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**The Foundations of Cognition: Variations on the Theme of
an *a priori* Structure of Awareness**

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Abstract

In the search for the foundations of cognition philosophers often encounter a familiar problem - the problem of content. The problem of content is essentially the problem of how content, whether experiential or intentional, is possible. In practice providing a response to this problem involves providing an account of how an active self-consciousness is able to conceive/perceive, or in some way be *consciousness of x*. The unique nature of this problem imposes significant constraints on the field of explanatory possibilities. Since the *x* which is to be accounted for is essentially the possibility of absolutely any *x* there is no *y* which is not also an *x*. Hence, nothing remains outside of the *explanandum* which can be appealed to in order to account for it without, to some extent, presupposing that which needs to be explained. In many of the theories we will examine overcoming this problem involves appealing to a transcendental "structure of awareness" which more often than not is composed of "universal-like" transcendental "entities" of indeterminate nature and ontological status. A major appeal of transcendental entities (e.g., forms, species, essences, pure categories, and *dharmas*) is that they can at least appear to provide a way of supplying the power of objective "determinateness" necessary to account for the possibility of determination without themselves being determinates (i.e., without presupposing content). The general strategy of appealing to such transcendental "entities" has, however, for some time been suspiciously regarded as it is unclear how such an appeal is able to avoid the aforementioned presupposition of content.

But if the appeal to transcendental cognizing intermediates is to be dismissed we may be left to face up to the fact that content simply "happens"- that the process of determination, of "judgment", is a mysterious talent that can neither be taught nor understood. Through a critical examination of both Western and Eastern philosophical approaches to the problem of content this dissertation identifies and describes, insofar as is possible, "that" through which content is rendered possible. In so doing it draws attention to previously neglected points of contact between major philosophical traditions and clarifies the central issues surrounding the problem. The dissertation supports the conclusion that, although there is a need to acknowledge a particular role for a transcendental "self-consciousness" in providing a coherent response to the problem of content, the attempt to articulate a mechanism through which this role is fulfilled most likely misguided. Although it appears to be possible both to know something about this "self-consciousness", and even to know it more directly, it cannot be understood in the usual sense.

Introduction

The original motivation for the investigations that are to follow was in part a desire to clarify and to find a coherent way to defend the anti-relativistic idea that “subjective” modes of experience such as music, art, poetry, ways of being, etc., were modes of understanding to which knowledge claims could be legitimately applied. Initial readings in a variety of disciplines including psychology, cognitive science, and philosophy led to a few core ideas that demanded clarification and further investigation.¹ It seemed, for example, that the greatness of a piece of music was fundamentally inseparable from the immediate experience and understanding of the music itself. This immediate understanding, moreover, seemed to be bound up with a resonance that was, in some sense, occurring between the subject and the object. In order to explore these thoughts, and the possibility that they might somehow be of assistance in defending my anti-relativistic intuitions, it was necessary to undertake an investigation of existing theories concerned with the problem of how experience “comes about”. Readings in this area recommended to me by my supervisor led quickly away from psychology and towards a quintessential philosophical problem - the problem of content.

The problem of content is essentially the problem of how content, whether experiential or intentional, is possible. Although there are a variety of ways of

¹ See appendix A for the relevant list of readings which led to this investigation but which did not make the final draft.

explicating the problem perhaps the most familiar is in terms of the concept of judgment. It seems that knowing something to be F (e.g. a lamp) necessarily involves correctly judging it to be so. This fact applies obviously to theoretical matters but it seems to extend even to perception. So when, for example, one turns one's head and perceives a lamp, the possibility of the veridicality of this perception implies that a judgment has somehow taken place within the "process" through which the lamp was rendered determinate (i.e., perceived). But since the idea of judgment implies an active self-consciousness to discriminate between things "seeming" one way and "being" another - simply put, a judge who can get matters right or wrong - the problem of how x is rendered determinate in perception is bound up with identifying how an active self-consciousness is able to perceive, or in some way grasp, x . In other words, it involves providing an account of the necessary conditions for the grasping of x , that is, of how a *consciousness of x* is possible. In practical terms this amounts to providing an account of the "process" through which x is rendered determinate and can be perceived as having been rendered determinate

As we will see the unique nature of this problem imposes significant constraints on the field of explanatory possibilities. Providing an explanation of some x requires, of course, appealing to some y through which x is rendered more understandable. The behavior of an apple, which has just been detached from a tree, for instance, is explained by appealing to the force of gravity. But in the case of the problem of content the x that is to be explained is essentially the possibility of absolutely any x . Since there is no y that is not also an x nothing remains outside of the *explanandum* that can be appealed to in order to account for it

without, to some extent, presupposing that which needs to be explained. In other words, it seems impossible to identify something, which is not “content”, but which can function to account for its possibility. In many of the theories we will examine overcoming this problem involves appealing to a transcendental “structure of awareness” which more often than not is composed of “universal-like” transcendental “entities” of indeterminate nature and ontological status - an idea that can be traced back at least to Plato. A major appeal of such transcendental entities as, for example, forms, species, essences, pure categories, and *dharmas*, is that they can at least appear to provide a way of supplying the power of objective “determinateness” necessary to account for the possibility of determination without themselves being determinates (i.e., without presupposing content).

The general strategy of appealing to such transcendental “entities” has, however, for some time been suspiciously regarded as it is unclear how such an appeal is able to avoid the aforementioned presupposition of content. It seems that if transcendental entities are called upon to supply the “that” through which an object is rendered determinate then their function is that of intermediates in the determination process set between consciousness and the object. But as both Kant and Wittgenstein demonstrate such intermediates (e.g., rules) require interpretation, and since no interpretation interprets itself, they are unable to do the job for which they are designed.² Appealing to intermediates in responding to the problem of content leads only to an infinite regress of intermediates and, if pressed, to the absurd conclusion that content is not possible. But if the appeal to

² Cf., for example, Wittgenstein’s P.I. §§ 197-202, pp. 80-1, and § 265, pp. 93-4.

transcendental cognizing intermediates is to be dismissed we may be left to face up to the fact that content simply “happens”- that the process of determination, of “judgment”, is a mysterious talent that can be neither be taught nor understood. And now what, if any, coherent characterisation can be given to this “spontaneous happening” on which subject and world ultimately seems to depend? How are we to account for the possibility of content?

This is a question that seems to have been largely avoided by twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy. We, however, through a critical review of both Western and Eastern philosophical approaches will seek to redress it and in so doing draw attention both to previously neglected points of contact between major philosophical traditions and to directions for future possible research. What follows then is in the first place an in depth examination of several theories, from a variety of philosophical and cultural backgrounds, which, in their own ways, address the problem of content and the issues which surround it. There is no attempt made here to “appropriate” concepts from theories in order to construct a philosophical system. Rather there is a striving towards the ideal of description and a concerted attempt to keep speculative-deductive commitments to a minimum - particularly with respect to metaphysics. But we will not merely be concerned with exegesis. Our goal is to identify and describe, insofar as is possible, that which renders content possible. In order for our investigations to progress in this endeavour it will be necessary to make comparisons between concepts from radically different philosophical and cultural traditions. This kind of comparison, of course, requires sensitivity to context and a thorough understanding of each tradition. Consequently, each of the six chapters attempts to

develop the depth of understanding that is necessary to identify comparable theoretical elements and to justify those comparisons.

Considered as a whole the dissertation supports the conclusion that, although there is a need to acknowledge a particular role for a transcendental “self-consciousness” in providing a coherent response to the problem of content, the attempt to articulate a mechanism through which this role is fulfilled most likely misguided. Although it appears to be possible both to know something about this “self-consciousness”, and even to know it more directly, it cannot be understood in the usual sense.

We will begin our investigations in chapter one by concerning ourselves with the problem of content as we have described it above in terms of judgment. Judgment, we first observe, can generally be divided into two types: practical and theoretical - a division which seems to inform the entire philosophical debate about judgment. Following a brief historical introduction we settle into a detailed examination of Kant who demonstrates that formulating the main problem on a model of theoretical judgment leads only to an infinite regress and to the demand for an account of practical judgment – that is, an account of the functioning of that intuitive spontaneity which, he suggests, plays an active role in the determination of all things? Kant’s failure to cope adequately with this problem in the first *Critique* and his apparent attempt to re-address it in the third *Critique* are then explored in detail. We conclude by observing that, for Kant, reason’s application of rules (of judgment) in acts of subsumption depends ultimately on a “that” which, being inherently contradictory (e.g., a law unto itself), cannot be grasped by the faculty which necessarily employs laws, rules, principles, etc., i.e., the faculty of

understanding. Fortunately, Kant has not left us completely empty handed with respect to the ground of the judgment as he connects it intimately with *supersensible* being through his moral theory. The moral and beautiful it seems go some way toward revealing the nature of “that” which is purposive for cognition.

Chapter two investigates phenomenological approaches to the problem of content with an emphasis on the work of Max Scheler. Scheler believes that he knows exactly where Kant goes astray. According to Scheler the source of the trouble is the division of experience into sensible intuitions and formal *a priori* processes - an error that he suggests can, at least in part, be accounted for by Kant’s ignorance of ‘phenomenological facts’ that exhibit what is already contained in receptive experience. Central to every account of how understanding grasps its object is a tension between the need for a subject (a someone to understand) and the need to rid the process of understanding of this subject in order to open up the possibility of objective experience. One strategy to deal with this problem is to postulate a realm of non-formal “ideal objects” through which content is somehow constituted. Such a *material a priori* might provide a means of accounting for the possibility of experience without needing to refer to a process of judgment. In chapter two we examine the possibility that the application of transcendental “entities” and “processes” has nothing to do with the how content is possible. But rather that content is manifested by means of the influence of a non-formal, or *material, a priori* structure of awareness. Unfortunately, some aspects of this particular phenomenological approach will be shown to be unsatisfactory and in the third chapter we return again to what is perhaps a more conventional approach.

In chapter three we turn to our attentions to the thirteenth century and the writings of Meister Eckhart. Although Eckhart's primary concern is "to explain what the holy Christian faith and the two Testaments maintain"³ he often does so through the appropriation of fundamentally Aristotelian ideas. Eckhart's explanations of how the mind comes to determine the world relies, at least in part, on the idea that ideal objects "exist potentially" in the core of the mind ("the One"). Eckhart's analysis of the how the mind functions to render things determinate is often put in terms of a "movement" of illumination through which the potentially existent Forms are rendered actually so. But Eckhart's account is ultimately not dependent on there "being" a proliferation of such entities either potentially or actually. In the final analysis Eckhart suggests that there is no "being", either determinate or indeterminate in the ground of the mind. The mind, in its capacity to render intelligible forms, is fundamentally groundless. Unfortunately, considered as a response to the problem of content Eckhart's analysis is perhaps unsatisfactory because, as with Kant's account, it suggests that content is ultimately possible by means of a "that" about which nothing can be known. It is here that Eckhart, like Kant, draws our attention to a fundamental connection between this "that" and a "supersensible" reality with moral "attributes".

Chapter four begins by observing that the apparent permanence and substantiality of our everyday experience, which provides the context within which Kant's problem arises, is held by Buddhism to be a partial view which needs to be balanced with the insight that all phenomena, including "self", are

³ E. Colledge and B. McGinn, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, London: SPCK, 1981, p. 123.

ultimately impermanent (*anitya*) and without any substantial or eternal essence (*anātman*). Since Buddhism adheres to a philosophy of universal flux wherein anything existent is momentary it holds that a “subject” emerges *with* a “world”. Hence, Buddhist philosophy is generally inconsistent with the idea that there is some “self” which can be known *a priori* of “acts of synthesis” and through which content is rendered possible. Thus, any “that” on which content is to rest, i.e., any “that whereby a synthetic apprehension of the whole becomes possible”, must itself be *a priori* to the appearance of “subject” and “world”. Chapter four examines how this is possible in the philosophy of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

In chapter five we note that the findings of the previous chapters come into conflict with some of the conclusions that John McDowell arrives at in “Mind and World”. Of particular interest is McDowell’s attempt to mate Kant’s notion of “spontaneity” to a pregnant notion of a “second nature” and to draw, from this mating, conclusions concerning the interdependent arising of a meaningful world. Although sympathetic to McDowell’s basic aim of reconciling “reason and nature” in responding to the problem of content, this chapter is critical of some aspects of McDowell’s approach. In particular the chapter takes issue with aspects of McDowell’s appropriation of certain aspects of Kantian and Aristotelian philosophy. McDowell relies on Aristotle’s notion of how practical wisdom is acquired to explicate his argument that the acquisition and employment of conceptual capacities by the understanding is not “spooky”. But, as we will show, Aristotle’s account of the acquisition of “practical wisdom” as a kind of second nature relies on an augmented platonism in a way that renders its acquisition “spooky” in a manner not anticipated by McDowell. Although there certainly is a

mundane aspect to the acquisition of “practical wisdom”, the necessity of experience with particulars to that acquisition, in light of Aristotle’s theory that particulars are constituted through the employment of potential “forms”, demands that the employment of such potential “forms” is requisite for the acquisition of “practical wisdom”. Hence, put simply, the “spooky” part of the story is required to account for the acquisition of the “mundane” part. Moreover, we will argue that Kant’s notion of “spontaneity” cannot, in any straightforward manner, be plucked from his transcendental project and mated to a fundamentally Aristotelian notion of a second nature. In this way we will attempt to focus the material of the previous chapters and lead to some general conclusions concerning the role of *a priori* structure of awareness in accounts of content.

Finally, in chapter six we examine an influential line of contemporary thought on the problem of content as it is elucidated in Susan Hurley’s recent book *Consciousness in Action*. Like McDowell, Hurley is concerned both with accounting for the constitutive power of “spontaneity” and providing a role for normativity without invoking anything “spooky”. But unlike McDowell she employs contemporary cognitive psychological and philosophical theorizing to outline a complex alternative to theories that rely on transcendental intermediaries. At the heart of Hurley’s alternative theory is the hypothesis that complex dynamic systems are central to cognitive performance. Hurley’s work is part of a renewed interest among philosophers and cognitive scientists in the use of dynamics as a framework for thinking about cognitive functioning. Central to Hurley’s approach is the hypothesis that a constitutive interdependence of perception and action emerges from dynamic feedback systems of natural causal relations. This interdependence, she suggests, has implications for providing a

response to the problem of content. In chapter six we will examine Hurley's approach and attempt to evaluate its explanatory potential with respect to our problem. In the course of our examination we will have occasion to observe certain consistencies that exist between some of Hurley's findings and some of the philosophies of previous chapters. These consistencies point to a possibility that Hurley does not address. Buddhist philosophy contains a line of thought, which also does not rely on transcendental intermediaries, does not presuppose content, and hence is not subject to infinite regresses. We will complete the dissertation with an evaluation of this line of thought in light of our previous discussions.

Chapter 1

Immanuel Kant and the Problem of Judgment

1. A recent book entitled *The Concept of Political Judgment* aims to “uncover and clarify what we really mean when we say that this or that person has, or this or that action was the product of, good judgment”.⁴ The author devotes a large portion of his book to a critical examination of how judgment has historically been addressed by philosophy because he considers political judgment to be a species of the larger genus of judgment itself. The book is composed of four large chapters the first of which is devoted to the intellectual history surrounding the problem of political judgment and so does not concern us. The second chapter, however, begins in earnest to take up an examination of judgment *simpliciter* by informing us that the process by which judgments are made has for a long time been understood on a model of categorical subsumption, a process which overtly resembles the activity of placing things in boxes. Thus, for instance, the judgment that *Churchill was a statesman* utilizes the universal concept - *statesman* - to categorize a particular - Churchill.

Any judgment—as the bringing together somehow of a universal and particular—would seem to require at least three things: (1) the universal *qua*

⁴ P. J. Steinberger, *The Concept of Political Judgment*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. viii.

concept must be identified, and this means being able to specify at least some of the conceptual features that make it what it is; (2) the particular must be identified, and this means being able to specify at least some of the characteristics that individuate it; and (3) there must be a mental faculty that allows us to establish some kind of demonstrable and explicable connection between the universal's features and the particular's characteristics such that we can say with some justification that "X is (or is not) Y." Together these three presuppositions may be thought to compose the basis of a *tripartite model of judgment*.⁵

To accept this tripartite model of judgment has historically meant that one endorses one or another form of rationalism, i.e., views which emphasize the role of reason. This may be due in part to the first and second requirements which seem to entail conceptual definitions specified in terms of some or other logical or linguistic tradition that will allow for the specification of rules of subsumption (e.g., Churchill was a statesman just in case ...).

2. Plato's *Gorgias* offers an early defense of just such a model of judgment. The *Gorgias*, which is an examination of rhetoric and the business of teaching rhetoric, defends a fundamental dichotomy between craft-activity (*technén*) and experience-activity (*empeirian*). *Technén*, as its ancient Greek origin suggests, is closely related to technical activity characterized by the application of rules and principles applied toward the achievement of some end. For Plato, it is the existence of these rules and principles that permits true judgments to be made. Thus, for example, an engineer judges how much concrete is needed in the

⁵ Ibid., p. 91.

foundation of a building by applying the rules and principles that define his vocation. *Empeirian*, on the other hand, such as cookery, which aims to make things delicious, are not able to provide the explicit rules and principles which would be necessary for true judgments to be made. According to Plato, taste is random and inexplicable. When one claims that something is delicious one is simply commenting that one finds eating it a pleasurable experience. But since not everyone finds the same things pleasurable there are no reliable defining characteristics by which to ascertain whether something is or is not pleasurable. Consequently, judgments concerning whether something is or is not delicious are, strictly speaking, not judgments at all, but merely indications of preference. Thus, whereas *technén* comports well with the tripartite model of judgment *empeirian* does not.⁶

But with respect to judgment there are good reasons to believe that the distinction between craft-activities and experience-activities cannot be coherently maintained. As Steinberger notes, Plato himself concedes that for any given experience-activity some individuals seem to be more proficient than others and that this proficiency relies on *experience* with reliable particulars. The knack of a good cook is thus dependent on such things as; a familiarity with ingredients, knowledge of the effects of heat on those ingredients, and of the apparent likes and dislikes of his patrons. The existence of good chefs implies their reliability and the reliability of the ingredients to respond in predictable ways. For a chef to consistently prepare a good prime rib dinner, for example, he must know a prime rib cut when he sees one, and be able to combine it with the proper heat and

⁶ For a more complete treatment of this issue cf. *ibid.*, pp. 94-102.

braising technique. Thus, good chefs have knowledge of universals, knowledge of particulars and a capacity, however unreflective, for bringing together particulars and universals. Consequently, experience-activities, such as cookery, appear to pass all three tests of the tripartite model of judgment.

Unfortunately, this Platonic dichotomy between craft-activity and experience-activity informs the entire debate about the concept of judgment. It first recurs in an augmented form in Aristotle's sixth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* with the distinction between theoretical wisdom (*sophia*) and practical wisdom (*phronésis*). At the time that Aristotle was writing, the popular usage of *sophia* described the skill of clever craftsmen, poets and artists⁷ and *phronésis* was often used as a synonym. However, Aristotle refines the use of these terms such that *sophia* is reserved for that type of analytical knowledge acquired through, and utilized in, the process of discovering what is objectively the case in the world (e.g., scientific knowledge) and *phronésis* is made up of an intuitive kind of knowledge utilized in the study of human affairs and other "subjective" matters - that is, things which are capable of going this way or that. *Phronésis* also includes a judgmental capacity that enables one to know what to do in any given situation. This is an immediate and unreflective ability that Aristotle likens to a kind of perception (*aisthesis*) and associates with the possession of understanding (*synesis*) and insight-judgment (*gnomé*).⁸ *Phronésis*, *gnomé*, and *synesis* are generally found together in persons of *arété* - excellence of character.⁹

⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. M. Oswald, trans., New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1962, n., pp. 155-156.

⁸ Ibid., NE 1142a 22-32. *Sophia* also requires a kind of insight - *nous*, plus objective conceptual or analytical knowledge - *epistémé*, and can exist independently of *phronésis* in any given person (1141b 7-12). Steinberger (1993) points out that Aristotle also uses *nous* with reference to *phronésis* although it is often believed that he is using the term in a very different way (p. 120).

⁹ Ibid., NE 1143a25.

In contrast to Plato, Aristotle argues that both *sophia* and *phronésis* are types of knowledge and that true judgments are possible in both the scientific and the human realm. The reliability of scientific judgments is roughly guaranteed by the rules of logic and by adherence to the tripartite model. Aristotle does not make clear, however, how practical judgments can be reliable and epistemologically equal to scientific judgments. What can be gleaned from Aristotle is that reliable and correct judgments in the realm of human affairs are determined by excellence of deliberation, understanding, and a kind of insight that may or may not be different from that which is employed in matters of scientific judgment. But for Aristotle practical judgment remains a fairly mysterious process that largely defies systematic analysis.

3. Over the next 2000 years or so many attempts were made to address the problems surrounding immediate and non-inferential forms of knowledge and judgment. Writers such as Addison and Pope, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, Burke and Hume made contributions to the subject in their discussions of the nature of aesthetic judgment. They invariably saw that the production, identification, and appreciation of beautiful objects could not be understood plausibly as cases of logical or scientific endeavor.¹⁰ These inquiries culminate in the Kant's *Critique of Judgment* where we find for the first time a systematic attempt to account for the kind of practical spontaneous judgment that must be involved in that "process" through which things are rendered determinate.

Kant's theory of judgment offers one of the most comprehensive and powerful accounts of human judgment in modern philosophy. In its totality it

¹⁰ Steinberger, p. 128.

covers all three of Kant's *Critiques*. As is well known the main task of the first *Critique* is to establish a stable basis for mathematics, science, and metaphysics by demonstrating the possibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge claims.¹¹ Kant suggests that these claims, although not analytic, are both universal and necessary. Hence demonstrating their possibility amounts to demonstrating the possibility of non-analytic knowledge. But since "judgment" is necessary to the acquisition of all knowledge Kant finds that he must establish the necessity of synthetic *a priori* "judgments" - that is, he must demonstrate that the pre-conditions of experience guarantee that the world, in so far as we are able to encounter it, will "harmonize" with, or conform to, our mental abilities so as to permit the discovery of universal truths.¹²

Kant's model of this type of judgment is a variant on the model of categorical subsumption. Judgment, he observes in the third *Critique*, consists in the *subject's ability* to "think the particular as contained under the universal".¹³ As we observed previously, a central component of subsumption consists in our awareness that a sensation we are having *matches* a certain concept.¹⁴ The judgment that, "This is a dog", for example, requires that we be conscious that the sensation we are having matches the concept "dog". On this scenario the possibility of knowledge depends critically on two factors: 1) the universal and objective nature of the concept being employed, and 2) the fidelity of the matching process responsible for determining that, "This is in fact a dog". The

¹¹ Cf. for example, the Introduction to I. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Werner S. Pluhar, ed., Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 1790, 1987.

¹² I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Werner S. Pluhar, ed., Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 1781, 1787, 1996, A 7-10/B 11-14, pp. 51-5.

¹³ CJ 179, *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁴ Cf. also *ibid.*, p. xxxiv.

faculty that Kant usually suggests enables a match to take place between entities as dissimilar as an intuition and a concept is the imagination.¹⁵ But exactly how the imagination functions to match concepts with intuitions is problematic for Kant.

Generally speaking the function of imagination is to “synthesize” the manifold of intuition, i.e., that which is given to our senses, into a form useable by human discursive intelligence. As Crowther observes this “synthesis” has a threefold structure;

(a) in the ‘synthesis of apprehension’ the manifold of sensible intuitions is ‘run through and held together’, that is, the parts of the manifold must be individuated in time. However,

even this apprehension of the manifold would not by itself produce an image and a connection of impressions, were it not that there exists a subjective ground which leads the mind to reinstate a preceding perception alongside the subsequent perception to which it has passed, and so to form a whole series of perceptions.¹⁶

This ‘subjective ground’ Kant terms (b) the ‘synthesis of reproduction in imagination’. [Finally, this must be augmented by]... (c) ‘the synthesis of recognition in a concept’.¹⁷

¹⁵ Imagination has a central role to play in judgment and, in fact, “mediates between many of the dualisms that Kant employs throughout his work - including those between concepts and intuition, thought and sensibility, spontaneity and passivity, subject and object, and, somewhat more indirectly, nature and freedom”. Cf. S. L. Gibbons, *Kant’s Theory of Imagination: Bridging Gaps in Judgement and Experience*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 2.

¹⁶ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Norman Kemp Smith, trans., London: Macmillan, A 121, p. 144 in Paul Crowther, *The Kantian Sublime*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 52.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Steps (a) and (b) function to render the manifold useable by the faculty of concepts, i.e., the understanding, which must be applied in step (c) in order to render something intelligible, i.e., “to bring this synthesis *to concepts*”.¹⁸ In the first *Critique* this application of understanding to an imaginative synthesis is a *schematizing* activity involving the application of rule-like *schemata* to intuitions.¹⁹ The schematism of the understanding provides judgment with a rule under which it subsumes given empirical intuitions.²⁰ The function of the schematism, therefore, is to provide a basis for the act of matching a concept to an intuition of an object.

If this all sounds a bit obscure the reader may take solace in the fact that it was also a bit obscure to Kant. David Bell has observed that Kant attributes the procedure of schematization variously:

to sensibility (B. 186), to understanding (B. 179), to empirical, reproductive imagination (B. 180), and to *a priori* productive imagination (B. 181).

Schemata are distinguished from concepts (B. 180), and then identified with them (*ibid.*); they are said to be determinate (B. 179), and also indeterminate (B. 180); and it is in one place implied that empirical concepts do not require schemata (B. 176), but in another that they do (B. 180).²¹

These apparent inconsistencies suggest that Kant may have been less than satisfied with his explanation of the act of judgment in the first *Critique*. He writes, for instance: “This schematism of our understanding, in its application to

¹⁸ A 78, Pluhar, 1996, p. 130.

¹⁹ Cf. A 141/B 180, *ibid.*, p. 213.

²⁰ Cf. FI 212, Pluhar, 1987, p. 400.

²¹ D. Bell, The Art of Judgement, *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Philosophy*, XCVI(382):221- 244, 1987, pp. 228-9.

appearances and their mere form, is an art concealed in the depths of the human soul ...".²² We know, at the very least, that he found his account incomplete for in the third *Critique* we find him reconsidering some of the same problems that exercised him in the first *Critique*. In particular problems that the schematism was designed to address - most centrally, the problem of judgment.

The postulation of schemata then can be viewed as Kant's first attempt to overcome a philosophical problem, which is articulated quite clearly in the first *Critique*. He writes:

If understanding in general is to be viewed as the faculty of rules, judgment will be the faculty of subsuming under rules; that is, of distinguishing whether something does or does not stand under a given rule. General logic contains, and can contain, no rules for judgment. [For] if it sought to give general instruction how we are to subsume under these rules, that is, to distinguish whether something does or does not come under them, that could only be by means of another rule. This in turn, for the very reason that it is a rule, again demands guidance from judgment. And thus it appears that, though understanding is capable of being instructed, and of being equipped with rules, judgment is a peculiar talent which can be practised only, and cannot be taught.²³

If the understanding is to be taken seriously as the faculty of rules, then the act of understanding anything, as the application of this faculty to sensible intuitions, is an act of judgment as defined above. The problem of judgment, therefore, is that if we are ever to be secure in our understanding of things judgment itself must be

²² A 141-142, B 180-181, in *ibid.*, p. 230.

²³ B 171-2, in *ibid.*, p. 227.

made secure. For Kant, this means that judgment must be rendered rational, reliable, defensible, and intelligible - that is, it must be based on universal and objective rules, i.e., laws. But a rule is merely a formal principle that, Kant implies, cannot provide its own internal measure of correctness. Kant finds himself caught in a trap of his own devising. If the world is to be rendered intelligible rules must be applied, but the possibility of content demands that these rules be guided. This guidance, however, cannot itself be rule governed. Thus, Kant is led to conclude the passage above by suggesting of the understanding, the very foundation of knowledge, that it depends for its security on "a particular talent," a kind of *knowing how*, about which he finds he can say very little.

The centrality of this problem to Kant's critical system demanded that he redress judgment *simpliciter*.²⁴ Hence in the third *Critique* we find Kant reexamining the relations between judgment and sensibility, and in particular "the relation between judgment and feeling, that is, between what is potentially objective and what is necessarily only subjective in our discursive mental abilities."²⁵ According to Bell, the third *Critique* presents Kant's attempt to elaborate "an account of our subjective, non-cognitive, spontaneous response to experience; and a model for this is to be found in the nature of aesthetic experience".²⁶ Aesthetic judgment provides Kant with a model of those processes underlying all knowledge. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to a critical evaluation of Kant's attempt to redress the problem of judgment in the third *Critique*.

²⁴ Thus, he writes: "A critique of pure reason, i.e., of our power of judging on *a priori* principles, would be incomplete if it failed to include, as a special part, a treatment of judgment, which, since it is a cognitive power, also lays claim to *a priori* principles;..." (CJ 168, in *ibid.*, p. 233).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 231-2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

4. In the third *Critique* Kant distinguishes between two types of judgment - determinant and reflective. Determinant judgment, which falls under the rubric of the tripartite model, was the primary concern of the first *Critique* and involves the subsumption of particulars under universals which we already possess.²⁷

Reflective judgment is less intuitively straightforward. Recall that the first criterion of the tripartite model of judgment is that the universal *qua* concept be identified, and this means being able to specify at least some of the conceptual features through which it is determined. If the universal cannot be adequately specified then there can, of course, be no rule through which the particular may be subsumed.²⁸ Reflective judgment does not permit the specification of conceptual features. Hence, it cannot be understood as the application of a universal to a particular. Instead it begins with particulars and searches for appropriately matching universals. The main role of reflective judgment then is in the supplying of concepts appropriate to the particular with which one is, whether in perception or thought, immediately engaged.²⁹ This fact explains why Kant considers reflective judgment to be foundational to all cognition.³⁰ As Gibbons observes, Kant believes that: “no empirical determinant judgments are possible without reflective judgment supplying the empirical concepts”.³¹

Here, one might ask, what is the import of an account of how concepts are arrived at for the problem of judgment? The problem of judgment, as defined above, is a problem of concept application not concept formation. So why does

²⁷ Cf. CJ 179, Pluhar, 1987, p. 18.

²⁸ Reflective judgment is still a matter of matching a universal and a particular but in this case the particular is given and the search for a universal must take place in the free play of imagination as it is guided by the indeterminate principle of nature’s purposiveness.

²⁹ As with any *vorstellung*.

³⁰ Cf. CJ 218, Pluhar, 1987, pp. 62-3.

³¹ Gibbons, 1994, pp. 81-2. Cf. also FI 212n, *ibid.*, p. 400.

Kant, if he is concerned with redressing the problem of judgment in the third *Critique*, focus on how concepts are arrived at? Consider for a moment what, on Kant's analysis of judgment, happens when one faces a particular. The act of judgment through which it is rendered intelligible is a subsumptive act requiring the application of concepts. But, as we have duly noted, not any concept will do. Only that concept which "matches" a given particular will unlock its meaning.³² But how is it that one knows which concept to employ at any given moment? A conceptual toolbox analogy will suggest the beginnings of an answer. On Kant's account having the faculty of imagination present an "I know not what" before one's faculty of understanding is, to some extent, comparable to being faced with a mechanical watch that isn't working. Finding an appropriate concept is akin to peering into an old watchmaker's toolbox for a solution. Now if one is to have a hope of fixing the watch one must be able to choose those tools necessary for the job. But to know which tools to choose depends on knowing how to use them. Consequently, to the extent that this analogy holds true of concepts, one can only know which concepts to pick from a conceptual toolbox if one also knows how to use them. But here we must recall that Kant is not working with a model of mind in which concepts lie formed and waiting for employment. Although Kant does, on occasion, speak about the "possession" of concepts. He also believes that relations of time "lie wholly outside the concepts of understanding"³³ Hence, for Kant, those "judgments" through which the world is rendered intelligible require not the selection and employment of concepts, but their immanent synthesis and

³² Cf. B 130; Imagine trying to apply the concept cat to a horse. Attention to detail will reveal a lack of "fit".

³³ B 159, Pluhar, p. 196.

employment.³⁴ The use of concepts is “based on the spontaneity of thought”- that is, on the understanding as the power of judgment.³⁵ Thus, every time I face a presentation those concepts most appropriate to it must, in a sense, spontaneously arise to meet the challenge of “uniting the manifold”. If this is correct then it makes Kant’s preoccupation with concept formation intelligible. For it appears that an account of how “appropriate” concepts are arrived at cannot be meaningfully separated from an account of how they are employed.

Kant faces a colossal problem. The possibility of knowledge requires that judgment be guided so that it can occur in a systematic and non-arbitrary fashion. But this guidance cannot determine conditions of application for a concept because then it would function like a rule and so be subject to the problem of judgment.³⁶ Kant’s response to this problem is to postulate the existence of an “indeterminate principle” contained within the process of judgment itself. To secure the necessity of this principle for our cognitive abilities he provides it with an *a priori* status.³⁷ Without an *a priori* principle of judgment, Kant claims, the attempt to organize nature systematically would be “mere groping about among natural forms,” and that success in this task would be “entirely fortuitous”.³⁸ Only an *a priori* principle, he suggests, can guarantee that nature will “conform to our

³⁴ Cf. A 86/B 118, *ibid.*, p. 143; A 126-8, p. 171-3; B 148-9, pp. 188-9.

³⁵ A 68-9/B 93-4, *ibid.*, p. 122-3; A 79/B 105, p. 131; cf. also A 126, p. 171.

³⁶ In the first *Critique* Kant suggests that a necessary *unity* must guide judgment in that creative and spontaneous capacity which makes content possible. This *unity* is, very generally and briefly, guaranteed by the pure categories operating through the original synthetic unity of apperception. Cf. A 127, *ibid.* pp. 172-173; also § 19-20, B 141-4, p. 183-6. By the time that Kant came to write his third *Critique* he may have come to see the limitations of his account of this *unity* as that through which the categories guarantee the existence of an ordered universe for our cognitive abilities to come to grips with.

³⁷ Guyer, 1979, pp. 42-3.

³⁸ FI IV, Pluhar, p. 210, and in *ibid.*, p. 49.

power of judgment”.³⁹ The indeterminate *a priori* principle of reflective judgment then is Kant’s attempt to guarantee that nature will, in the end, conform to the task which judgment has been set, i.e., the “rational” and systematic organization of nature.

Unfortunately, there are problems with the postulation of an indeterminate *a priori* principle of purposiveness in nature. The idea of an indeterminate principle is confusing. Kant, however, offers very little in the way of satisfying explication. Hence, one can legitimately question Kant’s attempt to capture the forces responsible for rendering content possible, and our cognitive life veridical, under the rubric of a “principle”. Moreover, even if one does not wish to quibble over language, one may wonder whether Kant is not employing an overly strong model of rationality. It is possible that Kant’s demand for an *a priori* principle is motivated by a certain distrust of nature. In the first *Critique* he claims that:

reason has insight only into what it itself produces according to its own plan; and...must not allow nature by itself to keep it in leading strings, as it were, but must - using principles that underlie its judgments - proceed according to constant laws and compel nature to answer reason’s own questions. For otherwise our observations, made without following any plan outlined in advance, are contingent, i.e., they have no coherence at all in terms of a necessary law - even though such a law is what reason seeks and requires.⁴⁰

³⁹ Kant writes: “if there is to be a concept or rule that arises originally from the power of judgment, it would have to be a concept of things of nature *insofar as nature conforms to our power of judgment.*” (FI 202, *ibid.*, p. 392)

⁴⁰ B xiii, Pluhar, 1996, p. 19.

This is, in fact, Kant's justification for the requirement of knowing things *a priori*. As it stands, however, it does not comport well with his notion of reflective judgment as something more or less beyond conscious control. In his book on the third *Critique* Guyer argues that his indeterminate *a priori* principle "does nothing but transform our own need for systematicity into a self-serving delusion that nature is systematic".⁴¹ Guyer also argues persuasively along these lines that the *a priori* principle of purposiveness is actually precluded by Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment.⁴² Unfortunately, as we shall see, extracting the offending *a priori* principle from Kant's account of aesthetic judgment reduces it to a primarily "psychological" theory that is incapable of providing the security he seeks.

5. Kant refers to two forms of the power of reflective judgment. Under the first form two "presentations" are "held up" through the operation of the faculty of imagination for the purpose of reflective comparison of those objects in light of a concept. Kant has very little to say about this first type of reflective judgment beyond the fact that it exists and it is of little consequence to our work. Of much more interest to him and to us is the second form of reflective judgment in which a "presentation" is "held up" before the subject's "cognitive powers" without the aid of concepts. For it is through Kant's account of this latter form of reflective judgment that we discover the process which he suggests lies at the basis of human understanding, a spontaneous process utilized by the faculty of judgment

⁴¹ Guyer, p. 47. This criticism seems rather weak and it may be that Guyer here belies his own mistrust of nature. Only a little reflection on the matter is enough to reveal that nature is thoroughly systematic. Do not birds fly south in the winter and for good reason?

⁴² Guyer, pp. 50-1 & 83.

in the formation and application of concepts.⁴³ It is this latter form of reflective judgment that Kant refers to as “aesthetic” and of which the judgment of taste is an iconic example.⁴⁴

The first thing to note in the apprehension of a beautiful object, Kant argues, is that the faculties of imagination and understanding do not interact on a conceptual level as they would in the case of determinant judgment but instead “harmonize” in a “free play”.⁴⁵ Kant observes that:

a merely *reflective* judgment about a given object *can be aesthetic*; [it is aesthetic] if (before we attend to a comparison of the object with others) the power of judgment, having no concept ready for the given intuition, holds [for the sake of comparison] the imagination [itself] (as merely apprehends the object) up to the understanding [itself] ([so that] a concept as such is exhibited) and perceives a [certain] relation between the two cognitive powers, a relation that constitutes the condition, which we can only sense, under which [alone] we can use the power of judgment objectively (namely, the mutual harmony of imagination and understanding).⁴⁶

Thus, aesthetic judgment, as a species of reflective judgment, occurs just in case a harmony of the cognitive faculties occurs and is sensed as having occurred.

The reason that this harmonization is experienced as pleasurable is explained in Section VII. There Kant re-introduces purposiveness and claims that

⁴³ For further defense of this interpretation of the role of the third *Critique* see Bell, 1987; Caygill, 1989; and Vossenkuhl, 1989.

⁴⁴ It is important to keep in mind the fact that Kant’s use of the term “*ästhetisch*”, as Bell so astutely points out, simply means “belonging to sensibility” either through feeling or cognition, and did not, in Kant’s time, possess its modern meaning as something akin to: that which pertains to beauty (1987, p. 232).

⁴⁵ CJ 217, Pluhar, 1987, p. 61.

⁴⁶ FI, 224, *ibid.*, p. 412..

the feeling of pleasure or displeasure which is experienced within the context of the harmonizing function is an indication of the purposiveness of the object for our cognitive powers.⁴⁷ In the General Comment that follows the First Division of the Analytic Kant suggests;

that the regularity leading to the concept of an object is the indispensable condition (*conditio sine qua non*) for apprehending [*fassen*] the object in a single presentation and determining the manifold in the object's form; [and] this determination is a purpose [we pursue] with regard to cognition, and so related to cognition it is indeed always connected with a liking (since achieving any aim [*Absicht*], even a problematic one, is accompanied by a liking).⁴⁸

Thus, purposiveness can be understood roughly along the lines of a flag to the powers of cognition in the search for meaning. Since the activity of “purposiveness detection” is foundational to cognition generally it is responsible for furthering its inherent aim (i.e., content - the determination of the manifold). But as Kant argues in Section VI of the Introduction: “The attainment of an aim [*Absicht*] is always connected with the feeling of pleasure;...” [in cases where success is not guaranteed].⁴⁹ Consequently, that the harmonizing of the faculties should result in a feeling of pleasure follows from the fact it enables the attainment of an inherent end of cognition just in case one is not completely sure what one is going to find.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ CJ VII, *ibid.*, 189-190.

⁴⁸ CJ 242, *ibid.*, p. 93.

⁴⁹ CJ 187, *ibid.*, p. 27 (brackets mine).

⁵⁰ Guyer argues that since the *a priori* principle of purposiveness was apparently designed to guarantee that judgment will be successful, and that nature will be perceived as purposive, it is inconsistent with the only way in which reflective judgment can be linked to pleasure, i.e., in the

Our characterization of Kant's account of the harmonization of the cognitive faculties now has it that the indeterminate *a priori* principle of purposiveness acts as a guide to the harmonizing function and pleasure is its product. But matters are not quite as straightforward as this characterization leads one to believe. We, for instance, have yet to explain what it is that secures the harmonization of the cognitive faculties. In the First Introduction Kant states:

if the form of an object given in empirical intuition is of such a character that the *apprehension* in the imagination, of the object's manifold agrees with the *exhibition* of a concept of understanding (which concept this is being indeterminate), then imagination and understanding are-in mere reflection-in mutual harmony...; and the object is perceived as purposive, [though] purposive merely for judgment.⁵¹

Gibbons suggests that this passage "emphasizes the point that the harmony is a felt response to a form exhibited in intuition,..." which "allows us to experience empirical objects in the natural world as suited to, or harmonizing with, our capacity for judgment;...".⁵² This interpretation is consistent with our characterization of the harmonization as a **response** to the "form" of purposiveness. But the above passage also suggests that the **perception** of an object as purposive is **dependent on**, or identical with, the harmonizing of understanding and imagination. Thus, it seems that although the harmonizing function is set in motion by the form of purposiveness the perception of the object in question as

satisfaction of contingent aims (cf. Guyer, 1979, pp. 79-83 for a complete analysis). But, it seems to me that this is to forget the fact that the *a priori* principle of purposiveness is indeterminate and hence, a merely regulative power which, although it might be claimed to guarantee success in the long run, doesn't always seem to work. The resultant contingency is precisely what permits the surprise necessary to produce pleasure as well as the possibility of getting things wrong.

⁵¹ FI 221, in Gibbons, 1994, p. 93.

⁵² Gibbons, 1994, p. 93.

purposive only becomes possible after the faculties are in free play. But even this is not completely accurate because in Section 12 of the “Analytic of The Beautiful” Kant writes: “The very consciousness of a merely formal purposiveness in the play of the subject’s cognitive powers, accompanying a presentation by which an object is given, is that pleasure”.⁵³ This passage makes it clear that the experience of pleasure accompanying the harmonization function *just is* an experience of purposiveness. Thus, purposiveness itself seems to be completely psychologically transparent. The cognitive faculties may be able to respond to it, but it is not directly perceivable.

Now, as Guyer observes, it would be nice to suppose that what Kant is arguing is that there are different pleasures (and/or pains), and hence different types of purposiveness, which attend the experience of any aesthetically considered object. If Kant were to admit types of pleasure into his theory of aesthetic judgment this would go some way toward clearing up two significant problems. First, it would become much easier to make sense of how one is to recognize when a given pleasure is an instance of aesthetically determined pleasure as opposed to pleasure that is connected with an interest. Second, it would be much easier to understand how reflective judgment could be an explanatory ground to acts of understanding, as the application of concepts to intuitions, because the types of pleasure could provide “information” to the understanding and so provide a “contentual” basis through which one could differentiate relative to concepts. In this case an object would be beautiful just in case it “felt” beautiful. Such an interpretation, however, would fly in the face of

⁵³ CJ 222, Pluhar, 1987, p. 68.

the passages in Section VII of the Introduction which suggest that all feelings of pleasure are identical and devoid of objective significance.⁵⁴ Thus, the feeling of aesthetic pleasure does not admit of types and cannot provide information about the world. The main problem with this position is that it appears to make one “feeling”, which is devoid of “cognitive import”, the basis of different judgments concerning different objects.

6. Leaving this problem aside for the moment let us examine more closely Kant’s model of the process of aesthetic judgment. According to Guyer, although Kant is not always consistent in distinguishing between the unintentional harmonizing function which is activated by a “purposeful” object and the “judging” of that object to be beautiful, Kant’s theory of judgment must, if it is to be intelligible, maintain that the;

declaration that an object is beautiful rests on two conceptually distinct acts of judgment: one, the “unintentional” reflection which produces the pleasure of aesthetic response; the other,... [the] quite possibly intentional exercise of reflective judgment which leads to an actual judgment of taste....⁵⁵

Guyer explains the need for this differentiation shortly thereafter by pointing out that:

Kant describes the feeling of pleasure as both the product of judgment and the ground of the determination for judgment; yet if aesthetic judgment resulted from a single act, this would be to say that the same feeling of

⁵⁴ FI 224, Guyer, 1979, p. 103.

⁵⁵ Guyer, 1979, p. 110.

pleasure both succeeded, as its product, and yet preceded, as its evidence or ground, a single judgment. This is clearly absurd.⁵⁶

The intelligibility, it seems, can only be restored by supposing Kant to have divided his model of the process of aesthetic judgment into the two phases that are outlined above. In this case the feeling of pleasure would be the product of the “subjective estimation” of the object and the ground of the “declarative judgment” of the object.

This twofold approach to Kant’s account of reflective judgment can be understood more fully through considering his, until now, de-emphasized claim that judgments of taste have universal validity. Kant writes that;

someone who feels pleasure in the mere reflection on the form of an object, without any concern about a concept, rightly lays claim to everyone’s assent, even though this judgment is empirical and a singular judgment. For the basis of this pleasure is found in the universal, though subjective, condition of reflective judgments, namely, the purposive harmony of an object (whether a product of nature or of art) with the mutual relation of the cognitive powers (imagination and understanding) that are required for every empirical cognition. Hence the pleasure in a judgment of taste is indeed dependent on an empirical presentation and cannot be connected *a priori* with any concept (we cannot determine *a priori* what object will or will not conform to taste; we must try it out); but the pleasure is still the basis determining this judgment, solely because we are aware that it rests merely on reflection and the universal though only subjective condition of

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 112.

objects generally, the harmony for which the form of the object is purposive.⁵⁷

Thus, since the pleasure that arises in response to a beautiful object is due to an underlying purposive unity between the object and the cognitive faculties of all human beings one may claim universal validity for any judgments of taste which are based on the experience of such pleasure. This account carries within it two critical assumptions and an unfortunate conclusion. First, it presupposes a fundamental uniformity across human cognitive faculties such that their functioning accords with the demands of the indeterminate *a priori* principle of purposiveness. If the universality of aesthetic judgments, and hence of cognition generally, is to be guaranteed this “accordance” cannot be merely “psychological”. For a psychological theory of mind cannot provide the necessity which Kant’s theory demands. This means that the *a priori* principle of purposiveness must, in some way, be immanent to cognitive processes. Second, it presupposes the ability of any discerning subject to ascertain whether the pleasure in question resulted solely from the harmonizing of the faculties. Unfortunately, since no independent, or public, criterion can exist it is unclear how is one to know whether one has made a mistake. If one cannot know that a mistake has been made then neither can one know that a judgment is correct. Hence, to the extent that the judgment of beauty depends on a sensation of pleasure one cannot “know” whether an object is, or is not, beautiful. And from this Wittgenstein would no doubt conclude that the pleasure in question forms no part of the judgment of beauty.⁵⁸ To the extent that the third *Critique* is an attempt to ground

⁵⁷ CJ 191, Pluhar, 1987, p. 31.

⁵⁸ Cf. L. Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*. trans., G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, §258, p. 92, cf. also §270, p. 95.

a universal judgment in private experience the standard Wittgenstenian criticism will apply.

Further support of this general line of criticism is to be found if we consider making the declarative judgment of beauty dependent on the sensation of pleasure in light of the problem of judgment. If Kant's account of aesthetic judgment is to be taken as a reattempt at the problem of judgment it would appear that, since acts of determinate judgment are somehow dependent on aesthetic reflective judgment to supply empirical concepts, and reflective judgment ultimately depends on a "harmonizing function", which is tuned by an indeterminate formal purposiveness, then acts of determinate judgment will also depend on this purposiveness.⁵⁹ The only indication of this purposiveness that can reach our awareness, however, is a simple pleasure that, at a conscious level, is to be identified with the harmonization function. Now, as we have observed, "Kant nowhere argues that there are qualitative or phenomenological differences between pleasures,... and in many places he suggests the opposite".⁶⁰

Consequently, the nature of the pleasure in question cannot be a guide to judgment because no "information", i.e., no content, is available serve as a guide in the task of "synthesis of recognition in a concept". In other words, the presence or absence of this simple pleasure can in no way provide guidance in the task of "how to apply a rule". A remaining possibility is that "the form of finality", or

⁵⁹ Kant writes that reflective judgment "*seeks* concepts even for empirical presentations, *qua* empirical, must make for this [end] this further assumption: it must assume that nature, with its boundless diversity, has hit upon a division of this diversity... that enables our judgment to find accordance among natural forms it compares, and [so] enables it to *arrive* at empirical concepts." (FI 212n, Pluhar, 1987, p. 400)

⁶⁰ Guyer, 1979, p. 116.

purposiveness, itself is providing the necessary guidance for judgment. But as we will see this seems implausible.

The harmonization function is dependent on an *apprehended* “agreement” between the form of an object given in empirical intuition and the *exhibition* of an “indeterminate” concept of understanding (i.e., the “subject’s power of cognition”). At CJ 189-190 he writes that aesthetically produced “pleasure cannot express anything other than the object’s being commensurate with the cognitive powers that are, and insofar as they are, brought into play when we judge reflectively, and hence [express] merely a subjective formal purposiveness of the object”. Guyer suggests that this purposiveness is “formal”, and is hence referred to by Kant as the mere “form of purposiveness”, simply because it furthers the general, or “formal”, aim of knowledge itself in its task of unifying the manifold of intuition.⁶¹ But how would a merely “formal” purposiveness provide the causal efficacy that appears to be needed to secure the harmonizing function? Kant does not provide a clear answer to this question. However, he implies that it is the awareness, or consciousness, of this purposiveness, and hence of that simple pleasure referred to above, which plays the necessary causal role. Hence, once again, in Section 12 Analytic of The Beautiful Kant maintains:

The very consciousness of a merely formal purposiveness in the play of the subject’s cognitive powers, accompanying a presentation by which an object is given, is that [merely contemplative] pleasure. For this consciousness in aesthetic judgment contains a basis for determining the subject’s activity regarding the quickening of his cognitive powers, and

⁶¹ Guyer, 1979, pp. 217-18.

hence an inner causality (which is purposive) concerning cognition in general, which however is not restricted to a determinate cognition. Hence it contains a mere form of the subjective purposiveness of a presentation.⁶²

Unfortunately, as we argued above, the consciousness of a simple pleasure can neither serve as a reliable indicator of appearance of beautiful objects nor provide the guidance for a determinative judgment.

