precisely because it is most closely bound up with the self-actualizing, spontaneous aspect of mental life. Twenty years later, in his text *Über das Vergleichende Sprachstudium in Beziehung auf die Verschiedenen Epochen der Sprachentwicklung* from 1820, he describes the interest that the study language can hold by comparing it to the study of nature:

> Just as our earth underwent great upheaval before it took on the present-day form of our oceans, mountains, and rivers and has changed little since then; so, too, there exists in languages a point of completed organization,

[32] In *Körperströme und Schriftverkehr*, Albrecht Koschorke suggests that Humboldt's aesthetics is in fact influenced by the notion of the arbitrary, non-representational nature of linguistic signs and that his guiding model of aesthetic creating is therefore poetry: "Man könnte…sagen, daß er [Humboldt –ML] dazu vordringt, auch Plastik und Malerei nun nach dem Muster der Poesie als rein aus der Imagination geschaffene Gebilde zu sehen." This might perhaps be true on the large epochal scale that Koschorke is dealing with. It might indeed be true that the freedom of the artistic imagination for which Humboldt is advocating takes its cue from an epochal fascination with the non-corporeality and intellectuality of arbitrary signs. However, looking locally at the development of Humboldt's thought, it seems clear to me that Humboldt wants to preserve some aspect of the "naturalness" of natural signs, and that he distinguishes his aesthetic theory of the 1790s from his language theory, seeing the former as a theory of the free engagement with natural signs, as opposed to arbitrary signs. Indeed, it might be a central distinction between Humboldt and his Romantic counterparts Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis that he attempts to maintain this separation between natural and arbitrary signs. See: Albrecht Koschorke, *Körperströme und Schriftverkehr* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1999), 317.

[33] "…Mittel…das, ursprünglich nur für den Verstand gebildet, erst einer Umarbeitung bedarf, um auch bei der Phantasie Eingang zu finden…" *Über Göthes Herrmann und Dorothea* (WB 2, 156).

[34] "…am meisten dem reinen Begriffe der Kunst entspricht…" In: *Über Göthes Herrmann und Dorothea* (WB 2, 166).

[35] *Über Göthes Herrmann und Dorothea* (WB 2, 161).

> from which point on the organized structure, the stable form no longer changes. However, as living creations of the mind, languages can contain a more refined cultivation that occurs within the limits given and progresses infinitely.
>
> Wie unsere Erdkugel grosse Umwälzungen durchgangen ist, ehe sie die jetzige Gestaltung der Meere, Gebirge, und Flüsse angenommen, sich aber seitdem wenig verändert hat; so giebt es auch in den Sprachen einen Punkt der vollendeten Organisation, von dem an der organische Bau, die feste Gestalt sich nicht mehr abändert. Dagegen kann in ihnen, als lebendigen Erzeugnissen des Geistes, die feinere Ausbildung, innerhalb der gegebenen Gränzen, bis ins Unendliche fortschreiten.[36]

The comparison he draws to the study of nature is no doubt in part motivated by the contrast he sees between himself as the student of language and culture, and his naturalist brother, Alexander. It is a way of identifying his and his brother's work as respectively mapping out the two basic realms of signs – the linguistic realm and the natural realm. Rather than disregard the "signs of convention" on account of their origin in human spontaneity as he had done in his letter to Foster, Humboldt argues later in his life that language is interesting precisely because it bears the traces and effects of the uniqueness of human spontaneity.

3.2 Expression as activity

Both before and after his introduction to Fichte's philosophy, Humboldt was deeply committed to a vision of human experience as a dynamic process, according to which the benchmark for judging and analyzing human achievement is not so much the accumulated achievements themselves as the activity on the part of the individual that brings about these achievements. This is an idea that we find both in Humboldt's earliest work, for example in his first major treatise *On the Limits of State Action* (*Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Gränzen der Wirksamkeit des Staats zu Bestimen*, hereafter: *State Action*) from 1792, and in his final major work, the treatise on the Kavi language with its general introduction to a theory of language entitled *On the Diversity of the Structure of Human Language and its Influence on the Intellectual Development of the Human Race* (*Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwickelung des Menschengeschlechts*, hereafter: the *Introduction*

[36] *Ueber das Vergleichende Sprachstudium in Beziehung auf die Verschiedenen Epochen der Sprachentwicklung* (WB 3, 1-2).

to the Kavi treatise). In *State Action*, for example, he says in the very first pages: "the happiness of a vigorous, powerful person resides in striving after a goal and achieving this goal with the expenditure of physical and moral force. Possession, which consigns the exerted force to quietude, is only attractive under the beguilements of fantasy."[37] Meanwhile, in what is one of the most-discussed claims of Humboldt's work on linguistics, the *Introduction* to the Kavi treatise draws a similar structural opposition between acquiring and having acquired, striving and possession, claiming that language "is not a work (ergon), but rather an activity (energeia)."[38] [39] One of the justifications Humboldt offers for this claim is of general philosophical import, namely, that "the existence of mind only ever can be conceived of in its activity and as activity."[40] It is no coincidence that four decades earlier, in 1794 and while he was working out his philosophical system, Fichte made an almost identical claim: "The human mind is activity and nothing but activity."[41]

My aim in this section is to show that Humboldt's privileging of activity over the completed work, energeia over ergon, first attained systematic clarity in his oeuvre after his appropriation of Fichte's philosophy. My claim is 1) that Humboldt recognized in Fichte's conception of the activity of subjectivity a holistic conception of human activity that he himself had been working toward in his engagement with Kant and 2) that Humboldt made Fichte's philosophical notion of the activity of mind and its relationship to the infinite ground of subjectivity one of the cornerstones of the

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[37] *Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Gränzen der Wirksamkeit des Staates zu bestimmen* (WB 1, 57).

[38] *Ueber die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwickelung des Menschengeschlechts* (WB 3, 418-419).

[39] For an account of how this sentence has been discussed in the scholarship, see Trabant's repudiation of how this sentence has been interpreted by Chomsky and his followers in: Jürgen Trabant, *Weltansichten* (München: C.H. Beck, 2012), 271-275.

[40] "Die Sprache als eine Arbeit des Geistes zu bezeichnen ist schon darum ein vollkommen richtiger und adäquater Ausdruck, weil sich das Daseyn des Geistes überhaupt nur in Thätigkeit und als solche denken lässt." See: *Ueber die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwickelung des Menschengeschlechts* (WB 3, 419).

[41] "Der menschliche Geist ist Thätigkeit, u. nichts als Thätigkeit" In: *Von den Pflichten der Gelehrten (Vorlesungen und Entwürfe)* (GA II/3, 325).

expressivist account of human experience that he developed in his theories of art and language.[42] Another way to say this is that Humboldt appropriated Fichte's notion of the activity of the mind in order to give his own developing critique and response to Kantian dualism a systematic metaphysical grounding.

In the years between 1790 and 1793, that is, after he began to study Kant intently in 1788 and 1789, but before the advent of Fichte's philosophy, we see Humboldt trying to formulate a conception of human activity in which the intellectual and the sensible capacities of the soul are more fully integrated than Kant himself allowed for in his first two critiques.[43] In his 1790 essay *On Religion*, Humboldt settles on the notion of an "aesthetic feeling" that man must develop as a way of mediating between his sensuous knowledge and desires, on the one hand, and his intellectual and moral strivings, on the other. This line of thinking bears an unmistakable resemblance to the theory of aesthetic judgment that Kant presented in his *Critique of Judgment*, published in that same year, and which Humboldt possibly had knowledge of at the time that he wrote *On Religion*[44]. However, Kant's account of aesthetic experience didn't provide enough of an integration of the sensuous with the intellectual that Humboldt was searching for.

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[42] For an extended account of the concept of energeia in Humboldt's thought that does not consider Fichte's influence see: Leonard Jost, *Sprache als Werk und wirkende Kraft, ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und Kritik der energetischen Sprachauffassung seit Wilhelm von Humboldt* (Bern: Haupt, 1960). Of particular relevance is the section *"Der Begriff der Energie in Humboldt's Denken*."

[43] For an account of Humboldt's initial engagement with Kant see: Peter Sweet, *Wilhelm von Humboldt: A Biography* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978), 38.

[44] Two pieces of evidence speak for the case that Humboldt was at least generally aware of Kant's *Critique of Judgement* even if the work likely hadn't yet been published at the time Humboldt wrote *On Religion*. First, there is the similarity of their arguments: both argue that aesthetic experience mediates between the sensuous and the intellectual. Second, there is the fact that Humboldt was friends with Friedrich Grentz in Berlin at the time that the latter was proofreading the *Critique of Judgment* for Kant. See: Sweet, Peter R. *Wilhelm von Humboldt*, 89-91.

This is evinced, for one, by the spirited defense of sensuality that we find in *On Religion* and *State Action*. In *On Religion*, Humboldt appears to criticize the severity of Kant's notion of the virtuous being as one who is free from the coercions of sensuous desire:

> All principles of morality must flow from the examination of the two sides of the soul, one's sensuous desire and one's purely intellectual power of thought and the relationship in which these stand to one another…Much depends on sensuous desire. It must not be entirely suffocated from any single angle, but rather nourished in accordance only with the variability of character.
>
> Aus der Betrachtung dieser beiden Seiten der Seele, der sinnlichen Begierde und der bloss geistigen Denkkraft und des Zusammenhangs, in dem diese beide mit einander stehn, müssen alle Grundsäze der Moral fliessen...Sehr viel hängt ab von der sinnlichen Begierde. Sie muss von keiner Seite ganz erstikt, sondern vielmehr, nur nach Verschiedenheit der Charaktere, genährt werden[45]

Likewise, in *State Action*, Humboldt states that "sensuality, with its salutary consequences, is woven through one's entire life and all the activities of man."[46] Kant had identified specific instances in which sensuality and intellectuality work in unison, for example in the act of empirical cognition or in the experience of the beautiful and the sublime, but, as the last quote makes clear, Humboldt advocates for a thorough-going collaboration between the sensuous and the intellectual.

At one point in *State Action*, Humboldt's defense of sensuality combines with his general emphasis on the priority of activity over possession. In response to Kant's suggestion that one rank the arts in relationship to how much they cultivate the understanding, Humboldt suggests that, in fact, the "energy" that an artwork incites should be the real yardstick for ranking the arts, for "according to my idea, energy is the first and only virtue of man."[47] The energy that Humboldt is talking about here is an energy that is both sensuous and intellectual, that engages with sensuality so as to uplift the entire individual in his combined constitution as a sensuous and moral being.

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[45] "Über Religion" (WB 1, 11).
[46] "Ich habe… zu zeigen versucht, wie Sinnlichkeit, mit ihren heilsamen Foglen, durch das ganzen Leben, und alle Beschäftigungen des Menschen verflochten ist." *Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Gränzen der Wirksamkeit des Staates zu bestimmen* (WB 1, 141).
[47] "Meiner Idee nach, ist die Energie die erste und einzige Tugend des Menschen." In: *Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Gränzen der Wirksamkeit des Staates zu bestimmen* (WB 1, 133).

In addition to these more or less oblique criticisms of Kant's aesthetics and his dualist outlook, Humboldt also discusses in a letter to Christian Gottfried Körner from October 1793 his desire to improve on Kant's account of the beautiful as a way of developing a unified account of human experience. Humboldt, namely, is dissatisfied with Kant's proposal that the experience of the beautiful cannot be justified with recourse to determinate concepts. He thinks that although concepts, in agreement with Kant, can't be said to fully determine or justify aesthetic experience, Kant has nevertheless neglected the possibility that one could give a systematic account of the specific ways in which the understanding becomes active in its free play with the imagination:

> In the meantime it is perhaps indeed possible to determine those concepts or ideas (in the Kantian sense of the word) which become active in the soul when it appreciates something beautiful, concepts which the object does not bring forth (as in logical concepts), but rather concepts whose animation (if I can put it that way) the object merely incites.
>
> Indeß bliebe es doch vielleicht möglich, diejenigen Begriffe oder Ideen (im Kantischen Sinne des Worts) zu bestimmen, welche in der Seele zugleich mit dem Wohlgefallen an Schönheit rege werden, Begriffe, die der Gegenstand nicht (wie logische) hervorbrächte, sondern deren Regewerdung (wenn ich so sagen darf) er nur veranlaßte.[48]

Humboldt's suggestion here is fully in line with his defense of sensuality in *On Religion* and *State Action*. He is trying to think about the way in which the beautiful sensuous object can be said to incite intellectual activity, so that, once again, the distinctly sensuous aspects of experience could be shown to contribute to and be of a part with man's intellectual development. This is also how Humboldt defends his proposed improvement on Kant's aesthetics in the letter to Körner, saying that in his proposed revised account of the experience of the beautiful:

> ...the feeling of beauty will be an effect neither of theoretical nor practical reason, but rather of the entire capacity of reason in general, and is in fact that which combines all human force into a unity. This is then the standpoint from which this investigation has the most interest for me, for I wish so much to see human knowledge and the principles of human development dealt with in terms of their entire connectedness.
>
> …wird auch das Gefühl der Schönheit weder eine Wirkung der theoretischen noch der praktischen Vernunft, sondern vielmehr des gesammten Vernunftsvermögens überhaupt, und ist nun eigentlich das, was alle menschliche Kraft erst in Eins verknüpft. Dieß ist nun eigentlich der Gesichtspunkt, von dem für mich diese

[48] Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Ansichten über Aesthetik und Literatur von Wilhelm von Humboldt. Seine Briefe an Christian Gottfried Körner (1793-1830.)*, ed. F. Jonas (Berlin: Verlag von L. Schleiermacher, 1880), 3.