But this is not Kant's last word on these matters for in the Third Moment of the *Analytic of the Beautiful* we find a further explanation of the phenomenon of a merely "formal purposiveness" through Kant's attempt to introduce restrictions on what can and cannot be considered beautiful. Kant concludes the Third Moment by defining beauty as "an object's form of *purposiveness* insofar as it is perceived in the object *without the presentation of a purpose*".⁶³ A flower, he observes, "is considered beautiful, because in our perception of it we encounter a certain purposiveness that, given how we are judging the flower, we do not refer to any purpose whatever".⁶⁴ Kant's main intention here seems to be to suggest that *purposiveness without a purpose* or, as it is sometimes referred, the *form of finality*, is somehow taken "note of...in objects - even if only by reflection...", as essential to certain objects, states of mind, and actions.⁶⁵ But since this "form", being merely "formal", can, by his own definition, possess no conceivable

⁶² CJ 222, Pluhar, 1987, p. 68. Kant goes on from this quote to suggest that this consciousness of simple pleasure, is not only responsible for setting the cognitive faculties in a free play, but also of keeping them there. He claims that: "We *linger* in our contemplation of the beautiful, because this contemplation reinforces and reproduces itself." (p. 68) Thus, it appears, the consciousness of simple pleasure is both the ground and the product of the aesthetic judgment.

⁶³ CJ 236, *ibid.*, p. 84.

⁶⁴ CJ 236n, *ibid.*, p. 84.

⁶⁵ CJ 220, *ibid.*, p. 65.

“content” his explanation of it can point to none and so, once again, none can be available to guide judgment.⁶⁶

7. Kant’s discussion of the form of purposiveness is difficult to penetrate. According to Guyer, the traditional interpretation which suggests that Kant is arguing “that there are certain phenomenal forms which are characteristic of designed objects...” neither holds up to scrutiny nor renders his discussion of purposiveness intelligible.⁶⁷ Moreover, he suggests:

that the only purpose which beautiful objects can appear to fulfill without actually being judged to be designed is the general purpose of cognition itself. But unless we have already placed some constraints on the features by which the objects can produce the harmony of the faculties, their appearing designed for this purpose can imply no such constraints. [Hence, since Kant’s theory implies no such constraints] the appearance of design is a vacuous criterion for aesthetic judgment, for any appearance might satisfy some design.⁶⁸

Ultimately, Guyer suggests that the process is left as a mystery because we are ultimately left “with no candidates for finality of form at all”.⁶⁹ Crowther, however, objects to Guyer’s analysis of this issue and suggests instead that:

⁶⁶ Indeed in the First Introduction, in Section VII we find Kant arguing as follows: “Hence we then consider the purposiveness itself as merely subjective; by the same token, this [purposiveness] neither requires nor produces a determinate concept of the object, and judgment itself is not a cognitive one. Such a judgment is called an AESTHETIC *judgment of reflection*.” (FI 221, *ibid.*, p. 409)

⁶⁷ Guyer, 1979, p. 221.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 222. Guyer suggests that in the end Kant returns to the first *Critique* for his inspiration and by importing its perceptual theory into his aesthetic theory attempts a transcendental explanation of the harmonizing function based on the *a priori* forms of space and time. But “nothing in the concept of the free play of the faculties itself requires its association with the first *Critique*’s separation of form and matter of appearance” (p. 230). Further, the implications of this

in so far as the harmony requisite to the purpose of cognition is between the faculties of imagination and understanding, and does not involve reference to sensibility or desire, this, of itself, implies some rather severe constraints on what will contribute to subjective finality.⁷⁰

The nature of these constraints, he continues, are implicated in Kant's notion of disinterestedness outlined in the First Moment. In the First Moment Kant claims:

The delight which we connect with the representation of the real existence of an object is called interest. Such a delight, therefore, always involves a reference to the faculty of desire, either as its determining ground, or else as necessarily implicated with its determining ground.⁷¹

From this and other passages in the First Moment Crowther quite rightly points out that Kant connects interest in an object with the imputation of its "existence".⁷² The pleasure which is experienced as a result of an interest is the result of desires and expectations being met - that is, of how an object, whether real or imagined, effects or will effect "me." But the power of the object to affect me implies its existence. Hence, interest in an object implies its existence in some form. "A judgment of taste, on the other hand, is merely *contemplative*, i.e., it is a judgment indifferent to the existence of the object...".⁷³ Only judgments of this type are *free* from the compulsions that must be presupposed in cases where

importation lead to absurd consequences for Kant's basic aesthetic theory (Cf. Guyer, 1979, pp. 230-34).

⁷⁰ Crowther, 1989, p. 57.

⁷¹ I. Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, J.C. Meredith, trans., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973, §2, p. 42: Note that Pluhar translates this passage as follows: "Interest is what we call the liking we connect with the presentation of an object's existence. Hence such a liking always refers at once to our power of desire, either as a basis that determines it, or at any rate as necessarily connected with that determining basis." (CJ 204, 1987, p. 45)

⁷² Crowther, 1989, pp. 57-58.

⁷³ CJ 209, Pluhar, 1987, p. 51.

interest is the basis that determines approval.⁷⁴ Hence, interest in an intuition is inconsistent with the possibility of harmony in respect of its presentation.

One might expect that when Kant claims universal validity for claims of taste he would be claiming that truly beautiful objects will universally impart aesthetic pleasure or that we can reasonably expect a truly beautiful object to impart such feelings. However, the language that Kant uses in this regard suggests that what he is in fact claiming is that a judgment that something is beautiful involves the rightful *demand*, or expectation, that everyone else also experience that object as beautiful.⁷⁵ Kant writes that;

the *ought* in an aesthetic judgment, even once we have [*nach*] all the data needed for judging, is still uttered only conditionally. We solicit everyone else's assent because we have a basis for it that is common to all.⁷⁶

The fact of beauty, in part, follows from the use of the word "beautiful". For when I declare something to be beautiful it would be absurd to follow such a declaration with the phrase "to me" for otherwise the distinction between something being agreeable to me and being beautiful would collapse. Of course, the "basis" which Kant refers to in the passage above as justifying the demand for a common assent is simply "the effect arising from the free play of our cognitive powers ..." i.e., the experience of pleasure.⁷⁷ Thus, for Kant, judging an object to be beautiful amounts to claiming that everyone who perceives this object *should* find it pleasurable - all things being equal. But how, we must now return to ask, can one

⁷⁴ CJ 210, *ibid.*, p. 52.

⁷⁵ CJ 213-15, *ibid.*, pp. 55-9.

⁷⁶ CJ 237, *ibid.*, p. 86.

⁷⁷ CJ 238, *ibid.*, p. 87.

be certain that the harmonizing of the cognitive faculties is in fact the cause of the pleasure being experienced in response to an object?

The short answer to this question is that one must be disinterested in the object. Kant holds that; “if a judgment about beauty is mingled with the least interest then it is very partial and not a pure judgment of taste”.⁷⁸ But this suggestion only pushes the problem back a step to that of how one is to recognize when the judgment of taste is without interest in the object. Guyer notes that whatever else is involved in having an interest in an object it clearly involves having a concept in mind.⁷⁹ This concept can then become associated with desires, expectations, goals, plans, theories, etc.. But since a true judgment of taste involves no concepts it cannot involve any interest in an object.⁸⁰ Thus, aesthetic judgment must be based on the recognition that no “thought” was involved in determining the resultant pleasure - put simply, that you didn’t “do” anything. Hence, on Guyer’s twofold analysis of the harmonization function, Kant has effectively made “disinterest” a necessary precondition of both the “declarative judgment” and its’ “subjective ground”.

But how is one to know whether interest in an object has corrupted one’s judgment when one has only the simple experience of pleasure as a veridicality indicator? Kant has no direct answer to such a question. He merely suggests that the knowledge that nothing “subjective” corrupted one’s judgment can only be obtained indirectly through introspection (i.e., recent remembering).⁸¹ If one

⁷⁸ CJ 205, *ibid.*, p. 46.

⁷⁹ Guyer, 1979, p. 187.

⁸⁰ As Guyer observes, the claim that beauty produces no interest cannot be accepted without qualification (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 167-206 for an extended treatment of this issue).

⁸¹ Guyer puts it this way: “A judgment of disinterestedness cannot be the direct consequence of a judgment that a feeling of pleasure is due to the harmony of the faculties, because of Kant’s thesis

cannot uncover any reason for an aesthetic judgment beyond the simple experience of a pleasure this is evidence, though not conclusive evidence, for its cause being the harmonizing of the faculties. Thus, for example, the fact that one realizes that one is thinking about the worth of one's own art objects while observing them is evidence against the hypothesis that the experienced pleasure is caused by a simple harmonizing of the faculties. But, of course, this would not be conclusive evidence because 1) acts of introspection are subject to all the weaknesses of any empirical investigation, and 2) the standard Wittgenstenian criticism still applies.

There is an additional problem with this explanation of how one is to discern a legitimately aesthetic pleasure. It implies that an experience of beauty is incomplete, or at least cannot be known to be such an experience, without an accompanying justification. But this demand overlooks the fact that when one experiences a beautiful object both its beauty and its existence are evident in an immediate and non-inferential way. If experiences of beauty were invariably accompanied by doubt they would also be accompanied by a motivation to resolve this doubt through some form of rational investigation. But, first, it is not clear that it is possible to doubt an aesthetic impression, particularly if it is defined as a simple experience of pleasure. And second, even if it were possible, there is no reason to believe that aesthetic pleasure is normally accompanied by doubt. People simply do not seem to engage in the kind of critical reflection in which Kant suggests that they ought. If "aesthetic" reflective judgment is to be the solution to the problem of judgment Kant's demand that we be skeptical about our

that in this case there is no consciousness of the cause except for the pleasure itself, or no consciousness of the cause except through its effect." (ibid., p. 204)

aesthetic intuitions is tantamount to suggesting that we adopt a skeptical attitude to all conceivable knowledge.⁸² But such a claim would have at least two very undesirable consequences. First, if every judgment requires justification, no judgment can ever be made with certainty and the possibility of knowledge is lost. Second, if we must be skeptical of reflective judgments then, since reflective judgment is foundational to all cognition, we ought, by the same reasoning, to be skeptical of this claim, i.e., that the only way to be certain of the adequacy of one's reflective judgment is by means of skeptical introspection. And here we can observe that Kant is driven to postulate the need for this justificatory step by the logic of his enterprise. For he cannot consistently maintain that *the* experience of pleasure be both the product and the ground of aesthetic judgment.

8. An outline of an alternative explanation of the harmonizing function can be gleaned from some remarks that Kant makes in the General Comments on the First Division of the *Analytic*. There Kant maintains that in aesthetic judgment the imagination must be free for if it were determined by a rule concepts would be involved and the judgment would not be a true judgment of taste. Nevertheless, as Kant writes; "in apprehending a given object of sense the imagination is tied to a determinate form of this object and to that extent does not have free play (as it does [e.g.] in poetry),..."⁸³ Consequently, in a pure judgment of taste the faculty of imagination harmonizes with the faculty of understanding in a *free lawfulness*.

⁸² As was first pointed out by Peirce such a strategy is ill conceived for one simply cannot force oneself to doubt that which seems evident. Thus, although such reflective moves may be necessary for justification, they are not required for experience generally (cf. C. S. Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief", in *Charles S. Peirce: Selected Writings*, P. P. Weiner, ed., New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1958, p. 100).

⁸³ CJ 241, Pluhar, 1987, p. 91.

“And yet”, observes Kant, “to say that the *imagination* is *free* and yet *lawful to itself*, i.e., that it carries autonomy with it, is a contradiction”.⁸⁴

Although the model is not Kant’s, one way of understanding “free lawfulness”, which helps resolve some of the apparent contradictoriness, is on the model of improvisation. Improvisation, whether it is in jazz, or dance, or art, always presupposes a framework of practice in which, and through which, such improvisation is rendered intelligible by both the performers and the audience. Radically free performance of any kind is unintelligible performance. On the other hand, simply following the rules of the practice is uninspiring and not “beautiful”. Consequently, Kant could be interpreted as arguing that aesthetic judgment (and hence cognition more generally) takes place within a *praxis* through which the imagination in its cooperation with the understanding plays freely in the process of rendering an experience as intelligible. This *praxis* would have to serve as a vehicle for “objectivity”, otherwise “beauty”, once again, could be *merely* “for” someone. Thus conceived “free lawfulness”, as a kind of schematizing without a concept, would occur in the leading edge, so to speak, of an embodied *praxis*. Unfortunately, a comprehensive characterization of “free lawfulness” never appears in the third *Critique*. Some intriguing remarks, however, that hint at an explanation can be found in Sections 21 and 38.

Sections 21 and 38 form part of Kant’s, unsuccessful, transcendental deductions that are designed to prove the intersubjective validity (or universal communicability) of aesthetic judgments.⁸⁵ Briefly, in Section 21 we, once again, find Kant claiming that the harmonizing function responsible for aesthetic

⁸⁴ *CJ 241*, *ibid.*, p. 91.

⁸⁵ For a detailed examination of these arguments see Guyer, 1979, Chapters 7 to 9.

judgment is a special case of the harmonizing function that is responsible for cognition generally. Basic human cognitive functions require that an “[attunement] does actually take place whenever a given object, by means of the senses, induces the imagination to its activity of combining the manifold, the imagination in turn inducing the understanding to its activity of providing the manifold in concepts”.⁸⁶ He then goes on to discuss the process in terms of the concept of “proportion”. Presumably, although all cognitive activity involves the activation of the faculties of imagination and understanding certain “objects”, as presented by the imagination, are more conducive for establishing those proportions responsible for the “quickening of the two mental powers”. This quickening or harmonizing, it is suggested, occurs in the apprehension of objects generally, a special case of which is to be found in aesthetic apprehension. From these, premises Kant attempts to derive the intersubjective validity of aesthetic judgment.

But the introduction of this notion of harmonization function being dependent upon “proportions” between the cognitive faculties is problematic for Kant. In Section 21 he suggests that some proportions are more conducive to harmonizations than others. Once again, Guyer is comprehensive in his treatment of this issue. He writes:

If Kant is committed to the view of the first *Critique* that any manifold of which one can be conscious as a manifold can in fact be unified in accord with some concept or another, then all manifolds may display the proportion appropriate for knowledge in general. Then either aesthetic response

⁸⁶ CJ 239, Pluhar, 1987, p. 88.

requires more than just this proportion, or else every object may be beautiful.⁸⁷

In order to resolve this apparent difficulty one is tempted to make sense of Kant's discussion of "proportions" in the following way: There is a base rate of harmonizing activity that occurs constantly in the everyday cognitive functioning. The simple perception, or imagination, of some objects, however, induces an increase in the activation of the cognitive faculties sufficient to cause a "pleasure" of which one may become conscious. Such an interpretation would avoid the above criticism of Guyer's by maintaining the beautiful objects can be differentiated from ordinary objects by the degree of harmonization induced. But, of course, there is nothing here to restrict all humans to respond to all and only the same objects with increased harmonization of the cognitive faculties. In addition, this account turns the harmonizing function into a "psychological" phenomenon and it is not clearly so since Kant suggests that the indeterminate *a priori* principle of purposiveness is critical to its occurrence. A further problem is raised by the fact that a passage in Section 39 contradicts that of Section 21, and the above interpretation of it, by claiming that only one proportion is required for cognition in general and for aesthetic determination.

A consideration of section 38 in light of its long footnote reveals Kant to be arguing in a similar, but not identical, fashion to that of Section 21. He begins with the assumption that our ability to communicate our "cognitions" entails that the "subjective conditions" required for cognition are the same in all humans. Since, these "subjective conditions", which utilize no concept, are responding to

⁸⁷ Guyer, 1979, p. 295.

the merely “formal” characteristics of objects, which include nothing immediately amenable to “concepts”, we can assume all humans to “respond”, on these purely subjective bases, similarly to all objects, and hence, to all beautiful objects. Since purely aesthetic judgments rely exclusively on such subjective bases one is justified in rationally imputing aesthetic judgments universally. Thus, the pleasure we experience in response to beautiful objects rests “on the same conditions for everyone, because they are the subjective conditions for the possibility of cognition as such, and because the proportion between these cognitive powers that is required for taste is also required for the sound and common understanding that we may presuppose in everyone”.⁸⁸

The faculties of imagination and understanding, in the case of aesthetic determination, and of cognition generally, are required to be present to each other in the right “proportions” in order to excite each other to create a “harmonization”. Leaving aside, for the moment, the obvious vagaries of this explanation, one might ask why, if one proportion is required for both general cognition and aesthetic determination, we don’t find everything beautiful? Guyer suggests that in order to solve this problem we must postulate an extra step for the harmonization of the faculties in aesthetic determination, but that the taking of this step undermines the cogency of Kant’s arguments for universal validity.

Once a capacity which is not an absolutely necessary condition of knowledge is introduced into the explanation of aesthetic response, so is an element of contingency, and the possibility of an entirely justifiable *a priori* imputation of aesthetic response to others is precluded. ... The psychological

⁸⁸ CJ 292-293, Pluhar, 1987, p. 159.

capacity to experience the free harmony of imagination and understanding goes beyond the minimal capacity for knowledge, and ... this harmony occasions a pleasure which is not felt in every case of knowledge.⁸⁹

Since, as we have argued, Kant cannot both claim the possibility universality in judgment and consent to a characterization of the harmonizing function as merely “psychological” capacity we are led to deny the acceptability of this extra step and conclude with Guyer that Kant’s transcendental deductions are unsuccessful and that his explanation of the harmonizing function is vague and, in places, inconsistent.

9. As was suggested above, one intuitive and accessible analogy that goes some way toward rendering the idea of the harmonizing of the cognitive faculties intelligible is artistic improvisation. Bell also employs this kind of analogy to make sense of the *harmonizing process*, “but” adds that:

the fully articulated model is couched in terms of our ability to enjoy a spontaneous, criterialess, disinterested, presumptively universal, non-cognitive, reflective feeling that certain diverse elements of experience *as such* belong together, that they comprise an intrinsically satisfying whole in virtue of their seeming to have a point (though without it being the case that there is some specific point which they are judged to have).⁹⁰

Unfortunately, if Guyer is correct then this quote misrepresents Kant’s position somewhat. Kant, it was argued, with respect to the harmonizing function, does not admit of different pleasures. In the above passage, however, Bell refers to the

⁸⁹ Guyer, 1979, p. 323.

⁹⁰ Bell, 1987, p. 239.

feeling of pleasure that accompanies the harmonizing of the cognitive faculties as a “feeling that diverse elements of experience *as such* belong together”.

Unfortunately, this is to introduce a phenomenological element into the picture that Kant appears not to admit. Bell supports his interpretation with the following passage in the third *Critique*.

In a critique of judgment [in general], the part dealing with aesthetic judgment is essentially relevant, as it alone contains a principle ... without which the understanding could not feel at home in nature.⁹¹

Kant, of course, could simply be inconsistent on the issue. However, it might be prudent to note that the same passage is translated by Pluhar as follows:

In a critique of judgment, the part that deals with aesthetic judgment belongs to it essentially. For this power alone contains a principle that judgment lays completely a priori at the basis of its reflection on nature: the principle of a formal purposiveness of nature, in terms of its particular (empirical) laws, for our cognitive power, without which principle the understanding could not **find its way about in nature**.⁹²

Notice that this translation does not include the idea that the understanding is **feeling** anything. Instead it suggests that an *a priori* principle is necessary for understanding, as a faculty of concepts, to “find its way about in nature”. Of course, we already know that Kant believes that reason “has insight only into that

⁹¹ CJ 193, in Bell, 1987, p. 239.

⁹² CJ 193, Pluhar, Section VII, On the Logical Presentation of the Purposiveness of Nature, 1987, pp. 33-4 (emphasis mine). The original text reads as follows: “In einer Kritik der Urteilskraft ist der Teil, welcher die ästhetische Urteilskraft enthält, ihr wesentlich angehörig, weil diese allein ein Prinzip enthält, welches die Urteilskraft völlig a priori ihrer Reflexion über die Natur zum Grunde legt, nämlich das einer formalen Zweckmäßigkeit der Natur nach ihren besonderen (empirischen) Gesetzen für unser Erkenntnisvermögen, ohne welche sich der Verstand in sie nicht finden könnte:...” (Kant, 1790, Kritik Der Urteilskraft, A XLVIII, XLIX).

which it produces after a plan of its own". Consequently, what Kant appears to be claiming here that aesthetic judgment is, in some way, guided by the universal but indeterminate *a priori* principle of purposiveness in nature. A principle, once again, which Guyer argues is ultimately prohibited.

If, as on Bell's interpretation, indeterminate, but intrinsically significant, wholes underlie the functioning of our entire conceptual apparatus then it is these wholes which must come into play in the harmonizing of the cognitive faculties.

Bell writes:

That one should spontaneously 'feel at home in nature' is a necessary, though, indeed, subjective condition of the possibility of objective knowledge; for it is only if I feel at home in this sense that I come into contact with phenomena that are not, so to speak, opaque or problematic for me, and which do not, therefore, require conceptualization, thought, judgment, or inference in order for me to grasp them. If this condition were not met, if, that is, phenomena were in the first instance always problematic, then the performance of some prior judgment *would* always require the performance of some prior judgment as to its appropriateness, relevance, or warrantability. That the regressive infinity of judgments on judgments, of rules for the following of rules, can be stopped, without thereby making a mystery of my ability to judge at all, is due to the fact that at a certain point I am directly aware of an intrinsic coherence, or unity, or significance in my experience, it is because of this *felt* unity that the concept of an object in general can so much as find a foothold in experience. And the vicious

regress is avoided because this feeling owes nothing to concepts, judgments, criteria, or rules.⁹³

Although, there is much in this summary to commend it, there is some doubt as to whether it can be unequivocally attributed to Kant. First, it assumes that I can somehow *feel* unity. But, as we have seen, by limiting the “harmonic indicator” to a singular and simple pleasure Kant denies this possibility. Second, if a *felt* unity is at the basis of aesthetic judgment and therefore cognition generally, reason, it seems, would no longer “show the way” but rather would seem to be “kept in nature’s leading strings” and judgment would not be based on principles (definite or indefinite) or “fixed laws” but rather would be contingent upon the occurrence of a “phenomenal” experience. This, fortunately or unfortunately, is a state of affairs Kant simply will not, and, I have argued, cannot, permit.

Finally, we should observe that admitting a felt unity into Kant’s theory would not solve the problem of judgment, for the experience of a felt unity in one set of circumstances and not another is ultimately uninformative as to the *nature* of the relationships that exist between things. Even if we suppose such an experience to be able to reliably provide one with an indication of the purposiveness of an object for cognition. This does not even get me half way to my goal of rendering the manifold intelligible. For “recognition in a concept” requires the application of rules, or rule-like, “structures”, to an already varied manifold of intuition. But, in the case of harmonization, the intuition that is presented to the faculty of understanding has only an invariant content and so, once again, is uninformative for the faculty of rules, i.e., the understanding. Bell’s

⁹³ Bell, 1987, p. 239.

analysis aside, Kant's theory of reflective judgment provides us with little with which we might solve the problem of judgment. It may in the end help account for why we feel at home in our environment, but it leaves the problem of how I know a cup of coffee when I see one virtually untouched.

10. An alternative to Bell's account is offered by Crowther who clarifies Kant's reliance on the notions of "proportion," "common sense," and "the indeterminate *a priori* principle of purposiveness" through observing that Kant connects them intimately with *supersensible* being through his moral theory. Kant, it seems, realized that if reflective judgment is to be able to claim universal validity, and so be fundamental for knowledge generally, the psychological capacity of the harmonizing function must itself be grounded in "that" through which judgments are actively disposed to universal intelligibility. However, since this "that", which grounds judgment, can have no "content," it cannot itself be grasped in an act of synthesis - that is, it falls outside the reach of human understanding.⁹⁴ It can, however, be approached by means of an analogy with moral judgment. As Crowther observes: "Pure aesthetic judgements are analogous with moral judgements, in respect of their characteristics of immediacy, disinterestedness, and universality."⁹⁵ Thus, we find Kant writing in §59 that:

the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good; and only because we refer [Rücksicht] the beautiful to the morally good (we all do so [Beziehung] naturally and require all other to do so, as a duty) does our liking for it include a claim to everyone else's assent, while the mind is also conscious

⁹⁴ Cf. CJ 483-4, Pluhar, 1987, pp. 378-80. Cf. also for a detailed and exceptionally informative account of how Kant's notion of the *supersensible* unites the three *Critiques* and completes his critical system §15 of Pluhar's introduction to his translation of the *Critique of Judgment*, 1987, pp. lxxxvii-cix.

⁹⁵ Crowther, p. 70.

of being ennobled, by this [reference], above a mere receptivity for pleasure derived from sense impressions, and it assess the value of other people too one the basis of [their having] a similar maxim in their power of judgment.⁹⁶

The beautiful is “symbolic” of the moral in the perhaps somewhat profound sense that it goes some way toward revealing the nature of “supersensible ground” which sustains and guides the harmonizing of the cognitive faculties.⁹⁷ As Crowther suggests of Kant’s philosophy:

In the Critical philosophy generally, theoretical and moral principles are both manifestations of the ‘supersensible’; but in the third *Critique* he uses the term in a more fundamental sense to pick out the unity which links these two domains together so as to realize morality’s status as the final end of all creation. Hence, in so far as it is the a priori principle of reflective judgment which manifests this morally significant unifying aspect of the supersensible, and in so far as taste has its causal origin in a common sense which is determined by this principle, it follows that taste’s causal origin is itself of ultimately moral significance.⁹⁸

If Crowther’s conclusion is correct then we can also conclude that, since the causal origin of taste is also that of cognition generally, the ground of cognition is ultimately of moral significance. Even though we have clearly shown

⁹⁶ CJ pp. 223-4, in Crowther, p. 71.

⁹⁷ Cf. CJ 175, p. 14.

⁹⁸ Crowther, p. 69. In the footnote to this passage Crowther writes: “Elliot suggests that the unity in question here is God. This is probably correct. It is he whom we presume to have created the phenomenal world and our rational moral being so as to allow the ends of the latter to be realized. That which bridges these two realms in accordance with the Divinely ordained final end is the a priori principle of regulative judgement. This is why, I would suggest, in the Critique of Teleological Judgement Kant describes the aesthetic pleasure which arises from such a principle as ‘akin to a religious feeling’ (*Judgement*, Part II, p. 159)”. (R. K. Elliot, ‘The Unity of Kant’s “Critique of Aesthetic Judgement”’, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 8:3, 1968, 244-259)

that in the case of the harmonizing of the cognitive faculties nothing but simple pleasure can be present to consciousness Kant maintains that the ground of judgment is not *just* this pleasure. Kant writes:

The morally good is the *intelligible* that taste has in view, for it is with this intelligible that ever our higher cognitive powers harmonize; for it is with this intelligible that even our higher cognitive powers harmonize, and without this intelligible contradictions would continually arise from the contrast between the nature of these powers and the claims that taste makes. In this ability [taste], judgment does not find itself subjected to a heteronomy from empirical laws, as it does elsewhere in empirical judging - concerning objects of such a pure liking it legislates to itself, just as reason does regarding the power of desire. And because the subject has this possibility within him, while outside [him] there is also the possibility that nature will harmonize with it, judgment finds itself referred to something that is both in the subject himself and outside him, something that is neither nature nor freedom, the supersensible, in which the theoretical and the practical power are in an unknown manner combined and joined in a unity.⁹⁹

Theoretical and practical powers, it seems, are grounded in the supersensible, which resides both within and without the subject, and manifests through our “cognitive” capacities as that power of harmonization in reflective judgment. The function of reflective judgment is to be attuned to the *intelligible* so as regulate those synthetic activities through which multiplicity is rendered as a unity and

⁹⁹ CJ 353, Pluhar, 1987, pp. 228-9.

hence, to keep our higher cognitive powers, i.e., understanding and reason, from continually finding themselves in contradiction. In other words, the faculty of understanding is guided towards the acquisition/application of laws and rules with a basis in reality because reflective judgment is attuned that which is *intelligible*, or purposive for cognition. In this capacity judgment legislates to itself, which is to say it functions outside of the normal domain of determinate rules and laws altogether.

Unfortunately, this account simply leaves the problem of judgment unresolved. The problem of judgment points out that the attempt to determine the normative conditions of application of universals to particulars, or concepts to intuitions, through reference to rules leads to an infinite regress. The third *Critique* shows that reason's application of rules of judgment in acts of subsumption is, at root, dependent on "that" which is a law unto itself, and consequently cannot be grasped by the faculty which necessarily employs laws, rules, principles, etc., i.e., the faculty of understanding. Thus, it appears, the third *Critique* is not misread as a reattempt to address the problem of judgment. In the end, however, it simply reaffirms the assertion of the first *Critique* that judgment is a particular talent that can be practised only and cannot be taught. Kant's alignment of the process of judgment with the non-spatiotemporal supersensible means that reflective judgment *must* be left as a mystery and consequently, so is the ground of both theoretical and practical reason.

But it appears that all is not lost for in addition to the insights which might be revealed through "analogy" with the moral and the beautiful Kant suggests that this supersensible ground can be approached through that form of judgment to

which the supersensible is immanent, i.e., reflective judgment. In the last paragraph of the *Critique of Teleological Judgment*, in speaking of attempting to ground the category of causality as it applies to the concept of a *first mover*, Kant suggests that since the concept of a supersensible being excludes all predicates it cannot be grasped by the usual means. “But”, he continues,

what if I [start] from the order in the world: perhaps I shall be more successful [in my attempt] not merely to *think* the causality of that being as the causality of a supreme *understanding*, but also to *cognize* that being by determining the concept in this way, since then the irksome condition of space and extension does not come in.¹⁰⁰

By attending to the “great purposiveness in the world” one comes, by analogy with the way purposiveness functions in my own understanding, unavoidably upon the view of the “supersensible being as an intelligence” which both provides the final aim of the world, i.e., a “good will,” and perhaps guidance for us along the route in our individual attempt to achieve this end.¹⁰¹

In the following chapter we examine the work of a philosophical school which found Kant’s general approach to philosophy unsatisfying and which looked to a kind of order in the world for their foundations. The German phenomenologists that followed Kant rejected the idea that the mind was responsible for combining things into a unity and instead searched for a more materially substantial ground. With Kant’s moral theory in mind, Max Scheler, for example, claims:

¹⁰⁰ CJ 484, *ibid.*, p. 379.

¹⁰¹ As Kant puts it, “a good will is that whereby man’s existence alone can possess an absolute worth, and in relation to which the existence of the world can have a final end.” (*Judgement*, Part II, p. 109; in Crowther, p. 43).

I am of the opinion that this Kantian colossus of steel and bronze obstructs the way of philosophy toward a concrete and evidential *theory of moral values* (which is at the same time independent of positive psychological and historical experience),... As long as Kant's terrifyingly sublime formula, with its emptiness, remains valid as the only evidential result of all philosophical ethics, we are robbed of the clear vision of the fullness of the moral world and its qualities as well as of the conviction which we might have that this world is something *binding*.¹⁰²

Scheler argues that the ground of cognition and judgment must not be formal but material. Certainly this is an intriguing idea. It would seem that a material ground stands a much better chance of providing cognition with something on which its "rules" could depend for guidance than a purely formal ground. But, as we will, see this general approach also faces some steep obstacles.

¹⁰² Scheler, 1973a, p. 6.

Chapter 2

The Phenomenology of Max Scheler

1. Why, the knowledgeable reader might inquire, if one wishes to turn to phenomenology for an explanation of the “processes” which make cognition and judgment possible, turn to Max Scheler? There are two main reasons. First, central to every account of how understanding grasps its object is a tension between the need for an “I think”, a subject to understand, and the need to rid the process of understanding of this “subject” in order to open up the possibility of objective experience. Scheler draws our attention to this fundamental tension and in so doing allows us to build towards a more comprehensive understanding of the foundations of cognition and judgment. Second, there is connection between Kant and Scheler on the issue of *a priorism*, which is both interesting and relevant to our discussion. Against Kant, Scheler argues for the existence of “non-formal” *a priorism* which he then relies upon to provide an account of foundations for understanding and judgment, considered as those “processes” through which the world is rendered intelligible (i.e., possible). In order to fully understand Scheler’s work it is useful to first set it in its proper theoretical context.

Like Kant, Scheler sees problems with theories of understanding that rely on appeals to rules and criteria. But, unlike Kant, Scheler is vehement in his assertions that the source of such trouble is the division of experience into sensible intuitions and formal *a priori* processes. “There is”, he exclaims, “no such thing as an ‘understanding that prescribes laws to nature’ (laws that are not

in nature itself)...!"¹⁰³ In one fell swoop Scheler denies the reality and hence the significance of formal *a priori* rules, laws, and principles, for cognition. Kant's entire transcendental project is swept aside. Rules, suggests Scheler, are empirical intermediaries that, although of some pedagogical use to beginners, have no significant role to play in ascertaining the "truth" in any given domain. Appeals to rules and criteria, consequently, are generally evidence of lack of insight into the nature of the phenomena under investigation.¹⁰⁴ If one wishes to know the "facts of the matter" one must "look and see" for oneself without the aid of such intermediaries. Only the reality of "phenomenological facts" provided in "phenomenological insight" can satisfy non-arbitrary judgments.¹⁰⁵

Understanding how to apply rules and criteria, and so the knowledge of whether one is or is not applying a rule correctly, relies on "insight into phenomenological facts".¹⁰⁶ Since, for Scheler, rules are derivative on "facts" revealed in phenomenological insight the problem of judgment never arises. Objective judgment and experience are possible because phenomenological "facts" are *given* and *manifest* in phenomenological experience.¹⁰⁷

But this type of insight-based "explanation" for how things are objectively known seems philosophically unsatisfying. Many questions immediately come to mind: What does Scheler mean by "phenomenological facts"? What justification does he provide for such entities? What processes underlie "insight" so

¹⁰³ M. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, trans., M. S. Frings, and R. L. Funk, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973a, p. 73.

¹⁰⁴ M. Scheler, *Selected Philosophical Essays*, trans., D.R. Lachterman, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973b, p. 139-140.

¹⁰⁵ Scheler, 1973a, p. 49.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Scheler, 1973a, pp. 74-75.

¹⁰⁷ Making objective judgments requires being able to *see* these facts as they are *given* in phenomenological experience (cf. Scheler, 1973a, pp. 51-2).

conceived? This chapter will provide answers to these questions. We will begin by situating Scheler historically and philosophically while emphasizing those ways in which Scheler differs from the major phenomenological figures of Brentano and Husserl. Then we will detail how in Scheler's later work he, like Kant, attempts to integrate his theory of cognition with metaphysics.

Unfortunately, as we will see, Scheler's elucidation of this relationship gives rise to certain inconsistencies which impact on his justification for the objectivity of phenomenological experience. The ensuing discussion will permit us to develop some of our own insights concerning the mental processes underlying "judgment".

2. Scheler's neglect by contemporary philosophy is undoubtedly due to many factors not the least of which is the difficulty of simply getting one's bearings in writings which are exceptional for the radical nature of their break with previous Western philosophical thinking. Although his approach to philosophy can safely be called "phenomenological", as readers of phenomenology know this term tends to have different meanings for different phenomenologists. Scheler's independent phenomenological thought can be traced back to the time shortly after he read Husserl's 1900/01 *Logical Investigations*.¹⁰⁸ However, as Frings is quick to point out: "Anyone familiar with Husserl's phenomenology will easily see few attachments to Husserl as well as Scheler's many deviations from him as to phenomenological procedures".¹⁰⁹ Be this as it may, Scheler's strategy is often to appropriate the language of Husserl and extend it to ethical and "spiritual" domains of experience. This extension brings with it both benefits and confusions

¹⁰⁸ M. Frings, *Max Scheler: A Concise Introduction to the World of a Great Thinker*. Marquette University Press, 1996, p. xii.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

which we will need to discern if we are to bring Scheler's particular contributions to light.

The primary concern of *Logical Investigations* is what we would now call the philosophy of logic.¹¹⁰ At the turn of the century logic and its implications for other domains of investigation had yet to be clearly determined and it was to this task that Husserl put himself. The first step in this task was to set out the purely formal conditions for the possibility of making non-arbitrary judgments. These included Husserl's *formal categories of meaning* and *formal categories of objects*, which, as Bell says, "together determine what it makes sense to say, or to think; they rule out sheer nonsense or gobbledygook (*Unsinn*)".¹¹¹ The second step was to suggest that any rational set of beliefs should conform to those *a priori* laws that guard against the possibility of formal absurdity and self-contradiction. These conditions together set out a comprehensive system of criterial constraints on rational judgment and the possibility of truth.¹¹²

Unfortunately, they provide no explanation of how judgments are ultimately to be arrived at or *grounded*. Meeting all of Husserl's *formal* requirements in making a judgment that "snow is white", for example, tells me nothing about the "basis" on which such knowledge ultimately rests. As Bell observes:

In the absence of genuine self-evidence, it is felt, the unpleasant possibility opens up that no matter how great the amount of evidence we possess for our beliefs there is the need - not universally, but very widely felt - to

¹¹⁰ Investigation III is an exception to this in being concerned with formal ontology.

¹¹¹ D. Bell, *Husserl*. London: Routledge, 1990, p. 89.

¹¹² Cf. Husserl, *EU* §3, p. 17, in *ibid.*, p. 91.

provide an absolute rather than a merely 'internal' grounding for one's system of beliefs. ... The obtaining of some state of affairs, *a*, may be conclusive evidence for that of another, *b*; but the judgment '*b* obtains because *a* obtains' itself can provide no stronger grounds for the belief in *b*'s obtaining than the strength of the grounds we have, quite independently, for believing that *a* obtains. As for this latter belief, we as yet have *no* grounds for it; it in turn requires evidence of its own; and so too does anything adduced in evidence of *it*, and so on. Only something that is evident but whose evidence is *independent*, can put a stop to this regression, and thereby make intelligible the possibility of a system of beliefs that is genuinely grounded.¹¹³

The regress to which Bell refers above is a variant of the problem of judgment. On Kant's account, judging whether some *b* obtains is a matter of distinguishing whether *b* does or does not stand under a given rule, e.g., "if *a* then *b*". But to know whether *b* can be subsumed under a rule such as "if *a* then *b*" one needs to know *how* to apply the rule. Knowing how to apply such a rule, however, is equivalent to knowing how to satisfy it. Both imply an ability to determine whether the antecedent obtains. For example, knowing how to apply the rule "if it is a banana then it is nutritious", requires that I know a banana when I see one. Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, like Kant's third *Critique*, has as its central goal the attempt to ground judgment and, thereby, to reconcile "the subjectivity of knowing with the objectivity of the known content".¹¹⁴ But, whereas Kant's

¹¹³ Bell, 1990, p. 92.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

theory is constrained by the inadmissibility of even phenomenological qualities, types of pleasure, for example, Husserl's theory is not.

Husserl recognizes that if logic is to *engage* the world its universal symbols must possess *content*, which, he suggests, are constitutive of the "meanings" of these symbols. Husserl's "ideal objects", "ideal unities", or "species", as the case may be, are an attempt to bridge the gap between the empty categorical symbols, which the subject must employ, and the "objective content" of the world. "Ideal unities" are purported to possess both *phenomenological content* and "universal" status. In order to better understand Husserl's concept of a "species";

Suppose, for example, that I have a visual presentation of a circular red patch, *r*. The colour moment of *r* is an abstract, though real, individual part of *r*. And as such it is unshareable: no object distinct from *r* may have *that* moment as a part. Clearly, however, there is a sense in which it is possible for another patch, *p* - indeed, for indefinitely many other patches - to be of 'exactly the same colour' as *r*. Husserl construes the judgment that 'p has exactly the same colour as *r*' as an assertion of numerical identity, equivalent to 'the colour of p = the colour of *r*'. And, *ex hypothesi*, the colour of *r* = red. The occurrence of the word 'red' in the last sentence cannot be taken to designate the moment or redness that is a proper part of *r*; and as the notion of numerical identity evidently applies to whatever it is that that occurrence of the word 'red' *does* designate, Husserl concludes that

it designates a concrete object, but one that is universal rather than individual, and ideal rather than real.¹¹⁵

The case of “red” in this example can be extended to cover a wide variety of *species* and also serves to illustrate just what Husserl takes “meanings” to be.

The essence of meaning is seen by us, not in the meaning-conferring experience, but in its ‘content’, the single, self-identical intentional unity set over against the dispersed multiplicity of actual and possible experiences of speakers and thinkers. The ‘content’ of a meaning experience in this ideal sense is not at all what psychology means by ‘content’, *viz.*: any real part of a moment of experience.

What, e.g., the statement ‘ π is a transcendental number’ says, what *we* understand when we read it, and mean when we say it, is no individual feature in our thought-experience, which is merely repeated on many occasions. Such a feature is always individually different from case to case, whereas the sense of the sentence should remain *identical*... the selfsame element expressed in them all, ‘selfsame’ in the very strictest sense.¹¹⁶

In postulating species, therefore, Husserl, like Kant and a host of philosophers before him, is addressing the problem of how the world comes to be organized, or unified, “objectively”. His concern is to give an account of the apparent objectivity of knowledge given the apparent subjectivity of the mental processes with which we have access to the world. Species, suggests Husserl, provide the “meanings”, which are themselves “unities” through which further unifications

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹¹⁶ Husserl, *LU I*, §§31-2, pp. 329-31, in *ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

may take place. The performance of mental acts, such as judging, remembering, and expecting, in so far as they concern instances of species, or “moments”, are dependent on the aforementioned “meanings” for their unifying efficacy. In other words, “species,” like Platonic “forms,” function to provide the means through which objective judgments occur. Speaking generally, and in the language of Kant’s first *Critique*, one might say that it is “species” which permit objects to be schematized.

Leaving aside for the moment questions of the reality of such “ideal unities” let us inquire into the issue of how we come to possess them. Here we encounter two general approaches. Either the “meanings” are somehow synthesized from particular experiences or they have an *a priori* status of some kind. If they are synthesized then one may legitimately ask for both an account of the process and of how “objectivity” is secured. If “meanings” are known *a priori* then we need an explanation of what such a claim amounts to and of how it is possible. With respect to these issues, it is sometimes unclear, in *Logical Investigations*, which way Husserl intends to go. Although “species” are clearly non-spatiotemporal entities they are not simply *a priori* “given”. Instead they are synthetically “realized” from sensorial experiences, which do possess a requisite *givenness*.¹¹⁷

This, of course, leaves open the question of how the reliability of this “synthesis” is guaranteed. But Husserl, it seems, is not concerned with such issues as his aim “is not to *secure* objectivity, but to understand it”.¹¹⁸ He is simply not concerned to justify the objectivity of his “ideal unities”. Instead he intends that

¹¹⁷ Bell, 1990, pp. 112-13.

¹¹⁸ Husserl, *Crisis* §55/p. 189, in *ibid.*, p. 160.

individuals discover such truths for themselves by means of an “immediate experience”. To this end he provides us with his famous method of the “eidetic reduction”. Husserl maintains that performing the phenomenological reduction reveals a realm of “transcendental being”, the contents of which has an objective and seemingly *a priori* status - that is, “species” are necessary conditions for the possibility of any objective knowledge whatsoever.¹¹⁹ Performing the phenomenological reduction, however, is no mean feat. Husserl claims that becoming aware of these entities requires reducing all ontological commitments, whatsoever, to zero. Only through the “bracketing” of all ontological commitments will the proper objects of phenomenological philosophy *appear*.¹²⁰

On this point Husserl and Scheler are, to a large extent, in agreement. In fact, as we will see, they agree on many points. However, in our summary of *Logical Investigations* there are already at least two fundamental differences. First, for Scheler, phenomenology is based on pure *intuition* and *not* on a method. In the introduction to *Phenomenology and the Theory of Cognition* Scheler states that phenomenology,

is the name of an attitude of spiritual seeing [*geistiges Sehen*] in which one can see [*er-schauen*] or experience [*er-leben*] something which otherwise remains hidden, namely, a realm of facts of a particular kind. I say “attitude,” and not “method”. A method is a goal-directed procedure of *thinking about* facts, for example, induction or deduction. In

¹¹⁹ Cf. Husserl, *Ideas* §33/p. 113, or Bell, 1990, pp. 156-161.

¹²⁰ As we have seen Kant also associates the imputation of existence to an “object”, which, being intimately associated with desire, constitutes an “interest” in that “object,” with “subjective experience.” In Kant’s case an interest prohibits reflective judgment from acting as a reliable guide to cognition by conflating that simple pleasure proper to the harmonization of the cognitive faculties with the pleasure which results from desires being met (see above, p. 41-1).

phenomenology, however, it is a matter, first of new facts themselves, before they have been fixed by logic, and second, of a procedure of *seeing*.¹²¹

Second, for Scheler, the phenomenological content, or “meanings”, that do *appear* in intuition are in no way synthesized but always and everywhere exhibit an *a priori* status. On this point Scheler’s non-formal *a priorism* is a radical move away from both Husserl and Kant.¹²²

3. Scheler’s brand of phenomenology is marshalled against Kant in *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*. The main objectives of this work are to 1) establish a rigorous foundation for philosophical ethics and to 2) use this foundation to criticize Kant’s ethical theory. Since our investigation is not directly concerned with ethics, to go deeply into the particulars of Scheler’s critique of Kant’s ethics would be imprudent. Fortunately, such an investigation is not necessary as Scheler’s general critique of Kant’s formal *a priorism*, which Scheler uses to explicate his ethical theory, will provide us with an understanding of Scheler’s phenomenology, as well as its significance for our project.

The first thing to note is that Scheler, like Husserl, gives evidence of a deep respect for Kant. Scheler, for instance, agrees with Kant in maintaining that ethics and philosophy in general must be grounded in the *a priori*. Scheler, however, disagrees with Kant at the very heart of his philosophy finding serious problems with Kant’s theory of the *a priori* and its application. He claims that in

¹²¹ Scheler, 1973b, p. 137.

¹²² The wary reader may be a bit put off by phrases such as “spiritual seeing”. They, of course, lend an air of mysticism to the whole process - a charge, I might add, which one can, with equal justification, lay at Husserl’s feet. For it appears, at least to this author, that Husserl’s method of eidetic reduction offers no significant advantage in providing an avenue of approach to the realm of “meanings” over Scheler’s more straightforward offer of none (cf. also Bell, 1990, p. 162).

all areas of philosophy Kant's *a priori* is connected with two misconceptions (to which a fundamental metaphysical world view and a fundamental position of the philosopher correspond).¹²³ First, only sensuous raw material in disordered form is "given" in intuition, which stands, as it were, in need of organization.¹²⁴ This is an error which, Scheler believes, Kant took from Hume on blind faith and which leads Kant to his second error, - the presupposition that cognition must be "formed" using only "sensible content" in conjunction with *a priori* "synthetic functions".¹²⁵ According to Scheler, this is an error, which can, at least in part, be accounted for by Kant's ignorance "of a 'phenomenological experience' that exhibits as a fact of intuitive content what is already contained in natural and scientific experience".¹²⁶ If the mind is to be ordered and all that is given is sense impressions then the need for "synthetic functions" is evident. But without the presupposition that "the world is pulverized into a medley of sensations... there is *no* need for such a hypothesis and *hence* no need for an interpretation of the *a priori* as a "law of functions" of such organizing activities".¹²⁷

¹²³ The companion metaphysical worldview, which supports these misconceptions, is, according to Scheler, usually associated with an "attitude" which, he suggests, is endemic to the Western world. He also attributes this attitude to Kant. He writes:

This "attitude" I can only describe as a basic "hostility" toward or "distrust" of the given *as such*, a fear of the given as "chaos," an anxiety - an attitude that can be expressed as "the world outside me, nature within me." "Nature" is what is to be formed, to be organized, to be "controlled"; it is the "hostile," the "chaos," etc. (1973a, p. 67).

We encountered some support for a claim such as this in the first chapter where, for example, Kant provides his justification for the need for synthetic *a priori* knowledge. Scheler maintains that his metaphysical worldview and his fundamental philosophical position stand in contrast to this isolationist picture of man's place in the universe.

¹²⁴ In *Logical Investigations* Husserl also disagrees with this point.

¹²⁵ Scheler, 1973b, p. 203. This, of course, is only one interpretation of the basic story of the first *Critique*. It, however, fails to consider the fact that "sensible content" can only *be* "sensible content" if it has already (i.e., *a priori*) been subject to the pure categories (cf., for example, B 134). *A priori* concepts make sensible content possible.

¹²⁶ Scheler, 1973a, p. 47.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 66. Unfortunately, this criticism is a "straw man" since, as was just observed, for Kant, there cannot even be a medley of sensations without there having already been an imaginative synthesis of the manifold through the original synthetic unity of apperception. An unsynthesized manifold is nothing at all to a merely human understanding (cf., for example, A 116, A 120).

Since for Scheler, the *a priori* is simply “given” in experience he also objects to any association of the *a priori* with the “rational”, or what understanding, through judgment, adds on to sensory experience. Scheler finds Kant’s rational-constructivist theory of the *a priori* to be wholly unsatisfactory. He writes:

Indeed, no doctrine has obstructed the theory of cognition more than the one proceeding from the presupposition that a factor in cognition *must* be *either* a “sensible content” *or* something “thought”. How can one bring to fulfillment, on this presupposition, concepts such as thing, real, force, equality, similarity, effect (within the concept of causality), motion, space, time, quantity, number, or - and this is our concern here - the value concepts? There must be for them a *datum* of intuition - to be sure, *not* a datum of “sensible” character; otherwise these concepts ... would have to be “fabricated” [*erdacht*], i.e., posited out of nothingness by “thinking.” This solution alone *always* implies an unsatisfactory solution to the problem of cognition. Whatever such a solution may be (whether more sensualistic or more rationalistic), it will doom cognition to the degree that it has *content* [*Inhalt*], which here obviously means “sensible” data or the cognition based on them, since such content is “*subjective*” and “*relative*” to the organization of man. Cognition is doomed to become *bare* content - in the final analysis, to become mere relations that are relations of nothing - to the degree that it is reduced to purely *logical* factors.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 63.

Scheler never considers the third *Critique* in the manner which we have above, i.e., as Kant's attempt to found judgment and ultimately cognition on essentially "arational" processes. This fact, however, does not affect the force of Scheler's criticisms for, as we concluded above, Kant's account of the foundations of judgment and cognition by leading to the supersensible, leads us to something about which nothing, except perhaps by metaphor and analogy, can be known.