> Untersuchungen das meiste Interesse erhalten, da ich so sehr wünschte, endlich einmal die Kenntnis des Menschen und die Principien seiner Bildung in ihrem ganzen Zusammenhange behandeln zu sehen.[49]

Humboldt's general discomfort with the dualism of Kant's philosophy could not be expressed in clearer terms. As long as human experience is divided into its sensuous and intellectual roots, there is no way to think of the human as a single entity that develops according to the laws of a unified, unfolding 'human force.' Instead, under the Kantian setup, the human subject is always doing an uncomfortable dance between responding to the affectations of sensibility, on the one hand, and cultivating its capacities of reason, on the other.

With the introduction of Fichte's philosophy a year later, the paradigm shifts. There is now only one entity, the mind, and it is a permanently active entity, always working to achieve one single goal, namely, the realization of the infinite. We can see in the work written most immediately under the influence of his introduction to Fichte, namely in the *Theory of Human Formation* from 1794 that Humboldt is appropriating Fichte's language of activity and using it to the same end that Fichte does, namely as a way of getting a grasp on the unified project of human reason. In the *Theory of Human Formation*, the constant activity of the mind makes its appearance in the notion of the "interaction" (Wechselwirkung) between mind and word that Humboldt says constitutes "the final task of our existence." As in the *Theoretical Part* of the *Foundation* where Fichte argued that the activity of the mind's interaction with the world pervades even the apparently static elements of human experience, Humboldt also speaks of a "thorough-going interaction":

> The human contains complete unity and thoroughgoing interaction, and thus he must transfer both over to nature; he contains several capacities that allow him to contemplate the same object in various forms: as a concept of the understanding, as an image beheld by the imagination, as an intuition of the senses. He must attempt to grasp nature with all of these capacities, and with just as great a variety of tools, not so much in order to get to know nature from all sides, but rather to strengthen, by means of this manifold of viewpoints, his own power that resides within him and of which these viewpoints are simply variously formed effects.

[49] ibid. 5.

> In ihm [dem Menschen] ist vollkommene Einheit und durchgängige Wechselwirkung, beide muss er also auch auf die Natur übertragen; in ihm sind mehrere Fähigkeiten, ihm denselben Gegenstand in verschiedenen Gestalten, bald als Begriff des Verstandes, bald als Bild der Einbildungskraft, bald als Anschauung der Sinnen vor seine Betrachtung zu führen. Mit allen diesen, wie mit ebensoviel verschiedenen Werkzeugen, muss er die Natur aufzufassen versuchen, nicht sowohl um sie von allen Seiten kennen zu lernen, als vielmehr um durch diese Mannigfaltigkeit der Ansichten die eigene inwohnende Kraft zu stärken, von der sie nur anders und anders gestaltete Wirkungen sind.[50]

Humboldt's vocabulary of "one's own inhering force" has its roots in his pre-Fichtean reflections on the human as a locus of a unified unfolding potency. However, in contrast to his tentative, searching criticisms of Kant that we observed above, Humboldt finds here an authoritative voice that simply states that there is one single "force" constituting a human subject, and that all of man's various epistemological capacities and practices are just various expressions of this single unifying force which comes to expressing in the "thorough-going interaction" that enlivens the mind. This authoritative insistence on the unified activity of the human subject and on its expression in the form of various mind-world interactions, draws its inspiration and insight from Fichte's philosophical system.

A fuller account of Humboldt's Fichtean notion of activity will have to wait until the next section in which I explain the role that sensuality plays in Humboldt's theories on art and language. Humboldt appropriates the idea from Fichte that the activity of mind can only realize itself in a sensuous medium, and it is therefore only in a discussion of the logic of sensuality that we can obtain a fuller picture of Humboldt's conception of mental activity. For now, however, we can connect the notion of activity to the results of the previous section in which we showed that Humboldt conceives of art and language as two forms of human practice which have as their aim the expression of the infinite ground of subjectivity. We already saw in the previous section that Humboldt thinks that art works to realize the infinite by leaving the realm of the real and entering into the realm of the possible. Now that we are equipped with this new notion of the continuously active mind, we can see that

[50] "Theorie der Bildung des Menschen" (WB 1, 237).

according to Humboldt's way of thinking, art is the expression of a certain kind of activity, namely the activity of pure possibility, and language, in contrast, is the mental activity that governs the mind's exploration of reality.

The latter part of this claim, namely, that language, according to Humboldt, is the activity through which the mind negotiates reality, requires some substantiation because Humboldt does not explicitly say this anywhere. My first piece of evidence comes from the early collection of theses *On Thinking and Speaking* from 1795, for there Humboldt describes the advent of language as coincident with the cognition of an empirical object: "…as soon as he clearly recognized an object as separate from himself, man must have immediately uttered the sound that was supposed to designate it."[51] My second, far more suggestive piece of evidence consists of a distinction that Humboldt makes in the *Introduction* to the *Kavi* treatise between poetry and prose. If we take prose, in contrast to poetry, to be closer to the form of common language use, then we can recognize in Humboldt's distinction between poetry and prose a distinction between an artistic use of language and an everyday use of language:

> ...poetry apprehends reality in its sensuous appearance, as it is sensed externally and internally, but poetry is not worried about that which makes reality what it is, on the contrary, it repels this aspect. Poetry then combines the sensuous appearance for the imagination and leads the imagination to an intuition of an artistically ideal entirety. Prose seeks out in reality the roots by means of which it can attach itself to being, the threads that connect it to being. Prose then combines on an intellectual path fact with fact and concepts with concepts and strives for an objective connectedness in an idea.
>
> ...die Poesie fasst die Wirklichkeit in ihrer sinnlichen Erscheinung, wie sie äusserlich und innerlich empfunden wird, auf, ist aber unbekümmert um dasjenige, wodurch sie Wirklichkeit ist, stösst vielmehr diesen ihren Charakter absichtlich zurück. Die sinnliche Erscheinung verknüpft sie sodann vor der Einbildungskraft und führt durch sie zur Anschauung eines künstlerisch idealischen Ganzen. Die Prosa sucht in der Wirklichkeit gerade die Wurzeln, durch welche sie am Daseyn haftet, und die Fäden ihrer Verbindungen mit demselben. Sie verknüpft alsdann auf intellectuellem Wege Thatsache mit Thatsache und Begriffe mit Begriffen und strebt nach einem objectiven Zusammenhang in einer Idee.[52]

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[51] "…der Mensch [musste], sobald er deutlich einen Gegenstand als geschieden von sich erkannte, auch unmittelbar den Ton aussprechen, der denselben bezeichnen sollte." In: "Über Denken und Sprechen" (WB 1, 98).
[52] *Ueber die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwickelung des Menschengeschlechts* (WB 3, 585).

Humboldt draws here from the definition of art that he had worked out nearly four decades earlier in the 1790s. Like art, poetry achieves its effect through the activity of the imagination. Like the artist from Humboldt's French article who "must destroy nature as a real object and remake it as a production of the imagination," the poetic mode is one which "repels" (zurückstossen) the character of reality.[53] The prosaic mode, meanwhile, lines up with Humboldt's characterization from the *Essays on Aesthetics* of the mode of mental activity that is occupied with "the collection, ordering, and application of mere knowledge of experience."[54] In contrast, however, to the finitude with which Humboldt had described this mode of empirical engagement in the 1790s, in the *Introduction* to the Kavi treatise Humboldt considers the engagement with reality to be a valid path along which the mind can strive after a non-empirical, all-encompassing "idea." The prosaic mode of language use is one which manages both to engage with reality as reality *and* to harness the unifying, ideal, striving force that is active in human language. This latter feature of striving is something that is common to both art and language, poetry and prose. It is a feature of intellectuality itself, and since both poetry and prose are, as Humboldt says, "paths of the development of intellectuality," both poetry and prose manifest the striving of the intellect.[55]

3.3 Expression in sensuous form and matter

The final aspect of Fichte's theory of mind that Humboldt appropriated for his expressivist view of human subjectivity can be captured in the claim that mind requires a sensuous medium in which to realize itself. Another way to say this is that the activity of the mind is necessarily an activity that works within a sensuous medium, that it only has reality as a mental activity insofar as it has at its

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[53] "En effet, l'artiste doit anéantir la nature comme objet réel, et la refaire comme production de l'imagination." In: Wilhelm von Humboldt, "*Essais Æsthétiqques de M. Guillaume de Humboldt*," 146.
[54] *Über Göthes Herrmann und Dorothea* (WB 2, 138).
[55] *Ueber die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwickelung des Menschengeschlechts* (WB 3, 584).

disposal a sensuous material through which it can act. In Fichte's philosophy, this insight expresses itself in the theory from the *Foundation* of sensuous form as a manifestation of the mind's infinite combinatorial capacity. At critical junctures in Humboldt's theories on art and language, we find this theory of sensuous form applied to the same end, namely to outline the way in which mind thinks or develops itself by means of working through and with matter.

We can first observe Humboldt engaging with Fichte's theory of sensuous form in his 1795 text *On Thinking and Speaking*, which argues in the fifth thesis that "no thinking, not even the purest thinking, can occur without the help of the general forms of our sensibility; only in these forms can we grasp thinking and, so to speak, hold onto it."[56] Even though Humboldt might appear to be paraphrasing Kant's requirement that cognition requires both an intellectual and a sensuous component, he is in fact expanding Kant's notion of sensibility to include a second-order sensibility that owes its existence and operational logic less to the empirical, intuited world than to the activity of human thought.[57] It becomes clear in the next thesis, Thesis 6, that Humboldt is thinking about sensibility in this new post-Kantian way:

> 6. The sensuous designation of those units to which certain portions of thought are united in order to be juxtaposed as parts to other parts of a larger whole and juxtaposed as objects to a subject – this process is called, in the broadest understanding of the word: language.
>
> 6. Die sinnliche Bezeichnung der Einheiten nun, zu welchen gewisse Portionen des Denkens vereinigt werden, um als Theile andern Theilen eines grösseren Ganzen, als Objecte dem Subject gegenübergestellt zu werden, heisst im weitesten Verstande des Worts: Sprache.[58]

Thought requires language because thought requires sensuous material in which it can become manifest and achieve its designative power over the world. Without a "sensuous designation," i.e. a

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[56] "Über Denken und Sprechen" (WB 5, 97).
[57] This use of Kantian language and the simultaneous divergence away from Kantian principles by way of Fichte's philosophy has already been pointed out by Christian Stetter is his extremely competent reading of *Über Denken und Sprechen*. See: Christian Stetter, "'Über Denken und Sprechen': Wilhelm von Humboldt zwischen Fichte und Herder," in: *Wilhelm von Humboldts Sprachdenken*, ed. Hans-Werner Schaf (Essen: Hobbing, 1989), 25-26.
[58] "Über Denken und Sprechen" (WB 5, 98).

phonetic, gestural, or visual linguistic sign that captures and expresses for the thinking subject its own thoughts, there would be no way for the subject to perceive that it is thinking and to see the logical structures of its own thought, and thought would thus, for all intents and purposes, cease to be. Perhaps the clearest expression of this line of thinking occurs in the *Introduction* to the Kawi treatise: "Intellectual activity, which is entirely mental, entirely internal, and, to an extent, passes by without a trace, becomes, by means of the sound in speech, external and perceptible to the sense."[59] This formulation also reveals very strongly the Fichtean provenance of Humboldt's vaguely Kantian-sounding claim that "no thinking, not even the purest thinking, can occur without the help of the general forms of our sensuality." Humboldt is thinking in Fichtean terms about a process whereby the work of the mind becomes manifest by becoming sensuous, and language, in giving thought a sensuous medium of phonetic, gestural, or visual articulation, fulfills this criterion.

On Thinking and Speaking then deepens its engagement with Fichte's theory of sensuous form in Theses 8 through 12. In these theses, Humboldt is interested in finding an argument for the medial specificity of language, for explaining why "linguistic signs are thus necessarily sounds," and not, say, visual shapes or gestures.[60] His argument takes as its driving observation Fichte's insight into the ideality of sensuous form that we find in the *Foundation*. Fichte's point there is that the border (Fichte's term is '*Grenze*') between entities or events is not marked out in sensuous material as a sensuously instantiated outline but rather derives its existence for the subject from the subject's mental capacity to distinguish between distinct entities and events and unify them into distinguished wholes, whereupon the unifying and distinguishing sensual form of the entity or event becomes

[59] "Die intellectuelle Thätigkeit, durchaus geistig, durchaus innerlich und gewissermassen spurlos vorübergehend, wird durch den Laut in der Rede äusserlich und warnehmbar für die Sinne. Sie und die Sprache sind daher Eins und unzertrennlich von einander." In: *Ueber die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwickelung des Menschengeschlechts* (WB 3, 426).
[60] "Über Denken und Sprechen" (WB 5, 98).

manifest. Humboldt expands on this view by comparing the perception of spatial borders to that of temporal borders:

> 9. The outlines of things lying calmly next to one another blend together when beheld by the imagination, just as they do when viewed by the eye. In the progression of time, by contrast, the current moment carves out a definite border between the past and the future moment. It is not possible to confuse being and being-no-more.
>
> 9. Die Umrisse ruhig nebeneinanderliegender Dinge vermischen sich leicht vor der Einbildungskraft, wie vor dem Auge. In der Zeitfolge hingegen schneidet der gegenwärtige Augenblick eine bestimmte Grenze zwischen dem vergangenen und zukünftigen ab. Zwischen Sein und Nicht-mehr-sein ist keine Verwechslung möglich.[61]

We can understand Humboldt's line of thinking here as building on Fichte's so-called "experiment" with the imagination. Humboldt is investigating the phenomenology of sensuous borders as it plays out both along the spatial and the temporal axis, and as we know from Chapter 1, Fichte does this, too. Early on in the *Theoretical Part* of the *Foundation*, Fichte sets up his question of the possibility of a border between mind and world in spatial terms: "Posit in the continuous space…in point 'm' *light*, and in point 'n' *darkness*…." Then, towards the end of the *Theoretical Part*, Fichte rephrases the problem in terms of time: "In the physical point X in the moment in time 'A', posit light, and posit darkness in the moment in time 'B' that immediately proceeds it…"[62] Fichte doesn't offer a comparison between temporal borders and spatial borders as Humboldt does, but he does develop the spatial problematics of sensuous borders differently from the problematics of temporal borders, and in a way that brings us one step closer to Humboldt's argument that temporal borders are more determinate than spatial ones. In the space example, namely, Fichte tells us to imagine the region between darkness and light as "twilight," an "intermediary" that is neither pure light nor pure darkness, but rather a "mixture of light and darkness". In the time example, Fichte tells his reader to "imagine the sharp border between both moments" and to consider how it is possible for the moment of light and the moment of darkness to come into immediate contact with one another.[63]

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[61] ibid.
[62] *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 301, 352-353)
[63] ibid.

We can see how this association of the spatial border with twilight and the temporal border with sharp opposition provides Humboldt with precisely the setup he needs to argue that language, as the thoughtful articulation of sensuous material, prefers a temporal medium to a spatial medium. Once Humboldt has established that temporal borders are more clearly manifest to the subject than spatial borders, he only has ask what form of physical human action is most conducive to establishing this temporal border, and his answer is vocalization: "Of all changes in time, the most incisive are those which the voice brings forth."[64]

Through his engagement in *On Thinking and Speaking* with Fichte's theory of sensuous form, Humboldt touches on a line of thinking that becomes crucial for his theory of art three years later in his *Essays on Aesthetics*. In the *Essays*, the challenge that the ephemerality of the sensuous outline poses for the articulative work of language becomes the guiding virtue of aesthetic experience:

> One cannot say that the outlines in nature are less complete, that the colors are less lively; the only difference is that reality speaks to the *senses*, whereas art speaks to *fantasy*, that the former presents hard and cutting outlines, while the latter presents outlines that are always definite, to be sure, but also always infinite.
>
> Man kann nicht sagen, dass die Umrisse in der Natur weniger vollendet, die Farben minder lebhaft wären; der Unterschied ist allein der, dass die Wirklichkeit zu den *Sinnen*, die Kunst zu der *Phantasie* spricht, dass jene harte und schneidende Umrisse, diese zwar immer bestimmte, aber immer auch unendliche giebt.[65]

In the realm of reality, the mind must assume the determinate sensuous forms that empiricity offers to it. This is, however, anathema to the basic nature of mind, which is infinite and therefore incapable of finding an adequate realization in any particular determinate form. Art recovers the original infinitude of mind by only provisionally assuming a distinct sensuous form and thereby foregrounding the ephemerality of sensuous contours, which, as we know from Fichte, derive their ephemerality from the infinitude of mind out of which they took shape. Humboldt elaborates on the thought this way: "fantasy never limits, it always goes forward into the infinite, and as soon as the

[64] "Die schneidensten unter allen Veränderungen in der Zeit sind diejenigen, welche die Stimme hervorbringt." In: "Über Denken und Sprechen" (WB 5, 98).
[65] *Über Göthes Herrmann und Dorothe*a (WB 2,142).

genius of the artist excites it, fantasy combines its infinitude with the forms that the artist lays before it…"[66] The artist achieves his affect by endowing sensuous form with a freedom that derives from the mind's virtual mastery over the sensuous material of experience, a mastery that consists in it's ability to form and reform experience according to its own desires and demands.

The Fichtean conception of sensuous form that we find in Humboldt's account of art's second-order mastery over the material and the forms of experience is just one piece of the entire complex of interrelated ideas that Humboldt appropriates from Fichte's philosophy for his aesthetic theory. Fichte's theory of sensuous form as an ephemeral, ideational element of experience brings with it a specific notion of sensuous material as inchoate form, as a material of the mind that has yet to reveal or attain its inhering form. This reciprocal relationship between form and material as expressed or unexpressed mind is further dependent upon Fichte's notion of the mind as permanently active, as always forming and reforming its own activity into the apparently, but only apparently, stable objects of experience. Humboldt captures this dynamic view of mind in his claim that it is the purpose of art to "make the imagination productive in accordance with laws," or, as he says in the French article, "inflame and direct the imagination."[67]

The vivification of the imagination that Humboldt claims occurs in art brings along with it the Fichtean understanding of dynamic form and matter. Humboldt unfolds this thought most clearly in relation to painting, explaining that "painting…has two means by which it portrays its objects: *outline* and *color*". We should understand 'outline' and 'color' here as stand-ins for sensuous form and

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[66] "...die Phantasie begränzt nie, sie geht immer ins Unendliche fort, und sobald also das Genie des Künstlers sie begeistert, verbindet sie ihre Unendlichkeit mit den Formen, die er ihr vorlegt..." In: *Über Göthes Herrmann und Dorothe*a (WB 2,142).

[67] "Daher ist die Kunst *die Fertigkeit, die Einbildungskraft nach Gesetzen productive zu machen*." In: *Über Göthes Herrmann und Dorothea* (WB 2,138). "C'est donc à mon imagination qu'il faut qu'il [l'atiste] adresse, et tout son talent ne consiste qu'à l'échauffer et à la diriger…" In: Wilhelm von Humboldt, "*Essais Æsthétigques de M. Guillaume de Humboldt*," 122.

sensuous matter. Humboldt doesn't explicitly relate his conceptual paring of outline and color to the form-matter opposition, but that is because he is trying, in line with the Fichtean view, to reimagine form and matter as dynamic elements. The clearest formulation of this dynamization of form and matter is expressed in regards to poetry, namely, with the question:

> …whether the poet was more concerned with a certain determinate activity of the imagination or with activity in general? whether it was more important for him to create precisely only this or that image, or simply in general create images in a certain tone or rhythm? One sees easily, that the question here is simple: if he works more through formation or through attunement (musically)?
>
> …ob es dem Dichter mehr auf eine gewisse bestimmte Thätigkeit der Einbildungskraft oder nur auf Thätigkeit überhaupt ankam? ob ihm mehr daran lag, dass sie gerade nur dieses oder jenes Bild oder bloss überhaupt in einem gewissen Ton und Rhythmus Bilder erzeugte? Man sieht leicht, dass hier bloss die Frage ist: ob er mehr *bildend* oder mehr *stimmend* (musikalisch) wirkt?" [68]

According to Humboldt's conception of art, sensuous form is that which is created through the formative activity of the imagination, whereas sensuous matter is that which heightens the activity of the imagination in general, bringing it into a particular state of active 'attunement' (Stimmung). Regardless of whether the imagination is generating a form or a color, i.e. whether it is 'forming' or 'attuning,' it is active. Under this common denominator of activity, form and matter enter into a special relationship of fluid reciprocity. The attuning, matter-oriented activity of the imagination can morph into a forming activity, constructing a sensuous form out of the activity that it has gathered in producing or apprehending this or that material. Similarly, the forming activity can relinquish its strict production of this or that shape, morphing into an attuning activity that instead delights in the potentiating effect of sensuous matter and the infinite possibilities for formation that it provides. This fluid relationship between form and matter as alternate manifestations of activity helps to render further intelligible Humboldt's claim discussed above that art presents us with "always determinate, but also always infinite outlines."[69] The infinitude of artistic outlines resides in the

[68] *Über Göthes Herrmann und Dorothea* (WB 2, 178).
[69] "...immer bestimmte, aber immer auch unendliche [Umrisse]..." See: *Über Göthes Herrmann und Dorothea* (WB 2,142).

unlimited possibilities for the formation and reformation of matter which present themselves in the ongoing activity of artistic creation.

Humboldt's distinction between fluid and distinct outlines already played an important part in his first language-theoretic text, *On Thinking and Language*, and we not only find this distinction again in Humboldt's mature language theory, but we find it used in a way that clarifies the relationship between his aesthetic and his linguistic theory as respective theories of natural and arbitrary signs. In an 1826 essay entitled *On Alphabetic Writing and its relationship to the Structure of Language* (*Über die Buchstabenschrift und ihren Zusammenhang mit dem Sprachbau*, hereafter: *On Alphabetic Writing*) Humboldt argues that the creation and use of an alphabet heightens the linguistic capacity of given culture, and it does this because it identifies the "basic elements" (Grundteile) of language which, according to Humboldt, are the "articulated sounds" of the language.[70] In using an alphabet, a culture completes "language's task of division" (das Teilungsgeschäft der Sprache) by finding its smallest constituent parts, namely, the articulated sounds that are represented by individual letters. When the culture has found these smallest elements it thereby attains a mature sense of how its own language composes its linguistic utterances, and with this sense for the basic combinatoric principles of its language comes an accompanying clarity in its thought processes. Where this doesn't occur, namely, in "uncultivated nations," one cannot identify the simplest elements of the language:

> One has to divide and divide and must always be wondering if that which appears to be basic is, in fact, still a composite. This is also to an extent the case with highly cultivated nations, although in a different way; for the cultivated nations it is only the case in an etymological sense, when one wants to gain insight into the origination of a word; for the uncultivated nations it is the case in a grammatical and syntactic sense, when one wants to gain insight into the concatenation of speech.
>
> Man muss theilen und theilen, und immer mistrauisch bleiben, ob das einfach Scheinende nicht auch noch zusammengesetzt ist. Gewissermassen ist freilich dasselbe auch bei den hochgebildeten der Fall, allein auf verschiedne Weise; bei diesen nur etymologisch zum Behuf der Einsicht in die Wortentstehung, bei jenen grammatisch und syntaktisch zum Behuf der Einsicht in die Verknüpfung der Rede.[71]

[70] "Ueber die Buchstabenschrift und ihren Zusammenhang mit dem Sprachbau," (WB 3, 89-90).
[71] ibid. 90.

We can understand what Humboldt is saying here as an extension of his argument from *On Thinking and Language* that language requires definite contours, a clear sense of the sensuous form that is communicating the linguistic utterance. It should also be clear that art and the synthesizing activity of the imagination function in a way that is strictly opposed to the articulative work of language. Art acquires its ideality through the infinite formative potential that resides in sensuous matter. Language also has an infinite formative potential, but its formative activity begins with the pre-formed elements of language. The material aspect of language that contains an infinite realm of new sound possibilities not found in the language fades into the background amidst the extreme formal complexity of the specific language's phonology and syntax.

This difference between the constrained, formal combinatorics that we find in language and the unconstrained, material combinatorics that we find in art is at the heart of a claim that Humboldt makes at the beginning of *On Alphabetic Writing* regarding the superiority of alphabetic writing over pictographic writing:

> It is readily apparent that because it stimulates the intuition of the actual object, pictographic writing must disrupt the activity of language as opposed to supporting it. Language does demand intuition, but uses sound to attach intuition to the bound form of the word. The representation of the object must subordinate itself to this word form so that it may be a link in the infinite chain on which thought, by means of language, meanders in all directions.
>
> Dass die Bilderschrift durch Anregung der Anschauung des wirklichen Gegenstandes die Wirkung der Sprache stören muss, statt sie zu unterstützen, fällt von selbst in die Augen. Die Sprache verlangt auch Anschauung, heftet sie aber an die, vermittelst des Tones, gebundene Wortform. Dieser muss sich die Vorstellung des Gegenstands unterordnen, um als Glied zu der unendlichen Kette zu gehören, an welcher sich das Denken durch Sprache nach allen Richtungen hinschlingt.[72]

Language unfolds its combinatoric potential by "riveting" (heften) sensuous intuition to a "bound word form." By limiting the infinite division of matter to which imagistic signs are susceptible qua images and instead binding perception to basic articulated elements of sound that can no longer be divided, language overcomes the absorptive power of sensuous matter that can only weaken the

[72] ibid. 86.

activity of thought. The likeness that natural signs have to the things they represent is necessarily a sensuous likeness and therefore follows the logic of the synthesizing imagination, for which there are no strict limits on the potential division of the sensuous medium. The great advantage of arbitrary signification is that it can leave the absorption of sensuous matter behind, selecting basic articulated elements that, by preventing further sensuous division and reshaping, allow for the complex formal combinatorics that we find in language.

There is, of course, much more to say about the important role that the articulation of sensuous material plays in Humboldt's mature language theory. However, Humboldt's mature language theory is breathtakingly extensive and detailed, and the inordinate amount of time that he devotes to the topic of the sensuality of language means that it cannot be within the scope of this chapter to give it a fair accounting. In closing, I will only make the summary observation that Humboldt puts a lot of weight on phonetics and phonology, attending to the way in which acoustic arrangements are used to express abstract grammatical relationships of thought. This emphasis on phonetics and phonology is particularly interesting in light of Ray Jackendoff's recent critique of Chomskyean linguistics as "syntactocentric," that is, as giving undue attention to the complexities of syntax at the cost of appreciating the role that phonology and semantics play in language production.[73] Without ignoring syntax, Humboldt places an extraordinary emphasis on the phonic aspects of linguistic expression, and it would be a worthwhile project to outline the parallels between his language theory and the emerging attempt to broaden contemporary linguistics beyond its focus on syntax.