In contrast to Kant's formal *a priori* then Scheler postulates a non-formal [*materialer*] *a priori* structure of experience in accordance with, what he refers to as, the non-formal structure of the world. He writes that:

this mythology of productive rational activity has nothing to do with apriorism;... The *a priori* is, then, the *objective structure* [*sachliche gegenständliche Struktur*] of the large areas of experience itself to which certain acts and functional relations among them "correspond," without its having been "brought into" or "added to" this structure by such acts.¹²⁹

Notice here that if one can be said to have *a priori* knowledge, as it is defined above, then the problem of judgment would appear to have an obvious solution. The infinite regress of rules would never get started because understanding need not rely on rules to the extent that the objective structure of experience is manifest in (one's) experience. In other words, since understanding is not conceived as the faculty of rules but operates by means of direct access to the "object structure", to the extent that judgment is conceived as an activity involving rules, principles, criteria, etc., cognition is not founded on judgment at all. Having denied the significance of Kant's transcendental project Scheler effectively reduces all

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp. 66-7.

judgment to empirical judgment - that is, judgment that takes place after the world has, so to speak, already made an appearance. The critical question for Scheler, therefore, if he is to provide a defensible account of the appearance of the world, is how to give credence to his theory of a "pre-existent" and "objective" structure of experience to which the understanding has a kind of immediate access.

Before we deal with this theory head-on, we need to develop a more thorough understanding of the concepts that Scheler is employing. We need to understand, for instance, what Scheler means by the phrase "objective structure of large areas of experience" and what he means by the term *acts*. We also need to know what it means for acts to "correspond" *a priori* with the "objective structure" of large areas of experience. Since Scheler's choice of descriptive terminology in these matters appears to derive directly from his reading of *Logical Investigations*, and Husserl's terminology can, in turn, be traced to Brentano's *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. We must first turn our attention to some basic facts concerning Brentanian phenomenology.

4. Brentano's early investigations are largely philosophical and concern themselves with the nature of mental phenomena. As Bell observes:

Two ways of modeling the human mind predominated in the second half of the nineteenth century. On the one side stood the classical empiricist model of the mind as a largely passive, static, transparent medium of awareness on which experiences impress themselves. According to this model, perception, memory, imagination, judgment, association of ideas and the rest are just so many vicissitudes of mental life, so many things which, so to speak, befall us. ... The second model, on the other hand, associated particularly with

Kant, assigns a dynamic, indeed *creative* role to the human mind: through such activities as synthesis, interpretation, inference, judgment, even perception itself, the mind imposes its own order and meaning on what Kant called 'the raw material of sensible impressions'. ...

Brentano rejects both these accounts outright, developing in their place a theory of mental phenomena which, he hoped, would nevertheless combine all that was worth salvaging from either of them. Accordingly, for Brentano, *mental phenomena are simply acts which have contents*.¹³⁰

Bell goes on from this quote to observe that this latter fact reveals an unusual characteristic of Brentanian philosophy. If all mental phenomena are, without exception, *acts*, then the contents of those acts cannot be mental phenomena. And, since Brentano divides all phenomena into those that are mental and those that are physical, the contents of any act must be a *physical phenomenon*. Brentano, however, employs a curious use of the term "phenomenon" since "it turns out that the so-called physical phenomenon does not actually appear to us, and indeed, that we have no presentation of it whatsoever...."¹³¹

Another unusual characteristic of Brentanian philosophy concerns the use of the term *act*. Implicit in Brentano's conception of mental phenomena is a use of the term *act* that is foreign to its everyday meaning. For, put simply, if all mental phenomena *are* acts then mental acts are not "actions". This aspect of the term *act* is preserved in both early Husserl and in Scheler. Thus, for example, Husserl writes: 'In talking of "acts"..., we must steer clear of the word's original meaning:

¹³⁰ Bell, 1990, p. 7.

¹³¹ Brentano, 1973, p. 78, in Bell 1990, p. 8

all thought of activity must be rigidly excluded.¹³² And Scheler suggests that with respect to such *acts*: “There is no activity which could be increased or intensified (as in all attention).”¹³³ This fact, combined with the fact that the contents of a mental act are not concerned with objects of “the world”, makes it extremely difficult to clearly distinguish between an *act* and its *contents*. Brentano claims that the nature of the relationship that exists between the two is one of intentional in-existence - that is, the content is immanent to the act. But what can this mean? I know what it means to act on an object, but to suggest that an object, i.e., experience, is somehow inherent in, or immanent to, an act requires clarification.

Clearing up this confusion requires that one be aware that central to Brentano’s early writings is a distinction between two kinds of complex whole or unity; which Bell, following Husserl, calls strong and weak wholes “(Brentano calls them ‘real things’ and ‘collectives’ respectively)”.¹³⁴ Strong wholes conform to the so-called principle of mereological essentialism whereby a whole and its “parts” are held in a relationship of mutual interdependence such that neither can have an independent existence. The parts of a weak whole, however, are simply strong wholes, or *proper parts*, held together in an aggregate. Thus, for example, a sheep is a strong whole while a flock of sheep is weak whole. This part-whole structure can be employed to make sense out of Brentano’s theory of mental acts and their contents in the following way: if content *c* intentionally in-exists in act *a*, then *c* is a proper part of *a*. This structure adequately captures any singular and non-reflexive mental act.

¹³² E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. J.N. Findlay, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul. [*Logische Untersuchungen* (2nd edition)], 1, 1900/1970, p. 563.

¹³³ Scheler, 1973b, p. 27.

¹³⁴ Bell, 1990, p. 18.

Brentano, however, argues that no mental act ever conforms to this simple structure. Instead he suggests that any given mental act always also has itself as a secondary object, *at the same time* as it has its primary object.¹³⁵ In this latter case the relationship between the mental act and its secondary object is one of identity. Brentano writes: “The consciousness of the primary object and the consciousness of the secondary object are not each a distinct phenomenon but are two aspects of one and the same unitary phenomenon”.¹³⁶ A strong whole is formed between a mental act and its secondary content and it is this structure itself which is purported to secure the “objectivity” of the inherent primary and secondary content since they are, strictly speaking, identical. As Bell observes:

Brentano’s fundamental, and very Cartesian intuition seems to be this: for me there is a logical space for error, for illusion, misconception, mistaken judgment and the like, only in so far as it is possible for there to be a real distinction between how I take things to be, and how they actually are. I *can* only be wrong if it is possible that things are not as I conceive (perceive, judge) them to be. If it could somehow be guaranteed that, however things might seem to me, *that* is necessarily the way they in fact are, then my beliefs and judgments would necessarily be true. But what could conceivably act as guarantor here? What could, even in principle, close the gap between how I take things to be and how things really are, so as to seal off all logical possibility of error? The only candidate would seem to be the strict identity, the complete coincidence of, in Brentano’s terms, the act and the object of judgment (belief, conception, presentation, or whatever). My

¹³⁵ Brentano, 1973, p. 155, in *ibid.*, p. 21.

¹³⁶ Brentano, 1973, p. 155; in *ibid.*, p. 22.

taking something to be thus-and-so becomes logically indistinguishable from its actually being thus-and-so in the limiting case in which the actuality exclusively *consists in* my taking it to be thus-and-so. And this is of course precisely the form which secondary consciousness or inner perception takes, with the result that “the phenomena of inner perception ... are true themselves. As they appear to be, so they are in reality”.¹³⁷

The distinguishing mark of the Brentanian lineage in phenomenology then is the conflation of appearance and reality in what is *given* in experience under certain specified conditions. Unfortunately, the theory as presented by Brentano is internally inconsistent for he ultimately maintains that the relationship of any mental phenomenon and its content is simultaneously one of identity and difference. Despite this difficulty both Husserl and Scheler with some qualification, adopt the basic structure and strategy of Brentano’s theory of intentionality.¹³⁸ But whereas Brentano and early Husserl rely on part-whole ontologies to construct the necessary interdependence between act and content, Scheler, for the most part, attempts to provide the requisite intentional-inexistence through metaphysics.¹³⁹ It is through an examination of Scheler’s metaphysics that we are able to provide answers to the questions concerning Scheler’s theory of the *a priori* with which we began our examination of Brentano.

5. Scheler’s metaphysics appears to derive from both Western and Eastern influences.¹⁴⁰ On the Western side one might claim to discern Neo-Platonic and

¹³⁷ Brentano, 1973, p. 20, in *ibid.*, p. 25.

¹³⁸ “Objects” are transcendent for Husserl.

¹³⁹ This metaphysics is only sketched in *Formalism*, and doesn’t take clear form until his later works, however its basic assumptions appear to be consistent throughout.

¹⁴⁰ Although the exact lineage would certainly be of interest in itself, it is not important for our investigation and nothing significant depends on it.

Christian influences as well the more obvious influences of Kant, Hegel, and Husserl. On the Eastern side it is clear that Scheler was aware of Indian philosophies, such as Buddhism, and was impressed by what he found.¹⁴¹ This fact may help account for certain isomorphisms between his own metaphysics and that of certain canonical forms of Buddhist philosophy. Although Scheler's metaphysics is, for the most part, unsuccessful in supporting his phenomenology, our analysis of it will provide us with new insights into that form of "insight-judgment" which promises to subvert the need for an infinite regress of rules of judgment.

The pivot of Scheler's metaphysics is his doctrine of "the person". "The person" is the name Scheler gives to the human form of "spirit" (*Geist*). Scheler maintains that "...all possible extra-spiritual being is in (mutual) dependency of possible spiritual being" (*des Geistseienden*), "spirit" can only "exist" in cooperation with its counterpart "world" and forms one objective structure in all its parts.¹⁴² Thus, considered outside of this relationship "spirit" is an abstract ideal. In his *Phenomenology and the Theory of Cognition* Scheler suggests that the structure of this ideal and its intrinsic relations is discovered through phenomenological experience. He writes:

On the side of content, we find a structure of interconnected essences belonging to a world which all the empirical facts of our human world or of our empirical milieu merely exemplify. The structure of this world and the

¹⁴¹ Cf. Frings, 1996, pp. 143-56.

¹⁴² Scheler, V 181, in Frings, 1996, p. 121.

structure of the spirit form one essentially connected structure in all their parts.¹⁴³

For Scheler, there is, therefore, only one *a priori* abstract, but “objective”, structure, which can be divided into two interdependent “moments,” i.e., the structure of “spirit”, and the structure of “world”. The reason for the division is that if the “objective structure” is to “appear” it must appear *to* “someone” in time. The burden of the emergence of spirit in time necessitates its division into the “aspects” which Scheler calls “act” and “essence”. The possibility of objective experience, for Scheler, then just consists in the possibility of “discerning” the *a priori* “objective” structure of “spirit” in time. This leaves Scheler, if he is to account for the possibility of “objective” experience, to provide an account of the role of the individual mental act in the “emergence” of this structure. He attempts to do this through his theory of “the person”.

In part II of *Formalism* Scheler defines *the person* as “*the concrete and essential unity of the being of acts of different essences,...*”¹⁴⁴ Scheler’s use of the phrase “concrete and essential unity” in this definition appears to derive primarily from his reading of Husserl and Brentano. As we discussed, Husserl’s formal ontology follows Brentano in being constructed in terms of relations between wholes and parts and assigns a central importance to the role of strong wholes in the description of ideal objects. In that analysis the term “concrete” is used to describe any strong whole, which can, by nature, have an isolated and independent existence. This sense of “concrete” is being employed here by

¹⁴³ Scheler, 1973b, p. 157.

¹⁴⁴ Scheler, 1973a, p. 383.

Scheler.¹⁴⁵ The term “concrete” then as it applies to “the person” refers to the fact the *being* of acts of different essences, in constituting “the person”, are interdependently bound together to form a strong whole, or “unity”, that is capable of possessing an independent existence. Moreover, the constitution of “the person” is that of concrete unity “essentially”. In other words, this unitary “transcendent” structure forms a strong whole with its interdependent parts, which, as we shall see, are act-essences.

The above characterization is adequate in so far as it deals with “the person” as an abstract notion. However, if Scheler is to give an account of the possibility of real non-formal *a priori* contents and provide us with a theory of the non-formal relationship of mind and world then he needs to account for the role of individual mental “acts” in the emergence of the *a priori* objective structure of experience in time. Thus, later in *Formalism* he augments his discussion of what constitutes a concretization of “the person” in the following way:

Abstract act-essences concretize into concrete act-essences only by belonging to the essence of this or that individual person. ... Any “interconnective complex” will remain a mere complex of abstract act-essences if the person “himself” in whom such an interconnective complex exists is not given.¹⁴⁶

In line with Scheler’s dictum that all spiritual being can only exist in dependence of extra-spiritual being the addition of this qualification to Scheler’s theory of the person clearly suggests that “the concrete and essential unity of the being of acts of different essences”, i.e., “the person”, is not truly “concrete” unless

¹⁴⁵ Cf., for example, *ibid.*, p. 383n.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 384.

immediately manifest, or exemplified, in some particular person. Thus, “the person,” considered in absence of the condition of exemplification in a real person, cannot be a concrete and essential unity as defined above. The “concretization” of this “abstract structure” requires its movement in an “act” - that is, in the act of a real particular person. The person is concrete only in the execution of acts.

Scheler’s theory is intriguing but there is problem as it now stands. Since the person is the “the concrete and essential unity of acts of different essences” any single concrete “act” of a real person cannot be sufficient to concretize “the person” as Scheler has defined it. Scheler, however, has not yet finished and we soon find him augmenting his theory of the “the person” as follows:

If we consider only one concrete act of a person, this act contains in itself all possible act-essences, and its objective correlate contains all essential factors of world ... on the basis of an a priori and lawful structure, valid without exception for all possible persons and all possible acts of all persons. This structure is valid not only for the real world but also for all possible worlds.¹⁴⁷

In this passage Scheler first claims that every concrete “act” of a real person, given its correlate “essence”, “contains” the entire atemporal abstract *a priori* “act-essence” structure of “the person”.¹⁴⁸ This assertion effectively guarantees that any concrete act of a real person will also be a concretization of the entire “person”. Scheler then postulates an *a priori* and lawful structure as a formal guarantor that the non-formal *a priori* will behave as he has suggested. This

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 393.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Scheler, 1961, pp. 36-37, and Frings, 1996, pp. 95-96.

lawful structure, it seems, is simply “the person” considered in abstraction and so is an *a priori* and formal condition of all possible non-formal person-world manifestations.

Since Scheler’s argument is complex let us now recap the details of the theory as we have considered it thus far. First, it postulates an ideal *a priori* objective structure of experience that contains all possible “act-essences”, i.e., the person.¹⁴⁹ Second, to the extent that any concrete “act” is of the *a priori* objective structure of “the person” it always occurs, by virtue of an *a priori* law, conjoined in interdependence with its corresponding “essence”. These first two facts together guarantee the objectivity of the contents of any mental act to the extent that that act exemplifies, or is a manifestation of, a “part” of the entire *a priori* “person-world” structure. Third, any particular concrete “act” contains, in some sense of that term, the entire *a priori* structure of “the person”. Of course, the idea that a single part can contain all the parts that make up the whole is both counterintuitive and, since there is no clear sense in which a part can “contain” a whole, logically inconsistent.¹⁵⁰ This fact, puts a heavy burden on Scheler’s notion of “containing”. Unfortunately, it is not adequately explicated and since there is no clear sense in which a part can “contain” a whole Scheler, like

¹⁴⁹ The quasi-Platonic idea that a transcendent world of “ideal objects”, in some sense, “pre-exists” their instantiation is an idea to which Scheler appears to have been attached throughout his career. In *Idealism and Realism*, one of his last works, we find the following statement: “It is clear that the being of ideal objects and their conformity to law are independent of and logically prior to the being of real objects” (1973b, p. 303). Unfortunately, it is neither clear what such a statement means nor that it is true. It is only clear that Scheler needs to posit the *a priori* structure of ideal objects to logically secure the possibility of objective experience.

¹⁵⁰ Of course, this idea is not completely impossible to come to terms with, at least intuitively. There are examples of systems that more or less fit this description. One such example would be a hologram, wherein any portion of the hologram in some sense contains the information necessary to create the whole structure. Another example might be that of a living cell, since the DNA of a cell contains all the information necessary to construct the whole creature. Finally, there is the example of seeds. Unfortunately, in these examples the whole does not “contain” in part in the strict sense that is necessary for a concrete act to guarantee the objectivity of its content.

Brentano, is subject to the charge of inconsistency. Finally, Scheler maintains that the realm of the ideal and the realm of the real exist in interdependence. "The person" can only *be* to the extent that some real person exists.¹⁵¹

6. There is one nuance of Scheler's theory that is left to be addressed. If *the person* is identical with *the objective act-essence structure* then it would appear that to the extent that the abstract structure of "the person" is concretely *exemplified* in more than one person the phenomenal lives of those persons must coincide with the ideal "person", i.e., the objective structure of experience.¹⁵² Scheler, however, does not arrive at this conclusion. In contrast to every major philosophical theory I can think of, Scheler finds such a conclusion completely unsatisfactory. Nothing is more obvious to Scheler than that every person contains a particular personality and that this fact cannot be an impediment to the realization of *absolute* truth. He suggests that one need only "glance at the person himself and his essence immediately yields a peculiarity for every act that we know him to execute, and the knowledge of his 'world' yields a peculiarity for the contents of his acts".¹⁵³ This fact, moreover, he claims, neither results from any contingent characteristics of a person such as embodiment, ego, or environmental impact, nor can it "be grasped in terms of essential concepts pertaining to general essences".¹⁵⁴ The latter claim entails that, since "the person" is itself an essential concept pertaining to general essences, this peculiarity cannot be grasped through the concept of "the person".

¹⁵¹ Scheler also defines the person as "the immediately co experienced *unity of experiencing*;" (1973a, p. 371).

¹⁵² Cf. Scheler, 1973a, ch. 6/A. Such is that case with any theory which holds the person as essentially a rational being, e.g., Descartes, Hegel, and Fichte (cf. *ibid.*, p. 372). Thus, the structure of spirit-world is not "essentially" rational though rationality may be an essential aspect.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 386.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

What we have failed to consider up to now is that, according to Scheler, an ultimate particularity, or personality, “is a general essential trait of all *possible worlds*”, i.e., of “persons”, as they emerge *into* time and space.¹⁵⁵ “Hence metaphysical truth, or ‘the’ truth, *must* have a different content, within the limits of the *a priori* structure of world, for each person because the content of world-*being* is, in every case, different for each person”.¹⁵⁶ Notice that Scheler’s theory will only sustain this demand for “individualized objectivity” because of the assumption that each concrete act “contains” the entire act-essence structure. Since any truly concrete act is held to “contain” “the person” and an ultimate peculiarity is essential to each concrete person there is no single template of “the person”. The concrete person varies with the particular “act consciousness” which is responsible for its manifestation. In line with his intuitions Scheler gives “the person” an infinite number of faces.

But in an environment where “the objective structure of experience” varies across persons the notion of “objectivity” loses its moorings to intersubjective and universal validity. Scheler elucidates this fact as follows:

Needless to say, “universal validity” has nothing to do with the *a priori*, for “universality” in no sense belongs to essence [*Wesenheit*]. There are individual essences and essential interconnections between individual elements. We have stressed elsewhere that universality in the sense of validity “for” all subjects having a certain “understanding”, or for the human species, has nothing to do with the “*a priori*”. There can very well be an *a priori* for only *one* individual’s insight, or one that only one individual

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 394.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 394-5.

can have! A proposition based on the a priori is “universal” only for those subjects who *can* have the same insight (all universality is essentially “for” someone, whereas the a priori does not at all imply such a “for” relation).¹⁵⁷

In this passage Scheler is at pains to differentiate his theory from any theory that seeks to explain objective experience by suggesting that an existent relates to a universal validity of some kind - whether exemplified in the form of a proposition, or in the form of a transcendent structure. For Scheler there is no subsistent soul to guarantee the identity of the subject through time. The person just “consists” in his acts.¹⁵⁸ Hence, “act-essences” come into being through the concrete acts of real persons. And, since each act “contains” the entire act-essence structure, the real person, to the extent that it is dissociated from anything contingent, is essentially the manifestation of the *a priori* structure of “the person”.

Nevertheless, the fact that subjects “can have the same insight” implies that “experiencers” are relating to a reality in which both parties participate.¹⁵⁹ Thus, it

¹⁵⁷ Scheler, 1973a, p.76. One of the first points that Scheler makes about essences is that they are neither universal nor particular. The essence red, for example, can be found in the universal concept as well as in each perceivable shade of this colour. Any universality or particularity must, therefore, be determined experientially through discovering whether or not any particular essence is found in a plurality of objects of different kinds. Second, essences are *cognized* completely independently of the ontological status of the objects that serve as the vehicle for such cognitions. Consequently, *a priori* essences and their interconnections can be *given* in objects of fiction and fantasy, or in deception. Third, essences are not learned, in any sense of the term. One exposure is all that is required for an essence to be grasped and it then may be validly applied to all objects and situations in which it plays a part. An *essence* is not conceptual but informs concepts, and is not a *thing* but can constitute the nature of an *individual thing*. In *a priori* essences and essential interconnections, therefore, we have a foundation for judgment and cognition itself, which threatens to transcend the strict separation of universal and particular, of concept and object, and of mind and world.

¹⁵⁸ He claims:

Surely the person *is* and experiences himself only as a being that *executes acts*, he is in no sense “behind” or “above” acts, or something standing “above” the execution and processes of acts, like a point at rest. For all of this is a picture taken from a spatiotemporal sphere; and it stands to reason that this does not hold for the relation between *person* and *acts* (p. 385).

Nevertheless, acts are executed, and since acts correspond to essences a priori, it is the nature of a given act that is responsible for the degree of objectivity of the essence that appears.

¹⁵⁹ Scheler writes:

is difficult to see how Scheler can simultaneously maintain that *a priori* essences are phenomenological “facts” which are not “for” any subject and that such “facts” are not necessarily valid universally.

Here we see Scheler concerned with a central and recurrent onto-epistemological problem, i.e., the apparent need to rid the subject of “subjectivity” to secure the possibility of “objective” experience. Scheler’s general approach to this problem is to attempt to isolate his theory of the non-formal *a priori* from it by in essence suggesting that the experiencer and the experience arise together. Scheler asserts that, the fact that absolute being *can* only arise in a person in accordance with *a priori* structural laws entails that absolute truth *be* personal. “And,” writes Scheler, “insofar as truth is impersonal, and insofar as it is ‘universal’ and not personally valid, there must be either falsehood or merely truth relative to life”.¹⁶⁰ Such statements make it appear that Scheler is concerned to secure, theoretically at least, *a priori* intuitive knowledge “for” particular persons.¹⁶¹ But this is not Scheler’s goal.

The person, as the concrete objective structure of experience and its experiencer, it seems, come into being in interdependence. The emergence of objective “contents” therefore is dependent on the concrete *acts* of particular persons with particular personalities.¹⁶² But, as we have seen, for anything at all to

Nonetheless, this does not mean that the discussion of phenomenological issues cannot enter into the question of universally valid truth or into the problem of how we can still *understand* an individually valid truth in spite of its individual validity - contrary to what the opponents of phenomenologists like to claim, not in order to refute phenomenologists but to silence them. For this much is clear: If what is *seen* by A is *genuine essence*, then everyone must be able to see it, since its inclusion in the content of all possible experience is essentially necessary (1973b, pp. 154-155; cf. also footnote).

¹⁶⁰ Scheler, 1973a, p. 395.

¹⁶¹ He suggests that *a priori* “essences” are not *for* persons but at the same time makes the emergence of such *facts* depend on the “being of the person”.

¹⁶² He suggests that in principle such “act-contents” are immune from outside corruption, see for example Scheler, 1954, pp. 163-164. He also writes in his last work that; “our own participation in

appear “the person” must become a real person. Any real person, however, necessarily functions through its lived body and historically, culturally, and biologically effected mind. This immediately raises the question of how phenomenological “facts” are to be isolated from among everyday percepts and concepts. Scheler (1973a) maintains:

We designate as ‘*a priori*’ all those ideal units of meaning and those propositions that are self-given by way of an *immediate intuitive* content in the absence of any kind of positing [Setzung] of subjects that think them and of the real nature of these subjects, and in the absence of any kind of positing of objects to which such units of meaning are applicable.¹⁶³

This gives the impression at least that the *a priori* will appear just in case the real nature of the subject is completely transcended such that the subject (with its inherent desires) does not contribute anything to that which appears (i.e., does not “combine” representations, or in anyway add something which is not “given”). But, as we know, this cannot be the case. If, as Scheler suggests, the interdependence of spiritual and extra-spiritual being comprehensively extends to all possible being, “ideal units of meaning” can only *be* just in case they exist in “real” being of some kind.

Now, if Scheler were to maintain that this real “being” is contingent in any fashion he would introduce contingency into “the objective structure of experience”. In one place Scheler claims that: *The being of the person is ... the*

these acts [of eternal spirit] is not simply a matter of discovering or of disclosing some being or essence that exists independently of us. It is, rather, a genuine co-creation of the essences, ideas, values and goals coordinated with the eternal logos, the eternal love, and the eternal will” Scheler, 1961, p. 48.

¹⁶³ Scheler, 1973a, p. 48.

"foundation" of all essentially different acts.¹⁶⁴ But what can the word "being" mean in this context? Scheler appears to be maintaining some kind of foundation for "acts" over and above the acts themselves. This would fit with our observation that Scheler's conception of "the person" is an ideal abstraction and hence, requires the power, if you will, of a real being for its concretization. But if Scheler must admit the necessity of the "real" contingently formed being as the foundation of the manifestation of the *a priori* structure of experience he will, it seems, be caught in a trap of his own devising. For it is difficult to see how he can consistently maintain both the possibility of a type of experience which is independent of the contingent nature of the real person, and that this same real person is foundational to said experience.¹⁶⁵

If we accept that all "phenomena" emerge interdependently with "the real nature of the subject" then it appears we must concern ourselves with how to "purify" our mental acts. We must consider the question of how to remove from the subject contingencies related to its embodied being so that its "ideal" nature can serve as the foundation of its mental acts. In other words, we must consider how to isolate the *a priori* nature of any particular subject from its *a posteriori* nature. This problem is a familiar one and, for Scheler, a central aspect of his philosophy.¹⁶⁶ With respect to this problem two intertwined threads that run

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 383.

¹⁶⁵ Scheler claims that "each experience is fully and adequately given only if the experiencing individual is co given in it" (1973a, p. 377). Scheler suggests that person and act are neither mental nor physical, but are psychophysically indifferent. He writes: "We are not troubled by the old Cartesian alternative, which requires that everything be either psychic or physical. For such a long time this alternative has concealed ideal objects...." (1973a, p. 389). But Scheler's theory cannot wholly avoid such Cartesian concerns. Notice also that if the real person becomes the foundation of the emergence of "contents" then the spectre of an infinite regress raises its head resulting from the fact that the intentional acts of a real person presupposes content.

¹⁶⁶ Cf., for example, Scheler 1973a, p. 380-381. Husserl also requires a similar overcoming of "embeddedness in the world" to bring about a transcendent awareness through which *species* are made apparent (CM §15/p. 35, in Bell, 1990, p. 169).

through Scheler's thought. The first is that *a priori* "facts" emerge in acts of "ideation" as a cancellation of the reality of the world. The second, stresses the "purification" of human being, in its essential nature as spiritual being, and detachment from all that is relative to this nature. Cognition of "essences", it seems, like Kant's harmonization of the cognitive faculties, requires the absence of drive impulses, such as desire, and of representations in the mind. According to Scheler, the human beings' ability to detach from its environment and its own psycho-emotional states is what differentiates it from "animals" and what permits the emergence of *a priori* essences. Doing phenomenology, in Scheler's sense, involves a kind of meditative practice wherein contingencies relative to situated-embodiment are peeled off the lenses of awareness thereby permitting the employment of *intuitive insight*. Developing phenomenological insight involves overcoming all that is contingent to manifesting spirit. Scheler mentions the ego, bodiliness, and prejudices, each of which block "absolute truth" from view. Thus, one has access to such truths to the extent that one is able to dissociate ones awareness from the "natural view" of the world.

7. As I mentioned above, Scheler was influenced by Buddhist philosophy and appears to share some basic metaphysical assumptions with certain canonical forms of Buddhism. I will now expand briefly on this relationship in order to further clarify Scheler's position and indicate where he seems to go astray. Scheler argues for the *a priority* of a certain class of "non-formal" phenomena which are permitted to vary across individuals. As we have seen his main line of argument for such a conclusion is not entirely cogent. The key assumption in this argument, once again, is the existence of *a priori* structural "laws" which are valid

for the real world and all possible worlds and which govern the regular emergence of particular “essences” given corresponding “acts”. A central assumption of Buddhist philosophy generally is also that of “pre-existent laws” which are, in some sense, contained in a unity and which govern the regular emergence of all phenomena given corresponding intentional acts.¹⁶⁷ Buddhism, however, does not go on from this assumption to postulate the possibility of a multiplicity of mental phenomena that are in no way relative to the historically embodied “subject”. Why, we might ask, given a philosophically analogous fundamental assumption does Buddhism contradict Scheler and deny the possibility of phenomena that are completely removed from the contingencies of embodied existence? The short answer to this question is that since, for Buddhism, any self must arise with an object, and absolute self is no self, any experience necessarily participates in the contingent.¹⁶⁸

A key concept of Buddhism is that of *pratītya-samutpāda*, which literally means “conditioned co-arising” or “interdependent co-arising” but is often also translated as “conditional nexus” or “causal nexus”.¹⁶⁹ It is the name given to a twelve member series that is held to account for the appearance, and apparent substantiality, of subject and world - that is, it accounts for content.¹⁷⁰ We will

¹⁶⁷ These are the laws of *dharma*, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

¹⁶⁸ As we will see in chapters 4 & 5 this statement also appears to be true of Kant.

¹⁶⁹ M. H. Kohn, trans., *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*. Boston: Shambhala, 1991. Cf. also, L. M. Pruden, trans., *Abhidarmakosabhāṣyam*, Berkley: Asian Humanities Press, 1988, pp. 413-17. “The meaning of the expression *pratītya-samutpāda* is as indicated in the Sūtra, “If that exists, then this exists; through the arising of that, there is the arising of this.” (p. 414).

¹⁷⁰ Scheler, appears to agree with this position and writes: “Whenever self-consciousness and consciousness of an object arise, they do so simultaneously and through the same process.” (1973b, p. 298). He goes on from this point to explicate what he has in mind by contrasting it with the kind of judgment employed in abstraction.

The categorical form of an object is not first impressed in a judgment upon a non-objective given, not even in a one-term, simple judgment, as some people have thought (e.g., Heinrich Maier in his book *Wahrheit und Wirklichkeit*). This is a pure construction. Consciousness of an object precedes all judgment and is not originally constituted by judgment. The same holds true of consciousness of states of affairs. The consciousness of

have an opportunity to examine this concept in detail in the fourth chapter but for the moment it is sufficient to observe that the series can be divided into two parts, which are closely associated with two uses of the term *vijñāna*. The first part of the series can be meaningfully captured under a metaphysical use of *vijñāna* as “consciousness”. *Vijñāna* in this sense can be understood as roughly parallel in function to Scheler’s use of “the person” considered as an atemporal structure of experience the postulation of which is necessary to account for the appearance of any phenomena whatsoever.¹⁷¹ The second part of the series comes under a use of *vijñāna* as “cognition” considered as that process through which the atemporal structure of experience is able to “concretize”.¹⁷²

Now, in spite of these apparent parallels between Scheler’s philosophy and Buddhism, in contrast to Scheler, Buddhism does not make claims for “pure” *a priori* mental phenomena. For Buddhism, the “*a priori* laws” which govern the interdependent emergence of mental phenomena do not guarantee the

an object and the intentional object are not the result of an active [*tätige*] “forming” or “imprinting” which we perform on the given through judgments or any other operations of thought. On the contrary, they are the result of a pulling back, the result, that is, of the reflexive act, in which an originally ecstatic [*ekstatic gebender*] act turns back knowingly onto itself and comes upon a central self as its starting point. This central self can be given at every level and degree of “concentration” and “collectedness” of “self-consciousness” (1973b, p. 298).

Scheler seems to think that this self-consciousness, which arises with consciousness of an object, is the central self and can somehow be “given”. Buddhism, on the other hand, holds any consciousness that arises with an object to be impermanent, insubstantial, and without genuine essence.

¹⁷¹ In the Yogācāra school, as we shall see, a species of *vijñāna* is held to “contain”, all possible “phenomena” in potential form. W.S. Waldron, How innovative is the *ālayavijñāna*? The *ālayavijñāna* in the context of the canonical and *Abhidharma vijñāna* theory. Part 1, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 22: 199-258, 1994, in particular pp. 201-2. Cf. also this text chapter 4, n. 15.

¹⁷² Here one might observe the tension which exists within any theory which suggests that “subject” and “object” are merely “co-arising interdependent phenomena” and the idea of a subject which “acts” or “cognizes” its “phenomena”. These two senses of *vijñāna* can only appear to co-exist happily because of the underlying metaphysical doctrine, widespread in Indian philosophies, of “an ultimate homology between what we would call the psychological and metaphysical realms, what Maryla Falk (1943: 49) considers a ‘conception of a fundamental identity of the facts and events on both the scales, which are considered as only twin projections of one common complex of facts and events’” (Ibid., p.226).

“objectivity” of those phenomena. There is nothing to prohibit a conditioned and contingent “mental act” *x* from interdependently arising with phenomenon *y* in accordance with an *a priori* “law” *z*. In fact, for Buddhism all “phenomena” manifest in just this way and are consequently all viewed equally in being conditioned. For the Buddhists, although interdependent arising in accordance with “*a priori* laws” guarantees a kind of invariant relationship between act and content, it does not guarantee the “absolute” nature, or objectivity, of that “act-content”. Rather any product of interdependent arising is held to be impermanent and inessential - that is, it has only momentary existence and its “content” exists in interdependence with, and relative to, the nature of its co-emerging “mental act”.¹⁷³ The doctrine, therefore, applies both to any self, or soul, and to its interdependently emerging manifestations.¹⁷⁴ Both Scheler and the Buddhists deny the existence of an *enduring self, or soul*, that subsists throughout a succession of experiences “in order to safeguard the ‘identity of the individual person’”.¹⁷⁵ The crucial difference between these philosophies concerns the ontological status of the “mental act”. In demanding the possibility of a kind of individualized objectivity Scheler makes personality a general essential trait of all possible worlds and the “being” of the real person as the foundation of all acts. He also insists that “acts” are executed. These assertions together would seem to imply the essentiality of an executor of acts. The metaphysics of interdependent

¹⁷³ Cf., chapter 4, n. 23 for further clarification of these terms.

¹⁷⁴ Here we should note that:

Buddha himself, in answer to the question whether a self exists or not, never put forward a definite position so as not to cause new concepts to arise that would be irrelevant and obstructive for spiritual practice. Thus the teaching of no self is to be understood more as a fruitful pedagogical device than as a philosophical doctrine. Nevertheless in the course of the development of the Buddhist system of thought, this came more and more to be an unequivocal denial of the existence of a self. M.H. Kohn, *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1991, p.8.

¹⁷⁵ Scheler, 1973a, p. 385.

arising and actionless “acts”, however, demands an inessential actor - that is, no essential self. It is unclear from Scheler’s writings as to how he intended to reconcile these apparently contradictory demands.¹⁷⁶

Buddhism argues that if it is the case that there is no enduring self, i.e., that the “self” subsists entirely within the dynamic of interdependent arising then the subject loses its ontological independence from this arising. So also if, as Scheler argues, *all* sense of “action” and “actor” must be removed from “act” and the subject just consists in its “acts” which arise with corresponding “essences”, then the “subject”, as a permanent and essential entity, has vanished! But if this “subject” is denied an independent and permanent reality it is not clear how content is possible, as “experiences” would seem to be completely relative to each momentary interdependently arising subject. If, for instance, the appearance of beautiful “object” *x* at time *t* can be adequately explained by its “law governed interdependent arising” with the appearance of “subject” *y* at time *t* then questions of the objectivity or subjectivity of the experience of *x* would appear to lose their force because the account seems to provide no role for the autonomous “mental acts” of an independent and, in some sense, permanent subject. To speak colloquially, there seems to be no “self” that continues through experiences to get the facts of the matter wrong or right and, therefore, no possibility of experience,

¹⁷⁶ That view that such contradictory demands are in fact irreconcilable is a view of one branch of Buddhist philosophy. The contemporary Indian philosopher J. N. Mohanty argues as follows: “A phenomenological philosophy has to accept a radical phenomenological discontinuity, and any attempt to overcome it is to be suspected as originating from a too hasty desire to achieve metaphysical simplicity. One of the beauties of the Advaita Vedānta is that it accepts such a discontinuity between *vyāvahārika* (the empirical) and the *pāramārthika* (the transcendental), and considers any relationship between them as being logically indescribable. Our distinction between the practical and the theoretical may be regarded as a pale reflection of that spiritual philosophy on the level of secular philosophizing.” (J. N. Mohanty, *Phenomenology and Ontology*, Martinus Nijhoff: The Haag, 1970, p. 103) This passage concisely captures a central thrust of this dissertation.

or more generally, of content. To accept such an account at face value would not, therefore, help us to understand our original problem of what it is that enables the possibility of content - that is, what it is that, if we take Kant seriously, abrogates the need for an infinite regress of rules of judgment.

Scheler, it seems, does not argue cogently that a non-formal *a priori* structure of awareness is constitutively influential in experience. How then might we attempt to rescue the subject and with it the possibility of experience from the oblivion to which our investigation of Scheler has led it? If we acknowledge the apparently greater consistency of the Buddhist position and admit to the *inessential nature of all phenomena* we would appear to be forced into a position where we are not able to provide a satisfactory response to the problem of content. In order to make further progress towards understanding how content is possible we will, at least temporarily, abandon Scheler and Buddhism. In the next chapter we will examine a philosophy not ostensibly based on interdependent arising. The philosophy of Meister Eckhart, as we will see, appears to be better situated to provide for a "self", which is sufficiently permanent to permit a satisfactory response to the problem of content, and to permit us to move forward in our attempt to understand the foundations of cognition.

Chapter 3

Meister Eckhart

1. Our focus in this chapter is once again with the problem of content and with understanding those “mental processes” which are foundational to cognition. Our interest in Eckhart is primarily motivated by the realization that in the course of his attempts “to explain what the holy Christian faith and the two Testaments maintain through the help of the natural philosophers” he perhaps provides us with a way forward.¹⁷⁷ As we will see, Eckhart’s explanations of how the mind comes to know things often employs the notion of “ideal objects” which exist potentially in the mind - an idea which can be traced at least to Aristotle. This postulation provides Eckhart with a fundamentally Aristotelian way to account for the emergence of intelligible forms (i.e., content). However, although Eckhart draws on Aristotle to help render these matters more satisfactory his own account is unique as it is ultimately not dependent on there being a proliferation of such entities either potentially or actually. In the final analysis Eckhart suggests that there is no “being”, either determinate or indeterminate in the ground of the mind. The mind, in its capacity to render intelligible forms, is fundamentally groundless. But, for Eckhart, this fact does not imply that experience is not possible or that it

¹⁷⁷ E. Colledge and B. McGinn, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, London: SPCK, 1981, p. 123.

is impossible to have knowledge of the ground of the mind. Rather Eckhart argues that for a detached mind both of these are simultaneously possible.

Much of Eckhart's work is, as Schürmann informs us, an attempt to reconcile his original insights into the nature of *being* with the philosophical thought that dominated Medieval Europe. One school of thought that flourished in Germany during the fourteenth century went by the name of Platonist Albertinism. The central doctrine of this philosophy held that all things eternally preexist in God by means of their ideal being. Plato, in the *Meno*, prefigures the thrust of this doctrine. In the *Meno*, as part of his inquiry into the teachability of virtue, Socrates concerns himself with how knowledge is possible and with the nature of its source. Central to this inquiry is his explication of the theory of recollection (*anamnesis*) whereby one is able to discover the truth of things buried within oneself like seeds. Socrates puts the theory to the test by eliciting from a boy who has not received instruction the answer to a geometrical problem. Since the problem is a geometrical one, it is one that cannot be answered by an appeal to the senses. Thus, when the correct answer is elicited Socrates claims that he has enabled the boy to recollect something that he had known by means of the pre-existence of his soul. To further support his argument Socrates mentions that the doctrine that the soul has long ago experienced all things in its various existences is well known to the priests and poets. Hence, in a sense, the soul knows all things but because it has forgotten them it has to be reminded of them.

In the hands of Thomas Aquinas and other medieval theologians this doctrine receives a reading which is mediated by Aristotle's theory of the intellect and his modification of Plato's theory of Forms. Of particular significance to

Eckhart are the following points from Aquinas' *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*. First, Aristotle claims that for any organ of sense to function properly it must be "without" any property and entirely receptive. Aquinas interprets this principle as applying also to the intellect. Thus, he maintains that if one is to know the truth of all things the intellect must be entirely receptive and empty of any "images" of its own production.¹⁷⁸ Second, Aristotle suggests that although the mind, as the intellectual part of the soul, is a place of "forms" they only reside there potentially and not actually.¹⁷⁹ Aristotle does not object to talk of the ideas of all things residing in man's intellect so far as these ideas are understood only potentially to inhere there. Eckhart subscribes to a similar position in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*.¹⁸⁰ Eckhart's way of explicating what this means is, however, not the same as Aristotle's.¹⁸¹

In addition to being influenced by the views of Plato and Aristotle the tradition of Medieval Scholasticism was also heavily influenced by Neoplatonic thought.¹⁸² Of particular interest to Eckhart was a text of Proclus', entitled *Book of Causes*.

According to Proclus, the $\text{fi}\ddot{\text{o}}\delta$, the first deployment or radiation springing from the One, contains in itself intellectually the multiplicity of sensible forms; like a reservoir of archetypes, it collects potentialities of all

¹⁷⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, ch. III, lecture 7, K. Foster et al., trans., New Haven, 1951, pp. 402-410.

¹⁷⁹ Aristotle writes: "It has been said well that the soul is a place of forms or ideas: except that this is not true for the whole soul, but only of the soul which can think, and again that the forms are there not in actuality but potentially." (Aristotle, *De Anima*, book III, ch. 4; 429 a 27; R. D. Hicks, trans., Amsterdam, 1907, 1965, p. 131, in R. Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Philosopher*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978, p. 34)

¹⁸⁰ Cf. College and McGinn, pp. 123-4.

¹⁸¹ Cf. R. Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Philosopher*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978, pp. 172-180.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 73.

things. With relation to the One, the summit of the universe and source of all existing things, in whose divinity it shares, the intellect is a *henad*: the first “hypostasis” or the first degree of perfection, and the family of the gods; with relation to existing beings, to which it gives intelligence, it is a “monad,” the principle in the quality of which they share. ... It is, one might say, the threshold where the One overflows into the multiple: “One and yet not one”.¹⁸³

In Proclus’ schematic of the universe the *fiōd* involves a twofold process in which the multiplicity of objects is derived from the One and then led back to the One. The intensity of being increases on such Neoplatonic systems as the mind approaches the fullness of being in universal One. Eckhart shares with Proclus the general idea that the intellect and the One are intimately related and that, in some sense, the intellect contains, potentially, all possible “intelligible forms”. Their general philosophical perspectives, however, are utterly distinct.¹⁸⁴ According to Schürmann, Eckhart adopts Neoplatonic vocabulary primarily because he cannot articulate his experience of the ground of being adequately and stay within the limits of Aristotelian philosophy.¹⁸⁵

Having familiarized ourselves with some of Eckhart’s philosophical influences let us now take a closer look at how he suggests intelligible forms emerge (i.e., how content manifests). Central to Eckhart’s account is a division of the intellect into active and passive aspects. According Eckhart, intelligible forms

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁸⁴ There is, for example, nothing in Proclus that compares to Eckhart’s conception of the power of the intellect to “manifest” the Son of the One.

¹⁸⁵ Schürmann, 1978, p. 140.

manifest by means of a movement of “Forms” or “principles” from the active to the passive intellect. In this way those Forms which inhere only potentially in the mind are rendered actual.¹⁸⁶ Eckhart illustrates this model as follows:

Now observe. We spoke just now of an active and a passive intellect. The active intellect abstracts images from outward things, stripping them of matter and of accidents, and introduces them to the passive intellect, begetting their mental image therein. And the passive intellect, made pregnant by the active in this way, cherishes and knows these things with the aid of the active intellect. Even then, the passive intellect cannot keep on knowing these things unless the active intellect illumines them afresh.¹⁸⁷

Here Eckhart suggests that things are known, or illuminated, in the movement of “images” from the active to the passive intellect. This description of how we come to know things is, it seems, not far removed from Aristotle’s characterization of the role of intelligence (*nous*) in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in so far as both accounts are concerned with attaining truth by means of abstracting universals and first principles from experience of particulars.¹⁸⁸ On this general line of thought

¹⁸⁶ Both Aquinas and Eckhart show particular interest in the following passage of *De Anima*: “The mind as we have described it is what it is by virtue of becoming all things, while there is another which is what it is by virtue of making all things: this is a sort of a positive state like light; for in a sense light makes potential color into actual color. Mind in this sense of it is... in its essential nature activity... .” (Aristotle, *De Anima*, book III, ch. 5, in R. McKeon, Trans. *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, New York: Random House, 1941, p. 592) Aquinas picks up the essentials of these ideas and repeats them in his own words. He writes: “The intellect is an active immaterial force able to assimilate other things to itself, i.e., to immaterialize them; in this way it makes the potentially intelligible actually so.” (Ibid., *Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima*, book III, ch. 5, lecture 10, n. 739; p. 430)

¹⁸⁷ M. O’C. Walshe, *German Sermons & Treatises Vol. I, II, & III*, London: Watkins Publishing, 1979, Vol. I, pp. 29-30.

¹⁸⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. M. Oswald. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1962, *N.E.*, 1141a1-20, pp. 154-156. Hence, for Aristotle, it would seem that in the sphere of matters about which deliberation is possible practical wisdom is that faculty which employs those ultimate forms, or universals, which intelligence is able to make available in receptivity. The resulting ultimate particulars may be used by active thought in theoretical matters. In this way “practical wisdom does not use theoretical wisdom but makes the provisions to secure it” [1145a-8].

once universals, or principles, are abstracted they are then “illuminated” by means of passing them from the active intellect to passive intellect as described above. But there is a significant problem with this kind of abstractionist approach to accounting for how things are rendered intelligible. It can provide no way to account for how “principles” are abstracted without presupposing that which needs to be explained.

On the line of thought advanced here by Eckhart abstracting a principle requires that one first identify likeness in the world. But identifying a “likeness” requires applying within the abstracting “process” a matching principle. Since, in practice, this latter principle turns out to be the very same “likeness” one is attempting to identify, there is ultimately no way for the active intellect to abstract principles. It can only pass on to the passive intellect those principles that it, in some sense, already possesses. Hence, as Eckhart observes, the problem with relying on abstraction is simply that “the active intellect cannot give what it has not [already] got”.¹⁸⁹ And since the active intellect has no power of its own to create *ex nihilo* that which intelligence grasps (in receptivity),¹⁹⁰ an account of how content emerges which relies on abstracting images from outward things, if it is to have a chance of being satisfactory, must assume that the movement through which likenesses are identified is powered by ultimate Forms, Principles, or Universals all of which, in some sense, must already exist within the abstraction

¹⁸⁹ Walshe, Vol. I, p. 30.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Colledge and McGinn, p. 73; and R. Blakney, *Meister Eckhart*, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1941, p. 98. Aristotle seems also to have noticed this fact. He writes: “Intelligence is, therefore, both starting point and end; for demonstrations start with ultimate terms and have ultimate facts as their objects.” (Aristotle, M. Oswald, trans., p. 167n., NE, 1143b10)

process. Thus Eckhart relies on the Aristotelian idea that the Forms exist potentially in the mind (*sêle*).¹⁹¹

But, as we have suggested, even this idea is not completely adequate to Eckhart's understanding of the process through which things are rendered determinate. This is shown, for example, when in speaking of God's perfections (e.g., goodness, truth, justice, love, wisdom, etc.) he writes that,

among perfections in themselves intelligence comes first, and then determinate or indeterminate being.... On the basis of this I show that in God there is no being, determinate or indeterminate.... Nevertheless I say that if there is anything in God that you want to call being, it belongs to him through his intelligence.¹⁹²

God's intelligence, it seems, is immanent to that movement of the intellect through which things are rendered intelligible.¹⁹³ This same intelligence is required both in tasks of perceiving, reason, imagining, judging, etc., and in drawing aside the veil to perceive "God naked, stripped, of goodness, or of being, or of any name."¹⁹⁴ This fact makes it clear that Eckhart's commitment to potentially pre-existent Forms is not without equivocation and implies that such talk is employed primarily as a useful expository device.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Eckhart's use of the term *sêle* has two meanings one corresponding to *anima*, the animating principle of the body, and the other to *animus* which can be more accurately translated as "mind" (Schürmann, 1978, p. xiv).

¹⁹² *Master Eckhart, Parisian Questions and Prologues*, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto, 1974, pp. 46-48; in Schürmann, p. 189.

¹⁹³ God is the active form of Godhead (Blakney, p. 226).

¹⁹⁴ Blakney, p. 221.

¹⁹⁵ Schürmann claims that, for Eckhart: "God is the universal par excellence: everything universal, inasmuch as it is universal, he says, is God. ... Eckhart pushes to extremes the Aristotelian teaching according to which universal forms exist only in particular beings. In the ground of the mind the universal is particularized (I possess intelligible forms), and the particular universalized (I am detached from sensible forms). In fact this thrust leads Meister Eckhart to abolish both universal and particular in the ground of the mind. The identity of a shared quality is a false

In the end Eckhart relies on a notion of the One, which he refers to by various names.¹⁹⁶ The acts of what we have called determinate judgment, discernment, comparison, understanding, thought, perception, etc., owe their possibility ultimately to this One.¹⁹⁷ It is the One, therefore, which possess the capacity to “illuminate”. As Eckhart suggests: “I cannot see anything unless it bears some likeness to myself, nor can I know anything unless it is analogous to me. God has hidden [the essence of] all things in himself. They are not this and that, individually distinct, but rather, they are one with unity.”¹⁹⁸ Or, as he writes elsewhere: “Likeness in all things,... is the birth of the One and the likeness of the One,...”.¹⁹⁹ Hence, for Eckhart the illumination of things involves a kind of reflexivity in which intelligence (or “the One”) contacts itself.²⁰⁰

But there are familiar difficulties with attempting to elucidate the “process” of emergence by reference to a reflexively illuminating Unity. First, it seems that we are only ever able to encounter that which has already been illuminated and, since that which illuminates can be none of those things, it will admit of no predicates. Second, and perhaps more fundamentally, an account of experience that relies on a reflexively illuminating Unity ultimately identifies the

identity. The effect of participation is that a perfection is no longer the same, but other. Participation depends on that formal hierarchy which Eckhart intends to destroy. Participation sanctions the gradual loss of intensity through degrees of being.” (p. 143)

¹⁹⁶ That which illuminates Eckhart refers to variously as the Father, One, Idea, God, Word, Principle, or Unbegotten while that which is illuminated is idea, object, principle, created thing, image, or begotten.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 221; and Blakney, p. 225.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹⁹⁹ College and McGinn, p. 221. Or elsewhere: “God *becomes* as phenomena express him.” (Blakney, p. 225)

²⁰⁰ Cf. where Eckhart writes: “It is asked where an image is, in the mirror [i.e., mind] or in the object? The image is in me, of me, and to me. ... Thus, the being of angels depends on the presence of the divine mind in which they behold themselves,... .” (Blakney, pp. 221-222) Angels, for Eckhart, are essentially ideas of God - Principles. For a recent defense of a closely related position cf. T. Nagel, *The Last Word*, Oxford University Press, 1997. Eckhart’s final position also seems close to that of Sāntarākṣita (cf. below chapter 6, §6).

knower and the known, and hence is inconsistent. Consequently, applied to the problem of how intelligible forms (i.e., contents) emerge, a theory that relies on the notion of a reflexively illuminating Unity can only leave the matter mysterious.