[73] See: Ray Jackendoff, *Foundations of Language: Brain, Meaning, Grammar, Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 107-117.

Chapter 4: Novalis's Theory and Practice of the Imagination

4.0 Overview

In this chapter I elucidate the lasting influence that Fichte's theory of mind had on Novalis's theoretic musings and his literary production. I argue that in his reception of transcendental philosophy Novalis was most lastingly impressed by the prominence that Fichte had given to the imagination in his account of the human mind that we find in the 1794 *Foundation*. In the first section of the chapter, I recount the surprising and unprecedented claim from Fichte's *Foundation* that the imagination produces the totality of human experience. I show with reference to Novalis's *Fichte Studies* (*Fichte-Studien*) that Novalis accepts this premise and even extends it beyond the boundaries that Fichte sets for the imagination. Whereas Fichte ultimately subordinates the imagination to the power of reasoned, discursive thinking, I show in the second section of the chapter that Novalis's intellectual project largely consists in the endeavor to defend a view of human experience according to which the imagination maintains a position of dominance vis-à-vis the understanding's and reason's achievements of empirical cognition and discursive reasoning. In the final, third section of the chapter, I suggest that Novalis conceives of poetry as the highest expression of imaginative thought. In support of this suggestion I present a close reading of Novalis's poem *Das Gedicht* in which I show how Novalis uses the language of Christian salvation to present the act of poetic creation as a quasi divine act in which the imagination approaches the unconditioned ground of human experience.

4.1 Novalis reads Fichte

In order to grasp the importance that Novalis attributes to the role that the imagination plays in human affairs, it is first necessary to understand the revolutionary significance of the account of the imagination that we find in Fichte's early Jena writings and that I outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. Before Fichte wrote his 1794 *Foundation*, the imagination was considered to be one mental faculty among others. It attracted attention, particularly in the 18th century, in relation to questions of artistic creativity, but it was by no means the dominant or determining faculty of the human mind, a distinction that was traditionally reserved for the faculty of reason.[1]

The break with tradition that Fichte's account of the imagination accomplished comes into view when compared to the role of the imagination in Kant's philosophy. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant preserves the traditional account of imagination as a subordinate faculty, describing in the *Transcendental Deduction* and the *Schematism* how the imagination is responsible for synthesizing the sensuous material of intuition into finite, cognizable objects that can be presented to the understanding as instantiations of particular concepts.[2] In this account, the imagination operates on a local level of cognition that is far removed from reason's global, lofty search for the unconditioned. This account is adjusted somewhat in the *Critique of Judgment*, in which Kant argues that the imagination has the ability to bring forth "aesthetic ideas" that inspire reason in its quest for

[1] For a brief overview of the history of the concept of imagination see: Jochen Schulte-Sasse, "Einbildungskraft/Imagination," in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, vol. 2. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001) 88-120.
[2] For example, in the B version of the *Transcendental Deduction*, Kant says on page B151 that it is the job of the imagination to "give to the concepts of understanding a corresponding intuition," and Kant defines a schema in the *Schematism* chapter on page A140/B180-181 as "a universal procedure of imagination in providing an image for a concept." The translation is from Norman Kemp Smith's translation: *Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1929).

the unconditioned.[3] However, this function of the imagination is limited to aesthetic practice and experience.

In contrast to Kant's account, Fichte argues in the *Foundation* that the imagination in fact forms the basis for all that human consciousness has to offer, be it empirical cognition, aesthetic experience, or moral action. As we know from previous chapters, human experience unfolds in Fichte's account as a consequence of the hovering activity of the imagination, which brings the transcendental subject into the conscious realm of time and space and further structures her experience by directing her moral actions towards the realization of an ideal, imagined object. In this account, the imagination becomes both the start- and endpoint of human existence. Life begins as a consequence of the imagination's struggle to reconcile the finite with the infinite, and it has its telos in the successive finite realization of the infinite. Under this new paradigm, Fichte describes the relationship of the mental faculties to one another as follows:

> The understanding can be described as the imagination insofar as it is fixed by the reason, or as reason which the imagination has supplied with objects. The understanding is a resting, inactive capacity of the soul, the mere container of that which has been brought forth by the imagination and which reason has determined and will further determine...
>
> Der Verstand lässt sich als die durch Vernunft fixirte Einbildungskraft, oder als die durch Einbildungskraft mit Objecten versehene Vernunft beschreiben. – Der Verstand ist ein ruhendes, unthätiges Vermögen des Gemüths, der bloße Behälter des durch die Einbildungskraft hervorgebrachten, und durch die Vernunft bestimmten und weiter zu bestimmenden...[4]

Reason shares its traditional position of dominance in the hierarchy of the cognitive faculties with the imagination. In contrast to Kant's account of the metal capacities in the *Critique of Pure Reason* in which it was reason alone that was said to strive for the unconditioned, Fichte argues that the imagination and reason must work together in this quest. In Fichte's account it is in fact the

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[3] The relevant passage from the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* reads: "…unter einer ästhetischen Idee aber verstehe ich diejenige Vorstellung der Einbildungskraft, die viel zu denken veranlasst, ohne dass ihr doch irgendein bestimmter Gedanke, d. i. *Begriff*, adäquat sein kann, die folglich keine Sprache völlig erreicht und verständlich machen kann." In: Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* in vol. 5 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaft (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1908), 314.

[4] *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA/I, 2, 374).

imagination that first contends with the unconditioned as it tries to realize the infinite under the conditions of finite consciousness. The imagination's oscillation between the infinite and the finite, that which Fichte terms the hovering (Schweben) of the imagination, produces the spatial-temporal matrix of intuition that only renders discrete empirical objects once reason intervenes to "determine" or "fix" the hovering activity. The perception of finite objects in intuition is thus the result of a coordination between reason and imagination. The imagination requires reason to bring its hovering to a standstill and thereby render to cognition the objects of perception on which reason can further operate in both a theoretical and moral capacity. Reason, in turn, requires the demiurgic activity of the intuition-generating imagination to provide reason with the concrete objects of experience in such a way that a realm of infinite possibility arises simultaneously with these objects.

Fichte's new paradigm finds its strongest expression in certain moments when he ignores the role of reason entirely, equating mental life in general with the activity of imagination. Thus we recall the following passage discussed in Chapter 2 in which Fichte argues that his philosophy, and therefore philosophy in general, can only be accomplished by the "productive imagination," on the grounds that "the entire business of the human mind proceeds from the imagination and imagination cannot be grasped save by means of the imagination."[5] And in the drafts to his lectures series *On the Spirit and Letter in Philosophy*, Fichte says of the imagination that "this creative power is spirit; for it is the final ground of all changes that occur in our mind, or in our consciousness…"[6] These statements all stand in stark contrast to Kant's conception of reason as the highest form of mental life and of philosophy in particular as reason critiquing itself. As we saw at the conclusion of Chapter 2, Fichte abandoned this fixation on the imagination when he revised his Jena philosophy starting in 1795,

[5] *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 415).
[6] *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA II/3, 311).

replacing it with an emphasis on the power of inter-subjective reasoning and mutual understanding. For Novalis, however, Fichte's initial fascination with the imagination was infectious and experienced in the intellectual itinerary of the former an extended afterlife.

Novalis's initial fascination for Fichte's theory of the imagination can be observed at various points in a series of notes referred to by its 20th-century publishers as the *Fichte Studies*, a collection of the notes that he wrote in 1795 and 1796 while studying Fichte's various publications.[7] In these notes, we observe him picking up on Fichte's ecstatic praise for the imagination and endowing it with a significance beyond that to which Fichte himself would have subscribed.[8] The clearest evidence of this is the following passage:

> Feeling, understanding, and reason are in a way passive – which is already shown by their names – imagination on the other hand is the only *power* – the only one that is active– the one that moves.
> And so it must be - only one brings forth – all four are always together – they are one – it is only for us to separate it within itself.[9]
>
> Das Gefühl, der Verst[and] und d[ie] Vernunft sind gewisserweise passiv – welches gleich ihre Namen bezeichnen – hingegen ist die Einbildungskraft allein *Kraft* – allein das Thätige – das Bewegende.
> So muß es auch seyn – Nur Ein hervorbringendes – Alle vier sind immer zusammen – Sie sind Eins – nur für uns zu trennen durch sich selbst.[10]

Here Novalis has redrawn the divisions between the active and the passive aspects of mind that Fichte mapped out when he set the coordinated activity of a determining reason and a creative imagination over and against the "resting, inactive capacity" of the understanding.[11] All three of the so-called "passive" capacities of mind exhibit their cognitive role only insofar as they can be related to the activity of the imagination. According to this revised conception, Novalis does not allow

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[7] For the dating of these manuscripts to the years 1795 and 1796 see Hans-Joachim Mähl's critical introduction to the "Fichte-Studien" in: (NS 2, 29).
[8] Richard Hannah makes a similar argument regarding Novalis's focus on the imagination as both the locus of his interest in Fichte's philosophy and the point deviation from it: "Now Hardenberg's emphasis on the imagination's singular position as the sole active power in the human psyche is a key point of divergence from an uncritical acceptance of Fichte's entire system." In: Richard Hannah, *The Fichtean Dynamic of Novalis' Poetics* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1981), 20.
[9] This is a modified translation of the translation given in: Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, Jane Kneller, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 65.
[10] "Fichte-Studien" (NS 2, 167, no. 212).
[11] "Der Verstand ist ein ruhendes, unthätiges Vermögen des Gemüths..." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 374).

reason to stand apart from the imagination, as it does in Fichte's philosophy, as a determining power of the mind, but rather folds its features into a specific dimension of the imagination.

Reason, the understanding, and feeling are all defined as aspects of a unified mind, of which the single productive capacity is the imagination. The drastic revision not only of Fichte, but also Kant becomes apparent when one considers that Novalis's three capacities of "feeling, understanding and reason" correspond exactly to Kant's model of the mind in the *Critique of Pure Reason* according to which "all our knowledge starts with the senses, proceeds from thence to understanding, and ends with reason."[12] Novalis inserts the power of imagination over and above the three capacities Kant outlines and accordingly redefines these three capacities in relation to the all-encompassing power of imagination. Thus Novalis suggests that reason is the imagination in so far as it works in a lawful fashion: "Reason corresponds to [imagination]. Reason contains its laws."[13] Meanwhile, Novalis's description of the other two 'passive' capacities – feeling and the understanding – follows Fichte's system very closely. He relates, namely, the capacities of feeling and understanding to the intuitions and the representations that they respectively produce once they are endowed with the imagination's activity:

> There is only imagination – feeling and understanding. Intuition and representation are just the names given to feeling and imagination [together] and concept and imagination together.[14]
>
> Es giebt nur Einbildungskraft – Gefühl und Verstand. Anschauung und Vorstellung sind nur die Namen, die man dem Gefühl und d[er] Einbildungskraft und dem Begriff und d[er] Einbild[ungs]Kraft zusammen giebt.[15]

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[12] "Alle unsere Erkenntnis hebt von den Sinnen an, geht von da zum Verstande, und endigt bei der Vernunft…" *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (A 298/B355). The translation is from Norman Kemp Smith's translation: *Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1929).
[13] "Ihr [der Einbildngskraft – ML] correspondirt die Vernunft. Ihre Gesetze enthält die Vernunft." In: "Fichte-Studien" (NS 2, 167, no. 212). Translation from: Novalis, *Fichte Studies*. Jane Kneller, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 65.
[14] Translation from: Novalis, *Fichte Studies*. Jane Kneller, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 66.
[15] "Fichte-Studien" (NS 2, 167, no. 215). This thought is repeated a few lines later: "Anschauung und Vorstellung ist Eins. Jene Beziehung der Einbild[ungs]kr[aft] auf die Sinnlichkeit – diese Beziehung d[er] Einb[ildungs]Kr[aft] auf d[en] Verstand." See: "Fichte-Studien" (NS 2, 168, no. 218).

According to Fichte's conception as laid out in the *Foundation*, "feeling" comes about when the ego's striving is limited by something external to it, and this inhibition of the ego's striving produces the raw material of sensation that the imagination then expands into the intuition of external objects[16]. The one alteration that Novalis makes to this model is that he equates all activity of mind with imagination, so that any resistance to the ego's striving is by definition a resistance to the imagination's free activity. Intuition thus arises as a result of combining the imagination's free activity with the resistance of feeling.

Meanwhile, representation arises in Fichte's account when reason brings the hovering of the imagination to a standstill. Reasons fixates the pre-consciousness hovering of the imagination into a determinate form, endowing the mental activity with a clarity and distinctness that allows it to rise to the level of conscious representation. By virtue of the arrested activity of the imagination and the clarity in consciousness that is hereby achieved, the cognitive products belong to the realm of the understanding and the discrete conceptual objects in which the understanding traffics and trades as it hands them off to the operations of judgment and reason. Hence Novalis's suggestion that representations are the product of the activity of imagination and the passivity of the concept or the understanding; the stasis of the understanding allows for the active hovering of the imagination to coalesce into the discernible representations of consciousness life. Thus we see from the passage quoted above that Novalis aptly applies Fichte's philosophical system and Fichte's conception of the various faculties and components of consciousness even as he makes the imagination the single

[16] Here the relevant passages from the *Foundation*: "Die Äußerung des Nicht-Könnens im Ich heißt *ein Gefühl*…" and "…der Stoff, als solcher fällt keineswegs in die Sinne, sondern kann nur durch productive Einbildungskraft entworfen oder gedacht werden….dieser Sinn [des Gefühls – ML] kündigt sich doch nur durch die Empfindung eines Widerstands, eines Nicht-Könnens an, das subjektiv ist…" In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2, 419, 440).

source of the mind's activity and disposes of the traditional role of reason as the dominant, determining faculty.

Novalis's reweighting of Fichte's philosophy towards the all-important activity of the imagination has several major consequences for his intellectual itinerary. The first is that the intellectual exploration of the unconditioned is accomplished not as a discursive program of systematic philosophy, but rather as a quickening of the imagination that realizes itself in the fragments he would write in the ensuing years and in his poetry and literary prose.[17] Novalis shares Fichte's and Kant's fascination for the unconditioned, but he wants to investigate this realm by means of an imaginative practice that is not bound by the rigorous form of argumentation to which Fichte and Kant aspired. One central limitation that the imaginative investigation of the unconditioned removes is Kant's central claim in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that we can have no knowledge of the divine. The philosophically permissible terms of the unconditioned and the infinite that we find in Kant and Fichte's philosophies mix fluidly in Novalis's fragments and poetry with reflections on God. This loosening on the strictures of intellectual inquiry as allowed for by the imaginative nature of thought is already evident in such notes from the *Fichte-Studies* as this one:

> We *are* God – we think as individuals. If transcendence becomes immanence, it is the idea of divinity – that is, if representation becomes intuition – then we are in the realm of the divine I – Imagination, as intuition, is God.[18]
>
> Gott *sind* wir – als Individuum denken wir. Wenn Transscendenz z[ur] Immanenz wird, so ists die Idee der Gottheit – i.e. wenn die Vorstellung zur Anschauung wird – so sind wir im Gebiete des göttlichen Ich – die Einbildungskraft, als Anschauung, ist Gott.[19]

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[17] I am emphasizing in this account the positive potential that Novalis saw in Fichte's account of the imagination. Manfred Frank gives an alternative view, according to which Novalis's intellectual development was inspired by a rejection of philosophy in general and Fichte's philosophy in particular. While Novalis may have indeed been skeptical about some of the content Fichte's philosophy, and particularly the direction of Fichte's philosophy after 1795, the enthusiastic mention of Fichte that we find in his later fragments, as well as the wealth of Fichtean concepts in his writing, simply cannot support the thesis that he fully rejected Fichte's philosophy. See: "Lecture 9: On Novalis' Pivotal Role in Early German Romanticism," in: Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, Elizabeth Millan, trans. (Albany: State Universtiy Press, 2004), 151-176.
[18] Translation from: Novalis, *Fichte Studies*. Jane Kneller, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 66.
[19] "Fichte-Studien" (NS 2, 168, no. 218).

We can understand Novalis's thought process here in terms of Fichte's account in the *Foundation* of consciousness as the product of the ego's imagination hovering between the infinite and the finite. Prior to the hovering of the imagination, the ego exists in a self-oblivious realm of infinitude. It is only once the imagination's hovering has been arrested into a finite form that full human consciousness is attained. Hence Novalis's thought that "We *are* God – we think as individuals." Novalis equates God with the absolute ego. The mediator between God, or the absolute ego, and a thinking individual is this transitional hovering of the imagination between the infinite and finite realms. Of course, because we are thinking individuals to begin with, we don't actually experience the divine, infinite state, but rather only have an "idea of God" that we attempt to approach in conscious life through our merely discursive representation of the transcendent being. Novalis's claim that the "imagination, as intuition, is God" seems to say that we can access our divine origin insofar as our imagination succeeds in finding this origin within the limitations of our discursively-structured sensuous reality. The imagination is our "divine I" because it attempts to find a representation of our sensuous world that can reveal the presence of the divine. This act of using the imagination to reveal the presence of the divine is a poetic act that allows us to reconnect with the divine origins of everyday world.

A second key feature of Novalis's imaginative model of mind is the drastic devaluation and even polemic that we find in Novalis's fragments against the understanding and the way it fixates reality to an array of finite objects. It is in his hostility to the understanding that Novalis most unmistakably parts ways with Fichte, for when Fichte revises his Jena philosophy, he takes the opposite route of rejecting the fluidity of imaginative thought in favor of the security of firm knowledge and mutual understanding. In the *Fichte Studies* Novalis doesn't yet explicitly voice a hostility to determinate thought, but we can observe its beginnings in a statement such this one:

> Possibility, actuality and necessity are one. [The concept] *Actual* relates to intuition – *necessary* relates to imagination – *possible* to representation. The ground of the concept of possibility lies in representation – [it] is thus the real thesis. The concept *actual* is grounded in intuition and is the antithesis, since it is a relational concept – [the concept] *necessary* is grounded in the imagination and is the synthesis – *possible* is a twofold relation to the third – it is nothing but an oscillating (*Schweben*) between *necessary* and *actual*.[20]
>
> Möglichkeit Wircklichkeit und Nothwendigkeit sind eins. Wircklich bezieht sich auf die Anschauung – Nothwendig auf die Einbildungskr[aft] – Möglich auf die Vorstellung. Der Grund des Begriffs der Möglichkeit liegt in der Vorstellung – ist also die eigentliche These. Der Begriff Wircklich gründet sich in der Anschauung und ist die Antithese, denn es ist ein Beziehungsbegriff – Nothwendig gründet sich in der Einbild[ungs]Kr[aft] und ist die Synthese – Möglich ist eine doppelte Beziehung im Dritten – es ist nichts als ein Schweben zwischen Nothwendig und wircklich.[21]

The provocation of Novalis's line of thought lies is his suggestion that the modality of necessity is a function of the imagination and that the representations of conscious life express mere possibility. The suggestion arises as a result of removing the determining act of reason from Fichte's account of the generation of conscious experience in the 1794 *Foundation* and preserving only the hovering activity of the imagination. Fichte describes the hovering of the imagination as an ongoing alternation between the absolute ego's own infinitude and the finite form that it repeatedly attempts to assume. In Fichte's account, the finite positings of the ego only attain to the level of a conscious representation once they have been held in place by reason, thereby arresting the hovering of the ego. Novalis, however, conceives of the finite positings of the hovering ego as the conscious representations of a fully self-aware mind that is seeking the absolute within the realm of conscious experience. Within this conception there is no place for the conceptual determination of empirical reality. Novalis relates actuality to intuition, and therefore to empirical reality, but this actuality is one of sensuous presence devoid of conceptual determination. According to Novalis's conception, intuition takes on conceptual determination and thereby attains to the status of a representation only as part of an unending search for a elusive necessity grounded in the imaginative absolute. Aside from provisional attempts to find the absolute within the sensuous manifold of intuition, there is no conceptual determination. This is why Novalis characterizes possibility both as a representation and

[20] Translation from: Novalis, *Fichte Studies*. Jane Kneller, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 75-76.
[21] "Fichte-Studien" (NS 2, 177-8, no. 234).

as the hovering between necessity and actually. The representations of the mind are not conceptually determined apprehensions of reality, but rather the unendingly playful attempts of the mind to hold onto imaginative necessity within the limitations of that which is sensuously available to experience.

This brings us to the third and final consequence of Novalis's conception of the mind as imagination, namely the cognitive role that Novalis attributes to images (Bilder) as he works through Fichte's imagination-centered account of mind that we find in the early Jena philosophy. If the mind is first and foremost imagination, then it follows that the primary medium of thought is the image and not, say, concepts, or sensations, or syllogisms. For, as both the Latinate and the German term indicate, the "imagination" or "Einbildungskraft" is the capacity to create in the mind an image – "imago," or "Bild". Judging from the chronological order of the *Fichte Studies*, it appears that Novalis embraced Fichte's valorization of the imagination subsequent to his reflections on Fichte's account of judgment from the 1794 *Foundation* during which he concluded that judgment is illusory and that consciousness must make due with an "image" of being rather than with an apprehension being itself.[22] Be that as it may, the precise order of Novalis's reflections on images and imagination is less important than the more general observation that Novalis does, in fact, relate the medium of images to the capacity of imagination. This is reflected in the following note, in which Novalis spells out the relationship between the two terms:

> /An image is a represented intuition.
> A sign is an intuited representation./
> /Symbolic formative power [*Bildungskraft*]. Imagination./[23]
>
> /Bild ist eine vorgestellte Anschauung.

[22] The idea that judgment is illusory and that consciousness is thus an image being and not an apprehension of being itself are expressed in the first two notes of the *Fichte Studies* (no. 1 and 2). Manfred Frank considers these notes concerning Fichte's concept of judgment to be central to Novalis's critique of Fichte. See: Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* (Albany: State Universtiy Press, 2004), 164-5.
[23] Translation from: Novalis, *Fichte Studies*. Jane Kneller, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 69.

> Zeichen eine angeschaute Vorstellung./
> /Symbolische Bildungskraft. Imagination./[24]

The mind is conceived here as a semiotic process that unfolds by raising intuitions (Anschauungen) up to the level of mental representation (Vorstellung). Following Novalis's terminology of "symbolic formative power," we can describe the process by which intuitions become representational as "symbol formation." The cognitive faculty that accomplishes this task is the imagination. It is the power that forms, or constructs (bildet) symbols. In order to make an intuition into a symbol and thereby imbue it with representational content, the intuition must become an image. This is where the "image" part of the formative process enters the picture. The symbols by which the mind thinks are images. These images are intuitive (anschaulich) in so far as they are made up of sensuous material, and they are representational in so far as they have some symbolic purport. Thus the sensuous, imagistic aspect of representation anchors the mind to reality, while the symbolic, representational significance of these images raises them up to the level of intellectual purport.

We have then the three main features of Novalis's reading of Fichte that will allow us in the next section to recognize and further specify the conception of imaginative thinking that is operative in Novalis's fragments. To reiterate, these three features of imaginative thinking are:

i. the orientation of the imagination toward the unconditioned, meaning that the unconditioned becomes the ultimate goal, or telos, of imaginative thought,
ii. the devaluation of the understanding and the conceptually determined empirical knowledge that the understanding brings forth, and
iii. the focus on the image as the dominant medium of thought.

[24] "Fichte-Studien" (NS 2, 171, no. 226).

In Novalis's conception of the mind as imagination, these three features are all intimately related. The imaginative mind moves toward the unconditioned by disengaging from the world of the understanding, mystifying established knowledge and realms of knowledge, and asserting in the place of secured knowledge new conceptual relationships that are drawn from the ability of images to inspire new connections in thought.

4.2 Imaginative Thinking in Novalis's Fragments

In his landmark study of Novalis's fragments, Jurij Striedter describes the course of Novalis's intellectual development as a gradual transition from "speaking about thinking," by which he means Novalis's immersion in the philosophy of Kant and Fichte, to "thinking about speaking," to the development of an "original language theory," and finally to a "formulation of his own poetic program…which, for its part is to be realized in poetry and is already partly realized."[25] The structure of this chapter reflects the development that Striedter outlines from philosophy to language to poetry in so far as it begins with a look at Novalis's appropriation of Fichte's theory of mind and then elucidates the expression of this appropriation first in Novalis's fragments and then in a poem he wrote concerning the nature of imagination and its relationship to poetry. In this section I cite freely from various fragments that Novalis wrote subsequent to his study notes on Fichte. Some of the fragments were published as part of the collections *Pollen* (*Blüthenstaub*) and *Faith and Love* (*Glauben und Liebe*), others belong to an unpublished collection that Novalis referred to as the *General Draft* (*Das Allgemeine Brouillon*), and still others never found their way into a defined collection or project. In contrast to the *Fichte Studies*, these fragments are not limited to the

[25] Here is Striedter's summary of his results quoted in full: "…im Verlauf der Aufzeichnungen [wird] aus dem Sprechen über das Denken immer mehr rein Denken über das Sprechen…das allmählich zur Ausbildung einer eigenen Sprachtheorie und zur Formulierung eines eigenen Poesieprogramms führt, welches dann seinerseits in Dichtungen verwirklicht werden soll oder zum Teil auch schon verwirklicht wird." see: Jurij Striedter, *Die Fragmente des Novalis als "Präfigurationen" seiner Dichtung* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1985), 18-19.

contemplation of any particular author. Rather, they are the expression of Novalis's own intellectual universe and reach beyond the confines of philosophy, deep into other such areas of knowledge as mathematics, the natural sciences, art, language, morality, political theory, and so on.