2. As a Meister of the Catholic Church Eckhart's primary concern is not to provide a philosophically coherent account of the possibility of content. Eckhart's employment of philosophy is strategic and modified where necessary in service of articulating his fundamental experience of the ground of Being and its relationship to the Christian faith. Eckhart's main concern throughout his sermons is to educate people about what he takes to be the true nature of the relationship between God and the human *sêle*. Eckhart is after expressing the Truth that reveals itself to a truly detached mind, - a mind that has been co-opted by, or more accurately *is*, God.²⁰¹ Eckhart's account of the life of the intellect in its capacity to render intelligible forms results in large part from his desire to place them appropriately as distractions from man's proper aim and destiny. The Truth that Eckhart ultimately desires for us occurs "beyond" all such contingencies. For Eckhart, thinking, imagining, judging, and perceiving lead only to an inferior sort of knowledge.²⁰² Hence, when Eckhart continues his discussion of the active and passive intellects he writes:

²⁰¹ The word, which is being translated as "disinterest" here and by "detachment" elsewhere, is *Abgescheidenheit*. The basic idea is not far removed from what Kant has in mind when he suggests that one must not have an "interest" in the object in question for harmonization to occur - at least in so far as no determinate thought can be in mind at the time of inception. For an analysis see Schürmann, pp. 84-5.

²⁰² Eckhart writes: "Thus, the authorities teach when one knows creatures as they are in themselves, that is 'twilight knowledge,' in which creation is perceived by clearly distinguished ideas; but when creatures are known in God, that is 'daybreak knowledge,' in which creatures are perceived without distinctions, all ideas being rejected, all comparisons done away in that One that God himself is." (Blakney, p. 79)

Now observe: what the active intellect does for the natural man, that and far more God does for one with detachment: He *takes away* the active intellect from him, and installing Himself in its stead, He himself undertakes all that the active intellect ought to be doing.²⁰³

What the active intellect ought to be doing is permitting Unity to reveal itself and not attending to multiplicity.²⁰⁴ Instead of bending God's power through attachment to do one's own will by thinking and perceiving, - that is, by continually passing images abstracted from outward things from the active intellect to the passive intellect in attachment (and thereby rendering content) - the active intellect should remain still, and disinterested, in order to permit "God to reveal himself". If the power through which things are illuminated is to reveal its nature the intellect, it seems, must remain fundamentally receptive and "let God do the work". Where the mind has ceased its incessant activity of "expecting and rejecting," Eckhart suggests, all things are present in their essence.²⁰⁵ But how should such a claim be interpreted? Such a lack of intellectual movement would seem imply a lack of consciousness. But, of course, this cannot be quite right.

As Eckhart describes it the movement of the intellect is a necessary condition of experience. But it seems that it is not in itself sufficient. It requires the One to supply the power of illumination. Now, according to Eckhart, if the One can become detached from the function of sustaining this movement it will service itself and reveal "God to be where he is One and simple". In other words, when a person is completely unattached to self and world, and hence purely

²⁰³ Walshe, Vol. I, pp. 29-30.

²⁰⁴ Blakney, 1941, p. 225. It is interesting to note that cognition (i.e., attending to things) is an activity which, like Kant, Eckhart suggests occurs with pleasure

²⁰⁵ He writes: "Intellect's object and lodgement is essence, not accident (*zuoval*), but pure unmixed being itself." (Walshe, Vol. I, p. 31)

receptive, the One, Godhead, or Void, by necessity of its nature as the power of illumination fills this void.²⁰⁶ In this case simple Being manifests and Truth is revealed.²⁰⁷ This is made clear by Eckhart in his explication of the following passage from Luke 10:38. He writes:

“Our Lord Jesus Christ went into a little castle and was received by a virgin who was his wife”.

Now then, pay close attention to this word: it was necessary that it be a virgin by whom Jesus was received. “Virgin” designates a human being who is devoid of all foreign images and who is as void as he was when he was not yet.²⁰⁸

Schürmann points out that this is a loose translation, so loose in fact that Eckhart has undoubtedly accommodated it to his own ends.²⁰⁹ The reception of Jesus by a “virgin” signifies the fact that, for God’s knowledge to manifest, the intellect must be completely “void”.²¹⁰ To speak metaphorically with Eckhart, God’s knowledge can only be received by a “virgin” and conceived by a “wife,” both of which are the same “woman”. As long as the active intellect is dominant and occupied with activities like abstraction, thought, and imagination the mind, it seems, is largely condemned to a kind of circularity in which it can only employ the products of

²⁰⁶ Eckhart often employs the phrase “and the light shines in the darkness” to illustrate this point. Here as in Eckhart, the terms Godhead, Not, Void, Father, Unity, and One are strict synonyms. Without this proliferation of terms, as Schürmann observes, we would be reduced to silence (p. 73).

²⁰⁷ Cf. Walshe, Vol. I, pp. 29-32.

²⁰⁸ Luke 10:38, Eckhart in Schürmann, p. 3.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

²¹⁰ The word “*empfangen*”, which Eckhart uses for “receive” in this text, can equally mean “conceive” (Schürmann, p. 11). Since, as Schürmann suggests, Eckhart’s sermons are carefully planned, I take the use of this bivalent term to imply the two emergent aspects of the unity he calls the little castle, i.e., the forming (active) and being formed (passive) “aspects” of the intellect. Since the little castle is a Unity this makes it clear that the differentiation of active and passive intellects are, in fact, two ways of conceptualizing one “movement”.

previous renderings.²¹¹ If, however, the active intellect can be made void then that ultimate Truth manifests which can be known by no “self” and hence is not an experience in the usual sense. Eckhart suggests that to know this one must:

Look and see: this little castle in the mind (*sêle*) of which I am speaking and which is my intention, is so simple,... that if God is ever to catch a glimpse of it, it will cost him all his divine names.... You see, insofar as he is one and simple, he penetrates into this unity that I call the little castle in the mind, but otherwise he will not enter into it in any way;... .With this part of itself the mind is equal to God and not otherwise. What I have told you is the truth; I give you truth itself as witness and my soul as pledge.²¹²

What Eckhart is here calling “this little castle in the mind,” is the seat of the intellect’s power. This power can be directed both toward the world through attachment and the movement of the intellect or it can be returned to itself as “void”. Directed toward the world it is the *means* by which the active intellect, with its abstracted principles, is provided with the power to render things intelligible. Returned to itself in detachment it is a revelation of the nature of “that” which is ultimately responsible for the possibility of content.²¹³

²¹¹ Eckhart writes: “No idea represents or signifies itself. It always points to something else, of which it is a symbol. And since man has no ideas, except those abstracted from external things through the sense, he cannot be blessed by an idea” (p. 98). This argument is analogous to: No interpretation interprets itself. All interpretations (i.e., rules) point to something else. And since all abstracted forms are interpretations. Abstracted forms cannot render content.

²¹² Schürmann, p. 45.

²¹³ Eckhart writes: “The masters say: The mind has two faces. The upper face beholds God incessantly, the lower face looks a little towards the below and directs the senses. The upper face, however, which is the peak of the mind, stands in eternity. It has nothing to do with time; it is ignorant of time as well as of the body.... The masters say that from the higher part of the mind emanate two powers. The first is called will, the other intellect. But the highest perfection of these powers resides in the higher power, namely the intellect. This can never find rest. It aspires to God neither as he is the Holy Spirit nor as he is the Son: it flees from the Son. Nor does it want God inasmuch as he is God. Why? Because, as such, he still carries a name. It wants something more noble, something better than God as having a name. What then does the intellect want? It does not know; it wants him as he is the Father. ... Only there is he the Father.” (Eckhart, in Schürmann,

But there is a problem with Eckhart's account of how the Absolute is able to reveal itself. As Schürmann observes, Eckhart's thoughts on these matters seem to lead to an *aporia*. On the one hand Eckhart suggests that the Absolute manifests just in case we become void, or "break through beyond everything that has a name", on the other hand it manifests in letting the "Son of God be born in you". In the first instance Truth, or *Being*, is to manifest in, or as, the unrepresentable One, and in the second instance it is to manifest through letting God act in place of the active intellect. Unfortunately, since something cannot consist both in a Unity and a multiplicity these lines of thought are inconsistent.²¹⁴

This inconsistency, Schürmann argues, is ultimately overcome in Eckhart's doctrine of detachment wherein the bifurcation of that which illuminates and that which is illuminated is resolved. As Eckhart writes:

Listen closely to the instruction that I am going to give you. I could have so vast an intelligence that all the images that all human beings have ever received and those that are in God himself were comprehended in my intellect; however, if I were in no way attached to them, to the point that in everything I do or neglect to do, I did not cling to any of them with attachment - with its before and its after - but if in this present now I kept myself unceasingly free and void for the beloved will of God and its

1978, p. 71) From this passage it is clear that the intellect is, for Eckhart, ultimately not anything like a faculty of concepts or the seat of merely formal, or noetic, activity. Rather, it is the dwelling place of the Father, the power of illumination, and identical with the ground of the upper face of mind, the seat of intentionality. The intellect when active and directed outward engenders "self" and "world," when passive and directed inwards "self" and "world" are both diminished. The more they are diminished the more likely it becomes that the power of Self-illumination (i.e., the Truth) will appear.

²¹⁴ Cf. Schürmann, p. 159.

fulfillment, then I should indeed be a virgin, without the views of all the images, as truly as I was when I was not yet.²¹⁵

The logic of the reconciliation then appears to run as follows: Eckhart's detachment is a self and world forgetting so complete that it would be a mistake to say of one who lives in detachment that they "are" so-and-so (who continues through time). And yet, for such a person, content neither vanishes nor merges into a unitary mass. Rather it seems that in detachment, where the "active intellect" is replaced by God, one's normal everyday "awareness of..." things is somehow transcended such that anything which "appears" is seen "in its True light". Here, in detachment, the One and the process through which it enacts itself are apparently identical.

Unfortunately, this is a rather imprecise way of speaking which does not clearly show how a "self-consciousness" (through which experience becomes possible) can be sustained. It also does little to show how an appeal to a reflexively illuminating "One", which transcends the bifurcation between that which illuminates and that which is illuminated, might provide a satisfactory alternative to an account which relies on this division. Hence, it is unclear from Schürmann's remarks how Eckhart's doctrine of detachment is able to resolve these apparently inconsistent lines of thought.

3. As Eckhart has explained the matter so far the voidness which is requisite for a knowledge of "That" which is responsible for content seems to require a detachment so complete that the "self" for all intents and purposes has vanished. In other words, in detachment the active intellect is "taken away", or at least

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

remains still, and God functions in its place. But Eckhart's account of how intelligible forms emerge, at least in the first instance, relies on the abstraction of forms and their subsequent movement from the active to passive intellect. Hence, it implies the identity through time of an active intellect in order to abstract, store, and then apply forms.²¹⁶ If the active intellect remains still then it would seem that the "self", through which these activities are made possible, cannot function, and hence cannot be sustained. In this case content would not seem to be possible because there is, so to speak, no continuing "self" to cement the individual experiences into one whole.

Here one may be tempted to suggest that Eckhart may be able to avoid the aforementioned inconsistency, as well as the conclusion that detachment offers no coherent possibility of experience, by means of his concept of God. According to Eckhart, in detachment God takes over the functions of the active intellect and does even more. Since God is conceived of a permanent the concept may provide Eckhart with a way, a kind of subject, by means of which "things" are able to manifest.²¹⁷ But there remains a significant problem which Eckhart can ultimately

²¹⁶ Consider the following passage from Aristotle in *Physica*, book 4, 14.223^b21f where he writes: "Whether if soul did not exist time would exist or not, is a question that may fairly be asked; for if there cannot be someone to count there cannot be anything that can be counted, so that evidently there cannot be number; for number is either what has been, or what can be, counted. But if nothing but soul, or in soul reason, is qualified to count, there would not be time unless there were soul, but only that of which time is an attribute, i.e., if *movement* can exist without soul, and the before and after are attributes of movement, and time is these *qua* numerable." (Hardie and Gaye, trans., in M. Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Albert Hofstadter, trans. Revised Edition. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 254f) The main point for our purposes is that multiplicity strictly implies time. But we can rephrase the argument along the following lines: Multiplicity involves the counting of things. But the counting of things implies both time and someone to count. Thus, we might conclude, multiplicity implies time and time implies the soul. Furthermore, time is an attribute of movement. And movement implies things to move. Things to move, however, imply space. Thus, the soul exists on one side of the equation and in interdependence, time, space, and number together on the other. Hence, a multiplicity of non-spatiotemporal entities (in the One) is an incoherent idea.

²¹⁷ Put another way, it would seem that one becomes immediately aware of, and transformed by, what always was the case, - the Truth - that the One is the source of that movement, of the self and other.

do little to clear up. Unlike the movement of the active intellect, God's "movements" do not take time.²¹⁸ As a result, when God takes over the functioning of the active intellect, Eckhart is left with an atemporal "Permanent" which, although capable of serving both as source of all potential forms and as the "perceiver" of actualized forms, cannot provide Eckhart with a way to account for the necessary movement by means of which the potential becomes actual – a process which, it would seem, must occur in time. But these are not Eckhart's last words on the matter.

Further clarification of the theory of experience implicit in Eckhart's doctrine of being can be obtained through a consideration of some comments that he makes at the beginning of his *Defense* to charges of heresy. There he sets out three main points from which, he suggests, "I can clearly demonstrate the truth of everything brought up against me from my books and remarks. I can also show the ignorance and irreverence of my opponents,...".²¹⁹ The first of his points, is that,

... the absolute acts of the Godhead proceed from God according to the property of his attributes, as a theological maxim says. Hence, in the fifth book of *On Consideration* Bernard says the 'God loves as charity, knows as

²¹⁸ Eckhart writes: "I am cause of myself according to my being which is eternal, but not according to my becoming which is temporal" (in Schürmann, 1978, p. 219). Or: "As long as one clings to time, space, number, and quantity, he is on the wrong track and God is strange and far away" (Blakney, p. 213). And elsewhere: "The spirit, in knowing, has no use for multiplicity, for multiplicity is of use only within time, in this defective world. No one can strike his roots into eternity without being rid of multiplicity." (p. 192) And again: "God does not see through time, nor does anything new happen in his sight." (Blakney, p. 86) Such being it would seem "is bereft of all wonder" and "gets nothing new from things to come nor from any chance" not because it can "tell the future" but because it is always already complete (in Schürmann, 1978, p. 6).

²¹⁹ Colledge and McGinn, 1981, p. 71.

truth, sits in judgment as justice, rules as majesty,... operates as strength, reveals as light, etc..'

The second is that the good man and goodness are one. The good man insofar as he is good signifies goodness alone, just as something white signifies whiteness. These two things, being good and goodness, are univocally one in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are analogically one in God and in us considered as good.²²⁰

Here Eckhart suggests first that, insofar as the absolute acts of Godhead, or the One, proceed from God they do so in the form of his attributes. Second, these attributes of God are, insofar as a person is detached, identified with that person. Hence, it follows that, insofar as a person is detached, the absolute acts of Godhead both proceed from that person (God replaces the active intellect) and *are* that person.²²¹ As Eckhart suggests, the good man and goodness are one. This identification is true univocally as regards the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit because this holy trinity, considered as a function (i.e., "movement") of the intellect, *is* the actualization of the being of the Father.²²² On the other hand they are analogically identified with God and with us insofar as we *are* good because in those instances both God and us are considered as merely potential, or ideal.

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 73.

²²¹ Exert yourself so that the child [i.e., the Son] be not only in the process of being born, but that it be already born, just as in God the Son is always born and in the process of being born. May God help us that this be our destiny. Amen." (Schürmann, p. 170) And elsewhere: "God desires urgently that you, the creature, get out of his way - as if his own blessedness depends on it." (Blakney, p. 127)

²²² Here we can note that creatures seem to be nothing without God and God is Nothing without creatures. Eckhart eliminates the notion of "ideal being" having any existence at all prior to its instantiation *in concreto*. This is a break with Aristotle, Plato, Augustine, and with the Neoplatonists (cf. Schürmann, 1978, p. 177, for a detailed account). This is also a position towards which Scheler leans but does not want to fully accept because it appears to reduce the individual to nothing.

In order to explicate this rather cryptic way of speaking more thoroughly we must return to Thomas Aquinas. St. Thomas borrowed from Aristotle several interesting expressions of identity. One of which is the principle that “the thinking and that which is thought are identical”.²²³ In his commentary on this passage Aquinas writes: “The actually (*in actu*) understood object and the actually understanding subject are one being, just as the actually sensed object and the actually sensing subject are one being.”²²⁴ This doctrine of the onto-epistemological identity of mind and object is picked up by Eckhart and extended to the realm of the spirit where he concludes that since God’s *being* is his knowledge, the mind that knows God *is* God. In other words, since the mind which functions in complete detachment engenders God’s knowledge (i.e., his Principles) and, since there is no separate experiencer here, this mind is God’s knowledge. But since God’s knowledge is his being this mind is identical with God.²²⁵

How God happens to engender his being is essentially the subject of Eckhart’s third point. There he begins by suggesting:

The third is that everything that begets, indeed everything that acts, at that moment possesses two characteristics. The first characteristic is that by nature it does not rest or stop until it introduces its form in what it acts upon

²²³ Aristotle, *De Anima*, book III, ch. 4; 430 a 3; op. cit., p. 135. Cf. also the following in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, book XII, ch. 9; 1075 a 3-5: “Wherever things are immaterial the mind and its object are not different, so that they are the same; and knowing is one with what is known.” (R. Hope, trans., New York, 1952, p. 266, and *ibid.*, p. 230)

²²⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima*, book III, Ch. 4, lecture 9, n. 724; p. 423.

²²⁵ In *The Book of Divine Comfort* Eckhart writes: “St. Augustine says that to apprehend apart from thought, apart from spatial forms and imagination, without abstracting from what is seen, is to know the truth of things. Those who do not know this will laugh and mock me and I shall pity them. They like to look at eternal things and consider divine works and to stand in the light of eternity, while their hearts still flutter about in yesterday and today, in space and time.” (R. Blakney, *Meister Eckhart*, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1941, pp. 72-3)

and begets. When the form as such has been introduced, bestowed and communicated, it confers existence, as well as everything that belongs to it, namely operation and any type of property. That is why according to Aristotle [*Physics* III, 2 and VII, 1] what has not been moved is not moved, and what does not touch does not act. The second characteristic is that every agent insofar as it is an agent, or everything that begets insofar as it begets, is unbegotten, neither made nor created, because it is not derived from another. For example, the form of a work of art (think of a house in the architect's mind) is a kind of begotten or made offspring. If I may speak in this way, it is created from something outside, namely from a real house or the architect's teacher. It does not beget as such; it is not a father or a principle that produces.²²⁶

Here Eckhart is referring to what he considers to be the essential characteristic of the "movement" of the intellect – that is, at any given moment, it's "acting" possesses two characteristics. First, it does not stop until its potential being is rendered actual. Second, "potential" being is Unconditioned being. As we have seen Eckhart maintains that the "form" of all things can be impressed on the intellect because it is a purely receptive faculty open to become all things.²²⁷

However, since the intellect is primarily an active power, and subject to desire and attachment, it tends to take up what it already knows and thereby impose those things on itself.²²⁸ Nevertheless, as we have made clear this "taking-up" of

²²⁶ Colledge and McGinn, p. 73.

²²⁷ Schürmann, p. 147.

²²⁸ Eckhart writes: "When the agents of the soul contact creatures, they take and make ideas [*bilde*] and likenesses of them and bear them back again into the self. ... Thus the soul gets at things by means of ideas and the idea is an entity created by the soul's agents. Be it a stone, or a rose, or a person, or whatever it is that is to be known, first an idea is taken and then absorbed, and in this way the soul connects with the phenomenal world." (Blakney, p. 97)

images, or forms, must be powered by those Ultimate Forms which Eckhart resolves into Unity and which achieve “being” in “becoming”. Hence, Eckhart continues:

“The Son can do nothing of himself” (Jn. 5:19). From this it clearly follows that the begetter [potential being] and the begotten [actual being] are one in reality, but of opposed and distinct relation, either by a real relation in the Godhead where the relation and the real being are the same thing, or by relation and reason in created things. This is because acting and being acted upon are two equally primary principles but one motion. To move and to be moved according to the nature of their relations begin and end at the same time.²²⁹

From this passage we are able to conclude that, for Eckhart, whether in the ground of the mind or in “becoming” intelligible things, the Universal and the particular are, the Illuminator and the illuminated are, in fact, One/one. This is true both for the Godhead where, accepting for the moment the idea that all intelligible forms exist potentially, relation (e.g. goodness) and real being (e.g., the good) are the same and, in created things (i.e., content) by means of relation (e.g., whiteness) and reason (e.g., the movement of the mind through which something is determined to be white). They are, however, as he recognizes, quite naturally broken up by the “active intellect” into a subjective/active aspect and an objective/passive aspect - a division that, once created, cannot be rendered consistent with the Unity that was responsible for its birth.

²²⁹ Colledge and McGinn, p. 73, (brackets mine).

Reasoning such as this then led Eckhart to rely on analogy to explicate his understanding of experience. In the end Eckhart suggests that in “becoming” God manifests *in fluxu et fieri*.²³⁰ In “becoming”, analogically speaking, Universal Being gets in particular being. The “movement”, however, by which this “happens”, since it begins and ends at the same time, is in fact is no movement at all. Instead, as he tells us elsewhere, time, space, and all things, come from this “movement”.²³¹ Consistent with his Christian mission these facts effectively render self, world, and the philosophical problems that creaturely experience gives birth to, as illusions to be overcome in detachment. Since some closely related claims are foundational to Buddhism. We will now return to look at Buddhist philosophy in more depth to see if it can contribute further to our understanding of the foundations of cognition.

²³⁰ *Fieri* is the passive form of the Medieval Latin *facere* a polyvalent term which primarily designates the formation of something.

²³¹ He writes: “The course of heaven is outside time - and yet time comes from its movements. Nothing hinders the soul’s knowledge of God as much as time and space, for time and space are fragments, whereas God is one! And, therefore, if the soul is to know God, it must know him above time and outside of space; for God is neither this nor that, as are these manifold things. God is One!” (Blakney, p. 131) Hence, in this being/becoming, which is One, the categories of being and non-being, movement and rest, illuminator and illuminated, are do not appear to be meaningfully applicable.

Chapter 4

Buddhism

1. From the introductory remarks of the previous two chapters it should already be clear that Buddhism will not provide us with a *solution* to the problem of judgment. Instead it will suggest that the apparent permanence and substantiality of our everyday experience, which provides the context within which Kant's problem arises, is a partial view which needs to be balanced with the insight that all phenomena are ultimately impermanent (*anitya*) and without any substantial or eternal essence (*anātman*).²³² Furthermore, that on which everyday experience rests, i.e., "that whereby a synthetic apprehension of the whole becomes possible", although in some indeterminate way permanent and real, cannot be known. In other words, it cannot be understood or grasped, at least not in the conventional manner. Unfortunately, the indeterminability of this foundation renders it largely unsuitable for explanatory purposes. This fact, however, has not stopped Buddhist philosophers from devising theories that attempt to account for the appearance of all things.²³³

²³² Something with an eternal essence would be unconditioned, or uncaused, - i.e., not the product of *pratītya-samutpāda* (e.g., a "soul"). Buddhism denies the existence of any such "thing". As Schumann observes: "These characteristics cannot be found in the empirical world, for it is devoid of essentiality, that is empty." (H. W. Schumann, *Buddhism: An outline of its teaching and schools*, Georg Fenerstein, trans., London: Rider and Company, 1973, p. 143)

²³³ In the current study we will primarily be concerned with those philosophical schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism that concentrate on the relationship between Unity and multiplicity, i.e., the Mādhyamika and the Yogācāra. A combination of restrictions on space and considerations of flow necessitate that certain generalizations be made in referring to "Buddhist philosophy" and

In our discussion of Scheler in the second chapter we introduced the Buddhist concept of *pratītya-samutpāda*, or “conditioned co-arising”. We are now in a position to investigate this concept more thoroughly. The *pratītya-samutpāda* series, it will be recalled, can generally be divided into two parts, which correspond to two senses of the term *vijñāna*. The first part of the series deals in a general way with *vijñāna* considered as an atemporal “consciousness” which, in some sense, “contains” all *dharmas*.²³⁴ The second part provides an explanatory sketch of how *vijñāna*, considered roughly as “cognition”, functions to render things intelligible and to impart to those “things” the appearance of permanence and essentiality. It also provides some explanation of how *vijñāna*, considered as “consciousness”, comes to be conditioned by its own “products”, thereby facilitating the “birth” of further “experiences”. The two parts of the series together, therefore, attempt to provide a general elucidation of the “process” through which the stable impression of an individual “subject” and “world” arise and are sustained.²³⁵

Although it will take some time to explicate the details, the series proceeds as follows: *Avidyā* (ignorance)²³⁶ is considered as the root of the appearance of all

“Buddhist philosophers”. These will be kept to a minimum and qualified in cases where the differences between schools bear significantly on the particular issue under discussion.

²³⁴ The term *dharma* is central to Buddhist philosophy. It has several meanings all of which are related (cf., for example, Schumann, pp. 86-90; pp. 101-2). In this text it is largely considered as that indefinitely large set of transcendent “laws” through which all phenomena appear and in which they are constitutively manifested. It must, however, be recognized that there are, strictly speaking, no *dharmas* (cf. the discussion of *prajñā* below for an elaboration of this point. Cf. also W. S. Waldron, “How Innovative is the *Ālayavijñāna*?: The *Ālayavijñāna* in the Context of the Canonical and *Abhidharma Vijñāna* Theory. Part 1,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 22: 199-258, 1994, pp. 216).

²³⁵ The word “process” is placed within quotation marks to indicate the fact, elucidated below, that *pratītya-samutpāda* is temporally and causally problematic.

²³⁶ Nāgārjuna suggests that, more specifically, it is “what is hidden by ignorance” (*avidyānivṛta*) which is the cause of all conditioned phenomenon and which sustains the activity of *samskāra* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikās: Fundamentals of the Middle Way*, 26-1, translated in F. Streng, *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning*, New York: Abingdon Press, 1967, p. 217).

“conditioned” phenomena. It can be defined as a lack of insight into *pratītya-samutpāda* and the “suffering-ridden” character of existence.²³⁷ The stage immediately following *avidyā* is *samskāra* (intention/consequence). The term *samskāra* refers generally to factors through which conditioning takes place. Stage three is consciousness (*viññāna*), which is held to function interdependently with stage four, name and form (*nāma-rūpa*).²³⁸ This “functioning”, it seems, occurs through *samskāra* in accordance with the *dharmas*.²³⁹ Thus ends the first part of the series. At this point an indeterminate “subject” has already been condemned to render some particular “content” which has been conditioned by previous cognitive activity.²⁴⁰ That content, however, can also only be considered indeterminate, or “potential”, until in stage five the six cognitive groups (*śadāyatana*) (i.e., sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, and momentary states of thought/feeling) are “informed” by the products of the first part of the series. The informing of the six cognitive groups begins the cognizing aspect of *viññāna* without which the sense faculties are essentially impotent.²⁴¹ On the Buddhist view no object can appear, and hence no analysis of the objects of perception can

²³⁷ As Streng observes: “The Buddhist insight into the “actual” character of existence requires an awareness of the mental processes themselves, for there could be no true knowledge if the mind is caught by its own mechanism.” (pp. 150-1)

²³⁸ In anticipation of the discussion of the *ālayaviññāna* to follow below we can note that, as Schmithausen writes: “In the Mahāyānasamgraha, this mutual dependence is in fact used as a proof for the existence of the ālayaviññāna.” (7.3.4.1, p. 170) Note also: For those readers with little or no background in Buddhist philosophy an initial and tentative grasp of the dependence in question here can be obtained without great risk if one considers the statement as roughly equivalent to Kant’s suggestion of the mutual dependence of concepts and intuitions.

²³⁹ The *dharmas*, in this context, are functionally equivalent to *nāma-rūpa* (cf., for example, Streng, p. 79). In the *Abhidharmakosabhāṣyam* we find the following: “It is also said that *pratītya-samutpāda* is both momentary and serial at the same time. The *Prakarana* says, “What is *pratītya-samutpāda*? All the conditioned (*samskrta*) *dharmas*. What are the *dharmas* produced through dependence (*pratītya-samutpanna*)? All the conditioned *dharmas*.” (p. 405) For a further elucidation of the concept of *dharma* cf. n. 234 above.

²⁴⁰ “Condemned”, in other words, to the everyday life of being a subject who has experiences of the world.

²⁴¹ In fact, each of the six cognitive groups is often said to have its own corresponding *viññāna* through which it is rendered potent.

take place, unless the object of perception is a meaningful whole. This presupposition requires that any “object” must, in some way, be constitutively cognized in and through “name and form”, i.e., in and through that body of accumulated knowledge and experience which, in some way, lies dormant in the mind. It is this body of knowledge, therefore, together with the constitutive power of the first part of the series that permits: (6) contact (*sparsha*) with the “object” and (7) sensation (*vedana*), out of which develops (8) craving (*trishnā*) and (9) attachment/appropriation (*upādāna*). With the appropriation of “things” *viññāna* (consciousness) appears and is momentarily sustained. Finally, consciousness being sustained (10) a new becoming of existent things (*bhāva*) is fostered and through thought the (11) birth (*jāti*) of cognizing “universals”²⁴² which continues to (12) old age and death (*jarā-maranam*).²⁴³

In the early Pali canons the details of the reciprocal relationship that exists between the two senses of *viññāna* implied in the two parts of the *pratītya-samutpāda* series goes largely undeveloped.²⁴⁴ Of central importance to this relationship, however, is the generation and perpetuation of “latent knowledge and dispositions” (*anusaya*). In early Buddhism this latent content refers to those

²⁴² S. Mookerjee sees an unbridgeable inconsistency between a “universals-based” approach to explaining perceptual cognition and the Buddhist doctrine of universal flux (i.e., momentary interdependent emergence). He also translates *jātis* as “universals” and argues that, being abstracted from experience, they are “pure fictions of the imagination”. (S. Mookerjee, *The Buddhist Philosophy of Universal Flux*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1935, p. 295, cf. also pp. 87 & 110)

²⁴³ The *Abhidharmakosabhāṣyam* suggests: “The “part” that receives the name of consciousness in a present existence [i.e., mind-moment] is called *jāti* in a future existence. ... From *jāti* until sensation, ... there are four parts of the present existent, *nāma-rūpa*, the six *āyatana*, contact and sensation which are, in a future existence designated by the expression old age and death, the twelfth part of this twelvefold series”. (p. 404, square brackets mine) This should help clear up the meaning and significance of the last two stages of the series. The last two stages of the series allude to its reflective nature and imply its indefinite continuity. Notice that since there is no substantial existent to move from one mind-moment to the next it is quite proper, the theory of reincarnation to one side, for the Buddhists to refer to their succession as “existences”.

²⁴⁴ W. S. Waldron, 1994, p. 203.

aspects of subliminal “mind” which, through the operation of the *pratītya-samutpāda* series, condition immediate appearances and, through appropriation, are themselves “conditioned” so as to impact on future intentions. In this way the latent content provides support for the continued appearance of a substantial self and world and so maintains the ignorance (*avidyā*) of the subject. Overcoming ignorance requires reducing or eliminating the impact of these latent dispositions on experience.²⁴⁵ A central problem for Buddhism then emerges in the attempt to elucidate the general nature of the relationships that exist between this latent content and the appearance of an essential self and world.²⁴⁶ And since this appearance is held to occur through the operation of the *pratītya-samutpāda* series the Buddhist’s were faced with the problem of elucidating the relationship of the first part of the series to the second.

One of the most detailed and philosophically sophisticated accounts of this relationship is developed within the Yogācāra school between the third and fifth century.²⁴⁷ The Yogācāra theory of the *ālayavijñāna* is an attempt to elucidate the nature of the relationships between subsisting and subliminal “consciousness”, on one hand, and momentary supraliminal “cognition”, on the other, as the process is outlined in the *pratītya-samutpāda* series.²⁴⁸ More particularly it addresses itself

²⁴⁵ Waldron quotes the following from *The Book of Kindred Sayings*: “If one does not will, O monks, does not intend, yet [a disposition] lies dormant (*anuseti*), this becomes an object for the persistence of consciousness. There being an object, there comes to be a support of consciousness. Consciousness being supported and growing, renewed existence takes place in the future. Renewed existence in the future taking place, old age and death, grief, lamentation, suffering, sorrow and despair come to pass. Such is the arising of this entire mass of suffering”. (*Samyutta Nikāya* (1894-1904) Rhys-Davids, C.A.F. and Woodward, F.L., trans., London: Pali Text Society, (191-30) in Waldron, 1994, p. 205)

²⁴⁶ Cf., for example, the discussion of *pratītya-samutpāda* in L. M. Pruden, *Abhidharmakosabhāsyam*, Berkley, Asian Humanities Press, 1988, Vol. II, pp. 401-439.

²⁴⁷ For a concise account see Schumann, ch. 4, or M. H. Kohn, ed., *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1991, pp. 131-2 & 253-4.

²⁴⁸ These remarks are merely introductory and do not begin to address the historical developments which took place from the traditional Pali canons to the Yogācāra texts. These matters are taken up in detail in L. Schmithausen, *Ālayavijñāna: On the Origin and Early Development of a Central*

to the question, which arises in Buddhism, as it does for Scheler, of how a “self” can impact on the nature of experience when it is purported to be inherently inessential and to subsist only in act-moments, which arise interdependently with corresponding “objects”. Thus, the theory of the *ālayavijñāna* is a theory of mind that attempts to account for the continuous appearance of a substantial self and world given the constraints imposed by the *pratītya-samutpāda* series and the doctrine of *anātman*.²⁴⁹

2. A preliminary understanding of the *ālayavijñāna* can be obtained by means of a conceptual analysis of its constituent parts of *ālaya* and *vijñāna*. Taking the root word *vijñāna* first, we can observe that, as Schmithausen notes, the Abhidharma definition of *vijñāna*, “which in substance can be traced back to canonical texts, takes *vijñāna* as that which performs the act of *vi-jñā-*, or, more explicitly, as that which makes known (*vijñapti*), i.e., perceives or cognizes (*upalabdhi*), an object (*visaya, ālambana*)”.²⁵⁰ The *ālayavijñāna*, hence, being a species of *vijñāna*, is a form of consciousness through which objects are cognized. Turning to the prefix *ālaya*, we can observe that it has two interrelated meanings, one of which is “that which is clung to”, and the other which is “dwelling place”, or “storehouse”.²⁵¹ The *ālayavijñāna* can thus be understood as the storehouse consciousness, which, in being clung to, makes experience possible.

Concept of Yogācāra Philosophy, Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1987, and in Waldron, 1994, 1995. Generally speaking, our concern is to give a defensible account of the final form which theory of the *ālayavijñāna* took.

²⁴⁹ It is interesting to observe that Scheler and Buddhism part company on the ontological status of “personality”. While Scheler maintains that personality is a general essential trait of all possible worlds and so is manifested in the unity of every “act-essence” Buddhism maintains that personality is an inessential aggregate.

²⁵⁰ Schmithausen, 5.2, p. 85, and 8.4, p. 191.

²⁵¹ Waldron, 1995, p. 34n.

But what, we might ask, is the *ālayavijñāna* storing? And how is it able, through the *pratītya-samutpāda* series, to make experience possible? An answer to the former question will provide us with a clue to the latter. The entities that the *ālayavijñāna* is purported to store are likened to the “seeds” of all possible experience. Although the precise nature of these “seeds” is left somewhat underdeveloped in Yogācāra Buddhist philosophy it is clear that the idea that the *ālayavijñāna* contains all the “seeds” is roughly equivalent to the suggestion that the mind contains all possible experiences in potential form. As Schmithausen observes, “in the *Abhidharmasūtra* and in the *Mahāyānasamgraha*, the *ālayavijñāna* is the Seed-basis or cause and the support not only of personal existence but of all dharmas, of the whole world as it appears to a given living being”.²⁵² Hence, since everything is constituted in and through *dharmas*, and the *ālayavijñāna* is that consciousness through which everything is constituted, the seeds can, generally speaking, be considered to be equivalent to *dharmas*.²⁵³

Dharmas, we can now observe, fall into two general classes:

“conditioned” (*samskrta*) and “unconditioned” (*asamskrta*). The unconditioned *dharmas* are eternal, are not subject to the forces of *karma*,²⁵⁴ and are constitutive of Nirvāna. The conditioned *dharmas*, by contrast, are impermanent, subject to

²⁵² Schmithausen, 3.13.7, p. 65.

²⁵³ Schmithausen observes that although the *Mahāyānasamgraha* and *Abhidharma-samuccaya* clearly emphasize the role of the *ālayavijñāna* as a container of all the *dharmas* its role as a cognizer of objects is less clearly implied there (5.12.1, p. 100). Cf., also in Waldron 1995: “*Mahāyānasamgraha* (Msg) I.2. ‘the cognition containing all the seeds is the receptacle (*ālaya*) of all *dharmas*,’ (*chos kun sa bon thams cad pa’irnam par shes pa jun gzhi ste /*) etc. This is probably the most common synonym of the *ālayavijñāna*.” (n. 226, p. 48); and in the *Abhidharma-samuccaya* (*ASBh*) 11, 9-14 we find, “Since *dharmas* dwell (*ālīyante*) there as seeds, or since beings grasp [to it] as a self, [it is called] the *ālayavijñāna*.” (ibid., n. 229, p. 49) The cognizing role of the *ālayavijñāna* receives full acknowledgment in the *Pavrtti Portion* (cf., for a thorough commentary, Schmithausen, 5.13.2 - 5.14.2, pp. 102-4).

²⁵⁴ Generally speaking the idea of *karmic* forces refers to a universal and transcendental relation of a cause-effect nature dependent on “intention”.

karmic forces, and exhaustively constitutive of Samsāra, i.e., of “subject” and “world”. In being “that *vijñāna* which is clung to” the *ālayavijñāna*, although able to cultivate and reinforce unconditioned *dharmas*,²⁵⁵ is particularly associated with the cultivation of conditioned *dharmas*. Once “cultivated” and “impregnated” with *karmic* forces these *dharmas* take on their empirical label as “latent knowledge and dispositions”. In the appropriation (*upādāna*) cum constitution of experience, therefore, the *ālayavijñāna* employs *dharmas* which, through previous experiential manifestations, have been *karmically* cultivated to grow into what we normally refer to as that body of knowledge, dispositions, attitudes, conceptual capacities, etc., which together form the core of a person as he or she exists through time and which lie dormant until such time as they are called upon, intentionally or unintentionally, and brought to bear, moment to moment, in rendering things intelligible, i.e., in experience.²⁵⁶

The necessity of *dharmas* to a plausible account of experience results, at least in part, from the constitutively legislative role that experience plays in thought. There is, of course, nothing particularly novel about the idea that an individual and her “mind states” are conditioned by her own interpretations of her “environment” and by earlier “mind states”. But, as we have observed, this fact is not in itself sufficient to account for the intelligibility of things. Since the mind which thinks, imagines, and abstracts cannot create *ex nihilo* it must rely on the

²⁵⁵ Schmithausen, 4.8.3-4, pp. 78-9.

²⁵⁶ As Waldron observes: “The mind which has all the seeds represents then the totality of karma, of causal conditioning, subsisting within, indeed virtually constituting, the mental stream, and thereby supporting all of its intermittent and momentary cognitive and affective processes.” (1995, p. 30) Since, however, *dharmas* have a merely momentary existence how they can be “cultivated” and “conditioned” so as to acquire experiential efficacy is problematic.

more or less passive presentation of an intelligible world for its material.²⁵⁷ It is this fact of intelligibility in receptivity which points to the need for “pre-existent” universal structures of experience in an account of how content is possible. In Buddhism these universal structures often take the form of *dharmas*, or *dharma*-like entities such as the “seeds”. The suggestion that the seeds of the *ālayavijñāna* are *dharma*’s under the influence of *karmic* forces then implies that these seeds are placeholders for “universal and transcendental relationships.”²⁵⁸ In other words, that they are indications of a reality which, in some way, is *a priori* and constitutive of experience.²⁵⁹ In this way the hypothesis of a seed-like realm of *dharmas* serves as a critical component in the explanation of experience.²⁶⁰

Now the notion that the seeds, as transcendental placeholders, are experientially “cultivated” into knowledge and dispositions implies an interaction between a transcendental realm of universal-like entities and an empirical world and existent. Ultimately, however, Buddhism admits of no such bifurcation. Consequently, we must investigate matters more thoroughly. Although Buddhist philosophy often employs the idea of non-momentary entities for explanatory purposes, the Buddhist account of how self and world appear and are sustained is, at root, a theory of universal flux. This theory demands that, “whatever is existent

²⁵⁷ A Buddhist acknowledgement of this fact can be found in Mookerjee, who notes the “inefficiency” of thinking consciousness “in regard to the acquisition of fresh knowledge”. (1935, p. 314)

²⁵⁸ Cf. Waldron, 1995, p. 32. Interestingly Eckhart uses the metaphor of “seeds” in a similar manner in College and McGinn, 1981, pp. 123-124.

²⁵⁹ Here one might be tempted to conclude that the claim that the *ālayavijñāna* contains all the “seeds” is isomorphic with Scheler’s claim that “the person” contains all “act-essences”. However, whereas Scheler’s “person” is “in principle incorruptible” and his “containing” restricted to, so called, *a priori* phenomena which have nothing to do with embodied existence, the seeds of the *ālayavijñāna*, are conditioned and conditionable. Hence, experiences, which the *ālayavijñāna* makes possible, do not reveal or express universal or absolute truth.

²⁶⁰ The necessity of *dharmas* to an intelligible account of the *ālayavijñāna* points to the interdependence of *vijñāna* and *nāma-rūpa* in *pratiīya-samutpāda* (cf. Schmithausen, 7.3.6.3.1, p. 178).

is momentary”.²⁶¹ Strictly speaking, therefore, neither *dharmas* nor “seeds” can be consistently held to refer to any form of permanent existent. *Dharmas*, it seems, must arise and pass away with the subject and world of which they are constitutive.²⁶²

The main implication of this fact for the *ālayavijñāna* is straightforward. As Waldron observes:

It is important to note that even though the *ālayavijñāna* always has an object and functions homogeneously (*ekarasatva*) from birth to death, it is not considered a singular entity since it cognizes its objects from instant to instant and so flows in a continuous stream of moments (*ksanika-srotah-satāna-vartin*).²⁶³

But while the fluxional nature of the *ālayavijñāna* puts to rest any notion that it may form part of a theory in which some permanent “self” interacts with a realm of universal-like intermediaries it creates other problems. It makes it difficult to see how the *ālayavijñāna* can be any kind of storehouse at all.²⁶⁴ It is difficult to understand, for example, how notions of cultivated and maturing “seeds” can contribute to our understanding of mental processes if the “seeds” do not

²⁶¹ Mookerjee, p. 24.

²⁶² Cf., for example, *ibid.*, 7.1B.2.1.4, pp. 160-2; also Streng, pp. 53-4. Obviously one cannot consistently maintain that there is no permanent subject and that experience comes about by means of the interaction of *a priori* universal “intermediaries” with a subject.

²⁶³ Waldron, 1995, p. 21. Cf. also Schmithausen, 5.6.3.4, p. 91. Note also that in the *Mahāyānasamgraha* I.4 we find the following:

“The appropriating consciousness, profound and subtle,
Like a violent current, flows with all the seeds;
I have not taught it to the ignorant,

Lest they should imagine [it] as a self.” (In W. S. Waldron, “How Innovative is the *Ālayavijñāna*? The *Ālayavijñāna* in the Context of the Canonical and *Abhidharma Vijñāna* Theory. Part 2,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 23: 9-51, 1995, p. 15)

²⁶⁴ It also becomes unclear how it can serve as that consciousness which continues during *nirodha-samāpatti* - the main function for which it appears to have been originally designed (cf. Schmithausen, 5.7, p. 92).

represent some permanent entity that undergoes change. In fact, if the seeds, or *dharmas*, can only exist in some “now” it is not clear how they can be differentiated from the momentary things of which they are constitutive.

It is perhaps with some of these problems in mind that the later dogmatics of Yogācāra Buddhism introduce a new class of consciousness through which the seeds are purported to be conveyed. The modified theory of mind distinguishes a total of eight classes of “consciousness”.²⁶⁵ The first six of these are the “cognitive groups” mentioned above, i.e., the five senses and a momentary intellect, the seventh is called *manas*, and the eighth is the *ālayavijñāna*. The momentary nature of the six cognitive groups means that they cannot receive, retain or transmit the seeds.²⁶⁶ This fact creates a functional divide between the six cognitive groups and the constitutively unifying power of the *ālayavijñāna*.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Cf. for example, *ibid.*, 7.1A.1, pp. 144-5.

²⁶⁶ Waldron, 1995, p. 26. The functioning of the six cognitions is thereby rendered consistent with the doctrine of the momentariness of all “existents” (which includes the six cognitions). Although the idea that the sense organs do not receive or retain “content” is common scientific knowledge the idea that they do not transmit “content” may be less universally received. At what point in the chain of events that begins with the illumination of the retina, for example, does the red “stop” sign become “red”, or a “stop sign”? Barry Falk and Stephen Mulhall suggest that science cannot give an adequate account of these matters because it conflates two entirely separate matters “- a perceptual capacity, and the causal preconditions for the exercise of that capacity. Science has traced a causal chain beginning with light reflected from an object and ending with a set of events in the perceiving subject’s brain within which irradiation of the retina by that reflected light plays a vital part, in that it brings about stimulation of the optic nerve; and as a result of this discovery, we can now confidently claim that certain things must hold of the retina, the optic nerve and the brain of a human being if she is to exercise her capacity for visual perception. But this means only that her retina must be appropriately irradiated if she is to see a given object: it does not mean that this irradiation is (any part of) the content of what she sees. If the phrase means anything, ‘the content of what she sees’ is either the object of her perception, or her visual impression of that object; and it is given by her best description of what she sees or of how it strikes her. It follows that, whilst information about the shape or location of the pattern of retinal irradiation may be relevant to a scientific account of why someone was able to perceive a given object or event, it can have no part to play in an account of what she saw”. (B. Falk and S. Mulhall, “Consciousness, Cognition and the Phenomenal,” *Aristotelian Society*, Supplement (67), 1993, p. 86) A sympathetic view is also maintained by Gibsonian theories of perception. In *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* Gibson writes: “The information for perception is not transmitted, does not consist of signals, and does not entail a sender and receiver.” (1986, pp. 61, 63)

²⁶⁷ The essential identity of the *ālayavijñāna* with the Absolute implies its nature as a permanent. But as Mookerjee points out “the permanent is not amenable to any activity” and, since this would presumably include cognizing, that activity must be assigned to another “consciousness”. (Mookerjee, 1935, p. 81)

Removing the six cognitive groups from direct interaction with the *ālayavijñāna* has the beneficial effect of rendering the *ālayavijñāna* free from having to be the locus of the impression of a substantial “self”²⁶⁸ and hence, free to be some kind of transcendental “storehouse”, i.e., one that is not tied to fluxional existence. But this move also immediately raises the question of how its “cognizing” functions are to be sustained. Nothing it would seem can “appear” without the interaction of the *ālayavijñāna* with the six cognitive groups. Yet, as we can now see, it is unclear how either a momentarily existent or transcendental *ālayavijñāna* is able to interact with the six momentary cognitive groups.

The introduction of a schematizing intermediate (*manas*) between the *ālayavijñāna* and the six cognitive groups seems to go some way toward addressing the problem of how the *ālayavijñāna* is to “inform” them.²⁶⁹ Through clinging to the *ālayavijñāna*, *manas* is held to appropriate its constitutive power with respect to objects and, thereby, serve as the schematizing vehicle of the seeds.²⁷⁰ In this capacity *manas* becomes the locus of the impression of a permanent self and the source of desire. It is identified as “the one which has the form (*-ākāra*)²⁷¹ of conceiving (*manyānā*) by way of the notion of “I” (*ahaṅkāra*)

²⁶⁸ Schmithausen, 7.1A.2.2, pp. 150-1. It is also free to serve the purpose of the basis of corporeal existence - the reason, Schmithausen argues, for which the concept was originally introduced (5.12.3, p. 101 & 7.1A.2.2b), p. 147).

²⁶⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 45. I do not mean to suggest here that the “resultant divide” is the historical reason for the introduction of the concept of *manas*, but only that the assignment to *manas* of cognizing functions originally held by *ālayavijñāna* addresses problems raised by the aforementioned “divide”.

²⁷⁰ In the broadest sense *manas* refers to those mental activities associated with intellectual functioning, and is usually translated simply as “thought.” Hence, it is conceptually akin to the notion of the active intellect.

²⁷¹ Dreyfus suggests two perhaps not wholly incompatible ways of viewing the role of an *ākāra*. First, one may view an *ākāra* as an intermediate, - a form or aspect through which an object is rendered. This idea often seems to presuppose that an intentional, “process” is occurring through which an individual “consciousness” is able to render objects apprehendable. In this case consciousness functions by means of the *ākāra* which, in some sense, stands between the subject and the world. Relying on such a model, however, leads to an infinite regress of intermediaries in need of guidance or interpretation. Second, one may see reference to an *ākāra* as a way of

and the feeling of identity (*asmimāna*)”.²⁷² But being the locus of the self renders *manas* a “something” - a product of the “seeds”. Unfortunately, it is not clear how *manas*’ status as a cognizer (*viññāna*) and conveyer of seeds can be made consistent with its also being a cognized product of the “seeds”.²⁷³ If it is a cognized product of the seeds it is only entitled to an empirical and momentary status. In this case its interactions with the *ālayaviññāna* take on the same problems that exist between the *ālayaviññāna* and the six cognitive groups. Consequently, as later Buddhists were to point out, relying on *manas* (as a new kind of *manoviññāna*)²⁷⁴ does not appear to provide any new insight into the processes through which experience is made possible.²⁷⁵

referring to the reflexive nature of Consciousness itself - that is, to a kind of self-consciousness (*svasamvedana* or *svasamvitti*, *rang rig*) which is comparable to Kant’s notion of *apperception* insofar as one does not conceive of apperception as implying or involving a “act” of a separate consciousness (cf. G. B. J. Dreyfus, *Recognizing Reality: Dharmakīrti’s Philosophy and Its Tibetan Interpretations*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997, pp. 335--41). From this perspective the *ākāra* can be identified with both the subject and the object, since the subject and object can be argued to be two “aspects”, or ways of conceiving, the same “process” of self-revealing Consciousness (p. 339, brackets mine). This line of investigation will be pursued more fully in chapter 6.

²⁷² Schmithausen translates this early “statement of identity” from the *VinSg ālay. Treatise* (7.1A.2.2c), pp. 150-1).

²⁷³ The dependence of *manas* on *ālayaviññāna* for its apparent existence is made clear in the following passage of the *Lañkāvatārasūtra*: “The Thought-consciousness (*manoviññāna*) by being active through its urge to make observations in the sense-world, interpenetrates the Base-consciousness (*ālayaviññāna*) with karmic impressions (*vāsanā*). ... (From these karmic impressions) there develops thought (*manas*) which brings with it the proneness for grasping a (supposed) Self and something of the nature of Self. ... It is (however) without the characteristic of a body (and) dependent on the Base-consciousness as its cause” (*Lañkāvatāra-Sūtra*, ed. By B. Nanjino, *Bibliotheca Otaneinsis*, Kyoto, 1956, 2, p. 126f.; in Schumann, p. 152) The picture which emerges here is that it is the urge, or desire, to make observations which, through appropriating the constitutive power of the base-consciousness (*manoviññāna*) sustains the impression of an essential self and world. Once sustained, the urge to “make observations” arises again. In this cycle the Yogācāra see the wheel of “rebirths”. Note also that although the *ālayaviññāna* is the mind that contains all the *karmically* charged seeds, it is, in itself, *karmically* neutral, unconditioned, and in essence identical with the Absolute. As Schumann observes: “In fact ‘mind’ in the Yogācāra system is a designation of the Absolute. Thusness, Emptiness, Nirvāna, Essence of Reality, and Mind are identical.” (Cf. *Lañkāvatāra-Sūtra*, 3, 31, p. 154; in Schumann, p.151) Thus, the judgment that the Yogācāra school is “idealistic” should not be interpreted to suggest, in “veil of ideas” fashion, that the real objects are never encountered but rather that the real objects are Mind.

²⁷⁴ Schmithausen, 7.1A.2.2 c), pp. 150-1.

²⁷⁵ In fact, Mookerjee goes so far as to argue that *manoviññāna*, considered in its capacity “as an intermediate between the indeterminate sense-perception and the determinate interpretive knowledge which makes selective activity possible”, “... is an idle hypothesis, ...”. (p. 314) In fact,

The question of the necessity or absurdity of a *manovijñāna* to one side we can conclude this section with some general observations concerning the structure of Buddhist accounts of experience. As with Eckhart's philosophy, the Buddhists divide the mind into active and passive aspects. The active aspect is closely associated with rationality and conceptualization and the passive aspect is associated with the Absolute as it is manifested through an individual mind. While the Absolute serves as the occasion for the appearance of all things, which are somehow immanent to it, it cannot, without the cooperation of an appropriating consciousness, yield any "experience". In terms of the *pratītya-samutpāda* series we can recall that appropriation is immediately preceded by craving, or desire, and followed by a new becoming. Consequently, for the Buddhists, it is desire that precipitates the appropriating consciousness to make new "existences" possible through clinging to the results of the maturation of the seeds, - i.e., to the Base-consciousness as it manifests relative to some object.²⁷⁶

3. We are now in a position to apply some insights from the above discussion to the problem of judgment. We have seen that for both Kant and Buddhism understanding is an appropriating, or "grasping", activity in which an existing "cognitive structure" is employed in the process of rendering things intelligible. For Kant such "rendering" involves a process of *synthesis* - by which, he says, "in

it leads ultimately to an infinite regress of interpreting intermediaries. Mookerjee, also suggests: "If you suppose a *tertium quid* between the two cognitions, you will only make the indeterminate sense perception an inefficient, abortive fact, which is absurd." (p. 315)

²⁷⁶ The *Parvrtti Portion* compares the functioning of the *ālayavijñāna* to a burning flame as follows: "Thus, one should know that the way the *ālayavijñāna* [occurs] in regard to the object of inner appropriation and the external object is similar to a burning flame which occurs inwardly while it emits light outwardly on the basis of the wick and oil." (1.b) A.3, in Waldron, 1995, n. 182, p. 39) It seems, therefore, that in turning back to appropriate the base consciousness relative to some "object" a product of consciousness appropriates a kind of self-reflexive consciousness which is not dependent on them for its existence. For more on such a notion of consciousness see chapter 6 below.

its most general sense, I understand the act of putting different representations together, and of grasping what is manifold in them in one cognition”.²⁷⁷ This notion of how understanding functions, however, implies a need for a self which can combine [*verbinden*] representations.²⁷⁸ Indeed, it is a central function of the first *Critique* to argue for the necessity of such a self in order to counter Hume’s skeptical claims. Thus, Kant suggests that the fact of synthesis requires that: “[I call my representations ‘mine’.] This amounts to saying that I am conscious to myself *a priori* of a necessary synthesis of representations - to be entitled the original synthetic unity of apperception”.²⁷⁹ However, as one commentator argues:

it is important to note a serious deficiency in Kant’s account. Kant equates standing in a relation of synthesis with being states of the same thinking self: the former relation is both a necessary (A118) and a sufficient (B134) condition of the latter. However, if synthesis is only a general relation of contentual dependence, the contents of the later states being produced as a

²⁷⁷ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1950, A77/B103). Pluhar translates this passage as follows: “By *synthesis*, in the most general sense of the term, I mean the act of putting various presentations together with one another and of comprising [*begreifen*] their manifoldness in one cognition.” (I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. W. S. Pluhar, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996, p. 130)

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, B137, p. 180. Cf. also Kant writes: “Hence all combination is an act of understanding - whether it is a combination of the manifold of intuition or the manifold of various concepts; ... I would assign to this act of understanding the name *synthesis*, in order to point out at the same time: that we cannot present anything as combined in the object without ourselves’ having combined it before hand;... *combination*... being an act of the subject’s self-activity - can be performed only by the subject himself.” (B 131, p. 176)

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, B135, p. 179; cf. also B133, p. 178, and B134, p. 178. The ontological status of Kant’s thinking I is the subject of some debate. The “thinking subject” is “transcendental”, i.e., beyond experience (A296/B351). However, it functions to impute existence (B15a and B422a). Note that whether one translates *Vorstellung* in this passage as “representation”, as N.K. Smith does, or as “presentation”, as Pluhar does, will effect how one understands the nature of the “I think”. For reasons which Pluhar presents I believe “presentations” may be more appropriate (cf. *ibid.*, p. 22, n. 73).

result of the information contained in earlier states, then it is plainly not a sufficient condition for comentality as pretheoretically understood.²⁸⁰

In other words, the deficiency of Kant's account is argued to be revealed in the fact that synthesis, as the general relation in which understanding is, at any given moment, constitutively dependent on former understandings, is not in itself a necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of a "thinking I" which accompanies the "combination" of [re]presentations.²⁸¹

Indeed Buddhism, as we have seen, maintains that current understanding is constitutively dependent on previous understandings. But it also accounts for the appearance of a subject by suggesting that it is "constituted" *with* its corresponding object *through* that fundamentally appropriative "process" in which all things appear.²⁸² In other words, the Buddhists maintain that the phenomenon of something appearing *to* an existent can be more accurately described as an appearance *with* a subject. Even when the Yogācāra Buddhists posit *manas* as a kind of apperceptive appropriating consciousness, it is not

²⁸⁰ Cf. P. Kitcher, "Kant's Real Self", in A. W. Wood, *Self and Nature in Kant's Philosophy*, (London: Cornell University Press, 1984, p. 117).

²⁸¹ Kitcher writes: "When Kant equates the relation of synthesis with the relation of comentality, he intends 'synthesis' to refer to the precise relation of informational interconnection which holds among the states of one mind, or thinking self (cf. B135)" as opposed to the general process of putting representations together. This, she continues, "renders 'synthesis' dangerously ambiguous"... and "enables him to move from his understanding of the [interdependent] nature of mental states to the doctrine that the specific concept of a thinking self is a necessary concept for experience, rather than to a vaguer doctrine about the generic concept of a mental system." (p. 118)

²⁸² Throughout the dissertation I am maintaining the basic position that an absolutely unintelligible appearance, or object, is a logical impossibility. In other words, as McDowell writes speaking of Wittgenstein's remarks on the possibility of a private language: "a bare presence cannot supply justificatory input into a conceptual repertoire from outside it, the sort of thing the connection between concepts and spontaneity made us hanker for." (p. 20) Or elsewhere: "When Kant describes the understanding as the faculty of spontaneity, that reflects his view of the relation between reason and freedom: rational necessitation is not just compatible with freedom but constitutive of it." (J. McDowell, *Mind and World*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 5) This amounts to saying that intelligibility (i.e., the supersensible) is itself an *a priori* condition of anything what so ever.

permitted any permanent, or *a priori*, status. Rather it is confined to being a product of the appropriative process itself, which in supporting a reflective clinging to the Storehouse-consciousness, “schematizes” by means of *dharmas*.²⁸³ In this way Buddhism argues that the “appropriating” activity itself, driven by desire and perpetuated by ignorance, simultaneously supports the experience of an essential “self” and “world”. Although there may be said to be an “I” in Buddhism *a priori* to the interdependent presentations of some “now”, to the extent that it *refers* to any “thing” it can only be to the Base-consciousness considered as Absolute which, like the formal “I think”, is an idealization, - although perhaps no mere idealization.

This fundamentally Buddhist line of thought reveals the source of the paradox which constitutes the problem of judgment. Kant’s model of understanding as the faculty of rules, and of judgment as the faculty of subsuming under rules; that is, of distinguishing whether something does or does not stand under a given rule, implies the need for a “judge” who exists prior to the moment of judgment and who possesses the “talents” necessary to abrogate the need for an infinite regress of rules of judgment.²⁸⁴ On this model of mind both the act of “understanding” and the appearance of anything what so ever, are held to function through *acts* of conceptual appropriation, i.e., by subsuming intuitions under concepts, or particulars under universals. As an explanation of “how one

²⁸³ The *dharmas* in question are of both the conditioned and unconditioned variety. The conditioned *dharmas* are, by and large, constitutive of the *ālayavijñāna*. Here, however, one must realize that any given *dharma* that could be said to constitute the *ālayavijñāna* must have been “employable” prior to said constitution. Hence, providing an account of the emergence of content in terms of the power of *dharmas* is problematic.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Kant writes: “*The unity of apperception [considered] in reference to the synthesis of the imagination is understanding; and the same unity as referred [beziehungsweise] to the transcendental synthesis of imagination is pure understanding. ...*” (Pluhar, 1996, A119, p. 167)

understands” Kant’s model accurately captures something of the nature of the mind in thought. The limitations of this explanation are, however, revealed when one demands that the resultant understanding be “knowledge” - that is, one attempts to epistemically ground judgment. Or, alternatively, one attempts to apply the notion of understanding as “rule-governed” to an account of how things appear in receptivity, i.e., in a “ready to hand” fashion.²⁸⁵ For Kant, or so it often appears, an inquiry into these matters concerns the activity of spontaneous synthesis through which “objects” appear *to* a subject.²⁸⁶ Consequently, it remains as a question of “judgment” in which a “subjective basis” is required.²⁸⁷ But for Buddhist philosophy this is always an inquiry into that appropriative “process” through which an object appears *with* a subject - that is, it is an inquiry into the relationships between the Absolute and the relative, between Unity and

²⁸⁵ Cf. Kant writes: “We may now characterize the understanding as our *power of rules*. ...” (A126, *Ibid.*, p. 172)

²⁸⁶ To a large extent Kant’s analysis of how a “self” is constituted agrees with that of Buddhism. The above argument, however, emphasizes a line of thought in the first Critique which latches on to the fact that the “unconditioned” original synthetic unity of apperception in its necessary application to experience must rely on sensibility which, as we have repeatedly argued, is necessarily “conditioned” (B140). By itself unity can have no “object” and hence, is merely an analytic presupposition of all experience (B135; B138). When Kant suggests that an *I think* necessarily exists prior to any cognition, it is the original “unconditioned” synthetic unity of apperception considered as transcendental and unconditioned which he has in mind (B142). “Judgment”, he tells us, “is nothing but a way of bringing given cognitions *to* the objective unity of apperception.” (B142, *ibid.*, p. 184) [emphasis mine]. Unfortunately, it seems, this process is necessarily “derivative (*intuitus derivativus*) rather than original (*intuitus originarius*)” (cf. *ibid.*, B72, p. 103). Although, the possibility of “judgment” then is contingent upon something which combines presentations *a priori*, and this thing, once again, is pure, original, and unconditioned, and so, it seems, are its “rules”, or “laws” (A127) (which we can only discover by abstraction, B145), the application of these rules in an empirical synthesis, which is our only avenue of approach to things, requires an act [*Handlung*] which depends on a “subjective basis” (A119-121; A124; §22). Kant does discuss the idea of “a thought with a subject” in connection with the synthetic unity of apperception but this synthesis, it seems, is the synthesis *of* the pure categories through which contact with the world proceeds. Hence “thought with a subject” is only a necessary condition of all possible experience and can have no object (cf. A397, *ibid.*, p. 419; and B138, p. 181). In this way Kant’s synthesis of the pure categories, or conditions of thought, is consistent with the first half of the *pratītya-samutpāda* series considered as “consciousness” (cf. A130).

²⁸⁷ For a related argument demonstrating how the notion of spontaneous synthesis, as something we do, must presuppose the possibility of “content” and hence cannot provide an account of it, see below Chapter 6, section III.

multiplicity, as revealed *through* the activity of a mind.²⁸⁸ This relationship they point out, can never be adequately grasped because, as we have seen, one cannot grasp “that” which permits grasping.²⁸⁹ Demanding an explanation of how one is able to understand (i.e., how one’s understanding can be epistemologically secured) leads directly to an encounter with the limitations of understanding and rational explanation - for example, an infinite regress of rules of judgment - a limitation to which the Buddhists are equally subject and of which they are aware.

One example of this awareness can be found in a book by S. Mookerjee²⁹⁰ on the philosophy of Dignāga.²⁹¹ Chapter XX, entitled “Self-cognition”, is devoted to a consideration of Yogācāra views on the relationship between consciousness and self-consciousness and to objections to these views. It is in this context that we find a Buddhist consideration of what in essence is the problem of judgment. The problem is framed in terms of how objects are illuminated by the mind and so lacks the structural details of Kant’s rule-based formulation. Nevertheless, the general strategy adopted is the same - the performance of a *reductio ad absurdum* on the notion that those “processes” through which the world becomes manifest can be guided. Mookerjee writes:

If a cognition cannot shine in its own light but only in the borrowed light of another cognition, how can the second cognition, which equally lacks original light like the first, make it shine? Certainly there must be light

²⁸⁸ Without individual minds, Mind would remain in a state of *shunyata*.

²⁸⁹ This is also true of the original synthetic unity of apperception (cf. B132, and A401-2). Hence, we should not be surprised that Kant’s attempt to rebuff Hume’s sceptical challenge should result in an overtly inconsistent doctrine, i.e., that “original synthesis” cannot *in practice* be separated from “empirical synthesis”.

²⁹⁰ Mookerjee, 1935, cf. n. 242 above. For more examples see the discussion of reflexive self-consciousness in chapter 6 below.

²⁹¹ Dignāga (480-540) was a principal teacher of Yogācāra Buddhism.

somewhere and in its own right and if it is supposed to belong to some remote cognition, what is the harm if it is conceded to the first? If you deny original light to any cognition whatsoever, perception of objective reality will become impossible, and darkness cannot remove darkness. And the alternative of shining in borrowed light is exposed to the charge of *regressus ad infinitum*. Thus, if a cognition is unrevealed in and by itself and is only revealed by another cognition before it can reveal the object, that other cognition being equally unrevealed will again require a third and the third again a fourth and so on to infinity. The upshot will be that the object will not be known - a position extremely absurd.²⁹²

From considerations such as this the Buddhists conclude that Ultimate truth cannot be grasped. The ultimate truth is, as we have gleaned from our discussion of Eckhart, that the object of consciousness is neither identical to nor different from consciousness itself. Furthermore, the cognizing consciousness, i.e., the subject, can neither be grasped nor can it be unknown. Hence it seems that somehow the revelation of an object by consciousness is simultaneously a revelation of consciousness itself.²⁹³ But exactly how this is to be understood is unclear and a subject of great debate within Indian philosophy.²⁹⁴

In the end, however, Buddhism suggests that the matter is one of where you wish to place emphasis, on the determinate or the determining.²⁹⁵ In any account of experience it seems that both must be accorded a degree of

²⁹² Ibid., pp. 325-6. For a Mahāyāna argument that proceeds along similar lines see Nāgārjuna's "Averting the Arguments", points 30-2, in Streng, p. 224.

²⁹³ Hence, the Yogācāra philosopher Dharmakīrti (7th century) writes: "Perception of an object is impossible if perception itself is unperceived" (Mookerjee, p. 325).

²⁹⁴ Cf. Dreyfus' discussion of theories of perception for a review of some of the relevant debates, 1997, in particular pp. 335-48.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., cf. pp. 340-1.

independent reality and yet outside of their meeting they are, strictly speaking, nothing. As Mookerjee writes: “The reference to the subject and object in a judgment is a question of emphasis and is possible only if there is a recognition of the fact of knowledge.”²⁹⁶ The fact of knowledge is the fact that any product of interdependent arising is always a meaningful whole.²⁹⁷ According to the Buddhists there is nothing before or after this whole. Providing an *explanation* of the manifestation of any whole, however, seems to require some variation on the theme of a cooperation between a cognizing consciousness and a percept, as it is presented through one or more of the six cognitive groups. In such an account a “resultant object” necessarily reflects something of the “consciousness” which made it possible. Both are idealizations but must, in any account of experience, be acknowledged to possess a kind of substantial permanence. As Mookerjee observes with respect to the “consciousness” side of the equation, if one only acknowledges the momentary as existent, and the subject is completely denied reality in experience, remaining “unknown and unknowable, what is there to cement the discrete experiences and thoughts into one subjective whole?”²⁹⁸ And yet for Buddhism, this combiner of phenomena, like any other existent, can only lay claim to a momentary existence, and so cannot be a permanent “self”.

4. The tension between the logical demand for a permanent “self”, or base-consciousness, to supply intelligibility to experience and the canonical claim of the momentariness of all existents runs throughout Buddhist philosophy. In Buddhism, however, philosophy is not granted the last word. Buddhism maintains

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 327.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., cf. p. 322, and p. 331.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 328.

that relief from this tension requires the “attainment”²⁹⁹ of an Ultimate truth, which cannot be achieved through philosophical activity alone. Rather the “attainment” in question takes the form of a way of life, which is generally referred to as the eightfold path. The eightfold path can be broken up into three main areas - the *trishiksha* (“threefold training”). These areas are composed of 1) training in moral discipline; 2) training in mind; and 3) training in wisdom. With respect to training in moral discipline Buddhism divides intentional states into three types: wholesome, unwholesome, and neutral. This division falls naturally enough along just those lines one would expect. “Wholesome” states are those which one would normally call “good” (e.g., states of compassion, generosity, justice, wisdom, etc.). “Unwholesome” states are those which one would normally call “bad” (e.g., lying, slander, murder, etc.). “Neutral” states are those which do not fall into the other two groups.³⁰⁰ By training in moral discipline is meant avoidance of karmically unwholesome activities. Training in mind is done through meditative practices.³⁰¹ Training in wisdom involves the cultivation of *prajñā*. These three elements mutually support each other. Cultivation of only one of them cannot lead to the intended goal - liberation (*vimukti*).³⁰²

Generally speaking the eightfold path contains the strategy for elimination of craving and the dispelling of ignorance. It consists of the development of “perfect” (*samyak*) view, resolve, speech, conduct, effort, mindfulness, and

²⁹⁹ The “attainment” of the ultimate truth involves the dissolution of the “self” and so cannot, strictly speaking, be an “attainment”.

³⁰⁰ This division itself presupposes an *a priori* universal and normative “structure”.

³⁰¹ Meditative practice is not here dealt with to any extent. A few words, however, may be appropriate. “A common mark of all forms of meditation is that practice of the meditation concentrates the mind of the practitioner, calms and clarifies it like the surface of a turbulent body of water, the bottom of which one can only see when the surface is still and the water is clean” (Kohn, p. 142).

³⁰² Kohn, p. 231.

concentration. The details of these need not concern us, but the effect of the elimination of craving through consistent practice of the path can be readily understood through examining its impact on the functioning of the *pratītya-samutpāda* series. We will recall that in this series “sensation” precedes “craving” which, in turn, precedes “clinging.” Now, we have said that “clinging” is that which is responsible for the “contents of consciousness” feeding back into the *ālayavijñāna* and cultivating the seeds of future “existences”. The effect of the elimination of craving then is simply to break the causal chain of *pratītya-samutpāda* before one begins to cling - that is, precisely at that point where the “products” of consciousness normally turn and feedback into the source of production. Once again, from the Yogācāra perspective, the process of feeding back into the *ālayavijñāna*, of developing the “seeds” into “latent dispositions” which then burst forth supraliminally to feedback again *ad infinitum*, is the immediate cause of its *karmic* “conditionedness” and the mediate cause of the apparent “existence” of subject and world. Consequently, the elimination of craving starves the *ālayavijñāna* of the feedback responsible for its “conditioning” and this, in turn, effects ones’ impression of “reality”. Although it is the overcoming of the first step in the series, i.e., ignorance, which is the necessary and sufficient condition for liberation, in practice this cannot be accomplished as long as the *karmic* forces of the *ālayavijñāna* are still active and operative. In other words, the wisdom (*prajñā*), which dispels ignorance (*avidyā*),³⁰³ only

³⁰³ This view is most closely associated with the Mādhyamika system. “In the Yogācāra view *avidyā* means seeing the object as a unit independent of mind”, overcoming *avidyā* involves seeing the object not different from it (Kohn, p. 15). Recall, however, that “mind”, in Yogācāra Buddhism, is generally synonymous with the Absolute.

comes about after one has become released from craving and one's heart is at rest.³⁰⁴

In the task of eliminating desire, or craving, training in moral discipline plays a particularly significant role. Although the appearance of “wholesome” states is consistent with the continued impression of a substantial subject and world the occurrence of these states functions to, in some sense, weaken such impressions because the “wholesome” states are *of* the whole, i.e., *of* the incorruptible Unconditioned, or Base-consciousness considered as Absolute, which contains no seeds or latent dispositions.³⁰⁵ This is to say that the wholesome states are of the nature of the Absolute. We have, up to now, defined the Absolute as a Unity which admits of no distinctions and as an idealization. But the Buddhists maintain that the Absolute is not just an idealization. Being Unity, it has an affiliation with qualities such as peacefulness, simplicity, and with such conceptually affiliated capacities/states such as “goodness”, “justice”, “wisdom”, and “love”. When these states are active and present to mind they tend to counteract the appropriating activities of consciousness. This counteraction effectively stills the mind, reduces attachment, diminishes the role of the active conditioned mind in experience, and paves the way for the Unconditioned, or Absolute, to communicate, or share, itself³⁰⁶ - that is, to permit a mode of

³⁰⁴ Consider the following: “*Bodhis* referred originally to the four stages of the supramundane path (*ārya-mārga*) and was attained through the completion of the thirty seven prerequisites of enlightenment (*bodhipākshika-dharma*) and the dissolution of ignorance (*avidyā*), that is, through the realization of the four noble truths.” (Kohn, p.22) The four noble truths are 1) the truth that all “existence” is characterized by suffering; 2) the truth that the origin of “suffering” is craving, desire, or thirst which breeds “attachment” and thus, further arising and passing away; 3) the truth that the absolute elimination of craving brings the cessation (*nirodha*) of suffering; 4) the truth of the eightfold path that leads to the cessation of suffering. The nonrecognition of the four noble truths constitutes “ignorance” (*avidyā*).

³⁰⁵ Waldron, 1995, p. 38n.

³⁰⁶ Cf. Blakney, 1941, p. 273; and Suzuki, 1957, p. 75. Eckhart writes: “What is the good? That which communicates itself.” (Blakney, 1941, p. 220); or “That which shares itself.” (M.O’C.

knowing which does not rely on grasping and hence, is, in an important way, free from the influence of the “subject”. In this way cultivation of the wholesome states is effectively aligned with training in wisdom (*prajñā*).³⁰⁷

But it is entirely unclear how the Unconditioned can be influential in experience. The idea of the unconditioned mind can only refer to the mind in so far as it has neither been determined by experience nor acts to determine any particular experience. Hence, it can refer only to the general capacity of the mind to unify in absence of any particular determination or determinate. Consequently, it is difficult to understand how the Unconditioned nature of the subject, can in any way relate to an, as yet to be determined, “object”, within a process of determination, and yet if they are not brought together content, it seems, will not be possible. A related line of thought leads Mookerjee to argue that:

The particular cognition of an object is to be supposed to be engendered by a common set of causes and conditions, which ushers into existence the object and the cognition as co-products at one and the same time. The cognitive relation between the two factors is to be explained by a law of

Walshe, 1981, p. 151) In Buddhism’s description of, what appears to be, the analogue of “God acting in place of the active intellect” (i.e., Eckhart’s detachment (*abgescheidenheit*), or releasement (*gelâzenheit*)), *avidyā*, as the source of that which appears, is vanquished and *prajñā* takes its place.

³⁰⁷ However, the Yogācārin observe that even in states where “wholesome” acts occur such as generosity, and compassion, there is still clinging to a persistent subject beyond the immediate act. It is ultimately the *ālayavijñāna* which provides the support for this kind of attachment. This sense of a persistent self is sustained even in individuals who are far along the “Path of Seeing” and those capable of enlightenment and is only truly absent during *nirodha-samāpatti* (cf. Waldron, 1995, pp. 43-44n.). They argue that if there were no *ālayavijñāna*, but only momentary mind, entrance into *nirvāna* would occur simply upon any fully “wholesome act” because momentary mind can only entertain mind-states serially. Waldron notes: “If there were no mind with all the seeds, this would entail the further consequence that when a supramundane moment of mind occurs in the Formless Realm, the other mundane *cittas* [minds] would be non-existent, that is, ... “when the counteractant (*pratīpakṣa*) is present, then since all of the counteracted (*vipakṣa*) have ceased, *nirvāna* without remainder (*nirupadhiśesanirvāna*) would be attained naturally and without effort.” (pp. 27-28) Thus, it is the persistent influence of the *ālayavijñāna* in each moment that supports the experience of a “self” far along the “Path of Seeing”.

harmony or mutual affinity inherent in the constitutional peculiarity of the subjective and objective factor. And this is the only possible explanation of the etiology of perceptual knowledge and the Buddhist shares the difficulties or advantages of this theory equally with the non-Buddhist schools. ... [Unfortunately] ... the relation of awareness and object cannot be explained, as there is no connecting medium between the two. Awareness will be pure, indeterminate awareness and not awareness of this or that, unless the two are supposed to be brought together.³⁰⁸

Hence, according to Mookerjee, it seems that we are left to postulate some such “mechanism” as interdependent arising either by itself or possibly in concert with a “harmonization of the cognitive faculties” to account for the influence of the Unconditioned in experience.

Ultimately, the Yogācārins suggest that the way to the Truth is by means of an abandonment of clinging (*sopādāna*) to the *ālayavijñāna* and a “return”, or “reversal” (*parāvṛtti*), of the mind to itself as the Absolute from which all things spring.³⁰⁹ Since the Absolute is one and simple such a return may seem to necessitate the complete extinction of all perceptual and mental activity, as in *nirodha-samāpatti*.³¹⁰ However, the the reversal in question does not necessitate such a state. As the *Lañkāvatārasūtra*³¹¹ states:

... (People) who seek Nirvāna (because they are) worried by the fear of suffering which (arises) from the discrimination (that) Samsāra (is distinct from the Absolute), do not know that Samsāra and Nirvāna are identical. As (things which seem) real by discrimination have (in truth) no reality, they think that Nirvāna (is realized) through future abandonment of the

³⁰⁸ Mookerjee, pp. 78-9, cf. also pp. 82-3.

³⁰⁹ Schumann, p. 153, and Waldron, 1995, p. 38n.

³¹⁰ *Nirodha-samāpatti* is a state in which the *ālayavijñāna* and its operations are temporarily but completely suspended. Waldron, 1995, p. 47n.

³¹¹ The *Lañkāvatārasūtra* is a central text of the Mahāyāna tradition. It proclaims a doctrine that is also held by the Yogācārins.

senses and sense-spheres... (They do) not (know that Nirvāna) is the Store-consciousness (vijñānālaya) which, after a reversal has taken place, has itself for the final goal.³¹²

Hence, it seems that the relevant “reversal” brings about a revelation in which the Base-consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), in its functioning to bring about content (i.e., Samsāra), is not fundamentally different from Absolute consciousness - a Truth which is apparently not available through the employment of reason alone.

Such insights as these lead Nāgārjuna to suggest that truth is two-levelled. The truth that one encounters in everyday life and which one employs in reason, discrimination, and judgment is conventional, or “relative”, (lit. ‘veiling’) truth (*samvrti-satya*). It is this everyday truth that leads us to the view that Samsāra and Nirvāna are different. The “reversal”, however, permits the revelation of ‘Truth in the Supreme Sense’ (*paramārtha-satya*) in which the world of conditioned appearances is seen, in some trans-logical fashion, to be Unconditioned.³¹³ This two-fold analysis of truth, which Nāgārjuna emphasizes, is consistently applied to his own theoretical constructs. The theory of the *praītya-samutpāda* series, and all the concepts on which it relies (e.g., *dharmas*), although of some value in helping us to understand the nature of experience, must be considered on the conventional level of “relative truth”. They should not be taken to express or refer to any absolutely existing entities and hence should not be expected to provide profound insight into an objectively existing ground. Non-attachment must apply equally to experience and to any explanatory constructs designed to account for experience (e.g., *praītya-samutpāda*). Seeing in the light of *prajñā*, therefore, does not refer to a mode of apprehension. It rather involves a dissipation of the

³¹² LS 2 p. 61f., in Schumann, 1973, p. 153. Whereas relative truth applies to the subject and world as revealed by relation and reason, Supreme Truth applies to Unity.

³¹³ Ibid., p. 145.

need to construct and cling to accounts of experience by means of an unmediated recognition of the emptiness³¹⁴ of all apparent “self-existents”. Nāgārjuna suggests that the wisdom of emptiness (i.e., *prajñā*) which recognizes that “there is only one state of existence: that things rise and dissipate through dependent co-origination”³¹⁵ also involves “the cognition of daily life without the attachment to it”.³¹⁶

To fully investigate the concept of emptiness would take us too far from our intended program and would be unlikely to bring us nearer to the goal of explaining the ground of experience. But briefly one way of coming to terms with the idea of the emptiness of self-existents is as follows: For ultimates like *dharmas* to be capable of being legislative for experience they must possess a transcendental status, but to assert that legislative ability they need an empirical status. In other words, only while an ultimate is transcendental can it be a “producer”, but to be transcendental is to be non-existent, and non-existents cannot “produce” anything. Once an ultimate becomes existent it is empirical. Unfortunately, it then is no longer a “universal producer” but rather a “particular something produced”. Hence, such ultimates can neither be grasped by the understanding nor abandoned by it. Buddhism, once again, holds that escape from this bind cannot be achieved but it can only be let go of with the realization of the

³¹⁴ Schumann illustrates the concept of emptiness as follows: “Whereas Nāgārjuna uses the adjectives ‘non-essential’ (*asvabhāva*) and ‘empty’ (*shunyā*) as synonyms, he does not regard as such the noun ‘non-essentiality’ (*asvabhāvatā* or *nihsvabhāvatā*) and ‘emptiness’ (*shūnyatā*).

Stating the non-essentiality of a thing is always a negative judgment; stating its emptiness, however, is an ambivalent judgment. On the one hand ‘emptiness’ signifies the non-existence of an individual Soul or Self, on the other hand essential liberatedness. For just because there is no Soul in beings but emptiness, they are essentially liberated. The Emptiness of every being which is identical with the Emptiness of all others, possesses all the characteristics of the essence. To become aware of one’s essential Emptiness is to achieve liberation. In the Madhyamaka system as in the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts Emptiness is the Absolute”. (p. 144)

³¹⁵ Streng, p. 146-7.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-60.

Truth of the emptiness of all things. But lest one should hold emptiness as a viewpoint Nāgārjuna warns:

If something would be non-empty, something would [logically also] be empty. But nothing is non-empty, so how will it become empty? Emptiness is proclaimed by the victorious one as the refutation of all view-points; But those who hold “emptiness” as a viewpoint - [the true perceivers] have called those “incurable” (*asādhya*).³¹⁷

5. Before continuing with our account of the implications of the alleviation of desire for Buddhist philosophy and for the problem of content a brief aside into Western philosophy is in order. If the idea that the elimination of craving could somehow impact on one’s experience of the ontological status of objects seems odd or extreme it will be interesting to note that Kant maintains some sympathetic views. In the third *Critique* Kant states: “For the power of desire, considered as a higher power governed by the concept of freedom, only reason (which alone contains that concept) legislates *a priori*.” In the same context he defines “the power of desire as the *power of being the cause, through one’s presentations, of the actuality of the objects of these presentations.*”³¹⁸ This suggests that freedom, or spontaneity, legislates *a priori* to that aspect of the “soul”, or mind, (i.e., desire), which, in some sense of the term, causes things to appear as “actual”! Here Kant’s use of the term “actual” concerns the existence of objects. Kant writes:

But our entire distinction between the merely possible and the actual rests on this: in saying that a thing is possible we are positing only the

³¹⁷ Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās*, 13.7-8, in Streng, p. 198.

³¹⁸ Ak.V, Pluhar, 1987, p. 16, n. 19.

presentation of it with respect to our concept and to our thinking ability in general; but in saying that a thing is actual we are positing the thing itself [*an sich selbst*] (apart from that concept). Hence the distinction between possible and actual things holds merely subjectively, for human understanding. For even if something does not exist, we can still have it in our thoughts; or we can present something as given, even though we have as yet no concept of it.³¹⁹

Hence, in the aforementioned italicized passage, Kant is suggesting that freedom legislates *a priori* to the power of desire as that power which is responsible for the existence of objects relative to human understanding - the only kind of understanding of which we are capable.

In the context of this discussion of §76 Kant refers to the possibility of “intuitive” understanding. He suggests that: “If our understanding were intuitive [rather than discursive, i.e., conceptual] it would have no objects except actual [ones].”³²⁰ But here Kant seems to mean a form of “actuality” which is not the counterpart to possibility. Kant observes: “reason forever demands that we assume something or other (the original basis) as existing with unconditioned necessity, something in which there is no longer to be any distinction between possibility and actuality; and for this idea our understanding has absolutely no concept, i.e., it cannot find a way to present such a thing and its way of existing.”³²¹ From this Kant concludes that the two propositions, “that things can be possible without being actual, and that consequently one cannot infer actuality

³¹⁹ Ibid., p. 285. Pluhar notes that “no *noumenon* seems to be intended here” (n. 20). For further clarification on this issue cf. § 76, Ak. 401-404; cf. also §2 Ak. 204, p. 45.

³²⁰ Ibid., Ak. 402, p. 284.

³²¹ Ibid., Ak. 402, p. 285.

from mere possibility,” do not hold of things as they would appear to an *intuitive* understanding. This realm of free lawfulness is, however, outside the domain of reason.

Although Kant maintains that such an intuitive understanding is unattainable. He does think that it is possible to minimize the negative effects of desire. Since the “power of desire is necessarily connected with pleasure or displeasure” which, in turn, has the power to lead reason astray, the role of disinterestedness, or nonattachment, in the appearance of things becomes obvious. Nonattachment is vital to the capacity of freedom, or spontaneity, to permit reason to legislate “unconditionally”. Unfortunately, since “judgment lies between understanding and reason”, reason functions *through* utilizing that which is revealed in “judgment”.³²² But, as we saw in the first chapter, “judgment” can only be determinate to the extent that there is some interest in the object. Hence, it seems that the transition from understanding to reason must always, to the extent that things are “grasped” and reasoned about, be influenced by desire. And although reason may, in some way, in its totality be wholly unconditioned, in its application it must always, or so it seems, be conditioned.

6. While the truth of emptiness may ultimately condemn philosophers to an endless pursuit of metaphysical unrealities there is an account within the general rubric of Buddhism that permits us to theorize about how the Unconditioned might be influential in experience. It is an account in which the concept of *prajñā* plays a central role. Buddhists generally use *prajñā* to mean a kind of “insight” and contrast it with *vijñāna*, which, as we have seen, is associated with cognizing

³²² Ibid., Ak. 178, p. 17, cf. also Ak. 197, p. 37.

activities and rationality. Access to *prajñā* is purported to have the virtue of being able to provide a direct access to the Truth so as to transcend the need for the contradictory theoretical constructs that we have been considering. The Buddhist account of how a self and world appear and are sustained, as we have noted, requires the postulation of entities such as *dharmas* and the *ālayavijñāna*. These entities, although perhaps going somewhat towards elucidating the nature of experience, possess contradictory ontological qualities such as permanence and momentariness. By rejecting rationality as the appropriate means to reveal the Ultimate truth the Buddhist concept of *prajñā* points to a redirection of mental energies caught in the web of discourse.³²³ As Streng observes: “Perfect wisdom, in its indifference to all (empty) forms, does not assert a teaching; the only “answer” one can receive from wisdom (*prajñā*) is silence.”³²⁴ But even though *prajñā* does not itself offer a discourse it is possible to productively utilize the concept to more thoroughly understand the “mental processes” underlying experience.

In his accounts of how experience comes about D. T. Suzuki suggests that the discriminating activities of *vijñāna* cannot exist without *prajñā*'s creative role in supplying the material to be discriminated. He defines *prajñā* as that “whereby a synthetic apprehension of the whole becomes possible” and so substitutes the word *prajñā* for the functions that Buddhism traditionally assigns to the *dharmas*.³²⁵ Instead of the *dharmas* working through individual mind to constitute

³²³ Tokusho (890-971), one of the great masters of Kegon philosophy and Zen Buddhism, writes: ‘If there is one *dharma* (i.e., universal law) the *Dharmakaya* (i.e., universal concrete) is not complete; if there is no *dharma* the *Dharmakaya* is not complete either. For here lies the whole truth of *prajñā*-intuition.’ In Suzuki, p. 99.

³²⁴ Streng, p. 89.

³²⁵ Suzuki, p. 124n; Suzuki actually refers to *prajñā* in this quote as “the fundamental noetic principle whereby...”. I have dropped his reference to it as a principle because he clearly does not

experience *prajñā* is theorized as providing the necessary constitutive power. In providing *viññāna* with constitutive guidance *prajñā*, like the harmonizing of cognitive faculties, is held to operate as a kind of free lawfulness.³²⁶ Suzuki suggests that *prajñā* can be described as an undifferentiated continuum which is differentiated in endless ways through various structures of consciousness. In speaking of this “process” Suzuki writes that,

we must not think that this process of differentiation as a function given to the continuum from an outside source. The differentiation is evolved from within the continuum (i.e., from *prajñā* itself), for it is not the nature of the *prajñā*-continuum to remain in a state of *sunyata*, absolutely motionless. It demands of itself that it differentiate itself unlimitedly, and at the same time it desires to remain itself. *Prajñā* is always trying to preserve its self identity and yet subjects itself to infinite diversification. That is why *sunyata* is said to be a reservoir of infinite possibilities and not just a state of mere emptiness.³²⁷

This way of speaking is somewhat poetic. But that is in keeping with the fact that understanding cannot grasp *prajñā* directly. To understand the passage more fully we must realize that as Suzuki suggests: “*Prajñā* is the ultimate reality itself”.³²⁸ In other words, *prajñā* is the epistemological manifestation of the metaphysical

intend it to function as such. He also, for instance, writes; “*Prajñā* is not the principle of judgment whereby a subject becomes related to [an] object. *Prajñā* transcends all forms of judgment and is not at all predicable.” (p. 94) Hence, to “think that there is a special faculty called *prajñā*”, or to call *prajñā* a noetic principle which permits synthetic apprehension is to court confusion. It is, as he suggests, “to make *prajñā* an aspect of *viññāna*.” (p. 94) Finally, he suggests that standard philosophical terminology is not “sufficient” to express what he has in mind (p. 85).

³²⁶ As Suzuki suggests: It “has no premeditated methods; it creates them out of itself as they are needed. ... [but] this does not mean that it is erratic and recognizes no laws.” (p. 100)

³²⁷ Ibid., p. 123, *Shūnyatā* is written here as *sunyata*; Eckhart writes: “God *becomes* as phenomena express him.” (Blakney, p. 225)

³²⁸ Ibid., p. 100.

reality of *shūnyāta*, (i.e., “Voidness”, “Emptiness”).³²⁹ Keeping this in mind the thrust of the above passage can be restated as follows: Since *prajñā* is the epistemological form of the Absolute, and the Absolute is all there is, *prajñā* must also be the *a priori* epistemological ground of the possibility of all *appearances*. In other words, for “the world” in all its diversity to *appear* to a subject the Absolute must work *through* the form of the consciousness to which it gives itself. Being *through* the form of “consciousness” means that the embodied form of that individual “consciousness” (e.g., the *ālayavijñāna*) gives recognizable form to the Absolute. And here we can add that the price of the resulting differentiation is separation. Differentiating we find ourselves separate existents. The existent, which arises interdependently with its object, is thus the conditioned product of *prajñā*’s cooperation with *vijñāna*.

But throughout the conditioning process *prajñā* remains fundamentally intact and unconditioned³³⁰ - a fact which permits *prajñā* to be “awakened to itself”. As Suzuki writes: “The body, the will, and the individual self are concepts worked out by the analytical *vijñāna*, but the inner creative life as it creates all these concepts through *vijñāna* is immediately apprehended only by *prajñā*”.³³¹ Since “the inner creative life as it creates concepts” is *prajñā* at work, this passage

³²⁹ Since God is the active form of Godhead (i.e., Void) this claim appears analogous to Eckhart’s assertion that, God’s being is his knowledge.

³³⁰ If one were to speak metaphorically here one might say that the light shines even in the darkness though the darkness does not comprehend it. Eckhart for example writes: “The word, *Logos* or idea of things exists in such a way and so completely in each of them that it nevertheless exists entire outside each. It is entirely within and entirely without. This is evident in living creatures, both in any species and also in any particular example of the species. For this reason when things are moved, changed or destroyed, their entire idea remains immobile and intact. Nothing is as eternal and unchangeable as a destructible circle. How can that which is totally outside the destructible circle be destroyed when it is? The idea then ‘the light in the darkness’ of created beings that is not confined, intermingled or comprehended. This why when John said, ‘The light shines in the darkness’, he added, ‘and the darkness did not comprehend it’.” (College and McGinn, p. 126. Cf. also Ch. 3 in its entirety, pp. 122-173 where Eckhart makes much of this biblical passage)

³³¹ Suzuki, p. 106.

suggests that *prajñā* offers a window on its own operations. Hence, we find that in addition to being that whereby a synthetic apprehension of the whole is possible *prajñā* also refers to, “an immediately experienced intuitive ‘seeing’ that cannot be conveyed by concepts or in intellectual terms”.³³² Suzuki refers to this immediate way of knowing as *prajñā*-intuition. The awakening of *prajñā*-intuition is the Absolute becoming conscious to itself. And since the unconditioned subject is itself the Absolute (i.e., *shūnyāta*) the subject who lives in *prajñā* does not experience things in the usual sense. There is a sense in which she does not discern, or “judge”, things to be thus and so but somehow realizes knowledge in a direct manner through her *being*.³³³

The reason that *prajñā*-intuition must remain an inexplicable “seeing” is that since the possibility of all discernment requires the differentiation of entities, to the extent that phenomenal states approach *prajñā* itself (i.e., the Absolute) they cannot, properly speaking, be discerned. Thus, if you think that you’ve got “It”,

³³² Kohn, p. 171.

³³³ A related claim, which might be of some assistance in coming to terms with this claim, can be found in Eckhart. In order to explicate his distinction between that which illuminates and that which is illuminated Eckhart asks us to consider the claim that “goodness”, as an unabstracted Principle, is the same as “goodness” or “whiteness”, as an idea derived from the experience of particular “good” and “white” things. Eckhart’s reply to this claim is that “goodness” (as a Principle) cannot be known in the same manner as “whiteness”, so conceived. While “elementary qualities [like whiteness] receive being univocally from a subject, through a subject, and in a subject... It is not so with justice, for example, or truth, or qualities of this sort, but contrariwise. They do not receive being from a subject but a subject receives from them its just, true, good, being, and so on: qualities which are prior to their subjects and which remain after their subjects are corrupted, as is beautifully taught by Augustine, *The Trinity*, Book VIII, chapter 3.” (Blakney, pp. 276-77) Eckhart does not deny that one can get a reasonably clear idea of goodness by abstracting from experience. However, he holds that whatever is grasped in this manner is not the “qualities” of which he speaks. The “goodness” of which Eckhart speaks as giving being to the subject is “that which illuminates” and hence, cannot be known. Thus, elsewhere we find Eckhart claiming: “God is not an ‘object’ for human understanding. He utterly transcends knowledge, and everything one says of Him is untrue. Be still and prate not of God (i.e., Godhead), for whatever you prate in words about Him is a lie and is sinful. If I say God is good, it is not true; for what is good can grow better; what can grow better can grow best. Now these three things (good, better, best) are far from God, for He is above all, [i.e., all such distinctions].” (in Suzuki, 1957, p. 75) To the extent that the properties of God are being discerned they are not One and hence do not differ fundamentally from abstracted ideas like “whiteness”.

you don't, *ipso facto*. The need for differentiation between the knower and the known extends to all forms of mental activity in which grasping is implicated (e.g., thinking, perceiving, understanding). Consequently, it is precisely this grasping mind that must either be "suspended" as in *nirodha-samāpatti*, or abandoned/transcended through non-attachment, as in the manifestation of *prajñā*. Since the former state requires, more or less, the obliteration of all phenomena it is of no concern to us here. Nirvāna, however, as was suggested above, is reached not by annihilating all thought and sense perception but rather by coming *see* phenomena in new a light. In this light the activity of discernment, or "judgment", may go on unhindered but the lack of desire and clinging in the manifestation "process" fundamentally alters the character of the resultant emergents (i.e., subject and world) such that the impression of their essentiality, or actuality, is compromised.³³⁴ Furthermore, a new insight is held to emerge such that, in some manner, that which would be discerned, and the true identity of the subject which would do the discerning, turn out to be the same entity/non-entity.³³⁵ Unfortunately, in such an account as this the law of identity is transgressed and we are left beached on the sands of reason.

7. Interestingly, it has been argued that Kant himself underwent a *prajñā* perception.³³⁶ Since, as we have seen, *prajñā* provides insight into itself, if this were true then Kant would have gained some insight to that whereby a synthetic

³³⁴ In fact, their character as "resultants" would seem to be effected. If "intention-consequence" is one movement in which experiences "occur" the division itself becomes suspect.

³³⁵ Eckhart writes: "As long as a man has an object under consideration, he is not one with it. Where there is nothing but One, nothing but One is to be seen. Therefore, no man can see God except he be blind, nor know him except through ignorance, nor understand him except through folly." (Blakney, p. 200)

³³⁶ David Appelbaum, "The Fact of Reason: Kant's *Prajñā*-Perception of Freedom," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, (1987), 15, 87-98.

apprehension of the whole is made possible, that is, he would have had a kind of direct experience of the foundation of cognition and judgment. So it will be of interest to us to know what aspect of Kant's philosophy this insight supposedly precipitated? According to David Appelbaum evidence for the insight in question is to be found in the second *Critique* where Kant arrives at the fact that pure reason is practical.

In order to ferret out the implications of this "fact" both for Kant and for our project first consider the following:

'Critique,' in Kant's sense of the term, consists in examining the scope and limits of our cognitive powers ('reason,' in the broadest sense in which Kant uses the term) in order to decide to what extent, if any, metaphysics is possible for us human beings. Metaphysics consists in the discovery of truths (true propositions) about the world that are not empirical (dependent on experience), in which case they would be contingent, but are necessary and hence a priori (knowable independently of experience). If such propositions not only are a priori but do not involve even an empirical concept (e.g., the concept of change, or of matter), then Kant calls them "pure".³³⁷

Now, for Kant, something is "practical" if it can determine the will in action. Hence, to suggest that pure reason is practical is to suggest that reason in pursuit of universal or metaphysical truth, unaided by experience, is able to determine the will in action. According to Kant, this "fact" is shown, in the second *Critique*, where he demonstrates, by reason alone, that the act of constructing maxims for

³³⁷ Pluhar, 1987, p. xxx.

the will immediately reveals that, “freedom and unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other”.³³⁸ From this insight Kant concludes that pure reason contains a practical ground in the form of an unconditioned free lawfulness, which is capable of determining the will.

In the Deduction of the Principles of Pure Practical Reason Kant continues this line of thought by suggesting that the fact that pure reason is practical “points to a pure intelligible world [as opposed to a sensuous world] - indeed, it defines it positively and enables us to know something of it, namely a law [i.e., the categorical imperative]”.³³⁹ Now, as we have seen, Kant also identifies the “intelligible” with the morally good in the third *Critique* and suggests furthermore that this “intelligible” is what taste has in view with the harmonization of the cognitive faculties. In the second *Critique* we also find the moral and the “intelligible” related. Here Kant suggests that the moral law is *of* the unconditioned intelligible world, which he characterizes in terms of “causality through freedom”.³⁴⁰ This is intriguing because it suggests a common basis for both the appearance of things in receptivity (i.e., the spontaneity of the understanding) and the activity of the faculty of reason in freedom.³⁴¹ Having established “causality through freedom” as the basis of pure reason Kant affirms and provides a positive content to the supposition of freedom made in the

³³⁸ I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, L. W. Beck, trans., New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1788-1956, p. 30; cf. also p. 46.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43; cf. also p. 48.