Despite the thematic variety and intellectual independence of the massive corpus of fragments that Novalis wrote subsequent to his *Fichte Studies*, we can recognize in the corpus the basic principles of imaginative thinking that we found in Novalis's notes on Fichte. Sometimes the terms are nearly identical to the language of the *Fichte Studies*, and thus certain fragments, such as the following from the *General Draft*, provide us with an entrance into the extremely variegated and fluid vocabulary of Novalis's thought in the years following his detailed study of Fichte:

> The *creative power of the imagination* is divided into reason, judgment, and sensory power. Every *representation* (expression of the productive imagination) is composed of all three, albeit in differing proportions – types and magnitude.
>
> Die *Schaffende E[inbildungs]Kr[aft]* wird getheilt in Vernunft, Urtheilskraft und Sinnenkraft. Jede *Vorstellung* (Äußerung d[er] prod[uktiven] E[inbildungs]Kr[aft]) ist aus allen Dreyen zusammengesezt – freylich in verschiednen Verhältnissen – Arten und Größen.[26]

Novalis's schema here of the mind's capacities is nearly identical to the schema I cited from the *Fichte Studies*, according to which imagination is the only cognitive "power," set over and against the three "passive" capacities of "feeling, understanding, and reason."[27] There are a few differences, but they are terminological rather than substantial. Most notably, in using "judgment" (Urteilskraft) and the neologism "sensory power" (Sinnenkraft) rather than "understanding" and "feeling," Novalis has chosen to emphasize the "power" (Kraft) that these capacities contain qua modes of the imagination (Einbildungskraft). "Representation" is also not specifically related here to the understanding, or concepts, as it is in the *Fichte Studies*, but rather signifies every and any kind of mental representation. These differences aside, we have here a schema that is nearly identical to the

[26] "Das Allgemeine Brouillon" (NS 3, 418, no. 775).
[27] Novalis, *Fichte Studies*. Jane Kneller, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 65. and "Fichte-Studien" (NS 2, 167, no. 212).

model from the *Fichte Studies* of the mind's capacities: the imagination is equated to mental activity in general and is then subdivided into three parts: a sensory capacity, a lower conceptual capacity of judgment or understanding, and the higher conceptual capacity of reason.

The fragment also shows how the logic of the threefold power of imaginative thought can proliferate into further threefold divisions of thinking. Novalis's model calls for a classification of thought wherein all or some of the three aspects are active within the representation to varying degrees. The exact way of describing the coordination of these three aspects within a given representation varies depending on whether one describes the representation from the perspective of the sense, judgment, or reason. Thus, from the perspective of the sensory power, the combination of the three capacities is described in terms magnitude – perhaps the degree of involvement of each capacity either in absolute terms or relative to one other. This connection between the sensory capacity and magnitude is a reflection of Kant's conception of intuition as consisting of both extensive and intensive magnitude, and hence of magnitude as the basic unit of sensually present objects.[28] Meanwhile, "type" (Art) can be understood as the basic unit of judgment, which, again according to Kant, is the capacity that finds the general category, or type, under which to classify a particular.[29] From the perspective of judgment, the imagination's various representations would be described according to the different types of representations that result based on the specific combination of the three capacities. Reason, finally, as the capacity of lawful inference would be able to specify the exact, lawful manner according to which the various

[28] See Kant's *Axioms of Intuition*: "Alle Anschauungen sind extensive Größen" and his *Anticipations of Perception*: "In allen Erscheinungen hat das Reale, was ein Gegenstand der Empfindung ist, intensive Größe, d.i. einen Grad." *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (A162/B202, A166/B207).

[29] From the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*: "Urteilskraft überhaupt ist das Vermögen, das Besondere als enthalten unter dem Allgemeinen zu denken." In: Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* in vol. 5 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, Preußische Akamie der Wissenschaft ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1908), 179.

capacities work together to produce the representation, or their mutual "relationships" (Verhältnisse).

There is one additional way to account for the coordination of sense, judgment, and reason in the productions of the imagination, and that is to describe the role played by each of these capacities from the perspective of the imagination itself. Novalis mentions such a possibility in the following fragment from the *General Draft*: "Starting from the productive imagination one must deduce all inner capacities and powers – and all outer capacities and powers."[30] The idea here would be to show first how the mind's various capacities are derived from the imagination, and then how the objects of experience are creations of the imagination and of the capacities derived from it. Novalis never carries out such a deduction – that would not be his style. We do, however, come close to a summary account of the imaginative dimensions of reason, judgment (or the understanding), and sense in the following fragment: "the difference between arbitrary, symptomatic, and mimetic characteristic or language."[31] At issue in this fragment are three different modes of signification – the arbitrary, symptomatic, and the mimetic. The idea here is to understand the world as it presents itself to mind in terms of its various modes of signification and the logic by which each of these modes operates. "Characteristic" refers to the notion of a semiotic system, such as Leibniz's proposed universal language, or characteristica universalis. The argument of the fragment is that language can be understood as involving three basic semiotic systems, or modes. We have to construe Novalis's understanding of language very generally, for, as Novalis says elsewhere in the *General Outline*: "It is not only man that speaks – the universe also *speaks* – everything speaks –

[30] "Aus d[er] product[iven] Einb[ildungs]Kr[aft] müssen alle innern Verm[ögen] und Kräfte – und alle äußern Verm[ögen] und Kr[äfte] deducirt werden." In: "Das Allgemeine Brouillon" (NS 3, 413, no. 746).
[31] "Unterschied zwischen willkührlicher, symptomatischer, und mimischer Caracteristik oder Sprache." In: "Vorarbeiten zu verschiedenen Fragmentsammlungen" (NS 2, 594, no. 315). The fragment doesn't belong to an identifiable collection of fragments. The editors have put it in a hodgepodge collection of fragments that they identify as written sometime in 1798 during Novalis's time in Freiburg. See the editor's introduction: (NS 2, 508).

infinite languages."[32] My claim is that this fragment's threefold division of signification into the arbitrary, the symptomatic, and the mimetic captures the work of reason, judgment, and sensibility, respectively, when they are operating entirely under the sway of the imagination.

The connection between arbitrariness (Willkühr) and reason is twofold. If theoretical reason is defined as the capacity to think lawfully, to bind oneself to the force and necessity of inferential logic, then arbitrariness is its opposite. Already in the *Fichte Studien*, Novalis recognized that lawfulness is not a characteristic of the imagination, so that even if one does define reason as containing the laws of the imagination, one would have to ask to what extent the imagination even has laws to begin with: "If reason is called the *laws* of the imagination, insofar as [the imagination] can be saddled with being *lawlike* at all, then philosophy is actually nothing but the theory of reason."[33] Novalis's fragments and poetry reflect his ultimate rejection of philosophy, understood as the lawful unfolding of reason. When brought under the power of imagination, reason becomes "arbitrary" (Willkürlich) and the theory of reason resembles more and more a free play of the imagination.

This is where a second connection between reason and arbitrariness comes into play. Reason, namely, seeks the unconditioned, and arbitrariness is by definition unconditioned. In regards to practical reason, this is reflected in the fact that, according to Kant, practical reason is constitutive of free will.[34] The ability to recognize and do the right thing necessarily entails the ability not to do it –

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[32] "Der Mensch spricht nicht allein – auch das Universum *spricht* – alles spricht – unendliche Sprachen." In: "Das Allegemeine Brouillon" (NS 3, 267-268, no. 143). Translation from: Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, David Wood, trans. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 24.
[33] "Wenn man Vernunft die *Gesetze* der Einbildungskraft nennt, insofern man dieser überhaupt *Gesetzmäßigkeit* aufbürden kann, so ist Filosofie eigentlich nichts, als die Theorie der Vernunft." In: "Fichte-Studien" (NS 2, 168, no. 218). Translation from: Novalis, *Fichte Studies*. Jane Kneller, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 66.
[34] Thus, for example Kant in the *Grundlegung zu einer Metaphysik der Sitten:* "Diese Freiheit des Willens vorauszusetzen, ist auch nicht allein…ganz wohl *möglich* (wie die spekulative Philosophie zeigen kann), sondern auch, sie praktisch, d.i. in der

to willfully elect another course of action. Another way to say this is that the moral strictures of practical reason imply the ability to act arbitrarily – this is an essential feature of having a free will. Novalis wants to explore this zone of arbitrariness, or unconditioned, free action, but in a way that does not bring with it the charge of immorality. He does this by opening up a realm of theoretical inquiry in which the mind can act of its own free will, and because this realm is theoretical rather than moral, the mind is freed from the moral strictures of practical reason. This realm of theoretical inquiry is the realm of imagination, and it is only when reason comes under the control of the imagination that reason gets in touch with the mystery and the wonder of its own freedom:

> The imagination is the marvelous sense that can *replace* all our senses – and that is subject to our will [Willkühr]. Whereas the external senses appear to be entirely subject to mechanical laws – the imagination is apparently not bound to the presence and the contact of external stimuli.
>
> Die Einbildungskraft ist der wunderbare Sinn, der uns alle Sinne *ersetzen* kann – und der so sehr schon in unsrer Willkühr. Wenn die äußern Sinne ganz unter mechanischen Gesetzen zu stehn scheinen – so ist die Einbildungskraft offenbar nicht an die Gegenwart und Berührung äußrer Reitze gebunden.[35]

"Arbitrariness" (Willkühr) is a virtuous term in Novalis's lexicon because it combines the freedom of the will with theoretical reason's search for the unconditioned. In the act of imaginative thinking, reason senses its own absolute freedom by removing itself from both the internal constraint of inference and the external constraint of sense, and instead following the will of the thinker.

The arbitrariness of imaginative thinking in turn effects the specific manner in which the mind directly apprehends the world. In a traditional Kantian framework this would be accomplished by a determining act of judgment which subsumes a given intuition under a given concept of the understanding. In the Fichtean framework of the *Foundation*, this occurs when reason or judgment

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Idee allen seinen willkürlichen Handlungen, als Bedingung, unterzulegen, ist einem vernünftigen Wesen, das sich seiner Kausalität durch Vernunft, mithin eines Willens (der von Begierden unterschieden ist) bewußt ist, ohne weitere Bedingung *notwendig*." In: Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zu einer Metaphysik der Sitten* in vol. 4 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, Preußische Akamie der Wissenschaft ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1903), 461.

[35] "Vorarbeiten zu verschiedenen Fragmentsammlungen" (NS 2, 650, no. 481).

"fixates" (fixiert) or "arrests" (festsetzt) the hovering of the imagination.[36] In Novalis's world of imaginative thinking, conceptual determination is replaced by an understanding that merely registers "symptoms" of its own mysterious act of unconditioned signification. Novalis goes back to the etymological meaning of "symptom" as "occurence" or "Zufall" (from σύμπτωμα), which is to say something that occurs or coincides, often as the result of an illness. In Novalis's conception, the coincidence occurs not between an illness and its symptom, but rather between the spontaneous mind and its representations conceived as the symptoms of this spontaneity:

> Operations of the understanding. If the abstract understanding should be the faculty of language – Here something becomes fixed and recognizable by means of an arbitrary linkage to the self-determined affection of a writing and sounding instrument. The relationships of the symptoms are now *for me the relationships of the occasions of the signs* (appraising the relationships of the causes from out of the relationships and the effects etc.)
>
> Operationen d[es] Verstandes. Sollte der abstracte Verstand – das Sprachvermögen seyn – Hier wird etwas durch willk[ührliche] Verknüpfung mit der an sich bestimmten Affection eines schreibenden und tönenden Instruments fest und erkennbar. Die Verhältnisse der Symptome sind nun *für mich die Verhältnisse der Zeichenanlässe* (Schätzung der Verh[ältnisse] d[er] Ursachen aus d[en] Verh[ältnissen] und Wirckungen etc.)[37]

The background to Novalis's line of thought here is that there is a circularity between mind and word such that the mind spontaneously produces mental representations of the world that are then in turn taken to be the cause, or "occasion" of the very representations that brought the world into view in the first place. It is, in other words, a reformulation of the guiding problem of the *Theoretical Part* of Fichte's *Foundation*, which asked how it is possible that "the ego posits itself as determined by the non-ego."[38] The question there was which act – the ego's positing, or the non-ego's determination of the ego – determined the other. In Novalis's fragment, this circularity is shown to be the product of the spontaneous understanding, which, in fixing one side of the mind-world relation must posit the other side as its determining ground. Thus the world as a "symptom" of

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[36] See: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA/I, 2, 374): "Der Verstand läßt sich als die durch Vernunft fixierte Einbildungskraft, oder als die durch Einbildungskraft mit Objekten versehne Vernufnt beschreiben. " For Fichte's account of judgment see *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA/I, 2, 381): "Beides [A und –A - ML], durch eine neue Anschauung wieder vereinigt, und im Verstande festgesetzt heißt *Urteilskraft*. Urteilskraft ist das bis jetzt freie Vermögen, über schon im Verstand gesetzte Objekte zu reflektieren, oder von ihnen zu abstrahieren, und sie, nach Maßgabe dieser Reflexion oder Abstraktion, mit weiterer Bestimmung im Verstande zu setzen."

[37] "Das Allgemeine Brouillon" (NS 3, 424, no. 791).

[38] "das Ich sezt sich, als bestimmt durch das Nicht-Ich." In: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2 287).

mind becomes the "occasion" of the signifying act of mind that produced these symptoms in the first place. Seen from the mind side of the mind-world relation, the world as representation is a symptomatic expression of a lone spontaneously productive mind. Seen from the world side of the relation, any representations that the mind produces are a symptom of the world as it is mediated through mind.