³⁴⁰ Kant writes: “The moral law is, in fact, a law of causality through freedom and thus a law of the possibility of a supersensuous nature...” (*ibid.*, p. 48); and also, “Pure practical reason now fills this vacant place [i.e., the ground of speculative reason] with a definite law of causality in an intelligible world (causality through freedom). This is the moral law.” (*ibid.*, p. 49)

³⁴¹ Notice that to suggest a common basis for “spontaneity” and the freedom required for reason and morality is not to confuse them in any way.

Dialectic of the first *Critique*.³⁴² Kant suggests that “the moral law is, in fact, a law of causality through freedom...” - the same causality which “theoretical reason had to assume at least the possibility of in order to fulfill one of its own needs”.³⁴³ This concept of freedom, he then observes, being of the intelligible world must forever remain outside of the reach of human reason. He writes:

on the one hand, in the explanation of natural occurrences, including the actions of rational beings, I leave to the mechanism of natural necessity the right to ascend from conditioned to conditioned *ad infinitum*, while, on the other hand, I hold open for speculative reason the place which for it is vacant, i.e., the intelligible, in order to put the unconditioned in it.³⁴⁴

Thus, the concept of freedom is rendered as a regulative principle of reason, which can in no way augment the reach of reason beyond the realm of the sensuous. The only way one could reach into the realm of the intelligible, Kant suggests, would be to use “the logical relation of ground and consequence ... with another kind of intuition than the sensuous... . [And] This reason cannot do,...”³⁴⁵

³⁴² Kant suggests: “The determination of the causality of beings in the world of sense as such can never be unconditioned, and yet for every series of conditions there must be something unconditioned, and consequently a causality which is entirely self-determining.” (in Beck, 1956, p. 48). With this line of thought in mind Beck observes: “If the empirical events which are the objects of scientific knowledge were events among things in themselves, the principle of natural causation would be absolutely true without restriction, there would be an irresolvable conflict between freedom and causal determinism, and freedom would have to be surrendered. But if the events we observe are only phenomena, i.e., appearances of things in themselves as organized by our own sensibility and understanding, as he believes he has shown...to be the case, then the causality of freedom might be true of the relation of realities to appearances while mechanical determinism would still hold of the connections among the observed events themselves. The two principles might therefore be true, each in its own context. Thus the *Critique of Pure Reason* shows that freedom is not incompatible with natural necessity and is thus a possible concept. But the first *Critique* does not give any reason for believing that it is actual, i.e., that there *is* freedom.” (ibid., p. xvii-xviii)

³⁴³ Ibid., p. 49.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 49.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 49-50.

Whether Kant arrived at the “fact” that pure reason is practical by means of a *prajñā*-perception is, I suspect, primarily a matter of speculation. However, here we can observe that all three of Kant’s *Critiques* can be seen to plot paths through which the unknowable realm of the supersensible, or intelligible, is able to impact on the sensuous in order to guide our cognitive powers to universal truth. As Pluhar observes:

... Kant considers the supersensible basis of nature’s subjective purposiveness to be *the same* supersensible substrate of both objects and subjects and the supersensible that “the concept of freedom contains practically”; this “same” supersensible is referred to in all these ways in the context of the solution to the antinomy of aesthetic judgment. Sometimes, however, still in that same context, Kant refers to it simply as the supersensible “within us” (see esp. Ak. 341).³⁴⁶

In this task “causality through freedom”, either in the form of pure reason or subjective harmonization, plays a central role. A free causality is, of course, a logical contradiction, but it is exactly the kind of logical contradiction that is used to describe the way *prajñā* operates in the world. Consequently, although there are essential differences, both the fact that pure reason is practical and the idea of the harmonization of the cognitive faculties captures something of the nature of *prajñā*.

8. We will now briefly attempt to develop a deeper understanding of how *prajñā* is purported to function by means of a route which, at least to some extent, attempts to bypass reason. Since *prajñā* is immediately available only through

³⁴⁶ Pluhar, 1987, p. xcvi. n.101, cf. also p. xxxviii.

prajñā itself it is not possible, as Kant would say, to permit a synthesis of this concept. For as soon as this synthesis is complete and we have settled on a “what-it-is”, “that” on which we have settled, cannot itself be *prajñā*. These facts account for the disdain which Zen Buddhism shows for rationalism and its preference for more “direct” approaches to *prajñā*-intuition. One of these approaches takes the form of *mondo* - question and answer stories designed to assist the practitioner to bring about the necessary insight. Although one could easily devote an entire book to these *mondo* we will restrict ourselves to two particularly illuminating examples before, once again, resorting to discursive means.

The first *mondo* is useful as an illustration of the limitation of rational means as an approach to *prajñā*. It reads:

A monk asked Yomyo: “I have been with you for a long time, and yet I am unable to understand your way. How is this?”

The master said: “Where you do not understand, there is the point for your understanding.”

“How is any understanding possible where it is impossible?”

The master said: “The cow gives birth to the baby elephant; clouds of dust rise over the ocean”.³⁴⁷

Realizing the inadequacy of reasoning to the task at hand and hence, the impossibility of providing a satisfactory “answer” to the monk’s query, the master substitutes a metaphorical allusion for a reason. This strategy carefully is designed

³⁴⁷ In Suzuki, p. 114.

to simultaneously frustrate of the monk's *attempt to grasp* at an answer and to stimulate an awakening of *prajñā* to itself. In answering Yomyo's second question the master might well have said: "Other than by understanding", but this would have been to simply point again at something which cannot be seen in the usual way. The answer that the master does provide is not as meaningless as it may first appear. He refers to an unfathomable "process" which precipitates "clouds of dust", i.e., the multiplicity of *dharmas*, to arise from "the ocean", i.e., the ocean of *sunyata*.³⁴⁸

The second mondo illustrates that "stage of being" in which *prajñā* reigns and which permits one to recognize the *a priority* of *prajñā* as that whereby a synthetic apprehension of the whole becomes possible. The master in question in this story is Kwasan who died in a.d. 960. It reads:

A monk came up and asked: "What is the stage of Truth?"

The master said: "I know how to beat the drum."

Another time a monk asked: "What is the first principle?"

"I know how to beat the drum."

The master's response was the same when he was asked by still another monk: "I do not ask about 'Mind is Buddha', but I wish to know what is meant by 'Not Mind, Not Buddha'."

"I know how to beat the drum", quickly came from the master. ...

³⁴⁸ Fa-tsang (643-671) founder of the Hua-yen school writes: "This little particle of dust arises through causes. This means a dharma ... this dust and other dharmas depend on and involve each other...all dust is formed through causation: this is matter... the theory of all things coming into existence through causation is unfathomable. All things are exhaustively combined as one, and all infinities are embraced to form a totality." (in Appelbaum, 1987, pp. 94-95)

Suzuki goes on from this to note that the master:

was probably once a drum-beater in his career as a monk, and it is likely that not only did he say, "I know how to beat the drum", but that, so saying, he actually beat the drum, or at least he went through the whole process, keeping time, "Do-ko-dong, do-ko-dong!"³⁴⁹

From this last *mondo* we can observe that whenever one uses any concept, regardless of its abstractness and universality, that use singles out a "particular", even if only a particular "use." But in the case of "that" which permits all things, "that" which is to be understood is not a "that" and consequently cannot be grasped.³⁵⁰ The employment of concepts is held by Zen to be a fruitless path, which can never arrive at the intended goal. In order to avoid falling into this trap the master resorts to actually beating the drum, or hitting the questioner, or getting up and walking out of the room!

Here, once again, we are in a position to observe something of significance to the problem of judgment and to understanding generally. From the above *mondo* we can conclude that if one were to ask the master how it is that one knows how to beat a drum, he would respond by simply beating the drum. Substituting for this last query that of, how it is that one knows how to understand, apply a concept, or subsume a particular under a universal, it follows that, assuming that we and the master are correct in our assumptions, if one does

³⁴⁹ In Suzuki, p. 77.

³⁵⁰ This is not to say that concepts are useless in coming to *prajña*. Most scholars of Mādhyamika Buddhism view analytical means as a necessary preparation for the emergence of insight *prajña*. This, however, does not appear to be the case with Zen Buddhism which follows Nāgārjuna's lead in regarding analysis as neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for the arising of *prajña* (Cf. C. Dean, The relationship between analysis and insight (*prajña*) in Mādhyamika Buddhism: Some western interpretations, *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. XXI, No. 4, 1994, pp. 347-53).

not wish a direct encounter with the limits of rationality (e.g., a demand for an infinite regress of rules of judgment), the most appropriate thing to do is to demonstrate an example of this “talent” by suggesting that, for instance, “The master is a very good drum beater!” Such an approach, of course, explains nothing and has the further consequence of seeming to make the act of understanding dependent on a particular talent, skill, capacity, or practice. Unfortunately, if judgment is a particular talent, we are, once again, left with the problem of how this talent can be made non-arbitrary - that is, how is it that one can *know*, for example, that the master is a very good drum beater.

In chapter 1 of this text Kant’s answer to this problem was seen to hinge ultimately on the ability of the supersensible to rule contingency out of the harmonizing function. Once again, the harmonization of the cognitive faculties, which is implicated in concept formation and application, is characterized in terms of an unconditioned, or free, lawfulness.³⁵¹ This free lawfulness is attuned to “the form of finality”, which Kant also characterizes as “the morally good”, and the “intelligible”, (i.e., supersensible), as it is found in the sensuous world. But since nothing can be *known about* the supersensible, as it admits of no predicates, it was no surprise to discover that the harmonization of the cognitive faculties must largely be left as a mysterious process. Although, as we have argued, the problem of judgment does not arise for Buddhism, the problem of how a stable subject and world appears does. The Buddhist answer to this question has been shown to hinge on the cooperation of the Unconditioned with a conditioned and conditioning mind, e.g., *prajñā* and *viññāna*. But since nothing can be known

³⁵¹ Cf. Pluhar, 1987, pp. lxi-lxvi; and ch.1 above.

about *prajñā*, as it admits of no predicates, it should come as no surprise to discover that the functioning of *prajñā* must largely be left as a mystery. Fortunately, the Buddhists have not left us entirely bereft.

As we have observed *prajñā* is both the Absolute itself and that through which the Absolute is seen, both that which plays a fundamental creative role in the appearance of all things and that “whereby a synthetic apprehension of the whole becomes possible.” The Buddhists do not have a philosophically sophisticated account of a “process” through which *prajñā* functions because, once again, the Unconditioned is held to be fundamentally unfathomable.³⁵² But there is an interesting fact about *prajñā* that enables us to directly know something of its nature. As with the harmonization of the cognitive faculties “the morally good” is, albeit in a general way, implicated in the functioning of *prajñā*.³⁵³ This conclusion follows simply from the following facts. The morally wholesome states are, as we have observed, of the Unconditioned mind. And, as we have also observed, *prajñā* is in essence the Unconditioned mind. Hence, the morally wholesome states are of *prajñā*. In other words, since *prajñā* is the epistemological form of the Absolute, and the wholesome states share something of the nature of the Base-consciousness as the Absolute, the wholesome states share something of “that whereby a synthetic apprehension of the whole becomes

³⁵² Here it is interesting to observe a comment that Kant makes in “On Methodology Concerning Taste” - his brief appendix to Part I of the third *Critique*. He writes: “Plainly, then, the propaedeutic that will truly establish our taste consists in developing our moral ideas and in cultivating [*Kultur*] moral feeling; for only when sensibility is made to harmonize with this feeling can genuine taste take on a definite, unchangeable form.” (Pluhar, 1987, CJ 356, p. 232)

³⁵³ Suzuki suggests that *prajñā* is value-giving, it makes things significant, and full of meaning (pp. 122-3).

possible”.³⁵⁴ This means that the morally wholesome states are somehow implicated as foundational to experience or, in Kantian terms, to “judgment”.

One interesting implication of this participation of the wholesome states in the “ground” of judgment is that it suggests a reason as to why “goodness”, “justice”, “virtue”, “wisdom”, etc., constantly elude attempts to understand and render them determinate. Put simply, since the wholesome states are of the fundamentally ungraspable “that which permits understanding generally” they cannot be a “that which is understood”. The attempt to understand the wholesome states can be likened to someone holding a candle and examining objects as a means to determine what is illuminating them. Or alternatively, think of Socrates wandering around the *polis* trying to determine what justice *is*. On our reasoning Socrates is justice incarnate. The fact that Socrates can’t grasp and render “justice” determinate is a direct result of its and his Nature. To the extent that “justice” can be discerned or grasped in some way, it is not any longer “that whereby a synthetic apprehension of the whole becomes possible”. To speak with Eckhart, “what is just, in that it is inferior, does not comprehend justice”, it is a *posteriori* knowledge, only justice itself, in so far as it is complete both within and without every just man and thing and is unknown, is it “the light of what comes from it”.³⁵⁵

9. In this chapter the crux of our investigation has, not surprisingly, been intimately tied to the apparent need for agency in cognition. Through comparing

³⁵⁴ This claim is, of course, a “relative truth” which captures only something of the reality of the situation. The claim is akin to what Scheler has in mind when he says that, “*love is the mother of spirit and reason itself*” (X 356, in Frings, 1996, p. 44).

³⁵⁵ College and McGinn, p. 128; Eckhart also writes: “Put another way, it is universally true that the principle is the light of what comes from it, and a superior illuminates an inferior.” (College and McGinn, p. 128) For Eckhart, as we have seen, “justice”, “goodness”, etc., are virtually synonymous with God as the active form of Godhead.

core aspects of Buddhist philosophy against the backdrop of core aspects of Kantian philosophy we have, among other things, provided support for the idea that providing an account of experience requires distinctions to be made which all but entail the postulation of some type of permanent existent. As we have seen, however, providing form and content to the requisite “cognizing permanent” has the effect of evaporating its status as a cognizer and turning it into a “that which has been cognized”. In an attempt to provide some insight into the source of this philosophical tension we have ventured onto ground that may seem philosophically disreputable. This venturing, however, has enabled us to make some progress toward developing a more comprehensive view of the foundations of experience.

Perhaps the most important component of this progress is our support for the view that experience results from a recursive and dynamic process in which “self” and “object” arise interdependently. On this view “active” and “receptive”, as terms applied to the mind, are two ways of viewing one continuous process. The driving force behind this process is held to be desire, or craving. On the Yogācāra account of this process experience is made possible through a clinging to, and appropriation of, a Base-consciousness by a product of the desire driven process. Since the Base-consciousness (i.e., *ālayavijñāna*) is that through which *dharmas* are effectively able to constitute the world, clinging to the Base-consciousness has the effect of appropriating and focusing the constitutive power of the “relevant” *dharmas*, which somehow lie *a priori* “in the Base-consciousness”, on the as of yet unrecognized “contents” of the cognitive groups. In other words, experience is made possible by means of a product of the

aforementioned desire driven process (i.e., *manovijñāna*) turning back and appropriating the Base-consciousness, and so with it the source of production, relative to some “intuition(s)”. In this way the manifold, if you will, is rendered determinate and is infused with impressions of permanence and essentiality.

In the end, however, Buddhism dissuades us from placing too much weight on any such account. The elements of such accounts, they warn, should not be taken as referring to any absolutely existing entities. Although Buddhist accounts of experience may reveal something of the Ultimate reality of the mind we must remember that any “that” which can be grasped cannot be “that” through which grasping is itself made possible. Further insight into the nature of experience, as well as relief from the philosophical tensions created by the attempt to ground experience, as they suggest, may only be attained through the development of a way of life which demands the elimination of the driving element behind the conscious appropriation of the world, i.e., desire. And this may ultimately require accepting both that discursive means are not fully adequate to the task at hand and that it is perhaps only through a “practice” that a philosopher may obtain peace.

Chapter 5

John McDowell and the Determination of Experience

1. I would now like to bring further clarity and a tighter focus to our discussion of “judgment/content” through an examination of some recent literature on the matter. John McDowell’s book, *Mind and World*, is a particularly good point of departure for its main purpose dovetails with our own. Generally speaking McDowell is concerned “to propose an account, in a diagnostic spirit, of some characteristic anxieties of modern philosophy - anxieties that centre, ... on the relation between mind and world”³⁵⁶ More to the point he is concerned with “the way concepts mediate the relations between minds and the world”.³⁵⁷ The bifurcation of mind and world, he observes, ultimately demands normativity in judgment. As he writes: “A belief or judgment to the effect that things are thus and so...must be a posture or stance that is *correctly or incorrectly* adopted to whether or not things are indeed thus and so.”³⁵⁸ Hence, normativity ultimately demands that the world be accessible and legislative. Unfortunately it is not clear how these “things” of the world can return a verdict on our experience.

The main problem as McDowell outlines it is that for some experience to be able to count as an experience of the world, and so be legislative for some understanding, it must be capable of being placed within the space of reasons. But

³⁵⁶ J. McDowell, *Mind and World*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. xi.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. xi-xii.

for something to be capable of being a reason is for it to possess rational relations to an existing network of understanding. Hence, it seems that all experience must be determined in accordance with that network, i.e., conceptually determined. Now, if all experience is conceptually determined then reason can appear to be unconstrained in its explorations. This leads to the at least apparent threat of “coherentism” followed by the yearning for experience to somehow extend beyond the space of concepts. In other words, the possibility of legislative experiences, given the possibility of this apparent threat, seems to require an extra-conceptual given which is able to impinge upon the space of reasons. Unfortunately, the idea of such a given is inconsistent with the demand that all experience be conceptually determined. The space of reasons, it is argued, cannot extend beyond the space of concepts. McDowell writes:

Even if we take it that answerability to how things are must begin with answerability to the empirical world, it nevertheless seems right to say this: since our cognitive predicament is that we confront the world by way of sensible intuition (to put it in Kantian terms), our reflection on the very idea of thought’s directedness at how things are must begin with answerability to the empirical world. And now, how can we understand the idea that our thinking is answerable to the empirical world, if not by way of the idea that our thinking is answerable to experience? How could a verdict from the empirical world - to which empirical thinking must be answerable if it is to be thinking at all - be delivered, if not by way of a verdict from (as W. V. Quine puts it) “the tribunal of experience”?³⁵⁹

³⁵⁹ Ibid., p. xii.

Since anything which can be legislative for a tribunal must fall within the space of reasons it would seem that all experience must be conceptually determined and the idea of an extra-conceptual given is a myth. And so we are once again led to the threat of coherentism.³⁶⁰

As we observed in chapter 1, for Kant, the use of concepts is “based on the spontaneity of thought”- that is, on the understanding as the power of judgment.³⁶¹ This description of understanding as the faculty of spontaneity reflects Kant’s position on the relation between reason and freedom: rational necessitation is not just compatible with freedom but constitutive of it. In other words, as McDowell observes, “the space of reasons is the realm of freedom”.³⁶² According to McDowell, it is misunderstanding this relationship and its implications for both “reason” and “freedom” that leads us to the kind of familiar problem which we have just outlined. The idea that the “freedom” of reason is total can seem to render our rational endeavours as a kind of ungrounded creativity. “And” McDowell writes:

surely there must be such grounding if experience is to be a source of knowledge, and more generally, if the bearing of empirical judgments on reality is to be intelligibly in place in our picture at all. The more we play up the connection between reason and freedom, the more we risk losing our grip on how exercises of concepts can constitute warranted judgements about the world. What we wanted to conceive as exercises of concepts

³⁶⁰ For a detailed account of the historical development of this problem see M. Friedman, *Exorcising the Philosophical Tradition: Comments on John McDowell’s Mind and World*, *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 105, No. 4, 1996.

³⁶¹ A 68-9/B 93-4, Pluhar, 1996, p. 122-3; cf. also A 79/B 105, p. 131; and A 126, p. 171.

³⁶² McDowell, p. 5.

threatens to degenerate into moves in a self-contained game. And that deprives us of the very idea that they are exercises of concepts.³⁶³

Such thinking as this inevitably generates a desire to bring rationality under external control through reference to some extra-conceptual “given”. But since it is simply not clear how the relations in virtue of which a judgment becomes warranted can extend beyond the space of concepts the appeal to such a given cannot help.

2. McDowell argues that the idea of a “given” can be seen to be a myth in light of the original Kantian insight that the appearance of anything whatsoever for a human understanding requires that the faculty of concepts cooperate with sensible intuition. As the Kantian slogan reads: “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind”.³⁶⁴ McDowell interprets this to mean “the world’s impressions on our senses are already possessed of conceptual content”.³⁶⁵ And, he suggests, insight into this truth alleviates the desire for the space of reasons to extend beyond the space of concepts by providing us with an understanding of “givenness” which is free from implications of extra-conceptual impingements. The resulting picture of the relationship of mind and world has it “that when we enjoy experience conceptual capacities are drawn on *in* receptivity, not exercised *on* some supposedly prior deliverances of receptivity”.³⁶⁶ This means that the very same network of conceptual capacities that is implicated in

³⁶³ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁶⁴ A51/B75, Pluhar, 1996, p. 107. Note also: McDowell suggests that the difficulty of getting one’s head around the matter results in part from the general passivity of experience which “does not by itself provide a good fit for the idea of a faculty of spontaneity” (p. 10-11).

³⁶⁵ McDowell, p. 18.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

“free” active thought is also implicated in “spontaneous” experience where we seem to be passively burdened with “content”.³⁶⁷

Having the same conceptual capacities operative in both activity and passivity provides for a convenient way of explaining how experiences can be integrated back into a subject’s “network of conceptual capacities”. Since the same conceptual capacities are operative in both activity and passivity there is no block to having experiences stand in rational relations to judgment. As McDowell observes:

In “outer experience”, a subject is passively saddled with conceptual contents, drawing into operation capacities seamlessly integrated in a conceptual repertoire that she employs in the continuing activity of adjusting her world-view, so as to enable it to pass the scrutiny of its rational credentials. It is this integration that makes it possible for us to conceive experience as awareness, or at least seeming awareness, of a reality independent of experience.³⁶⁸

The basic idea is that since the conceptual capacities that are operative in activity are part of a rationally integrated system of conceptual capacities, and the very same conceptual capacities are operative in passivity, any given experience has extended to it the sense that it participates in a wider reality - a reality of rational relations. In this way experiences are granted the degree of subject-independence which is required in order to permit them to be legislative.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁷ McDowell writes: “The conceptual capacities that are passively drawn into play in experience belong to a network of capacities for active thought, a network that rationally governs comprehension-seeking responses to the impacts of the world on sensibility.” (p. 12)

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

³⁶⁹ McDowell writes: “The understanding - the very capacity that we bring to bear on texts - must be involved in our taking in of mere meaningless happenings.” (p. 97)

But, of course, at this point McDowell has simply assumed that the “rational” linkages through which the activity of integration proceeds have a requisite independence from the network itself. The point of the postulation of an extra-conceptual given is that it seems to provide the possibility of an independent constraint on the process of rational integration. If McDowell is to relieve the philosophical yearning for a given he needs to make plausible the idea that the network is, in some way, independently regulated. Since, as he argues, that regulation cannot be from a source external to the network of conceptual capacities it must come from within it.³⁷⁰ In this respect McDowell follows the Kantian lead. In the first *Critique* Kant suggests that the concepts operative in receptivity belong to the faculty of spontaneity - that is, the understanding. Since, as McDowell suggests, “the spontaneity of understanding is *sui generis* in the way suggested by the link to the idea of freedom”³⁷¹, the network of conceptual capacities of which the understanding is comprised must also be linked to spontaneity.³⁷²

³⁷⁰ McDowell’s arguments against the possibility of an extra-conceptual given are impressive. But to examine them in depth here would take us too far from our main course. We are primarily interested in his positive project of attempting to direct us to “the discovery that gives philosophy peace” (p. 86).

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67. It is perhaps appropriate at this point simply to note the following dilemma that arises in light of attribution of *sui generis* existence. As Mookerjee observes with respect to the categories, of space, time, substance, etc.: “Is this *sui generis* existence something different from existence as such or not different? In the former alternative, it will be non-existence and the categories concerned will be unreal. In the latter, the *sui generis* existence will be unmeaning, as there is nothing to differentiate it from existence as such and the categories will be lumped into one.” (p. 6)

³⁷² McDowell writes: “The power of spontaneity comprises a network of conceptual capacities linked by putatively rational connections, with the connections essentially subject to critical reflection.” (pp. 124-5) And elsewhere: “The faculty of spontaneity is the understanding, our capacity to recognize and bring into being the kind of intelligibility that is proper to meaning.” (p. 71)

A line of thought such as this leads McDowell to introduce and rely on a notion of “spontaneity at large”.³⁷³ In considering the way colour concepts function in experience, for example, he writes:

Even here, where the linkages into the whole system are minimal, the relevant conceptual capacities are integrated into spontaneity at large, in a way that enables the subject to understand experiences in which those conceptual capacities are drawn into operation as glimpses, or at least seeming glimpses, of the world: ... If a colour concept is drawn into operation in an experience..., the rational connections of the concept enter into shaping the content of the appearance, so that what appears to be the case is understood as fraught with implications for the subject’s cognitive situation in the world: for instance, that she is confronted by an object with a facing surface illuminated in such-and-such ways.³⁷⁴

This passage suggests that experiences gain their rational legislative ability through the integration of receptively operative conceptual capacities into “spontaneity at large”. But it is not clear how a “capacity” can be integrated into “spontaneity”, conceived along Kantian lines, and in the next paragraph McDowell alters the point slightly. He writes:

The object of experience is understood as integrated into a wider reality, in a way that mirrors how the relevant concepts are integrated into the

³⁷³ McDowell writes: “What is needed is that the very same capacities [that are exploited in receptivity] can also be exploited in active judgements. And what secures this identification, between capacities that are operative in judgements, is the way appearances are rationally linked into spontaneity at large: the way appearances can constitute reasons for judgements about objective reality - indeed, do constitute reasons for judgements in suitable circumstances (‘other things being equal’).” (p. 62)

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

repertoire of spontaneity at large. Even in the case of colour experience, this integration allows us to understand an experience as awareness of something independent of experience itself: something that is held in place by its linkage into the wider reality, so that we can make sense of the thought that it would be so even if it were not being experienced to be so.³⁷⁵

Since understanding an object of experience as integrated into a wider reality can only provide a legislative power sufficient to dispel the yearning for an extra-conceptual given just in case the relevant concepts move in a network of “rational” relations - that is, *sui generis* relations - McDowell suggests that those concepts which are “passively” drawn into operation also participate in a kind of *a priori* network of rational relations.³⁷⁶ Putting the matter this way, however, encourages the reader to picture “spontaneity at large” in rampantly platonistic terms,³⁷⁷ - that is, as an *a priori* unity of integrated universals possessing a “radical independence” from the subject. But this is not the picture at which McDowell is ultimately aiming.

If, as McDowell argues, “intuitions” cannot make an even notionally separable contribution to experience then a shift of philosophical focus from the operation of “concepts” and “intuitions” to the functioning of “conceptual capacities” - e.g., the *ability* to see black things - is warranted. The adoption of this strategy enables McDowell, in Wittgenstenian fashion, to flow quite freely

³⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

³⁷⁶ An experience, it seems, can only constitute a reason for a judgment about “reality” by means of an ideal. McDowell observes: “[Davidson] urges that concepts of “propositional attitudes” make sense only as governed by a ‘constitutive ideal of rationality’. In the terms I have been using, the claim comes to this: the fundamental point of those concepts is to subserve the kind of intelligibility that is proper to meaning, the kind of intelligibility we find in something when we place it in the space of reasons. (n. I am taking Davidson’s thought to concern what I have been calling, in Kantian terms, ‘the spontaneity of understanding’)” (p. 74)

³⁷⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 77.

back and forth between discussing “the use, or exercise, of concepts” and the employment of “conceptual capacities”. This ease is augmented further by his idea that the very same conceptual capacities must be operative in both *receptive* experience and active thought. McDowell observes:

Quite generally, the capacities that are drawn on in experience are recognizable as conceptual only against the background of the fact that someone who has them is responsive to rational relations, which link the contents of judgements of experience with other judgeable contents. These linkages give the concepts their place as elements in possible views of the world.³⁷⁸

In order to identify concepts and their application it is necessary therefore to attend to the “rational linkages” which become apparent as events unfold. “Concepts”, so conceived, are derivative on, or abstracted from, experience. On McDowell’s account both active thinking and receptivity employ conceptual capacities. But how concepts and intuitions are operative *in* experience is a question, he argues, that can be safely ignored.³⁷⁹

McDowell, however, has no intentions of dispensing with the notion of “concepts”. In fact, he needs the notion of “concepts” because of the role “spontaneity at large”, in the guise of rationality, must play in experience. The idea that our thoughts are about the world demands, once again, normativity in belief and judgment. Since that normativity cannot be provided by an extra-conceptual given it must be provided within the space of concepts - that is, the

³⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 11-12.

³⁷⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 87-8; and pp. 112-3.

space of *sui generis* rational relations governed by “spontaneity at large”.³⁸⁰ Moreover, according to McDowell, reason can only make demands on a network of conceptual capacities if it is already determined in a manner that is responsive to those demands.³⁸¹ Hence, since the determination of the network occurs by means of discovering relations in the world, and the network of conceptual capacities has a constitutive role to play in determining those relations, the relations must possess a kind of *a priori*. Thus, for example, although I am free to use the colours on my palette in anyway I please, mix them together to create new colours, etc., the activity is essentially one of discovery. Since, however, my “conceptual capacities” played a constitutive role in the appearance of these colours, and there is no “given” to regulate the functioning of these capacities, the network of conceptual relations, which these capacities employ in being “conceptual”, must be, at least potentially, “predetermined”. Hence, once again, McDowell needs to rely on the idea that there is some, to be discovered, way in which the network of conceptual linkages is *a priori* related.³⁸²

This is, once again, not to suggest that the spontaneity of the understanding has some kind of “radical independence” from the network of conceptual capacities through which experiences are constitutively rendered. In claiming that our network of conceptual capacities is necessarily linked to spontaneity at large McDowell is suggesting, “that our responsiveness to meaning

³⁸⁰ Notice that if McDowell were to accept an *a posteriori* network of concepts as sufficient he would be subject to the kind of argument against abstractionist accounts of concept formation that we addressed in previous chapters – not to mention the threat of that which he is actively seeking to avoid, i.e., coherentism.

³⁸¹ McDowell observes that, “one can reflect only from the midst of the way of thinking one is reflecting about” (p. 81). Cf. also where he writes: “The fact that the demands bear on us is just, irreducibly, itself. It is something that comes into view only within the kind of thinking that conceives practical situations in terms of such demands.” (p.83)

³⁸² Friedman, 1996, writes: “Are we not here very close indeed to the traditional idealist doctrine that the world to which our thought relates is a creature of our own conceptualization?” (p. 464)

cannot be captured in naturalistic terms”³⁸³ but this does not mean that such responsiveness is not “natural” to human beings. He writes:

It can seem that we must be picturing the space of reasons as an autonomous structure - autonomous in that it is constituted independently of anything specifically human, since what is specifically human is surely natural (the idea of the human is the idea of what pertains to a certain species of animals), and we are refusing to naturalize the requirements of reason. But human minds must somehow be able to latch on to this inhuman structure. So it looks as if we are picturing human beings as partly in nature and partly outside it. What we wanted was a naturalism that makes room for meaning, but this is no kind of naturalism at all.³⁸⁴

Such characterizations are unacceptable to McDowell because he believes that they render an essentially human capacity external to our natural being and threatens to re-introduce a supernaturalism into explanations of human thought and experience. McDowell wishes to “keep nature as it were partially enchanted, but without lapsing into pre-scientific superstition or rampant platonism”.³⁸⁵

While it is true that “spontaneity at large” must be permitted to be legislative for the “wider reality” into which, and through which, experiences are understood McDowell believes that the “occult” quality of this basic explanatory framework can be exorcised.³⁸⁶ He suggests that in order to do this: “We need to recapture

³⁸³ Ibid., p. 77.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 77-8.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 85.

³⁸⁶ He writes: “The object of an experience, the state of affairs experienced as obtaining, is understood as part of a whole thinkable world. Since the whole is independent of this particular experience, we can use the linkage into the mostly unexperienced whole to hold the object of this particular experience in place, while we ask how things would have been if the experience had not occurred. This depends on a specific way in which concepts are integrated into spontaneity at large, a way that, as I have claimed, is minimally exemplified by colour concepts.” (p. 36)

the Aristotelian idea that a normal mature human being is a rational animal, but without losing the Kantian idea that rationality operates freely in its own sphere".³⁸⁷ But, as we will see, this is not as straightforward as it sounds.

3. McDowell's strategy for relieving us of our philosophical yearnings for an extra-conceptual given is comprised of a negative and a positive project. The negative project consists largely in the performance of a series of *reductio* arguments on the possibility of a given.³⁸⁸ The positive project attempts to move the reader to adopt a version of the aforementioned Kantian perspective that does not require the augmentation of a transcendental framework. These two general strategies are combined in an attempt to loosen the grip of the kind of philosophical thinking that leads to a yearning for extra-conceptual constraint - a kind of thinking which, McDowell argues, came into being with the idea that nature is a realm of law.³⁸⁹ The desire for an extra-conceptual given is, according to McDowell, a natural result of the attempt to unite the realm of meaning with the realm of nature, conceived in the traditional fashion. As a result McDowell's positive project includes an attempt to generate a conception of nature that is neither naively scientific nor supernatural.³⁹⁰ In this way, he attempts to render as "natural" the acquisition and employment of *sui generis* rational spaces.

The best way he knows of to work into the kind of conception that he has in mind is by reflecting on Aristotle's ethics.³⁹¹ He begins by offering an account

³⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 85.

³⁸⁸ Cf., for example, p. 7; or cf. also his consideration of the Wittgenstein's private language argument on p. 19. Generally speaking his arguments are cogent and powerful. Unfortunately to investigate them in depth here would take us too far from our main course.

³⁸⁹ McDowell writes: "What I suggests is that our philosophical anxieties are due to the intelligible grip on our thinking of a modern naturalism, and we can work at loosening that grip." (p. 177)

³⁹⁰ Cf. for example, *ibid.*, p. 72 and p. 78

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 78. McDowell writes: "In Aristotle's conception, the rational demands of ethics are not alien to the contingencies of our life as human beings." (p. 83)

of Aristotle's notion of "practical wisdom" (*phronésis*). "Practical wisdom", he suggests,

is a responsiveness to some of the demands of reason (though that is not Aristotle's way of putting it). The picture is that ethics involves requirements of reason that are there whether we know it or not, and our eyes are opened to them by the acquisition of "practical wisdom". So "practical wisdom" is the right sort of thing to serve as a model for the understanding, the faculty that enables us to recognize and create the kind of intelligibility that is a matter of placement in the space of reasons".³⁹²

The image at which McDowell is aiming has it that being human involves, all things being equal, the acquisition of interrelating sets of conceptual capacities that enable us to differentiate ourselves from objects and so to have "worlds". The ability to be responsive to the demands of ethics is, developmentally speaking, a late addition to the "network". But McDowell sees in Aristotle's conception of "practical wisdom" a general framework, which can be applied to the way the understanding functions.

In order to bring this picture further into focus McDowell introduces the conception of a *second nature* and then uses his account of practical wisdom to explicate it. He writes:

The notion is all but explicit in Aristotle's account of how ethical character is formed. Since ethical character includes dispositions of the practical intellect, part of what happens when character is formed is that the practical intellect acquires a determinate shape. So practical wisdom is second nature

³⁹² Ibid., p. 79.

to its possessors. ... Human beings are initiated into this stretch of the space of reasons by an ethical upbringing, which instils the appropriate shape into their lives. The resulting habits of thought and action are second nature.³⁹³

The general point, he suggests, can be extended to the acquisition of all conceptual capacities.

Moulding ethical character, which includes imposing a specific shape on the practical intellect, is a particular case of a general phenomenon: initiation into conceptual capacities, which include responsiveness to other rational demands besides those of ethics. Such initiation is a normal part of what it is for a human being to come to maturity, and that is why, although the structure of the space of reasons is alien to the layout of nature conceived as the realm of law, it does not take on the remoteness from the human that rampant platonism envisages.³⁹⁴

Thus McDowell, in introducing the notion of a second nature, is suggesting that the acquisition and employment by the understanding of any previously inaccessible tract of the space of reasons is a natural endowment - albeit a potential one - of human beings. Initiation into a tradition, or wider reality of some kind, permits the acquisition of conceptual capacities that are, as it were, "slightly enchanted" by virtue of their relationship to the *sui generis* rational linkages of "spontaneity at large". In other words, the acquisition of a set of conceptual capacities can be understood as the acquisition of: a) the ability to actively utilize a tract of spontaneity at large which the understanding was previously unable to employ, and b) the ability to have that same previously

³⁹³ Ibid., p. 84, McDowell has Book 2 in mind.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 84.

inaccessible tract of spontaneity at large applied, receptively, in making sense of the world. Hence, to say that our eyes are opened to a tract of the space of reasons by the acquisition of a set of conceptual capacities implicit in a wider reality, or tradition, is just to say that initiation into the wider reality is necessary for spontaneity to gain hold of, or be constitutively active in, the experiential domain circumscribed by that tradition.

The picture at which McDowell is ultimately aiming leaves the possession and employment of concepts by the understanding mysterious. But it denies that there is anything “unnatural” about this possession and employment. As McDowell observes: “Given the notion of second nature, we can say that the way our lives are shaped by reason is natural, even while we deny that the structure of the space of reasons can be integrated into the layout of the realm of law”.³⁹⁵ McDowell doesn’t object to the idea of spontaneity being active in experience but only to the sense that there is something “spooky” about its involvement.³⁹⁶ He argues: “We can claim both that the notion of spontaneity functions in a conceptual framework that is alien to the structure of the realm of law, and that it is needed for describing actualizations of natural powers as such”.³⁹⁷ But, he continues:

This is not to lapse into a rampant platonism. In rampant platonism, the structure of the space of reasons, the structure in which we place things when we find meaning in them, is simply extra-natural. Our capacity to resonate to that structure has to be mysterious; it is as if we had a foothold

³⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 88-9.

³⁹⁶ Cf., for example, *ibid.*, p. 95 and p. 176.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

outside the animal kingdom, in a splendidly non-human realm of ideality.

But thanks to our notion of second nature, there is no whiff of that here. ...

Meaning is not a mysterious gift from outside nature.³⁹⁸

McDowell is quite correct. Assuming the cogency of his arguments he will have succeeded in altering the idea of what is natural to include a place for the acquisition and employment of *sui generis* conceptual capacities by the understanding. Now while it is certainly true that Aristotle conceived of the acquisition and employment of practical wisdom as natural, he was also aware of the role that active “form-like” potentialities, or ultimates, must play in that acquisition and employment. But McDowell makes no reference to this fact in relying on practical wisdom to provide content to his notion of second nature. Let us then examine Aristotle’s notion of practical wisdom in more detail to see what impact this potential oversight might have on McDowell’s suggestions for the reconciliation of reason and nature.

4. McDowell’s reliance on Aristotle’s notion of practical wisdom as a model for the understanding is basically sound. In book 2 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle, for example, suggests that, “the virtues are implanted in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature: we are by nature equipped with the ability to receive them, and habit brings this ability to completion and fulfillment”.³⁹⁹ This way of putting the matter makes the emergence of practical wisdom appear almost mundane. But, as we will see below, a closer examination of what Aristotle says about the acquisition of the characteristic of practical wisdom reveals a reliance

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

³⁹⁹ *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, M. Ostwald, trans., New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1962, 1103a24, p. 33. In book 6 we discover that “practical wisdom is an excellence or virtue”... 1140b24.

on the kind of augmented platonism to which he refers in *DeAnima*.⁴⁰⁰ The notion of a second nature that McDowell derives from the Aristotelian context is, as McDowell acknowledges, part of a theory of understanding with transcendental implications of a platonic nature.⁴⁰¹ But McDowell's extrapolation of the notion of a second nature from the Aristotelian context makes no reference to Aristotle's own transcendentalism.⁴⁰² This, of course, does not render McDowell's reliance on the concept of a second nature somehow illegitimate. But his main target in introducing the notion of a "relaxed platonism made possible by a naturalism of second nature" is to exorcise, in Wittgenstenian fashion, the "sense of spookiness" which attaches itself to the idea that the emergence of a meaningful world demands the governance of a *sui generis* space of concepts. If the acquisition of practical wisdom requires a transcendental framework of some kind it may lack the mundane nature that McDowell requires to exorcise the offending sense of "spookiness". What is primarily at issue, therefore, is whether Aristotle's account of the acquisition of practical wisdom requires the augmentation of a form of Platonism that is "unnatural" in a sense with which McDowell would have to take issue.

The first thing to observe with respect to Aristotle's theory of practical wisdom is that he does not identify it with, or use it as a model for, understanding. As we observed in chapter 1 Aristotle already has a conception of understanding (*synesis*) that he distinguishes from "practical wisdom".⁴⁰³ Although Aristotle

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. this text chapter 3, n. 179.

⁴⁰¹ Cf. McDowell, p. 83.

⁴⁰² McDowell suggests that the view he is attributing to Aristotle is not a form of "rampant platonism" (p. 83). It is, however, unclear whether McDowell would consider Aristotle's position on the forms in *DeAnima* under the general category of "rampant platonism".

⁴⁰³ Ostwald, 1143a7, p. 164.

says little about the understanding he does suggest that the understanding only passes judgment - “for *good* understanding means that the judgment is right”.⁴⁰⁴ This suggests that “understanding” is a notion that Aristotle restricts to active thought. But the application of this active understanding cannot, it seems, work in isolation from some form of insight. Aristotle, as we noted, acknowledges two forms of insight: intelligence (*nous*) and good sense (*gnomé*). He suggests: “At a given stage in life a person acquires intelligence and good sense: the implication is that <human> nature is the cause.”⁴⁰⁵ Hence, if the judgment is to be correct understanding must cooperate with intelligence and/or good sense.

Now, in chapter 1 we also observed that *phronésis*, *gnomé*, and *synesis* are generally found together in persons of *arété* - persons of virtue, or excellence of character.⁴⁰⁶ As Aristotle suggests, “a man cannot have practical wisdom unless he is good”.⁴⁰⁷ But virtue comes in two forms: natural virtue and “virtue in the full sense”. Natural virtue is, it seems, a necessary but not sufficient condition for the acquisition of practical wisdom.⁴⁰⁸ And virtue in the full sense cannot be attained without practical wisdom.⁴⁰⁹ The transition from natural to full virtue is made possible by the emergence of intelligence (*nous*) and good sense (*gnomé*). But they are not in themselves sufficient to the task. Intelligence cannot bloom into practical wisdom, full virtue cannot be reached, and our eyes cannot be opened, as McDowell suggests, to the relevant tract of the space of reasons, in absence of experience with particulars. Experience with particulars is the missing piece that

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 1143a15, p. 164.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 1143b10, pp. 166-7.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 1143a25, p. 164.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 1144a36, p. 170.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 1144a30, p. 170.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 1144b17, p. 171.

is necessary for intelligence to acquire the characteristic of practical wisdom and so for full virtue to be reached.⁴¹⁰

The intelligence that is provided by nature must, it seems, be subject to maturational forces and habituation - both of which require experience with particulars. It is, however, entirely unclear how such experience is able to work with intelligence to bring about the acquisition of the characteristic of practical wisdom. Like intelligence, practical wisdom is part of the mind that thinks, i.e., the intellect.⁴¹¹ But as we argued in our third chapter the active intellect cannot get what it has not already got.⁴¹² If we are only able to have experiences by employing some member(s) of a set of constitutive concepts then the resulting experience will reflect the conceptual space which was constitutively responsible for that experience and so also, therefore, any concepts abstracted from that experience. At best, therefore, such mental activity will develop our appreciation of the “detailed layout” of that conceptual space through “reflective scrutiny”.⁴¹³ As McDowell observes: “In Aristotle’s conception, the thought that the demands of ethics ... bear on us, is just irreducibly itself. It is something that comes into view only within the kind of thinking that conceives practical situations in terms of such demands.”⁴¹⁴ Hence, it would seem that for any experience to *be* it must be constituted through a tract of the space of concepts to which intelligence, in

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 1143b4, p. 166.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 1140b25, p. 154.

⁴¹² “Abstracting images from outward things” is not sufficient to render them intelligible unless the operation is itself powered by “ultimate forms/Forms,” which, in some way, must already exist within the abstracting process. The movement in which and through which things are rendered intelligible is, it seems, constituted by intelligibility itself.

⁴¹³ McDowell, p. 82.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., p. 83.

some sense, already has access. And this is just to say that intelligence must always already be complete.

This line of thought reveals the utility, if not the necessity, of postulating some kind of *a priori* unified structure of awareness to govern experience. McDowell argues that for an experience to involve normativity, i.e., to be an experience, it must be powered by concepts that are linked in a space of *sui generis* rational relations that possess a requisite independence from a subject's conceptual capacities. One way of providing the necessary independence would be to suggest that any particular is an instantiation of some aspect of a governing "rational space". This space need not exist, in any sense of the word, but it must be "real" such that experience can be said to always, in some way, conform to it.

In *DeAnima* Aristotle suggests that "the forms" exist potentially in the part of the mind that thinks, i.e., the intellect. The accompanying model of the operation of the intellect has it that when a particular is encountered the appropriate "form-like potentialities" are activated in a movement through which the particular in question is enabled to *be*.⁴¹⁵ An experience, therefore, becomes an experience by means of the employment of "form-like potentialities" to which intelligence has access.⁴¹⁶ Hence, as Aristotle writes: "Intelligence is, therefore, both starting and end; for demonstrations start with ultimate terms and have ultimate facts as their objects".⁴¹⁷ On this account any particular is an "ultimate

⁴¹⁵ For a detailed account of this matter, which in a general way supports these contentions, cf. T.K. Johansen, *Aristotle on the sense-organs*, Cambridge University Press, 1998. In particular cf. chapter 6, section 4 entitled "The sense-object as active potentiality" and section 5, "The sense-object as an irrational potentiality" (pp. 263-271).

⁴¹⁶ Aristotle suggests that, "it is intelligence that apprehends fundamental principles." [1141a-8] Or elsewhere: It is "the intelligence [which] grasps the limiting terms and definitions that cannot be attained by reasoning,..." [1142a25].

⁴¹⁷ Ostwald, 1143b10, p. 167.

particular fact” from which a “universal” may be grasped.⁴¹⁸ Hence, for Aristotle, “that” through which a particular *becomes* and *is* must, in some way, always already be accessible. Experience with particulars, therefore, cannot “develop” intelligence in any straightforward manner because it cannot “add” anything to it.⁴¹⁹ The particular, as something intelligible, can only be an opportunity for intelligence to reveal some aspect of its nature to the subject.⁴²⁰ If all goes well, intelligence acquires the characteristic of practical wisdom by means of successive “insights” feeding back into the source of production so as to form a habit of mind, i.e., the habit deliberating well.⁴²¹ In this task initiation into a tradition and rational reflection both have critical roles to play. But they cannot, it would seem, without the constitutive role of some kind of a *sui generis* rational space, account for the appearance of anything, let alone the “acquisition” of practical wisdom.

Returning now to McDowell’s picture of the acquisition of a second nature we can observe that his characterization is largely in keeping with facts that we have just outlined. He, for example, writes that, augmented with an appropriate place for rational reflection:

⁴¹⁸ NE 1143a25-143b5.

⁴¹⁹ Note also that if an *a priori* potentiality permitted the possibility of modification its status as an absolute permanent would be compromised as would its ability to constitute experience in a legislative fashion in accordance with “laws”.

⁴²⁰ Aristotle writes: “Hence one must have perception of particular facts, and this perception is intelligence.” [1143b5] Note also: This line of thought helps explain the attractiveness of theories in which the things of the world lie buried like seeds, e.g., Plato’s to his theory of recollection (*anamnesis*).

⁴²¹ Of course, not all insights are correct. The appearance of some particular needn’t lead to the acquisition of practical wisdom - a kind of correctness. As Aristotle observes that “the same causes and the same means that produce any excellence or virtue can also destroy it, ... It is by playing the harp that men become both good and bad harpists, and correspondingly with builders and all other craftsmen: a man who builds well will be a good builder, one who builds badly will be a bad one. ...” [1103b7-13] Hence: “In a word, characteristics develop from corresponding activities. ... Hence it is no small matter whether one habit or another is inculcated in us from early childhood; on the contrary, it makes a considerable difference, or rather, all the difference.” [1103b23]

Aristotle's picture can be put like this. The ethical is a domain of rational requirements, which are there in any case, whether or not we are responsive to them. We are alerted to these demands by acquiring appropriate conceptual capacities. When a decent upbringing initiates us into the relevant way of thinking, our eyes are opened to the very existence of this tract of the space of reasons. Thereafter our appreciation of its detailed layout is indefinitely subject to refinement, in reflective scrutiny of our ethical thinking. We can so much as understand, let alone seek to justify, the thought that reason makes these demands only at a standpoint from which the demands of this kind seem to be in view.⁴²²

But McDowell doesn't examine in detail the role of experience with particulars in the acquisition of those "conceptual capacities" which are responsible for bringing the relevant demands into view. In particular he fails to take account of the fact that those experiences which are necessary for the "acquisition" of any previously inaccessible tract of the space of concepts must themselves be powered by concepts that form a part of that same inaccessible tract and which, consequently, cannot, prior to their employment, be under the command of the experiencer. This fact renders "practical wisdom" more of an "emergence" than an "acquisition" and it makes the "enchanted" part of Aristotle's theory a necessary component of his account of the emergence of the "natural" part. Applied to McDowell's theoretical framework this line of thought reveals that the emergence of any previously inaccessible tract of the space of reasons must be arrived at by means of a kind of insight. To the extent, therefore, that McDowell relies on practical

⁴²² McDowell, p. 82.

wisdom as a model for how the understanding functions he appears committed to the simple idea that, given the right opportunities, tracts of spontaneity at large “emerge”. And this, of course, is just to leave the whole matter unexplained and somewhat “spooky”.

5. The position which McDowell is putting forward is an attempt to “reconcile reason and nature” through naturalizing a central insight of Kantian philosophy.⁴²³ McDowell finds Kant’s existing theory of the understanding unsatisfactory because of its inclusion of Kant’s particular “transcendental framework”. He suggests that Kant’s division of experience into concepts and intuitions as descriptive of *how* the world actually appears leads Kant ultimately to a view in which the “real” world is always beyond our reach. Of the resulting transcendental philosophy, McDowell suggests: “The frame spoils the insight, because the radical mind-independence of the supersensible comes to seem exemplary of what any genuine mind-independence would be, and then when Kant purports to attribute mind-independence to the ordinary empirical world, as it figures in his thinking, that looks merely disingenuous.”⁴²⁴ The distorting effect

⁴²³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 85.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 96. Cf. also where McDowell writes: “We are asked to suppose that the fundamental structure of the empirical world is somehow a product of subjectivity, in interaction with supersensible reality, which, as soon as it is in the picture, strikes us as the seat of true objectivity.” (p. 42) And again: “The empirical world’s claim to independence comes to seem fraudulent by comparison. I think that it has to be admitted that the effect of the transcendental framework is to make Kant’s philosophy idealistic in the sense I have been considering. This is quite the contrary to Kant’s intentions, but in spite of his staunch denials, the effect of his philosophy is to slight the independence of the reality to which our senses give us access. What is responsible for this is ... the fact that he recognizes a reality outside the sphere of the conceptual.” (p. 44)

McDowell’s basic criticism of Kant’s transcendental philosophy, as it is presented in the first *Critique* seems sound. Kant, for instance, writes: “I call *transcendental* all cognition that deals not so much with objects as rather with our way of cognizing objects in general insofar as that way of cognizing is to be possible a priori”. A *system* of such concepts would be called *transcendental philosophy*.” {A12/B25, p. 64; Cf. also “Transcendental philosophy is the system of all principles of pure reason” (A13/B27 p. 66)} But Kant, it seems, has made a fundamental error in attempting to *do* transcendental philosophy so defined. He suggests, for example, that: “The foremost goal in dividing such a science is this: no concepts whatever containing anything

of the transcendental framework can be safely bypassed, McDowell argues, if his central insight concerning the relationship between concepts and intuitions is augmented with “a pregnant notion of a second nature”.⁴²⁵ Generalizing the acquisition of a second nature to account for the functioning of the understanding renders the acquisition of any set of conceptual capacities a “natural occurrence”.

Now, we already have provided some reason to doubt the comprehensiveness, if not the plausibility, of this last statement. This should make us suspicious of the justifiability of separating Kant’s central insights from his transcendental framework. In relying on the notion of a “second nature” McDowell is suggesting that the understanding does not function through the interaction of a subject with a realm of radically independent universals, or of *pure concepts with noumena*. Instead he argues that, through initiation into a tradition, or wider reality, previously inaccessible *sui generis* concepts are made available for application in both activity and passivity. More than this, he implies, we need not know. He writes: “If we restrict ourselves to the standpoint of experience itself, what we find in Kant is precisely the picture I have been

empirical must enter into this science; or, differently put, the goal is that the a priori cognition in it be completely pure.” (A14/B28 p. 66) Unfortunately, all thought necessarily employs *intuitions* together with *concepts*, and this means that all *intuition*, for a human understanding, is empirical. Hence, since concepts arise from thought through the understanding, any concept that can be thought cannot, it seems, be a pure *a priori* concept of the understanding. Kant writes: “Whatever in an appearance corresponds to sensation I call its *matter*; but whatever in an appearance brings about the fact that the manifold of the appearance can be ordered in certain relations I call the *form* of appearance. Now, that in which alone sensations can be ordered and put into a certain form cannot itself be sensation again. Therefore, although the matter of all appearance is given to us only a posteriori, the form of all appearance must altogether lie ready for the sensations a priori in the mind; and hence that *form* must be capable of being examined apart from all sensation.” (A20/B34, p. 72) The argument is straightforwardly of the *non sequitur* variety. The form of all appearance may indeed, in some sense, lie ready but there is nothing here from which to justify the conclusion that the form of appearance can be examined - particularly if all examination involves thought. Hence, it would seem that the faculty of reason cannot function entirely independently of sensibility.

⁴²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 97-9.

recommending: a picture in which reality is not located outside the boundary that encloses the conceptual sphere.”⁴²⁶

When it comes to matters concerning the structure within which meaning comes into view McDowell, for the most part, argues for a Wittgenstenian quietism as the most appropriate stance to take. He suggests that we have no need for a constructive philosophy either of the naturalistic or transcendental variety to account for how spontaneity functions in the world.⁴²⁷ He writes: “The naturalism of second nature that I have been describing is precisely a shape for our thinking that would leave the last dualism not seeming to call for constructive philosophy.”⁴²⁸ Meaning is an implicit characteristic of human life that occurs because we are the kind of beings that “by nature” acquire *sui generis* conceptual capacities. “Spontaneity” is both completely ungraspable and yet “it is needed for describing actualizations of natural powers as such”.⁴²⁹ McDowell implies that to say more than this is simply to find ourselves running again in unproductive philosophical grooves. To a large extent our own investigations here have supported such a conclusion.

But there is at least one bit of constructive philosophy that McDowell cannot avoid. By augmenting Kant’s insights with a notion of a second nature and claiming that meaning is a natural characteristic of human life McDowell has in effect argued that some kind of substantial subject interacts with spontaneity.⁴³⁰ By restricting his philosophy to the standpoint of experience he opens a gap between “spontaneity” and the “subjective take” which must then be bridged in a

⁴²⁶ Ibid., p. 41.

⁴²⁷ Cf., for example, pp. 94-6.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., pp. 94-5.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., p. 88.

⁴³⁰ Cf. Ibid., p. 109.

way that will make their necessary interaction appear “natural”. As he writes: “We are looking for a conception of nature that includes a capacity to resonate to the structure of the space of reasons”.⁴³¹ Now, as we have seen, any “resonance” requires the participation of two entities of similar structure. Hence, to render plausible the idea that a substantial continuant interacts with spontaneity McDowell must address the issue of the structure of the participants. But, since the Kantian position upon which he relies argues that both spontaneity and the *I think* lie *a priori* of the appearance of any determinate structure, McDowell needs to augment Kant’s original insights to permit an interaction between spontaneity and a substantial continuant.

McDowell begins his attempt to redress Kant’s position with a comment on Strawson’s interpretation of Kant’s Transcendental Deduction.⁴³² McDowell observes:

In the Transcendental Deduction, Kant seems to offer a thesis on these lines: the possibility of understanding experiences, “from within”, as glimpses of objective reality is interdependent with the subject’s being able to ascribe experiences to herself; hence, with the subject’s being self-conscious.⁴³³

McDowell suggests that it would be satisfying if the self in question here were the ordinary self of daily life. But he thinks that it is difficult to make that cohere with what Kant actually says. McDowell continues: “When he introduces the self-consciousness that he argues to be correlative with awareness of objective reality, he writes of the ‘I think’ that must be able [i.e., *capable*] ‘to accompany all my

⁴³¹ Ibid., p. 109.

⁴³² Cf. P. F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, Methuen and Co. Ltd., pp. 72-117.

⁴³³ McDowell, p. 99.

representations’.”⁴³⁴ From this McDowell appears to conclude that the *I think* is that which Kant must maintain arises interdependently with the world. With the problematically formal self-consciousness of the *I think* in mind McDowell then suggests: “The subjective temporal continuity that is a counterpart to experience’s bearing on objective reality shrinks to a mere point of view, not, apparently, a substantial continuant.”⁴³⁵ But Kant neither does nor, it can be argued, need he maintain that a subjective temporal continuity is necessary counterpart to reality.

That the *I think* is not that which Kant holds to arise interdependently with an object can be concluded from passages which immediately follow the infamous quote to which McDowell refers. But before proceeding to those passages we should first observe that Kant writes: “The *I think* must be *capable* of accompanying all my presentations” not that it *does* accompany all my presentations. It is, of course, no accident that Kant emphasizes the word *capable* in this passage. The phrase “must be *capable*” significantly refers to the formally necessary role that the *I think* must play in experience.⁴³⁶ As Strawson suggests:

Unity of self-consciousness to which a series of experiences belong implies, then, the *possibility* of self-ascription of experiences on the part of a subject of those experiences; it implies the *possibility* of consciousness, on the part of the subject, of the numerical identity of that to which those different experiences are by him ascribed.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99, brackets mine. The passage to which he refers us at this point begins §16 of the Deduction of Pure Concepts of Understanding. It reads: “The *I think* must be *capable* of accompanying all my presentations.” (B131, Pluhar, p. 177)

⁴³⁵ McDowell, p. 98.

⁴³⁶ Cf. also B277, Pluhar, p. 291.

⁴³⁷ Strawson, p. 98.

The possibility of “experiences” entails the possibility of this unity because the possibility of a unity of consciousness provides for the distinction between how things are and how things seem to be. In other words, Strawson observes that the possibility of things “seeming” one way and “being” another implies the notion of an active self-consciousness to discriminate between these options. Hence, the original synthetic unity of apperception simultaneously gives birth to the possibility of both objective and subjective experiences.⁴³⁸

It is quite correct, of course, to assume that this possibility of a unity is not a substantial continuant and that no “determinate intuition” corresponds to it. But, as Strawson also observes: “It is not essential for Kant to maintain that his provisions are *sufficient* to explain the actual occurrence of self-ascription of experiences. It is enough if they are *necessary* to its possibility.”⁴³⁹ One cannot explain the existence and experience of self-ascribing substantial continuants without first establishing the possibility of “experience”. Only once the possibility of experience has been established can we discuss the details and appearance of a world relative to some determinate and temporally continuing point of view. Hence, when Kant, a little further on in B132, attempts to add some clarity to the notion of *I think*, he writes:

Or, again, I call it *original apperception*; for it is the self-consciousness which, because it produces the presentation *I think* that must be capable of accompanying all other presentations[,] and [because it] is one and the same in all consciousness, cannot be accompanied by any further presentation.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 102.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. B132, Pluhar, 1996, p. 177.

What Kant is suggesting is that the *I think* is the formal condition of the possibility of any experience whatsoever, the *power* of the understanding,⁴⁴¹ and the *vehicle* through which the understanding is able to function.⁴⁴² Hence, it is that which renders possible that *empirical* apperception which may more properly be deemed the correlate of all other presentations. But, in itself, it is the correlate of nothing, i.e., “it cannot be accompanied by any further presentation”. Hence, although it may in some sense, be a “counterpart to experience’s bearing on objective reality” because it is required to make this “bearing” possible, it is not that which arises interdependently with an object. It neither can be the correlate of the objective world, nor can it be absent from that correlate. Hence, the *I think* is an inherently problematic and ungraspable notion, which although formal, cannot be merely formal.⁴⁴³

This investigation of the Kantian *I think* aside we can now examine McDowell’s characterization of that substantial consciousness which he holds to be correlative of the objective world. McDowell first suggests that attempting to determine a substantial continuant within the flow of consciousness one is bound to arrive at either the Cartesian or the Kantian position. But, he continues, the conclusion that a substantial *I think* necessarily implies a Cartesian ego results

⁴⁴¹ Cf. B 134, *ibid.*, p. 178.

⁴⁴² Cf. also *ibid.*, B399, p. 382, and B406, p. 424.

⁴⁴³ Cf. for example, *ibid.*, B429, p. 439. Why can not the *I think* be merely formal? For one thing, if the original unity of apperception were merely formal its activity(ies) would be rule-like and so would require interpretation. Strawson details this fact in the following manner: “The objection we have been considering turned, in its original form, on the point that the ascription of states to a *subject* required the subject itself to be an intuitable object for which there existed empirically applicable criteria of identity. The requirement that underlies the objectivity-condition, however, is not exactly that experience should be ascribable to such a subject, but that it should have a certain character of self-reflexiveness which is expressed by Kant in terms of the notion of self-consciousness. The expression is not altogether happy because we are immediately led by it to think in terms of *personal* self-consciousness and hence in terms of the full conditions for ordinary empirical self-ascription of experiences. But what is intended is something less than this, which yet really does constitute the essential core of personal self-consciousness.” (p. 107) For more on the significance of “reflexivity” to self-consciousness see the final section of chapter 6.

from the assumption that when we theorize about a persisting self we must “confine ourselves within the flow of ‘consciousness’”.⁴⁴⁴ But this assumption is deeply suspect. Discarding it makes room for a variety of “substantial persistence” which does not imply a Cartesian ego. He writes:

We can say that the continuity of “consciousness” is intelligible only as a subjective take on something that has more to it than “consciousness” itself contains: on the career of an objective continuant, with which the subject of the continuous “consciousness” can identify itself.⁴⁴⁵

The wider reality, it seems, is able to provide intelligibility to the idea of a “substantial persisting consciousness” by permitting the formation of a “subjective take” which is situated within that wider reality so that it “has more to it than ‘consciousness itself’ contains”. In this way the wider reality provides the content for “the career of the objective continuant” with which the subject of the continuous consciousness identifies itself.

The picture seems informative until we recall that the wider reality is only able to permit the appearance of any reality at all, which would then include the appearance of an “objective continuant”, by virtue of the integration of its constitutive concepts into “spontaneity at large”. McDowell suggests that the continuity of consciousness is made intelligible through “the subject of the continuous consciousness” identifying itself with the “objective continuant”, or “subjective take”, that has more to it than consciousness itself contains. But, since McDowell has argued that anything which comes into view gains its sense of being a real thing by virtue of its determining concepts being integrated into

⁴⁴⁴ McDowell, p. 101.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 101.

spontaneity at large, we can conclude that the appearance of any “real” thing requires the application of *sui generis* concepts within the stream of consciousness. Without such an application of concepts within the stream of consciousness the “subject of the continuous consciousness” would have nothing with which to identify itself. From this we can conclude that any “objective continuant” is itself made possible by the application of tracts of spontaneity at large in receptivity. McDowell does not deny this fact but, once again, argues for a Wittgenstenian quietism as an appropriate stance to take concerning such matters. But as appropriate as this stance may be, consistency demands that we acknowledge that anything with which the subject of the continuous consciousness can identify itself will require the immanent application of spontaneity to render it intelligible.⁴⁴⁶ Kant’s insight concerning the role of spontaneity in experience cannot, it seems, so easily be plucked from the Kantian frame and mated to a naturalized Platonism.⁴⁴⁷

For Kant, the idea of spontaneity is the idea of the understanding considered in its application to the manifold of sensibility.⁴⁴⁸ The idea of this active power considered as a unity, *a priori* to said application, is the idea of the *I think*.⁴⁴⁹ The idea of spontaneity, therefore, is the idea of the *I think* in application.

⁴⁴⁶ In Friedman’s commentary on *Mind and World* he writes: “In light of the historical-philosophical tangles produced by McDowell’s attempt to bring Wittgensteinian “quietism” into some kind of explicit relation with the philosophical tradition nonetheless, one can only conclude, in the end, that Wittgensteinian quietism may itself make sense only in the context of Wittgensteinian philosophical method.” (Friedman, p. 467) Note also that the use of the term “intelligible” here obviously has no relation to the Kantian use of the term below but rather indicates a meaning closer to “content” or “existent”.

⁴⁴⁷ McDowell acknowledges in Lecture II that excising Kant’s transcendental framework is not likely to be a straightforward matter (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 43-4).

⁴⁴⁸ B130, Pluhar, 1996, p. 176.

⁴⁴⁹ Kant writes: “We readily become aware that this act of synthesis must originally be a single act and must hold equally for all combination; and that resolution or *analysis*, which seems to be its opposite, yet always presupposes it.” (B130, *ibid.*, p. 176) Cf., also B153.

And now McDowell's attempt to separate the two notions and maintain the "purity" of spontaneity while spatio-temporalizing the *I think* so that its "continuity... involves a substantial persistence"⁴⁵⁰ looks inherently problematic at best. To the extent that the subject is conceived as a substantial continuant it cannot be a participant in spontaneity because spontaneity, considered as a unity, can admit of no predicates. Nevertheless, McDowell suggests that something along the lines of argument that he is advancing "is the right frame for the Kantian thought that self-awareness and awareness of the world are interdependent".⁴⁵¹

Of course it is perfectly legitimate to provide content to the idea of a substantial persistence outside of the stream of consciousness. In fact, on the line of argument that has been advanced throughout this work, that is perhaps the only way to provide content to a substantial persistence. But it seems that the desire to have this substantial persistence *interact with* spontaneity is misguided from the first. On Kant's account spontaneity is that which makes possible the interdependence of subject and world.⁴⁵² The necessity of its role in the appearance of the actual subject and world, of course, demands that it be accorded some kind of "reality", but it can be no "experienceable" reality. And now if we come to acknowledge that this "non-entity" is the essence of our understanding we seem to become deeply mysterious beings, even to ourselves, and that feeling flies in the face of our everyday experience of ourselves as substantial presences in the world. As McDowell, observes: "If something starts out conceiving itself as a merely formal referent for 'I' (which is already a peculiar notion), how could it

⁴⁵⁰ McDowell, p. 101.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁴⁵² In Kant's "Refutation of Idealism" he presents us with a much clearer picture of how he views the interdependence of subject and world (Cf. B275-6, Pluhar, 1996, pp. 289-90).

come to appropriate body, so that it might identify itself with a particular living thing?”⁴⁵³

McDowell’s answer to this problem is to argue that we should begin our philosophizing with a notion of an “I” which already contains something of the idea of a substantial continuant.⁴⁵⁴ The picture at which McDowell is aiming has it that a physical person, suitably initiated into a tradition, is a vehicle in which and through which “meaning” functions. But how “meaning” functions in this capacity is a mystery that he ultimately does little to clear up. McDowell’s attempts to account for experience through arguing that the interaction of this substantial “I” with spontaneity is *second nature* are intended to alleviate both the spookiness involved in the notion that spontaneity is constitutively involved in experience and, ultimately, the desire for an extra-conceptual given. Unfortunately, although much of his account seems intuitively correct, it is not clear that his arguments are successful in their aims.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., p. 103.

⁴⁵⁴ Cf., *ibid.*, pp. 101-2. In attempting to augment Kant’s account of spontaneity with a notion of a second nature he is, once again, suggesting that the *I think* that can accompany all my (re)presentations, is also a substantial continuant in the world and is rightly conceived as such.

Chapter 6

A Dynamic Response

1. In her recent book *Consciousness in Action* Susan Hurley sets out to challenge a general conceptual framework, which she suggests has received little direct attention in philosophy of mind.⁴⁵⁵ She refers to it as the Input-Output Picture of perception and action. Theories of mind that employ the Input-Output Picture tend to think of the mind as something which stands apart from the world and intervenes in cognitive functioning to make perception and action possible.⁴⁵⁶ What we find in such theories, she argues, is that: "The subject is the last stop on the input side of the person; the world impinges on the subject. The agent is the first stop on the output side; the agent impinges on the world."⁴⁵⁷ Hurley acknowledges that under some circumstances the Input-Output Picture provides an appropriate framework for thinking about cognitive functioning. But as a general framework for theorizing about perception and action she suggests that it is often inadequate and a source of confusion. With the aid of thought experiments and examples from the empirical sciences Hurley demonstrates that whether the Input-Output Picture ought to be applied to a given set of circumstances is an

⁴⁵⁵ S. Hurley, *Consciousness in Action*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998, pp. 249-50.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

empirical question.⁴⁵⁸ In so doing she challenges the Input-Output Picture's status as a generally applicable framework.

At same time Hurley outlines an alternative framework for thinking about perception and action. At its heart is the hypothesis that complex dynamic systems are central to cognitive performance. Hurley's work is part of a renewed interest among philosophers and cognitive scientists in the use of dynamics as a framework for thinking about cognitive functioning.⁴⁵⁹ This renewed interest has resulted in a variety of criticisms of classical approaches to accounting for cognitive performance as well as some programmatic sketches for alternative approaches. While these alternatives all provide a place for dynamics they often differ as to the exact role they assign to it.⁴⁶⁰ Central to Hurley's approach is the hypothesis that a constitutive interdependence of perception and action emerges from a dynamic feedback system of natural causal relations.⁴⁶¹ This interdependence, she suggests, "has consequences for philosophical issues: about the unity of consciousness, relations between mind and world, self-consciousness,

⁴⁵⁸ Hurley writes: "Notice that challenging the Input-Output Picture doesn't require that the picture never apply. Indeed, it is about right for many cases. What needs to be challenged is the status of the picture as a general conceptual framework. To do this, we only need to show that whether it applies in particular cases is an empirical question, not that it never applies." (p. 289)

⁴⁵⁹ With respect to this renewed interest van Gelder observes: "Dynamics forms the general framework for growing amounts of work in psychophysics, perception, motor control, developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, situated robotics and autonomous agents research, artificial intelligence, and social psychology". (Tim van Gelder, "The Dynamical Hypothesis in Cognitive Science," *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, in press, p. 2).

⁴⁶⁰ For a brief introduction to some of the central issues cf. A. Clark and J. Toribio, "Doing Without Representing?," *Synthese*, 101: 401-431, 1994.

⁴⁶¹ Cf., for example, p. 214 n. 21, pp. 403-4, and p. 429 where in clarifying the notion of constitutive interdependence with which she is concerned Hurley writes: "The constitutive interdependence of genotype and phenotype is not merely compatible with but emerges from dynamic systems of natural causal relations among environments, organisms, and genetic material. So in principle there need be nothing mystical about constitutive interdependence. It holds between perception and action because the contents of perceptions and of intentions depend on relations between input and output within a complex dynamic feedback system,...."(Hurley, p. 429)

cognition, ... and so on.”⁴⁶² In previous chapters we have discussed the idea of an emergent constitutive interdependence of perception and intention in a variety of guises and against the background of some of these same philosophical issues. In this chapter we will first examine the particular dynamics-based approach that Hurley advocates to see how it may be able to contribute to our concerns.⁴⁶³

Second, we will consider some of the problems it would face if applied to the philosophical issues with which Hurley is concerned. Finally, we will explore the possibility that a satisfactory treatment of those issues will require a notion of self-consciousness to which dynamical tools may not be appropriately applied but which does not correspond to that notion of “mind” which Hurley criticizes.⁴⁶⁴

2. Our point of departure for this exploration will be Hurley’s critique of the Input-Output Picture as a general framework for thinking about perception and action. Hurley’s critique, as we mentioned, rests, in large part, on empirical cases and thought experiments. In order to understand the significance of these items to her critique of the Input-Output Picture, and to supporting her alternative view,

⁴⁶² Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁶³ Hurley outlines her main plot in a nutshell as follows: “It will be argued that the unity of consciousness has both normative, personal-level, and subpersonal aspects. The relations between these levels can be approached via the closely related but more general idea of a perspective: the interdependence of perception and action that perspective involves can be explained in terms of their codependence on a subpersonal dynamic singularity. This subpersonal aspect of unity does not support sharp causal boundaries either between mind and world or between perception and action.” (p. 3) Whether our concerns form part of the main plot or one of the subplots is rendered problematic by the fact that Hurley seems to use the phrase “the unity of consciousness” to refer both to the problem of “co-consciousness”, or the problem of the togetherness of contents at a time (cf., for example, p. 39, and p. 117) and to the problem of the possibility of content. That these problems are not identical is evident from the way in which the problem of co-consciousness (i.e., of the togetherness of contents) must presuppose the possibility of contents *simpliciter*. In other words, if a “content” is a particular determinate this would, in itself, seem to presuppose its unification, or “combination”. The idea of “separate” contents is, on this line of thought, in fact, unintelligible (cf. p. 102) This is not to suggest that the idea of co-consciousness is not coherent nor is it to suggest that investigating it does not shed light on the problem of content. But it is to suggest that it is not the same problem. The “unity of consciousness” is not necessarily a conjoined or agglomerative unity (cf. pp. 117-118). Hence, providing an adequate response to the problem of co-consciousness does not in itself constitute an adequate response to the problem of content.

⁴⁶⁴ Cf. n. 271 above.

we must first understand a distinction that she makes between instrumental and noninstrumental dependence. This distinction attempts “roughly, to capture the difference between action having an effect on a separate perceptual system and its sharing the constitution of that system”.⁴⁶⁵ In cases of instrumental dependence, Hurley argues, a mediating “system”, or “self”, serves to initiate action, input varies as a result of this initiated action and, in turn, has an effect on the mediating “system”. Examples of the instrumental dependence of perceptual input on output include walking to a better vantage point, or turning one’s head.⁴⁶⁶ In such instances, she suggests, “the influence of output on perceptual experience operates via input, so that motor output is a means to a change in sensory input”.⁴⁶⁷ Hence instrumental dependence is both intuitively accessible and compatible with the Input-Output Picture. But the experimental cases and thought experiments to which Hurley draws our attention are not. They point to a kind of dependence in which no mediating “system” is implicated. In which, for example, perceptual content depends *directly*, or *noninstrumentally*, on changes in motor output even though sensory input remains constant.⁴⁶⁸ But what is meant by the notion of “direct”, or “noninstrumental”, dependence? And how do such notions contribute to an account of an emergent constitutive interdependence of perception and intention?

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 363.

⁴⁶⁶ “Instrumental dependence”, Hurley observes, “is not controversial and is not in dispute. It is obviously true that the contents of perceptual experience can be affected by, for example, walking to a better vantage point.” (Ibid., p. 248)

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 248. Cf. also Hurley writes: “Movement can alter sensory inputs and so result in different perceptions. ... This kind of instrumental interdependence is not at all surprising, and is compatible with the Input-Output Picture.” (pp. 341-2)

⁴⁶⁸ Cf., for example, *ibid.*, p. 177. Cf. also Hurley writes: “By contrast, when perceptual content depends *noninstrumentally* on output, it does not do so via input, but directly. ... If perceptual content depends *noninstrumentally* on output, then it is not a function of input.” (p. 342)

Perhaps the best way to understand the meaning of these terms is to briefly review a few of the cases to which she refers as examples of noninstrumental dependence. These cases fall into four categories. First, those that attempt to show how perceptual distinctions might depend noninstrumentally on output. Second, those that attempt to show how perceptual invariants might depend noninstrumentally on output. Third, those that attempt to show how distinctions in the contents of basic intentions might depend noninstrumentally on inputs. Fourth, those that attempt to show how invariants in the contents of basic intentions might depend noninstrumentally on inputs.⁴⁶⁹ In order to elucidate the meaning of noninstrumental dependence and its implications for the Input-Output Picture it is not necessary to review cases from all of these categories. Since examples from the last category turn out to involve a rather high degree of artifice we will restrict ourselves to a brief examination of one example from each of the first three categories. This should be sufficient to clarify the notion of noninstrumental dependence, to see how it challenges the Input-Output Picture, and to provide a conceptual basis from which to explore the implications of Hurley's work for our concerns.

The first case we will examine involves the noninstrumental dependence of perception on motor output. In particular it concerns what happens when an individual with paralyzed eye muscles attempts to glance to the right or left. Hurley begins her examination of this case with the following quote from Galistel's *The Organization of Action*:

⁴⁶⁹ Cf., *ibid.*, p. 369.

When a man with paralyzed eye muscles tries to glance to the right the world appears to jump to the right even though the pattern of light falling on the paralyzed eye has not moved. Uncanceled efference copy [a copy of the neural motor signal that normally moves the eye, which here is not accompanied by the normally corresponding change in neural sensory signal] has created an hallucination of movement, a sensory experience for which there is no sensory basis. The image of the world on the retina does not move, but one "sees" the world move.⁴⁷⁰

In this case input from the world, or afference, is held constant but an aspect of perception varies as a result of a direct dependence on motor signals which occur when the subject attempts, or intends, to move their eyes. Perception then may vary as a result of a noninstrumental dependence between efferent signals and those subpersonal processes which support perception in this case.

The second example we will consider also happens to involve the noninstrumental dependence of perception on motor output but it has additional implications for the noninstrumental dependence of perceptual invariants on motor outputs. In this experiment, which was first described by Ivo Kohler:

Each lens of a pair of goggles is vertically divided. The left side of each lens is tinted blue so that when the wearer looks to the left the world looks rather bluish. The right side of each lens is tinted yellow so that when the wearer looks to the right the world looks rather yellowish. If the goggles are worn for several weeks, vision adapts and the color distortions tend to disappear.

⁴⁷⁰ C. R. Gallistel, *The Organization of Action: A New Synthesis*, Hillsdale, N. J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, p. 175, in *ibid.*, p. 344.

Somehow the visual system learns to introduce the proper correction according to whether the eyes are turned to the left or right.⁴⁷¹

In this case perceptual experience seems to depend on feedback from motor factors, in surprising ways. As Kohler writes:

When the subject eventually removes his two-color goggles after wearing them continuously for 60 days, there is no doubt that his visual world is tinged distinctly yellow when he looks in the direction that his goggles had been blue and blue in the direction that his goggles had been yellow. The movement of the eyes either to right or left seems to act as a signal for the foveal area to switch over in its color response, compensating for a yellow image in one case and a blue image in the other.⁴⁷²

In a subsequent thought experiment Hurley asks us to consider what would result if, seated before a uniform white field, this subject were to look right and left. Presumably the subject would see blue or yellow depending on which way she was looking. From this observation Hurley argues that, for Kohler's subject, which colour is perceived depends directly, or noninstrumentally, on motor output involved in the action of moving the eye either side of a mid-point where the dividing line on the goggles would previously have been encountered. If this is correct then the variance in question would not result from a change in input but rather from a direct dependence of "perceptual contents" on motor output.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., p. 287.

⁴⁷² I. Kohler, "Experiments with Goggles", *Scientific American* 206, 1961, p. 68, in *ibid.*, p. 287. Cf. also p. 65.

⁴⁷³ With respect to this category in general Hurley writes:

"the content, or structure, of perceptual experience *may* vary directly with motor intentions or actions, even when sensory inputs are held constant. Perceptual experience is not a function only of sensory input and 'upstream' processing, and in particular is not independent of motor intentions. Experimental work in various areas suggests that the nature of an intended response

Since discovering whether this is in fact the best explanation for the above phenomenon requires empirical research⁴⁷⁴ the question of whether the Input-Output Picture ought to be applied in this case is an empirical question.

So far we have established another case of the possibility of the noninstrumental dependence of perception on motor output. In order to see how this example supports the possibility of what Hurley refers to as the noninstrumental dependence of perceptual invariants on motor outputs we need first to observe that, assuming motor dependence is the correct explanation, the reason that colour perception is able to come to depend in some way on motor output is that the optic system possess the ability to regain veridicality in the face of the “colour noise” introduced by Kohler’s goggles. After wearing the goggles for some time a perceptual adaptation occurs in which eye movement to the left or the right of some midline covaries with compensatory adjustments which serve to reestablish the colour invariants disturbed by the presence of the goggles.⁴⁷⁵ The colour phenomenon, which results when the goggles are removed, may therefore, with some justification be seen to count as evidence that the relevant perceptual invariants have become noninstrumentally dependent on motor output. At this point Hurley reminds us that it remains an empirical question as to whether this is the best explanation of the resulting covariation. However, this fact is all that is

may alter the experience it is supposedly a response to (Tegner and Levander 1991; Bisiach et al. 1990; and so on; see essay 9 below for further cases and references).” (p. 200)

⁴⁷⁴ Hurley suggests the plausible explanation that efferent feedback from eye movements may be the determining factor in which color is perceived. She writes: “It is an empirical question whether this new ability depends on efferent signals to eye muscles or on afference concerning eye position.” (p. 385)

⁴⁷⁵ Hurley writes: “This artificial sensory-motor correlation transforms but does not eliminate information about true color constancy. Kohler’s experiment suggests that color perception may be able to adapt to ‘find’ the new motor-mediated form of such information, despite the fact that there is presumably no natural or evolutionary basis for this kind of motor-mediation of color information.” (pp. 292-3) Cf. also pp. 385-6.

required to bring into question the status of the Input-Output Picture as a generally applicable framework.

To complement her examples of the noninstrumental dependence of perception on motor output Hurley also considers experimental cases and thought experiments in which intention appears to depend noninstrumentally on sensory inputs.⁴⁷⁶ In such cases basic intentions vary with inputs even though outputs and nonbasic intentions are constant.⁴⁷⁷ In a thought experiment Hurley considers the possibility of acquiring a new basic intention - the intention to raise one's alpha level brain wave activity given sensory biofeedback involving the observation of a line on a screen. Faced with this challenge subjects would initially not know what to do. Having no sensory access to alpha levels human beings, under normal conditions, do not even know how to begin to try to raise their alpha level. Hurley argues, however, that through noninstrumental biofeedback a subject may be guided to develop the requisite ability and they may also come to develop a new basic intention - the intention to raise one's alpha level.⁴⁷⁸ Once the new intention has become established and is available, it may be possible to act on it without sensory feedback. Hurley argues that the establishment of the new basic intention

⁴⁷⁶ Cf., *ibid.*, pp. 389-400.

⁴⁷⁷ Hurley writes: "Basic intentions are where the chain of what you intentionally (do by doing something else) begins" (p. 357). She provides an example in which one turns on a light in order to try to scare off a burglar. In this case she argues that intention of turning on the light is more basic. *Given her definition this conclusion seems odd to me. Faced with a burglar my intentions begin with wanting to scare him off. The intention to turn on the light may never enter my head, so to speak - particularly if I have drilled repeatedly for such an eventuality. Of course, practicing scaring off a burglar may seem unusual, but practicing what to do in case of physical attack is not and the implication is the same. In the case of practiced self-defense one's basic intention is to defend myself. The particular defensive "action(s)" undertaken occur(s) reflexively relative to the attack posture. At the limit this kind of "action" is actionless - a fact that lies at the basis of Buddhist influenced martial arts like judo and aikido. For Hurley's discussion of basic intentions cf. pp. 355-60.*

⁴⁷⁸ The biofeedback in this case is noninstrumental, she argues, because it "does not here provide new information about the effects of something I could already do intentionally" (Cf. *ibid.*, p. 390).

to raise one's alpha level "depends noninstrumentally on closing the sensory feedback loop" between the input from the monitor and efferent output events that occur concurrently with the new intention.⁴⁷⁹ The possibility of acquiring a new basic intention in this fashion illustrates the possibility of the noninstrumental dependence of intentions on input. Instead of input functioning as a means by which an intention is determined complex dynamic input-output relations appear to function noninstrumentally in the emergence of a new intention.⁴⁸⁰

These cases and others that Hurley explores have implications inconsistent with Input-Output Picture's presuppositions and hence allow Hurley to proceed by way of counter-example to challenge the Input-Output Picture's status as a general conceptual framework for thinking about perception and action.⁴⁸¹ The main problem with the Input-Output Picture from Hurley's perspective is, once again, that perception and action operate independently and relative to a mediator, or mediating system of some kind. Hurley's examples challenge this idea by demonstrating ways in which action does not merely have effects on a separate perceptual system, and vice versa. Rather perception and action are both seen to depend noninstrumentally on relations between input and output such that no mediating system is implied. In some of the cases she considers,

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 390.

⁴⁸⁰ Notice that Hurley is concerned not only with an emergent constitutive interdependence but also with a constitutively interdependent emergence (i.e., of content).

⁴⁸¹ In clarifying the nature of the Input-Output Picture Hurley writes: "Our working hypothesis in this essay is that the Input-Output Picture is whatever it is that these cases challenge. The characterization of the Input-Output Picture can then be sharpened by diagnosis of why the cases are similarly surprising. In this way we both spell out the commitments of the Picture and show how it goes wrong. ... actual cases and hypothetical thought experiments demonstrate that *whether* this view holds in particular cases is an empirical question. But since the Input-Output Picture does not present itself as an empirical claim about particular cases, but rather as a general conceptual framework, that is enough to defeat the status it assumes." (p. 340)

the intention to act seems to influence perceptual consciousness, even if the intention to act is itself a function of perceptual information. And the influence of intention on perception seems to be more than merely instrumental, in that it does not operate via changes in sensory inputs. Perception and action seem to emerge from a dynamic flow or circle of causes and effects. This real-life complexity is at odds with the normal Input-Output Picture of perception and action,...⁴⁸²

Hurley's findings, therefore, suggest that the subpersonal causal structures relating perception and action do not conform to Input-Output Picture presuppositions and consequently cannot be accommodated by it.⁴⁸³

The conceptual framework through which Hurley's investigations proceed, we can now observe, takes for granted the division of cognitive functions into personal and sub-personal levels.⁴⁸⁴ Distinctions made at the personal level concern the contents of states properly attributable to subject/agents.⁴⁸⁵ Sub-personal level distinctions concern vehicles of the personal level contents and are considered to possess the potential to be causally explanatory of personal level contents.⁴⁸⁶ But, Hurley warns, although we may ultimately be able to draw

⁴⁸² Ibid., p. 198.

⁴⁸³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 198, and pp. 288-9.

⁴⁸⁴ She suggests that, "once we bring the Input-Output Picture into doubt, we should distinguish the issue of causal relations between input and output, at the subpersonal level, from issues about the relations between perceptual consciousness and intentional action, at the personal level. We should not simply assume that these two sets of relations are isomorphic, and therefore cast intentional actions exclusively in the role of effects of conscious experience." (p. 212)

⁴⁸⁵ Examples of such contents include: perception, intention, belief, desire, etc.. Note also that Hurley suggests that such contents "need not be conscious contents but they are subject to normative constraints." (p. 28)

⁴⁸⁶ Notice that the idea of "vehicles" of consciousness is itself sustained by the division of levels. Certainly at the subpersonal level there are no "vehicles", there are just patterns of activity and inactivity across neuronal space, and neither are there "vehicles" at the personal level. It is, therefore, the attempt to connect the two levels which gives birth to talk of "vehicles" of content. (cf. p. 30; p. 332)

substantive conclusions with respect to how these levels are related we should be careful not to assume any simple isomorphism. The Input-Output Picture is problematic precisely because it is a view which projects personal level contents directly onto subpersonal states. In opposition to this kind of simple isomorphic projection Hurley's work supports the idea that personal level contents are noninstrumentally dependent on complex systems of input-output relations at the level of subpersonal vehicles.⁴⁸⁷ The notion of noninstrumental dependence is, therefore, specified in a way that is intended to cross between the personal and subpersonal levels. It is this level-crossing specification that "puts the Input-Output Picture at issue, since it is a view that precisely projects a subpersonal-level distinction and a personal-level distinction onto one another."⁴⁸⁸

The idea of noninstrumental dependence also offers support for an alternative way of modeling mental functions in which the notion of complex dynamic feedback systems plays a central role - in particular, the fact that perceptions and intentions depend noninstrumentally on relations between input and output points to the possibility that both perception and action are co-constituted, constitutively interdependent.⁴⁸⁹ Hurley argues that if the contents of both perceptions and intentions at a personal level depend noninstrumentally on dynamic relations of inputs and outputs at a subpersonal level then "a given change in these relations could equally constitute a change in the contents of perceptions and intentions".⁴⁹⁰ Hence, perception and intentional action may be

⁴⁸⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 27-30.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 380.

⁴⁸⁹ Cf., *ibid.*, p. 214, p. 342, p. 389, and p. 400.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 212. The possibility of the constitutive interdependence of perception and intention is developed as follows: "The various ways in which perception can depend noninstrumentally on output and intentions on input constrain one another. Not only do distinctions and invariants constrain one another, but perceptual content constrains the content of intentions and vice versa.

constitutively interdependent. This idea is central to Hurley's Two-Level Interdependence View. She writes:

Consider a *Two-Level Interdependence View*. There might be interdependence between perception and action at the personal level because both perceptual and intentional content depend on relations between causal input and causal output at the subpersonal level. Contentful perceptual experience and contentful intentional action would be constitutively interdependent, in the sense that their possibility is explained together (not in a way such that the explanation of one presupposes the other).⁴⁹¹

A programmatic sketch of the logical space that such a view would occupy provides insight into its philosophical implications. Hurley suggests:

On this kind of view, contentful intentions and experience both depend on relations between causal input and causal output, so that agency and experience are constitutively interdependent.⁴⁹²

Hence, in setting out to establish the noninstrumental dependence of perception on output and intention on input Hurley is, among other things, providing support for a type of dynamic approach to central philosophical problems surrounding issues of how content is possible. Perhaps through examining Hurley's Two-Level Interdependence View together with some of the arguments she presents for it we may be able to add to the limited progress that we have, thus far, been able to make.

The conclusion we approach is that in general both perceptual and intentional contents depend on *relations between* input and output, and hence are essentially interdependent." (Ibid., p. 371)

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., p. 85.

⁴⁹² Ibid., p. 85. Cf. also p. 381.

3. A more complete understanding of the philosophical implications of a Two-Level Interdependence View can be developed through exploring its relationship to certain Kantian influenced accounts of experience. The type of account with which Hurley is concerned often provides a central role to ideas such as the activity of spontaneous synthesis, self-consciousness, receptivity, and unity. Although the explanatory potential of such ideas may be powerful, as we have observed, the attempt to actualize their potentiality gives rise to some difficult philosophical problems. One such problem occurs in the form of the regress known as Kant's "problem of judgment".⁴⁹³ Hurley also notes this regress but she is primarily concerned with two other closely related regresses. The first of these regresses, which appears to include the problem of judgment under its rubric, results from "the way in which the question of unity arises again for any subjective content of consciousness that might be appealed to in giving an account of unity, even self-conscious content characterized in terms of formality or spontaneity."⁴⁹⁴ The second occurs as a result of the way in which synthesis, whether viewed empirically or transcendently, is often, and not without justification, conceived as an *activity* involving our agency. Here Hurley observes that appealing to agency in a constitutive account of the possibility of content leads to a regress because agentic activity is content presupposing. Since actions involving our agency are intentional actions and intentions presuppose

⁴⁹³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 243 n.22 for Hurley's comments on "the problem of judgment".

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73. In other words, for any "that" on which one wishes to found content one can always ask how this "that" comes about.

“content”⁴⁹⁵ an account of experience that relies on agency as its ground presupposes that which it seeks to explain.⁴⁹⁶

This fact, together with other ancillary arguments concerning the explanatory limitations of related Kantian inspired thoughts, leads Hurley to suggest that perhaps spontaneous synthesis should not be understood in terms of intentional agency at all.⁴⁹⁷ Perhaps more progress would be made if we were to consider a combined, normative and functional, approach to the problem of content in which the relevant sense of self-consciousness is not necessarily bound to content presupposing agentic activity.⁴⁹⁸ In this case, Hurley argues, the self-consciousness that accompanies our intentions and perceptions need not involve the decompositional/recombinant capacities which we usually describe as conceptual. She writes:

A suggestion that has at least some intuitive force is this: it is in the contents of intentional motor actions of an ordinary, worldly, embodied kind - as opposed to acts of synthesizing, classifying or conceptualizing - that self-consciousness has its most natural home.⁴⁹⁹

If we require that all content be accompanied by self-consciousness and then insist that the relevant notion of self-consciousness involve conceptual abilities we will have thereby rendered any creature incapable of conceptual abilities also

⁴⁹⁵ Hurley argues: “A coherent sense of agency must presuppose the possibility of intentions and hence content.” (Ibid., p. 84; cf. also p. 75)

⁴⁹⁶ We might observe here that Buddhism does not presuppose such agentic activity but rather concurs with Hurley on the notion that intention and perception are interdependent, arising together and out of the same process.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 84.

⁴⁹⁸ Cf. for example, *ibid.*, p. 54. Cf. also Hurley writes: “The difficulty again is that we do not have a viable account of the nature of the agency involved in transcendental synthesis or why it should be taken to ground unity”. (p. 83)

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 86. Cf. also Hurley writes: “But notice that the kind of action the perception gets tangled up with in these cases is not sophisticated conceptualizing or classifying activity.” (p. 389)

incapable of content. This conclusion seems intuitively unacceptable. Fortunately, Hurley argues, it is not inevitable. A Two-Level Interdependence View, she suggests, might permit us to disassociate conceptual abilities from that sense of self-consciousness which is necessary for the possibility of content because it might permit a characterization of the relevant sense of self-consciousness in practical, as opposed to, conceptual or epistemologically related terms.

This practical form of nonconceptual self-consciousness Hurley refers to as *perspectival self-consciousness*. For *perspectival self-consciousness*, she writes, “the kind of agency that is essential is intentional motor agency of an ordinary, empirical, worldly, embodied kind - as opposed to acts of classifying or conceptualizing or judging”.⁵⁰⁰ As Hurley suggests:

A creature that acts intentionally, and so on intentions, can act for reasons and is subject to at least some norms of practical rationality. Its actions depend holistically on relationships between what it perceives and intends, or between what it believes and desires. Relations between stimuli and responses are not invariant, but reflect the rational relations between perceptions and intentions and various possibilities of mistake or misrepresentation.⁵⁰¹

Hence, the intentional agency associated with *perspectival self-consciousness* may be capable of supporting, through practical as opposed to conceptual or

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 140. Conceptual abilities may, in some way, piggy-back on the *perspectival self-consciousness* as “something we do” - a practice particular to humans. Hurley writes: “*Perspectival consciousness* can but need not be conceptual”. (p. 142)

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., p. 137.

epistemologically related means, a level of normative power adequate for content.⁵⁰²

If perspectival self-consciousness, so conceived, is that form of self-consciousness which is most relevant to providing a satisfactory response to the problem of content then it seems an account of the possibility of content could be generated which avoids the regress which results from conceiving of spontaneity on a conceptual subsumption model. However, as Hurley acknowledges, the notion of perspectival self-consciousness is still an intentional self-consciousness. Consequently, she writes: "While conscious intentions with nonconceptual content may not presuppose conceptual unity, they will still presuppose the unity of consciousness, so will not avoid the regress".⁵⁰³ The appeal to perspectival self-consciousness is not in itself, therefore, to be taken as a response to the problem of content. Rather Hurley suggests that it "provides a way of expressing the personal-level interdependence of perception and action involved in having a unified perspective."⁵⁰⁴ In this way the notion of perspectival self-consciousness may be central to a personal-level component of a Two-Level Interdependence View in which personal-level perceptual and intentional contents are "in general ... functions of the subpersonal *relations between* input and output, such as the relations that hold within a complex dynamic feedback system."⁵⁰⁵

These are intriguing ideas, which, as Hurley suggests, leaves us with a project for further work. The view that Hurley advocates would abandon a

⁵⁰² Cf. Hurley writes: "Practical reason, not epistemology, and the holism of perceptions and intentions, rather than theoretical holism, provide the relevant normative context." (p. 138)

⁵⁰³ Ibid., p. 87. Here she seems to have in mind the regress associated with conceiving of spontaneity as involving agentic activity.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 87.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 339.

conception of spontaneous activity in terms of conceptually bound agentic activity in favour of an account characterized in terms of practical activity. This “activity” and the level of normativity it supports would then be explicated functionally, in terms of subpersonal dynamic feedback systems such that agency and experience might in the end be seen to be interdependently constituted as a function of those dynamic relations.⁵⁰⁶ On such a view personal level contents would be seen to be determined by *relations between* subpersonal vehicles of content, as opposed to being determined by intrinsic properties of such vehicles.

Such an explanation, Hurley now suggests, would appeal to the codependence of perception and action on dynamic singularities.⁵⁰⁷ The notion of dynamic singularity, which is intimately related to dynamics as an approach to understanding many phenomena, is central to Hurley’s approach. It is the notion of dynamic singularity that promises to provide the subpersonal functional idea of unity, which Hurley argues is needed to supplement a normative approach to the unity of consciousness and to explain the perspectival interdependence of perception and action.⁵⁰⁸ Briefly, the general hypothesis at issue is,

⁵⁰⁶ Hurley writes: “Even though perceptual and intentional contents are different functions of the relations between input and output, changes in these relations should in general be expected to affect both perceptual and intentional content. ... To say that content of a certain type is some function of certain causal processes does not say *which* function, or that it is the same function in different possible worlds. ... *Which* functions in particular may be determined in part by still more inconclusive considerations, both normative and causal.” (p. 339)

⁵⁰⁷ For those interested in her arguments for the necessity of such a notion cf., for example, pp. 215-17.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 336. Van Gelder writes: “Contemporary dynamics provides powerful resources for describing general properties of the behaviour of systems. These resources can be brought to bear even in absence of an actual equation-governed model. If done rigorously, this can buy a qualitative or preliminary understanding of the phenomenon, which may be the best available and forms a solid foundation for further exploration.” (p. 8) The footnote to this quote reads: “If done poorly, on the other hand, it is little more than handwaving with impotent metaphors. The jargon of dynamics does, unfortunately, provide all too many opportunities for pseudo-scientific masquerading”.

that the unity of consciousness may depend on subpersonal dynamic processes involving complex relations between sensory inputs and motor outputs and a circular or looping structure of causes, effects, and feedback effects on further causes, with both internal and external feedback loops. The idea of a *dynamic singularity* in the field of causal flows, centered on but not bounded by a biological organism, may provide a subpersonal element in an objective account of the unity of consciousness “at a time”. And if the contents of perceptions and intentions are interdependent because they are both functions of such a system of relations, as in a Two-Level Interdependence View, then we can see why such interdependence is part of what it is to have a unified perspective.⁵⁰⁹

The resulting account would suggest that dynamic singularity at the subpersonal level of the vehicles which carry content combined with a normative account at the personal (or animal) level, most likely in terms of the kind of practical rationality sketched above, are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for the unity of consciousness.⁵¹⁰ In this way a response to the problem of content might be generated which may ultimately be able to avoid presupposing agentic activity and in so doing avoid the associated regress.⁵¹¹

On such an account the notion of a dynamic singularity would involve the functional identification of the central nervous system as that system “where

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 206-7. Immediately following the above quote Hurley writes: “A further hypothesis crosses the personal-subpersonal divide in a particular way: it is that this kind of subpersonal complex dynamic feedback system can itself be an adaptive effect of intentional actions, among other things.” (p. 207)

⁵¹⁰ Ibid. p. 130n. Hurley continues: “The combined view would specify a two-level functional role for unity, which could be realized in various ways, and the role would be defined in part by reference to norms governing actions.” (n. p. 130) For a discussion of the way in which dynamic feedback systems bridge internal-external boundaries cf. for example, pp. 282-3, pp. 327-37.

⁵¹¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 78, p. 214 n. 21.

neural signals in the various modalities (such as visual, proprioceptive, and motor signals) converge and are compared and other signals selectively generated".⁵¹²

More particularly, as Hurley writes:

The causal relations between nervous systems and environments are intricate and continuous. ... At the subpersonal level, when we look at dynamic causal flows and patterns, distinct selves show up as distinct singularities, foci of systematic and complex feedback relationships,... which cluster around and move with the active biological organism but which also loop out into the environment. ...at the personal level, what it is to be a subject and agent is open to view, just where it seems to be, in the normatively constrained lives of creatures whose perception/action system embeds them into and deals directly with the world.⁵¹³

But here we can observe that although such a view may in the end provide cognitive science, and maybe even philosophy, with a new and perhaps powerful way of modeling various aspects of cognitive performance, it seems likely to

⁵¹² Ibid., p. 271. At this point the question arises as to how the process of "comparison" is taking place. The motor theory of perception, which Hurley suggests may contribute to a Two-Level Interdependence View, employs the notion of a "comparator". (cf. p. 443 and p. 449) But it is not clear how such notions can be unproblematically extended to an account of those mental functions responsible for content. Contrast Hurley's comments with, for example, Kant's comments on the process of comparison underlying the unity of consciousness. He writes: "This objective basis of all association of appearances I call their *affinity*. This basis, however, we cannot find anywhere except in the principle of the unity of apperception in regard to all cognitions that are to belong to me." (A 122) "Hence from what has been said thus far it is indeed evident, although strange, that only by means of this transcendental function of the imagination does even the affinity of appearances become possible, and with it their association, and through this association finally their reproduction according to laws, and consequently experience itself. For without this transcendental function no concepts whatever of objects would meld into one experience." (A 123)

⁵¹³ Ibid., p. 336. Hence, Hurley's view might be characterized as a kind of sophisticated contextualism. Since Hurley is advocating an account in which content is a function of dynamic systems which reach out and include the "environment" she can, in contextualist fashion, suggest that "content is determined by global context" (Cf., for example, pp. 263-4) In her chapter on Wittgenstein she implies that it is, at least in part, through the relinquishing of mind-world dualism that a contextualist response to the problem of content promises to be more effective than discredited Platonic and competing Kantian influenced views. (cf., pp. 237-40)

encounter significant difficulties if applied to the problem of content. If personal level intentional and perceptual contents are superposed on, and explicated in terms of, dynamic singularities in subpersonal fields of causal flows then a satisfactory response to the problem of content would seem to require an explanation of how such content emerges from those dynamic flows. Hurley sometimes gives the impression that she is advocating such an approach. But there are at least two main reasons to doubt that a Two-Level Interdependence View could provide an account of the emergence of content. First, a Two-Level Interdependence View would presumably retain a personal level component as part of the *explanans*, and, as in the case of perspectival self-consciousness, such a component would seem to involve presupposing some level of content.⁵¹⁴ Hence, a tension exists between the need for a personal-level component and the idea that two-level view might provide a satisfactory response to the problem of content. Second, although the level crossing notion of noninstrumental dependence would seem to be intended to resolve this tension, as we will see below, it is not clear that it could accomplish this feat.