Novalis explains the circle of causality between mind and world by suggesting that mind in fact relates to world as arbitrary signs relate to the objects they signify. The mind brings the world of intuition up to the level of mental representation through a free act akin to the arbitrary act of connecting a word to an object. In language, this act of connecting an arbitrary sign to an object is what allows this object to come into mental view in the first place as a distinct and manipulable object of thought. According to this analogy with the arbitrary, signifying act of language, mind and world are not causally connected, as one might naively assume, but rather coincide with one another as mutual symptoms of an arbitrary act of mind that spontaneously brings certain aspects of the world into and out of view by means of its free application of concepts.[39] By comparing the understanding with the faculty of language, Novalis is able to capitalize on the traditional conception of human language as a system of arbitrary signs in order to convert the notion of an understanding that determines or is determined by the world into the notion of an arbitrary understanding that spontaneously allows the world to become present to mind in various ways. The understanding apprehends external objects by means of a willful act of signification. In language, this willful act of signification leaves it ambiguous whether the word is a symptom of the apprehended object or

[39] This is also my interpretation of what Benjamin means in his dissertation when he describes the Romantic theory of knowledge as a theory of a "nexus of reflection" (Reflexionszusammenhang). It is a theory of human language that shows how thought, through the exercise of language, spontaneously creates its object. See, for example, the following passage from Benjamin's dissertation: "Denn weil sie [die Reflexion –ML] die Form des Denkens ist, ist dieses [Denken –ML] logisch ohne sie [die Reflexion – ML], obgleich sie auf dasselbe reflektiert, nicht möglich. Erst mit der Reflexion entspringt das Denken, auf das reflektiert wird." In: Walter Benjamin, *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik*, in: vol. I,1 of the *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), 39.

whether the inverse is true, namely that the object is a symptom of the mind's ability to produce a word and thereby attain the kind of grasp on an object that allows said object to appear in the first place. Lying between word and object, or mind and world, is the mysterious act of the signifying understanding. This "writing and sounding instrument" produces words, and, *in and perhaps by means of that same act*, apprehends objects. However, it is fundamentally unknowable which causes the other. The causal principle that could ostensibly coordinate mind and world is replaced by the principle of mutual and unpredictable symptoms. The word is a symptom of the object, the object a symptom of the word. Likewise, mind and world coincide as mutual symptoms of one another.

In contrast to Novalis's conception of the symptomatic understanding, Kant and Fichte conceive of the understanding as a capacity that produces fully determined cognitions in which the essential features of an object, such as its causes and its effects, are definitively established. By placing a free, undetermined imagination at the center of his theory of mind, Novalis refashions this aspect of mental determination into a theory of infinite symptoms. The understanding produces symptoms, which are in turn symptoms of other symptoms, so that no root cause or objective foundation can ever be established. This displacement of conceptual determination with an infinite sequence of symptoms is reflected in the following passage:

> Everything is a symptom of everything else. As that *simple*, external appearance that can be constructed, varied, and assembled in the most manifold way, sounds and marks are most convenient for signifying the universe. The universe is the Absolute Subject or the sum of all predicates.
>
> Alles ist sich gegenseitig *Symptom*. Töne und Striche sind, als diejenige *einfache*, äußre Erscheinung, die am mannichfaltigsten gebildet, variirt und zusammengesezt werden kann, am bequemsten zur Bezeichnung des Universums. Das Universum ist das Absolute Subject oder der Inbegriff aller Prädicate.[40]

Here again, we see the mutually symptomatic relationship of words and objects. Words are symptoms of the mind's apprehension of the universe. Conversely, the universe is the sum of all the signs, or symptoms, of consciousness experience that are made visible to the mind by means of the

[40] "Das Allgemeine Brouillon" (NS 3, 381, no. 633).

focusing power of linguistic designation. When everything is a symptom of everything else, there is no way to determine the direction of cause. This is especially true of the relationship between mind and world, where it cannot be determined whether consciousness is produced by the nexus of efficient causes that comprise the world, or whether the world is constructed by the mind as the result of some underlying mental force.

When conceptual order is dissolved into a nexus of symptoms that mutually implicate one another, the mind must resort to an associative thinking that orders the world not according to cause and effect, subject and predicate, but rather according to sensuous likeness. This is where the third aspect of imaginative thinking comes into play, that which Novalis refers to in the fragment mentioned earlier as "mimetic characteristic." When sense perception, or "sensory power" (Sinnenkraft) comes under the sway of the imagination, sensory data forms the basis not of conceptual determination, but rather of a free association that establishes likenesses on the basis of appearances. The term "mimetic" here captures a mode of signification in which relationships are established through phenomenal similarities.

Novalis has an entire cadre of terms that refer to this mimetic mode of imaginative thought. For example, he speaks of a "sympathy of the sign with the signified," where the notion of "sympathy" refers to a likeness, or relationship of verisimilitude, that exists between the sign and signified.[41][42] Novalis's most common designation for this mode of mimetic relation is that of analogy, which is a practice of tracing out entire systems of mimetic correspondence. He identifies his encyclopedia project as presented in the *General Draft* in terms of the ability to establish analogies:

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[41] "*Sympathie* des *Zeichens* mit dem Bezeichneten…" In: "Das Allgemeine Brouillon" (NS 3, 266, no. 137)

[42] For an excellent account of the intellectual sources that Novalis drew on in developing his notion of mimetic, or sympathetic signs see: Ayako Nakai, "Poesie und Poetik bei Novalis und die Signaturenlehre der Naturmystik" in: *Novalis: Poesie und Poetik*, Herberg Uerlings, ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2004) 185-199.

"Encyclopeadistic: Analogistic. The analogy – as a tool, describing it and showing its manifold use."[43] What is crucial to this notion of mimetic, sympathetic, or analogical relation is that the elements are related not thanks to any factual or lawful relationship of cause and effect, or subject and predicate, but rather only due to a likeness that occurs within the sensory data that one has of the two elements. Perhaps the best way to capture the generality of this idea is to invoke Peirce's notion of the "icon." An icon is a sign that signifies by virtue of what Peirces calls its "likeness" or "suchness," meaning a resemblance on a level of the phenomenon to that which it signifies.[44] Like Pierce's notion of the icon, the mimetic relation need not be a strictly visual likeness, though visual resemblance is perhaps the easiest to identify. An iconic or mimetic relation points to a resemblance that appears when it is traced out within the manifolds of both of the two phenomena in question.

Novalis's most common act of mimetic signification spots similarities between the realm of nature and that of culture. Thus, for example, we find the following fragment in the *General Draft*, which connects natural-scientific findings of his time regarding the effect of electric impulses on muscle tissue to the circulation of money: "Numismatic. The Galvanism of money."[45] This act of relating features of the natural world to the cultural is most pronounced in the collection *Faith and Love*, in which Novalis repeatedly refers to natural phenomena in order to justify and describe an ideal

[43] "Enc[yclopaedistik]. *Analogistik*. Die Analogie – als Werckzeug, beschrieben und ihren mannichfaltigen Gebrauch gezeigt." In: "Das Allgemeine Brouillon" (NS 3, 321, no. 431).
[44] In Peirce's words: "Firstly, there are *likenesses*, or icons; which serve to convey ideas of the things they represent simply by imitating them." In: Charles Sanders Peirce, "What is a Sign?" in: *The Essential Peirce* Vol. 2 (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), 5. Another formulation by Peirce is that the icon "represents whatever it may represent, and whatever it is like, it in so far is. It is an affair of suchness only." In: "The Categories Defended." Charles Sanders Peirce. *The Essential Peirce* Vol. 2 (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), 163.
[45] "Numism[atik]. Galvanismus des Geldes." In: "Das Allgemeine Brouillon" (NS 3, 270, no. 165).

monarchial state, as, for example, in his suggestion that: "the king is the pure life principle of the state: he is exactly the same as the sun in the solar system."[46] [47]

We can summarize the relationship between mimetic, symptomatic, and arbitrary signification as follows. My claim has been that these are the three modes of signification that emerge when sensory perception, judgment, and reason operate in the realm of imaginative thinking. These are not isolated modes of signification, but rather mutually implicate one another as interrelated aspects of imaginative thought. The imagination allows the mind to freely associate, dissolving the conceptually ordered word into a collection of symptoms that are connected to one another not as normal symptoms are in terms of cause and effect, but in terms of the principle of iconic similarity. The freedom of the imagination thus gives rise to both a vastly expanded range of possible associations and a new precariousness in the associations its constructs.

The following fragment from *Pollen* nicely captures the intertwined aspects of possibility and fragility that dwell within the mimetic associations created by imaginative thinking:

> Certain restraints resemble the fingerings of a flute player, who, in order to bring forth various sounds, covers now this opening and now that opening, and appears to create an arbitrary chain of silent and sounding openings.
>
> Gewisse Hemmungen gleichen den Griffen eines Flötenspielers, der um verschiedene Töne hervorzubringen, bald diese bald jene Öffnung zuhält, und willkührliche Verkettungen stummer und tönender Öffnungen zu machen scheint.[48]

The types of "restraints" that Novalis has in mind in this fragment are the restrains placed on conceptual thinking, specifically on the ability of the mind to grasp itself and its experiential realm

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[46] "Der König ist das gediegene Lebensprinzip des Staats; ganz dasselbe, was die Sonne im Planetensystem ist." In: "Glauben und Liebe" (NS 2, 488, no. 488). Translation from: Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, Margaret Mahony Stoljar, ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 88.

[47] In her recent book on Romanticism, Dalia Nassar describes the act of relating nature and culture to one another in terms of the complementary movements of "transforming the ideal into the real and the real into the ideal." I believe that my notion of mimetic correspondence could give us a way to think more intensely about the complementarity of these movements. See: Dalia Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2014), 70.

[48] "Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub" (NS 2, 415, no. 7).

through the application of concepts. This is indicated by the fragment directly preceding it, which reads: "We will never entirely comprehend ourselves, but we will and can do much more than comprehend ourselves."[49] The analogy of the flute player is thus supposed to communicate what this 'more' is that exceeds the act of comprehension. As indicated by the word for "fingerings" (Griffe), the act of comprehension is represented in the analogy of the flute player as the act of setting the fingers over the holes of the flute so as to grasp the instrument in a certain way. In this way the flute player maintains a grasp on, or comprehends, his instrument. However, the presumed ability of the flute player to have a grasp on his instrument is negated by the wonder of the music he produces and the apparent incommensurability between the act of grasping the flute in a certain way and the seemingly magical production of sound. Novalis expresses this incommensurability between the fingers and the sounds by invoking and then disappointing our expectation that the movement of the sounds should mimetically reproduce the visual movement of the fingers over the key holes. A mimetic relationship between the visual and tonal would exist if, as on a pipe organ, an open finger hole created a specific tone at that opening. Under this counterfactual scenario, the finger holes on the flute would correspond to "silent and sounding openings" that would be silent if covered by the finger and sound once the finger was raised to free the opening. However, just as we can't simply use concepts to directly grasp the world, so too the fingerings (Griffe) of the flute player don't actually control the acoustics of the flute in a visually intuitive manner. It is not the finger openings, considered individually, that create sound depending on whether or not they are closed, but rather the combination of openings, including the opening at the end of the flute, that together shape the acoustic chamber of the flute in a certain way. Thus, whereas on the visual level one has individual fingers that seem to be individually creating this and that sound, the tonal level is in fact determined by the totality of openings and closings, including the opening at the end of the

[49] "Ganz begreifen werden wir uns nie, aber wir werden und können uns weit mehr, als begreifen." In: "Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub" (NS 2, 413, no. 6).

flute that is never covered by a finger. The simple mimetic correspondence between individual fingers and individual sounds is negated, just as our ability to directly comprehend ourselves through the application of individual concepts is negated. Instead, we are left with an "arbitrary chain" of fingerings that much better captures the miracle of music residing in the mystery of its mechanism. As the expectation of a correspondence between fingers and sounds demonstrates, the possibility of mimetic correspondence is everywhere, but it is as much the disappointment as the expectation of this correspondence that creates the atmosphere of wonder that suffuses imaginative thought.

4.3 Imaginative Thought in *Das Gedicht*

It would be the task of a larger study to further trace Novalis's system of imaginative thinking through his many fragments, to elucidate the central importance he ascribes within this system to poetry, and finally to examine how imaginative thinking suffuses his literary works. In concluding this chapter, I offer a reading of a poem from 1799 entitled *Das Gedicht*. I take this poem to be representative of Novalis's conviction that imaginative thought finds its highest expression in poetry. As the title of the poem suggests, and as other commentators have noted, this is a poem about poetry.[50] It tells the story of a "flower princess" (Blumenfürstin), who, as the incarnation of poetry, writes a name in the sand - presumably her own name - and then disappears. The lyric voice recounts the woman's absence and expresses the possibility that she could once again be conjured forth. It then describes a scene of pure imaginative play that reaches its apex when the tapestry of poetic creation breaks apart and the princess appears for a fleeting moment only to disappear a moment later with the poem's conclusion.

[50] Gerhard Schulz, for example, interprets the flower princess as an figuration of poetry. See: Friedrich von Hardenberg, *Novalis: Werke*, ed. Gerhard Schulz (München: C.H. Beck 1969), 659.

My claim is that this poem is an enactment of imaginative thinking in its highest form, a form of thinking in which the imagination attempts to access the realm of the absolute. A close reading shows that *Das Gedicht* uses the reader's own imagination to conjure forth a scene of imaginative play and to present this scene as a depiction of the transcendental ground of human experience. The prime mover of this scene of imaginative transcendental creation is the flower princess, who represents both the power and the ephemerality of poetic creation. As the patroness of the imaginative absolute, the flower princess can become present only fleetingly and in the moment of her departure. The poem suggests that our experience of the imaginative absolute is necessarily an experience not only of beauty and creation, but also of mortality, loss, and limitation. I begin by quoting the poem in full:

> Himmlisches Leben im blauen Gewande,
> Stiller Wunsch in blassem Schein –
> Flüchtig gräbt in bunten Sande
> Sie den Zug des Namens ein –
>
> Unter hohen festen Bogen,
> Nur von Lampenlicht erhellt,
> Liegt, seitdem der Geist entflogen,
> Nun das Heiligste der Welt.
>
> Leise kündet beßre Tage
> Ein verlornes Blatt uns an,
> Und wir sehn der alten Sage
> Mächtige Augen aufgetan.
>
> Naht euch stumm dem ernsten Tore,
> Harrt auf seinen Flügelschlag
> Und vernehmt herab vom Chore
> Wo weissagend der Marmor lag.
>
> Flüchtiges Leben und lichte Gestalten
> Füllten die weite, leere Nacht,
> Nur von Scherzen aufgehalten
> Wurden unendliche Zeiten verbracht –
>
> Liebe brachte gefüllte Becher,
> Also perlt in Blumen der Geist,
> Ewig trinken die kindlichen Zecher,
> Bis der geheiligte Teppich zerreißt.
>
> Fort durch unabsehliche Reihn
> Schwanden die bunten rauschenden Wagen,
> Endlich von farbigen Käfern getragen
> Kam die Blumenfürstin allein,

Schleier, wie Wolken zogen
Von der blendenden Stirn zu den Füßen,
Wir fielen nieder sie zu grüßen –
Wir weinten bald – sie war entflogen.[51]

The poem is structured by a basic opposition between presence and absence – the opening presence of the flower princess, her subsequent absence, and finally her fleeting second coming and departure at the poem's conclusion. This opposition is further enforced by the meter which moves in galloping dactyls when the princess is present or approaching (*Himm*-li-sches *Le*-ben-im *blau*-en-ge *Gewand*) and falls back into measured trochees at the suggestion of her absence (*Stil*-ler *Wunsch* im *blas*-sen *Schein*). Only in the finally two lines do we find a new meter consisting of iams (wir *fiel*-en *nied*-er *sie* zu *grüs*-sen) which, for the first time, shift the accented syllabus to the end of the metrical foot and thereby mark in rhythm the final departure of the princess.

The poem begins with a primal scene of inscription in which a woman writes a name in the sand. It remains a mystery what name this is, and the mystery of the name corresponds to the mysterious identity of the woman, who we will later infer is the flower princess that reappears at the poem's conclusion. The unspecified name signifies some desired yet unattainable person, so that it thereby refers at least indirectly to the woman herself. We can therefore say that, for all intents and purposes, the woman is writing her own name in the sand. Perhaps she writes the name into the sand on a river bank, in which case this act signifies the material world becoming imbued with poetic spirit. Another possibility is that she is using blotting sand to dry the ink after having completed a book and signed her name as its author. The truth lies somewhere in between: the princess's act of inscription signifies the general project of poetry, which uses language to conjure forth an imaginative world that would ideally negate the distinction between the written words of the poem on the page, on the one hand, and the imaginary world that the words call forth, on the other. In a

[51] "Das Gedicht" (NS 1, 409-10).

pure act of poetry, the words would become world, and visa versa. The sand further signifies the infinite possibility and the ephemerality of the imaginative realm that is conjured forth. One can draw an infinite variety of forms in the sand, but these forms are also highly unstable and transitory.

The tension between the scenario of the material world versus that of the book is then drawn out in the next three stanzas, in which the lyrical voice talks about the possibility of reanimating the lost spirit of the princess. In order to help bring about the return of the princess, Novalis employs a clever poetic technique of quickening his reader's imagination by means of carefully placed homophones. The reader is ostensibly standing before a dimly lit church – "Unter hohen festen Bogen,/ Nur von Lampenlicht erhellt" – but it is equally possible that he is reading by the light of a lamp from the sheets (Bogen) of a book. These parallel scenarios are further extended when we read of a stray leaf (Blatt) that announces the second coming of the princess. This could be a leaf falling from a tree outside the church and thereby alerting us to the passing of time and our mortality, but it could also be a stray page in the book that the princess authored and on which is contained a poem or a name that would allow us to conjure her forth.

This play with homophones is an example of the mimetic association that characterizes the movement of imaginative thought. Although church arches and sheets of paper are otherwise unrelated, they share in German the phonic form "Bogen." Here the iconic similarity between two different object s– the sweeping length of the page and the sweeping of the stone arch – is established by an identical word that signifies these objects. The same can be said of a tree leaf and the leaf of a book. The ethereal quality of the falling leaf calls to mind the thinness of the pages in the book and the non-corporeal nature of the thoughts contained on those pages. Conversely, the

prophesy of the book imbues the falling leaf with an air of portent it would otherwise not have.[52] These mimetic associations between the book on the one hand, and the church and the falling leaf on the other, results in an enmeshment of world and spirit. The church scene becomes the expression of a written prophesy, and the written prophesy takes on the corporeal presence of the church.

In the fourth stanza, it becomes clear that the prophesy being considered is that of our mortality. The entrance into the church mimics the release of the soul from the body. This is again accomplished by a play of homophones. Novalis's choice of the word "Flügelschlag" to describe the opening of the gate also conjures forth the wings of the soul as it flies out of the body upon death. In entering the church, the church choir tells us that white marble gravestones will be the markers of our final resting place. This message of mortality is the quintessential message of Christianity. As Novalis recounts in his *Hynem an die Nacht*, it is the message of Christ's death and redemption that replaces the pagan worldview, which did not have the cultural resources to confront the problem of death.[53] In *Das Gedicht* Novalis also makes reference to this inability of the world of Classical Antiquity to confront death, for his word choice of "Thor" and "Flügelschlag" refers not only to church gates and the death of the soul, but also to the foolish revelry of the pagan imagination as it takes flight and ensconces itself in a world of immanent appearances. This notion of pre-Christian foolery is anchored in the New Testament, Corinthians 1:23: "But we preach Christ

[52] This is not to say that Novalis regularly employs homophones in his poetry in order to establish mimetic relationships. However, other examples can be found – for example in the Crusade poem in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, where the word "Heiden" signifies both the Islamic heathens attacking Jerusalem and the fields of flowers that might contain both Heinrich's blue flower and Goethe's "meadow rose" or "Heidenröslein." This strange chain of mimetic association between heathens violating the holy grail, flowers, and – with reference to Goethe's *Heidenröslein* – violent sexual encounters, condenses in Heinrich's mind into the following fantasy: "…das Grab kam ihm wie eine bleiche, edle, jugendliche Gestalt vor, die auf einem großen Stein mitten unter wildem Pöbel säße, und auf eine entsetzliche Weise gemißhandelt würde…" In: *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (NS 1, 233).

[53] Novalis recounts this in the fifth hymn: "Ein Gedanke nur war es…Das furchtbar zu den Tischen trat…Hier wußten selbst die Götter keinen Rat…Es war der Tod…" See: "Hymnen an die Nacht," (NS 1, 130-158).

crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness."[54] In fact, the Greeks are the fools because they are ignorant of the Christian significance of their death and the need for redemption in the afterlife.

With the topic of mortality having come to the fore in the fourth stanza, the poem can now open up onto the perspective of eternity. The "eyes of the ancient prophecy" (der alten Sage mächtige Augen) have been opened, meaning that the notion of our impending mortality has awakened in our soul and thereby transported us out beyond the immanent, material world of the Church building and the falling leaf. Starting in the fifth stanza, we are now looking down upon the immanent world sub specie aeternitatis. We can see from this vantage point how the pagan, immanent imagination weaves a "tapestry" (Teppich) of appearances that is eventually replaced at the end of the poem by a Christian imagination that, in contrast, transcends illusion. This Christian imagination is signified in the final stanza of the poem by the balance between semblance and negativity that we find expressed in the notion of a "veil" (Schleier) that both reveals and covers the true, divine ground of imagination, the flower princess. The final four stanzas of the poem describe this transition from a pagan imagination to a Christian imagination in terms of a festival that reaches its conclusion with the arrival and departure of the flower princess.[55]

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[54] *The Holy Bible, King James Version. Cambridge Edition: 1769* (*King James Bible Online*, 2015), www.kingjamesbibleonline.org.

[55] In her reading of the poem, Janet Gardiner similarly identifies the veiled appearance of the princess as marking a transition from a golden age to Christianity: "Wie das naive goldene Zeitalter in der 5. *Hymne an die Nacht* zu Ende geht, so muß auch hier der ‚geheiligte Teppich' als ‚Symbol der frühlingshaft blühenden Natur' zerreißen....Die Schleier fallen zwischen die Muttergöttin und die jetzt ‚unkindlichen, wachsenden Menschen', die die Suche nach der heiligen Jungfrau beginnen sollen." In contrast to my reading, however, Gardiner does not see such a strong opposition between Christianity and the pagan world. Rather, drawing heavily on Novalis's *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, Gardiner suggests that the spirituality of Christianity melds in the poem with the spirituality of an Isis-like cult to inspire "eine Vision des…Urvolks und der goldenen Zeit." Gardiner describes the end of the festival in the poem as akin to waking up out of a dream and returning to reality. The Christian problem of mortality is not a pressing problem in her reading. See: Janet Gardiner, "Novalis, das Gedicht," *Jahrbuch des freien deutschen Hochstifts* 1974: 226-7.

The eternal vantage point is also a transcendental vantage point. It is able to transcend the pagan world, giving us an external perspective on the way in which imagination generates appearances when it descends from the realm of the absolute into time and space. The "wide empty night" and the "endless times" of the pagan festival signify the liminal zone outside of time and space that Fichte seems to imply when he talks in the *Foundation* about an imagination that must first generate the spatial-temporal manifold. From this transcendental perspective of an eternal ground of humanity's spatial-temporal existence, the mind's confabulations are mere "jests," fleeting, but also beautiful, as indicated by the fact that "the mind pours forth in flowers." As the mind pours forth, it weaves a textile of illusion, the so-called "holy tapestry" (der geheiligte Teppich) that stands for the appearances of conscious experience, but also for the inherently imaginative and poetic act that synthesizes the manifold of experience into a interwoven whole. As a "tapestry" rather than a "veil", this construct of illusion is not permeable, so that in contrast to the readers of the poem who see its construction amidst the backdrop of eternity, the pagan revelers themselves cannot see past it until it tears entirely.

The tearing of the tapestry marks the end of the pagan revelry and the arrival of the flower princess, who is a syncretic figuration of all that the imagination can conjure forth, be it pagan or Christian. The pagan aspect is indicated by the beetles who carry her and her designation as the "flower princess." These two aspects help to give the divine female character a pantheistic coloring that recalls the immanence of the pagan worldview.[56] On the other hand, this princess bares

[56] In a fragment on religion from *Pollen*, Novalis calls pantheism the "idea, that everything can be an organ of divinity, a mediator, in so far as I raise it to this function." ("…die Idee…, daß alles Organ der Gottheit, Mittler seyn könne, indem ich es dazu erhebe." This is in contrast to the monotheistic view, according to which there can only be one element mediating the divine. Novalis appears to be invoking pantheism in this poem when he raises unconventional objects, like beetles, up to a divine level. That this pantheism is also a paganism is clear from Novalis's notion of the development of religion, also explicated in the *Pollen* fragment, according to which Christian monotheism is arrived at through a refinement of previous pantheistic attempts to mediate the divine. See: *Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub* (NS 2, 441-4, no. 74.)

unmistakable similarities to the Virgin Mary, particularly as she appears in Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*, a painting that Novalis had seen on a trip to Dresden the year before he wrote the poem, and that also served as inspiration for Tieck and Wackenroder's *Phantasien über die Kunst*, from which Novalis wrote out an excerpt on the same paper on which he wrote the poem.[57] Like the Sistine Madonna who appears in the heavens with a blue dress, the flower princess is described at the very beginning of the poem as "heavenly life in a blue robe," and just as the Madonna wears a veil over her hair and walks on the clouds, the princess appears at the end of the poem with veils that "trailed like clouds from her radiant brow to her feet."

The transcendental perspective of the poem that was able to show us the imaginative construction of the pagan world reaches its limits with the appearance of the Madonna-like flower princess, the overseer of the prior revelry. Her arrival signals the end to pagan festivity and the arrival of Christian transcendence. A realm opens up that is even beyond that which the transcendental perspective can show us. The woman arrives, but she is never seen directly. Although she is covered in a veil, which is at least semi-permeable, she disappears just as the lyrical voice is kneeling down to greet her. This final absence echoes the flight of the princess's spirit that was mentioned in the second stanza of the poem ("Unter hohen festen Bogen…Liegt, seitdem der Geist entflogen, nun das Heiligste der Welt"). In both cases, the princess can only be experienced as loss. The only possibility for a lasting encounter with this divine patron of imaginative creation seems to reside in the Christian afterlife. The departure of the flower princess directs our attention to a transcendent hereafter that we can only experience negatively as the fleeting appearance and disappearance of our imaginative creations. The poem suggests that we can transcend the pagan susceptibility to illusion

[57] Novalis's viewing of the *Sistine Madonna* is mentioned in: Gerhard Schulz. *Novalis: Leben und Werk Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2011), 157. Concerning Novalis's excerpt from the *Phantasien über die Kunst* that we find on the manuscript of *Das Gedicht*, see the editor's *Anmerkungen* in: Friedrich von Hardenberg, *Gedichte und Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, ed. Johannes Mahr (Stuttgart: Philip Reclam, 1984), 288-9.

by enacting the free play of imagination. In enacting this free play, however, we also learn that this realm of the imaginative absolute is in turn grounded in a Christian spirit that both directs our desire and points us towards our own mortality. The Christian divinity remains beyond our reach, appearing to us only in the form of the desire, the hope, and the loss that we experience in the exercise of our imaginative freedom.

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