4. Whatever else *Consciousness in Action* is able to contribute to issues of consciousness and cognition it does provide plausibility and support to an idea with which we are by now quite familiar. This is the idea that a constitutive interdependence of some kind exists between experience and intention. Hurley's findings in support of this idea permit her to argue convincingly that it is a mistake to attempt to separate intentional and perceptual accounts of the possibility of content. To provide an account of the possibility of content, she

⁵¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 87. Utilizing a personal level component in a response to the problem of content then seems likely to result in a regress.

suggests, neither agency nor experience should be taken as fundamental. The problem applies equally to both. Consequently, as she writes: "Explaining how content is possible involves explaining how unity, including the unity of consciousness and conceptual unity, can be determined for intentions and experiences together."⁵¹⁵ To do this in a way that is able to avoid content presupposing regresses does not, as we have seen, appear to be a simple matter. So how would a Two-Level Interdependence View provide a coherent account of content?

The logical and only apparent alternative to conceiving of spontaneous synthesis along personal/normative/intentional level lines, as involving something we do, is to conceive of it along subpersonal/causal level lines, as involving something that happens to us. Hurley's account acknowledges and respects this division of levels, but since neither level in itself seems capable of providing a satisfactory solution to problems of consciousness and content Hurley suggests a combined approach which appeals to the idea of complex cross level dynamic relations. This approach, once again, involves supplementing a normative account, provided at the personal (animal) level, with a functional account, provided in terms of dynamics at the subpersonal/causal level. In order to avoid a variety of problems associated with Input-Output Picture influenced, conceptually bound, theories of mind, and with a view to providing a symmetric response to the problem of content, the personal level account is conceived in terms of a normativity just powerful enough to support distinctions between consistency and

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., p. 85.

inconsistency.⁵¹⁶ This means that, to the extent that such a view attempts to provide an answer to the problem of content, the constitutive power of spontaneity must be assigned to the subpersonal/causal level and characterized in terms of “happenings”.⁵¹⁷ The most promising way of modeling these happenings, Hurley argues, is functionally, in dynamical terms.⁵¹⁸ The unity of consciousness, she suggests, has a functional character, but it is a high-level functional character, which could in principle be realized in variety of ways. On a Two-Level Interdependence View the dynamic *relations between* personal and subpersonal levels (i.e., noninstrumental relations) would be characterized in terms of this high-level functional account and conceived of as carrying not only subpersonal information but “information” about self and world.⁵¹⁹ In this way it is hoped that

⁵¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, p.141. For a detailed discussion of problems of normativity with respect to such an account of the unity of consciousness and Hurley’s position on the matter cf., 112-133. For further discussion of the kind of normative constraints envisioned by Hurley cf., pp. 135-40.

⁵¹⁷ Immediately before introducing the idea of Two-Level Interdependence View Hurley writes: “But perhaps spontaneity should not be understood in terms of intentional agency at all. Then perhaps the contrast with receptivity can be drawn causally, in subpersonal or computational terms: receptivity might be a matter of causal input, spontaneity a matter of causal output. Both causal input and causal output may be needed for contentful experience, as well as contentful agency, to be possible.” (p. 84)

Cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 73-78.

⁵¹⁸ She writes: “When neither subjective nor intrinsic objective properties quite do the trick, try functional properties.” (*Ibid.*, p. 54)

Note also that, as Clark and Toribio observe, recent years have brought about a kind of theorist of mind and advocate of dynamics which seeks to go beyond the idea that subpersonal systems are vehicles of content and call into question the idea of internal representation itself. As opposed to this project they argue for a revisionary representationalism in which perhaps “an unexpectedly large portion of what we generally take as our cognitive achievements may in fact turn out to be explicable without the invocation of any kind of internal representation”. Since Hurley does not attempt to do away with the notion of vehicles of content, or internal representations, her work can be taken to lend support to this project. However, insofar as the bulk of our cognitive activity is rather defined in terms of ‘perceiving’ and ‘acting’, by unseating “the dominant conception of perception as a process whereby internal representations are formed, and action as the carrying out of internally formulated commands” she also lends support to the anti-representational dynamicists camp. (Cf. A. Clark and J. Toribio, *Doing Without Representing?*, *Synthese*, 101: 401-431, 1994, in particular pp. 423-26.)

⁵¹⁹ Cf., *ibid.*, p. 46, p. 130, p. 136, pp. 193-4, p. 207, pp. 214-18, and p. 436. Without some background in the explanatory possibilities of dynamic systems theory it may be difficult to imagine what Hurley has in mind. Tim van Gelder suggests that the dynamical hypothesis in cognitive science is composed of two major components: the hypothesis that cognitive agents *are* dynamical systems (the nature hypothesis) and the hypothesis that cognitive agents can be understood dynamically (the knowledge hypothesis). A presupposition of a dynamical approach to accounting for the emergence of content would then seem to be that any sense of agency or self-

a Two-Level Interdependence View might be able to respond to the problem of content.⁵²⁰

Now, at the end of her book Hurley suggests that the view she is advocating expresses three general ideas. She writes:

The first is the idea of context-dependence. Content can be a function of distributed processes, of a network of relations, rather than of intrinsic properties of discrete, local vehicles. Content can be both carried relationally and determined relationally. The second is that there is no

consciousness which turns out to be necessary to content must also be dynamically constituted. If this turns out to be correct then it seems reasonable to expect the emergence of content, like the emergence of leopard spots, to yield to the explanatory power of dynamics. (J. Garson, *Cognition poised at the edge of chaos: a complex alternative to a symbolic mind*, *Philosophical Psychology*, Vol. 9., No. 3, 1996, pp. 301-322.) In such an account the tools of dynamics would be integrated into an explanation through which we could, in some way, understand how objective contents can emerge from subjectively instantiated dynamic systems of natural causal relations. Were such an account possible it would not, as both Hurley and van Gelder point out, be likely to be conceived at a "low level" in terms of neural firing rates, etc.. As van Gelder writes:

"The nature hypothesis tells us what cognitive agents are by specifying the relation they bear to dynamical systems. It is common to interpret the hypothesis as asserting that cognitive agents are literally identical with some particular low-level system made up of a large number of internal, low-level quantities such as neural firing rates. However, this needs correction in almost every respect.

First, the relationship at the heart of the nature hypothesis is not identity but *instantiation*. Cognitive agents are not themselves systems (sets of variables) but rather objects whose properties, etc., can form systems. ... According to the nature hypothesis, the systems responsible for cognitive performances are dynamical.

Second, cognitive agents "are", in this sense, not some particular dynamical system, but as many systems as are needed to produce all the different kinds of cognitive performances exhibited by the agent. ...

Another noteworthy fact about these models is that the variables they posit are not low-level (e.g., neural firing rates), but rather macroscopic quantities at roughly the level of cognitive performance itself. The lesson here is that the nature hypothesis is concerned in the first instance not with low-level systems but with how agents are causally organized at the highest level relevant to an explanation of cognitive performances, whatever that may be." (van Gelder, in press, pp. 6-7)

If it is correct to assume that cognitive agents *are* dynamical systems understanding them as such will require that cognitive science take a dynamical form. Confirming the knowledge hypothesis will require that scientists be able to furnish abstract dynamical systems to serve as models by specifying abstract variables and governing equations. Hurley suggests her Two-Levelled approach as a promising framework from which to construct models of the emergence and manipulation of content.

⁵²⁰ Cf. for the full discussion pp. 427-9. Note also that Hurley writes: "Dynamic systems demystify emergence. A self-organizing dynamic system may be fully deterministic, even though its emergent properties cannot be predicted other than by letting it run and seeing what it does." (p. 403)

neural boundary that might prevent the first point from applying to relations between input and output. The third is that superposition of contents make for interdependence. Networks of relations can carry various codependent or superposed contents in such a way that such contents are interdependently determined.⁵²¹

These ideas, in general, seem to be adequately supported given one proviso. The word “determined” in this paragraph should be understood to mean something akin to “covary as a function of...”⁵²² In the experimental cases and thought experiments which Hurley considers changes in relations between input and output at the subpersonal level are seen to covary with changes in the contents of perception and intention.⁵²³ This covariance provides support for her contention that perceptual and intentional contents are, at least sometimes, superposed on the same complex dynamic systems of input-output relations, and hence may be constitutively interdependent. It also renders plausible the idea that content is relationally “carried” and is dependent on subpersonal dynamic flows in a way that may permit “noninstrumental relations” to *select content for presence to consciousness*.⁵²⁴ But how these facts can be harnessed to provide an account of content is *determined* in the sense with which we have been concerned in previous chapters is, as least for the moment, left fairly mysterious.

⁵²¹ Ibid., p. 446.

⁵²² Hurley, for example, writes: “To raise our issues cleanly, we need a generic idea like that of noninstrumental dependence. The term “determine” will sometimes be used to indicate the complementary generic relation. So *x* depends noninstrumentally on *y* just when *y* determines *x*, and interdependence implies mutual determination.” (p. 342)

⁵²³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 212, p. 339, and pp. 374-376.

⁵²⁴ In the one clear example where content does seem to emerge from noninstrumental dynamic relations, i.e., the example of acquiring a new basic intention to raise one’s alpha levels, Hurley concludes by suggesting that “somehow, after practice with the monitor, you are able to bring your alpha level under intentional control. Feedback has enabled a new basic intention to emerge, the intention to raise your alpha.” (p. 444)

As we observed above, a tension seems to exist between the idea that a coherent response to the problem of content will require the inclusion of a personal level component, and the idea that the resulting two-level account may be able to respond to the problem of content in a way which is able to avoid content presupposing regresses. We can now observe that this tension is related to the fact that Hurley provides little in the way of content to the notion of noninstrumental dependence. Hurley's notion of noninstrumental dependence seems intended to be able to cross personal and subpersonal levels in a way that will permit the fact that personal level contents may be superposed on subpersonal dynamic relations to respond to the problem of content.⁵²⁵ But to respond to the problem of content the notion of "noninstrumental relations" would seem to require content beyond this fact. More particularly, if content presupposing regresses are to be avoided in responding to the problem of content the notion of noninstrumental relations would need to form part of a theory which provides an *explanation* of the (co)constitution of personal level contents from dynamic relations (that somehow can include both the environment and "information about the self"). Hence, the foreshadowed high-level functional characterization of the emergence of content from dynamic flows would seem to be required.⁵²⁶ Since it remains to be seen how this would be accomplished in a way that is able to avoid presupposing content, it is, at the very least, difficult to imagine how a two-level view would provide a satisfactory response to the problem of content.⁵²⁷

⁵²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 269-70.

⁵²⁶ For an insights into the kind of narrative explanation which dynamics can be expected to offer cf. Garson, in particular, pp. 316-19.

⁵²⁷ Cf. Hurley, p. 244, and p. 282. At one point Hurley observes that, "to admit that a functional approach has a role to play in a complex overall account of consciousness is not to suppose it suffices to account for all aspects of consciousness". (p. 207)

It seems that to respond coherently to the problem of content elements need to be found through which a satisfying narrative can be constructed in a manner that does not require presupposing content.⁵²⁸ In the quest for those elements dynamics promises to provide a powerful set of tools. However, as van Gelder observes, dynamics,

is a highly general framework which must be adapted, supplemented, fine-tuned, etc., to apply to any particular cognitive phenomena. This typically involves merging dynamics with other constructs (e.g., the schema ...) or theoretical frameworks (e.g., ecological psychology ...)” (p. 8).

Hurley’s observations together with her sketch of a Two-Level-Interdependence View provides some guidance to the employment of dynamics and to the discovery of relevant explanatory elements. But it neither is, nor does it seem intended to be, a blue-print for the employment of dynamics to problems of consciousness and cognition. Consequently, the possibility is left open that a satisfactory response to the problem of content will require mating dynamics to elements and theoretical frameworks other than those anticipated by Hurley.⁵²⁹

It is at this point that a question crosses our path: To what extent would the theories we examined in previous chapters prove suited to dynamical integration? Although this question cannot be pursued thoroughly in the space remaining, we can briefly observe certain consistencies which exist between features of some of those theories and some of Hurley’s central findings which point to the possibility

⁵²⁸ Garson’s comments suggest that what such elements might be is at present unknown. Cf. Garson, *op. cit.*, in particular pp. 306-7.

⁵²⁹ Of course, if some such theory were, in some way, to be inconsistent with empirical findings this would require explanation.

of a fruitful integration with dynamics.⁵³⁰ These include: 1) the idea that a constitutive interdependence exists between intention and perception, 2) the idea that dynamic feedback has a central role to play in the emergence of this interdependence (i.e., of content),⁵³¹ 3) the idea that ultimately no mediating system, or “self”, exists between intention and perception,⁵³² 4) the idea that the “activity” ultimately responsible for content is not intentional,⁵³³ and 5) the significance of the structural determinants of *flow*, or motion over time, to the emergence of content. Of course some of the theories we examined fit these findings better than others. But these general consistencies provide support to the hypothesis that some of the theoretical frameworks which we examined above may be integrated with dynamics in a way that would increase our understanding of consciousness and cognition. Exploring this possibility in any depth, however, is beyond the scope of this project. In our final section we will return to exploring the possibility that the unity of consciousness may prove unyielding such that a satisfactory *explanation* of its possibility may ultimately prove elusive or impossible.

5. Many of the models of consciousness that we examined in previous chapters provide a role for, what can be argued to be, cognizing intermediates through which content is held to be rendered possible. These intermediates, which

⁵³⁰ I have in mind here primarily the theoretical frameworks of Kant, Eckhart, and Buddhism (in particular the *ālayavijñāna* and *pratītya-samutpāda*).

⁵³¹ In the case of Buddhism, the idea that feedback from the six cognitive groups, each displaying continuity by virtue of their accompanying *vijñānas*, interacts in complex ways to determine present and future content.

⁵³² Scheler’s theory of “the person” would seem to be an exception. To the extent that Buddhism can be said to rely on a mediating self it is, for the most part, seen first to be the product of an unintentional and largely inexplicable “activity” (cf., for example, chapter 4, p. 126, n. 272 above).

⁵³³ Recall that Kant’s reflective judgment is characterized by the “unintentional” harmonization of the cognitive faculties. The formation of that through which the object is grasped (i.e., the intention) is, hence, not presupposed.

are generally speaking interposed between mind and world, have assumed many forms: “categories”, “rules”, “species”, “forms”, “principles”, “seeds”, and *dharmas*. Now it is, of course, commonly supposed that in Wittgenstein’s later writings he targets, and reveals as futile, the employment of intermediates between mind and world for the purpose of accounting for the possibility of content. He does this in a manner that echoes the comments of Kant with which we began our investigations.⁵³⁴ He demonstrates that since intermediates (e.g., rules) require interpretation, and no interpretation interprets itself, they are unable to do the job for which they are designed.⁵³⁵ Hence, appealing to intermediates in responding to the problem of content leads only to an infinite regress of intermediates and, if pressed, to the absurd conclusion that content is not possible. In light of these facts Wittgenstein turns his attentions elsewhere emphasizing instead the role of *practices*.

But how does Wittgenstein’s appeal to practices contribute to the solution or dissolution of the problem of content? Hurley suggests that in order to understand how the appeal to practices goes beyond intermediates in responding to the problem of content we need to appreciate the significance of the symmetrical nature of our problem - i.e., that the problem of content arises symmetrically for intention and experience together.⁵³⁶ In responding to this symmetry Hurley has argued for a constitutive interdependence between intention

⁵³⁴ A 133; B 172 - (i.e., ... “judgment is a particular talent which can be practiced only, and cannot be taught.”) Immediately following a footnote in which Hurley refers to this same quote. She writes: “These remarks seem to anticipate Wittgenstein; did Kant fully appreciate their import?” (p. 243 n. 22) In light of our investigations it seems that support could be found for both alternatives.

⁵³⁵ Cf., for example, L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, §§ 197-202, pp. 80-1, and § 265, pp. 93-4 .

⁵³⁶ Cf. Hurley, p. 222.

and experience (or action and perception). In the context of an analysis of Wittgenstein's critique of intermediates - in which cognizing intentions are conceived of as, or at least analogous to, "rules", and experiences are conceived of as, or analogous to, "applications" - a constitutive interdependence between intention and experience implies a constitutive interdependence between a rule and its application.⁵³⁷ If a constitutive interdependence exists between a rule and its application then a "rule" and its "application" may simply be two ways of conceiving of one "practice". Hurley clarifies and finds support for such an interpretation of Wittgenstein in the writings of Baker and Hacker. They write:

The apparent logical gulf between a rule and its 'extension' arises from the mistaken assumption that understanding a rule is at least partly independent of how it is projected on to actions. But however it is formulated or explained a rule is understood only if it is correctly projected.⁵³⁸

Hence, as they suggest elsewhere: "This rule would not be the rule that it is, if this act were not in accord with this rule. Because the relation is internal, no intermediary can be interposed between its two terms to effect a connection."⁵³⁹

And now if, as Hurley continues: "An internal relation is a relation of interdependence that runs to the very identity of the items in question" we are led to consider the possibility that the content of a rule (through which it may be understood) and the content of its application (in action) can only be "interdependently individuated" and "are not two independent items".⁵⁴⁰ In other

⁵³⁷ Cf., for example, Wittgenstein, § 148, p. 58, § 197, p. 80, and § 205, p. 82.

⁵³⁸ Baker and Hacker, 1985, p. 97;... in *ibid.*, pp. 235-6.

⁵³⁹ Baker and Hacker, 1985, p. 91, in *ibid.*, p. 235.

⁵⁴⁰ Nevertheless Hurley writes: "These remarks lead us to consider the possibility that the content of a rule someone understands and intends to follow, and the set of acts that constitute acting on it, are not two independent items. ... A parallel view about perceptual content would deny that the content of a perceptual experience is constitutively independent of the worldly objects of

words, it seems possible that the content x through which some rule y is understood is constitutively dependent upon, or is identical with, the content of its application z . As a result we are led to consider the possibility that x , y , and z , although different conceptual isolates, are ultimately the same “entity/practice”.⁵⁴¹

Through elucidating this contemporary Wittgensteinian line of thought in the context of her investigations Hurley is able to lend further support to her own arguments for the constitutive interdependence of intention and perception. But we can observe that this line of thought is also consistent with some of the other philosophies that we have investigated. In chapter one, for example, we observed that in the first *Critique* the Kantian account of the possibility of content relies on the spontaneous application of *a priori* concepts to intuitions.⁵⁴² Since these “concepts” are atemporal⁵⁴³ the “judgments” through which the manifold is united require their immanent synthesis and employment each time the understanding is confronted with an “intuition”.⁵⁴⁴ In other words, on Kant’s account, every time the understanding is faced with a presentation (i.e., an intuition) suitable schematizing “concepts” must spontaneously arise within the context of uniting the manifold.⁵⁴⁵ Hence, the “concepts” seem only to acquire content within the context of their application in “judgment”. And now if we take seriously Kant’s suggestion that such “concepts” are *a priori* “rules” (of the understanding) we are

perception. What we can call a broadly *contextualist* view of Wittgenstein is suggested in work by McDowell, and by others.” (p. 236) This is, of course, a perfectly reasonable conventional level rendering of an ultimate level truth. An alternative approach would be simply to symmetrically presuppose the possibility of content.

⁵⁴¹ Since no act can determine its own content and no rule can provide its own guidance, Hurley, as we have seen, rejects the idea that the “activity” responsible for content is intentional suggesting instead that it be conceived of as “happenings” which reach out to include the environment (i.e., content) without presupposing it (cf. *ibid.*, p. 241).

⁵⁴² A 68-9/B 93-4, *ibid.*, p. 122-3; A 79/B 105, p. 131; cf. also A 126, p. 171.

⁵⁴³ B 159, Pluhar, p. 196.

⁵⁴⁴ Cf. A 86/B 118, *ibid.*, p. 143; A 126-8, p. 171-3; B 148-9, pp. 188-9.

⁵⁴⁵ It is this task, which in the third *Critique*, Kant assigns to reflective judgment.

led to the same possibility to which Hurley, via Baker and Hacker, have led us - i.e., that the content of a rule (through which it is understood and identified) and its application (in "judgment") are two isolates of one "practice", or "judgment".

Here we can observe that if providing a satisfactory response to the problem of content were to require taking seriously the "substantial unity" of these isolates (e.g., of "rule" and "act", "concept" and "intuition", "intention" and "experience", etc.) then an account in terms of two relata and a functioning intermediate is inappropriate not only because it leads to an infinite regress but also because it does not accurately reflect reality.⁵⁴⁶ This is a point with which both Wittgenstein and Hurley would undoubtedly agree. An intermediate is, of course, some *x* through which two other things *y* and *z* are related in order to perform a function. Hence, the suggestion that an intermediate *x* might be functioning between some *y* and *z* requires that each participant is, at least to some extent, determinate at the moment of their interaction.⁵⁴⁷ But if no content can be provided to these apparent determinates within the cognizing process because they are mere isolates of a unitary "this" then there are no determinates between which an intermediate can be interposed prior to a unity of conscious (i.e., the appearance of a "this"). Since there can be no intermediates a response to the problem of content in terms of intermediates simply does not accurately model the "phenomenon" under investigation.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁶ For an approach to making the same point based on consideration of language see Williams summary of one of Mi pham's arguments (pp. 138-142).

⁵⁴⁷ As a result an appeal to intermediates in responding to the problem of content simply begs the question. This will apply equally in cases where the relevant entities are conceived as rules and acts, or pure concepts and intuitions.

⁵⁴⁸ Obviously, if that which is responsible for content does not involve two relata then Kant's account of the harmonization of the cognitive faculties will also be inaccurate. Kant's account of the harmonization of the cognitive faculties can be seen as an attempt to have two indeterminates interact (i.e., harmonize) which is, of course, incoherent.

This line of thought leads us to back to some Buddhist considerations, which were mentioned in chapter 4. In our investigation of *manas* as “the one which has the form (*-ākāra*) of conceiving (*manyānā*) by way of the notion of “I” (*ahaṅkāra*) and the feeling of identity (*asmimāna*)”⁵⁴⁹ we observed two perhaps not wholly incompatible ways of viewing the role of an *ākāra*.⁵⁵⁰ First, we suggested that one may view an *ākāra* as an intermediate - a form or aspect through which an object is cognized or rendered possible. In this case consciousness functions by means of the *ākāra*, which stands, in some sense, between the subject and world. This model leads ultimately to an infinite regress. Second, we suggested that one may see an appeal to an *ākāra* as a way of referring to the reflexive nature of Consciousness itself - that is, to a kind of self-consciousness (*svasaṃvedana* or *svasaṃvitti*, *rang rig*) which is comparable to Kant’s notion of the original synthetic unity of apperception, insofar as one does not conceive of apperception as implying or involving an “act” of a separate consciousness.⁵⁵¹ From this perspective we observed that it is possible to identify the *ākāra* with both the subject and the object, since the subject and object can be argued to be two “aspects”, or ways of conceiving, the same “consciousness/entity”.⁵⁵² In other words an *ākāra* can be conceived of as two

⁵⁴⁹ Once again, Schmithausen translates this early “statement of identity” from the *VinSg ālay. Treatise* (7.1A.2.2c), pp. 150-1).

⁵⁵⁰ Cf. chapter 4, p. 125, n. 270 above.

⁵⁵¹ Cf. G. B. J. Dreyfus, *Recognizing Reality: Dharmakīrti’s Philosophy and Its Tibetan Interpretations*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997, pp. 335--41.

⁵⁵² On Dharmakīrti’s analysis, for example, each unified consciousness contains both an *objective aspect* (*grāhyākāra*, *bzung rnam*) and a *subjective aspect* (*grāhakākāra*, *'dzin rnam*) (Paul Williams, *The Reflexive Nature of Awareness: A Tibetan Madhyamaka Defense*, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998, p. 339).

isolates of one “entity/consciousness” - in some non-ultimate sense.⁵⁵³ As Dreyfus writes:

Ākāra is the aspect of the object in consciousness as well as the aspected consciousness itself. The implication of this analysis is that perception is inherently reflexive. ... Awareness takes on the form of an object and reveals that form by assuming it. Thus, in the process of revealing external things, cognition [i.e., consciousness] reveals itself.”⁵⁵⁴

On such reasoning there is a very real sense in which self-consciousness is not different from consciousness of, for example, a table.⁵⁵⁵ But how can such a reflexively self-revealing self-consciousness be employed in a response to the problem of content?

In the first chapter of her book Hurley considers the idea that self-consciousness can be characterized in terms of “reflexivity”. But after a very brief examination of a few uses of the term she abandons it suggesting that it “is not in itself a helpful conception of self-consciousness. It can be interpreted in too many ways and lends itself to confusions.”⁵⁵⁶ There is, as we will see, some truth to this

⁵⁵³ Cf., Williams, p. 179. Cf. also Guy Newland writes: - “‘To say two things are different isolates is to make only the most minimal distinction between them. Since conceptual consciousnesses often operates under the sway of language, things are different isolates as soon as they are given different names - even if those names refer to the same object.’ Thus activity, agent and action *must* be different isolates and we can operate with that difference even if they are referring to the same thing, viz. an undivided self-awareness. ... There is only a problem in self-awareness if we think that the ‘x is aware of y’ model requires a substantival difference between x and y in order for one to occupy the subject and the object slot, this conceptual difference can be quite minimal, represented simply by different name-tokens (in English we can use ‘x’ or ‘one’ in the subject slot, and ‘oneself’ in the object slot), and that minimal difference only requires different isolates. Different isolates means conceptual difference, not substantival difference.” (G. Newland, *The Two Truths*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion, 1991, p. 60, in Williams, p. 145 n.28; cf. also p. 141) Cf. also our discussion of Eckhart in chapter 3, §3.

⁵⁵⁴ Dreyfus, p. 339, brackets mine.

⁵⁵⁵ Cf. Williams, p. 132.

⁵⁵⁶ Hurley, p. 37. She continues: “We would do better to use the related but more specific conceptions of perspectival self-consciousness, access, self-evidence, and incorrigibility.” (p. 37)

claim. But there is also an important sense in which the concept of reflexivity may be central to a satisfactory understanding of self-consciousness. Moreover, as Williams demonstrates in his book *The Reflexive Nature of Awareness*, it is possible to bring a good deal of clarity to such a notion of self-consciousness. Through a close examination of lines of thought associated with, what Tibetan doxographers refer to as, Śāntarakṣita's Yogāgācāra-Svātantrika Madhyamaka, Williams considers arguments concerned with the possibility that a sense of self-consciousness as fundamentally reflexive is essential to a satisfactory response to the problem of content.⁵⁵⁷ In the course of his examinations he discerns two senses of self-consciousness, which, he argues, are central to responding to the problem of content, and which exist widely but sometimes ambiguously in both Buddhist and Western philosophy.⁵⁵⁸ These two senses he refers to variously as self-awareness (i), or *reflective* self-consciousness, and self-awareness (ii), or *reflexive* self-consciousness.

Williams begins his analysis with the observation that reflective self-consciousness always provides an awareness of a subject(ive aspect) relative to an object(ive aspect). One might say that it is a self-consciousness, which in accompanying one's awareness of all things, *in some sense* takes the consciousness of those things for its object and in so doing renders them experientiable. In the case of a consciousness of blue, for example, there appear to be three elements: a blue object, the consciousness of blue (or of a blue object), and a self-consciousness (the subjective aspect) which takes the "consciousness of

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. Williams, p. 189. Williams does not use the phrase "the problem of content" but is, as we will see, nonetheless concerned with the problem.

⁵⁵⁸ The concept with which Williams is most concerned is *svasaṃvedana* (Sanskrit) or *rang rig* (Tibetan). The reference to Western philosophy is by way of commentary (p. 238).

blue” (the objective aspect) as an object.⁵⁵⁹ With respect to this type of self-consciousness Williams writes: “What self-awareness, self-consciousness, is aware of here is its own (object-taking) consciousness. ... it is the result of a subject(ive aspect) aware of a conceptually (and also phenomenologically?) different object(ive aspect).”⁵⁶⁰ In such cases the subjective aspect is intended to function as mediating consciousness. Self-awareness (i), therefore, is perhaps most naturally associated with an intentional model of “cognition” in which an agentic self-consciousness, by means of a cognizing activity (directed towards an “object”), permits a resultant action (i.e., some content). Unfortunately, as we have seen repeatedly, this tri-partite model of self-consciousness leads ultimately to (various forms of) an infinite regress. As Williams observes, for the Buddhist philosopher Śāntarakṣita, avoiding this inevitability requires a rejection of the model of self-consciousness that leads to it.

According to Śāntarakṣita, the problem of conceiving of the functioning of self-consciousness on the model of agent and activity is simply that such a model “regards what is by nature a partless unity [as] a threefold division (into action - ‘that which is done’ - agent, and activity - the actual doing)”.⁵⁶¹ Self-consciousness, he suggests, renders things known within a self-validating and non-dualistic “reflexivity”. Its inherent nature is such that it “illuminates” without need of an act and so is self-validating in a way that does not lead to an infinite

⁵⁵⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 20-2.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁶¹ *Tattvasaṃgraha* v. 2000 in Williams, pp. 29-30. In his elucidation of reflexive self-consciousness Williams frequently refers to Śāntarakṣita - an 8th century representative of the Mādhyamika tradition who was greatly influential on the development of *mādhyamaka* in Tibet. As the purpose of this dissertation is not the historical explication of the views of Buddhist philosophers and their critics we have limited our historical references to brief acknowledgments of the source philosophers.

regress.⁵⁶² The most common metaphor used to explain reflexive self-consciousness is that of a lamp which in its “illumination” of objects is held to function without dependence on them. Reflexive self-consciousness is, as Williams writes, “self-referring in a non-objective way, just as a lamp illuminates itself not as one object among others to be illuminated, but through the very act of *being* a lamp, an illuminator of others.”⁵⁶³ Thus, in the case of the consciousness of blue, for example, Śāntarakṣita would argue that there is only one “act” (which is not an act) out of which can be identified two “items” or isolates - “seeing” and “blue”. Since “seeing” (the interpreting) and blue (the interpretation) are mere isolates of the same unity the “functioning” of reflexive self-consciousness does not involve the case of an interpretation interpreting itself.⁵⁶⁴ Reflexive self-

⁵⁶² Cf. *ibid.*, for example, p. 20, p. 23, pp. 27-31, and chapter 4, p. 133-4 above. Śāntarakṣita writes: “All consciousness, cognitions (*citta*) and feelings (*caitta*) irrespectively are known by themselves, that is to say, they are self-transparent and self-luminous. Consciousness is diametrically opposed to matter in this that it is of the nature of illumination like the luminary in the firmament, whereas matter is veiled and hidden by a constitutional darkness. The being of consciousness is its illumination, its self-luminosity, and so it cannot be unknown. Consciousness, thus, differs from dead, unfeeling and unthinking matter, which has no light in itself. The immateriality of consciousness carries with it the prerogative of self-revelation and does not connote any subject-object relation in its constitution, which its very immateriality precludes. Matter alone can be divided and consciousness can be consciousness only if it refuses to be split up into compartments, which the subject-object relation involves. So self-luminosity of consciousness and self-consciousness, therefore, are interchangeable terms.” (*Tattvasaṃgraha* śls. 2000-2001 in Mookerjee, pp. 319-20) Cf. also where Williams writes: “Of course, ‘illumination’ here refers to illumination by consciousness, for which the illumination of a lamp serves as a metaphorical example. We have seen that even the illumination of a lamp depends on consciousness in order to render it knowable, in a way the consciousness itself does not. Also there should be no confusion between the self-validating nature of consciousness (i.e., that one cannot be in doubt whether one is conscious or not, whether one is experiencing at all), and a claim that experiences are self-verifying (i.e., that all or certain experiences are indubitable). The categories may overlap, but we are not concerned here with claims of self-verification.” (p. 24 n. 5) Hence, a pre-reflective self-validating self-consciousness [the nature of consciousness] should not be confused with a reflective self-verifying self-consciousness [a pure fiction].

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 20. Note also that in a footnote Williams observes: “Geshe Kelsang comments that ‘clarity’ [luminosity] refers to the nature of the mind [consciousness], while ‘cognizes’ [awareness] refers to its function.” (Geshe Kelsang Gyatso. *Understanding the Mind*, London: Tharpa Publications, 1993, p. 16, in Williams, p. 26 n. 10) This division would appear to correspond well to the two parts of the *pratītya-samutpāda* series as they were described in chapter 4. *Svasaṃvedana*, considered from the perspective of its ability to respond to the problem of content, would seem to be an alternative to the *pratītya-samutpāda* series.

⁵⁶⁴ In order to understand more clearly what they have in mind consider that in the hypothetical case of “pure consciousness” (i.e., consciousness that is not of anything) since reflexive self-consciousness is fundamentally unitary it would, in some sense, continue to exist. In other words,

consciousness, or self-awareness (ii), is not *in itself* intentional, does not *in itself* involve consciousness of anything and, therefore, does not *in itself* involve consciousness of (it)self.⁵⁶⁵ It is held to be capable of providing information about ... (e.g., the self, states of a person or animal, objects) precisely because it does not rely on an intentional aboutness. Hence, for Śāntarakṣita, as is also the case for follower Mi pham,⁵⁶⁶ reflexivity is the inherent nature of consciousness and a necessary postulate if the problem of an infinite regress is to be avoided in providing an account of how experience is possible.⁵⁶⁷

Perhaps Mi pham puts the matter most concisely when he argues along the following lines: If the possibility of experience were to require a self-consciousness in which a subject(ive aspect) related to an object(ive aspect) an infinite regress would result, and experience would not be possible. Experience clearly is possible so self-consciousness does not essentially involve such a relationship.⁵⁶⁸ But this line of argument makes it clear that the postulation of

since reflexive self-consciousness essentially does not involve two things its existence would seem not to *require* the taking of an object. As Williams writes: "The issue of an object is not relevant to reflexivity *qua* reflexivity." (p. 21) The same, however, cannot be said of reflective self-consciousness where the absence of an object of consciousness would mean that "there would also be no self-awareness (i), for there could be no case of a subjective aspect taking as an object the objective aspect, since there could be no objective aspect." (p. 30)

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 31-2.

⁵⁶⁶ Mi pham was perhaps the most important Nyingmapa (one of the four principal schools of Tibetan Buddhism) scholar of the late nineteenth century.

⁵⁶⁷ Williams suggests that Śāntarakṣita's model of reflexivity is precisely intended to avoid an infinite regress (p. 31 n. 17, and , p. 32). Śāntarakṣita maintains that the postulation of self-consciousness as reflexive "is necessary at some point (and the sooner the better) in order to prevent an infinite regress ..." (*ibid.*, p. 6). Note also that for Śāntarakṣita it is also that which differentiates sentience from insentience. Williams writes: "The idea of portraying self-awareness as the quality of consciousness understood as the reverse of insentience (*bems po*) may well have originated with Śāntarakṣita." (p. 25)

⁵⁶⁸ Although Mi pham does not appear to take into consideration the "symmetrical nature of the problem" his argument can be straightforwardly extended to intentional "content" (Cf. *ibid.*, p. 137). In light of the suggestion that the notion of a unitary self-revealing consciousness is both incoherent and inconceivable Williams writes: "... Mi pham's criterion for applying this strategy is that the reflexive nature of awareness is clearly evident and therefore well-known at least at some level in worldly transaction. A critical analysis which shows something clearly evident and accepted in worldly transaction not to be the case must be an ultimate analysis." But Mi pham is not arguing for the Ultimate existence of reflexive self-consciousness. "Mi pham's approach is

self-consciousness as reflexive does not so much offer an *explanation* of how experience is possible as a *description* of a formal condition of its possibility.⁵⁶⁹ To say that self-consciousness is reflexive is to say that if there is experience then inasmuch as *any* experience involves self-consciousness that self-consciousness is reflexive, because such is what any self-consciousness must be in order to avoid the relevant infinite regress(es) and hence, to render experience (or content) possible. In this respect the postulation of reflexive self-consciousness is akin to Kant's postulation of that self-consciousness which he calls the original synthetic unity of apperception.⁵⁷⁰

Also like Kant's original apperception is the fact that reflexive self-consciousness is not *merely* a formal condition of experience but is rather a reality

purely structural. He is not committed to any complex conclusions, ramifications and implications which his opponent might wish to insist follow from his acceptance of reflexivity conventionally." (pp. 130-1) For those interested in the details of Mi pham's arguments see, for example, *ibid.*, pp. 127-34.

⁵⁶⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 132-3. In her chapter on Wittgenstein and the significance of practice Hurley observes that some *nonskeptical* views on the import of the regress view it as part of a transcendental argument concerning the conditions under which content, or "aboutness", is possible. Such arguments point out that, as Hurley's writes: "Aboutness is possible; but it wouldn't be if it depended only on interpretation or similar intermediaries; therefore it doesn't." (p. 225) Although Hurley is sympathetic to the conclusion of this form of argument she is quick to point out that it is of little assistance in identifying what the needed item *is*. Mi pham's argument is of this general form but it goes beyond the criticism of intermediaries to suggest that the whole underlying model of how content is possible is flawed. The "activity" which in the end permits me, for example, to "imagine a red flower" is simply not relational. It is, more particularly, not an *awareness of...* in which: step 1) I ... step 2) imagine.... step 3) a red flower. Instead "I", "imagine", and "a red flower" all appear to be isolates of a self-revealing reflexivity which in a fundamental sense *is* the red flower. This line of argument permits Mi pham to argue that the needed item is quite simply a non-intentional self-revealing self-consciousness - that is, a reflexive self-consciousness that reveals the subject(ive aspect) and object(ive aspect) simultaneously and without relying on any activity.

⁵⁷⁰ See the discussion of the *I think* in chapter 5. Strawson, once again, suggests that: "The objection we have been considering turned, in its original form, on the point that the ascription of states to a *subject* required the subject itself to be an intuitable object for which there existed empirically applicable criteria of identity. The requirement which underlies the objectivity-condition, however, is not exactly that experience should be ascribable to such a subject, but that it should have a certain character of self-reflexiveness *which is expressed by Kant in terms of the notion of self-consciousness*. The expression is not altogether happy because we are immediately led by it to think in terms of *personal* self-consciousness and hence in terms of the full conditions for ordinary empirical self-ascription of experiences. But what is intended is something less than this, which yet really does constitute the essential core of personal self-consciousness." (p. 107)

which, although it can *in itself* be neither experienced nor perhaps even understood, can be known to be with(in) every experience. As Mi pham suggests, even though there exists in the world quite unmistakably and without error a mere reflexivity, if one were to investigate the conceptually-constructed object according to how it is that it is aware of itself there would not be found anything truly-established but merely unexamined worldly renown. The sort of critical investigation which tries to find out how a basic datum like reflexivity can possibly be eventually fails. It is not claimed that reflexivity is resistant to that sort of investigation - there is no claim that *svasamvedana* is truly established. It exists simply from the perspective of worldly convention,...⁵⁷¹

In other words, to observe that self-consciousness is reflexive is to recognize from one's experience that the inherent nature of experience is such that in one "act", which involves no intentional activity, there is awareness of both a subject(ive aspect) and an object(ive aspect) - a fact, Williams suggests, which renders the question of whether consciousness is reflexive or not "an empirical issue (perhaps an issue of science - the nature of consciousness, ...)"⁵⁷²

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., p. 133. By suggesting that *svasamvedana* is not being claimed to be "truly established" Mi pham means there is no claim that it is established as an "inherent existent" (*svabhāva*) - a something which is not co-dependently originated (e.g., Absolute Mind). But Mi pham is also of the opinion that there is, in a sense, more to *svasamvedana* than its conventional existence (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 208-210).

⁵⁷² Williams, p. 34. Since following Mi pham's arguments in detail would require a lengthy and unnecessary aside I leave it to the reader to refer to William's text. For a summary and review of possible objections see in particular, ch. 8, pp. 183-216. Note that on Mi pham's line of thought the *alayavijnana* and its functions might also be an appropriate subject of empirical inquiry. Williams writes: "Mi pham wants to say, that interpreted correctly the substratum [*alayavijnana*] and reflexive nature of consciousness appear to be appropriate understandings of how (of course, conventionally) the world is." (p. 185)

But if the issue of the nature of self-consciousness is empirical this raises the question of to what extent its functioning can be understood and explicated. Could the power of dynamics be employed to provide insight into the functioning of a reflexive self-consciousness - a self-consciousness which "illuminates" without the need of any relational activity between a subject(ive aspect) and an object(ive aspect)? Since reflexive self-consciousness is apparently not intentional it would seem reasonable to suggest that its functioning could be characterized as a kind of "happening". But as we have seen reflexive self-consciousness, in responding to the problem of content, avoids the otherwise inevitable infinite regress(es) because it does not depend on any relational activity between a subject(ive aspect) and an object(ive aspect). Consequently, the suggestion that reflexive self-consciousness is a "happening" cannot refer to any process that occurs on the personal level. Hence if dynamics were to attempt to shed light on reflexive self-consciousness, and so provide a satisfactory response to the problem of content, it would seem to be faced with the problem of how an "illumination without any activity" on the personal level could be instantiated by sub-personal systems of natural causal relations which are not isomorphic with personal level distinctions.⁵⁷³ In other words, how content (whether intentional or experiential), in which a subject(ive aspect) appears with an object(ive aspect), could be held to emerge from such systems. How this would be accomplished in a manner that does not presuppose content is, as we have argued, difficult to imagine.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷³ Such that what must be conceived of as personal level "inactivity" could be seen to be a function of subpersonal activity.

⁵⁷⁴ In elucidating the central issues with which she is concerned Hurley contrasts metaphors for the way in which philosophers and scientists conceive of the unity of consciousness. She writes: "Philosophers, and some scientists, tend to think of a unified consciousness as like a kind of interface between perceptual input and behavioral output, which remain in principle separable. But many scientists tend to think of unity as more like the twisting together of the strands of a rope,

6. J. N. Mohanty has observed that although thought is naturally conceived as a mode of disclosure the fact that “action could be considered a mode of disclosure is less often recognized.”⁵⁷⁵ Hurley has clearly recognized this fact and has, moreover, contributed significantly to our understanding of how it might be so. But Mohanty also argues that the discovery that the subject(ive aspect) and object(ive aspect) always occur together and as inseparable in one “act” is ultimately dependent on a non-intentional “pure” self-consciousness which is not available for inspection in either mode of disclosure.⁵⁷⁶ The “activity” of this self-luminous consciousness, like that of Kant’s original unity of apperception, and Eckhart’s One, although somehow constituting the core of self-consciousness, does not appear to introduce any sense of temporality. Hence, “activity” here carries with it a meaning closely akin to function. “Objectivity”, Mohanty argues, “is ‘constituted’ within the field of pure consciousness, inasmuch as the former

where each strand displays continuity of sensory and motor aspects. As well as being composed of twisted strands, the rope’s length coils back upon itself through time in complicated branches, backward loops, and reciprocal links. The strands of consciousness often pull apart in a way inconsistent with the interface picture. Instead of input or output separately coming unplugged from the interface, the links between particular types of conscious experience and action may remain strong, but the various perception/action strands unravel, as in a rope that has lost its twist.” (p. 183) “The general hypothesis at issue”, she suggests, “corresponds to the twisted rope metaphor, as opposed to the metaphor of the input-output interface:...” (p. 206). On the twisted rope metaphor each reflexively continuous strand sustains a high degree of unity, or autonomous integrity, such that content can be understood to be a “function” of the activity of such strands. If a reflexive self-consciousness could be instantiated by the activity of such “strands” dynamical tools would be appropriate to the task of providing a response to the problem of content.

⁵⁷⁵ J. N. Mohanty, *Phenomenology and Ontology*, Martinus Nijhoff: The Haag, 1970, p. 27. He goes on to cite Martin Heidegger, Max Scheler, and Nicolai Hartmann as having been fundamental contributors to this insight.

⁵⁷⁶ Mohanty writes: “The unique particular (physical object) and the unique individual (person) are identified not through theoretic contemplation but through practical relationships.” (p. 100) In which case, he suggests, both are discovered together and as inseparable. For an interesting related discussion see Williams long footnote on Mi pham’s views concerning a truly nonconceptual Ultimate as ‘a mere gnosis which is reflexive awareness’ (n. 8, pp. 199-206). In particular, see where, in speaking of Mi pham’s assertion of a non-conceptual ultimate, he writes, that “it is a condition of the existence of a truly nonconceptual entity that one cannot say that it exists. Nevertheless it is a condition of praxis and therefore the philosophical system which supports certain sorts of praxis that one can, one must, *indicate* that the nonconceptual entity exists.” (p. 202) Williams suggests that Mi pham, although not identifying reflexive self-consciousness (*‘rang rig’*) with this ‘non-entity’, does not want to distinguish reflexive self-consciousness from it (cf., p. 209).

represents a 'function' of the latter."⁵⁷⁷ The question that dynamically minded cognitive scientists may need to ask is whether what appears as an atemporal "function" on the personal level can be modeled causally (in high-level functional terms?) on the subpersonal level without presupposing that which needs to be explained. It is certainly conceivable that dynamic approaches to various aspects of cognitive functioning could be highly successful and yet still need to rely on a notion of reflexive self-consciousness in order to respond satisfactorily to the problem of content.

Of course, the scientific community is not likely to be receptive to an account of cognitive functioning that includes, as a necessary component, a notion of self-consciousness with transcendental implications. If such a component were to prove necessary to providing a coherent response to the problem of content then science, to the extent that it acknowledged the reality of the problem, would seem to be forced to acknowledge the necessity of a "superpersonal level" to which its investigatory powers cannot legitimately be applied.⁵⁷⁸ If such a

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 146. As Mohanty observes with respect to the functioning of Kantian categories: "The categories are as such functions, inasmuch as they can be understood as the modes in which the transcendental subject 'acts'. To call these the modes of 'activity' of the transcendental subject does not carry the sense of any temporal process in which the transcendental subject issues forth. They are called 'modes of activity', 'modes of synthesis', etc., because they do not stand for static faculties." (p. 146) And with respect to Husserl he writes: "It is interesting to see that this functional point of view is not really foreign to the doctrine of intentionality which forms the basis of Husserl's philosophy. The doctrine of intentionality recognizes conscious 'acts' as being directed towards some 'objective' reference. Now, to call these 'acts' is not to introduce any sense of temporality. Here 'act' means nothing but 'function'. ... (p. 146) Cf. also Williams pp. 128-9 n. 9 on Śāntarakṣita and Mi pham's denial of the normal transitive activity-agent-action model of self-consciousness.

⁵⁷⁸ Although the comment is perhaps slightly out of context I am reminded here of a passage from Spinoza's *Ethics* which I include here as note of interest. It reads as follows: "All must surely admit that nothing can be or be conceived without God. For all are agreed that God is the sole cause of all things, both of their essence and their existence; that is, God is the cause of things not only in respect of their coming into being (*secundum fieri*), as they say, but also in respect of their being. But at the same time many assert that that without which a thing can neither be nor be conceived pertains to the essence of the thing, and so they believe that either the nature of God pertains to the essence of created things or that created things can either be or be conceived without God; or else, more probably, they hold no consistent opinion. I think that the reason for this is their failure to observe proper order of philosophical inquiry. For the divine nature, which

component were to prove unavoidable it would imply the kind of limitation on knowledge envisioned by Kant⁵⁷⁹ and would perhaps place that through which content is rendered possible squarely in the realm of *faith*.⁵⁸⁰

We began this work by pointing out that the philosophical debate about judgment has been informed almost entirely by the distinction between practical and theoretical domains. Mohanty suggests that this distinction may be regarded as a pale reflection of the distinction between empirical and transcendental on the level of secular philosophizing.⁵⁸¹ Our investigations would seem to lend some support to this claim. But it also seems to be true that philosophizing, to the extent that it can do work, must remain within the realm of the secular for it must rely on what is “unhidden”, or can be rendered “unhidden”, to those who instantiate its praxis. As Wittgenstein reminds us: “Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. - Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us.”⁵⁸² Since to step into the realm of faith is, it seems, to step into the realm of the “hidden” it is consequently to step out of the philosophical playing field. Philosophical performances conducted in the realm of faith run a high risk of being unintelligible indulgences. But this does not entail that philosophers cannot

they should have considered before all else - it being prior both in cognition and in Nature - they have taken to be last in the order of cognition, and the things that are called objects of sense they have taken as prior to everything. Hence it has come about that in considering natural phenomena, they have completely disregarded the divine nature. And when thereafter they turned to the contemplation of the divine nature, they could find no place in their thinking for those fictions on which they had built their natural science, since these fictions were of no avail in attaining knowledge of the divine nature. So it is little wonder that they have contradicted themselves on all sides.” (B. Spinoza, *The Ethics and Selected Letters*, trans. S. Shirley, Hackett Publishing Co., Proposition 10, 1982, p. 69-70.)

⁵⁷⁹ Cf. B xxx, Pluhar, p. 31.

⁵⁸⁰ Mohanty suggests that this pure non-intentional self-consciousness “cannot even be a phenomenological notion and can at best be postulated by an act of faith.” (p.48)

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁵⁸² Wittgenstein, § 126, p. 50.

know anything about the nature of the transcendental. It only suggests that they should not expect their discourses to be understood by any but those who already share their reality. In our investigations we have pointed to a reality that seems to lie outside of all possible experience. But this reality, which reason seems both to require and to forbid, Eckhart describes as an “unhidden truth”.⁵⁸³ It is at this point that I remain, puzzled.

⁵⁸³ Cf. Schürmann, pp. 219-220.

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Appendix A

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